

ARTICLE

# Ethnography

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## Negotiating blackness, for richer or for poorer

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**ABSTRACT** ■ For decades, Chicago's South Side has provided the material for the iconic representation of black urban poverty in the USA. Today, the poorest (but best-located) parts of this vast homeland – where land and homes could be had for a pittance two decades ago – are being celebrated by the City, eyed by developers, and featured by the media for their rise from the dust. This article focuses on how they are also being reclaimed by affluent African Americans, and the resulting contests over the representations of blackness. Three years of ethnographic research in North Kenwood-Oakland, located near the heart of black Chicago, highlight the class and lifestyle fractures within black identity, while affirming the persistence of blackness as a collective experience and endeavor. Nonetheless, the distinctions made by affluent blacks, which marginalize the behaviors and interests of their poor black neighbors, have real consequences for the distribution of neighborhood resources.

**KEY WORDS** ■ African Americans, racial identity, class, Chicago, urban sociology, gentrification, public housing, Bourdieu

Consider the contrasting remarks made by two residents of Stanford Street, a residential block in the black neighborhood of North Kenwood-Oakland on Chicago's South Side.<sup>1</sup>

I know the block had to come up (i.e., 'improve'). I understand this, and I don't envy the people. But, I mean, it's just that they're just so different.

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Because I have a job where I've had a position too, but I didn't look down. You don't look down on anyone. Because all of us know where we've been, honey, but we don't know where we're going. (Ms McDaniel)

Then there's like this component on the block of the people who have like more than like two or three generations in the house, and are not keeping up their house. You know, 50 cars on the street, that kind of stuff, which I hate. Sitting on the porch all the time, staring at you from like the time you walk out of your door till you get to your car. I'm just like seeing them and it's like, oh, yuck. So that's how my neighbors are. (Mrs Howard)

I lived on Stanford Street in North Kenwood-Oakland (NKO), between Ms McDaniel and Mrs Howard.<sup>2</sup> It was clear in these separate interviews that they were talking about each other. To my north was the McDaniel household – headed by Emma McDaniel and including her two sons, her daughter, and her daughter's young son. The extended family frequently sat on their porch, talking on the phone, or talking to each other, entertaining visitors, barbecuing, or just passing the time. To my south was Mrs Howard, her husband, and their new son. They had built an extension to the back of their house, including a back porch, so they never sat in front of their house. In interviews with others on the block, she was characterized as alternately aloof in daily neighborhood interaction and disdainfully insistent on issues of block improvement. These qualities are not only referenced in Ms McDaniel's description of her neighbor as 'looking down on people', but they are illustrated in Mrs Howard's own words.

While some US scholars define 'class' as a combination of income, occupation and education (see Blau and Duncan, 1967 for a classic formulation), lay people express their own class standing and read others' class positions through signs of language, dress, demeanor, and other objects and behaviors that have social meaning. This kind of stratification in the social order is what Weber called 'status', where "status groups" are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special "styles of life" (Weber, 1946: 193). Weber argues that the two spheres of *class* and *status* are connected: 'The social order is of course conditioned by the economic order to a high degree, and in its turn reacts upon it' (Weber, 1946: 181). Bourdieu (1984: 249) makes a similar argument regarding the social (and cultural) order, which represents and reproduces distinctions in the economic order.

As a consequence, the space of life-styles, i.e., the universe of the properties whereby the occupants of different positions differentiate themselves, with or without the intention of distinguishing themselves, is itself only the balance-sheet, at any given moment, of the symbolic struggles over the imposition of the legitimate life-style, which are most fully developed in the

struggles for the monopoly of the emblems of 'class' – luxury goods, legitimate cultural goods – or the legitimate manner of appropriating them.

This article is centrally concerned with the sphere of lifestyle distinctions, which reflects and structures stratification in the material world of class, as articulated by Weber, Bourdieu, and others (e.g., DiMaggio, 1982; Lamont, 1992; Lareau, 1987). On Stanford Street, Ms McDaniel, a part-time bus driver, clearly felt the downward gaze of Mrs Howard, a corporate executive, but resisted it by both asserting her own previous occupational authority ('I've had a position too') and calling into question the belief in status security at all ('but we don't know where we're going'). Mrs Howard, on the other hand, was unwavering in her judgment of Ms McDaniel, and her vision of proper neighborhood conduct.

This neighborly exchange illustrates my first thesis: distinction-making characterizes black American communities, and lived class schisms (of the type defined by Weber and Bourdieu) constantly challenge both the attempt at racial solidarity by organizational activists, as well as the assumption of homogeneity by academics and other outsiders. Class and status conflicts have always been apparent in black communities, and are well-documented in ethnographic studies (DuBois, 1899; Frazier, 1939; Jackson, 2001). St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton (1993: 566) provide a fictionalized account of a field experience in 1930s Chicago, in which a black doctor was called to the house of a poor black family after a domestic dispute turned violent. The authors wrote: 'For a moment, Dr Maguire felt sick at his stomach. "Are these my people?" he thought. "What in the hell do I have in common with them? This is 'The Race' we're always spouting about being proud of?'. Such disdain is frequently documented in studies of past and present black America. However, the difference between pre- and post-Second World War black America is that middle class blacks now constitute a significant interest bloc, more able to translate disdain into disadvantage for those being disdained.

Whereas no more than 10 percent of African Americans could be considered middle class in the 1930s, roughly half of US blacks today are occupationally middle class (i.e., they work in managerial, professional, technical or administrative jobs), 30 percent of black families earn over \$50,000 a year, and roughly 17 percent have college degrees. Despite these positive trends, African Americans are still significantly disadvantaged compared to white Americans (see Billingsley, 1992; Landry, 1987; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Oliver and Shapiro, 1998 for further discussion of the black middle class).

As a result of moving into schools, institutions, and occupations from which they were once barred, blacks have forged legitimate alliances with white powerbrokers, and can consequently translate their tastes into

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exclusion and domination of more marginal groups. For example, Cohen (1999) shows how the AIDS crisis has been muted in the black community because of the discomfort and unwillingness of mainstream black political voices, especially black religious leaders, to address and ultimately embrace issues of sex and (homo)sexuality. Like the abrogation of political responsibility for combating AIDS, the practices of differentiation in NKO are ultimately political acts, as they privilege certain modes of action, define 'out-groups', shape whose voice will be heard, and determine how resources will be distributed – resources such as affordable housing, neighborhood amenities, or access to good schools. As Bourdieu writes, 'The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible the explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par excellence' (Bourdieu, 1989: 23). The politics of neighborhood change in North Kenwood-Oakland is occurring not only at the level of city bureaucrats and developers who wield electoral or financial power, but also among residents – new and old, formally educated and not, owners and renters, rich and poor – who vie for the ability to name what is acceptable and what is not, who should stay and who should go.

Distinctions are only half the story, however, for Drake and Cayton's account of the frustrated doctor continues as follows:

He had a little trick for getting back on an even keel when such doubts assailed him: he just let his mind run back over the 'Uncle Tomming' he had to do when he was a Pullman porter; the turndown he got when he wanted to interne [*sic*] at the University of Chicago hospital; the letter from the American Medical Association rejecting his application for membership; the paper he wrote for a white doctor to read at a Mississippi medical conference which no Negroes could attend. Such thoughts always restored his sense of solidarity with 'The Race'. 'Yeah, I'm just a nigger, too', he mumbled bitterly.

This passage illuminates my second assertion: simultaneous to the work of difference, distinction and sometimes even dislike, exists the primacy of race as a unifying social category, fostering allegiances across class, and similarities in worldviews and political attitudes (Dawson, 1994; Hochschild, 1995). For example, despite Ms McDaniel's and Mrs Howard's mutual critique, their views became more consonant when discussing the growing presence of whites in the neighborhood. 'Honey, naturally they want to get back here', Ms McDaniel believed about whites, 'and that's why I'm so determined, if it's God's will, to hold on'. Worried that many whites were moving into NKO to reclaim attractive real estate, Ms McDaniel righteously anchored herself in her home as a way to maintain a black presence in the neighborhood. Mrs Howard generally agreed: 'I do want my neighborhood to remain predominantly black, because I like it that way. So they (whites) can move if they want to, but I don't want this to be where it's more white

people and then it's like just a few black people.' The prominence of race as a structuring category in American society, manifest most starkly in space through rigid and persistent racial segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), compels African Americans toward some basic recognition of shared historical and contemporary oppression, as well as some core of valued practices and beliefs, however changing and internally contested.

Hence, the North Kenwood-Oakland case shows how affluent blacks form a faction that is now able to structure power in its favor – sometimes to the harm of poorer African Americans – through the employment of class-based cultural markers. Yet, they do so within the constraints of shared racial identity. I come to this thesis having been an upper-middle class newcomer to this poor black neighborhood, serving on a decision-making body in the neighborhood, and participating in daily decisions of being a resident (i.e., choosing a grocery store, deciding how frequently to cut my lawn, picking up or overlooking litter, speaking – or not – to passers by, etc.). This story is filtered through the politics and positions I bring to North Kenwood-Oakland as well as how others read my presence, and ultimately my interpretations include those biases. While I do not desire to produce an auto-ethnography, I maintain a subtext in this article that is cognizant of my role and power as a filter.

The article is organized as follows: I have already reviewed the concept of distinction-making and its consequences, and added to that literature a consideration of race. Below, I introduce North Kenwood-Oakland, detailing the particular development pressures, documenting the neighborhood's demographic changes and current make-up, and explaining the research method. Finally, I present case studies from North Kenwood-Oakland that illustrate the unique tension between the class-based protection of economic and lifestyle investments on the one hand, and racially motivated concerns for equity and solidarity on the other.

## **Welcome to North Kenwood-Oakland: Setting and method**

### **Development**

Along Chicago's south lakefront, two miles from the University of Chicago campus, and only ten minutes by car from downtown, North Kenwood-Oakland has been rediscovered as ripe for new investment, as have many inner city neighborhoods across the USA and Canada (see Abu-Lughod, 1994; Ley, 1996; Smith, 1996; Zukin, 1982). The City of Chicago is actively facilitating this process. Pressed by the organizing and lobbying of community residents through the 1970s and 1980s, NKO was designated by the City as a Conservation Area in 1990, under the Urban Renewal and

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**Figure 1** NKO's heterogeneous landscape includes vacant lots, rowhouses, and public housing. Author's photograph.

Consolidation Act of 1961. The development goal of a 'Conservation Area' is to renew the existing structures and neighborhood fabric, as opposed to the designation of a slum or blighted area, which connotes demolition, clearance (of structures and people), and rebuilding (Illinois Revised Statutes, 1961). Urban renewal has a long and storied history in American cities, perhaps best told in Herbert Gans' ethnography of the destruction of Boston's West End neighborhood. That area was leveled in order to make way for a completely new neighborhood of high-rises for people more wealthy than the working class (mostly) Italians who had once called it home. The hope in NKO is explicitly *not* to revisit that era of urban planning, but instead to build within the parameters of the existing landscape, which is dotted with large empty lots, interrupted by landmarked row houses, and towering 1950s public housing (see Figure 1: Vacant Lots, Rowhouses, Public Housing).

The Chicago Department of Planning and Development is responsible for the implementation of the Conservation Plan for NKO, which was created and approved through a planning process including roughly 200 residents. The Plan covers issues of housing, commercial, infrastructural, and open space development. Ongoing community advising and monitoring is done

by the Conservation Community Council (CCC), a body of 15 residents approved by the Alderman (the locally elected representative to city government) and the Mayor. The CCC meetings are a central site of negotiation and contestation over visions of NKO's future, and are thus featured prominently in this article. Two years into this research, I was appointed to the CCC. This position gave me easy access to nearly all facets of neighborhood development, but it also branded me in the eyes of some residents as beholden to the desires of the Mayor and Alderman who approved the appointment. In sum, NKO is benefiting from real municipal commitment not least in the form of substantial resources to realize its 'great redevelopment potential' (Community Development Commission, 1992: 1). Development activity has taken the form of firms and individuals rehabilitating existing buildings, and constructing new market-rate homes and condominiums. The result is a general upward trend in land, housing, and rental prices, and the inward migration of people who can afford these rising prices.

Yet such upscaling is only half the story. Coincident with the planning and ongoing implementation of the Conservation Plan, NKO was and is making decisions about public and affordable housing in the neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s and early 1990s, hundreds of dilapidated and abandoned apartment buildings were rehabbed as affordable housing, but the most contentious fight was over the future of several high-rise public housing developments referred to as the Lakefront Properties, which were built by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) in the early 1960s. The buildings were closed in 1985–6 for renovation, and families were relocated. Aside from two buildings that were remodeled and reoccupied in 1991, it soon became apparent that the other four high-rises containing 607 public housing apartments would never reopen, but instead would be demolished. Following protests from public housing activist residents, and after acrimonious negotiations and court proceedings, in 1996, the CHA was ordered to build 241 replacement units of public housing in NKO, 200 units elsewhere in the city, and to offer 302 Section 8 vouchers that families could use to move into the private rental market.<sup>4</sup> Issues related to building the new units, placement of families, and project management consistently appear on the agenda of the Conservation Community Council. Such agenda items almost always re-open the debate over the optimal socio-economic composition of the neighborhood, and the integration of low-income families and their neighbors who are buying \$200,000-plus homes.

### Demographics<sup>5</sup>

Extensive new construction is possible in NKO because of depopulation and demolition that has left large tracts of vacant land (see Figure 2).

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**Figure 2** Overgrown and trash-filled vacant lots stretch for nearly a half-mile, making substantial new construction possible. Author's photograph.

Kenwood lost over half of its population, and Oakland two-thirds between 1960 and 1990, following the familiar path of decline and concentrated poverty experienced by many inner city black neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987). The official poverty rates in North Kenwood and Oakland in 1990 were 51 percent and 70 percent respectively, median family income was roughly \$10,000, and unemployment was over 30 percent. The timing of NKO's designation as a Conservation Area in 1990 is fortuitous for gauging neighborhood change, with the 1990 and 2000 censuses serving as benchmarks. The overall demographic story shows relatively slow but sure upward socioeconomic change. Part of this could reflect the improving circumstances of people who already lived there, but observation suggests more strongly that it is the result of new, more affluent people moving in. According to the 2000 census, 58 percent of the residents of NKO had moved into their residences since 1995, illustrating significant influx. All of those newcomers are not, however, affluent, for in 2000, Oakland was still the second poorest of Chicago's 77 communities in terms of income, and had the third highest neighborhood poverty rate. North Kenwood was twelfth out of 77 community areas in median family income, and had the eighth highest poverty rate. Table 1 summarizes the census data over this time period, while the discussion below offers more particular explanations.

**Table 1** Demographic Changes in North Kenwood-Oakland, 1990–2000

	1990	2000
Total population	10,938	9,987
Percentage black	98.7%	97.5%
Median income (in 1999 dollars)	\$9,391	\$21,949
Percentage with income over \$50,000	6%	20%
Percentage homeowners	9.5%	17%
Median home value (in 1999 dollars)	\$44,160	\$219,153
Percentage of families that are poor	63%	39%

Source: 1990 US Census, 2000 US census at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

In some sections of NKO the population has declined, which is the result of 1) the *re-conversion back* into single family homes of homes that had been ‘cut up’ to house multiple families, and 2) the reconfiguration of previously multi-family rental housing into less dense and more spacious condominium units. Other parts of NKO are experiencing population increases as new homes are built on large tracts of formerly vacant land, and abandoned homes are rehabbed. Overall, total population has declined by about 9 percent.

Homeownership and home values are one measure of the change in the kind of residents in the neighborhood. In the North Kenwood census tract nearest the lakefront, homeownership grew from 17 percent in 1990, to 32 percent in 2000, a pattern that is repeated in all of the area’s census tracts. Overall homeownership grew from 9.5 percent to 17 percent in the ten-year period. According to home sales data, the number of single family attached homes sold in Kenwood (e.g., condominiums and townhomes) grew over 400 percent from 1993 to 2000 (the citywide average was 106 percent), and prices rose from \$67,500 to \$150,000, also outpacing rates of increase in the city (Chicago Association of Realtors, 2001). Oakland has fewer condominiums, but figures for single family detached homes tell a similar story in Oakland, showing a 300 percent growth in prices. Prices for newly constructed homes in North Kenwood-Oakland continue to rise, as happily noted by one local developer: ‘When (our development) opened three years ago . . . the base price per foot there was right around \$95 to \$100 per foot. . . . On our last units that we’ve closed out there, we’re now starting to get up to \$150 a foot’ (*Hyde Park Herald*, 2001: 10). These square-footage prices translate into \$225,000 for a modest 1500-square-foot, two or three bedroom home/condo, requiring a household income of roughly

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\$75,000 to purchase. Median family income in Chicago for 2000 is \$42,724, and black median family income is much lower.

Poverty and income data also illustrate the changes in NKO, but also show that there remains considerable income diversity in the area. Family poverty rates declined from 70 percent to 45 percent in Oakland, and from 51 percent to 32 percent in North Kenwood, and median family income more than doubled in the area. Family income in the City of Chicago at the same time was stagnant. Finally, in 1990, only 6 percent of families earned over \$50,000 per year, compared to 20 percent by 2000.

Although the private market changes are in the direction of high priced houses for high income families, and the census data reflect the increasing presence of these residents, there were still over 2500 units of subsidized housing in NKO in 1998. 43 percent of all dwelling units in NKO are publicly subsidized, either as CHA family or senior citizen housing, or as Section 8 units (see Note 4 for discussion of Section 8). Eligibility for these units is determined by limits on household income, and the presence of subsidized housing ensures the presence of low-income families in NKO.

Despite the many changes, NKO remains racially homogeneous. Predominately black since the 1950s, it is for the most part experiencing 'black gentrification', and the majority of public housing residents are black. Some whites have moved in, but the *discourse* among black residents concerning the imminence of whites' arrival is more extensive (and more telling) than the actual presence of whites in the neighborhood. North Kenwood-Oakland was 0.96 percent white in 1990, and 1.2 percent white in 2000. Thus, unlike the more common gentrification scenario where middle- and upper-income whites move into low-income black or Hispanic neighborhoods (Abu-Lughod, 1994), in NKO the newcomers and the oldtimers are African American (for a similar process in Harlem, NY, see Jacoby and Siegel, 1999; Taylor, 2002). The transformation of North Kenwood-Oakland under conflicting pressures but within a homogeneous racial setting pushes theories of race, class, and space into uncharted waters.

### Method

The data for this paper are drawn from ongoing ethnographic research in NKO commenced three years ago. I use a variety of data sources: field notes from meetings of the Conservation Community Council (CCC) and the Stanford Street Block Club; internal correspondence, official meeting minutes and supporting documentation from the Conservation Community Council obtained through the Freedom of Information Act; tape-recorded interviews with residents of Stanford Street; and field notes from various other meetings, and informal conversations. The following broad research questions have guided my fieldwork: What are the visions of North

Kenwood-Oakland residents for their neighborhood? What are the attitudes and behavior of middle-income residents toward low-income housing and residents, and vice-versa?

In addressing these questions, two axes of distinction emerge: 1) homeowner/renter, and 2) oldtimer/newcomer. These axes arise both as ways that residents organize themselves and their interests, and also in my own attempt to collect data. Despite the fact that homeowners are the minority in NKO, both the CCC and the Stanford Street Block Club are dominated by homeowners, as opposed to renters. Likewise, newcomers are disproportionately represented in both organizations. During the period of observation, 11 of the 15 CCC members were homeowners. All of the 16 dues paying members of the Stanford Street Block Club were homeowners, and oldtimers I interviewed attributed their withdrawal from the organization to the unequal influence of newcomers. These categories, however, are not completely mutually exclusive. *Homeowners* represent a mix of oldtimers and newcomers, as well as a wide swathe of working- to middle- to upper-class occupations – painters, lawyers, housewives, teachers, drug store clerks, nurses, contractors, mail carriers, bankers, and senior citizens on limited fixed incomes. Hence, homeowners cross occupational categories and neighborhood tenure. Renters can also be oldtimers and newcomers, but on the matter of socioeconomic status, the rental housing in the neighborhood is almost completely reserved for low- and moderate-income families, a fact I learned first hand when I searched for an apartment. Most of the renovated apartment buildings were financed with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which require landlords to rent to families with low- to moderate- incomes. The unrenovated buildings were in serious disrepair. Thus, the only market for middle- to upper-income renters is in small two- and three-story houses that are privately rehabbed and rented.

The predominance of homeowners in neighborhood organizations and thus in my data is first related to a theoretical point concerning neighborhood change. As Logan and Molotch (1987: 141) point out:

Operating through the community organization mechanism, the ‘better element’ in an otherwise disadvantaged area can function as a vanguard for change. . . . Not surprisingly, those who ordinarily join and become leaders in a community organization tend to be the middle-class (or aspiring middle-class) homeowners.

Thus, the balance of power in neighborhood decision-making favors homeowners; their voices and positions are the most visible.

Perhaps as weighty in determining the primacy of homeowners in this research is my own profile as a newcomer homeowner. I purchased a home in North Kenwood-Oakland six months prior to beginning this research project. As a middle class African American in a black gentrifying

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neighborhood, my first contacts and introductions were with similar people in similar scenarios. Friends and associates gave me numerous contacts within the neighborhood of other people who had recently moved there. A component of this social homogeneity is the interests that I shared with my homeowner neighbors as financial investors. I had to make a particular effort to find people *not* like me.

Three data sources proved useful toward this end. First, data was available from attendees of the CCC meetings who were not newcomers or homeowners. Occasionally a speaker gave hints as to his/her housing situation – remarking that they had been a resident of the demolished public housing building, or that they lived in a certain part of the neighborhood that is predominately rental housing. Or they signify their oldtimer status by self-righteously declaring, ‘I’ve lived in this neighborhood all my life!’. Representatives of organizations that serve or represent low-income residents also attended CCC meetings. Comments from these were captured in field notes. Second, I attended and took notes at the much-less-frequent meetings of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, whose constituents were primarily low-income residents. Finally, I attempted to supplement field notes by conducting interviews with every resident of two blocks of Stanford Street (approximately 40 occupied houses), choosing that block because I had corresponding data on block club meetings. I completed 20 interviews, including three with people who rented rooms or whole floors in owner-occupied houses on the block. Still, the sample was limited by disconnected phone numbers, one indicator of a low-income household. In all, while this exercise widened my field sample to include renters, some poor homeowners, some homeowners who never participated in neighborhood politics, and some oldtimers who rarely left their homes, the voices of active, middle aged, economically stable homeowners are still over-represented in my data. I continue to struggle with this imbalance.

In the following sections, I describe four ethnographic scenes that illustrate the larger themes of conflict and solidarity in NKO during this period of transition. First, I chronicle two events that illustrate the distinctions of class and lifestyle and the struggles for symbolic power for the purposes of exclusion. Next, I present two examples of how those cleavages exist alongside understandings of collective racial injustices and the drawing of boundaries *around* African Americans, excluding whites. I conclude with reflections on the new consciousness and power of affluent African Americans in urban politics.

### Fixing cars on Stanford Street

Summertime in NKO brings much-discussed incidents of loitering, loud music playing, and the increased frequency of hearing gunshots (which have

notably *decreased* in the three years of this research). On many streets, including Stanford Street, there was a particular issue concerning informal car repair businesses. Almost weekly, a group of young men in their 20s and 30s – some of whom lived on the block and some of whom were friends of residents – fixed cars in the middle of Stanford Street, a residential street with two- and three-story rowhouses. It is a narrow street, barely wide enough for a car to pass if another car is double parked. The automobile repair business brought together three or four cars, some parked in parking spots and others double parked next to them, hoods open, oil dripping, engines occasionally running and sometimes revving. A little music might be involved and maybe even a little drink to make the job enjoyable. The young men always gave a friendly hello to anyone who spoke to them, as they usually did when they weren't fixing cars.

This informal car repair shop was the 'new business' to be discussed at a summer Stanford Street Block Club meeting. 'I been shoooin' 'em away. I call the police', offered Ms Long about her approach to the issue. She invoked her status as a homeowner on the block for 30 years and insisted that the behavior was unacceptable both because of her tenure and her investment, stating, 'Not right here! Not when I pay taxes!'. Ms Fitzgerald voiced dissension to the brewing attack on the auto repair activities:

I don't have anything against somebody making a buck. They're making an honest living. Billy [the lead car-fixer] has been in jail, so I'm just glad to see him making an honest dollar. I have no problem with an entrepreneurial spirit. 'Cause if not, then it'll be the selling of drugs out there.

While Ms Fitzgerald makes no *explicit* racial references in her comments above, they contain subtle allusions to the racial solidarity that I argue often tempers calls to ban certain behaviors. Ms Fitzgerald appreciated Billy's industriousness because of her awareness of his previous criminal activities. Having moved onto Stanford Street 15 years prior (when she mistakenly expected it to start 'changing'), Ms Fitzgerald had watched Billy's ups and downs with sincere concern, and judged his current activities to be relatively admirable, especially in light of the alternatives. Ms Fitzgerald's comments must be situated within the context of a black neighborhood where youth crime, and particularly drug selling, is of acute concern. Indeed, the issues of drugs, crime, and incarceration are central topics of concern within black America at large (Miller, 1996), and represent simultaneous concerns with personal safety and racial justice. Heralding a young black man for staying out of the drug trade can be connected to this larger discourse on saving black youth from drugs and violence.

Without reaching a consensus on the best form of response, the block club delegated Mr Smith to speak with the young men about their business and impress upon them the importance of keeping the noise down and cleaning up the street after they were done.<sup>6</sup>

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Ms McDaniel gives us an insight into what it is like to be on the receiving end of a Block Club initiative. 'They come at him wrong, you know', she remarked about the way the Block Club representatives approached Billy, her son, about his car repair activities. Billy McDaniel – in his early 30s, sporadically employed, and the resident face of the car-fixing operation – is the son of Emma McDaniel, who was introduced in the opening vignette. Ms McDaniel was irritated by the Block Club's request of Billy to stop his business, and judged their interaction with her son to be rude. While Ms McDaniel repeated her awareness that changes are afoot in the neighborhood, she also expressed resentment at the new rules governing block behavior:

I didn't have anything against that. But at first, honey, they didn't say anything because he was doing – that's one thing that got me upset, because they didn't say anything – because if their cars wouldn't start, he would get their cars started. After he got their cars started, 'Oh no, we don't want this on the street anymore'.

But, honey, this could happen to any of us. And you don't always have money for a tow truck. You don't always have the big money to pay what they want you to pay, honey, at the garage. And this boy's not going to charge nobody an arm and a leg. Because I told him, I said, 'You're too stupid'. Because they'll turn around and say, 'Well, how much do I owe you?' (And he'll answer) 'Whatever you give me'. That's what he'll say. And that's just the way he is. He's just a giving person. And I told him, I said, 'See, after you've helped these other people', I said, 'now see what they're doing? Now they don't want you out there at all'. And the police even came and told him, honey, if they caught him or caught anyone working on a car, they were going to arrest him . . .

I know the block has come up. I know this. I know we all got our papers a while back that it was a landmark (area). But, you know, 'I don't want this done on the street. I don't want that done on the street'. I can't get up on some of the stuff that they're requesting. But I tell my kids, 'You have to do what these people say because the next thing you know, all they're going to do is call the police'. I mean, because I know it's been done.

Although her statements suggested exasperated acquiescence, Billy's and his friends' ongoing repair business illustrated her family's resistance. Block Club member Ms Ramos also met this defiance when she tried to talk to Billy directly. His resolute response was that he had lived on the block since he was a child, affording him rights that were unchallengeable by Ms Ramos, a relative newcomer of five years.

The McDaniels were oldtimers. The extended McDaniel family had lived in the house on Stanford Street since the early 1950s. Emma McDaniel first moved in 1963, from Pennsylvania, following her mother who had moved

in to care for her infirm brother (Emma McDaniel's uncle), who owned the house. Emma McDaniel moved back and forth between public housing projects in Chicago and the house on Stanford Street, until her mother became ill and she moved into the house permanently. Since her mother's death, Ms McDaniel has struggled to pay for the maintenance of the house. When I interviewed her, she was in danger of losing the house to a questionable loan company with whom she took out a mortgage to help her youngest son pay for community college. The Block Club members no doubt read these socioeconomic signals, as suggested by Ms Fitzgerald's mention of Billy's unemployment at the first Block Club meeting.

At the next month's Block Club meeting, the issue of fixing cars on the street was once again on the agenda. Ironically, as Block Club members walked down Stanford Street to the host's house, they were confronted with a direct reminder, seeing Billy and his friends working on three cars. At this meeting, with more members present and with the immediate visual reminder, the conversation was decidedly more heated. Mr Smith reported that he had done his assigned duty by speaking with Billy about the noise and waste from their business. He conveyed that Billy had been quite 'agreeable'. Both Mr Smith and Ms Fitzgerald judged that the makeshift car repair shop had become less noisy and was less objectionable. 'They have calmed it down a bit', reasoned Ms Fitzgerald.

Ms Long was unimpressed. This time she was joined by another oldtimer, Ms Reeves. 'They should be stopped altogether. They don't pay taxes.' It was unclear whether Ms Reeves (and Ms Long when she used the same argument the previous month) surmised that these men were not paying taxes on their business, or that the McDaniel family was not paying their property taxes. Though the second meaning was more likely, in either scenario this statement established a dichotomy between 'taxpayers' and those who are not full participants in, and thus full beneficiaries of this class-coded category.

Ms Ramos raised another point that took the conversation even more explicitly to an underlying class schism. 'If we have friends coming over, it's a bad reflection on the block. It looks terrible. I don't think we should accept it as a normal way of doing things. It is not acceptable behavior to me.' Ms Ramos reasons that just as she is reading the class cues of the McDaniel family, so too are others reading the class cues of her neighborhood. Using this logic, Ms Ramos concluded that car fixing on her block was a poor reflection on the neighborhood in which she chose to invest, and by extension *on her*. Ms Reeves agreed and was even more blunt: 'It makes it look like an old ghetto neighborhood. If we want to look like some old ghetto neighborhood, then okay'. Recognizing a hierarchy of places just as there are hierarchies of occupations, incomes, and educations, Ms Reeves makes explicit the negative social message sent out by the mechanic shop. For these

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Stanford Street residents attempting to redefine a once poor neighborhood as a 'revitalizing community', fixing cars on the street was outside the boundaries of acceptability.

'I say we write a letter to the police precinct to get some increased police presence over here to stop this stuff', concluded Ms Ramos. Again, however, these sentiments were tempered by Ms Fitzgerald's hesitations. 'I think we should send the letter to the neighbors themselves first so they know our intent, rather than just reporting them.' After a brief period of continued discussion, Ms Fitzgerald was able to win over the more adamant Mss. Ramos, Allen and Reeves. The decision was that the secretary would write a letter that was 'neighborly' in tone and stressed *only* the point that their informal auto-mechanic shop took up resident parking and made it inconvenient for the senior citizens to park directly in front of their homes, even though some Block Club members wanted harsher language about it impeding the improvement of the block. This debate illustrates marked features of boundary-making. The consideration of what outsiders think about the neighborhood refers in part to potential homebuyers, since there were several houses on Stanford Street that were for sale, and at prices only affordable to middle- and upper-income buyers. The threat of using the police illustrates the power to name and ban undesirable behavior, even if it means stifling the possible economic gains of a resident known to be struggling financially. The official enforcement arm of the state here works in concert with and reinforces middle class norms that strictly separate commercial areas from residential areas, and seeks to enforce 'acceptable' behavior in the latter. Hence, the controversy over fixing cars on Stanford Street is about controlling the public behavior of those outside of the legitimate economy and redefining what will be allowed on the block.

### **Building public housing by the lakefront**

The second example concerns the numerous community meetings devoted to planning for the construction of new public housing in the neighborhood. 'Some of the most difficult community meetings I've attended have been meetings that addressed public housing', remarked NKO's Alderman every time this topic was on the Conservation Community Council's (CCC) agenda.

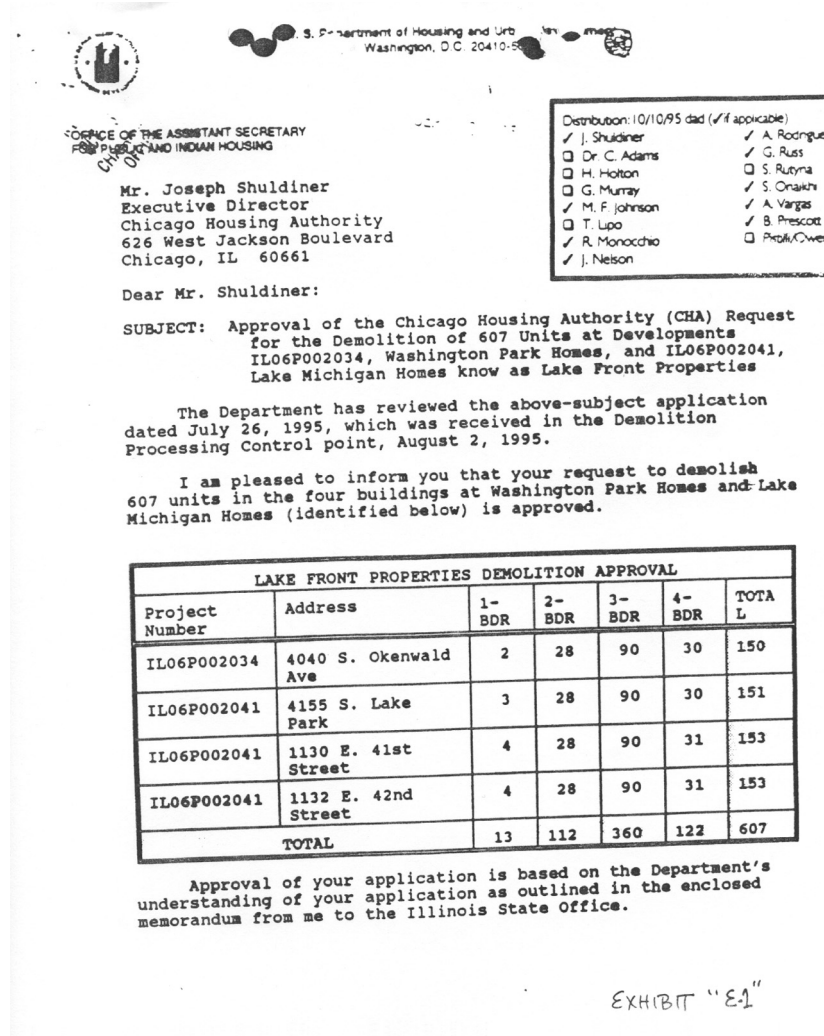
Public housing has always been controversial in the USA and particularly in Chicago. While it was originally planned as temporary housing for working families making transitions into the private market, by the 1970s, federal funding waned, maintenance deteriorated, working families fled, and public housing became the domain of the most destitute families. Chicago has the largest concentration of public housing in the world,

stretching for miles of neglect and decay (Hirsch, 1983; Kotlowitz, 1991; Lemann, 1991; Venkatesh, 2000). The history of public housing in Chicago is also marked by years of litigation regarding the disproportionate placement of public housing in black neighborhoods, and the segregation of black and white poor families into different public housing projects (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum, 2000). Court-ordered remedies to this segregation have still not been realized. Against this backdrop, Chicago, like cities across the USA, is now demolishing its high-rise public housing to build mixed-income communities in its place, a plan that is not without continued controversy.

As noted earlier, six public housing buildings rising 16 stories above the shores of Lake Michigan were once home to over 700 poor families. Today, only two buildings remain. The other four were demolished spectacularly (see Figures 3 and 4). There was contention to the very end. Days before the scheduled implosion, former residents filed a restraining order against the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) charging that the agency had not completed enough replacement housing units prior to demolishing the existing (albeit vacant) buildings. The request for a stay was denied by the court. Although the negotiations leading to the December 1998 demolition predated my research tenure in NKO, much of the drama was fought in court, leaving behind public records of the debate. Also, interviewees vividly remembered the discord, although many said they wished to forget it. Newspapers reported that during court proceedings regarding replacement housing, 'North Kenwood-Oakland homeowners who opposed the construction of new public housing units in their community interrupted the judge while an attorney representing their interests attempted to intervene in the case' (Michaeli, 1996). The newspaper also reported on the sentiments of the president of the displaced public housing residents' organization: 'Outraged by what she perceived as an attempt to block low-income, public housing residents from North Kenwood-Oakland, (the organization's president) said the mainly African American homeowners were discriminating against members of their own ethnic group' (Michaeli, 1996). The class schism in NKO was apparent to participants and not always as far under the surface as in the Stanford Street example.

By the time my research began in September 1998, the demolition of the buildings was imminent and the 241 replacement public housing units had been judicially mandated. The task before the Conservation Community Council was to decide upon the placement of the scattered-site units, the exact mix of the new mixed-income areas, and their design. Some members of the CCC and many residents were skeptical about and resistant to the provision of mandated public housing units. Residents' questions and comments in community meetings illustrate this caution: 'What will be the percentage of Section 8 certificates (see Note 4) awarded to tenants by

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**Figure 3** Letter from US Department of Housing and Urban Development authorizing demolition of public housing.

Source: US District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, Case No. 66C1459.

CHA? How are the evaluation criteria and selection of tenants handled? How many bedrooms will be available in the public housing units? Will the 25 percent public housing units be concentrated? In addition to these sentiments, there was recurring disbelief that the public housing units would be indistinguishable from private ones. There was staunch resistance to the



**Figure 4** Spectacle of the implosion of four public housing high-rises. Author's photograph.

construction of any high-rise buildings too reminiscent of what had stood before and continued to be the symbol of urban poverty elsewhere in Chicago. There were also condescending remarks about the families who would occupy the units: 'They're gonna have apartments with five bedrooms? They're gonna have five families up in there! That's 15 people!'. In general, there were repeated challenges to any proposals related to scattered-site units as if the CHA was going *over* the number of mandated units, when in reality, construction of replacement housing was proceeding slowly (Devitt, 1998).

There were also more explicit statements of distinctions. One man in his 30s, a newcomer of two years to NKO, asked:

What I wanna know is: for the 25 percent that's gonna be low-income are there going to be some guidelines for these people that when I go to work I don't need to worry about anything going on in my house. That people won't be up partying all night when some of us need to go to work?

In naming low-income tenants in this explicit manner, defining them as unemployed and distinguishing them from their employed neighbors, this resident baldly stated the hidden concerns that others couched more

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carefully in their questions about 'screening' and 'management'. Also apparent here is the connection between 'class' in its conventional guise of occupation – or in this case lack of occupation – and status as embodied in the behaviors of people of different classes. Low-income (or no-income, unemployed) people 'party all night' and cause 'worry' for employed people, who go to work and have a house.

These comments were rebuffed by the only Council member who lived in a public housing building. 'These people?' she asked, referring to the explicit 'othering' of public housing residents. 'Wait a minute, wait a minute. What are "these people"?' The first speaker attempted to clarify by saying that he was ultimately concerned about the selection process for the potential low-income residents 'since there are people here investing in bringing this neighborhood back up'. He had not done much better with this second statement and the Council member challenged him again. As the duel got louder the meeting had to be called back to order.

Middle class homeowners were not the only constituents concerned about the plan for public housing in NKO. Research on public housing projects illustrates quite generally that residents themselves are deeply dissatisfied with its condition and management. They desire safer, cleaner and more stable surroundings (Katz, Kling and Liebman, 2000; Popkin, 2000). Yet public housing activists in NKO brought definitions of improvement and respectability that were different from those of the new homeowners. 'Revitalization only means bringing new life *to what already exists*', announced Nikki Olds, the tenant representative for the public housing residents of a mixed-income development being planned in NKO. Her statement challenged the idea that improvement meant screening out current low-income neighbors or establishing harsh management rules that excluded poor oldtimers. Ms Olds went on to appeal to the racial consciousness of the Council and its audience, delivering a mini-sermon to the naysayers who resisted any kind of public housing and stigmatized all of its residents:

It's just like it was back in slavery days when black people were the worst people in the world. Until you get to know me! And when you get to know me as an individual then you make your own judgment. So we want you to get to know us. We need your support on this.

Both in the local controversy over fixing cars on Stanford Street and the community-wide issue of building public housing, residents' conflicting folk taxonomies and status negotiations are apparent. The contested field is narrated in the language of appropriate neighborhood activities and lifestyles, yet these discussions also recognize the shaping of lifestyles by economic resources. These examples are empirical elaborations of Bourdieu's theorizing about the *habitus* – 'the whole body schema' (Bourdieu, 1984: 190) – which is the inward embodiment and outward

performance of one's material circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Despite racial sameness, the NKO residents exhibit clashes between types of black habitus, which are conditioned by class-based experiences, resources and expectations. Yet despite these clashes, NKO also exhibits a coalescence of perspectives based precisely on that racial sameness. I turn to this below.

### Black neighborhood, black jobs

Alongside the concerns about scattered-site units and the behaviors of low-income neighbors is an understanding amongst NKO residents of collective racial experiences. As exemplified by Ms Fitzgerald's hesitant appreciation of Billy's entrepreneurial ventures, and Ms Olds' remembrance of slavery, there is recognition that African Americans as a group have been and continue to be shortchanged in the distribution of society's goodies and gorged with society's burdens. Ironically, this realization is part of the story that lies behind the *resistance* to public housing in NKO. Many residents felt that the neighborhood (and the entire black South Side) has already had its 'fair share' of public housing, and that other (white and wealthy) neighborhoods were being let off the hook.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the rhetoric in NKO is infused with attention to the collective subjugation of African Americans. The most continuous example of this racial consciousness is the demand that community residents be hired to work on development projects and in the new businesses that are coming into the neighborhood.

The Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) made this issue one of their focuses. KOCO's organizing heyday spanned from the 1960s to the 1980s. Its mission statement read:

Building/Rebuilding the Kenwood Oakland community through comprehensive community and human development and empowerment, targeting low-income residents, as a viable place where all people can live and work, on the basis of constituency leadership development.

KOCO was a key participant in the planning process for the Conservation Area. Its rehabilitation of several NKO apartment buildings stimulated interest in the neighborhood by the city and other investors (Lester, 1998). Even though the rehabbed buildings were for low- and moderate-income renters, the cosmetic upgrading of the housing stock ironically made the neighborhood less foreboding for upper-end investors. However, when the Conservation Community Council was created and development began in earnest in the 1990s, KOCO was marginalized.

Nonetheless, one point on which the Conservation Community Council and KOCO agreed was the economic empowerment of local residents. The Conservation Plan explicitly states one of the redevelopment goals as

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'giv[ing] priority to existing residents in all phases of community development' and 'to assist all residents (especially low income) through education and training, to take advantage of the new community development opportunities' (Community Development Commission, 1992: 3). Hence, despite the often bold disdain for low-income NKO residents displayed at community meetings, there are efforts to address racial inequities by demanding jobs for and participation by African Americans, especially low-income blacks. Toward these ends, over one hundred residents attended a KOCO meeting that was called with a flyer that promised jobs for residents. At this meeting, employment applications were available and a KOCO representative rattled off openings within area companies:

Envirotest will be looking for people with high school diplomas or GEDs, drivers licenses and good driving records. End of the summer construction jobs for CHA residents only – \$18.35 per hour for people with construction or contracting experience. UPS is recruiting for loaders and unloaders for \$8.50 an hour and 25 hours a week.

KOCO's leadership also made it clear at the meeting that KOCO's efforts were for *black* empowerment. 'I don't have anything against another race', the speaker began provocatively, 'but many of the construction jobs that have been around here since 1993 have not had people on them that look like you'. From KOCO's perspective, revitalization in NKO must be achieved by and for oldtimer black residents. This is a position shared by the CCC, and echoed at their meetings.

One such example of the CCC's emphasis on black economic empowerment occurred during the building of a new shopping plaza, planned to include a large grocery store, a national bank office, a drug store, dry cleaners and other businesses. Nearly every month that Mr Jackson, the manager for this development, presented to the CCC and residents on its progress he would be asked a variant of the same question: 'How many black people have been hired to work on the construction? What kind of preparation are you making for young people in the area to get these jobs?'. Mr Jackson's own identity as a black male did not exempt him from these demanding questions.

Community residents doing their own window survey of the construction site were often disappointed that they did not see more African Americans and would come back to the next meeting and protest. Each time Mr Jackson assured residents that his management team was meeting the aggressive goals set forth by the CCC in the plan for the shopping center. Still not satisfied with these somewhat vague assertions, the CCC requested concrete figures on minority hiring for the project. At the next meeting, Mr Jackson came more prepared, reporting that '76 percent of the subcontractors on the project are minorities; 57 percent of the subcontractors on the project are

African American; 15 percent of the workforce are community hires'. In addition to lobbying for black participation in the construction of the shopping center, NKO residents demanded job slots at the shopping center's largest tenant, a grocery store. The grocery store's manager also gave regular reports about their training program and the numbers of community residents hired from it. An even more detailed report entered into the CCC minutes was given by the grocery store's manager:

Community hiring for the (grocery store) is being done in conjunction with the City Department of Workforce Development and (the shopping center management team). To date, three different training sessions have been completed. 150 people completed the training. The (grocery store) has hired 50 people. Although the other shopping center retailers are not obligated to hire the participants that completed this training (the shopping center management team) is working to have the remaining participants hired.

A CCC member augmented this quantitative report: 'All of the people I recommended for jobs at the grocery store (have) been hired'. Furthermore, the Council had requested a tour of the construction site and reported back to the community that they 'did observe a significant number of minority contractors completing all phases of the buildout'. These demands illustrate that the CCC was conscientious and vigilant about ensuring job opportunities for blacks from NKO and more broadly. Similar types of inquiries and demands were made for the racial composition of the workforce or development team for other community projects.

### **Racial integration?**

My second example of racial solidarity concerns attitudes towards racial integration in NKO. As illustrated in the 2000 census data previously reported, there has been very little racial change in NKO since 1990. Most of the newcomers have been African American. However, some whites who live in the neighborhood have been very active. In the first year of this research there was one white man on the CCC. By the last year there was one white man and two white women. This represents 20 percent of the Council, while the neighborhood was less than 2 percent white. Furthermore, various city representatives and developers who presented before the CCC were white, and whites can frequently be seen driving through the neighborhood and shopping at the grocery store. These factors create an impression of a greater white residential presence in NKO than actually exists, which fuels anxiety over whites becoming the dominant racial group. As we saw at the beginning of the article, Ms McDaniel and Mrs Howard shared that anxiety even if they shared little else. (See Box 1)

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### *BOX 1: The Whites Are Coming!*

*Resident:* Well definitely it *was* real clear and understood that white people were not going to come north of 47<sup>th</sup> Street. In fact, friends who attended the University of Chicago, you know, at orientation, (they heard), 'Do not go north of 47<sup>th</sup> Street'. So today, 2002, you know, what do you have north of 47<sup>th</sup> Street? An abundance of (gives a look, no words). You have the Co-Ops (cooperative grocery store), you know, north of 47<sup>th</sup> Street. Those are all signs that are very interesting to me, and not settled. But north of 47<sup>th</sup> Street will be a third mixed community of folks other than us.

*MP:* And when do you think that change started?

*Resident:* Maybe over the last six-year period is when we started to gradually see this area evolve and 'shift away'. And they didn't bring the bulldozer at all, but rather 'shift away'. That was, again, maybe six years ago. However, maybe three years ago, was it? The explosion!

*MP:* Four years ago, '98.

*Resident:* '98, that was the bulldozer that came about and that was the sign of, 'All right, you guys, come get it! It's available!'. If you noticed that in all the public housing that is being torn down throughout the City of Chicago there was only one set of properties that were imploded and nationally televised. What a spectacle. 'Fine, you want Lincoln Park II? You may have it. Boom!' (Lincoln Park is a Chicago neighborhood that is 5 percent percent black.). So that day property values immediately escalated hugely, and the parade began. Every day, every weekend on Saturdays I had perched on my balcony with my morning coffee and I watched the parade of non-African Americans coming through Stanford [Street] . . . So I watch this parade, you know, and just see these folks sauntering through. It's like, Lord, look-a-here, it's so good to be common.

The actions as well as the words of NKO's black residents also illustrate their ambivalence towards racial integration. To encourage development, the City of Chicago was selling land, often overgrown with weeds and littered with debris, it owned in NKO. Any person who wanted to purchase a city-owned piece of land had to present their proposal in front of the CCC and residents. One evening Ms Sara Greene, a white woman in her late 30s, was on the agenda to present her proposal for a piece of city-owned land. She thanked the Council for hearing her request, and she displayed black and white architectural renderings of the single family home she proposed to build on the lot. 'My architect has done a few museums and since my

background is in the visual arts I wanted to go with that kind of architect for my design', she told the CCC. The plans for the home included a two-car garage (like the other homes on the block), and in the future she wanted to add 'guest quarters' as an addition to the garage, which she would also use as an art studio. The two buildings (the home and the studio) would be connected by an enclosed garden.

While Ms Greene presented, some CCC members sat with expressionless faces and others shuffled hastily through the materials she distributed. Her presentation was followed by a steady stream of challenging and technical questions: 'What kind of stone? Is that a window? What will those guest quarters be used for? How many square feet? What is the material for the stairs?' (To the City representative) 'Can someone build two residential buildings on a lot?'. The CCC is a very thorough group and often asks similar questions of developers when they present their plans. Ms Greene, however, was clearly shaken and had not expected such detailed questions. She repeatedly explained that she had not finalized the design and that these were preliminary plans. The Council minuted the following decision:

A roll call vote was taken to table approval of the Greene negotiated sale request. The vote was 8 in favor of tabling approval of the negotiated sale request, 5 opposed to tabling the approval and 1 abstaining vote. Council action was tabled on the Greene negotiated sale request. The Council requested Ms Greene to have her architect attend the June 1999 meeting to present the renderings for her home and to answer any additional questions.

Ms Greene returned the following month, this time with her architect, a photo essay of other houses on the block, two additional drawings of the facade and interior, samples of the building materials, and square footage information. Again there were questions, but she was finally granted approval unanimously.

Contrast this with the experience of Ms Janet Crawford, an African American woman of about the same age as Ms Greene and equally professionally dressed. Representing herself and her husband, and with a history of developing lots in NKO, she was known to some of the council members. Whereas Ms Greene had come prepared with professional architectural renderings of her proposed home, and presented remarks about her aesthetic vision, Ms Crawford's presentation consisted only of 3 × 5 photographs of the streetscape to give a sense of the other buildings that surrounded the vacant lot. She provided no drawings as a basis for the CCC to evaluate the style and design of the proposed building; she merely gave her architect's name. She intended to build a three-unit condominium building, each unit having two bedrooms and measuring 1100 square feet. The top unit would be occupied by herself and her husband. An audience member asked at what price she intended to sell the condominiums. She

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replied that she had not yet decided. There were a few questions from the Council to clarify the exact location, but little about her design features. The official minutes simply document: 'The council unanimously approved Ms Crawford's request to enter into a Negotiated Sale with the City of Chicago'. My own field notes include the following comment from the Chair of the Council after the approval: 'Ms Crawford, we commend you for being a pioneer in the North Kenwood-Oakland community'. Other CCC members nodded their agreement. Ms Crawford showed her appreciation and took her seat.

Ms Greene received no such commendation and had in fact met veiled resistance. Although the Conservation Plan clearly states one of its goals as becoming a 'racially diverse' community, just as it calls for the inclusion of and priority to 'existing residents', Ms Greene's reception suggests that the former goal may not be as widespread as the latter. The close vote on whether to consider her proposal – 8 to table, 5 not to table – also suggests the split opinion on issues of racial integration. The fact that the CCC did in the end unanimously approve Ms Greene's proposal shows that there is no disabling racial animus among community members. Nonetheless, the suspicion with which her proposal was received, contrasted with the encouraging acceptance of Ms Crawford's proposal, indicates the continuance of a racial collective consciousness created over many years by mistrustful relationships with whites (both individually and institutionally). The larger issue transcends whether any one individual white family should move into NKO. Instead, it is about the whole identity of the neighborhood and control over it. Such concerns for racial ownership are illustrated by the *naming* of spaces and places in the neighborhood, like the Little Black Pearl Workshop, an arts and crafts studio for neighborhood youth. In fact, even white developers follow this desire to have 'blackness' represented in the landscape of the neighborhood, exemplified by the naming of buildings after famous African Americans (see Figure 5). Marketing slogans such as 'Come Home to Kenwood' and development names like 'Jazz on the Boulevard' further underscore the desire to claim the neighborhood as black, even if what it means to be black is in constant negotiation.

### **Conclusion**

North Kenwood-Oakland yields a portrait of the complexities of boundary-making among African Americans. Black newcomers are moving into NKO and aligning with some oldtimer homeowners to resist the building of public housing and to reinforce attempts to control the behaviors of low-income neighbors in and out of public housing. Poor oldtimers and public housing renters assert their presence and refuse to disappear. Indeed it is their very



**Figure 5** Ellington Place development signifies the black presence in NKO. Author's photograph.

public use of what others define as private space (barbecuing on porches, partying all night next door) that fuels controversy. '[E]ach lifestyle can only really be constructed in relation to the other, which is its objective and subjective negation', writes Bourdieu (1984: 193). These mutually contested lifestyles reflect distinctions of capital resources – employed versus unemployed, taxpayer versus freerider, homeowner versus renter. These evident distinctions necessitate a reconsideration of monolithic and static depictions of black communities.

Yet just as boundaries exist *within* this black community, they also work on its *outside* to contain its members within a community of solidarity. Residents in NKO recognize the short shrift that African Americans have been given by the wider society. In light of this, they demand racially specific benefits, regardless of class status, and are hesitant to make firm alliances or relationships with whites who either want to move into the neighborhood or who are coming to NKO for business. The existing research on neighborhood change and the development of mixed-income communities is disappointingly silent on intra-racial processes of distinction-making and collective ideology, and micro-studies of black communities (mostly on poor black communities) overlook their socio-economic diversity, a crucial issue

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even in communities not changing as actively as NKO. An implication of this silence is that we under-theorize complex processes of racial domination, which position some groups as simultaneously dominated and dominators. The issue has not gone entirely unnoticed. E. Franklin Frazier's *The Black Bourgeoisie* deals with the contempt toward poorer blacks held by middle class blacks. The historical research of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) shows how black middle class women's assistance to poor blacks was conditional on their conforming to, basically, white middle class norms and codes of behavior. Yet the post-civil rights movement growth of the black middle class, and their presence in positions of power, as architects, city planners and elected officials, real estate developers and speculators, and social service providers, all professions which are particularly relevant to this research, raises a new prospect. Efforts to 'uplift the race' contained historically mainly within the black community of churchwomen and a small intelligentsia may now be articulated within much larger systems of power. The tastes of middle class blacks – not to have people fixing cars on their street, to live far from public housing, to screen residents according to their own employment and housekeeping standards – now gain legitimacy from financial investors, from legal frameworks and sanctions, and from the enforcement of the state.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Notes**

- 1 The South Side of Chicago is one of the most historically significant urban African American communities in the USA. Like Harlem in New York City, it was the destination of hundreds of thousands of blacks migrating from rural South USA to the North from 1910 to the mid 1960s. It became a mecca for black culture and politics, as a home to entertainers (e.g. bluesman Muddy Waters, jazz great Louis Armstrong) and activists (e.g. anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells). It is also characterized by its profound segregation from white Chicago, and, in the post-Second World War era, by large expanses of poverty. From its birth to the present, Chicago's South Side has been

intensively studied (e.g. Anderson, 1978; Drake and Cayton, 1993; Frazier, 1932; Venkatesh, 2000).

- 2 North Kenwood-Oakland is the neighborhood's actual name, the street names, names of people, and some identifying information have been changed to ensure anonymity.
- 3 The distinction between 'public' and 'affordable' housing in the USA is an important one. 'Public housing' is administered by Public Housing Authorities, which exist in most US cities, with funds directly from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Public housing developments often take the form of large concentrations of units reserved for poor and working poor families, senior citizens, or the disabled. In many cities, they have been characterized by poor construction and design, and minimal upkeep. 'Affordable housing' is a much broader category, but there are two primary distinctions from public housing: 1) it is created mostly by the private sector, or by non-profit community development corporations, and 2) affordable housing serves the population one rung up the socioeconomic ladder from public housing residents.
- 4 The Section 8 program began in 1974, and is now the federal government's major housing program for low-income families. Section 8 vouchers (now called Housing Choice Vouchers) allow low-income families to rent apartments that would normally be out of their financial reach, with the federal government paying the difference (through the voucher) of between one-third of their household income and the cost of the apartment. (See <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/index.cfm>)
- 5 Reporting demographic information in North Kenwood-Oakland is complicated by the fact that the Conservation Area does not precisely correspond with other geographic areas commonly used for collecting, aggregating and reporting census data. The legal Conservation Area boundaries cut through census tracts and split official Chicago community areas (see Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1995 for a definition of community areas). For example, the Oakland component of the Conservation Area contains two full census tract and parts of two others, comprising four of the five census tracts that are included in the 'official' definition of Oakland. The North Kenwood area fully contains three census tracts, but is only one-half of the official Chicago community area of 'Kenwood'. Kenwood raises particular concerns because median family income in *South* Kenwood is five times as high as in *North* Kenwood, home values are equally stratified, and South Kenwood is 23% white. This is the result of a history of urban renewal by the University of Chicago that preserved South Kenwood and neglected North Kenwood (see Hirsch, 1985). This is not the case for Oakland which is abutted by similarly poor black neighborhoods. In this article, I present statistics that correspond as closely as possible to the Conservation Area based on my own aggregation of census tract data. Occasionally, I rely on data that have been compiled at

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the community area level. There are also limitations in using the 2000 census. While the ten years since the 1990 Census does provide a reasonable period for change, two problems emerge: 1) there continues to be significant amounts of residential construction, and 2) the census may undercount newcomers because US mail may not have kept pace with address changes and new addresses.

- 6 The fact of delegating for this task the only active *man* in the block club was not accidental. Mr Smith is often the one in charge of talking to various groups of male youth. Although the women are definitely not scared, and do speak to groups and individual youth of their own accord, Mr Smith is always the official person chosen.
- 7 Bourdieu (1984: 170) writes: 'The relationship that is actually established between the pertinent characteristics of economic and social condition . . . and the distinctive features associated with the corresponding position in the universe of lifestyles only becomes intelligible when the habitus is constructed [*sic*] as the generative formula . . .'
- 8 In support of these charges, Chicago's predominately white northwest side had almost no scattered-site units (Hogan, 1996; see Kirp, Dwyer and Rosenthal, 1995 on the concept of 'fair share' of affordable housing in the suburbs).

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