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“We Ain’t Scared of No Mayor”:
LA’s Skid Row Residents Fight for Their Right to the City

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Christine Elizabeth Petit

August 2010

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Ellen Reese, Chairperson

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This Dissertation of Christine Elizabeth Petit is approved:

Dr. Ellen Reese, Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“We Ain’t Scared of No Mayor”:
LA’s Skid Row Residents Fight for Their Right to the City

by

Christine Elizabeth Petit

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, August 2010
Dr. Ellen Reese, Chairperson

This dissertation looks the rise and globalization of order-maintenance approaches to policing within the context of broader urban growth trends though a case study of one community organization which is resisting these trends. Under study is the impacts of and resistance to the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI)—a policing strategy that the city of Los Angeles implemented in its Skid Row community in 2006. Community residents organize their opposition to SCI and broader trends of displacement through the Los Angeles Community Action Network—a community organization whose primarily membership is Skid Row residents. I examine the following questions: *How are community residents organizing themselves through LA CAN to have a say over SCI’s impacts? How and why do LA CAN members and their supporters get involved and stay involved in LA CAN? How does LA CAN facilitate the participation of community residents?*

The study’s research questions are examined through two years of ethnographic research and 22 interviews with LA CAN members and supporters.

Activism on the part of groups subject to displacement via gentrification and police policies which criminalize poverty as well as whole categories of people (African Americans and Latinos most saliently in the current study) is often missing from or downplayed in the literature on urban growth, policing and social movements. Nevertheless, residents in Skid Row are actively resisting these policies. Social-movement scholars and activists can learn from LA CAN's successes, which hinge on three main strengths of the organization: First, LA CAN facilitates the involvement of community members through prioritizing the leadership development of community residents over outsiders; offering several ways for people to get involved; by providing selective and solidary incentives for members; and by fostering a sense of collective efficacy through collective discussions. Second, the organization demonstrates flexibility in the ways it frames its issues allowing it to both mobilize its constituents and garner outside support. Third, LA CAN addresses multiple issues of relevance to its membership, which helps to sustain interest in participation and also helps to build bridges among residents that are differentially impacted by various issues (housing, policing, et cetera).

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PREFACE

I grew up in Silverton, Oregon, a small town which had approximately 7,000 people in it when I graduated high school in 1997. Around that time, about 89 percent of the town was white, though I thought everyone was (except the Latino migrant workers). My family of six was solidly middle class. Although my family's income was lower when I was growing up, we had an annual income slightly higher than the median when I went off to college. My dad was about to retire from the Oregon National Guard and my step-mom worked in the office of a dental clinic. In an embodiment of American liberalism, my parents would often joke that they canceled each other out in the voting booth. Political differences aside, the general consensus was that politicians were looked up to and the police were there to help.

After two years at Oregon State University, I decided to enroll in the National Student Exchange program and head out to Los Angeles. I ended up near East LA at California State University, Los Angeles, which turned out to have a bad rap among the 23 CSU schools. But I liked it. Instead of going back to Oregon after my year was up, I stayed in California, became a resident, and eventually finished my Bachelor's degree at CSULA. I learned a lot there. I learned that CSULA's reputation had more to do with its location and predominately Latino student population than the education I received there. In the classroom and through my friends and others living in the dorms, I learned, first of all, about the experiences of people of color and LGBTQ folks and, second, about oppression in a much more nuanced way than I

had come to understand it in the land of “love sees no color” (a popular t-shirt slogan sometime during my middle-school years).

One of the most transformative experiences I had at CSULA was getting a job in the women’s resource center, which was part of the cross cultural centers. The centers would screen social-justice oriented movies on Thursday evenings. One night I went to see *A Dry White Season*, which is a movie about (and was released during) apartheid South Africa. The movie portrayed the brutality of apartheid and, in particular, the role of the police and the state-sanctioned violence used to maintain the system of racial segregation and inequality. After watching the intense and often brutal movie, I started home. As I came to the road separating campus from the dorms, a police car rolled by. I froze in fear. Realizing I was not in the movie, I snapped out of it, heart still racing.

I don’t know if it was in that moment or at some point after, but I distinctly remember making the connection that as a white middle-class woman, I had never before experienced fear when seeing a police car. I knew (I had learned), however, that that was not the experience of so many people of color, queer and non-gender conforming people, poor folks, immigrants, and activists. As I began making these connections and learning about police brutality and the repression of social-justice activists, I was upset by the lie I was told about the police—the lie that was really the truth for me because of who I was, but which wasn’t the truth for so many people. I became agitated by the injustice of it.

And then on May 1, 2007, I bore witness to this injustice at MacArthur Park. During an overwhelmingly peaceful immigrants' rights rally, with little (and certainly not adequate) warning, police officers cleared people from the park using force, including rubber bullets, batons, and tear gas (Associated Press 2007; Goodman 2007). A cartoon was released shortly after the incident which depicted a child in a stroller waving a U.S. flag with a police officer in riot gear holding a gun to the child's head. The cartoon reflected what people had been saying, and what I saw—the police had come down excessively hard on the immigrant rights' protestors, many of whom were Latino families, including children and the elderly. The police chief concurred that the force used was “inappropriate” and the city paid out nearly thirteen million dollars in settlement money to the rally's attendees (Associated Press 2007; Restin and Rubin 2009).

Much to do (although arguably not enough) was made of the May Day melee, but the focus of this dissertation is on much more routine and much less publicly scrutinized forms of state-sanctioned violence. The setting for the current study is roughly two miles away from MacArthur Park and 930 miles from my hometown in the Central City East community of downtown Los Angeles—a community commonly referred to as “Skid Row.” This started out being a dissertation about the criminalization of homelessness in Skid Row, but through my work with the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) it has become a dissertation, in part, about the role of the police in maintaining not just “law and order,” but a social order that supports white supremacy and structural racism. It's also a dissertation

about policy and planning, specifically what counts as community, and who is considered a resident. And, more than anything, it's a dissertation about people—people of color, poor people—standing up for their right to the city and, ultimately, their lives.

I discuss my background and how I came to this topic up front because of my approach to the creation and interpretation of bodies of knowledge. Our understandings of the world are not created in a bubble. They are not divorced from our history or our present. After reading Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, I began to understand what this means academically. Rereading this book recently, over six years after I first read it, I discovered a note that I had jotted in the margins: "every theory has a human price." This was next to a sentence of hers that I underlined, which reads, "Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization" (1991:230).

Collins challenges several assumptions standard in academia—the supposed separation of thought from action, notions of scientific neutrality and objectivity, and methodological approaches void of ethics and values. She asserts that all specialized thought "reflects the standpoint of its creators" (p. 201). Sharing this understanding, early on in graduate school I set out to produce work that does not reinforce my privilege at the expense of others. Instead, I prioritized learning from others and creating knowledge in concert *with* people rather than *about* people.

Throughout my research with LA CAN, I have kept this goal at the forefront of my mind.

Like my worldview, this dissertation was not created in a bubble. I am grateful for scholars, including my dissertation committee members, who have allowed me the space and who have provided me with examples of how to engage in this type of scholarship. I am extremely grateful for the guidance and respect Dr. Reese has shown me throughout graduate school. Having a mentor who is committed to social justice and who holds high standards for herself and those she works with is a source of great inspiration and encouragement. Thank you, Ellen. Thank you, Dr. Chase-Dunn, for your work which drew me to the University of California, Riverside in the first place and for including me in a number of engaging research projects throughout my time at UCR. To Dr. Mirandé: Thank you for stressing the importance of people's lived experiences and what richness this brings to the knowledge we create as well as the lives we lead. Thank you, Dr. Brooks, for helping me uncover what I wanted to study and how I wanted to go about studying it. I am inspired by your passion for ethnography and for your dedication to your students. To my committee as a whole: Whether it was through your courses, the qualifying exam process, feedback on the current research project, your facilitation of other research projects I've been involved in, or encouragement you've provided to me throughout my time at UCR (for all of you it's some combination of those things), you have challenged me and made me a better scholar and person. Thank you again.

Thank you to the people at LA CAN. I have often said that if it weren't for the fact that my dissertation was so compelling to me, I probably wouldn't finish it. My research is compelling to me because LA CAN's work is compelling to me. For those who ignore the activism of those who are "disenfranchised," who think that there's no use trying to change things, and for those who think that poor people, people of color, and the homeless are too down and out to mobilize—the work that LA CAN does and their successes will make you think twice and maybe even change your mind. A special thanks to everyone who allowed me to interview them as part of this research: Al, Alma, Anat, Barbara, Becky, Bilal, Deanna, Deborah, Fabiola, Forrest, General Dogon, James, Joe, Karl, Lea,¹ Linda, Lydia, Mary, Nick, Pam, Pete, and Steve. Beyond the interviews, over the past two years, I have learned, struggled, celebrated, protested, danced, camped out, created, lobbied, carpooled, documented, laughed and broke bread with my LA CAN family.

I also have a great deal of gratitude for my family of origin. Your interest in what I was up to, questions about when I would (finally) finish grad school, and your pride in me and what I was doing was a huge motivator. I want to say a special thank you to those who joined me as I celebrated my graduation: my dad, Steve; step-mom, Karin; sisters Janna, Maggie, and Kate; and my aunts, Anne and Babs. Each of you has supported and encouraged me and, in many ways, my PhD is just as much your accomplishment as it is mine. I am also grateful to my mom, Carolyn. Our

¹ Pseudonym used at interviewee's request.

relationship is complicated, but it is never hard for me to find examples of positive ways that she has influenced my life.

Thank you to my chosen family. To my partner, Tony: Thank you for the care you take of me and others; for your belief in creating sustainable connections between people and communities; for your ability to hold many possibilities at once; for your sense of wonder and fun; for your music, your words, and your love, trust, respect, and support. I am so grateful for all the people who have blessed my life in so many different and special ways. Among them are: Angela Bowden, April Leonard, Bernie Berk, Connie Martinez, Daria Yudacufski, David Willhoite, Dolores Ortiz, Dorothy Calvert, Elyse McGowan, Emily Hanson Gifford, Frederick Smith, Heather Bowlan, Irina Contreras, James McKeever, Jane Ward, Janet Lever, Jenni Maybin, Jessica Hoffmann, Kim Weiner, Kimberly King, Linda Kim, Lianne Valerio, Marilyn Garcia Peck, Mike Chavez, Mike Miller, Meredith Wilson, Ricardo Martins, Robbie Moen, Sylvia & Jon Demezas, the Leek family, Tie-ting Su, Tony Jugé, Torence Powell, Vinnie Gwozdz, and Yazmin Araiza. These people are past and present friends, colleagues, professors, mentors and cheerleaders (literally and figuratively) who have enriched my life and have helped me become the person I am today, with the outlooks, approaches, and skills I have today. I am also grateful for new friendships and connections emerging in the Long Beach community where I live.

Thank you to everyone at UAW Local 2865, the union for academic student employees at the University of California, of which I have served as president for the past two and a half years. I am grateful for all who worked to establish this union

and for those of us who continue to keep this legacy alive. It would have been difficult for me to make it through graduate school without a job that included good pay, benefits, and a reasonable workload. Also, as a leader in the union, it would have been impossible to finish my dissertation without the support and good work of other leaders. I look forward to working with you in the future as we continue to increase the power of workers and communities at the UC and beyond.

In truth, this list of acknowledgements could span the length of this dissertation (and then some). So, for those who I've left unnamed, I am no less grateful. Thank you.

CHAPTER 1: SKID ROW AND THE LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

“It’s never been just about pushing out the homeless,” Pete White, a co-director of Los Angeles Community Action Network, said as I talked with him and co-director Becky Dennison about my desire to research the impacts of the order-maintenance-policing-driven Safer Cities Initiative on the residents of downtown Los Angeles’ Skid Row. “It’s about displacing this predominately African American community, which includes many people who live in residential hotels.” Pete likened the recently increased police presence in Skid Row to war and “like most wars,” he said, “this is about land.” Indeed, many residents of downtown LA, housed and homeless alike, feel like they are under attack on several fronts. LA CAN—is a non-profit organization in Skid Row—which does community organizing primarily around housing and civil rights, but also around other issues facing the area’s homeless and very poor residents (e.g., access to food, government assistance, et cetera). Becky said that the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative—a policy that introduced a heavy concentration of police officers into the 50-block area that makes up Skid Row—in September 2006 has resulted in numerous civil-rights violations and has made way for high-end development and reductions to the availability of housing and services for the community’s residents. LA CAN and other opponents of SCI assert that rather than, and sometimes under the guise of, addressing the causes of homelessness and the lack of services for homeless people,

major actors within Los Angeles have taken the route of criminalizing homelessness and the very low-income people that live in downtown.

LA CAN is a non-profit organization located in downtown LA's Skid Row community. Established in 1999, LA CAN's constituency is the homeless and extremely low-income people living in the community. The membership roster of LA CAN includes 700 individuals, approximately 300 who are currently actively involved and, of those, 75 who are core members². While LA CAN members are a multiracial group which reflect the community's diversity, membership is comprised predominately of African American adults. Approximately 70 percent of LA CAN's members are African American, 15 percent are Latino, 10 percent are white, and the remaining five percent include Asian-Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. Ninety-five percent of LA CAN's members are current or former residents of Skid Row. Of the majority who currently live in Skid Row, approximately 75 percent live in residential hotels.

Although other groups oppose SCI, no one fosters and embodies resistance to the policy and, more broadly, the conditions which create such policing, greater than LA CAN. I selected LA CAN as the site of my research after meeting downtown resident and LA CAN staffer, Linda, at a Los Angeles Social Forum panel on "Media,

² The list of "core members" is revisited and revised regularly by LA CAN staff and interns. The distinction is made for purposes of who to invite to the annual member retreat, board eligibility, and travel on behalf of LA CAN. The criteria for inclusion on this list include some combination of the following: 1) being currently actively involved in a project committee; 2) regularly attending ROC meetings; 3) being a current or past stipended intern and/or board member; 4) regularly attending other activities, such as a building/residential-hotel committee, direct actions, et cetera; and/or 5) otherwise contributing "extra" time by helping to make phone calls, volunteering at legal clinic, et cetera.

Action, and Social Justice” in June 2008. Linda talked about her involvement with LA CAN and the Downtown Women’s Action Coalition (of which LA CAN is a part) and passed out copies of LA CAN’s newspaper, *Community Connection*. She conveyed how empowering her work with LA CAN and DWAC had been personally, and the *Community Connection* highlighted LA CAN’s work, analyses, challenges, and victories from the perspective of downtown residents and LA CAN staff, members and supporters. A few of my friends knew Linda and had worked with LA CAN in various ways.

I was already planning on doing research on the criminalization of homelessness in downtown, but hadn’t figured out exactly how I was going to approach the topic. Given that a key component of my research was going to be resistance (a hole in a lot of the literature on urban growth and policing), LA CAN was an obvious fit. I asked a friend of mine to introduce me to Pete and Becky, and following up on that introduction we scheduled a meeting to discuss the possibility of me doing research on and with LA CAN. Below is an excerpt of my field notes from that first meeting:

I met with the co-directors of LA CAN, Becky and Pete, and Deborah, a staff member and community resident. We introduced ourselves. I talked a little bit about myself, my research interests, and why I was interested in doing field research at/volunteering with LA CAN. Pete expressed concern about researchers who come, gather their data, and then leave the community in a way that feels more exploitative than helpful. I explained that that was not my goal and that I found myself at LA CAN because I find their work very compelling and meaningful. My goal was to be supportive of LA CAN’s mission while working on my dissertation. I also explained that my tendency is to stay connected to groups and organizations that are important to me even as I move into other projects and stages of my life.

I was given the go-ahead to volunteer and conduct research at LA CAN and we continued the meeting, discussing issues related to the “revitalization” of downtown and SCI policing. This meeting was helpful in orienting me to LA CAN’s perspective on what was happening in Skid Row. A major concern of LA CAN’s is that community residents are often ignored as stakeholders by the city’s decision-makers. When community residents were acknowledged, they were demonized—as individuals and collectively. More from my field notes:

According to powerful outsiders, this is 1) a community of do-nothing people; and 2) anyone who opposes this type of policing is crazy. Becky talked about the use of the media to perpetuate this image and cited George Kelling’s advice to “get the moral high ground” before implementing order-maintenance policing strategies. She suggested that I look at the *Los Angeles Times* six months prior to the implementation of SCI and I would find exaggerated stories of life in Skid Row with an overemphasis on drug dealers, prostitution, danger, and murder.

The group was especially interested in me documenting the grassroots resistance to these depictions and the policy conclusions drawn from them that LA CAN members engage in.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I locate the implementation of the Safer Cities Initiative in the broader context of urban growth and policing in the United States. This research focuses on the activism of homeless and other poor people when their livelihoods are threatened through the displacement which accompanies urban-growth trends. The increased policing of homeless and low-income Skid Row residents under SCI is viewed as one means of displacement. Central to my research are the questions: *How are community residents organizing themselves through LA*

CAN to have a say over SCI's impacts? How and why do LA CAN members and their supporters get involved and stay involved in LA CAN? How does LA CAN facilitate the participation of community residents?

Data and Methods

I employed two main methodologies in the research for this dissertation: ethnography and interview analysis. I engaged in ethnographic research by becoming a volunteer at LA CAN and regularly participating in the organization's activities. For nearly two years, I participated in a number of LA CAN activities at least once a week on average. Earlier on, I was working at my job more and usually came in once a week for a few hours, sometimes missing a week or two at a time. Later, I was able to come in for a longer block of time once a week and often participated in LA CAN activities multiple times in a week.

Timmer et al (1994) emphasize the importance of an ethnographic approach in studying homelessness. They note that among the vast body of research on homelessness that came out during the 1980s, very little of it involved talking with or even observing homeless people. In fact, most of the research analyzed surveys of homeless service providers and caretakers, not homeless people (Snow & Anderson 1993). Timmer et al (1994:7) write, "We believe that this [type of research] is fraught with what ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1983) has called 'experience-distant' representations and understandings of homelessness. The ethnographic approach, in contrast, provides more 'experience-near' representations and

understandings.” Similarly, Websdale (2001) writes about the importance of ethnographic approaches to policing:

Ethnography allows us to learn about policing from those subject to it rather than from official sources that rely on the various elements of the criminal justice juggernaut for data. Voices of people on the street provide a much more complicated picture of the role of the juggernaut than official figures. Ethnography strikes me as a particularly important alternative to mainstream criminological analysis, which relies largely upon formal data, often without questioning their veracity. (P. 11)

I engaged in ethnographic research at LA CAN for almost two years (September 2008-August 2010), which allowed me to interact with the homeless and low-income residents of Skid Row that are connected to LA CAN in a manner that was structured by them. This involved participating in LA CAN’s weekly housing and SCI committee meetings, weekly staff meetings, biweekly residential organizing committee (ROC meetings), and monthly DWAC meetings. My participation in the meetings varied throughout the two-year period (for example, for three months I attended the SCI and staff meetings weekly, whereas during other periods I attended less frequently). I attended ROC meetings with the most regularity. All of these meetings helped me understand how LA CAN members make sense of the issues under investigation, how LA CAN facilitates the participation of community members as well as outsiders, and gave me insight into LA CAN’s strategies for addressing the issues impacting its members. Attending sporadically-held SCI Community Impact Team meetings facilitated by LAPD in 2010 as well as a special police commission meeting on SCI in November 2008, gave me a sense of the Skid Row stakeholders and their relationships to and perspective on SCI.

Participating in LA CAN's Community Watch program—where LA CAN members go out and document police interactions with community residents—helped me get a feel for what the saturation of police that accompanies SCI looks like and means for community residents. Doing intake at LA CAN's weekly legal clinic allowed me to interact with people who had received citations for the minor infractions SCI police focus on and the potential impacts of these tickets on their lives and the lives of similarly situated people. I also took part in a number of one-time or unique events, including demonstrations, events organized by DWAC, housing- and homeless-coalition activities, city-council meetings where LA CAN members and supporters spoke out, and lobbying visits to city council members.

In documenting these events and activities, my goal was to portray “experience-near” representations and understandings the issues under investigation. I recorded my observations by jotting down notes while participating in LA CAN activities. I kept my notes brief while “in the field” and then fleshed them out later at home. I either typed up a record of the day when I returned home or recorded myself narrating and reflecting on the day's activities and experiences. In the case of recorded notes, I had them transcribed and then reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. In addition to describing the activity that I was participating in, I emphasized writing down the actual language used by people involved with LA CAN (and others, as relevant) to describe the issues under investigation in this dissertation.

Similar to Brooks (2004), I strived to be an “observing participant” to the fullest extent that the research setting and my own responsibilities allowed. Brooks talks about this in terms of coming to the field as an outsider with the hope of evolving into an insider. At LA CAN there are two distinctive groups of insiders: members and volunteers/supporters. Members are the true insiders—community residents who are directly impacted by the lack of affordable housing and services, on one hand, and the overabundance of police, on the other hand. Supporters are people from outside the community who help out and participate in LA CAN’s activities in a number of capacities. Within both categories—members and supporters—there are some people who are regulars (coming once a week or more) and others who come intermittently (usually every few weeks). I established myself as a regular supporter through my weekly participation in LA CAN activities.

I was still an outsider in the sense that I am not a resident of downtown LA and, if I was, I would be more in the “loft-dweller” demographic because of my race, education, and current class status. However, through my participation in LA CAN I became an insider of sorts. My status as a researcher was also something I had to transcend. At my graduation party, which was held at LA CAN, Pete put it in these terms:

For awhile, we had lost hope in the academy. Our latest crop of students sort of restored hope and faith, because in our community often times the academy would come in and strip us of everything that was good and whole to us and then regurgitate something out that continued to destroy our spirits. And so, often times they come bearing books and said, ‘we’re gonna do a research project on you and you’re gonna be better off when this research is released.’ But that never happened and so we were like *no more researchers, no more students*. We didn’t want any of that.

[The current students] helped us build a new model, they helped us create some new expectations for folks who come into our community, and so, as Dogon said, Christine was much more than a researcher, she was shoulder to shoulder every day on the front lines speaking truth to power. And so, for LA CAN we say, 'We love you, you're down and your work is definitely not done because we graduate you from this community.'

Over a year into the ethnographic component of my research, Becky and Pete asked me to interview LA CAN members and supporters. I expressed my hesitancy to conduct interviews because, although people knew I was working on research related to LA CAN, I did not want to highlight my researcher status. They dismissed my concern and said not to worry, "you're one of us now." I came up with a draft of the interview guide and circulated it to them for feedback. Together, we established the final interview guide (Appendix A). Interviews allowed me to explore issues more in depth with interviewees and also allowed me access to certain parts of their biographies, including how they came to the Skid Row community and got involved in LA CAN, that were typically not available just through observation or casual conversation.

I conducted 22 interviews, primarily with community residents, but also with outside supporters and volunteers. Interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 17 minutes and 1 hour and 34 minutes. On average, interviews lasted a few minutes shy of an hour. Interviewees were recruited through the personal connections I made as a volunteer for LA CAN. Volunteering for LA CAN allowed me to get to know the staff and interns (who previously live or currently live in the community) and the co-directors at LA CAN as well as a large swath of LA CAN members and supporters. I worked with the co-directors to identify a

representative sample of people active in LA CAN. In most cases, I personally asked the potential participants for their consent to be interviewed. In three cases, I didn't know the potential interviewees well (they were supporters as opposed to members), so Becky introduced me and helped set up those interviews. I explained the research as follows: "As part of my research about LA CAN and SCI, I am interviewing LA CAN members and volunteers about their involvement in LA CAN and what issues are most important to them," and asked for consent to be interviewed. None of the people I asked to interview declined, though there was one person I was unable to interview because she stopped participating in LA CAN activities as I was concluding the interview process (more on this in Chapter 5).

Interviews were recorded, transcribed by a paid transcriptionist, and then reviewed by me for accuracy (I listened to the recording, read the transcriptions, and noted any inaccuracies). I came to my findings by reading through each transcript a second time, this time taking notes on each. Then I went through them a third time and began identifying themes and classifying my findings. Since then the transcripts have been reviewed a number of additional times in the writing up of the research.

Theoretical Contributions: Relevance to Social Movement Theory and Studies on Urban Growth and Policing

This dissertation contributes to three often separate bodies of literature: 1) analyses of urban growth; 2) research on policing and crime; and 3) theories about social movement participation. LA CAN's organizing work is located at the meeting

points of two understandings of society that are pervasive and powerful: support for “tough on crime” measures and policies that assume that “growth is good” without qualification. Much of LA CAN’s work is centered on ameliorating the negative impacts that these policy frameworks and their accompanying gentrification and police repression have on downtown LA’s very poor residents. In the urban-growth literature, very little attention is given to the activism of homeless and poor community members to have their interests represented in city planning and policy. The homeless and poor people who are subjected to these policies are typically viewed as without the political, economic, and institutional resources to mobilize against them (Henig 1982; Logan and Molotch 2007 [1987]; Smith 1996). This dissertation contributes to the literature on urban growth by highlighting homeless and poor people’s resistance to growth that displaces communities and does not support residents’ ideals for their community.

Critical accounts of policing also tend to overlook the activism of those subject to it. While the context in which SCI arose and the initial results of its implementation from a crime-reduction standpoint have been investigated and reported on by other social scientists (Blasi 2007; Blasi and Stuart 2008; Reese et al 2010), my research will contribute to the research on SCI specifically and order-maintenance approaches to policing more generally by analyzing how community residents experience and understand the everyday impacts of these policies as well as how residents seek redress for their grievances.

Despite the absence of resistance in analyses of the “tough on crime” and “growth is good” memes, research on social movements has produced a number of studies on poor people’s mobilizations—many of which deal with these issues, especially in struggles for housing and state aid. My research on LA CAN builds on the research of social movement scholars studying poor people’s mobilizations. The current study adds to that body of knowledge because, unlike most research on this topic, I analyze the processes through which people become involved and their individual motivations *from the perspective of those involved*.

Poverty and Homelessness in Los Angeles

Los Angeles is home to nearly 10.5 million people (Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation 2009, citing July 1, 2009 figures from the California Department of Finance). Skid Row is located in the heart of this expansive city, which is characterized by deep disparities in wealth and wide racial segregation. United Way of Greater Los Angeles (2009) characterizes the economic situation in Los Angeles County as simultaneously “a profile of prosperity” and “a portrait of poverty” (pp. 4-5). On the one hand, Los Angeles County is the center of great wealth and home to the highest percentage of millionaires in the U.S. (TNS 2007). On the other hand, the poverty rate is higher in LA County than in the nation as a whole. “Over 1.47 million or 15 percent of people in LA County are living in poverty, defined as an income of \$22,000 per year for a family of four, compared to 13 percent for the nation” (United Way of Greater Los Angeles 2009b:5, using 2008 U.S. Census Bureau data based on 2009 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

poverty guidelines). Los Angeles is also the homeless capital of the nation with more homeless people than any other urban area in the U.S. (Inter-University Consortium against Homelessness 2008).

Economic disparities are even more pronounced along racial/ethnic lines. This is especially true for African Americans who comprise ten percent of LA County population and 19 percent of those living in poverty, yet make up 47 percent of LA County's homeless (United Way of Greater Los Angeles 2009b, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2009a). Similarly, high concentrations of Latinos in LA County live in poverty (20 percent) and make up the second highest concentration of homeless people (29 percent of LA County's homeless). Latinos are underrepresented in these categories, however, given that they comprise 48 percent of the LA County population. See Table 1.1 below for a breakdown of poverty and homelessness in LA County by race.

Table 1.1: Poverty and Homelessness in LA County by Race

	% of Overall Population	% Living in Poverty (compared to 13% overall)	% of the Homeless Population
Latino	48%	20%	29%
White	29%	8%	21%
Asian/Pacific Islander	14%	11%	1%
African American	10%	19%	47%

Sources: United Way of Greater Los Angeles 2009b:5, using 2008 U.S. Census Bureau data; Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2009a.

Poverty and homelessness in Los Angeles are exacerbated by LA's lack of affordable housing. California is the second most expensive state when comparing the fair market rent (FMR) to the "housing wage"—the wage a household needs to make in order to only spend 30 percent of its income on rent. In Los Angeles County, the housing wage for 2010 is \$27.31 (compared to a mean housing wage of \$25.52 for California and \$14.44 for the U.S.) (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2010). This means that given California's minimum wage and the Fair Market Rent in LA County, living in a two-bedroom apartment would require 3.4 full-time, year-round minimum-wage earners.

Another major factor contributing to LA's high rates of poverty and homelessness is a lack of good-paying jobs and jobs in general. Approximately 36 percent of LA County's population fell under the classification of "working poor" in 2008. Families are considered working poor when they are at or below twice the poverty level (\$44,000 annual income for a family of four). From 2000 to 2008, LA County's rates were an average of six percentage points higher than California and 7.5 percent higher than the nation (United Way of Greater California 2009b). Unemployment rates are also high in LA County. At 12.3 percent, Los Angeles County's unemployment rate is only marginally lower than the California rate (State of California Employment Development Department 2010). As of April 2010, California's unemployment rates were the third highest in the U.S. at 12.6 percent,

versus 9.9 percent for the nation as a whole (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010a, 2010b).

Per the U.S. Department of Labor, people are classified as unemployed:

if they do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the prior four weeks, and are currently available for work. Persons who were not working and were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been temporarily laid off are also included as unemployed. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010c)

These rates do not include workers who are “marginally attached to the labor force,” including temporary and underemployed workers, workers who are not currently looking for work due to a lack of childcare and/or transportation, and “discouraged workers” who have stopped looking for employment due to a belief that there are no jobs available for them (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010c). Of the races/ethnicities tracked by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, blacks have the highest unemployment rate (historically two times the rate of whites). This trend is exacerbated for black males and black teenagers. African Americans have the longest periods of joblessness and were represented among the marginally-attached and discouraged workers at significantly higher proportions than the proportion of the labor force they comprise. This picture is complicated by gender: while black men have the highest rates of unemployment amongst men who are 25 to 54, Latinas have the highest rates of unemployment amongst women of the same age (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009).

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority conducts a count of homeless people during the last week of January every other year as directed by one of its

fundings, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The study found that on any given night, there are approximately 48,053 homeless people in Los Angeles County. Per HUD's (2008) definition of homelessness:

A person is considered homeless only when he/she resides in one of the three following places: 1) places not meant for human habitation such as cars, parks, sidewalks, and abandoned buildings; 2) an emergency shelter; or 3) transitional housing for homeless persons and who originally came from the streets or emergency shelter. (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2009a:4).

This represented a 38 percent decrease in the number of homeless people counted in 2007. Similarly, Skid Row saw a reduction in its homeless numbers. An estimated 3,802 people are homeless in Skid Row at any given point in 2009, compared to 5,131 in 2007 (a 26 percent reduction) (LAHSA 2009a, 2009b). Sixty-seven percent of the homeless counted in LA County were unsheltered. This percent is much lower in Skid Row (22 percent of the homeless were unsheltered), due in large part to its high concentration of emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.

These homeless count estimates have varying degrees of validity and utility. The LAHSA report notes that their count misses those who are precariously housed and on the verge of homelessness. Due to issues of access, the count misses people living in abandoned buildings, forested areas, deserted locations, and other places that raised safety concerns for those conducting the survey (LAHSA 2009a). It is expected that the report underestimates specific groups who are especially likely to live less visibly, including migrant workers, youth, and families (LAHSA 2009a). HUD's definition of who is homeless also excludes those who are temporarily living

with friends or relatives, which often occurs due to a lack of available emergency shelters or transitional housing (Rolnik 2010).

In addition to simply a lack of space at shelters or in transitional programs, it is especially difficult for families facing homelessness to stay together due to a lack temporary housing services that accommodate families (Rolnik 2010). People with children and even couples without children who wouldn't be able to stay together in the shelter/transitional housing system may choose cramped quarters (when accessible) or living in a car or on the street over separation. When homeless parents do seek shelter and there are no accommodations for children, children are often placed in foster care (Rolnik 2010). A survey of homeless women in LA's Skid Row community found that 78 percent of women with children under 18 had lost custody of their children (Downtown Women's Action Coalition 2008). "Because I am homeless" was the most cited reason for why women lost custody of their children (DWAC 2008).

LAHSA (2009a) says that many factors likely contributed to the reduction of homeless people included in the 2009 count. The report cites programs that "are funded by the City and County of Los Angeles, including the County's \$100 million Homeless Prevention Initiative, the city's permanent-supportive-housing program, and the expanded Section 8 voucher programs that specifically target homeless individuals and families" (p. 1). The report also suggests that there has been a "paradigm shift" amongst housing and service providers and asserts that "now more than ever, programs are centered on housing placement of homeless families and

individuals and providing the tools and skills they need to stay housed” (p. 1). In addition to being a more humane alternative to homelessness and criminalization, programs that combine housing with supportive care make economic sense (Economic Roundtable 2009; United Way of Greater Los Angeles 2009a). A study of 10,193 Los Angeles County homeless individuals who received General Relief (GR) public assistance, found that the public cost of individuals in supportive housing is up to 79 percent less than their counterparts on the street, with an average savings of 50 percent (Economic Roundtable 2009). Supportive housing is less expensive because it reduces the need for costly emergency healthcare, stays in mental health facilities, and the cost of jail and/or prison when crimes associated with homelessness are enforced.

Supportive housing carries a significantly lower cost to the public than criminalization does. The Lewin Group (2004), in a study of nine U.S. cities, found that it was two to three times more expensive to criminalize homeless people than to provide individuals with shelter or supportive housing. This finding was based on the operational costs of the respective types of institutions. In Los Angeles, this translates to a 53 percent savings between supportive housing and jail (\$30.10 versus \$63.69 per day) and a 65 percent savings between supportive housing and prison (\$84.74 per day) (Lewin Group 2004). Similarly, sheltering individuals was less expensive than jail and prison, 41 percent and 56 percent less respectively. However, this economic argument cuts both ways. If you are opting for the route of institutionalization versus programs that help individuals exist in the world, it is

cheaper to send people with mental illness to jail or prison (10 and seven times less, respectively) than to a mental hospital (though with less beneficial results for those who are in need of mental healthcare). The main problem with this study is that it provides the cost per day of programs and institutions without providing information about how long people are usually in jail or prison versus a shelter or supportive housing. It also doesn't take into account the stabilizing impact of supportive housing, which reduces the need for medical or mental health hospitalization, et cetera. However, we get a fuller picture of the cost savings of supportive housing in the studies that take jail stays into account along with the utilization of services with a public cost attached (i.e., Economic Roundtable 2009; United Way of Greater Los Angeles 2009a).

Criminalization of the homeless takes on a number of forms. A 2009 report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless cite the following measures used to criminalize homeless people:

- Enactment and enforcement of legislation that makes it illegal to sleep, sit, or store personal belongings in public spaces in cities where people are forced to live in public spaces.
- Selective enforcement of more neutral laws, such as loitering, jaywalking, or open container laws, against homeless persons.
- Sweeps of city areas in which homeless persons are living to drive them out of those areas, frequently resulting in the destruction of individuals' personal property such as important personal documents and medication.
- Enactment and enforcement of laws that punish people for begging or panhandling in order to move poor or homeless persons out of a city or downtown area.
- Enactment and enforcement of laws that restrict groups sharing food with homeless persons in public spaces.

- Enforcement of a wide range of so-called “quality of life” ordinances related to public activities and hygiene (i.e., public urination) when no public facilities are available to people without housing. (Pp.9-10)

This report documents U.S. cities’ responses to homelessness and ranks the “meanest cities”—the cities who most heavily rely on policing versus other more constructive responses to homelessness. In the most recent ranking, Los Angeles topped the charts as the number one meanest city to its homeless based on the following criteria:

the number of anti-homeless laws in the city, the enforcement of those laws and severity of penalties, the general political climate toward homeless people in the city, local advocate support for the meanest designation, the city’s history of criminalization measures, and the existence of pending or recently enacted criminalization legislation in the city. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless 2009:33)

In addition to raising ethical and policy questions, Los Angeles’ trend of criminalizing homelessness also raises the questions about the reported decline of homeless individuals living in Los Angeles, and in Skid Row in particular. While LAHSA’s (2009) report notes that 44 percent of the homeless counts conducted nationwide in 2009 reported decreases, other studies find that homelessness is increasing nationwide (U.S. Conference of Mayors 2008). Given the prevalence of criminalization in Los Angeles, and especially Skid Row, homeless people may be increasingly found in jail or prison, in more remote locations, or in other cities.

The Creation and (Uneven) Maintenance of Skid Row

Approximately 15,000 people live in the Skid Row area—75 percent of whom are African American and 95 percent are extremely low income (LA CAN and

Dahmann 2010). Skid Row is home to the city's most impoverished residents, with the average residents' annual income at \$11,360 in 2008 (compared to \$48,882 for all of LA in 2008) (City-data.com 2010). The source of income for most of Skid Row's residents is GR (currently \$221 a month, \$2,652 a year) or SSI (\$845 a month, \$10,140 a year). Many have no income and others are able to work (usually part-time or in temporary positions). Most of Skid Row's housed residents live in residential hotels. These were once commercial hotels for transient workers, but are now transitional and long-term housing for the community's low-income residents (Spivack 1998). Approximately two-thirds of Skid Row's residents live in these hotels, while the other third are homeless (LA CAN and Dahmann 2010). Skid Row is also home to LA's highest levels of homelessness (LAHSA 2009, numbers discussed above).

The concentration of LA's homeless and poor in Skid Row is no accident. Blasi et al. (2007) point out that while it is not uncommon for cities to have "skid row" areas, the concentration of LA's most impoverished citizens was, from the mid-1970s until recently, the city's official policy. In a 1976 Los Angeles Community Design Center report "physical containment" is offered as the ideal policy solution, a way of keeping LA's undesirables out of the areas of downtown that the city had plans to develop and hidden from its patrons. This policy of containment resulted in the concentration of homeless services and residential hotels in Skid Row. Containment was relatively uncontested by business interests and homeless advocates alike until business owners (particularly those in the toy-manufacturing

and fish-processing industries who were attracted to the area because of its cheap rents) began advocating police sweeps of homeless encampments in the mid-1980s (Blasi et al 2007; Goetz 1992).

Goetz describes “policy spasms” within the broader framework of containment, indicating a lack of coherent policy in Los Angeles over the years. Goetz details spasms which occurred in the 1980s: the city’s mixed responses to and sometimes planning of temporary encampments and shelters for homeless people (plans often abandoned); the expansion and contraction of support for homeless services; the police and sanitation sweeps through the Skid Row neighborhood and the varying city responses to them; and the ebb and flow of political decision making about the Skid Row area. Davis (1990) describes proposals to disburse the homeless from Skid Row that have been considered by the city including “deporting them to a poor farm on the edge of the desert, confining them in camps in the mountains, or, memorably, interning them on a derelict ferry at the Harbor” (p. 232). According to Davis, “such ‘final solutions’ have been blocked by council members fearful of the displacement of the homeless into their districts” (p. 232).

Reese, DeVerteuil, and Thach (2010) examine the trend of poverty deconcentration, which includes attempts to break up the “largest service-dependent ghetto still in existence in the USA—Skid Row” (p. 311). The authors describe the often competing factors involved in the implementation of and resistance to poverty deconcentration:

Indeed, struggles over the geographic configuration of poverty are dynamic processes shaped by many contradictory forces, including economies of scale, 'not in my backyard' (NIMBYism), profit incentives to invest where land is cheap, 'law and order' interests, trends in public and private funding, and the organized advocacy on behalf of low-income people, middle class residents, business owners, and investors. (P. 313)

Reese et al (2010) document two main mechanisms of poverty deconcentration—that is, moving LA's most impoverished inhabitants out of Skid Row. The first mechanism involves moving housing and services for homeless and low-income residents out of Skid Row. The second mechanism involves the displacement of Skid Row residents through police action and harassment. Reese et al (2010) point out that these mechanisms of displacement are highly connected to the gentrification of downtown LA and write that although Skid Row is not an ideal place to live, the city's approaches to poverty and homelessness fall short of any semblance of a real solution to the problems facing downtown. The strategies do, however, fit nicely with the popularity of "broken windows" theories of crime and policing and efforts to develop and gentrify the region.

Reese et al (2010) argue that resistance to poverty deconcentration and gentrification have the potential to be stronger in "weak-center" cities—"cities that lack strong or high-amenity downtowns to act as centers of gravity for anchoring gentrification"—such as Los Angeles (p. 4). They assert that this is for two main reasons. First, business and political interests that propel poverty deconcentration and gentrification are less consolidated than in "strong-center" cities. Second, a weaker center provides a place for homeless and low-income citizens to become concentrated (and in the case of LA, "containment" or the concentration of this

population was not just circumstance but the actual policy). This concentration of homeless and impoverished people makes them simultaneously harder to displace and easier to mobilize. The ability for the residents of Skid Row to mobilize is critical in order for them to resist the mechanisms of displacement that are in play.

Remaining Chapters

The literatures on policing, urban growth, and social movements and the contributions of this dissertation to them are reviewed in more detail in the remaining chapters. In Chapter 2, I locate SCI policing within the history of policing in the U.S.. I argue that, while colorblind on its face, SCI and related policing initiatives reinforce white supremacy and disproportionately impact African-Americans and Latinos. The impacts of SCI as well as the ways community members resist SCI through LA CAN are also examined. In Chapter 3, I place the contestation over land in downtown LA and the implementation of SCI within the context of the neoliberal logic of “growth is good.” In the milieu of the redevelopment and increasing privatization of once public space, homeless and poor residents are often ignored, shut out, and removed from having influence on the decisions that shape these processes. LA CAN members, however, assert their “right to the city” and their desires to be heard and included in the decisions that impact their lives. Instances where LA CAN members have successfully fought to be considered primary stakeholders in these processes are examined in this chapter. In Chapter 4, I contribute to studies of homeless and poor people’s mobilizations by exploring how and why people became and stay involved in LA CAN. Here, I present findings on

how LA CAN facilitates community involvement through prioritizing the leadership development of community residents over outsiders; offering several ways for people to get involved; by providing selective and solidary incentives for members; and by fostering a sense of collective efficacy through collective discussions. In Chapter 5, I conclude my dissertation by summarizing my overall findings and discussing the implications of this research for both scholarship and activism.

CHAPTER 2: WHITE SUPREMACY, POLICING, AND RESISTANCE

In this chapter, I argue that policing in the United States has been, and continues to be, a key institution in the maintenance of white supremacy. White supremacy is defined as, “A system of formal or informal rules, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities” (Pulido 2008). Central to white supremacy is the adoption of ideology that “ensures that the white population will systematically maintain their position and dominance” (Ibid.). This chapter provides an overview of how white supremacy’s relationship to crime and punishment has shifted, but has remained salient over time.

Although many groups (racial and ethnic minorities, but also workers and activists) have been and currently are the subjects of legal repression, I first focus on the subjugation of blacks vis-à-vis the law and officers of the law in this chapter. I do this for three reasons. First, African Americans comprise the majority of Skid Row’s residents (approximately 75 percent) and are the subjects of the bulk of the policing. Second, the history of modern policing in the U.S. begins with the policing of black slaves. Third, this is the history that LA CAN members emphasize and relate to their own struggles and organizing work. I then consider the history of police and immigration officials’ relations with Latinos since many Skid Row residents and LA CAN members are also Latino. Having reviewed this history, I situate the policies and practices of the Los Angeles Police Department in Los Angeles’ Skid Row within this context.

White Supremacy and Policing

The general narrative of the history of policing in the U.S. is that modern policing was modeled after the British system, which came about in the early-to-mid-1800s. Williams (2007) proposes three characteristics of policing in general and an additional six characteristics that distinguish modern police forces from previous forms of policing. The three characteristics of policing in general are:

- 1) the authority to use force,
- 2) a public character and accountability (at least in principle) to some central governmental authority, and
- 3) general law enforcement duties (as opposed to limited, specified duties such as parking enforcement or animal control). (P. 28)

The six characteristics of modern policing are:

- 1) the investment of responsibility for law enforcement in a single organization,
- 2) citywide jurisdiction and centralization,
- 3) an intended continuity in office and procedure,
- 4) a specialized policing function (meaning that the organization is only or mainly responsible for policing, not for keeping the streets clean, putting out fires, or other extraneous duties),
- 5) twenty-four hour service, and
- 6) personnel paid on a salary basis rather than by fee. (Pp. 28-29)

So, the story goes that the history of policing in the United States is closely connected to the development of systems of policing in Britain. The British system of sheriffs, constables, and watches provided a model for policing in the U.S. colonies. Despite their lack of citywide jurisdiction, the London Metropolitan Police are typically acknowledged as the first modern police force. Similarly, historians tend to agree that the mid-1800s was when police forces throughout the U.S. came to resemble the systems of policing in place today (Williams 2007).

The telling of the history of policing that asserts that it began in its modern form in the mid-1800s, however, leaves out “an entire branch of the American police family tree”: City Guards in the Deep South (Williams 2007:35-36). As early as the 1780s, paramilitary municipal police forces that fit the criteria of “modern police” were put in place primarily to control the slave populations in Southern cities (which often had black slave populations that exceeded the white population) (Rousey 1996; Williams 2007). These City Guards were “armed, uniformed, and salaried; they patrolled at night but kept a reserve force for daytime emergencies. In most respects, they resembled modern American police departments to the same degree as did the London Metropolitan Police of 1829” (Williams 2007:36). So, while modern forms of policing did not appear in the Northern states until the mid-1800s, modern policing emerged much earlier in the Southern states.

The difference in the timing of the emergence of modern policing between Northern and Southern states is most strongly influenced by slavery, the preservation of which necessitated white control over the black population (Hindus 1980; Williams 2007). Control over the black slave population was legislated through slave codes which restricted the movement and activities of slaves, including prohibiting the gathering of slaves in groups of more than four or five without whites present (especially religious gatherings) and forbidding slaves from learning to read or write (Websdale 2001; Williams 2007).

Slave codes also enabled (and in some cases, required) enforcement by the entire white population (Websdale 2001; Williams 2007). Hindus similarly points

out that, “In such a racially stratified society, with few legal rights afforded to the black man, every white person, by virtue of his skin, had sufficient authority over blacks” (Hindus 1980:37-38). During the development of these codes (the mid-to-late 1600s, early 1700s), white supremacy empowered the average white citizen to act in lieu of an established police force and it wasn’t until the early-to-mid 1700s that formal slave patrols became a regular fixture in many Southern cities (Williams 2007). The transition between private enforcement and the regulation of the enforcement of slave codes through either the militia or the courts was slow as,

Each colony tried to cope with the unreliable nature of private enforcement, first by applying rewards and penalties, and later by appointing particular individuals to take on the duty. Volunteerism was eventually replaced with community-sanctioned authority in the form of slave patrols (Williams 2007:41).

Although slave patrols emerged in the rural plantations, they provided a model for urban patrols. “The growing numbers of black people in the cities were of obvious concern to the white population” and the control of black people—slaves and free—became just as much of a priority in the cities as it was in the rural U.S. (Williams 2007:41). City guards went through a similar transition from private to public regulation of black codes, which, like slave codes, restricted the movement and activities of the black population. Black codes included curfews for those who were slaves and free alike, pass systems requiring blacks to carry papers indicating that they were free, and bans from the use of public spaces, such as parks (Williams 2007). Some codes spelled out very specifically the ways in which blacks should interact with whites (e.g., a black person was supposed to step aside if a white

person walked toward her/him, black men were prohibited from using a cane in the style of a Southern gentleman, et cetera) (Websdale 2001). Other codes were less specific, allowing for the punishment of “disorderly behavior.” The closely related “vagrancy codes” were often extended to lower-class whites and whites who associated with blacks or advocated on their behalf (White 2008; Williams 2007).

Slavery was made illegal in the U.S. with the North’s victory of the Civil War and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment (ratified in 1865), yet many black codes remained in place and new laws to regulate blacks were created (Alexander 2010). Eventually black codes were overturned and in the period following the emancipation of slaves, known as the Reconstruction Era, a slew of legislation was passed which strengthened the rights of blacks. In addition to the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery, these laws included the first Civil Rights Act (1866), which extended full citizenship to emancipated slaves; the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified in 1868), which affirmed the citizenship of all individuals born or naturalized in the U.S.; the Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in 1870), which granted all men the right to vote, regardless of race; and the Civil Rights Act of 1871 (aka the Ku Klux Klan Act), which made it illegal to conspire to deny citizens of their equal protection under the law, including interference with voting or the violent denial of one’s civil rights (Alexander 2010; Websdale 2001).

While these civil-rights gains provided a serious challenge to white supremacy, they were largely symbolic for a number of reasons. Although voting rights were granted to all men, states imposed barriers, including educational and

residential qualifications, to exclude black men from voting. In some cases, the mechanism for redress was also a barrier. To make claims about violations of civil-rights laws, African Americans had to take their cases to the federal courts—something that was too costly and time-consuming for the majority of would-be grievants. And then there was the issue of retaliation from whites: “The threat of violence often deterred blacks from pressing legitimate claims making the ‘civil rights’ of former slaves largely illusory—existing on paper but rarely to be found in real life” (Alexander 2010:30).

In addition to barriers to the enforcement of laws discussed above and the violent resistance by whites to legal protections for blacks, legal challenges were mounted against civil-rights legislation. In 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had outlawed discrimination against blacks in public facilities, on the grounds that it was unconstitutional (Alexander 2010; Websdale 2001). Two years prior to that ruling, Tennessee passed the South’s first Jim Crow law, which mandated the segregation of railroad cars by race (Websdale 2001). Such laws were supported by the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), where justices of the Supreme Court voted eight to one to support the segregation of rail cars, allowing for accommodations that were “separate but equal.” Despite legal cases that chipped away at segregation, the separate-but-equal doctrine remained mostly intact until the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that separate was, in fact, unequal in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954).

Still, Jim Crow and vagrancy laws provided the basis for the state-sanctioned harassment and punishment (including brutality that ranged from beatings to death by lynching) of the black population in the decades between emancipation and the late 1960s. As Alexander points out, “Just as Southern legislatures had passed black codes in response to the early steps of Reconstruction, in the years immediately following *Brown v. Board*, five Southern legislatures passed nearly 50 new Jim Crow laws” (Alexander 2010:37). White supremacist groups, including white citizens’ councils and the Ku Klux Klan, also mobilized to reinforce the racial status quo through vigilante actions. During this time, “the Ku Klux Klan reasserted itself as a powerful terrorist organization, committing castrations, killings, and the bombing of black homes and churches. NAACP leaders were beaten, pistol-whipped, and shot.” (Alexander 2010:37).

From slave codes to Jim Crow, blackness had become conflated with criminality (Hindus 1980). The linkage of blacks to criminality helped maintain a system of slavery despite abolition. The Thirteenth Amendment allowed for one exception to the abolition of slavery—slavery was legally allowable as a punishment for crime. Since convicts are in essence slaves of the state (Alexander 2010). The U.S.’s first prison boom occurred during the Redemption Era (1877-1896) (Alexander 2010). This era is characterized as a period of declining federal intervention in the Southern states and when “the political forces that backed the Confederacy and the traditional racial hierarchies of slavery reassumed control without restoring the formal mechanism of slavery” (Websdale 2001:22). During

this time, the convict population grew at ten times the rate of the general population and prisoners “became younger and blacker, and the length of their sentences soared” (Oshinsky 1996:32).

The policing of African Americans in the era of Jim Crow and vagrancy laws was shaped by the overlap and cooperation between police and white supremacist groups, including the KKK (Williams 2007). Legal authorities who did try to enforce laws meant to protect the civil rights of blacks against terrorism became targets of terror themselves. Such authorities were only successful in protecting blacks’ civil liberties in areas where the Klan was politically weak (Trelease 1971).

When Klan-type violence occurred, arrests were unusual, prosecutions rare, and convictions almost unknown. ... Prosecutors were unwilling to press such cases, and magistrates were often glad to dismiss them. Klansmen frequently dominated juries—including grand juries and coroner’s juries. Witnesses and victims ... were intimidated and refused to testify while Klan members were eager to swear false alibis on one another’s behalf (Williams 2007:80, citing Trelease 1971).

Williams argues that the actions of white vigilantes and the police during Reconstruction are often indistinguishable and, moreover, connected. Examples (cited in Williams 2007) include:

- In 1866 a group of black veterans in Memphis kept police officers from arresting two of their friends. In retaliation, the police led white mobs through the city’s streets beating blacks they came upon and torching the homes, schools, and churches of the black population. The rampage lasted four days and resulted in the deaths of 48 people (46 of whom were black) and the burning of 91 houses, 12 schools, and four churches (Berry 1994).

- Police in New Orleans led an attack against a convention of Union loyalists in 1866. A fight broke out between the group of approximately 100 black convention delegates and the 1,000-1,500 whites after, by most accounts, a white policeman first fired at the group. The group of delegates returned fire and quickly made their way into the convention building where they were followed by the mass of whites who broke down doors, fired at the crowd, and clubbed the black delegates. There were at least 38 (mostly black) casualties. Despite the fact that a Congressional committee determined that the attack had been planned by a group of police comprised mainly of Confederate veterans, no one was prosecuted for the carnage (Rousey 1996).
- In 1868 the sheriff of Camilla, Georgia deputized the entire white population to prevent a political procession of blacks. A military investigation of the sheriff found that he made no effort to control the deputized whites and “was party to the wanton and unnecessary destruction of life which subsequently ensued” (Hennessey 1978:129).

Law enforcement continued to support white-supremacist violence against African Americans into the civil-rights era. The sheriff's response in the case of the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy, who was tortured, murdered, and then drowned in a Mississippi river by at least two white men, is one example. Till was murdered after whistling at a white woman—a wife of one of the men. Clarence Snider, the sheriff at the time of Till's brutal murder, tried to have Till

buried right away by ordering his relatives to put him in the ground on the same day his body was discovered. Till's mother, however, was able to garner political support to stop this burial and have Till's body viewed in an open-casket funeral. Because of this, Till's death became a galvanizing point in the struggle for civil rights. Sheriff Snider expressed his resentment at the organizing efforts of civil-rights leaders to bring publicity to the Till case and push for a fair trial:

We never have any trouble until some of our Southern niggers go up North and the NAACP talks to 'em and they come back home. If they would keep their nose and mouths out of our business we would be able to do more when enforcing the laws of Tallahatchie County and Mississippi. (Quoting press footage shown in Beauchamp 2005)

Sheriff Snider tried to bar black journalists from the courtroom altogether and, later settled for a segregated courtroom. Till's case did not receive a fair trial, however. His murderers were acquitted by an all-white-male jury. Free from being retried, the men admitted to the killing in a magazine article less than a year later (Beauchamp 2005; Public Broadcasting Service 2010).

This incident and countless others contributed to increasing militancy—fueled by expanding political opportunities, increased organizational capacity, and increased black-insurgent consciousness—on the part of African Americans and other civil-rights activists (McAdam 1999). During this time, civil-rights activists “endured fire hoses, police dogs, bombings, and beatings by white mobs, as well as by the police” (Alexander 2010:37). Civil-rights protestors were arrested en masse—approximately twenty thousand were arrested in the less than two years between fall 1961 and spring 1963 (Alexander 2010). The Black Panther Party—

whose members provided food, clothing, and healthcare in their communities and organized armed citizens' patrols to observe police behavior with the goal of curbing brutality—was subject to police raids. Its members and supporters experienced harassment and brutality at the hands of the police officers in California (Williams 2007).

As the civil-rights movement progressed, activists became increasingly focused on economic issues. "Blacks became more indignant over their condition—not only as an oppressed racial minority in a white society but as poor people in an affluent one" (Piven and Cloward 1977:269). Multiracial alliances formed between poor people of many races and cross-class coalitions were established among the "third world left," which included Chicano and Asian-American leftists (Pulido 2006). The coalescing of these groups, along with the rise of nationalist movements among people of color, threatened fundamental changes to the U.S. power structure and its white supremacist underpinnings. During this time members of the National Welfare Rights Organization took over welfare offices across the U.S. and demanded access to benefits. Related, but different in tactic and focus, were the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and, later, the Poor People's Campaign which demanded access to jobs and low-income housing. Making (albeit complicated) connections between gender, race and class, the welfare-rights movement was closely linked to struggles for civil rights (Piven and Cloward 1977; Reese 2005; West 1981). Although white women comprised the majority of welfare recipients,

the white pro-segregationist movement was a primary opponent of welfare during this time (Reese 2005).

Grassroots mobilizations, shifting political understandings, and court challenges to legal discrimination catapulted the civil-rights agenda forward, despite strong and often state-supported resistance. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 dismantled Jim Crow segregation laws and outlawed discrimination in voting requirements, employment, education, facilities that served the general public, and federally-funded programs. The Voting Rights Act (1965) broadened voter protections to ensure equal access to the right to vote and established federal oversight of elections procedures. A major protection in this act was the banning of literacy tests, which were colorblind on the surface but not in their effect. Indeed, early laws that prohibited the education of slaves and the later development of separate-but-inherently-unequal segregated educational system, led to higher rates of illiteracy among blacks and Latinos than whites. These important rulings signaled the end of overt institutional racism.

As calls for the maintenance of segregation became less acceptable, rallying cries for “segregation forever” were muted and transformed into demands for “law and order.” Conservative white politicians used the activism of civil-rights proponents (from sit-ins to urban uprisings) to fuel whites’ fear of blacks and other people who color. These politicians argued that if civil-rights activists would just conduct themselves properly they would not experience police brutality and characterized activists as terrorists (Alexander 2010; Beckett 1997). “Conservative

politicians who embraced [law-and-order] rhetoric purposefully failed to distinguish between the direct action tactics of civil-rights activists, violent rebellions in inner cities, and traditional crimes of an economic or violent nature” (Alexander 2010:42). Southern conservatives accused federal courts of being too lenient and thus contributing to the spread of crime.

Voters’ and politicians’ positions on crime policies were largely consistent with their racial ideologies. Those opposed to civil-rights legislation and desegregation efforts favored expanded crime legislation (Weaver 2007). In his 1968 Presidential bid, Richard Nixon found law-and-order rhetoric to be galvanizing “in all parts of the country, including areas like New Hampshire where there is virtually no race problem and relatively little crime” (Parenti 2008 [1999]:6, quoting a letter from Nixon to his mentor Dwight Eisenhower). Alexander (2010) describes one of Nixon’s campaign advertisements: it “began with frightening music accompanied by flashing images of protestors, bloodied victims, and violence” (p. 46). A deep voice then affirmed the rights of Americans to be free from “domestic violence” and urged voters to vote like their “whole world depended on it.” Nixon was reportedly pleased with the ad, saying that it “hits it right on the nose. It’s all about those damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups out there” (Klinker and Smith 1999:292).

The above African American centric telling of the history of policing in the U.S. is not meant to reinforce binary conceptions of race relations in the U.S. that narrowly focus on the relationships between whites and blacks. However, this

history is particularly relevant to members of LA CAN who are predominately African American, and who see themselves as continuing the legacy of those who struggled for the civil rights of blacks in the past. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that other groups have their own unique histories and relationships to the police. In the next section, I turn to the U.S.'s ballooning incarceration rates. As with African Americans, Latinos are overwhelmingly subjected to this incarceration binge.

Much of what can be said about portrayals of black criminality and the treatment of blacks under the law can also be said about Latinos: mainstream depictions of Latino criminality are also sensationalized and exaggerated; despite evidence to the contrary, Latinos are often cast as violent and as posing a sexual threat, especially to white women; Latinos are routinely the subjects of police brutality and targeting; Latino workers have faced Jim Crow style segregation and white-citizen-driven, and often state-supported, violence, including lynching³; and throughout history police have belonged to and worked with white-supremacist and other vigilante groups to threaten and harm Latinos (Díaz 2010; Escobar 1999; Joge 1999; McWilliams 1948; Mirandé 1987; Rodríguez 1997).

However, as Mirandé (1987) points out Latinos, subjected not only to abuse and harassment at the hands of local police, but also by the Border Patrol, experience a "double oppression" (p. 100). Harassment by the Border Patrol/Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents is not limited to

³ The first documented lynching in California was of a Mexican man (McWilliams 1948).

undocumented immigrants. In mainstream U.S. society, Latinos (sometimes all lumped together as Mexicans), legal immigrants, and undocumented immigrants are often conceived of interchangeably. Impacted by fluctuating immigration laws, differing legal jurisdictions, a long-history of periodic intensifications in immigration sweeps and workplace raids, and anti-immigrant backlash, Latinos, especially those who “look Mexican” routinely experience violations of their Fourth Amendment rights and are subject not only to arrest, but also detention in immigration prisons where those detained have far fewer rights than they would in jail or prison (Díaz 2010; Dow 2004; Mirandé 2003; Parenti 2008). The recently passed Arizona legislation SB 1070 and other proposals of its kind underscore these issues.

Alderete (2002) talks about her experience with the police when she was growing up in East LA in the 1960s and 1970s:

I grew up in East Los Angeles, an ‘unincorporated area that was ‘served’ not by the police but by the Sheriffs Department. Everyone knew they were bullies.

Sometimes at night, a group of Sheriffs would drive through Belvedere Park. Seeing us sitting around, they would flip on their loudspeakers and call out, ‘Hey you wetbacks, it’s late, time to go home. Why don’t you swim back to Mexico?’

The fact that most of us were born in the U.S. highlighted the Sheriff’s complete and willful ignorance of who we were: native Californians. (P. 4)

Because Alderete had witnessed several accounts of Sheriff violence against Chicanos during the height of the Chicano Movimiento (including the murder of journalist Ruben Salazar), police violence did not surprise her. In *Geography of Rage: Remembering the Los Angeles Riots of 1992*, she recalled, “The only thing that

surprised me about the 1991 Rodney King beating was that people were startled by it" (2002:5). Similarly, Rodríguez (1997) describes being witness to police brutality on Whittier Boulevard in East LA while on assignment for *Lowrider Magazine*:

What was the victim's crime? Wearing a sarape in the middle of the street? Being Mexican? The man who was beaten was not merely subdued but was subjected to a malicious free-for-all by peace officers who fought with each other like scavengers to see who could get in the best licks.

In my mind, the scene is frozen. Every time I snapped a picture, the camera recorded something that was already ingrained in people's minds. That was the sad part: that what I was seeing, that what I was photographing, that what everyone was seeing, was not unusual. It was business as usual, another beating of a Mexican. The guardians of justice were acting as enforcers. They had become the prosecution, the judge, and the jury (Pp. 5-6).

White supremacy coupled with nativist sentiments about who is a legitimate citizen in the United States make an already brutal criminal justice system that much more brutal for Latinos, who find themselves caught up not only in the prison-industrial complex and immigration-industrial complex (Díaz 2010).

Restoring "Order" Through Mass Incarceration

Over the last four decades, incarceration rates in the United States have skyrocketed. A number of scholars have linked this increase to the neoliberal backlash to struggles for civil rights (Gilbert 2008; Parenti 2008; Wacquant 2009). With varying degrees of emphasis, they assert that the social movements of the 1960s combined with the economic downturn of the 1970s led to political strategy aimed to: 1) discredit those involved in movements for social justice, and 2) find a scapegoat for the U.S.'s financial woes. Impinged by the movements of the 1960s, overtly discriminatory language went underground in mainstream political parlance and found its home in colorblind definitions of crime and approaches to criminality,

which are in fact far from race/class/gender blind in their consequences. Add to this the politics surrounding urban growth (i.e., more growth at just about any cost, including the displacement of those who stand in the way of, or are simply unattractive, to development) and it is not surprising that we find ourselves with unprecedented levels of imprisonment.

A number of factors led to an economic boom in post-WWII U.S. However, by the early seventies it was clear that the U.S. was in an economic crisis—fueled in part by overaccumulation, expanding international competition, and higher wages and standards of living for U.S. workers. In dealing with this crisis, corporate solutions meant reducing the wages, benefits, and number of jobs available to the working class. Afraid to lose the white working-class electorate, politicians sought to explain the worsening conditions for U.S. workers in a way that did not call into question the structure of capitalism and the accumulation of corporate wealth. The poor and people of color (often conflated as one group) became an easy scapegoat:

People of color were cast as parasites, and violent perpetrators pilfering middle-class (read white) America by means of such Great Society programs as AFDC [welfare] and Head Start. And the most potent anti-poor symbol—the one that always surpasses the welfare mother and the mendicant addict—is the young dark criminal, the untamed urban buck, running free, threatening order, property, and (white) personal safety. (Parenti 2008:168)

As of 2008, approximately 2.3 million people were in prison in the U.S.—seven times the rate of incarceration in 1971 (Gilbert 2008). Prior to this explosion, the rates of imprisonment had remained more or less stagnant for seventy years (Gilbert 2008). And it's not as if a massive crime wave suddenly swept across the U.S. The high number of people incarcerated reflects a shift in law-enforcement

policy which simultaneously expands definitions of criminality and increases penalties for behaviors defined as criminal. Wacquant (2009) describes this shift:

It is not criminality that has changed here so much the *gaze that society trains on certain street illegalities*, that is, in the final analysis, *on the disposed and dishonored populations* (by status or origin) that are the presumed perpetrators, on the place they occupy in the city, and on the uses to which these populations can be subjected in the political and journalistic fields. (P. 4, original emphases)

This new gaze is reflected in order-maintenance policing strategies—strategies that grant police a high level of discretion in the name of preserving vaguely defined “order.” “Broken windows,” “quality of life,” and “zero tolerance” policing all fall under the category of order-maintenance policing. Wilson and Kelling’s (1992) broken-windows theory of policing is perhaps the most popularly known of these approaches and often incorporates the policing of quality-of-life issues and the espousal of zero tolerance towards crime. Broken-windows theory puts forth a model of community policing that is based on criminalizing minor infractions and policing quality-of-life issues—including public urination and sleeping in public spaces. White (2008) describes how quality-of-life policing has its roots in vagrancy laws, which he traces to 14th-century England. The focus of vagrancy laws has shifted throughout the centuries—sometimes they are used to force “undesirables” out of a locale, other times they are used to intimidate people into staying in servitude (serfdom in 14th-century England; slavery in 19th-century U.S.). White (2008) offers post-slavery black codes as an example of “a system where the likelihood of being arrested, charged, and punished far outweighed the risks of continued servitude” (72). Black vagrancy was defined broadly:

Runaways, drunkards, pilferers; lewd wanton, or lascivious [exciting lust] persons, in speech or behavior; those who neglect their employment, misspend their earnings, and fail to support their families; and all idle and disorderly persons. (White 2008:72, quoting Mississippi's Black Code)

Whites who associated with blacks or who advocated for their equality were also subject to criminalization under these codes which leave a lot of room for officer discretion.

While order-maintenance theories of crime tend to assume a color- and class-blind "a crime is a crime is a crime" approach, labeling and critical criminological theories underscore the ability (tendency, even) for policing to be discriminatory and for enforcement to be selective. The order-maintenance approach posits two binary categories: the law abider versus the disorderly person (Harcourt 2001). What it means to be disorderly, however, changes across time, space, and situation. Opponents of this approach argue that these categories "mask the repressive nature of broken-windows policing and overshadow significant costs, including increased complaints of police misconduct, racial bias in stops and frisks, and further stereotyping of black criminality" (Harcourt 2001:7).

Ayres and Borowsky (2008), found that although whites were more likely to be written citations during the course of LAPD traffic stops, blacks were pulled over so much more frequently that they still got citations at about twice the rate as whites (per 10,000 residents, whites were stopped 1,750 times and blacks were stopped 4,569 times). Although they were more likely to be stopped, ordered out of the car, frisked, subject to consensual and

nonconsensual searches, and arrested, when frisked and searched both African Americans and Latinos were less likely than whites to have weapons, drugs, or other contraband.

Despite the portrayal of crackdowns on crime via order-maintenance policing, evidence suggests that these strategies are not particularly effective in fighting crime. Harcourt (2001) analyzes Skogan's (1990) empirical defense of broken-windows theory. Broken-windows theory posits that "minor disorder, both physical (in the sense of litter and broken windows) and social (in the sense of misdemeanor offenses) is causally related to crime" (Harcourt 2001:68). Reviewing Skogan's data and analysis, Harcourt argues that Skogan sometimes lumped serious crime (the dependent variable) in with minor disorder (the independent variable). Harcourt offered a corrected research design and found no significant connection between disorder and serious crime. In his review of other empirical research on broken windows, Harcourt concludes that "neighborhood disorder is not significantly related to homicide, burglary, physical assault, rape, or purse-snatching/pick-pocketing victimization (p. 88). He did find that there is some evidence to tenuously link disorder and robbery. This is similar to Blasi and Stuart's (2008) study of crime reduction in Skid Row as a result of SCI (discussed below).

While the logic of broken windows is convenient in its seemingly commonsense quality, it is by and large a fiction. As former New York City Deputy Commissioner for Crime Control Strategies, Jack Maple, put it:

Rapists and killers don't head for another town when they see that graffiti is disappearing from the subway. The average squeegee man doesn't start accepting contract murders whenever he detects growing tolerance for squeegeeing. Panhandling doesn't turn a neighborhood into Murder Central. ... Quality-of-life enforcement works to reduce crime because it allows the cops to catch crooks when the crooks are off-duty, like hitting the enemy planes while they're still on the crime. (Maple and Mitchell 1999:154-155)

While his last statement is questionable given the evidence, it is telling of the goal of these approaches—to put the police in contact with those who they perceive to be would-be criminals, or off-duty crooks. Parenti (2008) drives the point home:

'People say [zero tolerance] doesn't work because in New York or Baltimore, 80 percent of the quality of life tickets are never paid and an enormous amount of the misdemeanor court dates are no-shows,' says zero tolerance apostle Lt. McLhenny of the Baltimore PD. 'But hey, that doesn't matter. Unpaid tickets become [arrest] warrants. What counts is we've got them in the system. We're building a database.' Add to that disturbing admission the fact that zero tolerance is often selectively enforced against people of color and the visibly poor and what emerges is a postmodern version of Jim Crow. (P. 89)

Other scholars have made this connection between the U.S.'s current approach to crime and its past racist exclusion of African Americans from key institutions under the Jim Crow system (Alexander 2010; Parenti 2008; Wacquant 2009; Websdale 2001). Today, African Americans and Latinos are the primary targets of mass incarceration through the rise of order-maintenance policing and the war on drugs. Although African Americans and Latinos use drugs at about the same rate that whites do, they are disproportionately incarcerated for drug use. This is due to a law enforcement emphasis on urban areas where drug use and sales are more likely to take place outside and racial discrimination throughout the legal

process (from being stopped to discrimination in sentencing). For many blacks and Latinos, being convicted of a crime means being legally discriminated against in employment, education, housing, and access to government benefits. In many cases, convicted felons who have served their time are being denied the most symbolic (and actual) form of enfranchisement in the U.S.: the right to vote.

Safer Cities Initiative: Implementation, Impacts, and Resistance

This final section of the chapter places what is currently happening in Skid Row within the larger context of racialized order-maintenance policing (as discussed above). Advocates of SCI use two main arguments in its support: 1) this approach to policing reduces crime; and 2) this approach to policing protects the community from the outside criminal element that comes into Skid Row to prey on the area's most vulnerable residents. Casey Hernandez, a spokesperson for the mayor's office, articulates these points, "The city's first priority is to protect our most vulnerable residents from violent crime. The city dedicated an additional 50 officers to Skid Row to protect its residents and remove a significant criminal element that historically hinders efforts to provide services to the homeless" (Weeks 2009). Similarly, Officer Joseph, a lead officer in the SCI unit, blogs that his response to the question "why Safer Cities Initiative?" is that the goal of SCI is to "create an environment conducive to real change in the lives of those with the will to change" (Joseph 2009). He went on to write about the temptations

that people trying to recover from substance abuse encounter in Skid Row and how the efforts of LAPD “to bring order to Skid Row” reduce the influence of “addicts that refuse to change, gang members and the drugs they peddle.”

Although SCI wasn’t official policy until 2006, the foundation of this program was in the works several years earlier and was outlined in a 2002 internal LAPD memorandum entitled “Homeless Reduction Strategies.” This memo proposed the deployment of a minimum of twenty additional officers in addition to the eight officers already enforcing “quality of life type issues” in the area. “It proposed working with the City Council offices, the Business Improvement Districts, and the City Attorney to ‘impact the problem of the criminal homeless.’ In addition to at least 20 officers, the document recommended adoption of ‘anti-camping and anti-public urination/defecation ordinances’ and ‘disbursement [sic] of Social Service providers from within Central Area’” (Blasi et al. 2007:24). Proponents of these homeless-reduction strategies found an ally in LA’s then-new police chief, William Bratton, who was well-known for his application of broken-windows theory to policing in New York.

The lead up to the implementation of SCI involved input from James Q. Wilson and George Kelling who schooled stakeholders on the importance of gaining the moral high ground in the media by releasing stories emphasizing violence, lawlessness, and public-health concerns in Skid Row. Although SCI was eventually sold to the public as a way of decreasing the crime endemic to Skid Row and

protecting its vulnerable population from outside predators, the planning that went into SCI tells a different story. Blasi et al (2007) summarize minutes from key planning meetings:

On November 6, 2003, the press liaisons from the different agencies met to 'develop a coordinated strategy for communication to the press regarding the forthcoming effort in Skid Row' and developing the 'message of the effort' (i.e., the problem is 'lawlessness,' not 'homelessness'). However, there was no discussion at the meeting about lawlessness other than violations that inevitably accompany homelessness in the absence of adequate shelter or other facilities: sleeping or sitting on the sidewalk, conducting biological functions in locations other than bathrooms. Rather, the focus was entirely on discouraging visible homelessness in Skid Row. For example, the second item on the agenda addressed whether the sidewalks in Skid Row could be narrowed to make sidewalk dwelling more difficult. ... Although it would figure prominently in the public relations effort that accompanied the Safer Cities Initiative in Skid Row, in the meetings of August, September, October, and November, 2003, there was in the minutes of these meetings not a single mention of any 'crime' that does not necessarily accompany homelessness when there is a lack of shelter or other facilities: nothing about drug sales, nothing about violence perpetrated against homeless people. Nothing. (P. 26)

LAPD gave SCI a trial run of sorts in 2003 and LA CAN reports that during that time the emphasis was arresting people for violating LA Municipal Code 41.18(d) (sitting, lying and sleeping on the sidewalk) (LA CAN 2006b). However, SCI really came online in 2006 with the full support of LA's mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa (elected in 2005).

Journalist Anat Rubin covered news in Skid Row for Los Angeles' *Daily Journal* from March 2006 to June 2008, when she left journalism to begin working at Lamp Community—a non-profit organization in Skid Row which provides housing and services for severely mentally ill homeless people. Like LA CAN, Lamp Community has publicly opposed SCI. When she started covering the policies

guiding SCI in Skid Row, however, Rubin was wary of the opponents of SCI, saying she thought they were “conspiracy theorists” at first and would try to disprove the facts LA CAN publicized and organized around.

Rubin soon found that it was difficult to dispute claims that the underlying purpose of SCI was to displace Skid Row’s most impoverished residents. In an article about tenants of the Alexandria Hotel suing the hotel’s developer and the city which provided funds for the project, Rubin (2007c) writes:

Attorneys for the residents point to the Alexandria's Web site as evidence of the developer's plans to get rid of older, disabled people of color. The site looks like an advertisement for a college dormitory. Photos feature shaggy-haired boys lounging on modern couches and hip girls in bright rooms gazing into laptop screens. ‘Their planned new tenants don't look like the tenants who live there now,’ said McDermott attorney Matt Oster, whose firm is handling the case on a pro bono basis. ‘They're cleaning house.’

In another article, Rubin (2007b) points to disparities between the LAPD’s treatment of the homeless and extremely low-income residents of downtown versus visitors of the “new downtown”:

Critics of the policy [Safer Cities Initiative] say the double standard is most evident during the monthly art walk, which attracts thousands of people to the growing number of galleries near Skid Row. Community activists have videotaped police officers who ignore art-walk participants when they throw cigarettes on the street and walk from gallery to gallery with open containers of alcohol. Art-walk participants carry bottles of beer along Main Street while the area's poor residents, most of them black, are cited for ‘drinking from 24 oz. can of Budweiser on public sidewalk,’ according to one citation.

This double standard also became apparent in the handling of drug cases. Rubin (2007a) interviewed ten public defenders and concluded that, connected to the launch of SCI, the District Attorney had singled out drug cases coming from Skid

Row. The DA's policy was to restrict individuals in Skid Row from entering into plea deals, while people involved in the same types of cases in other parts of the city were allowed to enter into plea bargains. Public defenders said that the cases they were seeing were of ordinary addicts who were getting trumped up sales charges for "in the neighborhood of \$2 to \$20 worth of crack," often for breaking off a piece of their own rock for undercover agents asking to buy drugs. Sales charges make addicts ineligible for rehabilitation as an alternative to prison under California's Proposition 36.

Proponents of SCI say that it has been a success: both crime and homelessness are down in Skid Row, they assert. Blasi and Stuart (2008), however, found that SCI has not significantly reduced serious crime. Additionally, there is evidence that Skid Row's homeless and low-income residents are being displaced to areas that lack adequate housing and services or to jail or prison (Blasi et al 2007; Reese et al 2010). LAPD statistics do show a reduction in violent and property crime (44.3 and 41.8 percent, respectively) in Skid Row between the year prior to SCI implementation (2005) and the end of 2009 (SCI Community Impact Team Meeting handout, March 8, 2010). Such declines are consistent with the fact that crime in the city of LA has dropped for eight consecutive years (Hernandez 2010). In a quantitative analysis of LAPD's data, Blasi and Stuart (2008) found that the reduction in violent or property crime between the SCI-area and the rest of the Central Area (the control group) was not statistically significant.

When Blasi and Stuart broke out the individual categories of crime, one category—robbery—saw a statistically significant decline. In real terms, this meant a reduction of just under one robbery per SCI-dedicated officer a year. Blasi and Stuart estimate that at a deployment cost of \$6 million per year, the prevention of each robbery cost about \$117,000. The authors question the concentration of police in Skid Row, given that other areas of the city experience more robberies and assert that, “There is some reason to believe that the same 50 officers might have had more impact on serious crime in other areas of the city facing a greater crime problem” (Blasi and Stuart 2008:11).

The argument that SCI is helping Skid Row’s vulnerable population is undermined by the thousands of minor-infraction citations doled out to the most vulnerable residents of Skid Row by SCI officers. According to LAPD’s data between October 2006 and February 2010, officers gave out 28,971 such citations (11,010 were given out in 2007—SCI’s first full year). These types of tickets are written at between 48 and 69 times the citywide rate (Blasi et al 2007). Describing the logic behind these tickets, which are given out for sitting on the sidewalk, jaywalking, littering and drinking in public, Officer Joseph invokes broken-windows theory in an interview for National Public Radio:

‘If we let one person sit on the sidewalk, then it’s going to be two, three, four, five,’ the policeman says. And the problem with that, he says, is that ‘a lot of people are drug addicts, they’re going to start smoking [crack]. And the drug dealers are going to come ... and say, ‘Oh, cool, anybody want more?’ Then the gangs are going to say, ‘We can make money off of this.’ All from just one person sitting on the sidewalk. (Jaffe 2009)

This gets at two main focuses of SCI: quality-of-life citations and drug offenses.

Because LA CAN's legal clinic doesn't handle drug offenses⁴, most of my firsthand knowledge of the impacts of SCI policing relates to the massive number of quality-of-life citations that are being written. Doing intake at the weekly clinic, I found that one of the major impacts of SCI policing was that a large number of homeless and very low-income residents are being written tickets for minor infractions. The most prevalent type of infractions is crosswalk violations. These include jaywalking and variations therein, such as not making it across the street in time due to a disability, having one foot on the curb and another in the street while waiting to cross, or beginning to cross when the crosswalk light is counting down even if the person makes it across in time.

I found that many of the people receiving tickets for crosswalk violations were disabled. This included people with mental illness, who were blind, had leg amputations, were in wheelchairs, and had other major medical conditions. I also found that people commonly received tickets as they were on their way to get food at the missions. On several occasions, I did intake for people who were trying to make it to a meal before the meal line closed and were prevented from eating due to being stopped by the police and written up for a crosswalk violation. Others were given tickets on their way to meet case managers, mental-health providers, to follow a job lead, or to go to their home or place of work.

⁴ LA CAN's legal clinic does not handle criminal charges, such as drug offenses (or even drinking in public) because in these cases people already have a right to a public attorney. For evictions, infractions, and other non-criminal issues that can lead to devastating impacts for poor people, there is no legal right to an attorney.

Another typical, though less common, type of infraction is littering. During my fieldwork, an LA CAN member was given a littering ticket for cigarette ash. She said this occurred because she was standing outside smoking and refused to “move along” as requested by LAPD. She asserted her right to stand outside and the officers, lacking legal backing to make her move, gave her a littering ticket instead. In another instance, a man came into legal clinic for a littering ticket he got for setting down a bag of cans he was collecting for recycling. He hadn’t intended to abandon the cans, which were a source of income for him, but he was written a ticket nonetheless. In this case, his belongings were treated like trash.

Rather than supporting the attempts of people in the community to better their lives or even recognizing the precariousness of their situation as homeless and very low-income individuals, thousands of individuals get caught up in the net of SCI policing. LA Legal Aid Foundation lawyer Barbara Shultz, one of the original initiators of LA CAN’s legal clinic, described the impacts of these tickets on Skid Row residents:

If they don’t do anything about [their tickets] they turn into failures to appear, they then get stopped and it can go to warrants, they can be dragged off to jail. That’s going to have an effect on their benefits, it’s going to have an effect possibly on housing ... particularly if they’re [getting] section 8 or other subsidies that have rules about criminal activity. And it’s also a distraction that people that are trying to get their lives together really do not need.

Residents may not take care of their tickets for a number of reasons, including having a lack of money to pay for the ticket and not knowing where to go to for help;

losing the ticket and not being able to receive a reminder in the mail due to lack of an address; and complications due to mental illness or other disabilities.

Barbara also expressed frustration that the legal clinic had been overwhelmed by intake for these tickets. She said that she would prefer to see the available pro bono legal services put toward issues such as housing, government benefits, and family law issues: “There are a lot of other issues that are a lot more important than jaywalking tickets, but unfortunately due to the scale and the instant effect that has on folks that’s what we’re focusing on.”

At an LAPD-led SCI Community Impact Team meeting in March 2010, one of lawyers whose firm participates in LA CAN’s legal clinic described the resource drain created by the citations and how they were harming the ability of homeless and low-income residents to receive help with other issues and caused impediments to them receiving social services. Captain Chamberlin cut in:

I don’t mean to interrupt you but I’m not gonna sit up here in front of anybody and tell you a promise—‘you know what, you convinced me, we’re not gonna write tickets anymore.’ Because you might think those tickets, *oh they’re not important, they don’t really do anything*. But in reality, they demonstrate that we’re not giving up on this area. We’re not gonna change what we do in Skid Row or what we would do in [pause] Hollywood or West LA. If someone jaywalks in Hollywood or West LA, they usually get a citation. ... We’re not just gonna throw up our hands and say ‘Okay, we’re gonna give that part of the aspect up’ because that just sets a tone, not just for the jaywalking, which might be very minor, but it sets the tone for a lot of other things. And somewhere you gotta draw the line.

As part of the back and forth, the lawyer responded, “I have clients with degenerative hip conditions, nerve conditions, who can’t get across—who are still getting multiple citations for jaywalking. It doesn’t seem like the best use of

resources.” The captain responded that there is a balance that needs to be struck, but “somewhere you gotta draw the line in the sand and say ‘hey, we can’t just throw up our hands on everything and just say there’s no law and have this place revert back to what it was.’” In these types of conversations, someone will inevitably jump in (usually someone from LAPD or the Union Rescue Mission) and remind those critical of the police’s focus that police officers are not social workers nor do they build homes. While opponents of SCI argue for housing and services over policing, no one is actually confusing the police of being the ones to provide those things. This line of argument serves to derail such conversations and deflect attention away from what police are actually doing.

By participating in LA CAN’s Community Watch, I was able to get a sense of what SCI policing looks like and some of the impacts this style of policing has on community residents. In November 2005, LA CAN launched its “initiative to provide an alternative private security presence in the downtown community” (LA CAN 2006a:1). Similar to the Black Panthers’ police patrols, LA CAN members go out, typically in two-hour shifts, and document police activity in the community. When the initiative was launched, it was primarily in response to harassment and brutality of community residents at the hands of BID guards—private security guards hired by the business improvement districts that are funded by local businesses. According to Pete, at that time BID officers were predominately white men, who patrolled at night, and who carried guns. LA CAN designed a survey and through surveying residents, came up with community-based demands about the BID

guards. These demands included the hiring of people of color and women, getting rid of the guns officers carried, and having BID officers go through trainings. All of those demands were incorporated by the BIDs. As the practices of BID officers became less of an issue, SCI was implemented and the treatment of community residents by LAPD became the primary focus of LA CAN.

Community Watch serves the purpose of documenting the residents of Skid Row's constant subjection to police interaction and harassment; allows for the documentation of civil-rights violations; and is a symbolic form of resistance—an empowering assertion of one's rights. Community Watch teams are comprised of four people: a lead, who sets the tone, directs and interacts with the police (if necessary) on behalf the rest of the group; a videographer; someone who fills out the incident reports and is responsible for gathering all pertinent information (e.g., badge numbers, names of witnesses, et cetera) and for describing each incident in detail; and someone who checks in with the LA CAN office via walkie-talkie or phone throughout the shift and alerts the base person (the person they communicate with throughout) of any major incidents or need for additional witnesses or support. Being part of LA CAN's community watch has allowed me to see firsthand the over-saturation of police in the Skid Row area as well as the civil-rights abuses that occur. Below are my field notes from a Community Watch shift I did in October 2009:

Stop one: We arrived on the scene to find four black men handcuffed and facing a wall outside the Union Rescue Mission. We talked to onlookers and asked for information. No one had any. We stayed on the scene, observing and documenting. In total there were three police cars (a fourth rolled by) and five police (seven for a moment). I saw the men handcuffed; IDs being returned with an officer slipping them into the men's pockets; one officer

digging through a man's jacket and then his pant pocket. And then, one by one, the handcuffs were unlocked. The men were free to go.

So, we asked one of the guys—the one who I saw being searched by an officer—what had happened, why they had been stopped and handcuffed. He said, when he asked, the officer said that the men had been observed 'standing around.' The man asked the officer how long he had observed this. The officer replied, 'between 30 seconds and one minute.' So, it was up against the wall. A fellow Community Watch member asked, 'Did they ask you if you were on parole or probation?' 'Yes,' said the man. 'Did they search you?' she asked. 'Yes,' he said, 'and he was really disrespectful—sexually harassed me.' We prompted the man to ask one of the officers for his card to which the officer replied, 'You can get it at the station.'

A few things: It is against the law for LAPD to stop and question people about their parole/probation status⁵ and to conduct warrantless searches of this manner. LAPD officers are supposed to provide their business cards and identifying information when asked. The officer suggesting that the man go to the station to get it served as a threat to the man who quickly backed off and told us, 'Hey, I gotta live here.'

Stop two was just around the corner—this time in front of the Los Angeles Mission. Homeless men were waiting for beds at the shelter. The police, some of the same officers from stop one, came, put latex gloves on, and began confiscating and throwing away any of the men's belongings that were touching the ground as they waited. A cleaning crew from the Central City East Association then came through, sweeping up debris and asking us and the men to move aside as they swept the sidewalk. (They did not clean the other side of the street, which was equally littered but did not contain homeless people waiting for shelter beds.)

One officer began confiscating milk crates, which are used by homeless people to sit more comfortably and to store personal items in. At some point there was a little back and forth between the officer and those of us on Community Watch. Usually we are very focused. Day after day we watch and document the civil-rights violations that are occurring in downtown LA. It wasn't a new situation: warrantless searches; harassment; rubber gloves as personal belongings are confiscated; the flip attitude of the officers.

One of the officers mocked our documentation of what was transpiring. 'No pictures, please,' he said, flashing us with a movie star grin. 'Why do you hate me?' he asked glibly. I responded to the officer that it wasn't about him as an individual, but rather the institution he works for—

⁵ LAPD and the City Attorney's office argue that this is not illegal; LA CAN questions it's legality under the December 8, 2003 settlement agreement in a lawsuit where Skid Row residents (Donald Fitzgerald, Delbert Eugene Hudson, Dilworth Menefele and Mario Youngblood) alleged a violation of their Fourth Amendment right in LAPD's search and seizure practices. This agreement (often referred to as the Fitzgerald agreement) said that LAPD officers were enjoined from "conducting detentions or 'Terry' stops without reasonable suspicion that the person is involved in criminal activity or has committed a crime or violated parole or probation, but were not prohibited from engaging in consensual encounters" (Fitzgerald v. City of Los Angeles 2009:1).

the LAPD—and what it’s doing to the community. He paused for a second and then told me that maybe I should try to do something to help the community: like pick up trash, like he was.

During another Community Watch shift in May 2010, we documented four stops, three of which were “catch and releases,” in under two hours. Most of the stops were in progress when we approached, but we observed one from start to finish: A young black man was walking down the street. Two officers rushed up in a car, jumped out, and grabbed the man. He looked absolutely stunned. The cops handcuffed him, searched him, found nothing, and let him go. The cops pointed at us, and told him to walk in the opposite direction. He did, so we followed him and he told us what happened. One of the guys on Community Watch described the situation as “humiliating.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I show that from its history to present, modern policing in the U.S. is a key institution in the maintenance of white supremacy. Shifts in policing and the treatment of people of color under the law have changed less than the post-civil-rights rhetoric of colorblind equality would suggest. Overtly racist application of the law is no longer acceptable in mainstream U.S. Instead, we’ve seen a shift toward racially-coded depictions of criminality. Order-maintenance police strategies became popular as calls for “segregation forever” were replaced with an emphasis on “law and order.” Communities of color, especially African American and Latino communities, are overwhelmingly subject order-maintenance policing and criminalization under the “war on drugs,” despite the fact that their rates of drug

use are similar to those of whites. The heavy policing of African American and Latinos as well as disparities in other aspects of the legal system are fueled by a rapidly expanding prison industry. Although racial discrimination is illegal, African Americans and Latinos are increasingly facing Jim Crow type discrimination legally due to their criminal status, as well as detention and deportation as it relates to immigration and national security. I connect the implementation of the Safer Cities Initiative in LA's Skid Row to the history of policing in the U.S. as well as current trends in policing. Despite claims that this broken-windows-theory-style policing is helping the vulnerable Skid Row community, evidence suggests that SCI is a project of those who want to redevelop downtown and displace its very poor and predominately black residents, making conditions much worse and leading to the disenfranchisement of those the policy purports to help.

CHAPTER 3: PROTECTING THE COMMUNITY AGAINST URBAN GROWTH

Growth as a measure of success is a troupe of neoliberalism that impacts LA's Skid Row population. Following the "growth is good" theme, downtown LA is currently experiencing a "revitalization"—which includes the proliferation of condos, restaurants, and services which cater to middle- and upper-class people. Logan and Molotch (2007) argue that "local conflicts over growth are central to the organization of cities" (p. xxvii). Logan and Molotch discuss the tension between "exchange value" and "use value" and the actors tied to each. Exchange value is gained by making money off the land, whereas use value comes from people using the land and communities attached to it as part of their daily lives. The concept of the "growth machine" is central to Logan and Molotch's work because they argue that it is those for whom "the city is their business" that are dominant in the structuring and governance of U.S. cities (they also note that this model is proliferating globally, informed by the logic of free-market capitalism).

Despite the "growth is good" mantra, Logan and Molotch find that in many cases, the growth agenda actually erodes the standard of living for local residents. This is especially the case in poor communities of color:

Over the long haul of U.S. history, such neighborhoods have been the dumping grounds for waste and first candidates for other forms of disruption. Disinvestment lowers use values as buildings crumble, streets become less safe, and public health dangers emerge. When growth elites sense opportunities to convert their spaces to more profitable uses, like a convention center or urban renewal project, there goes the neighborhood and the daily round it sustained. (Logan and Molotch 2007:xii).

The daily rounds and even the mere presence of the poor, especially poor people of color, threaten exchange values for developers and businesses which move into these areas. Poor people, after all, don't have the money to pay higher rents, eat at high-end restaurants, or purchase expensive goods for themselves. Poor people are unattractive residents in this way, but also by way of social stigma. The classiest and racist foundations of the seemingly colorblind growth machine work to rid the converted area of its undesirables through displacement as we see in the case of LA's Skid Row.

One major difficulty in stopping the growth machine is that it is propped up by doctrine of "value-free development"—the belief that the "free market" should decide what is produced and where it is produced. This assumption omits any consideration of the value of the product or venture to the community and the social consequences of its production. Instead, it is uncritically accepted that all growth is good and will bring value to the community, increase job opportunities, and expand the tax base and all that that entails (Logan and Molotch 2007:32-33). To be clear, this is not just a belief held by conservative developers and politicians. More often than not it goes unquestioned by liberals/progressives and even residents who will bear the brunt of its negative consequences.

As pervasive as the "all growth is good" agenda is, in many cases it simply is not true. Logan and Molotch point out that it's hard enough for cities to coordinate the most basic services competently (e.g., schools, health and safety, environmental protections), much less manage the impacts of the growth machine. The authors

evaluate the effects of growth on fiscal health, employment, job and income mobility, eliminating social problems, the environment, accommodating natural population increases, and satisfying public tastes—areas (except for the environment) that the growth machine is often touted as benefiting. They conclude that, “Some of these claims, for some times and places, are true. ... Nevertheless, for many places and times, growth is at best a mixed blessing and the growth machine’s claims are merely legitimating ideology, not accurate descriptions of reality” (p. 85). For example, Logan and Molotch find that in most cases growth does not create jobs, it merely distributes them; and social problems are not reduced, instead class and racial inequalities are often exacerbated by growth policies.

Logan and Molotch, however, do not see the growth machine as all powerful. Sure, the capital and political cards are certainly stacked in favor of growth. But the conflicts that arise between those whose interests are exchange value and those who are seeking use value make a place what it is. And, although difficult, those who live and use a place can shape and even change the course of growth. Yet they are pessimistic. In terms of resistance to this sort of value-free city building, Logan and Molotch note that “there is precious little evidence” of such resistance (p. 53). Further, they assert that it is especially difficult to organize opposition in the neighborhoods of those most negatively affected by the growth machine—poor people—because the organizations that represent their interests are ineffective and “low-income people are difficult to mobilize; their day-to-day marginality makes it hard for them to contribute time or funds” (pp. 113, 136).

This characterization is typical of other urban theorists, who make these claims based on resource mobilization theory (Gin 2007). Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the need of movements to be supported by external elites who can provide the movement access to resources, including money, political support, and media access. However, while these resources are often helpful to movements, they do not make movements. One of the weaknesses of resource mobilization theory is “the consistent failure by many of its proponents to acknowledge the political capabilities of a movement’s mass base” (McAdam 1999:29). McAdam asserts that disenfranchised “minority” communities have their own types of resources, including “indigenous organizational strength,” which is facilitated through existing social networks, communication channels, and established structures of solidary incentives (or “interpersonal rewards that provide the motive force for participation”) (McAdam 1999:45).

In the case of LA’s Skid Row, the most audible resistance to the growth machine is coming from predominately low-income people of color. This resistance comes in the face of the severe demonization of the Skid Row community. When detached from a historical analysis of what created these conditions, stereotypes about poor people of color are used to pave the way for the displacement of the community (through a reduction of affordable housing and services and through the heavy policing and increased criminalization of a community and its daily round). Simply put, “Blaming the victims helps justify destroying their community” (Logan and Molotch 2007:134).

Those who do challenge the growth machine must be mindful of the different strategies governments use to control them. “When residents’ claims on behalf of use values threaten to undermine growth, government can turn back the challenge, either by invoking police power or by distracting dissidents with payoffs (for example, relocation allowances to displaced tenants)” (Logan and Molotch 2007:35). Both of these are seen in LA’s Skid Row. In this case though, the policing element did not start because of resistance to growth but as a part of the plan to revitalize the downtown area. LA CAN organizers have been targeted and harassed by the police, probably because their activism is critical of LAPD and the city’s plans for downtown. Relocation allowances have only come after hard fought legal battles (e.g., settlements to already displaced tenants). Yet amidst concessions for those who have been displaced and opposition to increased “quality of life” policing in downtown LA, city officials are standing firm in their support for the renewal of downtown and its policing component, the Safer Cities Initiative. The pro-law-and-order and pro-growth policies complement one another. They are palatable to most, and are attempted to be shoved down the throats of others.

Fighting for our Rights (and Then Some)

Within the context of the current global economic crisis, Mitchell (2003) sees two divergent paths before us. The first path is the new “class strategy,” as outlined by Harvey (1982). Summarized by Mitchell, “This strategy has sought to capture relative surplus value through the gutting rather than the development of social services and other forms of working-class subsidization, in the expectation that

these costs will be depressed through the simpler mechanism of immiseration” (p. 221). The second path is the struggle for a greater “right to the city,” as conceived by French Marxist and social theorist Henri Lefebvre. ... “any reasonable ‘right to the city’ requires also a right to *inhabit* the city, the right to housing” (p. 220, original emphasis).

I invoke the concept of the “right to the city” for the title of this dissertation because LA CAN members are, in part, struggling for a greater right to the city. In doing so, they are also fighting for their right to exist and to live in a community that reflects their needs and interests. Contestations over the land and use of space in Skid Row impinge on the freedom and existence of the community’s residents. Privatization, as it relates to the neoliberal growth machine and as it is elaborated on in Kohn (2004), obscures the fact that Skid Row’s residents have a stake in the community.

Kohn asserts that the standard definition of privatization—simply, the transfer of ownership of previously state-owned assets to individuals and corporations—doesn’t fully capture the essence of privatization. In addition to turning once public space into commodities, with privatization comes increasing social control. Kohn and others (e.g., Mitchell 2003) examine the impacts of privatization on homeless people as well as how approaches to homelessness and the use of space by the homeless are colored by different perspectives on the homeless. It is worth examining these perspectives and their policy implications in some detail, because although the privatization of space impacts all community

members, homeless people the most vulnerable to the accompanying social control for lack of anywhere else to exist. As Mitchell points out, more often than not, community responses to homelessness do not include the homeless. “‘Community’ simply does not include homeless people” (p. 217).

As I review Kohn’s analysis below, I relate it to what is happening in Skid Row amongst both homeless and housed community residents. Kohn’s (2004) delineation of perspectives on homelessness is a useful starting point. She describes four such perspectives. First, the conservative view is typified by an outlook which treats homelessness as a sign of disorder. Second, the liberal view asserts the rights of homeless people to bare life. Third, the romantic view characterizes the homeless as urban nomads. Fourth, the democratic view sees homeless people as political agents.

The conservative view assumes that homeless people are homeless due to a combination of bad choices and/or personal flaws; that homeless people will engage in disorderly conduct (and, in fact, their very existence is disorderly); and that they should be contained out-of-sight from the rest of the, presumably orderly, population. This view may also portray homeless people as dangerous and criminal. Advocates of the conservative view often rely on racist and classist stereotypes and conceptions about what is acceptable in civil society. Relatedly, the romantic view portrays homeless people as “urban nomads” who chose homelessness because of the freedom it provides. This view highlights the agency of homeless people, but

doesn't reflect the fact that the vast majority of homeless people are not homeless because of an antisystemic outlook on life.

For the purposes of this research, I am lumping the romantic view in with the conservative view. Both views, which assert that people are homeless by choice (romantic) or have made choices that led to their homelessness (conservative), have the same implication in this context: a lack of support for programs and services to assist the homeless or address the structural causes of homelessness. These conservative views lend support to approaches which criminalize homelessness.

Challenges to the criminalization of homelessness are found in both the liberal and democratic views. Laws criminalizing homelessness have been struck down for two main reasons. First, related to the liberal approach, are arguments that laws criminalizing homelessness violate the Eighth Amendment's clause prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. Second, related to the democratic approach, are arguments that the behavior of homeless people (e.g., panhandling) is protected expression under the First Amendment.

The liberal view asserts that homeless people have the right to "bare life" (the ability to fulfill the basic biological functions of survival, such as eating, sleeping, going to the bathroom, and having sex). This is the logic that was used to strike down anti-sleeping ordinances in LA's Skid Row. In *Jones v. City of Los Angeles* it was argued that homeless people should be allowed to sleep on the streets because there is a shortage of shelter beds. This argument held up in court, and people are now able to sleep on the street between 9pm and 6am.

This approach—"rights talk" as Tushnet (1984) put it—has some limitations (Kohn 2004; Mitchell 2003). According to Tushnet, the four fatal flaws of the liberal emphasis on rights are instability, indeterminacy, reification, and political disutility. Rights are unstable because they are context specific; their meaning and content may shift over time and space depending on the circumstances in which they arise and are shaped. The language about rights is open and indeterminate, leaving "rights talk" susceptible to adoption by opposing groups. Reification is a problem in the sense that concrete experiences become abstracted as a representation of the concept of a right (or lack thereof). Tushnet asserts that this abstraction devalues the concrete experiences and undermines political efficacy. Finally, talk of rights is often used to protect privilege and power and is thus harmful to progressive social change. Kohn's main concern with the liberal view is that the ask for mere survival may be too low. "If the rights of the homeless only extend to the basic functions of survival, then they have no legitimate grounds for turning down a shelter space or leaving the confines of an area like skid row" (p. 175). She asks, "what if a homeless person chose to live on the streets because she did not want to be separated from her partner or pet, or feared theft or disease?" (p. 176).

Mitchell, however, takes the position that Tushnet's critiques, while valid, are overly pessimistic about the utility of the rights framework. First and foremost, rights are a product of struggle. "The city is a place where difference lives. ... In the city, different people with different projects must necessarily struggle with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even

the rights of citizenship” (p. 18). He argues that, if successful, struggles to define rights result in the institutional backing for rights via law and policy. He writes, “No matter how appalling it might be to argue and struggle in favor of the *right* to sleep on the streets or urinate in the alley, it is even more appalling, given the current ruthless rate at which homelessness is produced, to argue that homeless people should *not* have that right” (p. 27, original emphases). Although not discussed by Mitchell, Kohn’s concern can be addressed by this perspective as well. Struggles can be had, and in fact are occurring, not only over the right to housing, as an example, but the right to *adequate* housing.

The democratic approach recognizes the agency of homeless people as political actors, “citizens and bearers of a legitimate social critique” (p. 183). Kohn argues that in a culture steeped in individualism and achievement, it is unlikely that the experiences and messages of homeless people will resonate with the majority people in society. However, allowing space for the message to resonate is critical to democratic society. “If the homeless do not have the opportunity to be visible in public space, if they cannot communicate their needs, then there is no chance that they will convince others to make the social changes necessary to meet these needs” (p. 184).

The Struggle to Define Skid Row

The conservative view is the view most commonly expressed by proponents of SCI. This view fits well the conservative approaches to crime and punishment (discussed at length in Chapter 2). This view is often articulated in negative

characterizations of the Skid Row community. At a LAPD Community Impact Team meeting in June 2010, a service provider from the Union Rescue Mission, a white woman who lives outside the community but says she has worked in Skid Row for 20 years “and not for the paycheck,” gave her approval of SCI:

There’s this polarized view of what’s good for people and what’s good for community. ... Are you violating somebody’s human rights if you allow them to not lay around in squalor on the streets? Some of the stuff that we’ve seen over the years down here in the Skid Row area is just deplorable in a civilized society, that’s my opinion. That’s not okay for people, it’s not healthy for people, it’s not healthy for community, and order creates a sense of pride in the community, and we’ve seen that pride restored over the past few years.

Later in the meeting, the same person said:

I live in a sleepy, quiet, residential neighborhood, and if you come on our street with your pants on the ground, and your hat turned sideways, and defecate on the streets or whatever, we’re gonna call the police and they’re gonna question you, and maybe hassle you a little bit [laughs], because they’re gonna want to know what you’re doing there. And that’s okay, that’s keeping the peace, that’s their role.

This first comment reflects common moral judgments made about the community as uncivilized and implies that people who oppose SCI because of civil-rights violations think the conditions created by extreme poverty and homelessness in Skid Row are acceptable. Her second comment suggests that it’s the job of the police to regulate fashion (of course, the sagging pants and sideways cap references are also racialized) and overlooks the conditions leading to going to the bathroom outside in public, such as a lack of restrooms.

Estella Lopez, the executive director of one of Skid Row’s business improvement districts, spoke about the people she “represents” at two Community

Impact Team meetings that I attended. Estella is an advocate of SCI and says that the effort has improved the area, but it needs to continue. She said that there are two types of workers who come to the Skid Row area: the primarily Latino industrial and blue-collar workers who come to Skid Row for work each day and the drug dealers who also come from outside the community to sell drugs. She said that the workers that she represents (actually, she represents their bosses) are scared to come to work because of the weapon-brandishing drug-dealers they may encounter and that these workers also fear losing their jobs if their employer moves out of the area due to its blighted conditions. In the March 2010 meeting, Estella attributed the loss of jobs in the area to these conditions and made no mention of the U.S.'s current economic crisis.

To those invoking the conservative view, it's not relevant that a person didn't make it across the street in time due to a disability; that a person poops on the street because there's no where else to go; or that ordinary addicts are targeted for drug busts rather than dealers. If you jaywalk, defecate in public, or use drugs—you are a criminal and should be prepared to face the consequences. As the Captain Chamberlin at Central Division put it during a SCI Community Impact Team meeting, he can't "turn a blind eye" to crime. This perspective ignores the fact that the police create enforcement strategies that reflect values and priorities and officers have a great deal of discretion in their work (Herbert 1997; Williams 2007).

Those invoking the conservative view find themselves at odds with those, such as LA CAN and supporting groups, who mobilize around liberal and democratic

views. In describing LA CAN's activism, I find the "liberalist" and "communalist" frames as described by Gin (2007) to be useful. Gin's liberalist and communalist frames correspond to Kohn's liberal and democratic views, respectively. Gin's (2007) work studies anti-gentrification movements in Northern California, making it a good lens through which to view LA CAN's anti-gentrification activism in Southern California.

Social movement frames are the ways in which people and groups identify, understand, and articulate their grievances and help groups to establish a common identity (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 1992). Gin found that different neighborhood groups primarily relied heavily on either liberalist or communitarian frames. Liberalist frames, like the liberal view described above, focus on "the idea that everyone deserves to be treated equally and that social-systems should be colorblind" (p. 474). These frames emphasize freedom, autonomy, and equal rights. Communitarian frames, like the democratic view, emphasize the shared experiences of community members. In the case of resisting gentrification in San Francisco's Mission District, communitarian frames focused on people's long-standing ties to the community and place attachment and linked their struggle to race and class oppression.

Gin found that each frame had its benefits and tradeoffs. In the case of Mission District activists, Gin found that by relying on a primarily communalist frames, the movement was better able to mobilize large numbers of community members. Although others participated, Mission District activists considered their

base to be working-class people of color. The coalition created a strong distinction between insiders and outsiders, which sometimes created tensions around race and class. The Mission District activists' centering of the issues of low-income people of color made it difficult for the coalition to garner the support of outsiders, including the media, citywide policy organizations, and the general public. West Oakland activists primarily organized around liberalist frames. Because of its resonance with mainstream U.S. values, this movement garnered much more outside support. However, it was less useful in actually mobilizing community members. For this reason, Gin found that the Mission District movement was more successful in winning policy change.

In terms of actually challenging neoliberal forces, a communalist frame is most useful. Gin writes, "If the core premise is that no one should benefit at the collective expense, then poor people gain standing to call for local control over land use, even if it means infringing on developers' rights" (p. 610). There are some lessons to take from the West Oakland movement as well, especially their success getting media coverage of neighborhood efforts to resist gentrification. She found that, ultimately, the groups became more successful when they incorporated tenets of both frames.

In my analysis, LA CAN invokes both the liberalist and communitarian frames. The liberalist and communitarian frames are employed both internally (e.g., at LA CAN's Residential Organizing Committee meetings) and externally (e.g., at a public meeting, such as city council, or a public protest) to varying degrees. The

liberalist frame is utilized most often in public; the communitarian frame is used most often among LA CAN members. Internally, the communalist frame is used to solidify the group's collective identity. Although the liberalist frame is sometimes invoked to encourage people to identify these issues as rights (i.e., housing is a human right, people's civil rights need to be respected), these discussions are subsumed by appeals to communalism (i.e., we are being denied this right because we are black, poor, homeless, et cetera). Linda, during our interview, said that she used to think that things such as food and housing were things "you had to earn." Through her participation in LA CAN, her perspective changed and she now conceives of those things as rights. Being involved in political action was a turning point for her:

Standing in front of City Hall council members and knowing that this is really a political process [made me shift my thinking]. And knowing that the only way we're going to get things done was through organizing and the power of the people. Because it's just like right now with the Los Angeles rental stabilization ordinance. If we don't speak up, next year we're going to be paying more rent. I just thought it was okay for landlords to raise the rent, because they had expenses. But it's not about expenses anymore: it's just about getting rich.

In the above quote Linda has begun to see the landlord as someone with different interests than hers. Communalist lines are commonly drawn between "us" (the community residents) and "them" (landlords, outside developers, "yuppies," and "loft-dwellers") at LA CAN.

Externally, the liberalist frame is more commonly utilized. This is strategically smart given the U.S.'s general consensus around liberal, even "American," values and the prevalence of colorblind racism in U.S. society. Using the

liberal approach, housing is often expressed as a human right. Police brutality is described as a violation of one's human and civil rights. As Al, a community resident and LA CAN member, put it in our interview, "There's nothing more basic than being treated decently and having a place to live." At a demonstration on the third anniversary of SCI, a sign reading "human rights not harassment" donned one of the tents in the encampment LA CAN set up in front of the police station. LA CAN's participation in an International Human Rights Day action in December of 2009 with other affordable-housing activists was described in LA CAN's newspaper,

Community Connection:

With chants addressed to the city council, mayor, and federal government, the protestors from across the city call attention to the reality that housing in Los Angeles is a privilege and a commodity, not a basic right. At the massive Christmas tree on the steps of City Hall marchers called for housing in the year to come. Later, in the shadow of the new 450 million dollar police headquarters, low-income tenants demanded the end to the costly criminalization of homelessness and poverty. The collective message of the day was 'We demand that you recognize and address our human right to adequate housing.' (LA CAN 2010a:7)

Claiming and Preserving the Community

Because the focus of this dissertation is much more about the processes by which people become and stay involved in LA CAN, rather than the impacts LA CAN has on the outside world (although these are certainly touched on), I am going to spend more time on elements of LA CAN that relate to the communalist frame.

Although the liberalist frame is useful both internally and externally, it is less useful internally. Rights are a great umbrella for LA CAN to lump its concerns under, but much of its internal emphasis is on claiming and preserving the community. People

are involved in LA CAN not because they are cashing in on some abstract right they believe they are owed. They participate in LA CAN because they feel connected to the community that LA CAN helps define and preserve. Through LA CAN, very poor people of color (for the most part), gain the confidence and skills to claim that they are community stakeholders.

When community residents assert that they are stakeholders and that their opinions and experiences should be included in the decision-making processes about policies that impact them, they embody the communalist approach. At an LAPD SCI Community Impact Team meeting, LA CAN members asserted that their issues were not reflected on the agenda. Instead of allowing the meeting to follow the planned agenda, LA CAN members raised their concerns as they introduced themselves—significantly drawing out the time it took to do introductions. LA CAN members also raised questions throughout the meeting. When the facilitators were bombarded with the hands of at least 15 people wanting to speak, they eventually abandoned their planned agenda (while still mentioning it and in some cases trying to bring the group back to it). The majority of the people who spoke were community residents, many of whom were LA CAN members, and the majority of them raised concerns with the police. Earlier in the meeting one of the facilitators remarked that LA CAN had a lot of people in the room and Pete argued that the facilitator's comment was a way of diminishing the presence of community residents and their unique position in the discussion. LA CAN members assert that the perspectives of community residents should be the driving force behind the

policies that will impact them. Yes, they are members of LA CAN, but first and foremost, they live in the community—unlike the majority of other groups and people who are considered stakeholders.

A common theme in my interviews was an assertion of community where policy makers often cite a lack of community—or an unworthy community. Al, a community resident and LA CAN member, found support from seemingly unlikely people when he found himself unexpectedly homeless after losing everything—his job, family, house—in connection with a health condition that left him in a coma for six months. He said that he was befriended by “homeless drug addicts,” who could see that he—an older, white male—was out of place as a homeless person in downtown. The other homeless people he met would get food for him, give him advice on where to sleep, and sometimes sleep near him to help him feel less vulnerable to attack. Through this he began to appreciate the challenges that people who are addicted to drugs face and found that “they’re really good people, decent people that would do anything for you.” Al now lives in one of the residential hotels and stays involved with LA CAN to give back to those that helped him—people who are criminalized rather than receiving the housing assistance and services that would help them the most. Barbara said that she learned about “the diversity of the Skid Row community ... the fact that it is a real community and not just something that people come in and out of” through her work with LA CAN. Alma, a volunteer for LA CAN, said that she sees LA CAN as reinforcing the community that exists. She brought up the point that it’s common in the city for people to not know their

neighbors, but LA CAN encourages people to “look out for each other” through community watch, in particular, as well as having a place to go for help or information.

Another impact cited by interviewees was LA CAN’s role in the preservation of the community. LA CAN was referred to as a “community watchdog” by Lea who said if it weren’t for LA CAN the community would’ve been “steamrolled”; “cheap insurance for all residents who live in this community” by Joe; and a “knight in shining armor” by Deanna who benefited from the settlement of a lawsuit against the Alexandria Hotel on behalf of LA CAN and several residents who experienced habitability issues and, as in the case of Deanna, were wrongfully forced out of the residential hotel during it’s renovation. As Steve puts it, “downtown wouldn’t be downtown if it wouldn’t be for LA CAN.” He elaborated that this is because of all the work around housing preservation and criminalization LA CAN has done: “Although the beast has run rampant through the community, the beast was a tamer beast than it could have been.” Dogon said that if it weren’t for LA CAN’s activism the developers would’ve “swept Skid Row clean, and wouldn’t a damn thing been said about it because anybody that had power and a voice to say or do something about it was in cahoots with ‘em.”

Anat discussed the leadership role that LA CAN takes on the community and how its work benefits a broad spectrum of the downtown community. She said that “even some of those folks that have been on opposite sides of a policy argument from LA CAN have found at one time or another that LA CAN is up there advocating

for their members and on their behalf.” One example that Anat gave was LA CAN’s opposition to proposed changes to the Section 8 program by the LA County Housing Authority that would make the vouchers less accessible to people in the downtown community—“an issue that the missions and emergency-shelter folks were opposed to as well.” She said that LA CAN was one of a few organizations that took the lead in organizing opposition to the proposed changes—informing community stakeholders of the proposed changes, getting letters of opposition signed by homeless-advocacy organizations, doing turnout for the public hearing, et cetera. She underscored her point,

I think that other organizations that might find themselves in contentious situations with LA CAN also have at one time or another greatly benefited from their advocacy work. And certainly the people served by the missions, you know despite what the missions might think at any moment about LA CAN, the people served by the missions have greatly benefited from the work that LA CAN does. They’re the only ones organizing. It’s crazy because there are a lot of people out here that could benefit from community organizing, but LA CAN is the only group.

Barbara characterized LA CAN as “the most impactful organization in LA, possibly wider.” One area this impact is seen in a number of LA CAN’s housing-related legal victories. The gains Barbara outlined were that residential hotel occupants became recognized as tenants by moving residential hotels under the jurisdiction of the housing department (they were previously under the department of building and safety). This allowed them to take advantage of some of the city’s affordable-housing programs and to make improvements to some of the units. Other victories include avoiding mass displacement and consequences for illegal displacements when they do occur. A number of interviewees mentioned that LA

CAN's impact extends beyond the downtown community. The hotel preservation ordinance, for example, is citywide.

One oft-cited measure of LA CAN's impact is a shift in increased accountability from politicians and policy makers, business interests, and the police. While the actual level of responsiveness and accountability varies by agency and issue, LA CAN members and supporters have seen significant shifts over time. Bilal talked about LA CAN's relationship with former LA mayor James Hahn. He said that initially Hahn instructed his staff to ignore and refuse meetings with LA CAN, but as time went on Hahn's office was requesting meetings with LA CAN. Speaking more broadly, Pete said, "We are now, but we were not at first, looked upon as a community that politicians should be beholden to." LA CAN pushes for this sort of accountability even in cases where their having their demands met seems unlikely. Becky said that in these cases LA CAN still feels like it's important to be in the fight: "If they're going to screw us, we're going to let them know that they're going to screw us. We're going to push back and we're going to resist in some way." In terms of housing, James said that LA CAN's work had impacted the "slumlords" who now know that they can't mistreat their tenants without repercussion. In terms of business interests, Fabiola said that it's significant that groups, such as downtown's business association, the Central City Association, know that there is a group organized around the interests of the long-standing community residents of downtown.

Although LA CAN has experienced less concrete gains in terms of its policing/civil-rights agenda, a number of interviewees talked about the potential impact of LA CAN on the way the community is policed through its community watch program. Bilal described community watch as a way of “turning the light on” to the BID guards’ and LAPD’s actions. He said that a lot of civil-rights abuses were being committed in the “dark.” In other words, people weren’t witnessing or documenting them. Community watch turned the light on to these abuses by documenting the interactions between BID guards and LAPD officers with community residents. He said this was especially true for the BID officers, who have less legal protections than LAPD. Fabiola said that LAPD is well aware that there is a group of people out there “that knows how to use video, knows how to use their own selves to document and then challenge [wrongdoing].” LA CAN has seen some successes in the area of policing. As described in Chapter 2, LA CAN was successful in pushing for changes to the ways BID guards police the community. Also, police in the Central Division have begun to slowly decrease the number of citations given, as reflected in the data LAPD presented at a March 2010 Community Impact Team meeting.

Conclusion

In challenging the city’s plans to redevelop downtown LA, LA CAN is fighting against two major currents that shape U.S. policy: 1) “growth is good” beliefs and policies; and 2) conservative views about homeless, the poor, and people of color. LA CAN’s activism makes a bold statement in the face of “precious little evidence”

that challenges are being levied against the what Logan and Molotch (2007) term the “growth machine.”

In this chapter I, like Gin (2007), call for “a reconsideration of the potential of low-income communities to assert their own interests in the face of development” (p. 20). LA CAN fights back against conservative attempts to displace and criminalize Skid Row’s low-income residents (most of whom are African American) by invoking what Gin (2007) calls the “liberalist” and “communalist” frames. The liberalist frame—which emphasizes liberal values, such as rights and equality under the law—is utilized most often in public. The communitarian frame—which emphasizes the group’s commonalities, collective history, and connections to the Skid Row community—is used most often internally, among LA CAN members. Flexibility with these frames allows LA CAN to mount a powerful campaign that speaks to mainstream values while mobilizing a broad base of its constituents. In terms of understanding how and why people get and stay involved in LA CAN, the communalist frame is most significant. Through the communalist frame, LA CAN gets community residents to view and assert themselves as stakeholders and plays a critical role in the creation and preservation of the Skid Row community.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY LEADERS: RECRUITMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN LA CAN

Much of the social movement literature on poor people's mobilizations emphasizes the role of social movement organizations and the outcomes SMOs achieve. Piven and Cloward (1977), in their analysis of the National Welfare Rights Organization, assert that organizations are antithetical to poor people's mobilization and emphasize the importance of disruptive tactics in achieving goals. Most scholars suggest, however, that SMOs provide vital resources and infrastructure for mobilization (Knoke 1985; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Schwartz 1976). Cress and Snow (2000) identify four types of outcomes (two organizational; two for the "beneficiary" group). For SMOs, outcomes include representation and resources. For the beneficiaries, outcomes are characterized by rights and relief. Although my research does not focus on correlating characteristics of LA CAN as an SMO to its outcomes, I do provide some analysis of LA CAN's successes and losses throughout its decade of existence. LA CAN exists in a vacuum of organizing around the interests of Skid Row's impoverished residents. The successes that residents have had in preserving affordable housing, expanding tenants' rights, and alleviating civil-rights abuses by police and private security guards can largely be attributed to LA CAN's organizing efforts. So, while a lot of research shows that organizations matter, my research focuses on how they matter, from the perspective of community residents and supporters of LA CAN.

Homeless People's Activism and Social Movement Participation

Snow and Mulcahy (2001) research the spatial exclusion of the homeless and homeless people's responses to the efforts of politicians, police, and other "agents of local control" to contain, displace, and exclude them. This research is done by analyzing spatial contestations as represented in the local newspapers of Tucson, Arizona between 1992 and 1997. First, Snow and Mulcahy delineate three different types of space: prime, transitional, and marginal. Prime spaces are used by mainly white, upper-income, well-educated, non-immigrant people for residential and/or recreational purposes; have entrepreneurial/commercial use; and or political/symbolic use for politicians. Marginal space, in contrast, has little or no residential, commercial or political/symbolic use for the upper classes, business or politicians, but nonetheless, contains many of the sustaining resources for homeless people. "These include places to sleep on the street with minimal police intrusion as well as shelters, cheap hotels, and affordable (albeit lowest-rung) housing, and the like" (DeVenteuil, Marr and Snow 2009). Transitional space is the in-between space—neither fully prime nor fully marginal. Transitional spaces are often shared by businesses, the homeless, and housed (though usually low-income and marginalized) communities; and are often the sites of reclamation or "revitalization" efforts for political and economic reasons. These are not perfect categories and a particular place may fit into one category at one time and another at another time (e.g., downtown LA may be considered prime during the day but marginal at night) (DeVenteuil et al. 2009).

Second, Snow and Mulcahy analyze which types of social control—containment, displacement, and exclusion—are used against homeless people and the prevalence of tactics by type of space. Containment characterizes strategies used to reduce the public visibility of the homeless and their interactions with other, non-homeless, citizens by containing them in designated areas. Displacement means removing homeless people altogether from spaces where they carry out their daily economic, social, and residential activities. Exclusionary controls seek to keep the homeless out of specific areas, such as in front of businesses or certain areas of the city. Snow and Mulcahy find that containment is the most common strategy (employed in 44 percent of the incidents), followed by exclusion (34 percent), and displacement (21 percent). The spatial control of homeless people was invoked the least in marginal spaces and the most in transitional spaces.

Third, Snow and Mulcahy look at how homeless people respond to the social controls outlined above. Tweaking Hirshman's (1970) analysis of how people respond to the unsatisfactory and/or unsteady performance of a corporate actor (e.g., a state, organization, corporation, or community), Snow and Mulcahy put forth four categories of resistance to spatial control used by homeless people: exit, adaptation, persistence, and voice. Exit involves changing one's location, but not behavior. Adaptation includes the modification of one's behavior, such as stopping sleeping or panhandling, without leaving the contested space. Persistence is signified by the person making no change—staying the course both behaviorally and spatially. Voice involves the collective expression of dissatisfaction with the

spatial controls one is subjected to. In Snow and Mulcahy's sample, persistence was the most common response (in 36 percent of the cases), followed by voice (27 percent), exit (20 percent), and adaptation (16 percent). There is quite a bit of variation between which forms of resistance occur by the type of space they occur in. Persistence and adaptation are more common in transitional spaces than in prime or marginal spaces. Exit is most common in prime spaces, but so is voice. Voice is also a common response in marginal spaces. Addressing the prevalence of voice in both marginal and prime spaces, Snow and Mulcahy (2001:163-164) write:

The reason, we suspect, in the case of marginal space is because what often is at issue is the defense of home territory or practices associated with it. In the case of prime space, there appear to be three issues that stimulate voice: one is the right to have access to and hang out in public spaces by virtue of citizenship; the second is the fact that prime space is the most fertile foraging space, thus warranting the expression of dissatisfaction with the efforts of control agents to exclude the homeless from those areas; and the third is that homeless activists and their organizations sometimes appropriate prime space in a demonstrative and explicitly political manner to exercise voice (Cress & Snow 1996, 2000; Wagner 1993; T. Wright 1997).

DeVerteuil, Marr, and Snow (2009) expand upon (Snow and Mulchay 2001) by studying homeless resistance by space-type in Los Angeles County. DeVerteuil et al. do this through their analysis of in-depth, life-history interviews which were conducted with 25 homeless people in 2003. They found that within prime space, only exit and adaptation were present; within transitional spaces, persistence, adaptation, and occasionally exit strategies were employed; and that voice was only invoked in marginal spaces—though persistence was a more common response.

DeVerteuil et al.'s findings differ from Snow and Mulcahy's (2001) findings⁶. The most notable difference was that DeVerteuil et al. found that voice was not invoked by homeless people in prime locations. A lot has changed in LA since 2003, however, and I'm not convinced, for example, that downtown LA should be classified as a marginal space. Instead, given LA's "revitalization," I would argue that at this point in time it is all transitional.

Given DeVerteuil et al.'s small sample, their study's strength comes from giving readers a more concrete idea of how homeless people experience social control, what the different responses to social control look like for homeless individuals, and the meaning homeless people attach to both. It also talks back to the ways in which homeless activism is dichotomized in much of the social science literature—such activism is either nonexistent due to assumptions about a lack of resistance by homeless people characterized by their stigmatization, powerlessness, and lack of social ties; or it is ubiquitous thanks to romanticized characterizations wherein every act of survival is a form of resistance. Snow and Mulcahy (2001) and DeVerteuil et al. (2009) demonstrate a "middle way" understanding of homeless resistance by showing varying levels and forms of individual and collective resistance.

Using Snow and Mulcahy's typology of homeless resistance, LA CAN exemplifies poor people—homeless and housed alike—and their supporters resisting through "voice." DeVerteuil et al. found that voice is the rarely invoked by

⁶Snow and Mulcahy (2001) did predict that the results of their study would likely differ by location.

homeless people and attributed this to homeless people's internalized shame and humiliation, which they picked up from the tendency of people within the U.S. to "blame the victim" (c.f. Wacquant 2007; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Despite its rarity in the social movement literature, we see homeless people and members of other marginalized groups invoking voice through their activism in LA CAN, and in transitional space, nonetheless. It makes sense for individuals to invoke voice in this space, because, like the marginal spaces discussed by Snow and Mulchay (2001), people are raising their voices in "the defense of home territory or practices associated with it" (p. 163). This is also happening because individuals are part of a group that believes in and facilitates their resistance through voice. LA CAN uses a "communalist frame" (discussed in Chapter 3) to solidify people's articulations of themselves as stakeholders in a community to which they have place attachments. Below, I consider how and why LA CAN members joined and became active within the organization and how the organization helped them to assert their collective voices through leadership development.

Corrigall-Brown, Snow, Smith and Quist's (2009) research stands apart from the literature on poor people's mobilization in that it focuses on why homeless people participate in social movements and protests that seek to improve the lot of homeless folks. Corrigall-Brown et al. test four sets of variables, each set related to the major theories of social movement participation, in their quantitative study of why homeless people do (and do not) participate in protests about homelessness. This study is based on the quantitatively-coded interview responses of 400

homeless individuals in three U.S. cities: Detroit, Philadelphia, and Tucson. The four types of theories tested are: social psychological factors, biographical availability, social ties, and contextual factors. They compare participants and nonparticipants of homeless protest events and analyze differences between people who have participated in one such event versus two or more protest events.

Corrigall-Brown et al. find that the significant factors in distinguishing participants from non-participants are absolute and relative strain, identification with other homeless people (collective identity), believing in the efficacy of collective action, and being invited to homeless mobilization meetings and protests. Examining levels of participation, one-time participants are compared to those who don't participate and those who reported participating in two or more events. There are three main findings. First, higher levels of absolute strain are significant in predicting one-time participation, but have no statistically significant bearing on multiple-time participation. Second, individuals who are invited are more likely to participate once, but this doesn't seem to impact multiple-time participation. Who does the inviting and where the inviting occurs matters though. People were more likely to participate when invited by an organizational member as opposed to a friend. Participation was also more likely when the inviting was done in a public place versus a shelter. Third, individuals who are had less free time/are less "biographically available" (measured in three ways by Corrigall-Brown et al.: if the person lived with a spouse, had children, and the number of days worked per week) are actually more likely to participate one time. Again, this factor does not

significantly impact multiple-time participation. The one statistically significant indicator for multiple-time participation (as opposed to one-time participation) is people's belief in collective efficacy (the stronger the belief, the more likely they are to participate). In terms of control variables, the authors find that people in Detroit are more likely to participate in social movement protests. They attribute this to the fact that Detroit's homeless population and services are more concentrated and centralized.

The authors use their study to highlight how homeless mobilizations may differ from the mobilizations of other groups of people. Strain, for example, tends to inhibit social movement participation in other groups. However, in Corrigan-Brown et al.'s study it facilitates participation. The authors hypothesize that because individuals feel strain, they may be more likely to accept invitations to participate when invited, but that strain, especially if it increases, may make it difficult for people to participate multiple times.

This latter finding is consistent with my analysis of LA CAN—people tend to get involved when they have a specific grievance or find their way to LA CAN because of a specific need. However, the vast majority of LA CAN members that I interviewed were no longer homeless or experiencing high levels of strain, even though many had at one point in time.

Another of Corrigan-Brown et al.'s findings was at odds with other social movement literature: While biographical availability and social ties tend to facilitate social movement participation, Corrigan-Brown et al. found that people who are less

biographically available are more likely to participate at least once. They explained this by saying that homeless people tend not to have the biographical or social connections that non-homeless people do—that “homeless individuals tend to have unstable and fleeting relationships with one another on the streets” (p. 327).

Through my participation in LA CAN, I found many examples of relationships and social networks that were maintained by homeless people, including long-standing friendships and romantic partnerships. One thing that Corrigan-Brown et al. overlook in their explanation of the role of biographical availability and social networks is the stability and social connections that organizations, such as LA CAN, provide for the homeless and other marginalized groups.

Like Corrigan-Brown et al., the current study examines factors contributing to poor people’s participation in movements around the issues that impact their lives. The current study is broader than simply homeless mobilization, however, and looks at the role of formerly homeless individuals in mobilizing around issues that impact homeless people, those living in temporary and transitional housing, and the many long-term low-income residents of LA’s Skid Row community. The current study also benefits from understandings that can only be captured through ethnographic research and through in-depth interviews with participants. For example, like Corrigan-Brown et al, I find that people’s belief in collective identity is a common reason for their continued involvement in LA CAN. However, unlike Corrigan-Brown et al’s quantitative interview survey, my study gets at how this

collective identity is fostered within LA CAN and how people's beliefs shift over time as a result.

While quantitative studies like Corrigan-Brown et al.'s can help detect the factors that facilitate social movement participation, ethnographic research and in-depth interviews with participants help paint a more complete picture of social movement participation. My study, for example, looks beyond attendance of organizational meetings or participating in protest events to how social movements happen, how people are organized, why and how they get involved, what they think about the organization they are part of and its impacts on the community and their personal lives. Corrigan-Brown et al. write that they selected the cities that were included in their study because there was ongoing ethnographic research occurring in them to ensure they "had a working understanding of the situation of the homeless in those cities" (p. 315). However, their study would be strengthened by more engagement with that ethnographic component. Some of the things that they tested should not have been reduced to dichotomous variables. The question of "who did the inviting?" is one example. In my research on LA CAN, I found that members were often invited by people who were both friends and organizational members, not either one or the other, which people in Corrigan-Brown et al.'s study had to choose from. Over two-thirds of the LA CAN members I interviewed first heard about LA CAN through a friend or neighbor who, in most cases, was also member of LA CAN. More importantly, ethnographic methods and in-depth interviews allows me to explore the processes through which LA CAN members

joined the organization and became more active within it and how members themselves understand those processes.

One important way that this dissertation differs from Corrigan-Brown et al.'s study is that, while the number of years and level of experience varies by individual, all of the participants in the current study are highly involved in LA CAN's organizing around housing and civil rights. This means that they are not just one-time participants, they are regularly involved (often once a week or more) in LA CAN's activities. The participants of this study were highly involved for periods spanning several months to several years (with the vast majority falling into the latter group). Presumably some highly involved individuals could have been included in Corrigan-Brown et al.'s study, but low levels of participation were the main focus since participants were either classified as "one-time" or as "multiple-time" participants. My study thus explores, in the voices of my informants, how and why they joined and became "core members" of LA CAN and the ways in which the organization helped them to develop their leadership and organizing skills.

Community Residents Mobilize!

"We ain't scared of no mayor!
We ain't scared of no chief!
We ain't scared of city hall
'cause they ain't nothin' but thieves!"
~Common LA CAN chant

During the period under study, LA CAN was able to consistently meet their mobilization goals in turning community residents and supporters out for its wide array of activities, including meetings (internal and external), demonstrations,

community forums, and visits to city council members. LA CAN's turnout goals ranged from 10 to 200 people depending on the activity. According to Becky, "Over the past year or two, it's not a huge burden to turn out 50 to 60 people, like for large Right to Housing actions. And for smaller, weekly activities like delegations or testimony, 10 to 20 people are regularly showing up." LA CAN's ability to mobilize their membership is facilitated by at least five main qualities of the organization: 1) It is a member-driven organization. Community residents are central to decision-making and feel like their opinions matter; 2) LA CAN meets people where they're at by providing people with an abundance of different opportunities to get involved; 3) LA CAN provides solidary incentives for its members by fostering a strong sense of collective identity and defining Skid Row as a legitimate community; 4) LA CAN also fosters a strong sense of collective efficacy, which is supported by the organization's tangible wins; and 5) LA CAN provides selective incentives to its members, including a sense of family and something positive to be involved in.

LA CAN centers the experiences of people from the community in its organizing. LA CAN currently employs four full-time staff organizers, one part-time staff organizer, and has two interns who receive a stipend. All of these paid organizers and interns currently reside or have lived in Skid Row. This is different than the model of most social movement organizations, which tend to hire people from outside the community (often with more education and resources than the constituents they are trying to mobilize). Two co-directors assist with organizing, provide leadership, and oversee the day-to-day administration of LA CAN. Both co-

directors formerly worked in organizations that provided services to and/or advocacy on behalf of homeless people but left those organizations to help establish and be part of an organization that empowers individuals and helps them mobilize for change. LA CAN currently has a board of nine members, including five long-time LA CAN members who currently live or previously lived in the community. Other board members are long-time LA CAN supporters. There are also a number of volunteers and supporters of LA CAN that come from outside the community, including academics, lawyers, and organizational partners.

LA CAN emerged from the experiences of both community residents and those working to provide homeless services and advocacy. Pete, one of LA CAN's co-directors and founders, was working with a homeless-advocacy organization and was struck by the fact that the people the organization were advocating on behalf of—homeless people—were missing from the decision-making process and there was no formalized structure for them to participate in it. Attempts were made to get community residents involved in the organization's advocacy program through a residential-hotel organizing team. However, the issues the organization was pushing for didn't resonate with community members. Pete recalls being "checked" at a community meeting when one of the residents in attendance said, "Pete, we love you. We think your heart is in the right place, but you're talking about issues that nobody in this room give a fuck about." This "very humbling and humiliating" experience led Pete to think more about his role within the organization and prompted him to wage a personal boycott against turning people out to the

organization's actions. "That was the moment that I said, 'nah, no more, not doing that anymore.' 'Doing that' meaning not going out mobilizing all these people for an organization without truly empowering the community," he said.

This boycott didn't last long because the organization accommodated the desire to have a resident-driven organizing component. This was described by Pete as a "check and balance" to the organization. The resources and go-ahead from the organization coupled with access to the residential hotels helped facilitate this organizing and after a year and a half, 25 residents (homeless and housed in the community's residential hotels) met and decided to launch their own organization—LA CAN. The group came up with its mission statement and goals:

The mission of the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) is to help people dealing with poverty create & discover opportunities, while serving as a vehicle to ensure they have voice, power & opinion in the decisions that are directly affecting them.

Our overarching goals focused on social change are:

- Organize and empower community residents to work collectively to change the relationships of power that affect our community.
- Create an organization and organizing model that eradicate the race, class, gender barriers that are used to prevent communities from building true power.
- Eliminate the multiple forms of violence used against and within our community to maintain the status quo. (LA CAN 2010b)

From there, the group made and distributed a community newsletter, held a couple of community events, and started attending meetings that discussed issues that would impact the community's homeless and impoverished residents. For example, they discussed the various public agencies affecting their lives, including the Community Redevelopment Agency and the Civilian Police Advisory Board meetings. Pete recalls,

During the early years [the service providers] were just like ‘Aw, how cute, a couple of [the residents] are in the room at the table.’ For the first few meetings [LA CAN] folks were quiet, because it’s a very new environment. And so folks really went to listen, then took it back to our 25 members and said ‘this is what’s being discussed, is there something we need to do because they’re meeting again?’ And then we started going back. Instead of sending one person in by [his or her] self, we sent two and three [members]. And then we started going back with positions. Then everyone didn’t think it was all that cute and funny anymore, you know what I mean?

He said some uneasiness developed amongst the service providers, including the board of directors where Pete worked. LA CAN’s model of resident-based organizing for structural change didn’t exist organizationally elsewhere in downtown Los Angeles. This model was in stark contrast of the status quo where service providers “very confidently made decisions on behalf of poor people and saw nothing wrong with it,” according to Pete.

Similarly, Becky Dennison, LA CAN’s other co-director, through her work at several service agencies, found that “there was a huge power dynamic even within the people who were supposedly helping, and the way people were treated, framed, viewed.” Becky explained that service providers were encouraged to view those they were providing services to as untrustworthy—that they were supposed to be on the lookout for clients who would try to “play”/take advantage of them. Far from immune to the stereotypes about people of color, the poor, and those struggling with substance abuse and/or mental illness, service providers often made subjective judgments about “who was worthy of help,” according to Becky. Becky notes that this dynamic is made worse by the fact that service providers are riddled with high caseloads and there are a number of funding circumstances that limit what help

they can provide. Her involvement in LA CAN, and its partner, the Downtown Women's Action Coalition (DWAC), was spurred by her desire for "a place where workers and residents in downtown could work together as peers as opposed to the dynamic that was existing."

Other members and supporters of LA CAN reflected this tension between "homeless management" and "homeless advocacy." Bilal, a former member and staffer of LA CAN who now works with a community organization in another LA community, talked about service providers in the context of the "homeless management industry." He said that as a resident of Skid Row he noticed that the structural causes of homelessness—"social, political and economic inequalities that give rise to homelessness"—were not being addressed by the shelters, missions, or other service providers. He said that while the services of these organizations are greatly needed, "they're just managing a problem basically." Bilal made his way to LA CAN because "this was the organization that was mobilizing the residents of Skid Row to address those inequitable political and economic realities."

Lea, a formerly-homeless community resident, LA CAN volunteer and currently the chair of LA CAN's board, was previously involved in a homeless service organization. She stopped being involved there after the organization decided to do away with its homeless/formerly-homeless component. Lea felt that people in the organization were not "open to listen to homeless people" or "deal with the reality of what homeless people see on the streets." In addition to the benefit of having the issues LA CAN works on come from community residents, LA CAN encourages

people to get involved and organize to have a say over the things that impact one's livelihood. One of Lea's first points of entry into involvement with LA CAN was through helping with DWAC's needs assessment of downtown women. She stayed involved with LA CAN because it's a "serious organization." "Not only about talk, this is the kind of organization that helps people believe in their ability to use their own voice and tell it like it is," she said.

General Dogon, another grassroots leader, contrasted LA CAN and its emphasis on leadership building to service providers. As he explained, when you go to a service provider, you fill out an application and leave your problem in their hands. In contrast,

... at LACAN when you walk in the door, we're going to tell you to roll up your sleeves, and get cracking because you going to have to fight your own battles. One of our sayings here is, 'We'll fight with you, but we ain't fittin' to fight for you, you understand me.' ... You learn organizing skills, you learn debating skills, you're learning how to facilitate meetings, how to talk to people, learn how to find out things and make people move and stuff like that. So, you learn the whole shebang—that's the difference.

General Dogon expressed satisfaction with his involvement in the organization and confidence in his organizing abilities:

I never did think that I would be able to sit in meetings with the mayor, or go confront the police commissioner, and have meetings with the mayor's staff and city council members, or meet lawyers, meet with ACLU and all that kind of stuff. Never thought that I would be able to—that it would go that far. But it did. ... And so, you know, it made me to a point where now I can go anywhere and organize. I can go to the moon and organize the Martians around some Martian rocks, whatever the situation may be.

The structure of LA CAN is one that facilitates involvement amongst people who live in the Skid Row community. This is in stark contrast to academic literature

and “commonsense” understandings of activists which stress the impediments to poor people’s organizing (or which ignore it all together). Becky said that people across the board, including those with social justice orientations and organizing experience, “felt like there wasn’t any organizing potential, there weren’t any wins to be had.” She said that outsiders stressed the need to find a “big name” for organizational support, but without any strong or well-known allies in the beginning, LA CAN decided to take on a number of seemingly unwinnable campaigns around housing and civil-rights issues. She said, “If we wait[ed] around for some big name or some big organization to think what’s happening in Skid Row is important, we would be long gone.”

Similarly, Pete discussed the lack of support from progressives who would say that you can’t organize poor people or you can, but not poor people without homes and not poor people without jobs because “they have too much to worry about.” Pete contrasted these assumptions with the organizing victories of LA CAN’s members. He said:

We have the strongest housing protection ordinance in this city that covers over 19,000 units of housing citywide. There’s lots of other groups that’s been working on housing stuff well before us, but, you know, miraculously very poor people, who were ‘unorganizable,’ secured that.

Bilal, too, talked about LA CAN’s ability to “mobilize a constituency that people said couldn’t be organized, much less mobilized.” He said that he’d even heard that from activist “comrades” of his—people involved in the civil-rights movements of the 1960s and similar struggles today—but “LA CAN proved that wrong.”

LA CAN facilitates the involvement of community residents by meeting people where they're at in terms of their skills, knowledge about the issues, and comfort-level around the various activities. Members of LA CAN encourage each other to build on individuals' strengths and move beyond their limitations. LA CAN provides a range of educational, developmental, and organizing opportunities to its members and is structured to provide a number of opportunities for people to give feedback that help shape the priorities and direction of LA CAN. These things along with the reinforcement of individuals' responsibility to themselves, each other, and the community as well as encouragement to get involved or increase one's involvement promote an engaged membership. Quoting Becky, LA CAN has

put a lot of time and effort into developing solely folks from the community, hiring solely folks from the community, trying to get resources to do an intern program, to do very regular staff and member training, not just on organizing skills but the political analysis that folks need to support the organizing.

Barbara, a lawyer for the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles who has worked with LA CAN on a number of issues, compared LA CAN to other community-based organizations that give "lip service" to "the folks, the people." LA CAN, she said, "really takes seriously their objective to create community leaders." This commitment is demonstrated, according to Barbara, in LA CAN's willingness to take time to listen to people in "meetings, after meetings, after meetings" and in its committee structure where people are empowered to make decisions about LA CAN's next steps: "they aren't afraid to give people power to make their own decisions." The decision-making process is shaped by LA CAN staff and core

members and volunteers who provide context, institutional/historical memory, and other guidance. Barbara speaks to LA CAN's role in lawsuits she's taken on: "LA CAN really organizes the plaintiffs and keeps them together and keeps them on issues. ... Some of my plaintiffs are community leaders now."

Things that might be impediments to involvement, such as differing skills and abilities, unstable living situations, work and family responsibilities, and health issues, are met with a structure that is fairly flexible in terms of people's involvement. Lydia, for example, said that she hadn't previously been involved in activism or organizations similar to LA CAN because she didn't think she would be able to do something like that due to problems she has with reading, writing, and expressing herself verbally. After being involved with LA CAN for a year, she spoke out at a city council meeting (something fairly common for LA CAN members to do). She said she finally did this because a number of her peers had and she was encouraged by other people to do so. She said, "I mean I can't do what they like to, to talk the way they talk, but I talked the way I could talk." Lydia is one of LA CAN's active members and one of her volunteer responsibilities is talking about LA CAN to people who come to LA CAN's legal clinic, giving them a copy of *The Community Connection*, and signing them up for membership. While it would be hard for her to do the intake paperwork for people who come into the legal clinic or input information about the tickets into the computer, for example, she has an important role to play nonetheless.

Other members echoed this. Debbie, a community resident, member, and staffer, also talked about how LA CAN found a place for her and helped her develop her skills. She said, “I didn’t have computer skills, but I could connect to my neighbors.” Today, she says she’s still honing her computer skills and LA CAN provides a space for her to grow as an organizer. Both Debbie and her co-worker Linda mentioned the support of other co-workers as being critical when they were first starting. Debbie said supportive co-workers “pulled me out of myself.” Linda said that at first doing outreach in the community was “scary” for her and that LA CAN had brought out qualities she didn’t know she possessed. She said,

I think I’ve always been a fighter but it had to do with my motherhood, you know? And so I know the fight was in me, it just, I needed the direction and the empowerment and the knowledge and the skills and the tools to do it with. And this is what LA CAN gave me: the knowledge, the tools, the training, the persistence, the caring.

Linda also said that knowing people LA CAN saw her good qualities was important and helpful to her. James, an intern who found his way to LA CAN through Dogon’s recommendation that he do community service there, said he had been given the chance to develop a number of skills—persuasion, leadership, teamwork—through his participation in LA CAN. He said, “There’s a lot of skills in me that I thought had died. You can lose those qualities in the street.” LA CAN brought those qualities out by putting him in roles where “they had to come out.”

All but one of the people I interviewed responded with an unqualified “yes” to the question “Do you feel like your ideas and opinions matter at LA CAN?” Karl, a former community resident and current LA CAN volunteer, answered, “I would say

60/40.” He said it depended on the type of meeting, time constraints, and also people having the same basic knowledge about the topic under discussion. Karl did say that there are a number of times when he felt that his opinion was “heard and appreciated.” He gave an example of people following his suggestion to hide the paper-mâché pigs, which are sometimes brought out for protests, prior to a meeting in LA CAN’s office with one of the police captains.

Affirmative responses to this question of whether or not people felt their ideas and opinions mattered at LA CAN ranged from people saying yes simply because their opinions are asked for at meetings to people having specific suggestions implemented. Mary, a community resident and LA CAN member, described being asked for her opinion at a housing committee meeting. In her interview, Mary expressed some hesitation about participation due to mental health issues that make it difficult for her to attend meetings regularly. At the meeting, one of the staff members told her that her opinion matters. She reflected on this,

It kind of got me, and I’m thinking: *Okay. it could be your first meeting. It could be your 99th meeting. Your opinion does matter.* And I think that’s basically what he was saying: ‘Hey, you haven’t come, but your opinion does count—whether you agree with everybody around this table, or you disagree with everybody else around this table—we want to know.’

Some of the examples people gave of having their ideas implemented included:

Debbie’s suggestion to do outreach to those in the residential hotels who may work by holding the ROC meeting in the evening; DWAC member, Fabiola, suggesting that the coalition perform *The Vagina Monologues* as a fundraiser and to hold a women’s

summit in downtown; and Al's suggestion that LA CAN participate in the downtown art walk.

Some people felt like their opinion mattered a little too much within the organization. Forrest, a Ph.D. student at UCLA who volunteers as part of his dissertation research, said that from the time he first got involved with LA CAN he was "kind of blown away" at the "equal measure" with which his input was considered. This was surprising for him "as someone who doesn't live here, someone who is not from this community, who drives in." I had a similar experience. I felt like it wasn't my place to weigh in on certain aspects of the organizing strategy because I wasn't a member of the community. I remember coming to a committee meeting for my first time and being asked about the timing of an action—I gave my opinion because it was asked of me, but felt like I should have deferred to those who had been doing the organizing around it. Becky also mentioned that sometimes she feels that Pete's and her ideas and opinions matter too much because of their roles as the organization's co-directors. She said,

Obviously, Pete and I have earned a lot of credibility and we've certainly tried to lead in a very collective and collaborative way. But it's clear, sometimes even uncomfortable, when people are like, 'Oh, let's ask Pete and Becky.' Now, we also have a core group of people, including members, who've been together for a very long time. So, in some ways it doesn't really matter who thinks up what at this point.

Although some people focused on the specific outcomes of input they'd given, most spoke to a satisfaction with the process of having their input considered. Joe, a former intern and long-time member who was homeless when I interviewed him, said that "anything I bring up or say that I'm interested in" is "brought to the table"

and the group would consider it and take it seriously. Fabiola discussed how the antiviolence initiative grew out of conversations that DWAC members were having. Forrest spoke about planning for the third anniversary of the Safer Cities Initiative—people would give ideas, they would go on the dry-erase board, and the group considered the ideas and came up with the action. Dogon said that if there's disagreement about an issue or the direction LA CAN should take on something, "We sit there, and turn it around, turn it this way, turn it that way, different ways of looking at, you understand me, 'til we get the best [solution]." He said if the group doesn't reach consensus on something, they go with the majority and "in most situations the majority always end up being right."

Two of the people I interviewed compared their participation in LA CAN with attempts to get involved with another local community organization that organizes around issues of economic justice, including tenant rights. Fabiola said that she did a brief stint as an intern for the other organization, but that even though everyone was really busy, there was nothing for her to really plug into there. At LA CAN, she was "able to do some things, like do outreach, help with like a letter or a flyer with like meetings that they're having, because we know they do so much activity with this community."

Nick, a Ph.D. student at USC who volunteers with LA CAN as part of his research, acknowledged that not speaking Spanish was one of the things that made it difficult for him to get involved in that organization, but that he was also discouraged by the feel of the organization—the big warehouse it was located in

made it feel impersonal and also he felt like it wasn't really about member-driven organizing. At the time he was involved with the other organization, it had 15 staff and three organizers. He contrasted this to LA CAN's much smaller staff where "everyone is organizers." This organizing focus and constantly having a lot of different campaigns going on may help increase LA CAN's flexibility and ability to include a variety of people into its work. Students with research skills can summarize policy papers and create fact sheets; people from the community can do outreach by talking to their neighbors; just about anyone can make phone calls encouraging people to come to a planning meeting or action. It is also useful to have people with a range of experiences and expertise articulating LA CAN's message.

LA CAN's staff, members, and volunteers reinforce a sense of individual responsibility to the community. Something that Pete often says is that once an individual knows about an injustice, s/he has a moral obligation, or is duty-bound, to do something about it. Both Lea and Nick quoted him saying this in their interviews and indicated that they agreed. Going back to Lydia's decision to speak out at city council, she said, "And I thought I have to do something. I can't just sit around and just have other people do it for me." In her interview, Debbie posed the question, "If I don't speak up, advocating for my neighbors, my community, who will?"

A key place where LA CAN members create and establish their sense of identity and purpose is at Residential Organizing Committee (ROC) meetings. These twice-monthly meetings are attended by LA CAN members, staff and supporters as

well as other community residents. There are usually between 25 to 35 people in attendance at the ROC meetings—about three-quarters of whom are involved with at least some regularity. Another quarter are first-time attendees, many of whom are homeless or living in residential hotels. These meetings are key in staying current on issues that the organization is working on, upcoming events, and opportunities to be involved. The agenda for each meeting is created by a committee of LA CAN members and various people are solicited to make reports about events and issues relevant to the organization and the larger Skid Row community. The meetings last for an hour and are structured in a way that invite participation and feedback from those who are not presenting on specific items. Dinner is served after ROC meetings, while helps reinforce the familial aspects of LA CAN and also provides an opportunity for LA CAN to discuss the importance of healthy eating.

LA CAN's mission statement is read at each ROC meeting. At the first meeting I attended one of the members talked about LA CAN's beginnings—when residents, in a meeting at the Rossmore Hotel, came together to have a say over their living conditions. At another ROC meeting, Al, gave a history of Skid Row starting in the 1970s. Al talked about downtown LA as an example of failed city/regional policy. He described the city's decision to concentrate services for the homeless and "low-class white residents" and said that this "contained the less fortunate and created a buffer zone between the haves and have-nots." He talked about the area's shifting demographics and the increased repression of the community as it shifted to be a predominately African American community. Piggybacking on Al's overview which

ended at the implementation of SCI in 2006, Dogon, a staff member, began discussing the impacts of SCI. He said, "Every time I walk on the street I see one of my neighbors against the wall. ... You see the way [the cops] look at us, like they're fittin' to get outta the car and beat our brains out."

ROC meetings are also a forum to let community residents know about, or remind them of, LA CAN's victories and why community residents continue to organize. At one meeting, Pam was discussing housing issues and a new attendee spoke up, saying that he was retaliated against when he complained about bad conditions where he was living. He said that maybe if he'd had done this with a group of people, like LA CAN, that wouldn't have happened. Below are my field notes on a discussion that occurred at a (December 2009) ROC meeting. The conversation below began with Steve talking about a *Downtown News* article (Vaillancourt 2009) where the police captain at the time characterized "aggressive panhandling" as robbery:

One of the members said he was going to go to the next police commission meeting to express his concern about this. Deborah raised concerns that this new definition created an incentive for people to accuse others of robbery and also would plant this idea in their minds. Pete said he was really concerned, 'this might be applied to people who aren't even asking for money.' That 'you're just looking at somebody, and they're like 'oh I'm scared' or somebody says 'I was scared, so I gave him a dollar,' without the person asking. Another member said 'this is just about profiling people, and the police aren't concentrating on the real issues which are gangs and drugs like heroin.' James said 'this is going to be used to arrest and target people.' Steve said 'it's a plot to keep us off the block.' Someone shouted from the back 'and to incarcerate us!' Another member said 'this is about the land.' Forrest said 'it's also about looking out for each other. If we see LAPD talking to people or harassing people, we need to be good neighbors, find out what's going on.' ... Another member said, 'there's not enough eyes on Skid Row, you have cops asking people 'where's your drugs?'" He said he had witnessed

a homeless woman in a chokehold by police, she was clearly mentally challenged. ... The police were telling him 'get away, get away.' 'What can we do?,' he asked. James said, 'Community Watch.' A student volunteer said, 'know your rights.' Pete said, 'each one teach one.' Dogon said, 'we are our brothers and sisters' keepers.' Somebody joked, 'We need LA CAN surveillance. We need our own cameras all over the place.' Becky followed up on that and said, 'we don't always have cameras, but there are other ways to document this. You can come into the office and we work with public defenders.' One of the community residents said 'look, I'm on the streets 24/7, what can I do if I see something? Can I call you guys and people come out?' Steve said 'Yeah, get our number. You can give the info to Dogon.' Pete also jumped in and said 'Yeah, and get trained on Community Watch.'

One of impacts of LA CAN that people cited was the creation of connections and strengthening of relationships—both in sense of individual friendships and family-like relationships and also in a broader community-ties context. Nick spoke to this on a personal and academic level, "Paradoxically, I found community in the one community that sociologists would tell you that all kin networks have broken down, that doesn't have community, doesn't have people caring for each other." He said that he found these characterizations of Skid Row to be "completely bunk" and plans to stay connected to the community for a long time. Debbie has lived in downtown for ten years despite her initial intention to "to come here, get a room, get on my feet and move back out." She said,

But I realized once I got here that this is a community. This is not a way through, you know, you just come in stay for a moment and then leave. Many folks have lived down here for 10, 20 years, or more. And so once I realized that I did not, first I couldn't afford to move out of the community because it's just too expensive outside of the downtown community. But once I got here and I met friends and talked to folks and I felt the same issues that brought me to this community was the same issues that brought many, many folks to this community. And since I was here, why not instead of move but improve, that was my motto. Don't move, just improve.

Those who had experienced a loss of family members (such as Linda, whose son was murdered before she came to LA, and Lydia, whose husband died shortly before she got involved with LA CAN) or who didn't feel particularly connected to their families of origin (such as Debbie who says she keeps her distance), discovered a sense of family at LA CAN. Debbie mentioned having Thanksgiving dinner with one of her co-workers and said that she was "creating a different family." James described the people at LA CAN as "a family of leaders." Steve, a community resident and staffer, said that when his mom died calls of support from residents he'd worked with at the Alexandria—one of the residential hotels—were five of the eight or nine calls he got within the first 15 to 20 minutes of him learning of her death. Pam, also a community resident and staff member, began tearing up recalling her recent stay in the hospital. She said, "I had more people from [LA CAN] call in and check than my own actual family" and recalled an earlier instance when Becky said, "Your family is not your only family. LA CAN is a family."

Another important impact of LA CAN that interviewees commonly cited was empowerment through education. This includes putting what is happening in the community in context through social and historical analyses; learning one's legal rights; gaining understanding of how policies that affect the community get made and how to impact the process by which they get made; as well as some of the nuts-and-bolts organizational and community organizing skills previously discussed. Linda said that she felt "dumb" for not having known the history of blacks and Latinos but also pointed out that she didn't learn about these histories in school. She

said that she learned from her co-workers and that the group read a lot and connected those histories to the struggles for civil rights. She said learning “how much our freedom has cost us” made her want to be part of a broader movement for civil rights. At one ROC meeting, a member said, “I just have to say, you know, I lived in the time of Dr. King. I lived in the time of Malcolm. I lived in the time of the Kennedy’s. And I am living in the time of LA CAN!” In doing so, the member portrayed LA CAN’s work as continuing the legacy of the civil-rights movement of the 1960s.

Several interviewees said LA CAN’s work helps the community by informing people of their rights. Lydia said LA CAN helps people know “what to do if they have problems about their housing or the police.” She gave an example of someone not knowing his rights when it came to housing relocation—his manager gave him \$300 to move out of his unit and he became homeless as a result. General Dogon articulated the importance of knowing one’s rights, saying that a person who lives and dies “without ever knowing his rights, basically lived the life of a slave.” He said that knowing and asserting his civil rights is important to him “because it takes me out of that slave state, make me stand up and fight.”

Most of the LA CAN members got involved because of an issue that was directly impacting them. Very few considered themselves activists or community organizers when they got involved with LA CAN. Joe and Bilal had previous organizing experience: Joe in the civil-rights movement, Bilal in the Black Radical Congress and other radical left organizations. Dogon had a political awakening in

prison that compelled him to seek out an organization. Still, it was the concrete conditions of living in Skid Row that brought these members into the fold of LA CAN. It was also LA CAN's outreach and the encouragement of others members that brought the community residents I interviewed to join LA CAN. Dogon said, "I was really looking to get involved ... I just didn't know where or when or how it was going to come. And it came by way of the purple shirts [BID officers] twisting that woman's arm." One day Dogon and some friends heard a woman screaming. They went outside to see what was going on and saw the guards had hold of a woman and were twisting her arm:

And I was like, 'What the hell are you doing, man? Let her arm go.' And the guy was like, 'Oh she got a pipe in her hand.' I said, 'I don't give a damn what she got in her hand. You going to break her arm. Let her hand go.' And she was like, 'I ain't got no damn pipe. I ain't got no damn pipe.' He let her hand [go]. She opened her hand and it was eyeliner, right? So, this is like about the fourth incident [I saw] ... and so I got pissed off this time. So, I said man something got to be done about this shit.

Dogon talked to a friend—who turned out to be a member of LA CAN—about his frustration with these incidents. His friend encouraged him to go to LA CAN and talk to Bilal. During their first meeting, Dogon and Bilal spent several hours talking about what was going on downtown and how LA CAN members were organizing in the community. Bilal "gave me a camera and a clipboard, told me to go take pictures. And that's really how I got started. Been here ever since."

Several members got involved in LA CAN initially because of the issues of displacement and habitability in the residential hotels. Steve's introduction to LA CAN came by way of a flyer announcing a meeting about the living conditions of the

Frontier Hotel where Steve was living at the time. Steve went to the meeting because he was unhappy with the increasing restrictiveness of the Frontier (having to show identification or a room key each time he came home) and the disappearance of a large community space (which became the entrance for the newly-renovated Rosslyn Lofts). He said,

During the meeting I started hearing all these things about how it was wrong, and how you could fight back, and this is the way you could fight back. So, I ended up after the meeting talking to Pete, who basically really energized me. I really didn't know what the hell was going on. And he was like, 'Come through, this is where our office is at. Come learn how you can get involved, so that you don't have to go through this and begin to change these things.' ... So, I came by the next day.

Steve talked to Becky the next day and has been involved in one capacity or another in the seven or so years since then. Steve volunteered for about eight months, was an intern who received a stipend for a year, and is now a full-time staff member of LA CAN. Al also got involved with LA CAN as a resident of the Frontier. He said the Frontier was eliminating its tenants and Al felt that he needed support. He came to LA CAN despite hearing that it was "a group of potheads." Al said that the advice he got was helpful and the situation "came out a whole lot better than it would have if I would have tackled [it] myself." He has been involved with LA CAN for approximately six years now. Many of LA CAN's core members are from the residential hotels where LA CAN's most intense organizing has happened and where some of the most egregious tenants' rights violations have occurred. When I asked interviewees what issues that LA CAN works on are most important to them, the

majority of people said housing first, though some of them went on to mention or talk about SCI and civil-rights violations.

As Al touched on in his “pothead” comment, one of the things that may discourage people from getting involved in LA CAN are the ways LA CAN is cast in a negative light and the stigma and repression that sometimes accompanies activism. In informal conversations, Lydia mentioned that the manager of the residential hotel she lives in discouraged her from getting involved in LA CAN by saying that those involved are troublemakers. James said that prior to his involvement with LA CAN he had a negative perspective on activists: “I thought ‘activist’ was another term for ‘rebel.’” For him “rebel” had a negative connotation of people agitating “in the wrong direction.” LA CAN members have certainly been treated as such by city decision-makers and by the police. Mischaracterizations of LA CAN as drug-supporting troublemakers and the police harassment of LA CAN organizers can have a chilling impact on members. Mary described going to one of LA CAN’s actions and then not coming back for a while after witnessing an interaction between one of the members and the police. She said an LA CAN member, an older woman, was arrested and mistreated by the police—she didn’t spend much time behind bars, but “once she came out she looked pretty bad” and had marks on her. Mary said, “that kind of turned me off a little while. I’m thinking, *hey, I don’t want to be involved in something like that.*”

Several of LA CAN’s organizers, especially in the course of Community Watch, have been arrested. An extreme example of this occurred on May 21, 2010 during

the course of my field research. LA CAN and other tenants' rights organizations attended a city council where after five hours, the council voted to send a proposal to put a four-month moratorium back to committee, which effectively killed the proposal. Those in support began to chant, disrupting the meeting to show their discontent with the council's action. LAPD officers began to fill the chambers and, instead of allowing the protest to continue, or declaring the assembly illegal and arresting those who did not disperse, they lined up with batons and began physically pushing people outside the council doors. During the course of this three LA CAN members were arrested, one of them tased multiple times and hog tied with the plastic ties that substitute as handcuffs. However, any time a charge has been brought against LA CAN members, even in this recent example, it has been dismissed.

Fear of reprisal may be something that discourages involvement in LA CAN or even asserting one's rights. As illustrated in Community Watch field notes (quoted in Chapter 2), when our Community Watch team encouraged a man to ask for the card of an LAPD officer he thought had mistreated him, he quickly backed off when the officer suggested he go ask for it at the station. He told us he wasn't interested in having us take a statement or file a complaint for him, and said, "Hey, I gotta live here." I interpreted this as his way of saying that he felt threatened and that nothing good would come of him taking issue of the way he was treated by the police—if anything, it might bring more scrutiny and harassment on him. Another LA CAN member who was not on Community Watch with us but stood by and

watched the incident was told by a police officer, “Just wait, we’ll get you too.” In my interview with Karl, he cited people being on parole or probation as an obstacle to involvement as they were likely to avoid extra attention from the police.

Pete pointed out that some people want to distance themselves from LA CAN’s work because their battles are intricately connected to “the structural racism that permeates the United States.” This level of discrimination is insidious because it is easy to deny—overtly racist language and policies are looked down upon in a United States that provides “equal opportunity” for all. I interviewed Anat, a former journalist who covered Skid Row for *The Daily Journal*, who said that when she first talked to people at LA CAN she thought they were “conspiracy theorists” and tried to really hard to disprove what LA CAN was saying “but it panned out.” Anat said that she was constantly accused of being an advocate rather than a reporter because of the way she covered what was happening downtown and the implementation of the Safer Cities Initiative. She said that despite the fact that *The Daily Journal* is a small statewide legal journal read mainly by lawyers and politicians, her editors received calls complaining about her coverage. As a result, her stories that involve LA CAN also include “a great deal of cited documents, because of the amount of research that went into them to have documents to back everything up because it was so contentious.”

All that said, people do decide to get involved and take those risks. For some, this is because they perceive the risks to be minimal. This was the case for Mary who after her initial hesitance kept coming to meetings and seeing that LA CAN was

working on issues she cared about and people weren't getting arrested all the time. For some, it becomes a matter of living life as fully human—not in a “slave mentality,” as Dogon said. Also, the fact that many of LA CAN members feel a strong commitment to each other and get a lot of support from each other, which normalizes involvement and creates solidary incentives to participate. And LA CAN's victories—having charges against its members dropped, winning lawsuits when hotels displace people, et cetera—reinforce this.

One of the common personal reasons why people are involved in LA CAN is that it provides them with a space to do something positive for their community and to feel good about themselves. Many members contrasted negative conditions and feelings they experienced prior to their involvement in LA CAN with the positive results and sense of self gained through their involvement. Dogon talked about his previous gang involvement and said that even then he was always looking for some way to be involved—“to help folks. I was supposed to be helping my protecting my neighborhood, protecting my community.” He said that his political understanding of who the enemy was shifted in prison and his work with LA CAN allows him to fulfill his desire to protect his community while building the foundation for “the next big movement.” He describes this as “the people's movement where we taste victory—the big victory, reparations or our share, our real share.” Similarly, James said that he'd been around a lot of negativity downtown and didn't know there were people like LA CAN members in existence. He said he wants to stay involved with LA CAN because “to be surrounded by people with positive goals. It's a beautiful thing.”

A number of members who lived in the residential hotels said that being involved in LA CAN gave them something to do besides stay in their rooms all day. There are a number of reasons why people would just stay in their rooms, including not being able to work due to disability, fear of police harassment, being in recovery for drug and alcohol addiction and not wanting to encounter temptations, the lack of things to do for low-income people in the downtown area, and the lack of public space where low-income, people of color are free from harassment in downtown LA. Debbie had heard about LA CAN from a neighbor but didn't actually get involved until she got a flyer about a trip LA CAN was taking to Sacramento for Hunger Action Day. She felt that her access to food was constrained by her set-up at the residential hotel and the lack of grocery stores in the community. She signed up because she cared about the issue, but also because it was something to do. She thought, *Okay, I ain't doing nothing anyways, so why not? At least it's a bus ride out of the city.* Travel to actions and conferences about issues members care about is an example of the benefits of involvement for some LA CAN members who wouldn't otherwise get the chance.

Al said that his motivations for getting involved in LA CAN were twofold: he was bored and didn't have anything to do and he could do something to give back to the community—the people who helped him when he was homeless and LA CAN which helped him protect his rights. He said,

Prior to getting active with LA CAN all I would do is either sit in my room or sit in the park and virtually do nothing because I wasn't in the position where I could actually go out and find another legitimate job. So, what do

you do? It just seemed that, gee, this was a good fit because now I have something to do and there are people that I'm actually benefiting by doing it. And so you kind of regain some of the self-esteem that you feel you've lost.

Al said he'd lost his self-esteem because his medical problems, losing his family and job and becoming homeless were major blows. Even when he began to recover and had a place to live he felt discouraged by the fact that the "computerized generation virtually passed him by" and he didn't know what he could do anymore. He said that he felt "hopeless" and was in "despair." He reiterated a few times throughout his interview that being part of LA CAN "restored a little bit of my self-esteem."

Involvement in LA CAN helped a number of the members move beyond the stigma connected to their circumstances. LA CAN meetings and events helped people see that their "personal issues" were actually connected to broader political and structural forces. Linda, for example, found herself homeless after falling into a deep depression when her son was killed. Her husband left her. She lost her house. She turned to prescription drugs to dull the pain. Linda found her way to Skid Row to help her daughter enter a recovery program in the community and realized that she should stay and get help with her addiction too. She said that she felt "totally alone" and "embarrassed," but when she came downtown she "was embraced by the fact that I was not alone. That despair and that hopelessness I was feeling was shared amongst many other folks in this community. Too many, we were too many." Pam also said that she thought her situation was "embarrassing" and didn't realize there were so many people in similar circumstances. She said she became more comfortable getting involved and speaking out about her experiences after "finding

out a lot of people—especially a lot of women out here—have been through a whole lot worse than I have.” As members like Linda and Pam connected with others in similar circumstances, their consciousness was raised.

Karl said that he was very angry—at himself and society—when he moved downtown because he felt stuck. He said that he was “in shock” when he first moved to Skid Row and said that many of the people he encountered “were so beaten down mentally, emotionally, and [they] didn’t really give a darn.” Karl said that he did not want to do anything to make a home in downtown and felt no commitment to the place. He was isolated, angry, and frustrated with his circumstances until he met some LA CAN members in the hotel he was living in. He said that after hearing about LA CAN he went to check it out for himself. Karl was inspired by what he heard and found that being involved with LA CAN helped give him direction:

Otherwise I would have been down there with no purpose, I would’ve been still full of frustration and stress. But, you know, with me going to LA CAN meetings and getting involved with them, it gave me structure. And I like that.

Karl eventually moved out of Skid Row (to Long Beach, about 30 miles away) but remains involved, volunteering weekly (often multiple times a week).

Conclusion

Members of LA CAN and their supporters exhibit what social movement scholars classify as “voice” in their response to attempts by the city to displace the homeless and poor residents of LA’s Skid Row community. Like the urban theorists discussed in Chapter 3, social-movement scholars tend to emphasize the factors

which constrain the ability of the homeless, the very poor, and impoverished people of color, to collectively engage in acts of resistance and protest. In addition to a lack of resources to aid mobilization, some scholars suggest that this is due to an internalization of negative judgment for their plight. This dissertation underscores the importance of organizations that value the experiences of marginalized groups and help individuals reframe their “personal issues” as structural, political issues.

In this chapter, I argue that qualitative methods, such as the ones employed in this dissertation, add nuance to the research on homeless and poor people’s mobilizations that quantitative studies cannot provide. I review the history of LA CAN and its establishment in part as an alternative to the model of service provision that occurs on Skid Row. LA CAN is in essence a place where people get to find and invoke their own voice, rather than having service providers speak for them. I discuss five main ways that LA CAN is able to facilitate the participation of community residents: 1) It is member driven, allowing members to shape the group’s agenda; 2) LA CAN offers a variety of way for individuals to get involved; 3) LA CAN participants receive solidary incentives for participating as this enables them to belong to a social-movement community and to be seen as “community leaders” by their fellow members; 4) LA CAN fosters a strong sense of collective efficacy by emphasizing the gains made by the group in organizing meetings and through its publication, *Community Connection*; and 5) LA CAN members receive selective incentives, namely a sense of family and friendship amongst fellow members.

CHAPTER 5: FROM SKID ROW TO THE SLUMS: SEEING THE GLOBAL WITHIN LOCAL STRUGGLES

Although this dissertation is about members of one organization in one segment of a particular city, what is happening in Los Angeles' Skid Row has global implications. Smith (2001) argues that order-maintenance policing strategies are being exported globally at "lightening speed" (p. 70). He notes that a visit to Berlin by William Bratton (between his New York and LA gigs) was followed by the implementation of NYPD-style computerized surveillance of homeless people. Smith discusses similar developments in New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Argentina and England. Like other scholars (e.g., Gilbert 2008; Parenti 2008), Smith ties the proliferation of zero tolerance to global economic restructuring, or what he calls "postliberal globalization." According to Smith, this restructuring includes a project of social cleansing, which is packaged and sold as a necessity to maintain "decency" and "civility"—terms which are defined through Eurocentric and class-privileged lenses—in order to reduce crime, despite evidence to the contrary. Instead of a crime-reduction strategy, Smith argues that zero tolerance is "a rapidly crystallizing antidemocratic form of global social control" (pp. 72-73).

The rise of zero tolerance policies in the 1990s corresponds with the most recent wave of gentrification, what Hackworth (2000) calls "gentrification generalized," a phenomenon fueled by the "growth machine" which is not just a factor in the U.S., but globally (Logan and Molotch 2007). "The world is moving increasingly to a global competition for investors, encouraging local units to dampen

controls on how land gets used and raising the social and environmental costs that ensue” (Logan and Molotch 2007:xvii). With this shift comes more of an emphasis on the value business interests can extract from a place, rather than how the space is used by those who live there. The privatization of space is an increasing concern for marginalized groups, who are routinely excluded from these spaces; people who find value in having accessible public space; activists who want to demonstrate their views publicly; and those generally concerned with democracy and the free movement of people and ideas (Fernandez 2008; Kohn 2004; Mitchell 2003).

A society’s levels of racial inclusion and racial justice are important barometers for the strength of its democracy (Winant 2004). According to Winant, globalization and its accompanying trends signify a “re-racialization of the world” (p. 131). “This global system of stratification correlates very well with racial criteria: the darker your skin is, the less you earn, the shorter your life span, the poorer your health and nutrition, the less education you get” (p. 135). Winant argues that because overt racism is no longer widely accepted, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which “commonsense” and “colorblind” racism continue to enable racial inequality throughout the globe (c.f. Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney-Lopez 2003). What this looks like varies according to a country or region’s history. For the predominately black residents of Skid Row, it looks like this:

Deep histories of racial discrimination and exclusion through housing and job markets have produced poverty, homelessness, and conditions for our constant criminalization. ... We directly experience [the city’s policies] through our state-sanctioned reduced life expectancy of 42 to 52 years. In contrast to the national average of 80 years, we are three to four times more like to die than the general public. ... The elimination of dental, vision, and

podiatry care from Medi-Cal further causes our physical bodies to deteriorate while we are unable to afford, find, or readily access fresh vegetables or cooking facilities in our [residential hotels]. (Los Angeles Community Action Network and Dahmann 2010:1-3)

Scholars and social-justice activists can learn from the residents of Skid Row who organize themselves through LA CAN. This study of LA CAN provides an example of a movement that is challenging powerful and widespread views on growth and the treatment of people under the law. As Gin (2007) found, anti-gentrification movements that employ communalist frames are better able to mobilize community members than those that rely heavily on liberalist frames. She found that mobilization using the communalist frame led to more success in winning policy change. I found that one of the reasons LA CAN was effective in mobilizing community residents was because it drew on and reinforced communalist connections between its members. LA CAN also used liberalist frames, especially externally, in portraying the issues impacting community residents as issues of rights they were being denied of through the city's policies. LA CAN's use of both communalist and liberalist framing strategies is consistent with Gin's (2007) recommendation, because while mobilization is of primary importance, having a message that resonates with mainstream society is helpful in garnering support for the movement's goals.

LA CAN organizes around multiple issues, housing and civil rights being the two most salient ones, and has experienced more concrete gains in the area of housing. Although an analysis of the successes and challenges of LA CAN's

campaigns is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I did find that LA CAN was more likely to get broader support from other community groups and progressive organizations for its housing work than for its work to protect residents' civil rights against police abuses. I also found that housing was the issue that LA CAN members cited as most important, even if they did express concern about policing or draw connections between the Safer Cities Initiative and gentrification in downtown. Not having adequate, or any, housing certainly carries a negative stigma in the U.S., however, images of the houseless are not nearly as stigmatized as those who get caught up in the criminal-justice system. This is especially true in the context of the current economic crisis where unemployment rates and home foreclosures are at historic levels and public sympathy for the poor and homeless has increased. Additionally, it is easier (though still not easy) to find a landlord, developer, or banker to be criminal than to find the police to be criminal.

Throughout the course of the research for this dissertation, I did not document a single case of an LA CAN member or a Skid Row resident that I came into contact with disagreeing with LA CAN's position on housing issues. When it came to the presence of the police in Skid Row, people were more likely to distance themselves from LA CAN's opposition to SCI. This did not happen more than a handful of times and was often qualified in some way (e.g., someone would express support for the police in general, but then disagree with a particular aspect of policing, such as excessive force or giving jaywalking tickets to the disabled), but it did happen. This likely occurred because people wanted to distance themselves

from criminals (especially when the police characterize people who disagree with their policies as criminals or as supportive of crime) and also because people want to feel safe and feel like there is somewhere to turn if they are in danger. Abuses by the police are often rationalized away in mainstream society. Police are regarded as heroes who “routinely do what the rest of us won’t” by risking their lives to keep the peace (Williams 2007). Never mind that policing is less dangerous than many other jobs, including truck driving and grounds-keeping (Williams 2007).

For those of us who are concerned with democracy, paying attention to and contesting racial and other forms of inequality that are perpetuated through the law and its agents is of utmost importance. We must not be afraid to ally ourselves with “criminals,” because who and what is considered criminal and how those who are deemed criminal are treated, are the canary in the metaphorical coal mine of democratic society. To ally ourselves with “criminals” means to recognize that too often this label is applied to a society’s most vulnerable and marginalized members and that too often it is used to sustain systems of inequality. LA CAN works to undo some of the reservations its members have about taking on the police by connecting the policing that is occurring as part of SCI to housing issues and the broader movement by the city to displace the residents of Skid Row and by connecting their resistance to this to past struggles for civil rights. In doing so, LA CAN is able to organize large numbers of community residents (and some supporters) around policing issues. The fact that LA CAN organizes around multiple issues that are relevant to its base is a strength of the organization.

As discussed in Chapter 4, LA CAN is structured in a way that facilitates the involvement of those it considers its base. One of the limitations of my research on LA CAN is that I do not focus on internal issues which may hurt its success. This occurred for two main reasons. First, I interviewed and interacted with those who were actively involved in the organization. Interviewing inactive community residents or people who have left the organization may have led to further insights on why LA CAN's may not have appealed to everyone. Second, my main goal was to gain an understanding of how community residents who were involved with LA CAN experienced the issues LA CAN mobilizes around as well as how and why they got involved in, and continue to be involved in, LA CAN. Although some of my interview questions could have yielded criticism of or internal conflict within the organization, very little surfaced.

I did find, however, that one of LA CAN's strengths—the selective/social/familial aspects it provides—can have its downsides. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that one of my potential interviewees stopped participating in LA CAN activities before I could interview her. Although there may be other issues that I am not aware of, I do know that she stopped coming around after she found out about a party that she wasn't invited to. For those who are particularly motivated by being part of a close-knit group, being excluded from something may be enough to make her/him leave an organization. Although it is normal and even good to socialize with those one works and struggles with, it is important to be aware of the downsides of creating a strong in-group. One thing that we stress in the union I am part of is that

it's important to not be too cliquish and to make the actions we participate in and the goals we accomplish the main reward. Still, the incorporation of fun is important, because we spend much of our lives working together in hard-won and often long-fought battles.

As for those battles, the targets are always moving. Winant (2004) discusses this:

To achieve the incorporation of movement demands into state policies—winning the civil-rights legislation, for example, that outlawed de jure segregation—is perforce to recognize the very limitations of any given set of movement demands. There is no dishonor in this, for the 'horizon' of our demands is necessarily set by the injustices we face. (P. 216).

LA CAN embodies this understanding in its work. It draws upon the successes of the civil-rights movement and insists that although equality did expand, rampant inequalities exist. LA CAN is not satisfied with equality under the law when, in so many ways, the law is used to continue to stifle the freedom of people of color and other groups in our society. As LA CAN wins one victory, it continues to look to the next and it engages in multiple struggles on multiple fronts.

As goals are met and the "horizon of our demands" moves, the ultimate goal should be nothing short of global democracy, what Chase-Dunn and Boswell (2002) define as "real economic, political and, cultural rights and influence for the majority of the world's people over the local and global institutions that affect their lives" (p. 7). Although not the focus of this dissertation, LA CAN members recognize that their work in Skid Row is to connected struggles in Los Angeles, throughout California, on the national level, and in the international arena. This recognition is demonstrated

through work on multiple coalitions at these various levels and by LA CAN's involvement in hosting site visits by United Nations' rappateurs on affordable housing and racism. LA CAN members play a central role in this coalition, were central to the site visits, and have no problem connecting the dots between what is happening in Skid Row to post-Katrina New Orleans to the favelas in Brazil. The goal of global democracy encourages us to see connections between movements, locations, and histories and to struggle for the freedom of all people. Let the quotation on the back of one of LA CAN's shirts be true:

"There will be no prison which can hold our movement down."
~Huey P. Newton

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

When did you first get involved with LA CAN?

What made you first want to get involved with LA CAN?

Which LA CAN programs and activities have you participated in (e.g., ROC meetings, community outreach, Community Watch, protests, speaking out at City Council, legal clinic, etc.)?

Which programs and activities do you like to participate in the most?
Why?

Are there any programs or activities that you would like to participate in that you haven't yet, or that you'd like to get involved in?

If yes, which ones?

What makes you want to participate/increase your involvement?

Why haven't you participated/increased your involvement yet?

What makes you want to stay involved with LA CAN?

What impact do you think LA CAN's work has on the community?

How has being part of LA CAN impacted you personally?

Have you done similar activism as part of other groups or movements?

If yes, how does LA CAN's work connect to your previous activism?

If no, why is that? What is it about LA CAN or about circumstances in your life that made you get involved?

What issues that LA CAN works on are most important to you? Why? Which of LA CAN's various programs and actions are most important to you? Why?

Are there other issues or actions that you wish LA CAN would take on or do?

Do you feel like your opinions and ideas matter at LA CAN?

What examples do you have of this?

Is there anything else about LA CAN or the issues affecting the downtown community that you'd like to talk about?

Please tell me a little bit about your background.

Where did you grow up? Please describe your neighborhood(s). What class or income-level would you say your family was when you were growing up? Where are you living now? (If in downtown, homeless? In an SRO? Have you ever been homeless? In an SRO?) How long have you lived t/here?