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URBAN VOICES:
AMERICAN DISCOURSES ON CRIME

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ACQUISITIONS

by

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PREFACE

Polly Klass. Car-Jacking. Chuck-E-Cheese's Pizza.
Chez Vous. The Long Island Railroad Massacre. Rodney King.
The L.A. Riot. "Willie" Horton. "Wilding" in Central Park.
The Subway Vigilante. Yusuf Hawkins. Carol Stuart. The
list could be extended almost indefinitely. The public
arenas where American political culture is reproduced
overflow with images of crime, violence, and punishment.
These images fuel the daily production of analytical
discourse: Newspaper columns, magazines articles, radio talk-
shows, television "special reports," brim with argument and
debate about the sources of urban violence and its remedies.
What are the contours of this public debate? What do
ordinary people think about the issue? What is the
significance of the prominent place crime occupies in
American public life?

Answering these questions is the chief aim of this
dissertation. Because crime is such a salient issue, how
people think about it is of considerable importance. This
sentiment is widely shared among scholars and political
analysts, thus, as we shall see, the territory I will cover
is well traveled. But I will argue that existing work in
this area is theoretically rich but empirically poor. This
study is an attempt to redistribute the wealth.

The dissertation is also a sort of case study and hence of larger significance. Crime, following Gusfield (1981), is a *public problem*, hence how it is interpreted for and by ordinary people can inform a larger theoretical interest in the dynamics of the public sphere. The study can thus contribute to our understanding of the relationship between what Edelman (1988) calls the "political spectacle," and the consciousness of regular people.

If dusted for fingerprints, the manuscript would reveal the following contributions. Deborah Grant suggested that I do a dissertation on anti-crime activism and persuaded me to stick with the project through its many mutations. Bill Gamson, as dissertation chair, offered guidance and inspiration at every turn. His fingerprints, a bit faint due to his aversion to heavy-handedness, will be evident on every page. Charles Pinderhughes, as facilitator of the groups of color, brought to the project unflagging commitment and expert judgment. Rose Miller and Denee Gravitte transcribed more than twenty often chaotic conversations with patience and precision. Members of the Boston College Media Research and Action Project provided feedback at the early stages of the project. Lew Coser, Charlie Derber, Diane Vaughan, Stephen Pfohl and Eve Spangler offered guidance and encouragement throughout. Piers Beirne provided important bibliographic assistance. Katherine Beckett read a complete draft of the manuscript and offered useful criticism and kind

words. The project received financial help from Boston College, the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Justice.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the crime watchers who gave of their time and their thoughts. The lightbulbs they took home from the conversations were small thanks indeed for their contribution to the study.

Finally, without the early and continuous assistance of Chris Hayes and Jerry Smart of the Boston Police Neighborhood Watch Program, the research for this project and other related work would have been immeasurably more difficult. They gave willingly of their time to yet another pesky graduate student doing yet another "important study."

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Critical sociologists and criminologists tell basically the same story about crime as a political issue. The details vary from author to author but for my purposes only the most salient features matter. The story begins with a gap between reality and the manner it which it gets constructed by ordinary people.

IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

Americans, the critics contend,[1] regard crime as a threat "from below" (Reiman, 1990). They view the typical offender as poor, male and usually black (Gordon, 1990; Reiman, 1990; Rubin, 1988). They believe that crime is caused by either individual moral failure or a poorly functioning criminal justice system. To solve the problem, they believe the police should crack down on offenders and the courts should "get tough" (Elias, 1993; Gordon, 1990; Scheingold, 1984 & 1991). Political Scientist Stuart Scheingold (1991) refers

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[1] The most important references for various lines of argument appear in the text. In general, by 'critical sociologists and criminologists' -- referred to here and elsewhere as 'the critics' -- I mean the following: Cohen, 1985; Dahrendorf, 1985; Ehrenreich, 1989; Elias, 1993; Gordon, 1990; Hall et al., 1978; Johns, 1992; Reiman, 1990; Scheingold, 1984 & 1991; Quinney, 1970 & 1974.

to this perspective as *volitional criminology*. Others call
it a "law and order" orientation (Gordon, 1990; Dahrendorf,
1985; Hall et al, 1978).

Reality, however, is a different matter. In the critics'
view, crime and violence in the United States stem not from
institutional or individual failure, but from the basic
organization of political and economic power (Elias, 1993;
Gordon, 1990; Johns, 1992; Reiman, 1990). Poverty, growing
inequality, the disruptive effects of a relatively
unregulated market economy, weak government supports, a
market-driven consumer culture, the emergence of an urban
"underclass" -- these are the true causes of crime and
violence.[2] In the recent volume *Victims Still*, Politics
Professor Robert Elias tries to correct the popular
misconception:

> Crime primarily results not from inherently evil
> offenders, institutional inefficiencies, or victim
> complacency. Rather, it is caused by adverse or
> destructive political, economic, and social conditions.
> Instead of blaming offenders, institutions, or victims,
> this diagnosis blames the system: the existing set of
> U.S. political and economic arrangements... The economic
> system, for example, promotes crime by producing poverty,

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[2] The argument is not always made in the same terms. The Marxists, for
example, tend to situate the structural sources of crime within a larger
crisis of modern capitalism (eg. Hall et al, 1978; Reiman, 1990). The
liberals, on the other hand, tend to treat them as properties of
peculiarly American social arrangements (eg. Gordon, 1990; Currie, 1985
& 1993).

inequality, homelessness, hunger, and other forms of victimization. It is not surprising that many poor people turn to crime either for economic gain (as one of their few opportunities) or merely to vent their frustrations (1993:108-9).

If the truth is so simple, then why don't regular people see it?

SOURCES OF ERROR

The critics attribute popular beliefs about crime to American culture, the psychodynamic process of displacement, the "implicit ideology" of the criminal justice system and the messages communicated through the mass media. We take up these *sources of error* in turn.

1. Culture. Scheingold argues that the resonance of volitional criminology is a reflection of a potent bit of American culture which he terms the "myth of crime and punishment." The myth holds that criminals are "predatory strangers," fundamentally different from the rest of us, and eagerly "awaiting their opportunity to attack persons and property."

This frightening image triggers off a second and more reassuring feature of the myth of crime and punishment: the idea that the appropriate response to crime is punishment. Punishment is both morally justified and practically effective (1984:60).

The myth derives its strength in part from the twin themes of vigilantism and individual responsibility, both "deep-seated" in American history and culture. But perhaps more importantly, it constructs the problem in a manner that is reassuring. If offenders are readily recognizable and punishment an effective solution, then crime is not so troubling an issue after all. "In effect," Scheingold writes, "the myth of crime and punishment is a simple morality play, a contest between good and evil, with the odds strongly in favor of the good" (1991:21). In contrast, when crime is constructed in structural terms, it becomes everybody's responsibility and the possibility of a "quick fix" disappears.

2. Displacement. Political scientist Diana Gordon argues that punitive attitudes toward criminals can derive from social stresses that have little to do with crime.

> People whose material well-being is deteriorating, or who equate social change with the disruption of cherished values, or who feel their voices are not heard in important public debates, may displace their anger and frustration onto the "undeserving," however defined (1991:161).

This, in Gordon's view, is precisely what occurred in the 1970s and 80s. In the earlier period, the student and civil rights rebellions seemed to working people to flaunt the values of respectability and patriotism. In the later,

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stagnant wages and growing economic insecurity supplied new

sources of anger and resentment. These "structural

discontents" were readily channeled, in part by enterprising

politicians, into punitive attitudes toward the undeserving,

especially criminals.[3]

3. Criminal justice messages. In the celebrated

undergraduate text *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get*

Prison, Philosophy Professor Jeffrey Reiman argues that

people learn to think about crime by observing the routine

operation of the criminal justice system.[4] Thus, Reiman

argues, the justice system can be said to "broadcast a

message" concerning the nature of crime; this message is the

system's "implicit ideology." What message does our justice

system broadcast? First, by punishing individuals for their

offenses, the system *"implicitly conveys the message that the*

social conditions in which the crime occurred are not

responsible for the crime" (1990:124, emphasis in original).

Thus people learn from the routine operation of the courts

that crime is a matter of *choice* rather than a consequence of

unjust social arrangements. Second, because the laws

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[3]   Scheingold makes a similar argument, albeit in a more cursory
fashion. America's individualistic culture, he writes, *"increasingly*
generates the kinds of insecurities that promote a yearning for
scapegoats and synergistically supplies the volitional understandings
that make these scapegoats credible" (1991:173, emphasis in original).

[4] Reiman's argument is actually a popularization of Althusser's theory
on the functions of the "ideological state apparatuses." See Althusser,
1971.

criminalize and the courts punish the socially harmful

activities of the poor while largely ignoring the more

harmful activities of the rich, the criminal justice system

teaches that the principal threat to the well-being of middle

Americans comes from "those below them on the economic

latter, not those above" (p. 130).

4. Media messages. Robert Elias attributes popular law

and order attitudes, at least in part, to the influence of

the mass media. To discover what messages the news media

communicates to the public about crime, he examined all of

the crime stories appearing in the newsweeklies *Time, U.S.*

News and World Report, and *Newsweek* between 1956 and 1991.

The newsweeklies, he discovered, express all of the key

features of the "law and order" perspective. In Elias's

words:

> The newsweeklies do not really consider the "causes" or
> "sources" of victimization at all... Rather than
> examining whether something might be wrong with our laws,
> our society, or our fundamental institutions, the
> newsweeklies conceptualize crime as an entirely
> individualized problem: Everyone has the opportunity to
> avoid becoming a criminal. It is the individual's
> choice, except, of course, for those irretrievably evil
> people among us who must simply be put away. How, then,
> can we prevent crime? According to the newsweeklies, we
> must provide endless resources to law enforcement,
> abandon rights technicalities that handcuff the police,
> toughen our penalties and build more prisons...
> (1993:13).

The message is so uniform, Elias argues, because of media reliance on government officials and conservative crime control experts. These news sources, in turn, derive political benefit from promoting the "law and order" interpretation of crime, a matter to which we turn presently.

POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

The critics argue that the manner in which crime is constructed in American political culture undermines the viability of effective public policy responses. But they also describe other damaging consequences. Most significantly, they charge that popular and media constructions of crime encourage the expansion of state-sponsored social control and bolster prevailing power arrangements. We take up these charges in turn.

Expanding Social Control

The resonance of law and order rhetoric, the critics argue, has been too much for politicians to resist. During the last 25 years, they have campaigned for and legislated an array of measures that have had the cumulative effect of dramatically expanding state-sponsored social control. Diana Gordon distinguishes between measures that "get tough" by expanding the traditional criminal justice functions of "capture and confinement," and measures that extend state power through intensification of surveillance.

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The "get tough" measures adopted by state legislatures and the U.S. Congress revived the death penalty, narrowed defendants' rights, lengthened average criminal sentences and imposed mandatory minimum prison terms for drug offenses. The effect of these actions on the U.S. prison system has been dramatic. Between 1971 and 1987, Gordon informs us, the incarceration *rate* (the number of state and federal prison inmates for every 100,000 U.S. residents) rose by more than 137%. By mid-1988, the combined populations of state and federal prisons reached an all-time high of 604,824. At the time, the average daily population of local jails was about 300,000, bringing the total daily population of incarcerated U.S. residents to nearly one million.[5]

As striking as these figures may be, they are, perhaps, less significant than developments along the "second track" of the "justice juggernaut." During the 1980s, as prison populations expanded, so too did crime control practices aimed at keeping tabs on offenders in their communities. New forms of "community corrections," including electronic monitoring and house arrest, gained popularity. The number of probationers and parolees passed the three million mark.

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[5] Gordon, 1990:16. By 1993, the combined populations of state and federal prisons reached 925,000, bringing the *total* incarcerated population (including inmates in local jails) to nearly 1.4 million (Smolowe, 1994). During the 1980s, the U.S. earned the dubious distinction of incarcerating a larger share of its population than any other record-keeping nation (Americans Behind Bars, 1992).

And police agencies nationwide dramatically expanded their computer databases to include files on tens of millions of Americans.[6] These latter developments, Gordon warns, threaten the civil liberties of all Americans while "branding" and consigning to an "outer ring of society" the urban poor who constitute their principal target.[7]

Reinforcing Power Arrangements

In addition to serving as grist for criminal justice expansion, the manner in which ordinary Americans think about crime legitimates existing inequalities. The critics reason that if middle Americans view crime as *both* a matter of free choice, *and* as something primarily done by the poor, they are apt to regard the latter as morally deficient. Poverty thus does not appear as a cruel injustice but as something that is deserved, and public support for efforts to reduce social inequalities is diminished (Reiman, 1990; Johns, 1992).

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[6] As Gordon points out, these developments have disproportionately affected African Americans. According to a 1990 report by the Sentencing Project, on any given day in 1989 nearly one in four African American men between the ages of 20 and 29 was under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system, either behind bars or on probation or parole (Americans Behind Bars, 1992).

[7] For another excellent account of these trends, see Cohen, 1985. Social historian Mike Davis, in *City of Quartz*, describes the high tech police tactics, proliferation of private security and architectural innovations that have made Los Angeles a "fortress city." Though not directly addressed in *The Justice Juggernaut*, the trends Davis describes, conceptualized as the *militarization of public space,* round out Gordon's account of the expansion of state-sponsored social control.

The second and related part of the argument is that crime, as a political issue, benefits conservative politicians at the expense of their liberal challengers. To make the point, the critics catalogue the list of right-wing politicians -- Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, Spiro Agnew, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush among them -- who campaigned on "law and order" platforms and, when elected, waged wars on drugs and crime. Several devote special attention to the "Willie Horton" advertisements run by the 1988 Bush Campaign. Horton is the convicted murderer who, while Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis was governor, escaped from a Massachusetts prison furlough program. While at-large, Horton raped a Maryland woman and stabbed her fiancee. The Bush campaign ads featured the black man's face while a voice-over made the apparently devastating point: the Democrat who would be president is *soft on crime.*

Why has the crime issue proved so beneficial to conservatives? First, if the critics are correct in their assessment of public opinion, then from a strictly ideological standpoint conservatives are closer than liberals to the views of ordinary Americans on crime and its remedies. Second, crime has proved useful to conservatives because, like the cold war, it supplies them with an enemy against whom they can rally middle Americans in a common struggle. This is especially valuable to national politicians who are

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upper class and whose economic policies provide most
Americans with little that is worthy of support (Scheingold,
1984 & 1991; Reiman, 1990). Finally, Gordon (1990) argues
that because white Americans have tended to conflate
criminality with blackness, Republican politicians have been
able to successfully use the issue of crime to fragment the
Democratic Party's inter-racial coalition.[8]

* * *

Much of what I have described thus far makes sense to me.
First, I share the critics' preference for structural
interpretations of the United States' exceptionally high rate
of crime.[9] Second, the notion that Americans view crime in
volitional terms makes a good deal of intuitive sense. We
know, for example, that Americans tend to attribute
responsibility for all manner of behavior to individuals
rather than societal forces (Gans, 1988). Moreover among the
most robust findings of public opinion polling is that
Americans favor capital punishment and view the courts as too
lenient (Komarnicki and Doble, 1986). But hard evidence to

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[8] Thomas Byrne Edsall makes this argument in a much more detailed
fashion in the 1991 book *Chain Reaction*.

[9] The strongest arguments in support of the structural interpretation
appear in Elliott Currie's books on street crime (1985) and drugs
(1993).

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support or contradict important parts of the critics'
argument is scarce.

OPINION RESEARCH ON CRIME

The two most important scholarly studies of public
thinking about crime are *Crime and Punishment: Changing
Attitudes in America,* by Arthur Stinchcombe and his
colleagues (1980), and *Crime News and the Public,* by Doris
Graber (1980). The authors of *Crime and Punishment* examined
responses over many years to questions in the General Social
Survey on fear of crime, capital punishment, the courts and
gun control. They demonstrate that during the 1960s and
1970s, while the public was expressing increasingly liberal
attitudes on issues such as abortion, feminism and race
relations, it was growing more punitive on the issue of
crime. To resolve this paradox, they also examined cross-
sectional survey data on opinions on a variety of political
issues. They conclude that the relationship between
"liberalism" and "lenience" is weak, the result of perhaps
one percent of the population ("extreme liberals") for whom
liberal values extend to criminal justice practices. For the
vast majority, the "law and order" response to crime is
common sense. Thus, *Crime and Punishment* seems to support
the theoretical argument described in the first part of this
chapter. But against the notion that the issue is settled,

its authors readily admit that the data upon which they base their conclusions is "thin." In their words,

> [E]ven though popular criminology is replete with theories on what kinds of people commit crimes, we have no questions on what makes for a criminal character and what should be done about it... [O]ur poll questions on attitudes toward crime and punishment tap only a few aspects of the public's overall views about the causes and control of crime (pp. 5-6).

Doris Graber's study examined the influence of news reports about crime on public thinking. Her research team analyzed all of the crime stories appearing in the course of one year in a large sample of media sources and contrasted their content with findings from interview research conducted during the same period. The interviews were with three panels each comprised of 48 respondents. The panels were interviewed by telephone on nine occasions. In addition, a "core panel" of 21 members kept diaries of media use and were interviewed in-person. Elsewhere I will have occasion to refer to Graber's findings on media content; here I want only to note her conclusions concerning public opinion. In support of the critics' argument, Graber discovered that her panelists view the crime threat as principally emanating from poor people, especially the minority poor. Moreover, when asked to name the most important causes of crime, they placed the "bulk of the blame" (49% of attributions) on "personal

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factors" such as peer pressure, greed, and deficiencies in home life. But against the critics' argument, Graber reports that more than one-third (34.6%) of her panelists' attributions for crime were to poverty, economic stress and unemployment (p. 72). She concludes that most panelists saw "social conditions, particularly poverty and poor home life, as the primary causes of crime, thus absolving individual criminals and their ethnic groups, at least in part" (p. 127). Thus, Graber's study is best regarded as ambivalent in its bearing on the critics' theory.

In the absence of more up-to-date scholarly research on public opinion about crime, writers have turned to the publications of the large polling agencies such as Gallup, Ropers and Harris (eg. Gordon, 1990; Scheingold, 1991). But the publications of these organizations tend to raise more questions than they answer. To illustrate the problem, let me describe some of the conclusions of a 1989 Gallup Report entitled "Frustrated by Criminal Justice System, Public Demands Harsher Penalties." The Gallup writers provide ample support for their conclusion that the public increasingly has a "get tough attitude toward law enforcement." Specifically, they report that 83% of Americans believe that the "court's treatment of criminals" is "not harsh enough," and that "drugs" has replaced "unemployment" as the single factor held

to be most responsible for crime.[10] But in the same report

they note that Americans, by a two-to-one margin, believe

that the most effective way to fight crime is to "attack

social problems" rather than to "improve law enforcement."[11]

To me, these findings seem inconsistent. If in fact the

public exhibits a "law and order" attitude, then why by such

a large margin does it prefer anti-crime measures that focus

on the "social and economic problems that lead to crime"? Of

course, it is possible to interpret the poll data in such a

way as to conjure a coherent picture of public opinion. In

fact, reconciling inconsistencies in opinion polls is a

favorite pastime of sociologists and political analysts. But

taken on their own terms, the data provided by public opinion

polls can hardly be offered as either definitive support for,

or refutation of, the theoretical position described in the

first part of this chapter.[12]

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[10] In 1981, and again in 1989, respondents were asked the open ended
question "In your opinion, what factors are most responsible for crime
in the U.S. today?" In 1981, 37% of respondents' attributions for crime
were to "unemployment" and 13% were to "drugs." In 1989, 58% of
respondents' attributions were to "drugs" and only 14% to unemployment.

[11] In response to the following statement, 61% of respondents selected
"attack social problems" and 32% selected "improve law enforcement":
."To lower the crime rate in the U.S., some people think additional money
and effort should go to attacking the social and economic problems that
lead to crime, through better education and job training. Others feel
more money and effort should go to deterring crime by improving law
enforcement with more prisons, police and judges. Which comes closer to
your view?"

[12] Of course, one can find plenty of other apparent contradictions
within and across public opinion surveys. I can't resist mentioning
just one more from the same publication. In 1981, the year that 37% of
respondents' attributions for crime were to unemployment, 38% favored

In the next chapter, I explain in greater detail why opinion polling has failed to live up to its promise and describe the details of my alternative approach. But before proceeding, I would like to set down some of the latter's basic premises.

A CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

This study is informed by the "constructionist" approach to political discourse and public opinion as developed in works by Gamson (1988), Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992). The approach rests on three basic assumptions.

1. Regular people should not be regarded as passive recipients of media messages (cf. Bagdikian, 1983; Bennett, 1988; Entman, 1989; Marcuse, 1964; Schiller, 1989). Instead, they should be regarded as active assemblers of meaning. In constructing accounts of public issues, they draw upon local resources including popular wisdom, their personal experiences, and bits of media discourse. To assemble this raw material into coherent and meaningful accounts, they select from the range of interpretive

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"harsher punishment" as a crime reduction strategy. But by 1989, after the public had reportedly become more punitive, the proportion of respondents favoring "harsher punishments" dropped to 24%! Based on this observation, one might conclude that the public has grown *less* punitive. But the real point is not that the Gallop staff misinterpreted its survey; rather, it is that Gallop surveys, and others, can be interpreted in different ways.

frameworks available in the culture for making meaning on the issue at hand (cf. Miller and Holstein, 1993).[13]

Gamson and his colleagues (1992:384) point out that the concept of interpretive framework or "frame" derives strength from its ambivalence on the question of structure versus agency.

> On the one hand, events and experiences are framed; on the other hand, we frame events and experiences. Goffman warns us that "organizational premises are involved, and those are something cognition arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates." At the same time, he calls attention to the fragility of frames in use and their vulnerability to tampering. This underlines the usefulness of framing as a bridging concept between cognition and culture. A cultural level analysis tells us that our political world is framed, that reported events are pre-organized and do not come to us in raw form. But we are active processors and however encoded our received reality, we may decode it in different ways.

Frames on public problems typically feature a diagnostic component which identifies a condition as intolerable and attributes blame or causality, and a prognostic component which prescribes one or more courses of ameliorative action (cf. Snow and Benford, 1988; Gusfield, 1981). Frames can

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[13] The concept of interpretive frameworks or "frames" comes from Goffman, 1974. Its application to the field of political sociology is developed in Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988; Gamson, 1988; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987 & 1989; and Gamson et al, 1992.

evoked through catchphrases, historical exemplars, public figures and other types of condensing symbols (Gamson 1988).[14] Finally, frames tend to have more or less standard rebuttals.[15]

2. Meaning construction through the work of framing occurs in various forums, including academic journals, the mass media, and everyday conversation. These ought best be treated as discrete cultural systems each with its own norms and vocabularies and each deserving of study in its own right. No a priori judgments should be made about how the various forums relate one to the other. Because the mass media is presently the principal venue for public discourse, I will use the terms "media discourse" and "public discourse" interchangeably. I will use the term "popular discourse" to refer to what Neuman and his colleagues term "common language" and the "natural discourse of the mass public" (1992:141).

3. Political conflicts on particular issues are fought out as symbolic contests between contesting frames. Politicians, social movements, pundits, business groups and other political actors vie with one another to get their preferred frames before the public and to rebut those of

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[14] Condensing symbols are discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

[15] In the literature these are treated as properties of rival frames. In this study I treat a frame's negation as a hidden or repressed quality of the frame itself.

their rivals. They measure their own success in this venture by the degree of visibility they win for their preferred frames (Gamson, et al, 1992). How well particular frames perform depends upon a variety of factors including media practices, cultural resonances, and the resources and skills of frame sponsors.

The emphasis in constructionist research on public opinion and political discourse has been, for the most part, on describing the contours and dynamics of frame contests (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gamson, 1992); the relationships between public and popular discourse (Gamson, 1992; Neuman et al, 1992); and the manner in which regular people construct meaning (Gamson, 1992). The study described in this manuscript pursues each of these lines of inquiry. Specifically, I set out to answer five questions: 1) What are the contesting frames on crime? 2) Which frames are dominant in the public discourse? 3) Which are dominant in popular discourse? 4) Why are some frames more successful than others? 5) What (therefore) is the significance, for politics and public policy, of the prominent place crime occupies in American public life?

WHAT FOLLOWS

The architecture of the manuscript is simple. The next chapter identifies the crime frames and discusses the study's discourse samples and methodology. Next, chapters three

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through six describe the frames' "performances" in the samples of popular and public discourse. Chapter seven then attempts to explain why certain frames performed well while others did not. Finally, chapter eight presents the study's conclusions.

Chapter Two

THE STUDY

This overview of the study begins with a description of the five interpretive frameworks. It then describes the samples of public and popular discourse and the circumstances of their production. It concludes with a general description of the study's analytical techniques.

THE CONTESTING FRAMES

In order to establish a catalogue of culturally available frames on street crime, I examined the publications of activists and partisans on various "sides" of the issue.[1] There are two advantages to this strategy: First, frame sponsors tend to express their views in an ideologically coherent manner, thus presenting relatively "pure" or unadulterated frames. Second, by first consulting sponsors rather than mass media products, the analyst can create a catalogue that comes close to including all culturally

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[1] Specifically, I examined the publications of citizen advocacy organizations (National Rifle Association, American Friends Service Committee, Citizens for Safety (Boston), Correctional Association of New York, Minnesota Citizens Council on Crime and Delinquency, Justice Fellowship); think tanks (Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation); and academics who write about crime for a mass audience (James Q. Wilson, Elliott Currie).

available frames rather than only those that enjoy prominence in the mass media.

My review of the activist and partisan discourse yielded a working catalogue of frames. I then tested the "fit" of this catalogue on the sample of media discourse assembled for this study (see below). My aim at this stage was to make sure that the frame catalogue offered the right balance between precision (it should represent all of the important views and ideas in the crime debate) and economy (it should summarize and simplify the debate). The final, revised catalogue included five basic frames; they are presented in the coding guide (Appendix B) in terms of their constituent elements. Here they are described as ideal types.

The "law and order" perspective described in the introduction is best captured in the frame FAULTY SYSTEM. This frame regards crime as the consequence of impunity: People do crimes because they know they can get away with them. The Supreme Court has handcuffed the police. Overcrowded prisons have revolving doors for serious offenders. The best solution to crime is to enhance the swiftness, certainty and severity of punishment. FAULTY SYSTEM is sponsored by Republican politicians, conservative policy analysts, and criminal justice professionals.

The frame BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES depicts crime as a consequence of inequality and discrimination, especially as they manifest themselves in unemployment, poverty, and

inadequate educational opportunities. People do crimes because their legitimate opportunities for success are blocked. The best solution to the problem is to ameliorate the structural conditions that cause it. BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES is sponsored by liberal and Left policy analysts and by some liberal Democrat politicians.

The frame SOCIAL BREAKDOWN depicts crime as a consequence of family and community disintegration. The breakdown of the nuclear family in the context of urban anonymity has loosened the bonds that ordinarily discourage crime. The remedy for the problem can be found in collective efforts to reconstitute family and community through neighborhood associations, crime watches and "community policing." SOCIAL BREAKDOWN has a conservative and a liberal version. The former attributes "breakdown" to the new social movements (eg. feminism, civil rights) and government-sponsored anti-poverty initiatives (eg. "welfare"); the latter attributes breakdown to "unemployment," "deindustrialization" and "capital flight."

The frame MEDIA VIOLENCE depicts crime as a consequence of violence on television, in the movies and in popular music. Violence in the mass media undermines respect for life. By the time the average child reaches age 18 she's witnessed 10,000 murders on television. To reduce violence in the society we must first reduce it in the mass media. MEDIA VIOLENCE is sponsored by citizen lobby organizations

(eg. Action for Childrens' Television), and, occassionally, by members of Congress and the executive branch.

The fifth frame, RACIST SYSTEM, derives its essence from a depiction of the criminal justice system rather than an attribution of responsibility for crime. The frame depicts the courts and police as racist agents of oppression. The purpose of the criminal justice system is to repress a potentially rebellious underclass. RACIST SYSTEM is sponsored by civil rights and civil liberties activists and by Left intellectuals.

Each of these five frames has a number of standard rebuttals. FAULTY SYSTEM, for example, is frequently negated with the claim that imprisonment "hardens" offenders; BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES with the claim that most poor people are straight as an arrow; SOCIAL BREAKDOWN with the claim that rhetoric about the "nuclear family" is in fact thinly veiled hostility for feminism; and so on. The coding guide (Appendix B) specifies some of the frames' most common negations. Figure A illustrates the frames' key components.

Figure A

CRIME FRAMES

	Diagnostic	*Prognostic*	*Condensing Symbols*
FAULTY SYSTEM	Crime stems from criminal justice leniency and inefficiency.	The criminal justice system needs to 'get tough.'	"Willie" Horton "Handcuffed police" "Revolving door justice"
BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES	Crime stems from poverty and inequality.	The government must address the 'root causes' of crime by creating jobs and reducing poverty.	"Flipping Burgers" at McDonalds
SOCIAL BREAKDOWN	Crime stems from family and community breakdown.	Citizens should band together to recreate traditional communities and families.	"Take back the streets" Kitty Genovese "Family values"
MEDIA VIOLENCE	Crime stems from violence in the mass media.	The government should regulate the volume of violent imagery in the media.	"Life imitates art" 2 Live Crew
RACIST SYSTEM	The criminal justice system operates in a racist fashion.	People of color should band together to demand justice.	Rodney King Crown Heights Charles Stuart

MEDIA DISCOURSE

The sample of media discourse created for this study is comprised of 58 op ed columns on the topic of street crime. The op eds appeared between June 1, 1990 and May 31, 1991, in six metropolitan newspapers. The newspapers include the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, the Boston Globe, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Los Angeles Times. Items were initially included in the sample if they addressed the topic of street crime and appeared opposite the editorial page or in the expanded commentary section of the Sunday paper. The sample was subsequently winnowed to

include only items that displayed at least one of the crime frames either for the purpose of advocacy or rebuttal.[2]   It is representative of elite public discourse in the so-called newspapers "of record."

POPULAR DISCOURSE

The shortcomings of survey research for gathering data on public opinion are well known: Surveys tend to produce findings that reflect the categories of their authors rather than their subjects (Reinharz, 1988); they treat opinions as stable when in fact they vary with context (Potter and Wetherell, 1987); and they foster an image of people as isolated individuals rather than as members of particular cultures and subcultures (Blumer, 1948). At the root of the problem is that survey research rests on a faulty depiction of the research subject: it assumes that each person carries about in her head a fixed and relatively simple structure of attitudes. But in the real world, human consciousness is bound up with social context and language, both rife with shades of symbolic meaning. What people think and say depends on who is asking, who is listening, how the question

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[2] Of the handful of op eds excluded at this stage of data compilation, most were pieces that merely described the seriousness of the crime problem without offering either an analysis of its sources or recommendation for its cure.

is posed, and a host of related details. Surveys, in spite
of the best efforts of skilled researchers, cannot adequately
deal with this complexity.

Michael Billig's (1987, 1991) depiction of the research
subject is perhaps the alternative most compatible with the
constructionist approach. He contends that thinking is
nothing more than a dialog or an argument occurring in a
single self. Hence public conversation and private thinking
can be treated analytically as part and parcel of the same
process. The best way to analyze both is to regard people as
orators and to examine the rhetorical components of their
arguments. Prominent among the latter are "common places" --
the contrary themes, maxims, folk wisdom, values, etc., that
together comprise a culture's common sense. But how can we
sample the work of everyday orators?

Peer Group Conversations

Peer group conversations (Gamson, 1992) are ideally
suited to producing discourse for the kind of analysis Billig
proposes. Like the conventional focus group (Morgan, 1988),
of which they are a variation, they permit the researcher to
observe as subjects use their own categories and vocabularies
to cooperatively create meaning. But unlike conventional
focus groups, the participants in the peer group are
acquainted with one another *outside* of the research setting.
This difference offers two advantages: First, peer group

participants typically interact with greater intensity and less reserve than their focus group counterparts. This, in turn, permits the facilitator to minimize his or her participation in the conversation and results in richer transcripts. Second, because the peer groups have a social existence independent of the sociologist's contrivance, their discourse can be regarded with greater confidence as reflective of the particular subcultures from which they are drawn.

Recruitment

I decided to constitute peer groups from a sample of neighborhood crime watch groups because the latter are venues . in which urbanites regularly talk about crime.[3] The staff of the crime watch division of the Boston Police Department provided me with a list of group organizers from which I did most of the recruitment. The organizers were contacted by mail and telephone and asked to arrange and host a conversation with four-to-six members of their group. In all, organizers of at least 60 groups were contacted, resulting in 20 successful interviews.[4] I tried to achieve a

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[3] See Appendix C on what crime watch groups do other than create discourse for sociological research.

[4] I also conducted several pilot sessions to rehearse the format.

racial balance in group type by recruiting from both communities of color and neighborhoods that are mostly white. This effort proved successful: Of the 20 groups, eight were comprised of white people,[5] nine were comprised of people of color,[6] and three were comprised of roughly equal numbers of both.

The groups I recruited were from the working and middle class residential zones of seven Boston neighborhoods. The groups of color were from Roxbury, Mattapan, and North Dorchester, all segregated black communities. The white groups were from Jamaica Plain, South End, Roslindale and Mission Hill, predominantly white communities but among the most integrated in the city.[7] Six of the seven neighborhoods have housing stocks that consist mostly of single and two-

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[5] One group of seven conversationalists included a single person of color. I decided to treat this as a white group in spite of this fact.

[6] These groups were overwhelmingly comprised of African Americans but in general I will use the term "group of color" to describe them as some included either a Cape Verdean or a Latino participant. Where the term proves too clumsy, I will revert to the convention "black groups." Note also that one group of color included a Scottish immigrant.

[7] Precise figures on the racial compositions of these neighborhoods are not readily available as the tract districts listed in the U.S. Census do not correspond to traditional neighborhood boundaries. But the Census data can be used to generate some basic distinctions: Jamaica Plain has a large Latino population comprising about one-fourth of the total. It also has an African American population that constitutes about another 10%. The South End is the most integrated neighborhood in the sample with almost equal numbers of blacks and whites. Roslindale is the whitest neighborhood with a combined black and Latino population of about 20% (U.S. Census, 1990).

family dwellings with an occasional apartment building or public housing development.[8] Though there are crime watch groups in the latter, none are included in this sample.

These neighborhoods have in common their close proximity to "underclass" zones (Wilson, 1987). The frontier dividing the shady streets and well kept houses of the former from the vacant lots and boarded up buildings of the latter is sometimes as narrow as a single street. This is especially true for several of the groups of color. But even in these cases the distinction between the two areas is real enough.

Boston neighborhoods suffer a great deal of crime, a fact that becomes especially apparent when we compare the rates of street crime offenses within the city with those statewide. Boston comprises less than 10% of Massachusett's population, but approximately one third of all homicides statewide, one fourth of all rapes, and nearly one half of all robberies, occur within the city (Uniform Crime Reports, 1992). Notably, however, while most city neighborhoods suffer crime rates that are higher than those statewide, the aggregate figures reported here mask the disproportionate concentration of street crime in Boston's minority neighborhoods. In 1990, for example, 81% of all homicides,

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[8] The exception is the South End which consists primarily of brownstone style townhouses and apartment buildings. Two white groups were drawn from this neighborhood.

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54% of all rapes and 46% of all robberies occurred in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, the three neighborhoods from which all of the groups of color participating in this study were drawn.[9]

The Conversations

The conversations were structured around six questions aimed at generating discussion on the dimensions of the crime problem, its sources, and its most promising remedies. I served as facilitator for the white groups and for two of the mixed ones. To minimize the possibility that norms of politeness would alter the quality of discourse, I hired an African American sociologist to facilitate the groups of color. We compensated participants with the modest gift of a package of low-watt light bulbs designed for use in outdoor fixtures. All of the conversations were held between October, 1991, and December, 1992.

The interview schedule (Appendix A) was designed with two goals in mind: First, I wanted to ensure that the conversationalists would have ample opportunity to come up with their own shared frames on crime. Second, I wanted to be sure to get their reactions to the interpretive frameworks

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[9] These figures consist of crimes reported to the police. They were compiled by the Boston Police Department for the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports and provided to the author by the Department's Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development.

that are the subject of this study. Accordingly, the schedule began with two general questions aimed at sparking open conversation on the dimensions and sources of the crime problem. These questions were followed by a series of three statements, one representing each of the first three frames described above. The conversationalists were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements, and to explain their positions. The frame RACIST SYSTEM was not prompted with a statement; instead, reaction to it was elicited separately through a question about the highly publicized murder of Carol Stuart.[10] The frame MEDIA VIOLENCE was not prompted in any fashion but occasionally emerged spontaneously.

The facilitator did not participate in the conversation in any way, beyond asking the six structuring questions. Upon arrival at each session, he explained to the participants that he would be audio-taping the conversation

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[10] I decided to trigger RACIST SYSTEM using this *indirect* approach because of the highly charged nature of its claims. As things turn out, the strategy proved only partially successful in averting a breakdown of rapport between the facilitator and the group. The full story is told in chapter six. The Stuart question refers to the 1989 murder of Carol Stuart apparently by her husband Charles in a largely black neighborhood. In the immediate aftermath of the murder, Charles Stuart, who was white, told police that his wife's assailant was a black man wearing a running suit. The police subsequently conducted an aggressive search of the neighborhood. Many neighborhood residents complained that the police, in conducting their hunt, violated civil liberties. Complaints reached a crescendo after Charles Stuart committed suicide and the fraudulent nature of his claims became commonly known.

and taking notes in order to keep track of who was speaking. After asking each question, he withdrew into the background by burying his head in a note pad. The conversationalists were thus, in effect, left to negotiate their own response to each question. Of the 20 conversations, 18 were lively and intense, resulting in transcripts of 20-30 single-spaced pages. In two of the conversations the participants seemed less interested; transcripts of these sessions are considerably shorter than the others.

Typicality of the Sample

Who participated in the conversations? To what population can we generalize from this non-random sample? In all, 110 Boston residents participated in the peer group conversations. The following profile is based on information provided by the participants in a brief questionnaire filled out at the conclusion of each conversation. The sample population is more racially balanced than the larger population of Boston (50% of the participants are white, 47% African American) but underrepresents Hispanic and Asian Americans (less than 3% of the sample).[11] It is also more

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[11] Sixty three percent of Boston residents are white, 26% are African American, and 5% are Asian American. Ten percent of Boston residents are of Hispanic descent, but were coded as either white or Black in the U.S. Census (U.S. Census, 1990).

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female than the larger population (71% of the participants are female, 29% are male),[12] and a bit better educated (40% completed at least a bachelor's degree, 48% did not).[13] With respect to age, the sample population is right on target for people aged 60 and older (21% of the sample population), but overrepresents people in the 40-59 bracket (42% of the sample population) at the expense of younger residents (26% of the sample population).[14]

The most intuitively significant characteristic of the sample is that it is comprised of participants in crime watch groups. But for three reasons, this turns out to be less important than at first it might seem. First, the participants in this study are not anti-crime zealots. For most, participation involves no more than attending meetings in a neighbor's living room a few times each year. Second, while the participants are certainly fearful of crime, survey research (Stinchcombe et al, 1980; Cullen et al, 1985) has

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[12] Fifty-two percent of Boston residents are female (U.S. Census, 1990). Despite the overrepresentation of women in the study, at least one man participated in each of 17 of the 20 conversations. The three female-only conversations were all in groups of color. Appendix C discusses the overrepresentation of women in crime watch groups.

[13] The percentages do not total to 100 for education and age because some participants left these items blank on the questionnaire. But even with missing data, the figure of 40% college graduates is greater than in the larger population. According to the U.S. Census, 30% of Boston residents aged 25 or older hold bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census, 1990).

[14] Fifty-seven percent of adult (20 years and older) Boston residents are aged 20-39, 23% are aged 40-59, and 20% are 60 or older (calculated from the U.S. Census, 1990).

failed to identify any relationship between this variable and attitudes about crime's causes and remedies. Moreover, *fear of crime* is quite widespread in the neighborhoods represented in this study (Boston Globe, September 1, 1991). Third, research has also failed to sustain the common sense notion that people who participate in crime watch are either unusually fearful or unusually punitive. After reviewing the best studies in this area, Lewis and Salem (1986) conclude that "...there is no systematic evidence that an individual's attitude toward crime is associated with participation in collective responses" (129). The best predictor of participation, the authors contend, is the presence of an effective crime prevention program.

So if participation in crime watch is a red herring, to what population may we generalize? In my view, the participants in this study are representative of their neighbors and the kinds of people who live in neighborhoods of the same type. For whites, this means neighborhoods that are racially integrated (if primarily white) and that abut high crime "underclass" areas. For blacks, this means the nicer streets and blocks in segregated minority communities.

There is one final point to be made concerning the study sample and design. The peer group technique is itself a device for minimizing the kind of sample bias that plagues researchers who use interviewing techniques to study small samples. Because the conversation created by the group is a

collective product, it tends to reflect the common sense of the subculture from which its participants are drawn. Indeed, as Gamson points out (1992:192), meaningful interaction within a group is only possible to the extent that its members share taken-for-granted assumptions about the world -- *intersubjectivity*, in Schutz's (1967) term. Group interaction dynamics thus tend to discourage the expression of marginal ideas, encouraging instead ideas that are in broad currency within a particular subculture. This tends to be the case regardless of the precise composition of the group. While the presence of a few "outliers" (individuals with idiosyncratic views) can badly skew the results of conventional interview research, their presence within a peer group tends not to pose so much of a problem.

Fear of Crime

Most of this manuscript describes how people *explain* crime. But what is the nature of the problem that demands explanation? What, in other words, are the participants afraid of? The first interview question asked "What crimes are you most concerned about and who is doing them?" The participants answered, for the most part, that they are fearful of "bodily harm" and not merely of losing "material things." Burglaries and car thefts are a hassle and a "violation," but they pale in significance in comparison to "drive-by shootings" and "random acts of violence." The

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following excerpts, the first from an African American and
the second from a white speaker, are typical:

Group: Troy Street[15]

Vanessa: To me the most scariest aspect of crime is really
not the property issue... I don't have a great attachment
to my car or anything in my house necessarily. It's just
a piece of thing that -- you know -- I'll make a claim,
I'll get the money and I'll replace it... I worry more
about, you know, just walking down the street one day and
being in the way of a random shooting...

Group: Dean Avenue

Carolyn: I think I'm afraid of the personal violence -- of
being attacked... I've been robbed two or three times.
You can survive that, I mean material things don't
matter.

Who is committing these crimes? The conversationalists
insisted that crime is committed by all types of people in
all types of neighborhoods, thus implicitly repudiating the
stereotype of the black male offender (see chapter one). But
at the same time they discussed which neighborhoods and bus
routes ought best be avoided in the interests of safety, thus
revealing "cognitive maps" which accurately reflect the

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[15] The names of crime watch groups, participants, and their residential
streets are pseudonyms.

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actual distribution of violent street crime in the city.[16]
The following excerpts are, once again, from an African
American and a white speaker, respectively:

Group: Pleasant Street

Libby: Like when I told my friend, well I live on Walker
    Street but I take the bus and get off on Plymouth Street
    side. I do not come Parker way side... I'll tell them in
    a minute, "If you come to my house don't come Parker way.
    Don't get on the 11 to come to my house. Take the 33--"
    In a minute. I tell them get on the 33. Do NOT get on
    the Parker. No telling who's out on the corner.

Group: Jacob's Lane

Geraldine: I came originally from Dorchester and now it's
    sad -- I mean, I never thought this day would come. But
    we really don't, if we can possible help it, go down
    through Cummins Highway and Mattapan. And that's where I
    was brought up.

In discussing their fears, the conversationalists
referred to first hand experiences of victimization as well

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[16] Cognitive maps store information about which places are safe and
which are not, they thus "allow people to find their way and provide
individuals with a sense of security and safety" (Wachs, 1988:63). The
participants' maps seem to have varying degrees of specificity with
whites indicating fear of black neighborhoods and blacks indicating fear
of specific corners and streets. But participants seem to agree that
the segregated minority neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester and
Mattapan are the most dangerous in the city. And the actual geographic
distribution of violent crime is consistent with this widely shared
belief (see footnote, page 36).

as to news stories about crime happenings. But the large

volume of references to the former should lay to rest the

charge that fear of crime among urbanites is either

essentially irrational or out-of-proportion to the actual

threat of victimization.[17] For example, consider the

following exchange between members of one group of color:

> *Group: Fisher Hill Road*
>
> *Cast:*
>
> *Chuck, a printing estimator who has attended college, in
> his early 40s.*
>
> *Deborah, a facilities manager who has attended college,
> in her late 30s.*
>
> *Georgia, a director of administrative services who has
> attended college, in her late 30s.*
>
> *Karl, a research and development aid who has attended
> college, in his mid 50s.*
>
> *Victor, retired, in his mid 60s.*
>
> *Sam, retired, in his 70s.*

Chuck: I tell you a real big problem is, ah, we can say that
I found two loaded pistols on my property. These guys --
And I just found handguns. There have been shotguns
found, you name it --

Deborah: Automatic weapons.

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[17] These findings thus support the position of the "left realist"
criminologists (Young and Matthews, 1992; Matthews and Young, 1992)
against the those who argue that signs of incivility are the chief cause
of fear (Lewis and Salem, 1986; Skogan, 1990) and against those who
identify it as the mass media (Gerbner et al, 1978, 1979). Within this
ongoing debate on the sources of fear, the realists insist that direct
experience of victimization is the chief cause, and thus efforts to
reduce fear must ultimately deal with the real problem of crime.

Chuck: -- pump shotguns and stuff like that. And they just
       put them anywhere. They could be in a bag, and they'll
       just lay it down. And it looks like its just a piece of
       trash but there's a gun in it. Laying out anywheres.
       Any kid on the street could pick it up...

Gloria: And also one of the children have found packages of
       crack that one of the drug dealers had dropped because
       the police were coming. And they ingested it. It was
       very fortunate that the mother knew exactly what to do or
       that child probably would have been dead...

Deborah: As I was saying, the unprovoked violence is a
       problem too in that -- There's a school yard not far from
       here, and they just stand out there at any time of the
       day or night and shoot. And a lot of kids are out there
       playing basketball, football, what have you. Innocent
       kids who could have some harm come to them as a result of
       these idiots.

Karl: Some *have had* some harm. You all got to remember we
       had a little girl shot right on the head because another
       drug dealer was shooting at another drug dealer. A
       little small child.

Gloria: And I don't think I'm wrong in saying that just
       about every house on this street and River Street have
       had shots fired into their homes or at their homes.

Victor: I know -- Well, I had the windshield shot out.

Karl: I know, I don't know about the them next to you, but
       the next two down and mine, I've seen bullet holes.

Gloria: And unfortunately, what has happened -- I mean for
       my husband and I personally -- we refuse any friends and
       family from coming to visit us. Because just out of the
       fear -- it has cleaned up a little bit but at one point
       we never knew when we were going to have to end up on the
       floor. My mother used to live with us. It was so wild
       out here that we had to ask her to leave, we had to

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basically pack her up and ship her out, because we did not want to take that risk.

Victor: Well, this Bullock affair -- same thing what you have said happened to her. But she did have some friends over there. They all had to lay on the ground, right out in front of the house there.

Sam: Guy came right out here at the house there with a gun in his hand coming over here toward some kid I think he was coming over toward Joe I heard later on. And the kids was ducking and dodging and everything you know. Because they thought there was going to be some shooting...

Deborah: We live in the Wild, Wild West that we sat on Saturdays and watched.[18]

For the participants in this study, there have been sufficient direct experiences of victimization to justify their level of concern.[19]

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

This section describes the basic analytical strategy used in chapters three-to-six. The strategy used in chapter

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[18] While this chapter was being drafted the late-night news reported the death of a 12 year old boy on this group's street. The child was apparently shot by a "drive by" bicyclist.

[19] The post-conversation questionnaire asked each participant if s/he had recently been a victim of crime. Thirty-four percent of the participants circled "yes" and described a recent crime happening. The crimes mentioned most frequently were house-breaks, purse-snatchings, muggings and car thefts. Several participants mentioned more serious offenses including assaults with knives and shootings.

seven is described there.

As noted above, a coding guide, included as Appendix B, specifies the ideational elements of the various frames. Using this guide, I coded all displays of the frames in the media sample. In operational terms, a frame display consisted of either the expression of one of a frame's idea elements (for either the purpose of advocacy or rebuttal), or the expression of an opinion about one of a frame's idea elements. For example, the claim that crime stems from unemployment was coded as a display of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, as was an argument concerning the validity of such a claim. Where passages expressed two or more frameworks -- or opinions about two or more frameworks -- they were cross-coded. All coded passages were then typed into a computer database program.[20]

Next I coded the conversation transcripts for discourse relevant to each of the frames. Here the standard for inclusion was less rigorous than in the case of the media discourse. If an utterance appeared to be even partially relevant to a particular frame, it received that frame's code. Many utterances were therefore cross-coded under more

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[20] The software used for this study is Textbase Alpha, developed by Bo Summerlund and Ole Steen Kristensen. It is available through Qualitative Research Management, 73-425 Hilltop Road, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240.

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than one frame. The coding guide was used as a general reference for coding decisions.

After this preliminary round of coding, I used the database software to sort the two discourse samples by frame type. The result was two sets of five computer printouts each, the first presenting the media discourse relevant to each of the five frames, the second likewise presenting the conversational discourse. The two sets of printouts were then subjected to another round of analysis, this one aimed at determining the quality of each frame's "performance." For each frame, I examined the following:

1) Prominence. This quality refers to a frame's salience in discourse. It is not influenced by whether the frame appears in a positive or negative light, but strictly with how much attention it commands. In the media discourse, prominence was determined by frequency of display with each op ed treated as one "opportunity." In the popular discourse, it was determined by a threshold measure of participants' *involvement* with the frame. This measure is fully described at the point of its first use in chapter four.

2) Resonance. This quality, in contrast, refers to a frame's persuasiveness. What did the columnists'/ conversationalists' have to say about the frame? Did they affirm or reject its claims? At this stage of data analysis I switched from coding for idea elements to coding for

arguments. There were two advantages to this strategy:
First, arguments tend to combine various idea elements thus
reducing the number of units that demand attention. Second,
as Billig (1987) so persuasively shows, people do not just
frame reality, but rather they argue about how best to frame
it.[21] By examining the conversationalists' arguments we can
listen as people both *frame* crime and argue about how it
ought to be framed. This method thus captures the natural
dynamics of argument and thought.

We need not be delayed at this point with examples of
this analytical strategy as they abound in the chapters that
follow. But before proceeding to the first frame there is
one more matter to clarify. In their discussions,
participants often attributed crime to drugs and guns. I made
an early decision that drugs and guns are part of the crime
problem -- something that demands an explanation -- not an
explanation in itself. If in the account that follows
"drugs" and "guns" are conspicuously absent as a "causes" of
crime, it is because of this decision.

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[21] "In selecting one form of discourse, or one schema, over another, we
state implicitly that this form captures the essence of the matter best.
If we are challenged, and another set of categories is thrust at us, we
might then make the implication explicit, and find ourselves arguing
about the heart of the issue." (Billig, 1987:138)

Chapter Three

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES

...a lot of young people are from homes where, you know, there isn't enough to eat and that sort of thing. I think that they're out roaming the streets and no one cares about them, and I think that if there were better living conditions and more opportunities for better education, I think that would help quite a bit.

— Stella, a white woman in her mid-70s.

I strongly disagree that there are not opportunities out there and this is why youth, or whoever, turn to crime. It's just that we're used to having our plate served to us. And when it's not served to us, then we get an attitude and we don't want to go find that plate... Opportunities. That's the big word. Opportunity. That we don't have the opportunity. There's been many of us who've HAD the opportunity who blow it.

— Marjorie, an African American woman in her 30s.

The BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES perspective on crime has its social scientific roots in Robert K. Merton's 1938 essay "Social Structure and Anomie." Merton's argument will be familiar to most readers so I will present it only in its briefest form. Crime, in this perspective, results from a disjuncture between socially prescribed goals and the institutionally available means for goal attainment. American culture, Merton argued, inculcates a desire for material success -- for the "American Dream" -- but American economic arrangements render attainment of material success by legitimate means impossible for many. This contradiction

between goals and means exerts pressure on individuals. To reduce this pressure, individuals adopt one of five possible "modes of adaptation." Two of these involve at least some behaviors which are conventionally regarded as criminal. It is with these that we will be concerned.

One mode of adaptation available to individuals who discover their means to material success blocked is *innovation*. This involves resorting to illegitimate means -- typically crime -- to achieve conventional goals. In effect, the innovator sacrifices her commitment to institutionally sanctioned behavior in order to satisfy her enduring attachment to the culturally prescribed goal of material success. For Merton, the archetypal innovator was Al Capone, a figure who "represents the triumph of amoral intelligence over morally prescribed 'failure'" (1938:679).

The second mode of adaptation is *retreatism*. The retreatist is one who abandons both socially prescribed goals *and* institutionally sanctioned behavior; unable to achieve material success by legitimate means, but unwilling or unable to innovate, she adapts to the unbearable situation by escaping society altogether. For Merton, typical retreatists include "[p]sychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts" (1938:677).

Merton's theory is of such enduring importance because it specifies several concrete ways in which relative deprivation

gets translated into criminal acts. In the next two sections, in examining contemporary discourse on crime, we will encounter ideational material that is, at least in part, a popular sedimentation of Merton's formal theoretical writing.

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

An op ed was coded as displaying a positive version of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES if it expressed at least one idea element that appears in the coding guide (Appendix B) as either a diagnostic or a prognostic component of the frame. An op ed was coded as displaying a negation or rebuttal of the frame if it expressed an emphatic rejection of at least one of these idea elements.

In all, BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES appeared in 25 of the 58 items in the sample of newspaper commentary. Of these, 19 items sought to advance the frame by displaying at least one of its key diagnostic or prognostic elements. The remaining six conjured the frame for the purpose of rebuttal.

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES frequently appeared in the discourse as a counterpoint to FAULTY SYSTEM: of the 19 pieces that featured positive displays of the former, 11 also featured rebuttals of the latter. The relationship appears even stronger in the reverse: of the six pieces that featured *rebuttals* of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, five also featured displays of FAULTY SYSTEM. By way of illustration, the

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following excerpt from a Tom Wicker column in the New York Times begins with a rebuttal of FAULTY SYSTEM, and then promotes BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES by expressing some of its key prognostic elements:

> In the U.S., in the last two decades, the death penalty has been reinstated (in any state that opts for it), the prison population has been doubled, sentences generally are longer and less flexible, parole in some jurisdictions has been eliminated, peacekeeping forces have been increased... Crime, however, has steadily increased, not just in New York but across the nation... More jobs, better housing, decent medical care, improved education, greater opportunity -- in the long run, all might be more useful than more police (Sep. 16, 1990; emphasis in the original).

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES also appeared frequently in combination with SOCIAL BREAKDOWN -- of the 19 items that displayed positive versions of the former, ten also displayed the latter. In fact, some passages were cross-coded under both frames because discerning which was a closer match proved impossible. Consider the following statement by New York City Police Commissioner Lee Brown (which, incidentally, also contains a rejection of FAULTY SYSTEM):

> The police have been very good at arresting people, and the courts have been sending offenders to prisons in record numbers. But is the nation to build prisons until it runs out of space or money? Or shall we look at the problems of inadequate education, poverty, housing and

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addiction -- at the pervasive loss of community that has led to amorality, a shattered moral compass -- for long term solutions? (NYT, Nov. 24, 1990).

Here the writer moves easily between attributions for crime to poverty and attributions to community disintegration. As I will show in chapter five, SOCIAL BREAKDOWN can have both liberal and conservative inflections, and the former tend to express elements of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. For now, it is enough to note the frequent appearance of elements of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN in op eds that displayed BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES.

Of the 19 positive displays of the frame, 10 included elements of its diagnostic component. Of these, one was a weak display which merely mentioned education, poverty and housing among a series of crime-causing factors. The other nine, however, offered - at least implicitly - a more concrete image of the mechanism by which poverty or relative deprivation gets translated into street crime. A basic distinction can be drawn here between pieces that constructed the offender as one of Merton's innovators and pieces that constructed him or her as one of Merton's retreatists. In drawing this distinction in contemporary discourse the crucial issue is whether the offender is constructed as a rational actor in pursuit of material success (the innovator), or as an arational actor whose behavior is essentially expressive (the retreatist).

Seven items fit into the former category. They included

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pieces that attributed crime to "hopelessness," "despair,"
"not enough jobs" and "nothing to lose." These items shared
in common a depiction of the offender as one who would like
to succeed by legitimate means but finds his or her way
blocked. Frustrated, the would-be conformist turns to crime.
The following claim in a New York Times op-ed by Michael Z.
Letwin is typical:

> The immense artificially inflated profit in illegal drugs
> combined with dwindling economic opportunity, draws young
> people into the low level trade (Oct. 6, 1990).

Three op eds expressed the retreatist imagery. These had
in common attributions for street crime to "anger," "hate,"
and "rage." Here inequality was depicted as a source for
emotions which generate violence. The following lengthy
excerpt is from a New York Times column by psychology
professor Kenneth B. Clark.

> Our society does not ask itself, "How do so many young
> people become mindlessly antisocial and, at times, self-
> destructive?" A painfully disturbing answer to this core
> question is that "mugged communities" "mugged
> neighborhoods" and, probably most importantly, "mugged
> schools" spawn urban "muggers." Given this fact, a more
> severe criminal justice system, more prisons and more
> citizen shootings will not solve the problem of urban
> crime. These are selective forms of anger directed
> toward the visible "muggers." The educationally rejected
> and despised "muggers" -- the pool of unemployed and
> unemployable from which they come -- will increase in

numbers, defiance and venom. Not able to express their
frustrations in words, their indignation takes the form
of more crime (September 30, 1990).

We turn now to the frame's prognostic dimension. Of the
19 positive displays of the frame, 11 featured at least one
of its prescriptive components. These generally took the
form of calls for more social programs aimed at creating
opportunities for inner-city residents. The last sentence in
the excerpt from the Wicker column (above) is typical of
these passages. Between 'jobs, housing, medical care and
education,' jobs and job training are the most important in
this sample; seven of the eleven items that featured a
display of the frame's prognostic dimension called for either
more jobs or more job training.

Finally, six items in the op ed sample conjured the frame
for the purpose of rebuttal. Among these, two types can be
discerned. The first type, which occurred in two items,
includes rejections of the "liberal" approach to crime
control, as in "The liberal solutions to our crime problems
simply won't work" (Richard Neely, WP, Oct. 21, 1990). The
second type, which occurred in four items, is much more
interesting. Here the writers argued that liberal rhetoric
about crime, because it "excuses" criminal behavior, is in
fact a source of the problem. Consider the following
illustration from a Chicago Tribune op ed by Patrick T.
Murphy:

The '60s ushered in the view that because the poor and
the disadvantaged are victims, they should not be held
fully responsible for their actions. The thug who knocks
down the old lady and steals her purse is a victim of
poverty... Parents who pour scalding water on their
children as punishment get their kids back because after
all, they are poor and frustrated. The message is
simple: You are not responsible for your actions... The
view that the poor are victims and so have diminished
responsibility for their actions is paternalistic. Over
the past 25 years it has caused increased misery and
poverty among the very people it attempts to help. And
it has caused untold horrors for the rest of us (Sep. 16,
1990).

As we shall see, this line of argument was echoed in many of ·
the peer group conversations.

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONVERSATIONS

In the conversational discourse we want to understand two
dimensions of frame performance: prominence and resonance.
As noted above, prominence is a measure of a frame's salience
in the discourse. It is not influenced by whether the
participants expressed support for or opposition to the
frame; it is strictly a measure of their *involvement* with it.
In operational terms, a frame will be regarded as *prominent*
in a conversation if at least half of the participants
cogently expressed, either for the purpose of advocacy or
rebuttal, at least one of its idea elements. A frame that

does not meet this threshold requirement will be regarded as *inconspicuous*.

The second dimension, resonance, is a measure of a frame's persuasiveness for the conversationalists. This dimension is strictly concerned with participants' cognitive orientation toward the frame. In operational terms, a frame will be regarded as resonant if 1) all expressions of the frame's elements were positive in nature, and 2) criticism of it was either altogether absent or limited to one or two marginal comments (ie. there was no decisive negation of one of its idea elements). Conversely, a frame will be regarded as *dissonant* if 1) all expressions of the frame's elements were for the purpose of rebuttal, and 2) positive expressions of it were either absent or limited to one or two marginal comments. Finally, a frame will be regarded as *contested* if even one member of the group staked out a cogent position contrary to the others with respect to one of the frame's elements.

There were good theoretical grounds for expecting that the three frames introduced with trigger statements would be contested in the conversations. Each of the three has deep roots in American intellectual and popular culture and each is quite visible in the media discourse. We can therefore assume that most conversation participants were familiar, at least in a general way, with both the positive and negative versions of these frames. Moreover, the norms governing the

production of the conversations subtly encouraged contestation; participants were urged to discuss the interview questions among themselves and hence to react to each other's contributions. These factors, in combination, militated in favor of raising "all sides" of the issue, and hence in favor of considering idea elements central to both the frames' positive and negative incarnations.

We will use a summary measure, derived from consideration of both prominence and resonance, to describe each frame's performance in the conversations. As Figure A graphically illustrates, a performance will be regarded as *strong* if the frame was both prominent and resonant. A performance will be regarded as *weak* if a frame was dissonant (regardless of whether it was prominent or inconspicuous), or if it was contested but inconspicuous. Finally, a performance will be regarded as *mixed* if the frame was either prominent but contested, or resonant but inconspicuous.

Figure A

R E S O N A N C E

		RESONANT	CONTESTED	DISSONANT
PROMINENCE	PROMI-NENT	STRONG	MIXED	WEAK
	INCON-SPICUOUS	MIXED	WEAK	WEAK

Figure B illustrates the distribution of frame
performances for BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES within this schema.
Using the conventions described above, we see that the
frame's performance was strong in just three groups, weak in
seven and mixed in ten. The modal category for frame
performance is clearly *prominent and contested*; in nine of
the 20 conversations BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES proved important
to the participants' thinking on the issue but disagreement
existed over its merits. This is as we expected. Differences

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by racial compositions of the groups are insignificant; in the figure, the names of the groups of color appear in capital letters, the names of the white groups in lower case letters, and the names of the mixed groups in italics.

Figure B

R E S O N A N C E

		RESONANT	CONTESTED	DISSONANT
P R O M I N E N C E	PROMI-NENT	Holyoke St. Maple St. GROVE HILLS RD	Dean Avenue Jacob's Lane FISHER HILL RD CONCORD ST LONGWOOD RD MAIN ST *Troy St.* *Park Terrace* *School St.*	Gordon Rd. Hallibut Squ. PLEASANT ST
	INCON-SPICUOUS	JULIET ST	Meadowbrook St. Morton Rd. PEACH TREE LN WOODMAN RD	

KEY: *Prominence is a measure of frame salience.*
       Resonance is a measure of frame persuasiveness.

       Lower case letters indicate a white group.
       Upper case letters indicate a group of color.
       Italics indicate a mixed group.

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Key Arguments

Eight discrete lines of argument, four in support of the
frame and four against it, could be heard in more than one
conversation. By reviewing these we can get a good sense of
those aspects of the frame that were most important to the
conversation participants and hence governed overall frame
performance. We will begin with the four arguments advanced
in support of the frame.

Supportive Arguments

In the peer group conversations, as in the public
discourse, we can discern contrasting constructions of the
offender as both innovator and retreatist. Both
constructions typically appear in brief passages consisting
of a sentence or two. The following example of the innovator
imagery comes from the conversation of a group of color. In
it we hear the participants arguing about the relationship
between poverty and crime. They are responding to the
statement used to trigger the frame (Appendix A, question
three, statement two). In the final utterance, Sarah
presents a clear display of the innovator imagery:

> Group: Main Street:
> Cast:
> Ben, a building and grounds supervisor with more than a
>   college degree, African American, in his early 60s.

Helen, a retired African American woman who has attended college, in her mid-70s.

Gloria, a book keeper who has attended college, African American, in her late 50s.

Sarah, a retired Cape Verdean woman who did not complete high school, in her early 60s.

Ben: Jobless, starvation, poverty goes on, yet I think that question is asking us if we think it's an excuse...

Helen: Not really.

Ben: Excuse or a reason.

Helen: Some people will find an excuse. But really if most of those things were addressed -- I think -- That's the way out. That's the way out.

Gloria: People will change.

Sarah: People would take a loaf of bread to feed their kids if they don't have it. It's hard for parents to see their children hungry. And it happens.

In a second example, this time from a group of white professionals, we see a version of the argument that closely resembles the media discourse on the issue. These speakers are also responding to the statement used to trigger the frame.

Group: Holyoke Street

Cast:

Carol, a housing planner with more than a college degree, white, in her late 30s.

Janet, a marketing director with a college degree, white, in her mid-30s.

Jennifer, a graduate student, white, in her late 20s.

Facilitator: O.k. Second statement."Crime stems from poverty, unemployment, poor education, bad housing... [reads rest

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of statement]"

Carol: I strongly agree. I don't think it's just
disadvantaged kids, but I think a lot of kids right now
don't see a lot of options to minimum wage jobs, because
all they are offering people in this country are service
jobs which don't have any ability to progress or to be
promoted, and all of our manufacturing jobs that go on to
Third World countries. And there's just not a lot of
upward mobility for people and who want to work at
minimum wage.

Jennifer: You can't survive on that.

Carol: Right.

Janet: But I think it's hard in our society. It's hard to
grow up in this culture that says you're not something
unless you have something...

In one final example, Charles, an African American
firefighter in his 30s, draws upon his personal experience to
make a point about the relationship between work and crime.
He is responding to the claim, advanced a few moments earlier
by a fellow member of his group and appearing in the epigram
to this chapter, that opportunities for African Americans are
plentiful. It is in the last portion of this excerpt, with
the claim "I didn't have to turn to crime to feed myself..."
that Charles explicitly offers the innovator imagery:

Group: Longwood Road

Charles: It's family values, you know. I was fortunate
enough to, you know, we were poor and didn't have this,
and had to go without this, and had to walk to school
five miles and pack your own lunch, and all that stuff.

But the thing about it was, like Alice and her family, you know, I had a mother and father who was there to guide me through. They said "You want money? Go work for it!" I was fortunate enough to be, you know, in that era where there were jobs -- to me were plentiful. Because at least I always went out and I looked and I asked. And you know I did a little research, and I always was -- Today it's a whole different ballgame. There's no work out there for nobody. They're laying off. They're cutting this, they're cutting that. The financing is this. The budget is gone. We don't have this. And then, like Marjorie is saying, I can't agree with that now, especially for maybe a young Black people today who are coming up, who don't have the same opportunities I've had. When I was coming up, their age, I mean I could just go down the street and get a job in O.J.'s carwash, or Rothstein's flower distributors. And it wasn't a great job or career, but I could always make some money. I didn't have to turn to crime to feed myself or to feed my family or anything like that.

Discourse that constructs the offender as a retreatist tended to occur in the context of discussions of either drug abuse, domestic violence, or violence among young black men. Jane's depiction of the typical drug offender in the excerpt which follows is a good example. The conversationalists, all white, are responding to question two: "Experts disagree about whether the crime problem is getting worse or better. In your opinion, is the crime problem getting worse or better, and why."

Group: Dean Avenue

Cast:

Bill, a disabled man who did not finish high school, in
his late forties.

Eleanor, a vice president in charge of marketing with a
college degree, in her late 30s.

Susan, a clerk who has attended college, in her early
40s.

Jane, a librarian with more than a college degree, in her
mid-40s.

Carolyn, an engineering technician with a college degree,
in her mid-40s.

Bill: It's getting worse and it's going to get worse until
they can fight the war on drugs. I think that's the
whole basic [problem] behind everything. Every street
corner you walk, you see them, you know?

Eleanor: Do you really think that we as a nation will ever
get anywhere close to solving this drug problem?

Bill: I hope so.

Susan: Until our values turn around, I don't think so.
[unintelligible comment]

Carolyn: Money talks like he said.

Eleanor: If people don't have respect for themselves and
their own bodies, so they're not going to respect others.

Jane: Yeah but as the economy turns around and these people
feel more secure economically, people of our kind are not
going to need to hide in drugs or in alcohol, or you know
whatever.

Eleanor: Yeah, that's probably true.

Jane: O.k.-- they're going to feel secure they've got a job,
they're not afraid of losing it, so that will cut back on
it because the market will decrease to some extent just

because the economy is better.

Eleanor: Yeah, I think the economy has a lot to do with it...

In Jane's discourse, people of the type in her discussion group use drugs when they feel insecure. A stronger economy will provide more jobs, diminish feelings of insecurity, and hence undermine the market for illicit drugs. The same kind of reasoning could be heard in several groups in connection with discourse on domestic violence and violence among young black men.

The speeches that presented innovator or retreatist imagery were often countered by rebuttal arguments which insisted, for example, that poverty is not an "excuse" for crime, or which pointed out that not all poor people are criminals. We will consider these rebuttal arguments in the next section.

When compared, the innovator imagery proves the more important of the two; it was expressed in ten conversations, whereas the retreatist imagery was expressed in only five. Race differences do not appear conspicuous: the innovator imagery was expressed in four groups of color, four white groups and two mixed. The retreatist imagery was expressed in one group of color, three white groups and one mixed. Finally, the innovator imagery was important to the success of the frame; it was expressed in two of the three conversations in which the frame's performance was strong,

and eight of the ten conversations in which its performance was mixed.

The third argument in support of the frame, appearing in more than one conversation, is in fact simply an expression of its prognostic component. In most instances, calls for more jobs, job training, better housing and better education, for the purpose of reducing crime, were coded as expressions of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. The exceptional cases were the occasional calls for job creation and improvements in public education *explicitly for the purpose of enhancing informal social control.* These arguments are considered separately in the chapter on the frame SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.

Calls for job, housing and education initiatives, for the purpose of expanding opportunities and thereby reducing crime, were heard in 14 groups. Again, differences by the racial compositions of the groups were insignificant; these arguments were expressed in five of the eight white groups, seven of the nine groups of color, and two of the three mixed groups. These arguments were also important to the frame's performance in the conversations; they could be heard in all three of the conversations in which the frame's performance was strong, and in ten of the eleven conversations in which it was mixed. The following illustration, taken from the speech of an African American woman in her late forties, is more or less typical:

Group: Concord Street

Harriet: ...I really think we need to help the young people
get a GOOD job, because what they're really looking for
is money. Not a little bit of money. They want money.
That's just what this selling does. They want BIG money.
And they don't have the education to get it. They need to
educate the kids from the beginning, let them know--
Start educating them from small, and keep on educating
them. And give them some big money, I guess. Because
that's what they seem to want.

The fourth argument in support of the frame closely
mirrors the basic "anomie" theory advanced by Merton and
described in the first part of this chapter. Recall that in
its simplest form this argument holds that crime stems from a
disjuncture between culturally prescribed goals and
institutionally available means for goal attainment. This
construction appeared in the conversations of three white
groups and two groups of color. In the excerpt that follows,
Henry, an African American police officer[1] in his 40s,
explains the roots of crime in a fashion that improves upon
Merton's formulation in its persuasiveness. Henry is
responding to a member of his group who a few moments earlier
advocated youth activities for the purpose of crime
reduction.

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[1] Henry participated in the conversation in the capacity of
neighborhood resident, not as a police officer.

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Group: Grove Hills Parkway

Henry: Activities are fine and dandy. They last so long, a
couple hours or whatever, and then the kid gotta go home.
Y'know, nasty, stinkin' house. Ain't nothing to eat.
Dismal, y'know? A parent that, you know, is suffering.
And looks at this TV, and the show is this other world
out there where everything is bright and shining and
["hoyty toyty" -- a voice interjects]. People have the
gall to think that this phony activity they set up over
here is gonna mollify or, you know, tone that down? That
kid has desires. And they see them in the middle of a
dump, a trash situation. What kind of hope is he gonna,
you know -- Do you think that activities for this kind of
kid is gonna pump him up? Ahhh.

In a similar vein, an African American woman in a group
of color argues that sports celebrities Michael Jordan and
Magic Johnson, because they appear in advertisements for
high-priced sneakers, are in part responsible for the crime
problem. The advertisements, the speaker contends, are
targeted at inner-city kids who could not possibly afford the
footwear. "How would you market something like that when
you're trying to help your people? You know one thing my
mother always said, never forget where YOU came from!"

Rebuttal Arguments

Four kinds of arguments *against* the frame could be heard
in more than one group. The most important of these,
expressed in 13 conversations, is the argument that poverty

is *not* a cause of crime. There are three versions of this argument, each important to the participants' regard for the frame.

The first version, expressed in four groups of color, three white groups and two mixed, points out that most poor people do not turn to crime. The following illustration is excerpted from the conversation of a group of color. The speaker is an unemployed African American woman who has attended college and is in her late 20s.

Group: Concord Street

June: ...I think that it's been more of a stereotype to say that poverty, discrimination and different things -- You know, like you said, those are factors that could come into play. But I think, like she said, because a person is poor doesn't mean that they're gonna go out and do all these things. There are poor people that you know are. very -- They're not criminals. They live their life just as normal as everybody else and I think that -- like she said, the media has really stereotyped, especially like single parents and different things of all this nature, where there are a lot of people that grew up in single-parent families that are fine. They're not criminals. Their mother or their father really brought them up in a good way...

Another example of the same kind of argumentation comes from the conversation of a white group. In the following excerpt, Alex seems to be arguing that because impoverished European immigrants "pulled themselves up," poverty per se

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should not be considered a cause of crime. This line of argument could be heard in another white group as well.

Group: Jacob's Lane
Cast:
Alex, a television producer with a college degree, in his mid-40s.
Paula, a fundraiser for a non-profit organization with more than a college degree, in her mid-40s.

Alex: It's hard to give these kids a desire. And that's what to me it boils down to, is giving them the desire to be better. I don't mean not crime-ridden, but again if we're looking at history -- and that's what this is that we're living now -- will soon be history in some years. What about the people who -- and granted they may have been caucasian -- but what about the people who came here from Italy, Europe, Germany, Russia...

Paula: There's always been crime in poor neighborhoods.

Alex: I agree. But what happened is they would start working hard to pull themselves up. Does that stop because now suddenly you're Black or Puerto Rican or Hispanic? No!

Paula: I just think they have additional challenges.

The second version of the *poverty does not cause crime* argument insists that attributing crime to poverty is merely "making excuses." This view is expressed in only one white group but in five groups of color. In the example which follows, an African American woman in her early 40s concludes a personal experience narrative about overcoming poverty with the moral "You can make it." Attributing crime to poverty, she insists, is strictly for "weak minded people." The

speaker works as an "order picker" and holds a high school degree. She is responding to the statement used to trigger the frame.

Group: Woodman Road

Clara: All right. And I'm going to tell you why I disagree on that. There were seven of us, o.k.?, in my family. A lot of days -- nights, my mother went to bed hungry to feed us. We may not have had meat on the table. But we had something on that table. I didn't know what a lot of things were until I was fourteen years old -- old enough to go to work for myself after school. I worked every two weeks, and made $32.80 every two weeks. I would go home and give my mother $10.00 to buy milk and bread. The rest I would save to buy me a leather coat, sneakers, the things I needed. So it's not poverty. If you want to make something of yourself, you can. You might have a struggle. But you can make it. So I don't agree with this poverty and all this other stuff that they're talking about. Those are for weak-minded people.

Clara's speech also contains an example of the third version of the argument. In nine conversations - four black, two white and three mixed - speakers told personal experience narratives about growing up poor. These narratives were shared to make the point that poverty does not inexorably lead to crime. The stories were often quite detailed and clearly important to their tellers. In the interests of economy, we will restrict our consideration to just one more. The following example is from another group of color. The

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speaker is an African American woman in her mid-30s who has attended college. She is responding to the statement used to trigger the frame:

Alice: I think -- I grew up with all these -- ["Yes!" -- a voice interjects] all those things you say, but it didn't make me go out there. My parents were the structure that Charles is talking about. My parents were there. We were poor. There were 11 of us. I mean we had all those things and -- no, I don't think -- It doesn't make you grow up feeling a great deal proud of who you are as a Black person, but at the same time, I think the support and love I got from my parents encouraged me to grow up to be who I am and be a responsible adult. I have six brothers and they're not out there trying to be in the wild wild west. Both of them -- the younger two -- are born-again Christians. So I don't think that all that causes people to turn to crime. I think it's people's perspectives on life and what foundation they're brought up on. We were also brought up in church until we were 18, and then we were given a choice that we could decide whether we were going to continue or not. So we were poor and did all those things and very happy, so, you know -- that's one side of it. I'm sure there are other people that don't have that family support and then turn to crime I guess. I mean, I don't know.

The second rebuttal argument, expressed in three groups of color, four white groups and one mixed, holds that offenders *choose* crime because it is either easier or more lucrative than legitimate employment. In five groups this argument was expressed specifically in reference to the drug

trade. The following example comes from the conversation of a white group. Note that the excerpt also contains yet another example of the personal experience narrative described above. Christine is responding to the statement used to trigger the frame.

Group: Gordon Road
Cast:
Christine, an administrative assistant who has attended
    college, in her early twenties.
Martha, a white woman in her late 60s or early 70s.

Christine: I strongly disagree. I'm an inner city kid. I went to school. I made the choice to get an education, and even though I went to school with some animals, I got an education. I went on an interview, I spoke properly, I got a job, and I started working when I was 15. And most of my friends did the same. The kids that were lazy and didn't want to do it, didn't. And THAT's why they turned to crime, because they were too lazy and didn't want to have to work. They wanted to be able to say, oh, I'm going to work from ten to midnight tonight, and I'm going to sell these drugs, and I'm going to make this much money that you're not going to make in a month.

Martha: They wanted instant success without working for it.

Christine: It's a personal choice. It doesn't matter where you live or what school you go to. You can get an education at any school you're in. It's just a choice you make whether you do it or you don't. From an inner city kid.

The third rebuttal argument, expressed in three groups of

color, two white groups and one mixed, attacks the frame's

tacit claim that crime is principally the work of poor

people. In four of the six instances of this argument,

speakers referred to the frame's inability to make sense of

white collar crime, in particular the Savings and Loan

debacle. In the following excerpt, from a group of color,

the speakers are especially impressed with the exploits of

junk-bond trader Michael Milken.

> *Group: Peach Tree Lane*
> *Cast:*
> *Louise, a nurse clinician with more than a college*
> *   degree, African American, in her early 60s.*
> *Margaret, retired, African American, in her early 60s.*
> *William, an organizer, Latino, in his 30s.*
> *Ertha, a homemaker who did not finish high school,*
> *   African American, in her early 70s.*

Loise: I don't fully agree with that, because all the crimes
   are not committed by poor people or ignorant people.
   ["That's true, that's true" -- two unknown voices
   interject] There's much white collar crime.
Margaret: Now it's a funny kind of crime like that Milliken.
   Now they just reduced his sentence to two years. You
   know that man made billions?
William: Yeah, white collar crime.
Margaret: When he comes out he has a billion dollars.
Unknown voice: A brilliant mind.
Unknown voice: Is that horrible?!
William: People see that, then keep going, because if he can
   do that, then ["They can do it" -- voices interject]. I
   could spend a few years -- Hey, I'm a pretty honest guy,

but if I can make a few million dollars, go to jail for
3, 4, years, even 5, I'll do it! [laughter and clamor]
As long as I don't kill anybody.

Ertha: I'll go a year. I'm not going three or four years.
[clamor for a few seconds, laughter] One year I'll go to
jail for. I'll be with you for one year.

The final rebuttal argument, expressed in two groups of
color and two white groups, asserts that opportunities for
poor people or people of color are in fact plentiful. An
example of this argument appears as Marjorie's contribution
to the epigram for this chapter. An additional example, this
one with a notably harsher edge to it, comes from the
conversation of a white group.

Group: Hallibut Square
Cast:
Janet, a medical-billing clerk with a high school
diploma, in her late 40s.
Bob, a housekeeping supervisor with a high school
diploma, in his early 40s.
Phyllis, a woman in her late 40s who has attended
college.

Phyllis: I think everybody around here, I don't know, I think
the kids -- [over interruptions] I think what this is
saying too is like these down in the project where I
helped -- you know, the poor, disadvantaged [edge of
sarcasm in the speaker's voice]. They're no more
disadvantaged than I am! They all went to school with my
kids. Right? They probably have more money than I had.

Bob: We were brought up to like respect other people's

property, and stuff like that. You don't see that anymore.

Janet: Sometimes I think that they're given too much, and they expect. They expect. Where we had to go out at 15 years of age and get a job. If you wanted a skirt for a dance, you went out and got a job and you bought your own.

[A few paragraphs further down in the transcript:]

Phyllis: [Reading from the question sheet:] "Inner city kids turn to crime because they don't see any opportunities for legitimate work." The kids in the suburbs don't have any more opportunities than the kids in the inner city do.

Janet: Actually, kids in the inner city, there's more jobs for them than there are in the suburbs.

Bob: Than there is out in the suburbs. Exactly.

Janet: That's a lot of hogwash [referring to the trigger statement].

Phyllis: We're crossing that statement right out of here.

· [laughter]

CONCLUSIONS

The overall performance of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES is mediocre in its own terms and weak, as we shall see, in comparison to FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. In the elite public discourse the frame is invisible in more than half of the op eds, and its positive elements are displayed in fewer than one third. The frame is clearly "available" in the media discourse -- a fact that runs counter to the claims of some of the critical criminologists (eg, Elias 1993:6-25).

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But it is just as clearly subordinate in the ongoing symbolic contest.

Turning to the conversations, the frame's performance was strong in only three groups but weak in seven. In the ten groups in which the frame was contested, voices raised against it were the most fervid: they spoke for longer; they spoke with greater intensity; and they drew more heavily on personal experiences. We will examine the last point more closely in chapter seven.

Finally, in comparing the media and popular discourse on this frame, we see at least one potentially important similarity. In both discourse samples, the innovator imagery appeared with much greater frequency than the retreatist imagery. The implications of this finding are discussed in chapter eight. Next we turn to discourse on the frame FAULTY SYSTEM.

Chapter Four

FAULTY SYSTEM

There are many policemen that are doing their job, but it's what happens to these young people when they get to the court and the judges and the lawyers. It's just not right. They're back out on the street. The young man that was shot in Brockton -- he was still out on a charge! He was supposed to show up for -- What do you call it? Yes, the arraignment. He never did and nobody went looking for him. This criminal justice system needs to be revamped.

        -- Gloria, an African American woman in her 50s.

I think it's an easy solution for conservatives to say "Let's spend more money on law enforcement" and "Let's get tough." ...[O]ne of the problems with that is it doesn't take into account how much it's going to cost to incarcerate people and how little good incarceration seems to do for people and even for society. So I think we need more social programs... But also I think the violent nature of our society contributes. In some ways making our punishment more violent might make things worse and not better.

        -- Brian, a white man in his mid 20s.

The FAULTY SYSTEM perspective has its roots in what is commonly known as "classical criminology," most notably in the work of the 18th century theorist Cesare Beccaria. In his famous essay "On Crimes and Punishments," Beccaria asserts the emerging Enlightenment notion that man is a rational actor whose behavior is governed by the desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This premise concerning human motivation, he insists, leads inexorably to the conclusion that crime stems from irrational laws:

> If pleasure and pain are the motives of sensible beings,
> if, among the motives for even the sublimest acts of men,
> rewards and punishments were designated by the invisible
> Legislator, from their inexact distribution arises the
> contradiction, as little observed as it is common, that
> the punishments punish crimes which they themselves have
> occasioned.. If an equal punishment be ordained for two
> crimes that do not equally injure society, men will not
> be any more deterred from committing the greater crime,
> if they find a greater advantage associated with it
> (1963: 63).

Just as irrational laws encourage crime, so too can rational
laws and efficient law enforcement serve to deter it. "Do
you want to prevent crime?" Beccaria asks rhetorically, "See
to it that the laws are clear and simple and that the entire
force of a nation is united in their defense..." (Ibid: 94).
More specifically, the Italian writer advises, see to it that
punishments are certain ("The certainty of a punishment...
will always make a stronger impression than the fear of
another which is more terrible but combined with the hope of
impunity..."), prompt ("[W]hen the length of time that passes
between the punishment and the misdeed is less, so much the
stronger and more lasting in the human mind is the
association of these two ideas, crime and punishment...") and
perfectly calibrated to render slightly more pain than the
criminal act in question would pleasure. In short, where the
laws are just and the administration of justice efficient,

people will have little cause to engage in crime (Ibid:58 & 56, italics in the original).

So controversial was "On Crimes and Punishments" in its day that it first appeared under anonymous authorship (Beirne, 1993). The essay, after all, was an implicit challenge to the prevailing Church-sanctioned notion that crime stems from supernatural forces (Pfohl, 1985). Two centuries later, however, many of the ideas expressed in the essay have become so thoroughly naturalized in common sense as to render their polemical content nearly invisible. In this chapter we shall *denaturalize* contemporary expressions of classical criminology, restoring to them some of their argumentative qualities. We turn first to expressions of the perspective in the public discourse.

FAULTY SYSTEM IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

FAULTY SYSTEM is clearly the dominant frame in our sample of elite public discourse. In all, it appeared in 52 of the 58 op eds, 32 times for the purpose of advocacy and 21 times for the purpose of rebuttal. But these aggregate figures obscure an important distinction between two versions of the frame. One version, which I will call LENIENCY, highlights the putative lax nature of punishment meted out by the criminal justice system; in Beccaria's terms, it attributes crime to insufficient severity in the treatment of offenders. The other version of the frame, which I will call

INEFFICIENCY, highlights inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the justice system; in Beccaria's terms, it attributes crime to the system's failure to treat offenders with requisite promptness and certainty.[1]

In the contemporary public discourse LENIENCY has a decidedly ideological edge; it appears, from a rhetorical standpoint, as the conservative counter-point to the liberal frame BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. INEFFICIENCY, on the other hand, appears as purely technical discourse; rhetorically speaking, it is presented as if it were devoid of ideological or political content. In fact, in many cases the frame is implicit in an op ed; the writer merely assumes that crime can be reduced by enhancing the performance of the criminal justice system. In the sections that follow we shall examine the sample of elite public discourse for displays of these *subfra*. 3 of FAULTY SYSTEM.

LENIENCY

In all, this subframe was displayed in 25 of the 58 op eds, but more frequently for the purpose of rebuttal (16 items) than for the purpose of advocacy (nine items). We turn first to the advocacy displays.

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[1] The coding guide provides more ample descriptions of these two versions of FAULTY SYSTEM and specifies their ideational elements.

LENIENCY appears in its positive form in nine of the op eds. Of these, six either depict the punishments currently meted out by the criminal justice system as too lax, or demand harsher treatment of offenders. Two rationales for harsher treatment can be discerned. The first, appearing in two pieces, advances the Durkheimian claim that harsh punishment is necessary to bolster the moral order. Consider the following example from a Los Angeles Times op ed by Law Professor Samuel Pillsbury:

> When we do not treat offenses such as fraud and burglary and the sale of crack cocaine seriously, we accede to the deterioration of city life... If we care about this violation we should be angry and seek to punish it. Only in this way can we show [the criminal] and ourselves, the extent of our commitment to basic order (December 24, 1990).

The second rationale, appearing in four items, claims, at least implicitly, that harsher punishments will *deter* potential offenders. The following example comes from a Washington Post op ed by a Judge Reggie Walton, then serving as associate director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Walton is criticizing D.C. legislation that affords automatic sentence reductions to prison-bound offenders:

> Punishment, or at least the threat of it, has always been used as a deterrent against socially unacceptable behavior... The "Good Time Credit Act"... means that ... the perpetrator of a second degree murder in the District

of Columbia will serve only about 10 years in prison for the malicious taking of a human life... I submit that there are many cases where a prison sentence restricted by the law as it is now is the equivalent of a slap on the wrist when compared with the horror of the crime (October 21, 1990).

An additional four op eds imply the frame LENIENCY by calling for a relaxation of regulations governing police and prosecutorial conduct. These have in common the implicit claim that Fourth and Fifth Amendment protections "handcuff" law enforcement agents, preventing them from performing their order-maintaining functions. The most striking of these appeared in the Los Angeles Times in the aftermath of the police beating of motorist Rodney King. The writer is Llewellyn H. Rockwell:

> As recently as the 1950s -- when street crime was not rampant in America -- the police always ope ted on this principle: No matter the vagaries of the c irt system, a mugger or rapist knew he faced a trouncing -- proportionate to the offense and the offender -- in the back of the paddy wagon, and maybe even a repeat performance at the station house. As a result, criminals were terrified of the cops, and our streets were safe (May 10, 1991).

Of the video-taped beating of Rodney King, the same writer observes: "It is not a pleasant sight, of course; neither is cancer surgery."

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The rebuttal displays of LENIENCY were more common than the advocacy displays. General rejections of the "law and order" approach to crime control appeared in nine op eds and were the most common type of rebuttal display. Typically these insisted that "getting tough" is an unpromising strategy either because it fails to address crime's root causes (four items) or because it has been tried before and failed (five items). The following from a Washington Post op ed by Michael Kinsley is an example of the latter type of argument:

> The U.S. prison population has tripled in the past two decades to more than a million. This country has more of its population behind bars than any other nation with reliable statistics... It is absurd to say the answer to rising crime is locking up even more people for even longer periods, or chopping off more heads. But few politicians can resist (April 19, 1991).

An additional three op eds reject the claim, described above, that Fourth and Fifth Amendment protections "handcuff" the police. Of these, two argue that any erosion of defendants' rights would give police "carte blanche to stop and search any of us... for any reason whatever, even though no grounds exist to believe we have done anything wrong" (Gary Leshaw, AC, March 29, 1991). The third challenges the notion that Fourth Amendment protections, such as the exclusionary rule which bars illegally obtained evidence from

use in court, in fact reduce the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Finally, two op eds reject the notion, at the core of LENIENCY, that punishment in the U.S. is in fact lax. Consider the following from a New York Times op ed by Donald Lay, chief judge of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

> [W]e countenance... episodes of temporary banishment of individuals to horrific and indecent environs in our jails and prisons, and falsely assume on their return to society that they will become useful citizens bearing no resentment. The criminal justice system is a disgrace to a civilized nation that prides itself on decency and the belief in the intrinsic worth of every individual... The crimes committed against those who are victimized by the system are intolerable (Oct. 22, 1990).

INEFFICIENCY

As noted, discourse that attributes high rates of crime to failures in the day-to-day operations of the criminal justice system appears non-ideological but in fact is the expression of a particular point of view. For Beccaria, the claim that a well-functioning, rational and efficient criminal justice system can deter crime was contentious, even polemical. That these ideas are assumed rather than defended in contemporary discourse heightens rather than reduces their potential significance for politics and public policy. We therefore take a close look in this section at how the

INEFFICIENCY version of FAULTY SYSTEM appears in the elite
public discourse.

The subframe is displayed in 35 of the 58 op eds, 28
times in a positive way and seven times for the purpose of
rebuttal. Three categories of advocacy displays can be
readily discerned and together account for most displays of
this subframe. The first, including four displays,
attributes crime, at least implicitly, to the system's
failure to prosecute and sentence offenders swiftly and with
certainty. Typical of these is the following excerpted from
a New York Times op ed by columnist Todd S. Purdum. The
author is arguing that the proposed hiring of 5,000 new
police officers for New York City can not, by itself, reduce
the city's crime problem.

> In theory, there should be enough prosecutors, probation
> officers, enough jail guards and jail cells, to handle
> the problems the police bring in off the streets every
> day. But virtually no one thinks there are -- or that
> the system they are in works very well. So if more
> officers are hired and more cells are built, but trial
> calendars are still clogged, dismissals of serious
> charges are still common, caseloads for probation workers
> are still too high, the gap between arrest and
> arraignment times is still too long and the likelihood of
> avoiding punishment is still high even for criminals who
> are caught, what will have changed?

The author's point: "The challenge is to make the whole stubborn sprawling process not just bigger, but better" (September 23, 1990).

The second category, including 11 displays of the subframe, consists of complaints about the absence of adequate resources for law enforcement or calls for more resources. The most common characteristic of these displays is the demand for more cops. The following excerpt is from a Los Angeles Times piece by columnist Joe Domanick. The author is describing New York City in the aftermath of the stabbing death of Brian Watkins, a tourist from Utah killed while attempting to defend his mother in an attempted subway mugging:

> The outraged talk in the wake of Watkin's killing was rightly of more cops, more judges, more probation officers, more jails, a reemphasis "community policing" and the modernization of the police communications system -- all of which New York desperately needs, and all of which can only improve a cynical calcified police force (November 5, 1990).

The third category, including 17 displays of the subframe, is comprised of calls for new policing and sentencing strategies. Two op eds urge expansion of alternative sentencing programs; one calls for intensive policing of "hot spots," and one for efforts to disrupt "open-air" drug markets. But the proposed reform that

receives by far the most attention urges that cops be assigned to particular neighborhoods and instructed to walk a daily "beat." Typically described as either "community policing" or "problem oriented policing," this deployment strategy is promoted in 13 op eds. It is mentioned in the Dominick excerpt quoted above, but the following from a Washington Post piece by columnist George Will offers a more ample account of the strategy:

> The newfangled notion of "community policing" is essentially the oldfangled notion that more police should get out of their cars and back on the beat. There, they can deal not just reactively with crime, but proactively with the disorders -- loitering, poorly parented children, panhandling, anxiety that drives people indoors. These are early indices of neighborhood decay (February 14, 1991).

INEFFICIENCY is rebutted when a writer claims that the performance of the criminal justice system is irrelevant to the volume of crime in society. Rejections of INEFFICIENCY are distinct from a rejections of LENIENCY in that the latter consist strictly of rejections of harsh and punitive measures ("crack-downs" and "get-tough policies"), whereas the former claim that *all* law enforcement responses to crime (ie. even the apparently progressive enforcement strategies such as community policing and alternative sentencing) are unpromising.

The subframe INEFFICIENCY is rejected is seven of the 58 op eds. The following excerpt from a Washington Post op ed is typical of these rebuttal displays. The writer is James J. Fyfe, a former New York City police lieutenant and current American University Professor:

> The experience of Washington demonstrates the futility of over reliance on law enforcement as a crime control strategy. In about 18 months, D.C. police made 46,000 arrests -- one for every 14 District residents -- in Operation Cleansweep, the recent anti-drug operation... [D]rugs are still readily available, the violence associated with the drug traffic shows no sign of abating and the major result apparently was to clog the courts and correctional system (March 17, 1991).

* * *

In summary, FAULTY SYSTEM is clearly the dominant frame in the sample of media discourse but it performs much more successfully as INEFFICIENCY than as LENIENCY. In the next section, we turn to the frame's performance in the focus group conversations.

FAULTY SYSTEM IN THE CONVERSATIONS

We can measure the performance of FAULTY SYSTEM in the conversations by using the schema described in the previous chapter. As Figure A indicates, the frame was prominent in all 20 conversations.

Figure A

RESONANCE

	RESONANT	CONTESTED	DISSONANT
PROMINENT	Gordon Rd. Hallibut Squ. Jacobs Ln. PEACH TREE LN GROVE HILLS RD MAIN ST PLEASANT ST FISHER HILL RD *Park Terrace* *School St.*	Dean Avenue Meadowbrook Rd. Morton Rd. Maple St. CONCORD ST LONGWOOD RD WOODMAN RD JULIET ST *Troy St.*	Holyoke St.
INCON-SPICUOUS			

(Left axis label: PROMINENCE)

KEY: *Prominence is a measure of frame salience.*
Resonance is a measure of frame persuasiveness.

Lower case letters indicate a white group.
Upper case letters indicate a group of color.
Italics indicate a mixed group.

In ten conversations the frame was both prominent and resonant, meaning that it proved both salient and entirely persuasive to all of the active participants in those conversations. The frame's performance in these ten

conversations can be considered strong. In an additional

nine conversations the frame proved prominent but contested,

meaning that in each, at least one participant took a

position contrary to the others with respect to the frame. In

these conversations the frame's performance can be regarded

as mixed.[2] In only one conversation was the frame's

performance dissonant, and hence in only one conversation can

its performance be regarded as weak. Race differences were

not significant at this general level of analysis.

The distinction between LENIENCY and INEFFICIENCY proved

unhelpful in illuminating the dynamics of FAULTY SYSTEM's

performance in the conversational discourse. While the

distinction tapped into a natural fault-line in the sample of

public discourse, it found no such fault-line in the sample

of popular discourse. Conversation participants, it turns

out, tended to conflate the subframes, often expressing

elements of both in individual utterances. This state of

affairs militated against any attempt to quantify the

subframes' relative prominence in the sample of popular

discourse. What should become clear in the following

account, however, is that rhetoric associated with LENIENCY

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[2] We should note, however, that in all but one of these nine
conversations, a majority of participants expressed positive versions of
the frame. Indeed, of the 110 participants in the study, only 22
cogently expressed ideas associated with this frame's rebuttal.

is considerably more prominent in the sample of popular discourse than in the sample of public discourse.

Supportive Arguments

Six distinct lines of argument could be discerned that both advance FAULTY SYSTEM and appear in more than one conversation. In this section I will consider each of these arguments, beginning with the most salient and progressing to the least.

Revolving Door Justice

The most important argument insists that the putatively poor performance of the court system is a major source of urban crime. Claims of this sort were expressed in *all* of the groups of color, seven of the white groups and two of the mixed groups. In only two groups, both comprised largely of highly credentialed professionals, was harsh criticism of the courts altogether absent.

Discourse on the shortcomings of the courts advanced the claims that offenders "fall through the cracks" or escape punishment altogether (13 conversations); that the punishments meted out are too lax and time actually served too short (13 conversations); that judges are too liberal and "out of touch" (six conversations); that the judicial process is too slow (five conversations); and that sentences are random but ought to be uniform (three conversations).

Because these claims are so important to the participants' constructions of the problem of crime, we should consider several examples. The first comes from the conversation of a white, mostly working-class group. It includes instances of the first three claims described above.

> *Group: Gordon Road*
> *Cast:*
> *Sally, retired, in her late 60s or early 70s.*
> *Rhoda, a secretary who has attended college, in her late 50s.*
> *Edward, a corporate environmental manager with more than a college degree, in his mid 40s.*
> *Christine, an administrative assistant who has attended college, in her early 20s.*
> *Martha, retired, in her late 60s or early 70s.*

Facilitator: O.k. Next question. I suggest 10 minutes for this one. "Do you think the crime problem is getting worse or better and why? And I guess I'm thinking about both the community and the city and maybe even the country. Is the crime problem getting worse or better and why?"

Edward: I think it's getting worse to some extent, because the hands of the police and the judicial system -- not so much the judicial system -- the hands of the police and the prison system are somewhat tied, so that the punishment is almost a joke.

Sally: Doesn't fit the crime.

Edward: And if you're a hardcore criminal, you don't really get punished.

Rhoda: When a police officer makes an arrest, before he finishes his paperwork, the damn criminal is back on the street.

Unknown Voice: Right. I know.

Rhoda: The courts have no room for them. There's no follow-up.

Christine: It's easy to be a criminal.

Rhoda: Jails. The courts don't follow through. They're let out in the street, and then the cop doesn't even finish his paperwork and the guy's back out in the street. Ninety percent of the cops don't even want to go to court anymore. It's not worth the effort.

Edward: It's discouraging.

Rhoda: It is. They're discouraged. I mean when we were assaulted, Christine and I, the cop literally said, do you want to push this? Yeah, I want him off the street! Of course I want to push it!

Edward: And the judicial system is very set up to protect the rights -- But you're far more protected if you're a criminal than if you're a victim, which is very frustrating.

Unknown Voice: Mmhm.

Martha: You're telling the truth.

[A few pages further down in the transcript:]

Martha: The police make the arrests, but nothing happens. If you a policeman and you arrested a hardened criminal, and you're sitting in court and all of a sudden this sweetheart of a judge -- "There's a little bit of good in everybody." If he knew how little there was in some of them, he wouldn't sleep nights! So the little so-and-so gets -- goes free. And he goes out and he does it again. He says, what do I have to worry about? I can commit this crime many times. And they do. They do. They keep repeating their crime, because they have no fear.

The next example of discourse critical of the courts comes from a group of color. In this excerpt, Margaret charges that punishments meted out by the courts are both too lax and insufficiently uniform. The participants are responding to the statement used to trigger the frame (see Appendix A, question three, statement one):

Group: Peach Tree Lane
Cast:
Margaret, retired, African American, in her early 60s.
William, an organizer, Latino, in his 30s.

Margaret: I think that the court system needs to be reformed. I think that we need a different kind of parole system. We need to make parole less available. I mean if you're gonna get ten years, you should get almost ten years.

William: Not two and a half.

Margaret: Not take off what you've served already in detention, then parole you because --

William: You've been a good boy!

Margaret: -- for a year or so. And you're out in two. Or two and a half. You know what I mean? And you were supposed to serve ten. I think that if the crime was big enough for ten, you should be serving almost ten. So I think we need a -- I think we really need to reform the parole system. Then as we were just saying, we need to reform the educational system in the prisons. And also I think that judges should more or less have the same kind of sentencing procedure, not one judge say two years and somebody else does the same crime, ten years! You know what I mean?

William: More uniform.

Margaret: More uniform procedure, and set limits. They can't
go under this limit, like if that crime should be five
years then it would be five years. Some judge say three
instead, because of some circumstances he finds. No, it's
five years. Five years in all courts. Maybe he wants to
go to six or seven, but he can't go to four.

The final example of discourse critical of the courts
comes from the conversation of a white group. In this
excerpt the conversationalists charge that offenders often
escape punishment altogether, and that terms of imprisonment,
when actually administered, are too short. They are also
responding to the trigger statement.

> Group: Jacob's Lane
> Cast:
> Peg, a college instructor with more than a college
> degree, in her late 20s.
> Carol, a student, with more than a college degree, in her
> mid-40s.
> Alex, a television producer with a college degree, in his
> mid-40s.

Peg: I agree somewhat. Because I was in the crimewatch in
J.P. [a Boston neighborhood], where a guy had gotten over
30 house break-ins. They caught him over 30 times for
breaking into houses. And it was finally when a group of
people who in the neighborhood got together to go against
that guy in court, they went down there, they stood up
and they said to the judge, if this kid is let go with a
slap on the hand one more time, he's going to be lynched
by us. And that kid got sent to jail. So I think that's

partly the answer. On the other hand, I also don't think
that jails are reforming people.

Carol: It's a complicated question, because, I think, I
agree with Peg that, you know, it would be wonderful if
our criminal justice system worked, and it did the things
it was supposed to do. But we know very well that it's a
revolving door and you get them in jail, and what the
hell good does it do? You know, makes them harder
criminals.

Alex: And plus they're out in no time. I mean--

Carol: You do everything but shoot down the entire city of
Cleveland, and you'll be out in 6 to 8, you know?

Alex: Exactly. If not less. You go in the front door, and
two hours later your lawyer's in with the bail until
trial or whatever, and you're out.

Finally, note that criticism of the courts is frequently
expressed through slogans. For example, participants claim
that punishment amounts to a "slap on the wrist" (four
conversations); that the courts and prisons have "revolving
doors" (four conversations); that "if you do the crime, you
should do the time" (two conversations); that the justice
system protects the rights of criminals but not those of
victims (one conversation); and that because of the system,
crime victims are victimized twice (one conversation).[3]

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[3] Of course, the slogans are not expressed in precisely the same
fashion in every conversation. The term "turnstyle" was considered
close enough to "revolving door" to receive the code. As was the claim
that punishment is the equivalent to a "tap on the wrist."

Adult Crimes, Kiddy Punishments

Participants in more than half of the groups also conjured the frame by arguing that young people commit crimes because they know that as juveniles they will be treated leniently. The solution to this problem, many insisted, is to sentence youthful offenders as if they were adults. Claims of this sort were made in six groups of color (66%), three white groups (37%), and two mixed groups. While the sample size is too small to permit a definitive judgment on the significance of these racial differences, the rhetoric on the treatment of youthful offenders seems more important to the discourse of the groups of color. We take our first example from one of their conversations. The participants are from the Fisher Hill group whose members we first encountered in chapter two. They are responding to question two (see Appendix A).

Group: Fisher Hill Road

Deborah: ...[T]he antiquated judicial system...is not in line with what is going on today. The laws around juveniles. They commit adult crimes and yet they get kiddy punishment. And I think for the most part juveniles are the big problem.

Chuck: They lean on this. They lean on this. You find these kids know the law better than the defense attorneys. [clamor and laughter]

Karl: When they turn them out, tell them to turn them out in a suburb. They won't do that. They turn them out and turn them right back on us. And they come back and take revenge out on us!

[A few pages further down in the transcript:]

Karl: Yeah, it's falling right back to the same thing. We have to make them accountable, that's all.

Georgia: And they have to be responsible for their own actions, especially when they get to a certain age. What is the age of reason, all right? Come off it. You've had kids out here, 15, 16, 17 years old with guns. And they're going to sit here, and they're going to shoot somebody and say, oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hit that person? No, no. It doesn't work. You know what a gun is used for, you treat [it as an] adult crime.

Our second example of discourse on the system's putative lenience toward youthful offenders comes from the conversation of the group at Jacob's Lane. It appears just one page down in the transcript from the excerpt quoted above. The cast is the same but for the addition of Laura, who is a high school graduate, a homemaker and a student. She is in her mid 40s.

Group: Jacob's Lane

Laura: I think there is some truth [to that]. I think young kids, the 13, 14, 15 year olds. I think they feel "We can do whatever we want and get away with it." I think if they have a fear of being taken off the street or taken away from home and sent somewhere -- I don't mean like a jail or --

Alex: No.

Laura: -- but somewhere, it would deter them. I think the
    feeling [is] that they can do anything and get away with
    it.
Alex: There was a girl on the news. She was 15 years old and
    she was caught for robbery, and the newsman was
    interviewing her and she said -- That's exactly what she
    said -- She said "I can do anything I want till I'm 18
    because I'll just get right back on the street because
    I'm underage." And I thought, what an attitude! That's
    what it is, they think they can bet away with it.

Luxury Prisons

Participants also conjured the frame by depicting prisons
as excessively pleasant. Reading the transcripts, one learns
that prisons offer "three hots and a cot," a chance to "pump
up," air conditioning, swimming pools, parking garages with
mosaic floors, opportunities for higher education, special
rooms for sexual liaisons, top quality medical care and a
host of other amenities unavailable to most Americans.
Always implicit in this type of discourse - and often
explicit - is the notion that harsher prisons could more
effectively deter crime.

Claims concerning the high quality of prison life were
advanced in four white groups, four groups of color and all
three mixed groups. They were almost always expressed in an
animated fashion and often sparked laughter. The example
that follows is by no means extraordinary in its tenor or
ideational content. It comes from the conversation of the

Fisher Hill group quoted in the previous section. The cast is the same but for the addition of Lloyd, a Cape Verdean police officer who works for the Registry of Motor Vehicles. He has attended college and is in his mid 30s.

Group: Fisher Hill Road

Deborah: ... [T]here's no rehabilitation services available, or no deterrent services either. Because we were talking earlier about quadruple bunking them for example. You know, make prison a really --

Lloyd: Not a kiddy club.

Deborah: Yeah. A real terrible place to be --

Karl: Take away the TV.

Lloyd: The gyms, the swimming pools --

Georgia: Let them know that they're there for a reason.

Lloyd: [Take away] the cable TV's.

Deborah: [Over clamor] If they're going to act like animals, they should be treated like animals.

Lloyd: People here in the winter have it so bad that they'd rather go into jail because it's so good there. Three squares. A place to work out. A place to watch TV. A place to go swimming, or whatever. And read and get a little bit of knowledge and stuff, and then it's warm. And then they come out in the summertime.

Georgia: And if they're there long enough, they can come out with a Ph.D.

Unknown voice: Mmhm.

[A few paragraphs later, in response to the trigger statement:]

Lloyd: ... I feel strongly on that one. That one is something that has to be addressed. That's why we're trying to make more prisons and stuff like that. But they need to make them less plush, right, and more of them.

Unknown voice: Mmhm.

Chuck: Make it what it is -- it's a jail. [Over clamor] It's
   a prison.

Unkown Voice: Quadruple bunk 'em.

Chuck: It's not a country club. It's not a camp. It's not a
   summer camp, you know. It's not bodybuilding camp. You
   know, most of these guys go in the joint, they come out,
   they look like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Unknown Voice: Sure you're right. Sure you're right.

Unknown Voice: Pumping iron every day.

Unknown Voice: Eating good.

Chuck: If you don't want to work, you don't have to work.

Karl: You know how much it costs a year to keep one in
   prison?

Deborah: Something outrageous.

Karl: $46,000.

Deborah: More than they pay me.

Lloyd: Is it?

Karl: To keep ONE. $46,000 for ONE.

Deborah: Wow.

Handcuffed Police

   FAULTY SYSTEM was keyed in one third of the groups

through the claim that police officers, prosecutors and

prison officials are prevented from performing their jobs by

senseless definitions of offenders' "rights." Instances of

this basic argument allege that offenders are set free

because of "technicalities," that the "hands of the police

are tied," and that the public must choose between "civil

rights and public safety." One example appears above, in the

lengthy excerpt from the conversation of the Gordon Road group. Later in that same conversation, a participant makes the point about "rights" even more explicitly:

Rhoda: [T]hey took away a lot from the police when all these civil rights came in. When I [was] a kid growing up and a cop came down the street, the beat cop came down the street, there wasn't a kid on the block that didn't shake in his shoes, so that there wouldn't be anything wrong.

In all, claims that a putative preoccupation with offenders' rights is a source of crime could be heard in three groups of color, two white groups and two mixed groups. The most cogent and elaborate form of the argument was expressed by Henry, the African American police officer whom we first met in the previous chapter. In the following excerpt he is responding to the statement used to trigger the frame:

Henry: ...[T]he communities further neutralize the police by emphasizing the importance of not violating people's rights. We're in the middle of a war zone and people are acting like animals feeding off of the life of other people. Yet you want to worry about that person's rights? So the police in response HAVE to. Now you have a police department that's ineffective. That's another feather in the animals hat. He can really do what he wants more now. It's not the police's fault... The courts can't prosecute. And certain judges will go along with the emphasis on rights and rights and rights. So these people have the right to rip you off. The right to stay out

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there. The right not to be dealt with by the system....
[Later in the conversation:] [O]ur Boston police
department has been watered down. It is really not that
effective. And it doesn't have the backing of the
community at all. They have to make up their minds what
the hell they want. Do they want law and order or do they
want civil rights for the guys that are running around
that rip you and your family off?

Officer Friendly

Participants in 11 groups conjured the frame by
recommending that police be assigned to particular
neighborhoods and instructed to walk a daily "beat."
Effective policing requires visiblity, commitment and a good·
relationship with neigbhorhood residents. These interests
are undermined by the practice patroling by police cruiser.
Officers who walk a daily beat can get to know their assigned
turf, learn who the trouble makers are, and inspire
confidence in neigbhorhood residents.

The participants' discourse on on this topic was
strikingly similar to the the public discourse on "community
policing." In fact, in many groups participants used the term
"community policing," indicating a familiarity with the
public discourse. Consider the following illustration
excerpted from the conversation of the group at Hallibut
Square.

Cast:

Bob, a housekeeping supervisor with a high school degree, in his early 40s.

Phyllis, a woman in her late 40s who has attended college.

Janet, a medical billing clerk with a high school degree, in her late 40s.

Bob: Well, like there's no cops around no more.

Phyllis: This is true.

Bob: Like when we did have the horse guy, he went off at 11:00 or whatever it was.

Phyllis: Yeah, he probably went on vacation and the horse went on vacation too.

[Later in the conversation:]

Janet: But I think too that more people on the Hill should work with the police than just the few of us that do... I mean like this new community policing thing. Because people don't get to know the police and the police are supposed to drop off at people's houses to come in and say, hi, how are you. What's been going on in the area -- stop by for five minutes, ten minutes -- whatever. But because people don't get involved, they're not going to know about it so there's not going to be any residences that the police can stop at and we have to have that. We have to have the policeman know the area. And besides we need to know the police. Cause then they get used to you. And they're gonna fight more, to make sure that this is their territory, and that their territory is protected.

Race differences do not appear significant with respect to

discourse on community policing: Calls for a renewed emphasis

on foot patrols, and so on, could be heard in four groups of color, six white groups and one mixed group.

Discourse on community policing often featured nostagic references to an "officer friendly," a beat cop fondly remembered from a participant's past. The images conveyed in these references are more typical of discourse displaying the frame SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. This is hardly surprising as the "beat cop" is remembered as much for his role as an informal agent of social control as for his formal duties an an agent of the state. Consider the following illustration; the speaker is Stella, whom we first met in chapter three.

Group: Maple Street
Stella: Well, I think it would be helpful if the policemen that we DO have could relate to the neighborhoods a little better than they do. We have cruisers coming down here. They come down and turn around -- whip up the street again all the time. And I do think the walking cop I grew up with -- Casey, the cop living right behind, down the next street. When my brother Alex was in trouble, which was not very great trouble but you know, running into a neighbor's yard taking pears off a tree and stuff like that -- Casey delighted in coming to the protestant minister's home -- yes he did! -- and we were good friends, but nothing pleased him more than to come and report to my father than Alex was in trouble again. And he was in a lot of trouble that way. But I do think maybe if the police were walking and getting acquainted with the neighborhood -- And then, speaking of our neighborhood here ... [Stella shifts to a new topic.]

In addition to the relatively mild criticisms of police officers' reliance on cruisers, participants in eight groups expressed much more serious criticisms of police performance. Charges that the police target minority men for harassment are associated with the frame RACIST SYSTEM and discussed in chapter six. Here we are concerned with claims that the police are corrupt, ineffective, or deployed disproportionately in neigbhorhoods with relatively little crime. Race differences with respect to these kinds of criticisms are striking: Discourse charging ineffectiveness, corruption, and unfair deployment could be heard in six groups of color but in just one white group.[4] What makes these race differences still more striking is that in three white groups but in only one group of color participants spontaneously rejected the notion that the police bear any responsibility for the crime problem.[5] Let us first consider two brief illustrations of discourse critical of police performance. The first is excerpted from the conversation of a group of color. The speaker is an African American school teacher with a graduate degree in her mid-30s:

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[4] These charges were also expressed in one of the mixed groups by a person of color.

[5] Gloria's contribution to the epigram for this chapter is the only example of a person of color exonerating the police.

Sharlene: [P]eople don't trust anyone today, and that means
     a policeman, because some of the policemen are committing
     the same crime as all the people that they arrest! [Right
     - a voice interjects] And some of the judges are
     committing the same crimes. We need an enema -- as what's
     his name would say. [laughter] It's just so many things
     that need to hapen. And I don't see it happening -- in
     my lifetime.

The second example is also excerpted from the conversation of

a group of color. The speaker in this case is an Hispanic

office manager who has attended college and is in her early

30s.

Priscilla: The patrol cars sitting around Dunkin' Donuts,
     two and three at a time. Maybe they should start [sic]
     doing that and go on patrol and do what they're supposed
     to do. And stop bothering people because they're giving
     them a parking ticket. Just silly things, you know. Get
     into the real things that they should be -- I mean, I got
     robbed. I had to wait almost an hour to get a policeman
     over here. He was probably doing something else that was
     unnecessary, you know. They should restructure and put
     into priorities what should be done.

Next we consider a brief example of a spontaneous

rejection of the notion that police bear responsibility for

the crime problem. The excerpt is from the conversation of a

white group. Note that in addition to illustrating a

rejection of police responsibility, the excerpt also presents

discourse critical of the putative lenience of judges. The

speakers are responding to the statement used to trigger the frame.

Group: Dean Avenue
Cast:
Susan, a clerk who has attended college, in her early
40s.
Bill, a disabled worker who did not finish high school,
in his late 40s.

Bill: I've listened to police officers and they've told me
that they'll get the criminal and get him to court and
the judge gives him a slap on the wrist...
Susan: Because the judge gets his bed count in the morning.
Unknown voice: Where are they gonna put 'em if they don't
have the room?
Susan: [Apparently mimicking a judge:] "We locked up 21
people today because we only had 21 vacant beds."
Bill: I don't think it's the police officer that they're not
doing their job.
Susan: No. They're bringing them in.
Bill: It's that the judges aren't doing their job.
Susan: But there again it goes around to every time they
want to build a prison, who wants the prison in their
back yard? Me, for one, I would love one in my back
yard. You know why? Because when they break out, do you
think they're going to stay in your back yard? No,
they're going to the next town. [laughter]

Just Pay the Edison Bill[6]

Calls for the death penalty, expressed in three white groups and just one group of color, comprised the sixth and final means by which the frame was expressed in more than one conversation. In the three white groups, the death penalty was proposed as a way to save on the costs of long-term incarceration. In two of the three white groups, the exchanges on the topic were at once extremist in their ideational content and suffused with humor. The illustration that follows comes from the conversation of the group at Hallibut Square, first encountered earlier in this chapter:

Bob: They should just bring back capital punishment. That would give us more room in the jails.

Unknown voice: That would be great.

Phyllis: Well, they have to give some funding to the courts, too, because everybody is just passing the buck. First of all, you don't have any probation officers.

Bob: All you have to do is pay the Edison bill for the electric chair.

Janet: No, we'll do it by injection. It will be cheaper.

[laughter]

* * *

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[6] Boston Edison is the local power utility.

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Three final observations deserve mention. First, in two groups of color and one white group participants spontaneously called for the creation of more "boot camp" style detention centers for juvenile or first-time offenders. Second, in one white group and two mixed groups participants spontaneously called for harsher punishment for white collar offenders. Third, in three groups of color participants expressed support for a curfew for minors. Next we turn to the rebuttal displays of the frame.

Rebuttal Arguments

FAULTY SYSTEM was contested in nine groups and dissonant in one. As noted above, in almost all of the conversations in which the frame was contested, only one or two voices were raised against it. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern four lines of argument against the frame that appear in more than one conversation. The most important of these, appearing in one group of color, five white groups and one mixed group, insists that the criminal justice system is essentially irrelevant to the question of crime. According to the participants who advanced this argument, crime is caused by social factors and must be treated in terms of its causes. Even if all offenders were imprisoned, crime would persist because its social causes would remain unchanged.

Consider this example from the conversation of a mixed group. The speaker is an African American woman in her 30s or 40s.[7]

Vanessa: I agree with you Michael. Certainly we need to
    deal with the people that do commit crimes -- need to
    suffer the consequences. By focusing your money and your
    energy and your people on putting these people in jail,
    it's like closing the door after the horse is gone. You
    know? You just need to refocus. You need to focus your
    efforts elsewhere, you need to focus on prevention. You
    need to focus on helping kids refocus their energies.
    Helping families stay together. Helping families get
    jobs. Housing. Education. It's like closing the barn
    door after the horse is gone.

The second most important rebuttal argument rejects the frame because of its implicit sanction of police abuses, especially those perpetrated upon African American men. This argument was expressed in four groups of color but in none of the white or mixed groups.[8]   Our example is drawn from a speech by Alice, whom we first met in the previous chapter. She is responding to the trigger statement:

Alice: I mean, there's holes in all that. If you agreed to
    that means that all the Black men in Boston are gonna be

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[7] This participant left the group meeting without filling in a
questionnaire; further demographic information is therefore unavailable.

[8]

    Several passages coded for this argument were cross-coded as
expressions of the frame RACIST SYSTEM.

picked up, stripped, searched, and thrown in jail and doing time for a lot of things they haven't committed.

Arguments against capital punishment were treated as negations of the frame and constitute the third argument against it. Such arguments were expressed in two white groups, one group of color and one mixed group. They were generally offered in brief utterances and in tones that were affectively neutral. They pointed out, for example, that evidence of a deterrent effect for capital punishment is scant; that if an innocent is executed the error cannot be corrected; and that executions intensify the "climate of violence" and thereby generate more crime.

The final rebuttal argument, appearing in just two white groups, insists that the "get tough" approach to crime has proved costly and ineffective. In its strong form, this argument holds that expanding incarceration not only fails to bring down the crime rate; in fact, by 'hardening offenders', it makes matters worse. An example of this type of argument appears as Brian's contribution to the epigram for this chapter.

CONCLUSION

FAULTY SYSTEM, visible in 89% of the op eds, was clearly the dominant frame in the sample of elite public discourse. But to fully grasp the frame's dynamic performance in the

public discourse I found it necessary to distinguish between two subframes. The subframe INEFFICIENCY performed quite strongly, appearing in 60% of the op eds, four times as frequently for the purpose of advocacy as for the purpose of rebuttal. The subframe LENIENCY, however, did not perform nearly so well. It appeared in fewer than half of the op eds and nearly twice as often for the purpose of rebuttal as for the purpose of advocacy.

In the popular discourse FAULTY SYSTEM's performance was strong by any measure. First, it was prominent in all 20 groups. Second, in ten of the conversations no dissenting voices could be heard. Third, while the frame was contested in nine groups, in almost all of these the voices raised against it spoke briefly and without much emotion, and were decidedly in the minority.

Although the nature of the popular discourse discouraged any attempt to quantify the relative prominence of the subframes, as the account offered above should have made clear, both perspectives proved quite resonant. Calls for the death penalty and harsher punishments for juvenile offenders, and complaints about liberal judges, defendants' rights and the allegedly cushy quality of prison life, all indicate a strong showing for LENIENCY. At the same time, complaints about clogged courts, overcrowded prisons and inadequate police protection all indicate a strong performance for INEFFICIENCY.

Comparing the elite public discourse with the popular discourse, we see that the most noteworthy difference concerns LENIENCY. While the subframe's ideational content was more often rejected than affirmed in the public discourse, *the opposite proved true with respect to the popular discourse.* The significance of this finding will be considered in chapters seven and eight.

Finally, though not discussed in this chapter, the reader may have noticed that the conversational discourse expressing FAULTY SYSTEM draws heavily upon media stories and the personal experiences of the participants. The significance of this finding will also be examined in chapter seven. In the next chapter, we turn to discourse on the frame SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.

Chapter Five

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

Basically the reason [we have so much crime] is because society's whole moral structure and moral fiber has broken down, where people don't feel like they have to live by the rules or that they have to nurture their neighbor or, you know, whatever.

> -- Jenny, a white woman in her 30s.

[T]he sad and unfortunate part to me is when I hear concerns talking about how you have to keep the family together... It's almost like their emphasis is on this ideal that doesn't exist. You know -- Ozzie and Harriet don't exist anymore in America... And they're always talking about the Black community, how the family's disintegrating. And if I've heard that term once, I've heard it a zillion times!

> -- Vanessa, an African American woman in her 30s.

The SOCIAL BREAKDOWN perspective has its scientific roots in the work of the early "Chicago School" researchers Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay. In a number of studies extending from the 1920s to the 1950s, the Chicago sociologists examined the impact of rapid social change on various urban neighborhoods. Advancing what became known in the literature of criminology as "social disorganization theory," they argued that rapid change destroys the prevailing normative order and thereby produces crime and delinquency. Under pressure from immigration, industrialization and urbanization, families and communities lose their ability to regulate individual conduct. Moral

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dissensus results, which in turn generates crime and delinquency. The problem is especially acute with respect to children growing up in the communities closest to the center of the city. "Children living in such communities..." Shaw and McKay explain, "...are exposed to a variety of contradictory standards and forms of behavior rather than to a relatively consistent and conventional pattern" (quoted in Pfohl, 1985:150).

For many of the early social disorganization theorists, the solution to the social problems that resulted from rapid social change could be found in purposive efforts by ordinary people to *reorganize* their communities. Several Chicago School figures were, in fact, instrumental in organizing the Chicago Area Project, an agency that prefigured the community action projects of the 1960s and 70s, innovating many of the tactics commonly associated with urban organizing today. The Project sponsored counseling and recreational activities aimed at adolescents and coordinated the community improvement activities of schools, churches, social clubs, labor unions and local businesses. Linking these efforts was the basic theoretical notion that the best way to combat the erosion of informal social control is to organize community members to reassert their leadership and in so doing to establish a new and binding moral order (Pfohl, 1985).

Contemporary discourse that attributes crime to community and family breakdown conjures the arguments of the theorists

of social disorganization. While new contests have emerged over the contemporary roots of disorganization, the imagery of the Chicago theorists remains as potent today as ever. We turn first to traces of it in the contemporary public discourse.

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN appeared in 21 op eds, 20 times for purpose of advocacy and three times for the purpose of rebuttal.[1] Op eds advancing the frame commonly also featured positive displays of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES (six items), FAULTY SYSTEM (five items), or both (five items). Chapter three provides an illustration of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN in combination with the other frames (see page 53).

We can discern four types of advocacy displays of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. The first two advance the frame's diagnostic component; one attributes crime to community disintegration, the other to family breakdown. The third and fourth types advance the frame's prognostic component; one calls for various kinds of interventions aimed at setting offenders on the straight and narrow (rehabilitation, counseling, "boot camps"); the other for collective action by neighborhood residents to reduce crime.

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[1] Two of the three rebuttal displays were in op eds that also featured advocacy displays of the frame. This is why the sum of advocacy and rebuttal displays exceeds the total number of frame displays.

Several op eds presented the frame through a combination
of two or three of these arguments. A particularly pure
example of this tendency appeared in a Washington Post op ed
by Chief Justice Richard Neely of the West Virginia Court of
Appeals. Consider the following excerpt:

> Crime, I believe, emerges from a breakdown of the
> traditional family and traditional neighborhood. If that
> sounds tiredly familiar, let me add this: Currently, 72
> percent of all women with minor children at home work
> full time. Who's watching the neighborhood after school?
> The very act of organizing to protect a neighborhood from
> crime has the effect of strengthening traditional values
> concerning standards of public behavior (October 21,
> 1990).

Of the 20 op eds featuring advocacy displays of the
frame, seven attributed crime, at least in part, to urban
anonymity or the disintegration of traditional communities.
The Neely excerpt quoted above illustrates this line of
argument. A second illustration comes from the James J. Fyfe
op ed quoted in the previous chapter. In the excerpt that
follows, Fyfe conflates elements of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES
with SOCIAL BREAKDOWN's emphasis on community disintegration:

> The increase [in crime] can be attributed to several
> converging forces, but two probably are most important.
> The huge baby-boom generation entered adolescence, so
> that an unusually large percentage of the population was
> in its most crime-prone years. In addition, cities
> changed. For years, blacks and Hispanics had steadily

been replacing white city dwellers who had fled to the suburbs, taking businesses and jobs with them. This pattern came to a head in the 1960s, when communities broke up, to be replaced by densely populated projects. Urban tax bases eroded, municipal services declined and all the ills of the inner city flourished as they had not since the great waves of European immigration a half-century earlier (March 17, 1991).

Finally, the story of Kitty Genovese, the New York City woman who in 1964 was stabbed to death while dozens of her neighbors watched from their windows without intervening, serves as a condensing symbol for the problem of urban anonymity. References to the story appeared in several items in the sample, including once in a Washington Post op ed by Richard Cohen:

> The saga of Kitty Genovese became a national story. The dead woman came to personify the cold anonymity of the big city, its lack of community, its indifference... We have learned, often the hard way, that New York is not atypical... (May 24, 1991).

Of the 20 advocacy displays of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN, just three attributed crime to the state of the American family. The Neely excerpt quoted above illustrates this type of attribution, albeit in a cursory fashion. The other two instances of it were both in Washington Post op eds by Columnist George Will. In one, Will describes, apparently

approvingly, the views of Brooklyn's 75th precinct police
commander:

> Carroll... has a master's degree in urban affairs and a
> quarter of a century of on-the-street education, all of
> which tells him this: Police will be overwhelmed until
> the rest of government gets on with its jobs of enacting
> gun controls, providing drug treatment and treating the
> seedbed of most crime, the dysfunctional families that
> send forth violent young men (Feb. 10, 1991).

We turn now to the advocacy displays that advance the
frame's prognostic component. The first type, as noted,
includes calls for interventions that share in common the
tacit claim that crime stems from either inadequate
supervision or a failure of moral integration. These
included calls for rehabilitation and counseling programs,
recreation centers, and "boot camps." Of the 20 items that
advanced the frame, four included expressions of support for
one or more of these interventions. The following example
comes from a Chicago Tribune piece by columnist Clarence
Page.[2]

> It is politically incorrect in many minds to suggest that
> the vast majority of those who are in prison deserve to
> be there. And it is politically incorrect in many other
> minds to suggest that many who are there might not be

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[2] The excerpt also includes a call for job training; it was therefore
cross-coded as diplaying the prognostic component of BLOCKED
OPPORTUNITIES.

there had someone taken them aside at an earlier age and given them some counseling, encouragement, and job training. It is politically incorrect in too many agendas to discuss alternative sentencing, such as restitution or "boot camps" that might give young offenders a second chance in an environment removed from the corrupting influences of their home turf and, one hopes, with counseling and job training programs (Jan., 1991).

The final category of advocacy display promotes the notion that ordinary people ought to band together, in cooperation with the police, to fight crime. Most of the nine op eds featuring this element urged a greater "police-community partnership"[3] against crime. The following example is from a Boston Globe column by city councilor Charles Yancey:

> We all share some of the responsibility to create a safer environment. The problems cannot be solved by the police alone. The police risk their lives every day for those who live in Boston. Community residents who demonstrate great courage in the face of rising violence, also cannot solve the problem alone. We need to develop a partnership between city government and community residents. This partnership must be based on mutual respect and support... The public must be involved in the fight against violence. There are hundreds of community

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[3] Op eds advocating community policing were coded as displaying INEFFICIENCY, and cross-coded as displaying SOCIAL BREAKDOWN if they stressed the idea of a "police-community partnership" or the role of regular people in fighting crime.

crime watch groups throughout the city -- especially in Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury -- eager to work with the police (April 29, 1991).

In addition, several others simply called for ordinary people to "get involved" in crime-fighting activities. For example, consider the following from a New York Times op ed. The writer is Todd Watkins, the brother of the tourist from Utah whose killing sparked such widespread media attention.

> ... [W]e challenge you, the citizens of New York, to get involved... If everyone would take the time to get involved, to report crimes when you see them, criminals would be apprehended and the crime rate would go down (Sep. 12, 1990).

Finally, displays of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN can be inflected with either a liberal or a conservative accent. When writers attribute social breakdown to poverty, capital flight or deindustrialization -- in other words, when in a single argument they conflate SOCIAL BREAKDOWN with BLOCKED OPPORTUNITES -- they are inflecting the frame in a liberal fashion. This sort of display appeared in three items in the op ed sample. The Fyfe excerpt quoted above is an example.[4]

The frame can also be inflected with a conservative accent. This can be achieved by attributing breakdown to

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[4] Liberal and conservative inflections of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN were included in the tabulations of display-types described above.

welfare dependency, permissive parenting, or the putative cultural and social effects of the protest movements of the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, these are precisely the kinds of attributions preferred by many conservative intellectuals[5] and their think tanks.[6] But the op ed sample does not include any frame displays of this type.

There were just three rebuttal displays of the frame. One insisted that rehabilitation ("Lock of the criminals, teach them the good life, mold them into law abiding citizens and then let them go...") has "failed miserably" (WP, Oct. 28, 1990). The other two criticized the notion that ordinary people ought to engage in crime-fighting. One instance of this latter argument appeared in the New York Times as a contribution by playwright Janusz Glowacki. It was written in response to Mayor Dinkin's call, appearing in an op ed two weeks earlier, for the "calm assistance of every citizen of New York" in the war against crime. Glowacki's piece is entitled "Sorry, I'm No Crime Fighter."

> The enthusiasm of good people, I suspect, is rarely efficient when confronted with guns and skillful criminals. I would like to point out, for example, that President Bush didn't ask the Saudis to arm themselves

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[5] See, for example, James Q. Wilson's *Thinking About Crime* (1975).

[6] See, for example, the publications on Criminal Justice of the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (both in Washington, D.C.)

with baseball bats and walkie talkies and stand on their border. The President applied a more traditional strategy: he mobilized the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. I'm ashamed to admit that this kind of solution appeals to me more (Sep. 27, 1990).

We turn now to SOCIAL BREAKDOWN in the conversational discourse.

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN IN THE CONVERSATIONS

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN was prominent in all of the conversations, fully resonant in 12 of them and dissonant in not a single one (see Figure A). We can therefore state that the frame's performance was strong in 12 conversations and mixed in eight. By this measure alone SOCIAL BREAKDOWN appears as the most successful of the three principal frameworks. Three additional factors support this claim: First, participants in almost every group responded to the frame's trigger statement enthusiastically, often interrupting its reading to signal approval. Second, in the eight conversations in which the frame was contested, the voices raised against it were always in the minority, and typically offered only tepid objections to this or that aspect of the frame while acceding to its core claims. Third, in terms of sheer volume, discourse expressing SOCIAL BREAKDOWN commanded roughly *twice* as much space in the

transcripts as discourse expressing either BLOCKED

OPPORTUNITIES or FAULTY SYSTEM.

Figure A

R E S O N A N C E

		RESONANT	CONTESTED	DISSONANT
P R O M I N E N C E	PROMI-NENT	Gordon Rd. Morton Rd. Jacobs Ln. Dean Avenue PEACH TREE LN GROVE HILLS RD MAIN ST PLEASANT ST LONGWOOD RD FISHER HILL RD JULIET ST *School St.*	Holyoke St. Hallibut Squ. Meadowbrook St. Maple St. CONCORD ST WOODMAN RD *Troy St.* *Park Terrace*	
	INCON-SPICUOUS			

KEY: *Prominence is a measure of frame salience.*
      Resonance is a measure of frame persuasiveness.

Lower case letters indicate a white group.
Upper case letters indicate a group of color.
Italics indicate a mixed group.

Supportive Arguments

Five distinct lines of argument could be discerned that both advance SOCIAL BREAKDOWN and appear in more than one conversation. The first of these consists of general claims concerning a putative crisis in values or morality. The next four correspond, in a general way, to the four categories of display examined in the previous section in relation to the elite public discourse.

Value Crisis

Participants in 17 groups conjured SOCIAL BREAKDOWN by alleging that society is in the midst of some sort of general crisis of values or morality. Claims stemmed from the general assertion that "all the traditional values are lost" to particular laments concerning distribution of condoms in schools,[7] diminishing respect for elders, waning authority, and declining "family values," religion and personal responsibility. Unfortunately, there is no neat way to capture the range of these sentiments other than to point out that they share in common the apparently widespread sentiment that values and morality "ain't what they used to be." The series of brief excerpts that follow were selected to capture

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[7] The speaker in fact expressed concern over the distribution of "condos" but the current slump in Boston real estate is not, I imagine, what she had in mind.

the diversity of these sentiments, if not to represent them in an exhaustive fashion:

Group: Woodman Road

Doris: Yeah, I think the whole of society--not just this neighborhood--needs to return to a moral, traditional standard. Parents as well as children, all across the board -- from the poor neighborhood to the rich neighborhood, whatever, needs to return to morals, good old fashioned morals. The Bible.

Group: Dean Ave

Susan: I think society -- I mean we have a generation raised, growing up with limited values. This is what I'm afraid of.

Bill: They took the church out of schools. They took the Pledge of Allegiance out of schools. You know --

Group: Gordon Road

Sally: But I mean it's the discipline. You can't --

Martha: Traditional rites and mores.

Edward: All the traditional values are lost --

Unknown: Yes, that's correct.

Edward: People are out to get what they can get for themselves.

Martha: The ironic part of it is that the children themselves are suffering from it. They don't realize it. But they are suffering from it. Because they don't know where to turn or what to do. I mean they don't know "Am I doing right?" They say "Who cares? Who knows?" They don't know. And in the end, the society pays for it.

Group: Hallibut Square

Laura: I think there's a total disintegration of any kind of --

Janet: Morality.

Laura: -- morality and structure that helps people find some kind of, y'know, balance.

Group: Maple Street

Maynard: But I think the big problem, in my mind, of why I'd say crime has got worse, and I think the reason for it has been authority. The authority symbol has waned in the home, it's waned in the church, it's waned in the schools. Given that, people get their own figures of authority, or else take authority into their own hands, and given that, you can get some youngster, maybe seven or eight years old -- "I'll sue you" or "I'll do this." Where do they know that? They probably heard it on TV, or suing their parents or doing this, and this is what's happening. I think we have to get back to respect for authority. But authority has to earn their respect if they want to get them back.

Group: Fisher Hill Road

Deborah: But that's why it's so important that people come together to try to resolve this, because that's my exact point. You have these kids that have no respect for anything. They have no values, no parameters. They are making babies because they don't have any. They can't teach their kids any. And the population is just growing to epidemic proportions, and these people are going to take us to hell. I mean I know I sound like a preacher but it's true.

[brief clamor]

Lloyd: I went to this rap concert. The Departments? The last one we just had? [Yeah, Yeah -- voices indicate recognition] I couldn't believe the girls there. Right. And you know they're saying swears.

Deborah: Oh yeah, filthy!

Lloyd: And repeat, the singers are saying repeat it. And the girls are out there, F this, F that, whatever. -- I'm looking at these young girls, and I'm saying, what are they doing?

Chuck: A lot of the lyrics was downing women.

Lloyd: They don't even understand what they're doing. And they're up there, yeah, you know --

Unknown: Yeah, I can't cuss in front of my mom and daddy now!

Deborah: I know it. You know it. You wouldn't dare -- Out of respect.

Interestingly, in the School Street group several participants conjure SOCIAL BREAKDOWN to counter the suggestion that the prohibition on drugs be lifted. Consider the following excerpt:

Cast:
Betty, a white woman who has attended college, is presently retired, and is in her mid-70s.
Frances, an African American school teacher with a graduate degree, in her mid-50s.
Janice, an African American assistant treasurer who has attended college and is in her mid-40s.

Betty: Maybe they've got to legalize drugs?

Frances: That wouldn't solve anything.

Unknown: That would get rid of the drug dealers.

Janice: But then we have--what we forget -- is that it was legalized at one time.

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Unknown: But they'll still mug you to get the money to go buy
    the drugs.

[laughter]

Betty: So it wouldn't be so expensive, they wouldn't be
    making that kind of money.

Frances: I think that's why we're in the situation we are
    now, because we keep relaxing the rules --

Janice: Exactly.

Frances: -- to fit the people, and you can't -- You have to
    enforce it.

Janice: There has to be a bottom line.

Betty: They're just going to keep on killing people.

    [A few paragraphs further down in the transcript:]

Janice: But this is part of it. It's church, schools, home,
    no one's doing their job. That's why it is. It used to
    that -- church used to play a big part in the family.
    Your family did. Your friends. If you were out here
    acting up, you didn't want anybody to know it. Now you
    brag about it because you're not taught any values at
    home. And if you're not taught -- if it doesn't start at
    home, the street's got you. The street has you. And
    you've a school system that is rigged against you. They
    keep relaxing the laws and this -- I'm with Frances -- do
    not relax the laws. Do not relax the standards. It does
    not help. It makes it worse. If a child knows that he or
    she can come in that classroom at 11:00 in the morning --
    o.k. half the school day is over -- and still get marked
    present, be disruptive, beat up teachers and still not
    get thrown out -- and other folks see it -- what are you
    going to do?

In Frances' and Janice's discourse, crime stems not from
absence of economic opportunity, for example, but from the

failure of "church, schools and home" to "do their job" -- that is, to instill values and impose standards of conduct. The prospect of legal drug use is repellent to these women because it implies a further erosion of public expectations concerning values and conduct. In Frances' words, "that's why we're in the situation we are now, because we keep relaxing the rules."

Negligent Parenting

In the public discourse, attributions for crime to what criminologists Eleanor and Sheldon Glueck once referred to as "under-the-roof culture" (quoted in Currie, 1985) were rare, appearing in just three of the op eds. In nearly all of the conversations, however, participants insisted that crime stems from the failure of parents to supervise, discipline and properly care for their children. Attributions of this sort were expressed in all of the mixed groups and groups of color, and in six of the eight white groups. These sentiments were communicated both as bald assertions and through the telling of personal experience narratives that contrasted prevailing child-rearing practices with participants.' memories of their own upbringings. As an example of the latter, consider the following excerpt from a lengthy speech by Vanessa, whom we first met in the previous chapter:

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Vanessa: I think that there is a lot of responsibility on
parents. And I think that when you say that as a Black
person, people are like "Blaming the victim." Well I'm
sorry, you have to raise your children. You HAVE to raise
your children to be responsible, to act responsibly and
to value people and to value life and to value people's
property. If you don't do that you are lacking as a
parent. And again you can't always control how your
children come out, but I've seen it again and again where
people don't even make the effort. And I think that as a
community we need to take that back. As a parent. We
need to make demands of our children. We need to
discipline our children and make them know what's what.
I mean there's good and there's bad, to me. And I make
sure my daughter knows, there's black and white, and
there's good and bad. And never mind this fuzzy gray
line. She'll figure that out as an adult. But for a
five-year-old mind you have to say good and bad, moral,
immoral. That's the only way children learn about what's
right and how to be good people. And I think my mother
instilled that in me. I think as a community,
particularly in the Black community, we have to say that.
Parents, you have to control your children. You HAVE to.
We are lacking that strongly, as parents, to a large
extent. We do not control our children, to a large
extent... There's no doubt that it can be done. I am a
product of very poor parents. We were never on welfare
and my parents were always together, but were always
lower class. I think Michael's the same and maybe others
in here. There are people that do it in spite of the
system. You can do it. You have to have parents that
instill in you the fact that it can be done. You have to
want to do it. If you're a Black person there's no doubt
that there's racism, that it's rampant. You can overcome

it and that's what you have to teach your children.
There's gonna be times when it's gonna overcome you. In
the long run you can overcome it. I think we really have
to work together.

A second example of discourse critical of prevailing
child-rearing practices comes from the Main Street group.[8]
This example also features a general lament concerning
contemporary values, and several tropes typical of other
SOCIAL BREAKDOWN displays. We will have occasion to refer
back to it in the sections that follow:

Group: Main Street
Gloria: I feel as though it's happening because of the homes
    that some of these young people may come out of. Lack of
    supervision, lack of parents -- parents being parents.
Ben: No guidance. [Right -- a voice interjects] A few years
    back on TV, you remember, "It's 11:00 o'clock, do you
    know where your children are?" And the answer to that
    today is "Yeah, they're outside on the street somewhere."
Gloria: No commitment in the home, no commitment in schools.
    Parents do not go to parent/teachers' meetings. They
    don't go to the schools until the student has a real
    serious problem.
Ben: And then they get angry with the teacher.
Gloria: Yes. Or angry with the principal, or angry with the
    guidance counselor, or angry with the bus drivers. It's
    everybody else's fault.

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[8] In the remainder of this chapter and in those that follow, background
information will be presented only for those speakers who have not yet
been introduced.

Ben: There is no respect.

Unknown: Oh, we know that.

Ben: They don't respect themselves. They don't respect anyone else. When I was young I was taught *that* was one of the keys to everything. I hate to sound like Rodney Dangerfield -- But I don't get no respect!

Gloria: It goes back also to parents not going to church themselves so the children do not go. And there's certain guidance they receive when they go to church and Sunday school. The children are just not doing these things anymore. Parents are not requiring it or demanding it because they don't do it themselves.

Ben: [Turning to the moderator:] Do you call your mother by her first name?

Moderator: No. Of course not.

Ben: Neither do I. And I'm quite a bit older than you are.

Helen: Do you hear that now, youngsters calling their mothers --

Ben: Oh yes. They'd call their fathers by their first name if they could FIND some of them. That's one of those things --

Gloria: It's the time we're living in, you know. Things have really changed.

Ben: But it shouldn't be.

Gloria: But it's there. Can we turn it around?

While discourse charging parents with responsibility for crime was richer and more expansive in the conversations of the groups of color,[9] it could also be heard in three quarters

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[9] There were more attributions to poor parenting, on average, *within* the conversations of the groups of color and speakers making such attributions contributed more in terms of transcript lines.

of the conversations of the white groups. In the excerpt
that follows, two school teachers compare notes on their
pupils' parents.

> *Group: Maple Street*
> *Cast:*
> *Melissa, a teacher with a graduate degree, in her early*
> *40s.*
>
> *Eve, a teacher with a graduate degree, in her early 60s.*

Melissa: I don't know about you Eve but I see that parents
can't set limits for their kids. They can't. If you sit
down with them in a conference and you say, you know, I
notice that your child really has some difficulty
accepting limits -- this is what I'm trying to do. They
have no idea what to do. And if I say to them, "Well you
could try having consequences for their behavior -- you
know - like - pick something." And so some will say,
"Well, he swears." So I say, "Well, o,k., if he swears,
then he needs to have something that's going to happen
when he does that, like maybe send him to his room." And
they'll look at me and say, "But he'll cry."

Eve: Yes.

Stella: Yes.

Melissa: It's like [they] just don't understand it.

Eve: Exactly.

Melissa: And you've got to lay down the law, so to speak,
and it doesn't have to be harsh, but it's got to be
steady and consistent, and I just don't think that we're
doing it.

Eve: No.

Melissa: They don't. They don't stick to their guns.

One feature of discourse critical of prevailing parenting practices deserves special attention because of its frequent occurrence. The conversationalists in ten groups charged that parents, when confronted with the delicts of their children, deny the message and assail the messenger. We have already seen an example of this trope in the excerpt from the conversation of the Main Street group, quoted above. In that conversation, Ben claimed that when told of their children's difficulties in school, parents "get angry with the teachers." Gloria responded "Or angry with the principal, or angry with the guidance counselor," and so on. Details varied slightly across the conversations -- sometimes the complaining agent is a teacher, other times a neighbor -- but the central claim that parents deny the message and assail the messenger is the same in all ten.

In six of the ten conversations featuring this charge speakers integrated a personal experience narrative, explaining that in the past parents would "back up" teachers or neighbors who complained about their child whereas today they are more apt to "jump down their throats." Two examples of this type of claim follow. The speaker in the first is Beatrice, an African American woman who works as a quality control inspector. She is in her mid 50s and participated in the conversation of a group of color.

Group: Woodman Road

Beatrice: And my thing about the neighbors -- I truly
honestly believe if it was like it were when I was kid,
things would be much better. It would be much better. If
a neighbor could speak to your child and to my child and
tell that child -- And if that child got unruly, you put
a switch on that child and send him home, or you put that
kid on punishment, that child would be much better. But
now nobody wants you to touch their kid. Their kids don't
do this. Their kids don't do that. O.k.? And it's not
only just in this little area. It's all over. And it's
BAD. It's really bad. I can say one thing. I haven't had
any problems with [our neighborhood] kids because... they
are good. I mean I speak to these kids. They may not
like it. They may go off and mumble, but I haven't had no
problems. But I hear other neighbors say: "This kid there
cussed me out. This kid do this." I tell anybody, if your
kid cusses me, I'm gonna slap, you know? I mean you might
have to sit down and talk about it after -- say, well you
tell me to do this, do that. But I'll be doggone if I'm
gonna be a Mama or Grandma and have to come to you
"You're child cussed me." It don't make sense. I'm the
oldest. I should be able to tell your kid, you don't talk
that way. ["That's right" a voice interjects] You gonna
talk that way, you go into that house. O.k.? Because I'm
not gonna hurt your child no more that I would hurt --
I'd probably hurt mine quicker than I'd hurt yours. But
they just -- You can't say nothing to these kids because
everybody is in an uproar. "You don't say this to my
kid..." [I]t should be each member of this area could be
able to speak to somebody's kids and it wouldn't be no
hardships.

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In the next example, the speaker is Alex, whom we first met in chapter three. He participated in the conversation of the Jacob's Lane group:

Alex: The teachers aren't allowed to discipline too. And I hate this phrase more than anything in the world and that is "when I was a kid." When I was kid if you got in trouble in school, you better not go home and say you were in trouble in school because you'll get in trouble at home. Nowadays you go home and say you're in trouble in school, the parent asks what it was. "Let's go down and sue the teachers for getting you into trouble."

In most of the conversations participants offered explanations for the poor state of parental guidance and supervision. We encountered one such explanation already, when Gloria (above, in this section) insisted that "it goes back... to parents not going to church themselves so the children do not go." We can now be a bit more systematic: In all, participants argued that poor parenting is due to family breakdown or the absence of fathers (11 groups); selfishness and greed -- especially with respect to parents who tolerate drug trafficking in order to benefit from its fruits (five groups); the need to work in order to make ends meet (six groups -- one black, four white and one mixed); the youthfulness of so many parents due to "babies having babies" (four groups); substance abuse (four groups); and the intrusion of government into family life through laws governing child abuse (six groups).

The last item was a bit surprising and so deserves elaboration. In five groups of color and one white group,[10] participants argued, sometimes repeatedly, that laws against child abuse discourage or prevent parents, teachers and neighbors from disciplining children. Their logic? In one participant's words: "Since the courts have said child abuse these children know how far they can go, and how far YOU can go." In the extended illustration that follows Sam tells of a 13 year old removed from his home by the state, and Karl shares an experience that demonstrates his unwillingness to cede what he feels are his parental rights. The conversationalists are from the Fisher Hill group. We have met all of them except Sam, who is retired and in his early seventies. He holds a high school diploma.

Group: Fisher Hill

Sam: You know it's a lot different now then when we were coming up. Because I know when I was coming up, if I did something wrong, was bad, it didn't have to be no one in my family. The woman down the street would get me and whip my behind and sent me home and I'd get a licking when I git there. And you know I know some people right here in Boston now, that the State is trying to take this kid now, because they spanked this kid. The kid is 13

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[10] These differences are striking, especially in light of the fact that the charge was sharply contested in the one white conversation in which it appeared, while it was accepted as a commonplace in all five of the groups of color.

years old. He went to school and said his mother whupped him with a belt. Then they took that kid out of school!

Karl: Well you know what I'd do? Look, I tell them, you take him and raise him.

Sam: I'm just telling you. So when they go to school and the teacher tells them things, they talk back to the teacher, they say what they want to say, and then they come home, you can't whup them, you know.

Georgia: And that's what Lloyd was saying before about being too liberal.

Sam: Right, that's right!

[clamor]

Chuck: There's no respect.

Karl: You know what I did? The little one, we're back on the little one again. When that law first come out she was about 13 or 14, the little one: "You can't whup me, I'll call the police." Shit my hair rolled upon my head. I took my belt, whupped the ass, drove up to the phone and said "You call the policeman." And I had made up my mind if he come near talking about me, put me in jail, I said "Look you put me in jail, now you take her and take care. Don't bring her back here when I get out of jail. I don't want to catch her back here. Because I'm not going to kill my kid." See I ain't gonna let the police officer tell me how to raise my kid. See people just making excuses, not doing what they're supposed to do. If we take care of them kids while they're young ["Just making excuses" -- a voice interjects] -- I ain't never whupped her since.

Community Breakdown

In 14 groups, participants conjured the frame by attributing crime, at least in part, to a breakdown in

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community. Race differences are noteworthy with respect to both the content and quantity of this discourse, so we shall consider the white groups and the groups of color separately.

Discourse on the degraded quality of community life could be heard in five white groups but was typically offered in only brief utterances. In three groups speakers simply observed that these days "people don't know their neighbors." In one white group, a participant remembered that in the past "if I was going out shopping... somebody always took care of our kids. The kids were everybody's kids -- They weren't your kids or her kids." And in another group a participant recalled that "years ago if you spit on the sidewalk your parents would get 15 phonecalls."

In the groups of color discourse on degraded neighborliness was typically much richer. Speakers frequently contrasted prevailing neighboring practices with those remembered from their childhoods. We already know from our review of discourse on parenting practices that in the past parents "whupped" their children whenever neighbors complained about their behavior. In this section we see that in the past, neighbors also did their share of whupping. In all seven of the groups of color that conjured the frame through discourse on degraded neighborliness, speakers recalled that in their childhood communities neighbors

enjoyed "spanking rights."[11] For speakers in three groups,
this meant that as children, whenever they were caught
misbehaving, they got a "double whammy." Sam's speech from
the excerpt quoted above contains an instance of this trope.
Another could be heard in the conversation of the group at
Longwood Road. We were first introduced to this group in
chapter three; the new speaker in this excerpt is Martin, a
firefighter who has attended college and is in his mid 30s:

Martin: When I was growing up, it was like, if some parent
    seen me doing something wrong, it was like "open season
    on Martie." They could smack you upside the head, and it
    was o.k., and then they'll tell your father, and you go
    get it again when he comes home. So it was like --
Marjory: A double whammy!
Martin: Yeah.
Marjory: And you got it twice as hard because you now
    embarrassed your mother.
Alice: And disrespected an adult!

In three groups of color and in one mixed group, African
American speakers also insisted that in their childhood
communities neighbors were more helpful than they are today.
While supervision and care of children was the form of help
most commonly mentioned, Michael, an African American[12]

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[11] The frame was also conjured in this fashion in one mixed group by an
African American participant.

[12] In place of checking a box to indicate a race category in the post-
conversation questionnaire, Michael wrote "HUMAN". As facilitator of

participant in the conversation of the Troy Street group, told of another type of neighborly assistance. Michael is a college graduate in his mid 30s and works for a state agency as an economist:

Michael: I'll chime in. I grew up in a neighborhood -- what I'll call a real neighborhood. And I grew up very poor. But one thing about growing up as poor as I did is that we had a sense of community. And we really had to work as a community, because individually the people of the community could not have survived by themselves. The only way that we could survive is that we had to pull together as a community. An example of that is that we were constantly without food. I did not eat every day. What we do sometimes is we would go around to the various neighbors, I need a cup of flour, I need a cup of milk. Go tell Ms. Sue to send me some baking powder and salt. And we would borrow amongst ourselves in order to make that bread. Children just got together and played. This is one thing that -- children today, I come in the neighborhood and say "where are the children?" [In my] day you see like tons of children. We just played together as big groups of children when I was growing up. And there was spanking rights throughout the neighborhood and this type of thing. And I long for that.

How do the participants explain the breakdown in community about which they speak? For the most part, they do not. Community atomization and the degradation of

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that mixed race group, I (reluctantly) coded Michael as an African American.

neighborliness are *described* but not *explained*, much as one might describe the experience of growing old without feeling any need to explain the biological determinants of aging. But the transcripts do suggest two possible explanations, one or the other of which is implicit in the discourse of five of the groups of color. First, in three groups of color participants explain their own or others' reluctance to intervene to correct a mischievous child by pointing out the increasing likelihood that the child's parent will react in a hostile fashion. We encountered discourse on this general theme above, in the section on parenting practices. The second implicit explanation for community breakdown highlights the "random" nature of street violence and the apparent unpredictability of its youthful perpetrators. In three groups of color, speakers comment that nowadays they must think twice before intervening to correct a child. The following excerpt from the conversation of the Longwood Road group is typical.

Charles: I mean, I myself, I keep my values. And if I see a
    kid on this street doing something, if I know who he is,
    I'm gonna tell him to his face. Because I guess I'm
    willing to take a risk. But if I'm going down to
    Castlegate [a housing project], and if I see some kid, a
    five-year old -- If I see a 10-year old kid, you know,
    stealing a tire off a car, [You look the other way, hee
    hee -- a voice interjects] I might mention something, but
    believe me I'm not gonna say HEY WHAT Y-- I'm not gonna

grab him. I'll say -- I might go "is that your car?"
But I keep walking. I won't -- I'm more intent to mind
my business than I will to intervene in something of that
nature -- You know, somewhere else. Because I like my
life, you know?

Recreational Activities

If conversationalists assert that crime stems from an
erosion in the capacity of families and communities to
regulate their members' conduct, then we might expect them to
favor crime control strategies that seek to enhance informal
social controls. This expectation is amply confirmed through
the participants' persistent advocacy in 15 conversations of
structured programs and supervised gathering places for urban
young people. Among the interventions most commonly suggested
were recreational activities, after-school programs, youth
centers, mentor programs, organized sports and staffed parks.
Race differences were not apparent with respect to these
ideas.

Many participants were quite specific in explaining the
anti-crime rationale behind the interventions they proposed.
For example, Sandy, a bank executive with a college degree,
offered the following account in response to the statement
used to trigger the frame BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES:

Group: Meadowbrook Street
Sandy: When you talk about education and family values and
all that sort of thing, it's giving people options --

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it's -- there are some very [good] programs in terms of
when you challenge the kids and when you get them
involved in art programs and sports programs and you
basically get them using their time in more of a
constructive fashion they don't have as much time to
basically sit around and feel bored and look for trouble
to get into. I think we've all been there as kids
ourselves and if that's what they're advocating then I'm
all for it. I think that would help, definitely, in
terms of reducing the crime. And also, it's not only
going to do it because you're keeping the kids busy, but
it's also because you're teaching them good value systems
at the same time.

We should also note that a good deal of the advocacy of
"education" and "job creation" stressed their centrality as
mechanisms for informal social control rather than as means
for earning money and moving up the class ladder. Where an
utterance clearly and unequivocally treated job creation or
education as strategies for enhancing moral and interpersonal
integration rather than for ameliorating poverty or relative
deprivation, it was coded as displaying SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.[13]
For example, in the conversation of the Woodman Road group,
Beatrice argues that there should be "more jobs" for young
people in order to "keep their mind occupied to do
something... to keep them busy." Because this utterance
treats jobs strictly as a means for integrating young people

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[13] Where ambiguity existed with respect to the speaker's intention, the
utterance was coded as an expression of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES.

into conventional behavior, it was coded as displaying SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.

In stressing the importance of "keeping kids busy" speakers in two groups wielded the maxim "idle hands are the devil's workshop." While conversationalists in the other groups neglected the maxim, most would surely have agreed with its message. Indeed, in nine groups participants commented that young people have either "no place to go" or "nothing to do." Consider the following illustration:

Group: Hallibut Square
Phyllis: I think that especially during the summertime that
  our parks should be staffed. We should have someplace
  for kids to go -- something for them to do. Definitely.
  And I don't mean just for the poor and disadvantaged,
  quote unquote. But for every kid, everybody to be able
  to have a place to go and something to do.
Janet: That is one thing we did have as kids.
Bob: Yeah.
Janet: We did have the park --
Phyllis: And we had the gym -- mine had the gym and the
  park. Mine were fortunate to have both places. Kids
  today don't have either place.

Anti-Crime Activism

It is hardly surprising that participants in 16 of the 20 groups offered spontaneous support for anti-crime activities such as crime watch. While discourse of this sort conjures the frame, it is clearly related to the fact that the setting

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for each discussion was a neighborhood crime watch meeting.
As it happens, however, the frame's overall performance as
described in our schema (page 60) would be the same if all
references to crime watch were excluded from analysis.
Bearing this in mind, we turn now to keyings of the frame
through discourse on citizen-activism against crime.

Participants offered three distinct defenses of anti-
crime activism. First, in seven groups participants argued
that crime watch has proven to be an effective method for
crime control. Most argued that watchful neighbors deter a
good deal of crime, in particular burglaries and muggings.
The excerpt which follows is a particularly colorful
explanation of the logic of crime watch as understood by most
participants. It should also, incidentally, help lay to rest
once and for all the notion that crime watchers are motivated
by irrational fears (cf. chapter one). We have already met
Henry, the African American police officer quoted in chapters
three and four. The new speaker is Henry's wife Ruth, an
African American graduate student in her 40s:

Group: Grove Hills Parkway
Henry: I got involved and I really care about it because I
    see that the police can only go so far. I mean I sit
    right here [and] I've been awakened in the middle of the
    night where a cab driver's been shot right outside my
    bedroom window. My neighbor's son was killed right here
    in front of my house. I called for help because there's
    fights right out -- I've seen my neighbors get robbed

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there. All my neighbors have been robbed. Mr. Ferraro
was knocked down this hill. His wrist was broken - an
old man. And then Mr. Wilson was robbed and Mr. Smith
was robbed right here in front of my neighbor Johnson's
house. Guys have been going into the windows of my
neighbors while they're home at night. People who used
to live across the street. And they got the hell out
because they were scared... The police are out there
somewhere and if someone contacts, communicates, then
police come. [But] by that time the guy has done what
the hell he wants -- the criminal has done what the hell
he wants to do and he's made off. Crime watch is people.
When she [indicating Ruth] gets out of the car... she
beeps her horn, another neighbor can look out the window,
come out on the porch because at certain hours of the
evening that's when everyone, these women, are getting
ripped off. There's somebody that looks and once in a
while they come and they start snatching. When they get
out of their car the guy will just jump out of nowhere.
He'll pretend like he's going up on the porch, like other
people in the neighborhood, and when she gets walking up
her steps, he sneaks up behind and grabs her and grabs
her bag and takes off. If neighbors look out the window
-- or somebody -- I'll walk out on my porch -- you hear
somebody's blowing the horn -- come out and stand out
there and this guy who's gonna try to rip her off, he
gonna see me standing there saying "How you doing Sally."
And I'll look at him. And another time a guy come down
and he sneak in and he stands at my corner. I was in my
room. I was typing on the computer. And I look out my
window, and he's been peeking way down my street and he
goes over the other part and comes back up and -- now
this is neighborhood crime watch now in effect -- I says,
"Hey asshole, what are you looking for?" "I was just

going to my girlfriends." "Why don't you go home and say
something to her? What's her name? Get the hell out of
here or I'll call the cops." That's crime watch there,
that's what happens. That's why I got involved, you
know.

Ruth: That's the most excellent point that was made. That
is crime watch in action. That is *in action*. To me it's
like a watering hole. You know you have a watering hole
and all the animals in the jungle come to the watering
hole, the lions, the tigers and the folks that they eat.
Well that's what this street is like at night. You got
criminals. They're thinking about how can I rob you and
you look at them saying now how can I get in the house
before you rob me. And unless another lion comes along
and says ROAR [makes sound], then you're going to get
mugged. It is just like that out here at night.

Note that even speeches that stress the practical utility
of crime watch have a rich moral tenor. In chapter two we
learned that participants typically insisted that they were
not really concerned about the possibility of losing their
property as much as the possibility of being hurt, or of
having a loved one or neighbor hurt. Here, in reviewing
discourse on the practical utility of crime watch, we see the
expression of a similar *moral* concern with protecting loved
ones and neighbors from harm.

Second, participants in two groups also argued that crime
watch can be an effective means of extracting services and
improved police protection from the state. The group can

serve as a mechanism for "holding politicians accountable" the speakers argued.

Finally, conversationalists in nine groups discussed crime watch as, at least in part, a means of fostering community solidarity and reconstituting the neighborhood "as it used to be." These speakers reflexively offered what is essentially a Durkheimian[14] explanation for the benefits of participation. Consider the following two examples from the conversations of the Jacob's Lane and Troy Street groups.

Group: Jacob's Lane
New Cast:
Geraldine, a white housewife in her 60s.

Paula: Even things like the crime watch gatherings we've had -- you know, kind of the parties for kids and the block parties. That is like an old-fashioned thing.

Geraldine: I think that's really like an extension of the family [several voices echo sentiment].

Peg: If neighborhoods pull together in the way that they [used to] naturally come together --

Laura: NATURALLY come together. So we have to FORCE it now to come together.

Carol: I know, if something, God forbid, should happen -- My kids know they can roll out the door and into anybody else's door in the neighborhood.

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[14] Emile Durkheim, in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1964), argued that crime serves a positive function for society in so far as it causes people to band together to punish offenders and thereby ritually affirm the prevailing moral order.

Group: Troy Street

New Cast:

Ronnie, a white college graduate who works in human resources, in her 30s.

Ronnie: I really believe that the way the society affects people is that we get very isolated, we get divided and we end up throwing grenades at each other, either mentally or physically... And so I feel compelled to try to figure out, to whatever degree I can, to bring people together...

Michael: I guess my ideal thing would be to bring back Halloween the way I remember. I mean, that is such a lost tradition as well as piece of our society. Halloween was such a fun time. I mean you would just take and you wouldn't have to worry about whether this person going to snatch you and take you away. And you could just roam for miles throughout the community collecting. Now mom and dad have to take you from house to house. And before you can eat the candy you have to take it to some place and stand in line and have it X rayed. I don't want the damn candy now. That's no fun!

Facilitator: People X ray candy? Do people really X ray candy?

Michael: Oh yeah. They take it to the hospital and they X ray it. How can they have a good time -- spoil the whole thing. What are you going to say to the child? You can't trust. You can't trust.

Vanessa: And the sad fact is, you can't. That's the saddest part! You really can't.

Michael: Bring back Halloween the way it was.

This final line of argument, when considered in relation to the overall strong performance of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN,

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suggests an interesting possibility: Participating in a crime watch groups may be, for many participants, not merely a strategy for increasing personal safety and protecting investments in homes and property (though it is certainly that), but also a means of addressing what they believe to be the *root cause* of crime, namely, apathy, urban anonymity, and self-interested pursuit of personal advantage at the expense of community. In other words, participation in crime watch may be, for many participants, primarily a *moral gesture*. Let me make this idea as clear as possible: If one believes that crime stems from inequality, then anti-poverty programs are indicated; if one believes that crime stems from a poorly functioning criminal justice system, then reform of that system is in order; but if one believes that crime stems from a crisis in values and morality, what then? For the conversationalists, participation in neighborhood-based collective action, in so far as it expresses altruistic concern for the well being of others, may be as much a "root cause-solution" as tougher law enforcement or better jobs programs. Of course, motivations are elusive phenomena; it is hard enough to recognize one's own let alone those of others. But the moral tone of so much of the discourse on crime watch seems to support this hypothesis. And at least one participant made the connection explicit, albeit in a slightly jumbled statement. The speaker here is Jenny; she is explaining her decision to participate in a street patrol

organized by her upscale neighborhood group. Note that part of the "moral fiber" speech to which she refers is excerpted as the epigram to this chapter:

Jenny: I think that it's that sense of making a better community, not so much that I think I can cure -- I don't do it to solve crimes. I do it for the benefit of the community spirit type of thing. And I think that the problem -- I mean I'll go back to my moral fiber speech again [laughter]. I think that the problem is that people don't have a sense of helping a community and doing whatever it's gonna take to help it and to become a part of a community and that they have an obligation to do that. That they're not gonna be able to pay somebody else to patrol the street for them. And I've had neighbors come up and complain about being accosted on the street. And you say well this is what you could do to help. And they're like, well can't I just give $500 a year and hire somebody to do it? Well no you can't because you're not going to get that same overall feeling for everything, you know? Can't we just hire somebody to sweep the street so I don't have to? It's that whole sense of what you're responsible -- what you have to do to be a responsible member of your community. And that's what's missing.

Liberal and Conservative Inflections

Discourse inflecting SOCIAL BREAKDOWN in a conservative fashion was absent from the sample of elite public discourse but clearly present in the popular discourse. The clearest traces of a conservative accent could be heard in discourse

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on child-rearing, especially in the groups of color. In
charging that child abuse laws have undermined parental
authority participants echoed general conservative criticisms
of intrusive government and "elitist" social workers. Other
traces of a conservative accent could be heard in the two
white groups in which participants charged, albeit a bit
elliptically, that crime is rooted in the culture of the new
social movements. For example, in reaction to a story about
a school principal who interfered with an effort to punish a
child for repeatedly "hooking" school, Alex explained that
"It's this movement of like free to do what you want whether
that gets in somebody else's way or not -- that's right
because it pleases me."

Liberal inflections of the frame could be heard in four
conversations. As in the public discourse, these consisted
of utterances that conflated BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and SOCIAL
BREAKDOWN, typically arguing either that unemployment is a
source of family and community disintegration, or that job
creation is necessary to help keep families together and
thereby reduce crime. The following exchange between Henry
and Ruth is illustrative:

Group: Grove Hills Parkway
Ruth: [T]ake some of the middle class, upper middle class
    folks, from wherever they come from -- suburbs, whatever
    -- and take away their job for a month, o.k.? Where they
    don't get their paycheck. And see what starts to happen

in their family. You know that to me answers a lot of
questions...

Henry: [A few paragraphs down in the transcript:] The best
way to fight crime is... teaching the family to take
responsibility more in bringing up the kids, providing
the jobs for the family people, promoting family again...
JOBS, doing what you can to give support to that
family...

Rebuttal Arguments

One or another element of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN was rejected
in eight conversations. Two of the SOCIAL BREAKDOWN rebuttals
mirrored, in terms of rhetorical structure, arguments leveled
against BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. First, participants in four .
groups argued that most children raised in single parent
families do just fine, so single parenthood *per se* should not
be regarded as a cause of crime. Second, participants in
three groups argued that some kids wind up criminals in spite
of their parents best efforts, ergo crime must be regarded as
a matter of personal *choice.*

In addition to these rebuttal arguments, participants in
seven groups expressed reservations about the notion that
either "family breakdown" or "family values" is a source of
crime. These speakers were apparently aware that in the
public discourse the family breakdown argument is
increasingly associated with a conservative or traditionalist
political position, a position with which they were

uncomfortable being associated. One example of this type of rebuttal appears as Vanessa's contribution to the epigram for this chapter. Another was delivered by Margaret, a member of the Peach Tree Lane group:

Margaret: You know when Vice-President Quayle said that we don't have family values... I think we can have family values without having family *neatness*. Know what I mean? Now for instance you take a 16 year old girl who WANTS to be pregnant. Wants to be pregnant because she has a mother that's indifferent, she has a father that's indifferent, she has brothers that are indifferent. This baby will be HERS. There are children like that. [I've heard 'em say it -- a voice interjects] They are CHILDREN but they want a child -- those little fingers to wrap around theirs. That little smile, you know, in the middle of the night. And that [makes a polite version of a burping noise]. You know how babies just turn them on! And they want that love. So this is the single mother -- they have no family values? I don't really understand how they can't see the nature of things. But they're Republicans of course [laughter]. Republicans, they're like ice -- Ice Man Commeth. That's the way I feel about Republicans... They form this icicle around them. They don't see past Ozzie Nelson and whatever the name of his wife was and their two little children.
Ertha: Ozzie and Harriet.

Finally, it must be noted that even the speakers who leveled the criticisms described in this section typically expressed support for at least some of the frame's core claims. While entire groups rejected all of the key elements

of BLOCKED OPPORTUNTIES, not a *single speaker* offered a similarly sweeping critique of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. As an example of the tentative and partial nature of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN rebuttals, consider one participant's response to the statement used to trigger the frame. Jane is a white graduate student in her late 20s:

Group: Holyoke Street

Jane: I somewhat disagree -- agree [laughter]. I mean I
     think that all this stuff about the dissolution of the
     family is questionable as to whether that has actually
     happened. And there are a lot of single parent families
     and there are a lot of melded families and that kind of
     stuff throughout history. Maybe not in the fifties but
     there were other than in the fifties. There's been
     plenty of that and I don't think that the situation is
     the same. But on the other hand I do feel like you can
     take some control of the situation if neighbors know each
     other and act together... I don't think it's a breakdown
     of the family but it just seems that it's a breakdown of
     people knowing their neighbors, knowing their
     communities, being just aware when people that don't live
     on the street, that might cause problems are even there.
     And that's a kind of cooperation that I think solves the
     problem.

CONCLUSION

The frame's performance was so strong that I have been tempted to label it a "consensus frame." This I have not done because several groups, as noted, expressed reservations

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about the frame's concern for "family breakdown."
Nevertheless, I can state that SOCIAL BREAKDOWN was the most
resonant of the three primary frameworks, a bit in front of
FAULTY SYSTEM, and way ahead of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES.

The frame's performance in the op eds (displayed for the
purpose of advocacy in 20 op eds, rebutted in just three) was
not as strong as FAULTY SYSTEM but a bit better than BLOCKED
OPPORTUNITIES. Interestingly, discourse absent in the media
sample -- on the failure of parents to discipline their kids
and on the criminogenic effects of child abuse laws -- proved
important in the conversations. The significance of this
observation is discussed in chapter eight.

In conjuring SOCIAL BREAKDOWN the conversation
participants typically contrasted the prevailing normative
order with one remembered from the past, and found the former
lacking. The tenor of the frame's expressions, therefore,
tended toward the nostalgic. Listening to the conversations,
one learns that in the past parents disciplined their
children and communities were tightly integrated. Today,
neighborhoods are chaotic and authority is frequently absent.
The conversationalists clearly sense a general breakdown of
order and authority, a kind of societal unraveling. These
feelings are all expressed in both white groups and groups of
color but perhaps, on the whole, with greater intensity
poignancy in the latter. The significance of these strongly
held sentiments is also discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Six

SECONDARY FRAMES

A complete account of the conversationalists' discourse on crime requires that we consider two additional frameworks: RACIST SYSTEM and MEDIA VIOLENCE. These two are treated as *secondary frames* because discourse displaying their key elements occupied much less space in the transcripts than discourse relevant to each of the three primary frameworks. "Secondary framework" is thus a designation based upon an empirical observation rather than a normative judgment or deductive inference.

I should note, however, that RACIST SYSTEM and MEDIA VIOLENCE were introduced into the conversations in ways distinct from the primary frames. In chapter two I explained the rationale behind the decision to trigger RACIST SYSTEM with a question about the Stuart affair. As I will show, my initial feeling that the sensitive nature of talk about race and crime demanded an *indirect* approach was amply borne out. The possibility exists, in any case, that the relative paucity of discourse displaying RACIST SYSTEM is related to the study design.

MEDIA VIOLENCE is a different matter altogether. Where this frame entered the conversations it did so spontaneously. The interview schedule did not attempt in any way to trigger

the frame. In fact, I decided to consider the relevant discourse only after examining the transcripts.

Both frames can be traced to criminological theory but their lineage is less direct than in the cases considered thus far. MEDIA VIOLENCE is rooted in notions concerning imitation that extend backward to the work of the nineteenth century French scholar Gabriel Tarde (Beirne, 1993). Adumbrations of the frame can also be found in the writings of American criminologist Edwin Sutherland (1974). In promoting his theory of "differential association," Sutherland argued that the propensity for crime is learned from parents, peers, teachers, and other close associates. While the role of the primary group was clearly most important to the theory, the eminent criminologist also considered the mass media to be a potentially important agent of socialization into conformist and criminal values.

RACIST SYSTEM has criminological roots in both labeling and conflict theory. To the extent that the frame offers an attribution for crime, it is one informed by the former. Labeling theorists (Lemert, 1972; Becker, 1963) insist that criminal careers (what they call "secondary deviance") are the result of the successful labeling of particular youthful offenders as delinquents. Once successfully attached to an individual, the "delinquent" label influences both the individual's self-concept and how others behave toward him or her. By these means the label creates a "self-fulfilling

prophecy," impelling, for example, a youth guilty of only innocent hijinks into commission of more serious and more frequent crimes. RACIST SYSTEM borrows this line of argument when it suggests that police harassment of people of color -- or society's general expectations concerning their alleged criminal propensities -- are actual *causes* of crime.

RACIST SYSTEM's floodlight is not generally cast on the causes of crime, however, but on police, judicial and political reaction to it. In this regard the frame echoes the views of conflict theorists such as Richard Quinney (1970, 1977). The Marxist criminologist argued that the state's agencies of social control can best be understood as tools in the class struggle. If the criminal acts of the poor are policed and punished vigorously while the criminal acts of the rich are for the most part ignored, it is because the criminal justice system plays a key role in reinforcing, through ideology and brute force, an unjust capitalist social order. The conversationalists key a variation on this theme when they insist that the white power structure either generates or tolerates inner-city drug trafficking in order to eliminate, through street violence or police crackdown, a stratum of jobless, angry and potentially rebellious young black men.

We take up the secondary frameworks in turn, beginning with MEDIA VIOLENCE. First we consider its performance in the sample of public discourse.

MEDIA VIOLENCE IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

MEDIA VIOLENCE appears in just three of the 58 op eds, each time for the purpose of advocacy. All three displays were in the Washington Post: two were in op eds by columnist George Will, one was in a piece by psychiatrist Charles Krauthammer. No need to construct an elaborate typology here as all three pieces present the same basic claim: Depictions of killings and mayhem in the mass media *glorify* violence and *cheapen* regard for life. I will quote Krauthammer's piece at length as it is a paradigmatic expression of the frame:

> [T]hat American popular culture is drenched in sex and violence and a degrading combination of the two is a truism. But it is then hard to understand the surprise that greets the resulting degradation and depravity of real life: a quadrupling of rapes in 30 years, random shootings of children... a doubling of the number of youths shot to death in the last six years alone... Kids see 10,000 killings on TV by age 18. Is it any wonder that a growing number might like to commit just one? Sexual aggression and misogyny are celebrated in rap. Is it any wonder that kids arrested for rape and murder are utterly conscienceless and uncomprehending? ... As a psychiatrist, I used to see psychotic patients who, urged on by voices inside their heads, did crazy and terrible things, like immolating themselves. Now we have legions of kids walking around with the technological equivalent: 2 Live Crew wired by Walkman directly into their brains, proposing to "bust you [...expletive] then break your

backbone... I wanna see you bleed." Surprised that a
whole generation is busting and breaking and bleeding?
Culture has consequences (Oct. 26, 1990).

MEDIA VIOLENCE IN THE CONVERSATIONS

MEDIA VIOLENCE was conjured in five conversations. Race
differences do not appear to be striking: the frame was
expressed in three white groups, in one group of color, and
in one mixed group by an African American speaker. The
central message of these displays is identical to the public
discourse: The mass media glorifies violence, engendering in
young viewers an urge for imitation. Moreover, the
overabundance of media depicted killings make it difficult
for viewers to distinguish between fantasy and reality, or,
what is essentially the same thing, to grasp the finality and
seriousness of death. Most of these ideas are at least
implicit in four of the five conversations displaying the
frame.[1] Consider these two examples:

Group: Peach Tree Lane
Ertha: They're drug related but I don't think these kids have
　　to be on drugs in order to kill. Seems like they're
　　doing it on their own.
Rose: There's so much t.v.

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1 The exception occurs in the conversation of a white group in which
one participant merely asserts "Everything's violent -- the comedy's
violent, the music's violent -- you know, everything is violent -- TV
shows, everything."

Unknown: They can't separate reality.

Ertha: Just an argument will bring out a gun. Or they leave
a hall or something, they come back with a gun.
[Further down in the transcript:]

Margaret: But it's sort of like a fantasy out there.
Instead of the real world, you know. ["I know" -- a
voice interjects] And it's almost like they live in
fantasies instead of living responsible, real lives. I
have a feeling that it has more to do with the fact that
all of the movies are fantasies, all the t.v. is fantasy,
even the guns that you were talking about -- the toy guns
-- they're fantasy!

Rose: They could change that if they wanted to. Just like
we have everything bad, they could put good on. But
sometimes I think -- I don't know -- it's like Moses
time.

Group: Jacob's Lane
(In response to the question: What crimes are you most
concerned about and who is doing these crimes?)

Geraldine: I fear the violence of television. I really do.
You know when I'm watching it and I'm thinking about a
show like this -- one program coming on tomorrow night--
prime time, like five o'clock. How many children really
would be watching? And I honestly say boys and girls at
the age of like 13 or 14 are imitating what they see in
violence. And I think it really is [up to us] as a group
to try to do something to clean up television.
[Further down in the transcript:]

Alex: And I go again with what Geraldine said, and I've said
this too when I'm doing a radio show. You look at the
movies that are popular and kids see the most violent
person in the movie is the most successful -- Rambo, the
Terminator, whatever it is. So the more firepower you

have -- the more knives, guns -- the more you can beat
somebody up or cut them up -- you end up as a winner.
And they see that, and they think, well, and if I carry a
gun and I shoot another kid, well then I'll be the winner
because he'll be gone.

Carol: And I think some of the new films that are coming out
-- the New.Jack City, Boyz in the Hood --

Alex:' Juice.

Carol: Juice. Well, the overlying message is not what's
happening. I mean they're usually saying, you know,
don't do the drugs, don't hang out with the gangs and so
forth. That's not what kids are identifying with. And--

Alex: The medium is the message is what it boils down to. if
they see the violence and they miss the message of don't
do it -- all they see is the violence on the screen.

RACIST SYSTEM IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

RACIST SYSTEM is displayed in ten op eds, six times for
the purpose of advocacy and four times for the purpose of
rebuttal. Two types of advocacy displays were most
important. In three op eds writers decry the violation of
Fourth Amendment rights of black men through police
"brutality," "illegal searches and seizures" and "frame-ups."
Two of these displays were triggered by the assault by Los
Angeles police on Rodney King. The example which follows is
excerpted from a piece by Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence
Page:

Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl F. Gates wants you to
believe his police have no prejudices. As W.C. Fields

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might say, they thrash everyone equally. That's just about how silly he sounded when he asserted that racial prejudice did not play a role in the infamous beating three of his department's white officers inflicted on Rodney G. King... Whether it was sparked by racism or simple sadism, the shocking video... can only stir more antipathy toward police, particularly by poor blacks whose victimization by police may be outmatched only by their victimization by civilian criminals (March 13, 1991).

The second type, also appearing in three op eds, consists of pieces that allege a racial "double standard" in the administration of justice. This double standard is the reason blacks are arrested and imprisoned in numbers disproportionate to their share of the general population. Our example comes from a New York Times piece by Rutgers University Professor Evan Stark:

> Blacks constitute 13 percent of the urban population, but, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, account for more than half of those arrested for murder, rape and nonnegligent manslaughter. This is five times the rate for whites... The problem with using this information to draw conclusions is that its primary source -- data on arrests and imprisonment -- may itself by the product of racial discrimination. Our picture of black violence may be more a reflection of official attitudes and behavior than of racial differences... The belief that blacks are "violence prone" leads to a double standard in police response. When white and black teen agers commit the same offense, police are seven times

more likely to charge black teen agers with a felony, and courts are more likely to imprison the teen ager (July 18, 1990).

The frame was also conjured in individual op eds through the following claims: that police do not provide adequate protection to black communities; that the stereotype of the young black offender encourages black youth to act out the role; and that the death penalty is administered in a racist fashion.

Three of the four rebuttal displays of the frame reject the claim that police officers use excessive force in their dealings with criminal suspects. While none of these pieces addresses the allegation that police brutality is motivated by racism, all were written in response to such claims. The rhetorical context for the op eds, therefore, renders them unequivocal rejections of RACIST SYSTEM. The excerpt which illustrates this type of rebuttal comes from a Los Angeles Times op ed by patrol officer Susan Yocum:

> Regrettably, there may always be officers who react without restraint or compassion. But to accuse the department of maintaining brutality ignores the dangerous reality of our job. Often and increasingly, our actions are a necessary response to horrific situations. To confuse this with institutionalized brutality ... is ridiculous (Sep. 11, 1990).

The fourth rebuttal display appeared in another Clarence Page op ed. In this case Page insists that "it has become politically incorrect to suggest... that black on black crime is anything other than (take your pick) the byproduct of a racist system or the byproduct of misguided government efforts to help the poor" (Jan. 9, 1991).

RACIST SYSTEM IN THE CONVERSATIONS

The question about the Stuart affair was intended, perhaps naively, as an indirect means of raising the issue of race in relation to crime and criminal justice. In the first five conversations it was asked first, as a sort of topical "warm up" to the questions that would follow. But in two groups, one mixed and the other white, the question sparked immediate hostility. In the white group speakers complained that they were "bored" with the topic which had already received far too much media attention. In the mixed group, Al, a retired white cop, angrily complained that the question threatened the unity the group was working so hard to achieve:

Group: Park Terrace
Al: We were trying to get along in this neighborhood and now you bring up an issue like this and people are going to get on everybody's back. We're trying to get along. We're trying to live with each other. No problems. We're trying to everybody do their own thing. And then

you come along with a question like this and it's going to upset everything.

Recognizing the unexpectedly provocative nature of the question, I decided to switch its place in the interview schedule. In the remaining conversations the question was asked last on the theory that upon reaching the final question the conversationalists would be more at ease with each other and less wary of the facilitator.[2] This strategy proved successful as the question was willingly addressed by the remaining groups.

That most of the discourse relevant to RACIST SYSTEM occurred following the Stuart question raises a problem of interpretation. The Stuart case has its own rich culture of competing interpretive frameworks. One frame holds that the story is really about an abusive husband who finally killed his pregnant wife. Another holds that the story is about a working class kid who would do anything to achieve his "American dream." But the frame that seems to have been nearly hegemonic in the media discourse highlights race: It holds that the story is about a white man who played off popular racist assumptions about crime and criminals, and about politicians, media personalities and police who were

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2 The question was not asked in one of the mixed group's conversations, as the interview had already run overtime before the question was reached. The data reported on RACIST SYSTEM is thus based on 19 conversations.

taken in by the ploy. The dominant media interpretation of the facts surrounding the murder of Carol Stuart, therefore, included key elements of RACIST SYSTEM.

This state of affairs renders interpretation of the conversation transcripts a bit tricky: If the participants' discourse on the Boston murder and its aftermath expresses elements of RACIST SYSTEM, we are left wondering whether that discourse is specific to the case at hand (ie. a consequence of the media's preferred framing of the Stuart story) or reflective of a more general orientation. In dealing with the actual transcripts, however, this problem did not prove insurmountable. It turns out to be relatively easy to distinguish between claims concerning the Stuart case in particular and claims concerning the operation of the criminal justice system in general. In the account that follows, we shall consider both types of claims, but we shall regard displays of RACIST SYSTEM in discourse narrowly focused on the Stuart case as *weak displays of the frame*. Conversely, we shall regard displays of the frame that make points about the criminal justice system in general as *strong displays*.

Weak Displays

Conversationalists in four white, seven black and one mixed group charged that police or politicians responded to the murder of Carol Stuart in a racist or prejudiced fashion.

In most cases speakers argued that police violated the civil rights of black men in the course of their search for the killer. Some criticized the treatment of Willie Bennett, the man the police framed for the murder. As we might have expected, discourse of this sort was brief and vacillating in the white groups but fully developed and impassioned in the groups of color. Consider the following brief examples from two white groups:

Group: Meadowbrook Street
Cast:
Jerry, A manager with an advanced degree, in his 50s.

Sandy: I think that after going through [the Stuart affair] -- in terms of still today you're not quite sure in terms of whether it was handled improperly or properly. That it didn't do a very -- it didn't do the Boston Police Department any credit in terms of how the whole thing was handled. Especially in terms of -- you know -- taking the quick identity and then going after every black male who had a black sweatshirt on and assuming that they were--

Unknown: The person.

Sandy: -- the person, you know.

Jerry: It really left a bad taste in your mouth about some of the ethnic communities around here, too, how they are very bigoted.

Group: Holyoke Street Group

Carol: I think [the Stuart affair] had a very devastation impact on the Mission Hill neighborhood. And I think it will take a long time for those people to trust the

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police again. Because I suppose the police were very rough, I mean they stopped any young black male -- you know-- everyone they saw was stopped and questioned and I think it will take a really long time for people to forget that.

One white participant seemed to be ready to generalize from the Stuart case to routine police practice but backed-off under challenge from others in his group:

Group: Jacob's Lane

Alex: Well, it makes you wonder, too, in that regard, that if he had said some white guy had come in and stolen his car, [whether] they would have been so quick to go find the white guy. Right away, because it was in Mission Hill, and he said it was black guy who shot them -- whammo! -- immediately they went and picked up the suspect because he was black. Literally. So I don't know, I just think that it was bad all around.

Paula (to Laura): What do you think?

Laura: I mean, I don't agree that just because he said it was a black man -- I think that if he said a white person they would not have disre-- They would have taken the same approach. They would have gone looking for a white man because -- looking at Stuart himself first, because he was shot. I don't think it's JUST because he said he was black.

Alex: No, but I think that really carried a lot of weight with the police *in that area*. It just fell into place. There is a great deal of crime over there, and so naturally, assuming that the black man was named, it seemed to fall into place. I'm not [saying] they

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wouldn't have looked for a white man, but I wonder if they would have looked as hard.

Laura: But I think it's also an area where a lot of white people travel in that area -- because of the hospital there are a lot of white people over there.

Carol: I think they would have looked as hard because of the nature of the crime.

Unknown: Yes.

Alex: Because she was pregnant.

Carol: Because she was pregnant, her baby was dead, and the whole business.

In contrast to these equivocal expressions of criticism, consider the following from a group of color:

Group: Concord Street
(In response to the trigger question -- see Appendix A, question six:)

June: Boston is going to be known for [the Stuart case]. No one's gonna forget this -- just like in L.A., Rodney King... I think the Stuart case is not gonna be buried. It's gonna live on for a long time. It has a very negative effect because of the police and the police are brainwashed to a certain extent too -- even by the media. This is why they tore these people's houses up and stuff. They're going in there busting people that don't got nothing to do with it. Butstin' down their house -- you know what I'm saying? What is this?

June's discourse is not simply more vivid and impassioned than the discourse heard in the white groups. It also links

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the reaction of Boston police to the Stuart murder to the
beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police. In so doing,
June is developing an argument about police behavior *in
general*. This excerpt is thus also an example of a strong
display of the frame.

Strong Displays

The move from specific to general expressions of RACIST
SYSTEM could be heard in six groups of color but in just one
white group. In the latter, a speaker also mentioned the
King episode, commenting that "there is a lot of brutality
among law enforcement officers." But with that exception,
strong displays of the frame were absent in the white
conversations.

References to King comprised the largest category of
strong displays in the groups of color, appearing in five
conversations including June's. But most speakers in these
groups were more explicit than June in drawing out the
message of the King beating. Consider the following:

Group: Longwood Road
Martin: Charles Stuart -- Mission Hill Housing Projects --
   it's what goes on in every state of the nation. I mean
   it's nothing new. I see it happening with Charles Stuart,
   Rodney King, and I don't see it ever going to change. I
   mean we are a minority here and unless people learn to
   treat each other equally it's not going to change. I
   basically see it like that.

Charges of police harassment of blacks and other minorities *independent* of discourse on King could be heard in four groups of color. Alice's speech, cross-coded as a rebuttal to FAULTY SYSTEM and quoted in ch pter four, is an example.

In four groups of color speakers conjured the frame by charging that the police and the courts use a 'double standard' when it comes to blacks. This category includes charges that minorities "do not get a fair shake within the criminal system," that whites receive preferential treatment, and that police are more likely to assume that a complaint is veridical when the alleged offender is black. The following excerpt contains instances of the latter two types of claim:

Group: Fisher Hill Road

Deborah: We see, you know, on national television, young
　　　black men just slammed up against walls and frisked down
　　　and all of that and you know just because they happened
　　　to be in a particular area at a particular hour. So --
Sam:　The crime boss -- who was that? Archa?
Deborah: Patriarcha.
Sam:　Whatever. They had him -- they had him handcuffs *in*
　　　front of him. Like to put his hands where he *want* to.
　　　But [the hands of black suspects they put] in the back.
　　　So see, there's lots of differences in that, you know.
　　　No question about that.
Karl: It's racist. It's racism. In the State of
　　　Massachusetts -- any way you look at it.

Unknown: No question, that's right.

Karl: And I don't know if you all know -- Boston is the
mother of this country and she's the mother of racism.
She's the mother of this country and she's the mother of
racism.

Sam: The only difference that makes it sound different here
in Boston is -- I was raised up in the South also --

Karl: Yeah, I was too.

Sam: -- and here's the thing what happened: We know what's
going on here. And these people here are racist. They
know but they don't want to come out and admit it.
That's the difference. See, they don't want to admit.
They know they're racist but they'll come and smile in
your face. And let them get behind your back -- Don't
you look at a girl! If you look at a girl and she happen
to say rape -- regardless, you are the one. Regardless,
you're the one.

RACIST SYSTEM can also be conjured through the charge

that courts and police do not provide "equal protection" to

black neighborhoods. This charge was expressed in two black

groups, including once by a speaker who stated that "a lot of

us think that [if] we kill our people, nothing gonna be done,

and usually it's not, and I think that's why they [keep]

doing it."

Before turning to the rebuttals there is one more type of

RACIST SYSTEM display that warrants attention. In four

groups of color speakers argued that forces external to the

black community are encouraging its destruction. The

specific charge advanced in three of these groups is that

inner-city drug trafficking is either tolerated or encouraged
by the powers that be. Consider the following two
illustrations of this *conspiracy* argument:

Group: Peach Tree Lane

Margaret: Let me say a little something about that. I think
that crime is introduced into our community. It's
introduced by outside elements who find we are
vulnerable. They come in with their drugs, they come in
with their guns, they come in with the money and the
incentives. ["Right" -- voices interject] And they find
poor people, people that feel they're up against the
wall, that don't have an education. You know. They're
the people that they want to make their millions for
them.

William: You see them in flashy cars, good clothes.

Margaret: Because where the poor people of these districts
make hundreds, these people from outside make
millions...How many of us could bring in millions of
dollars worth of marijuana? So they stick it to us. And
just because we're vulnerable. We're at the bottom of
the ladder, right? ["Right" -- voices agree] And then
they call us the criminals.

Unknown: We're the victims!

Margaret: Because they stand on the outside, you know,
clean. They live in the suburbs and people don't even
know. They say "We have lovely neighbors" you know?
"They dress so nice, they have good cars, they have
lovely homes." And they don't know that they are the
ones that are feeding these districts.

Ertha: That's why they can bring all the guns and things in.

Margaret: Yeah, because they look so nice.

Ertha: They got the boats to bring the stuff in and they own
        the little small planes which they just, whoosh, right
        over our heads.

Margaret: There's a kind of genocide going on. I mean
        everything is slanted if you know what I mean. The idea
        is that we're the criminals, you know, and we can't be
        educated. There's a lot of slant going on. We have the
        most diseases. We die earlier. We're killing each other
        off, you know? Things like that. This keeps on going,
        and going, and going. And it's designed to make us the
        kind of people that nobody would have any pity for. See,
        so if they ruin Roxbury, there's nobody in those other
        districts that give a damn! Because they're the kind of
        people that have those diseases, least educated. Not
        just poverty, we're just no good!

Group: Pleasant Street

Cast:

*Sheila, a college graduate who works as an administrative
        aide, in her mid-40s.*

Sheila: I have this philosophy that I say it's all part of a
        plan -- and the people get scared when I say that.

Sharlene: I agree. I agree.

Sheila: It's all part of a plan: How do you do away with a
        race of people without a law or anything? You let them
        kill off each other.

Sharlene: Because if it wasn't part of a plan they couldn't
        congregate like that in any other neighborhood, the way
        they do here on the corners and stuff. So I really agree
        with you.

The other two incidence of this type of discourse are
less fully developed. In one case speakers charge that drugs

come "essentially" from the offices of the governor and the mayor. In the other, a speaker identifies the media as the external agent bent on repressing blacks:

Group: Longwood Road
(In response to question two:)
Alice: In general I would say -- see -- I don't think that
   violence has really gotten any worse. I think the
   publicity they show on the black folks has gotten
   enhanced more. I don't think that it's really that
   enormous. I think that the media portrays us to be worse
   and that it's on the increase to try to keep us in check
   -- to keep whatever going -- I mean -- I don't know --
   the whole ghettoized system going.

Rebuttal Displays

There were no direct rebuttals of the charge that the criminal justice system routinely operates in a racist fashion. But speakers in five white groups and two groups of color implicitly rejected the frame's relevance to the Stuart case. One type of rebuttal argument pointed out that Willie Bennett was "no saint" and hence his treatment by the police was at least understandable. Both rebuttals in groups of color consisted solely of this observation. It was also expressed in three white groups, but in each case in combination with a more general defense of the police.

The more general defense, advanced in varying degrees of detail in five white groups, insisted that police reaction to

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Carol Stuart's murder was reasonable given what the officers knew and the pressures under which they were operating. For example, consider this excerpt from the Maple Street group:

Eve: I think that particular case -- the reaction -- Charles Stuart didn't accuse a particular person that fit the description. So it was only natural that they would look to the black community because it wasn't that they were saying it was a black person, *he* had identified it as a black person. ["Right" -- a voice interjects] So therefore I don't see anything wrong with the fact that they went to the black community...
[A few paragraphs down in the transcript:]
Maynard: ...I don't blame the police for what happened. I'm sure that the papers love to play it up, but when you have to do something fast you have to do it fast...
Diane: Plus, I think there was tremendous pressure on the police department --
Unknown: Sure, absolutely.
Diane: -- the nature of the incident. They had to get, you know, they were under a lot of pressure, and I think people nowadays want instant solutions. They want that guy caught -- that day! They're not prepared to wait for weeks while the police solve the case.
Unknown: Right!

In two groups speakers argued that were the "situation reversed" police reaction would have been the same. We already encountered an instance of this argument in the Jacob's Lane excerpt quoted above.

Two other rebuttals deserve quick mention. A speaker in a mixed group argued that critics of the police "throw out the

baby with the bath water" and that the problem is limited to a few "rotten apples." And a speaker in a white group referred to the videotape of the King beating, but in order to argue that what "you see on a videotape may look much worse... but maybe it's not exactly the way it's shown."

Frame-Neutral Discourse

Of course, the Stuart question did not require a response in terms of the frame RACIST SYSTEM. The question was intentionally rather open-ended and engendered a wide variety of responses. Before concluding we should review some of the frame-neutral discourse sparked by the question.

First, speakers in eleven groups responded with criticism for an allegedly bungled police investigation. Participants noted a variety of facts that ought to have tipped off the police to Charles Stuart's culpability. In one speakers words "They forgot the first rule of law enforcement: the husband should have been the first suspect."

Second, speakers in 14 groups confessed that they were "taken" by Charle's Stuart's ploy "hook, line and sinker." This discourse had a confessional quality to it, but the speakers were quick to note in self-defense the compelling nature of the "stereotype" of the black male criminal:

Group: Holyoke Street
Jane: It was so clever for Charles Stuart to think of that, you know, that it attached such a fear that was already

present that a black male would jump into your car and kill you in the middle of Boston. And it was something so basic to so many people that they were just, you know, obsessed with it. And then when it came out that it was actually a domestic thing -- violence against a woman -- that was sort of masked in the idea that "Oh! Thank goodness it wasn't really a black man that did this." You know? And it was like "Oh it was this crazy man." But again, it was still a husband killing his wife, being violent against his eight-months pregnant wife. And that in itself is so horrific, but that isn't the big fear here. The fear was racial and not about gender -- that whole issue is kind of thrown out once we realized it wasn't a racial episode.

Third, speakers in two white groups and eight black commented that the Stuart case revealed just how racist a city is Boston. In the groups of color these comments often included comparisons of Boston to the South (in the latter, white people "don't treat you like very good and then stab you in the back") and were frequently accompanied by personal experience narratives about racism. While it is important to note that brief comments on the persistence of racism could be heard in two white groups, these comments were *not* expressions of RACIST SYSTEM. They were offered as commentary on racial attitudes of people in general, not as commentary on crime or its control.

Finally, speakers lauded the creation of a scholarship fund by Carol Stuart's family for Mission Hill youth (five

white groups and one black); criticized the media for "sensationalizing" the Stuart episode (10 groups); and lamented the effect the case has had on the reputations of Mission Hill and the City of Boston (11 groups).

CONCLUSION

MEDIA VIOLENCE was the least successful of the five frames. This may be simply an artifact of the research design; the frame is the only one that was not triggered in the conversations by a statement or a question. Two factors lead me to suspect that this is not the case: First, the other frames appeared in most of the conversations in either positive or negative form *prior to being triggered*. Second, MEDIA VIOLENCE was not only faint in the conversational discourse, it was also nearly invisible in the sample of elite public discourse.

In spite of its inconspicuousness in the conversations, we should note that there were no rebuttal displays of MEDIA VIOLENCE. The frame apparently has no negative form and indeed is virtually a consensus perspective on crime.[3]

Turning to RACIST SYSTEM, we first observe that discourse expressing the frame was difficult to locate in the conversations of white groups. It appeared in weak form in

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[3] This fact alone explains, at least in part, recent efforts by Attorney General Janet Reno and members of Congress to turn up the heat on broadcasters of television entertainment. See Jensen and Graham, 1993.

four conversations but in strong form in just one -- and
there only through a passing reference to Rodney King.
Rejections of RACIST SYSTEM, appearing in five white
conversations, were in fact much more common.

African American participants, on the other hand, spoke
readily about abuses by the police and racism in the society.
Indeed, the notions that police harass people of color and
that Boston is a very racist city were expressed in just
about every group of color and were unchallenged: they are
common places. But it is important to recognize that these
notions concerning racism seem to the conversationalists to
be irrelevant, for the most part, to an understanding of
crime. In virtually no case did a participant charge that
crime is encouraged by police harassment or court-ordered
incarceration of people of color, as a labeling theorist
might contend. In only one case did a speaker suggest that
specifically racial barriers to achievement, such as
segregation in housing and education or discrimination in
hiring, might be a source of crime.

The one glaring exception to this observation concerns
discourse on a putative conspiracy against inner-city blacks.
This argument has no analog in the op ed sample; perhaps its
absence from the public discourse accounts for its generally
vague nature. But talk of conspiracy reveals an apparently
widespread sentiment that powerful white people are knowingly
responsible for the guns and drugs in black neighborhoods.

The significance of these sentiments and of their absence in the public discourse is taken up in the two chapters that follow.

Chapter Seven

CLASS, RACE AND RESOURCE STRATEGY:
EXPLAINING FRAME PERFORMANCE

Why do certain frames perform well while others flop?
Gamson (1992) argues that in constructing meaning people draw
upon three types of *ideational resources*: popular wisdom,
experiential knowledge and media discourse.[1] He further
distinguishes three types of *resource strategies* that
conversationalists use to arrive at shared frames. *Personal·
strategies* are those that combine popular wisdom with
experiential knowledge. *Cultural strategies* are those that
combine popular wisdom with media discourse. *Integrated
strategies* are those that combine all three types of
resources. "There are theoretical reasons" Gamson argues,

> for expecting that frames based on the integration of all
> three types of resources will be more robust. They enable
> people to bridge the personal and cultural and to link
> issue frames to broader cultural themes (134).

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[1] Attention to resoruce use in popular discourse is spreading. Gamson's
model is the most elaborate, but see also Billig, 1987; Graber, 1988;
Swidler, 1986; Gusfield, 1981; and Neuman et al, 1993.

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Integrated strategies combine knowledge that is valued because it is "direct... relatively unmediated" with knowledge that is valued because it is widely shared (126).

Gamson's argument suggests a good starting point for our inquiry. If integrated resource strategies produce especially robust frames, then we should find that the frames which performed most successfully in the conversations are also the ones most readily conjured through a combination of cultural and personal resources.

The relationship between frame performances and the participants' resource strategies is important because its elucidation promises to show us not just *what* people say but *why* they say it. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting, so in the next section we explore how popular wisdom, media discourse and experiential knowledge were used in relation to the various frames. But first we need to establish some general expectations:

First, SOCIAL BREAKDOWN and FAULTY SYSTEM were the two most successful frames; we therefore expect that both were expressed through combinations of cultural and personal resources. Second, BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES performed relatively poorly; we therefore expect that participants failed to integrate the two levels of resources in expressing this frame. Third, RACIST SYSTEM performed moderately well in the groups of color but poorly in the white groups; we therefore expect that participants in the groups of color –

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but not in the white groups - integrated cultural and personal resources in expressing this frame.

Now we can proceed.

RESOURCE STRATEGIES

As noted in chapter two, the first phase of coding produced five printouts, each one containing discourse relevant to a particular frame. These printouts were first analyzed to determine the lines of argument employed by participants to conjure the various frames. The results of *that* analysis were presented in chapters three through six. The printouts were then examined again, this time for the participants' resource strategies. In what follows I describe the results of this second phase of analysis.

Because one purpose of this analysis was to test Gamson's argument, I employed the operational definitions described in *Talking Politics*. Experiential knowledge was thus operationally defined to include all stories told by participants about personal experiences or those of their family members. Such *personal experience narratives* are typically shared to make a point and hence to conjure a frame. Recall that in chapter three we considered several such stories about growing up poor.[2] These stories were told by participant's to make the point that poverty, *per se*, does

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[2] See, for example, the speeches of Clara and Alice.

not cause crime. They were thus told to rebut the frame BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES.[3]

Media discourse is introduced into conversation in two ways. First, speakers can directly refer to a news item or bit of information gleaned from the mass media, as when Alex tells of a "girl on the news" who said "I can do anything I want 'til I'm 18... because I'm underage."[4] Second, speakers can make use of public figures, catchphrases, or spotlighted facts that are part of the public discourse on crime. For example, discourse that mentions Rodney King draws upon a figure who is deeply implicated in the public discourse on policing. Such discourse typically occurs within the frame RACIST SYSTEM. Accordingly, references to King were treated as uses of media discourse in support of RACIST SYSTEM.[5]

Similarly the public discourse on crime is rife with catchphrases and slogans. These, too, tend to be properties of particular frames. When a speaker laments a jail's "revolving door," she is drawing upon a slogan deeply

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[3] Gamson notes that people also tell stories about friends and co-workers, and that it is difficult to know where to draw the line on what constitutes personal experience. He decided to restrict the operational definition for experiential knowledge to a speaker's stories about herself and her immediate family. In the interests of consistency, I adopted the same restriction.

[4] See chapter four.

[5] By "in support" I mean to conjure the frame. Discourse on Rodney King can be used to rebut as well as to advance RACIST SYSTEM, as indeed it was in one of the conversations (see chapter six).

embedded in the public discourse on crime -- and she is keying the frame FAULTY SYSTEM. Accordingly, use of this slogan was treated as an instance of media discourse in support of FAULTY SYSTEM.

Finally, the public discourse on crime includes a range of "spotlighted facts" which also tend to be properties of particular frames.[6] Such facts may be part of the experiential knowledge of researchers or criminal justice administrators but among regular people they are known strictly through their prominence in the mass media (cf. Gusfield, 1981). When, for example, Carol argues that "all of our manufacturing jobs...go on to Third World countries and there's just not a lot of upward mobility for people who want to work at minimum wage" she is drawing upon spotlighted facts that are part of the public discourse.[7] More specifically, these facts are properties of the frame BLOCKED OPPORTUNTIES and were used in the conversation to conjure that frame.[8]

Popular wisdom is the most commonly used resource but also the one most difficult to draw boundaries around. The

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[6] The term "spotlighted fact" is Gamson's (p. 120). Note also that by "fact" I mean *fact claim*. As Gamson points out, the truth value of a particular fact is irrelevant to this kind of analysis.

[7] See chapter three.

[8] The coding guide (Appendix B) lists, for each frame, the catchphrases, public figures and spotlighted facts treated as media discourse.

term refers to popular beliefs about the way the world works. These beliefs generally enter conversations through maxims, rules of thumb, Biblical sayings and analogies to everyday life situations. On the continuum that extends from cultural resources (media discourse) to personal resources (experiential knowledge), popular wisdom is in the middle. In Gamson's (p. 126) words, popular wisdom is

> an amalgam of personal and cultural. On the one hand, it embodies the lessons of personal experience. One's experiences take on meaning by being linked to these rules of thumb. They help to transform the unique experience of different individuals into a bit of popular wisdom that invokes others' similar experiences... Popular wisdom is also part of the media discourse on these issues. Analogies to everyday life and popular maxims are often invoked to make abstract frames more immediate and concrete.

When Vanessa argues that "focusing...on putting these people in jail, *it's like closing the door after the horse is gone,*" she is drawing on a bit of popular wisdom to rebut FAULTY SYSTEM.[9] More examples of popular wisdom and the other resources will follow, so without further delay we turn to the conversations.

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[9] See chapter four.

Experiential Knowledge

Table A describes the participants' use of experiential knowledge to support the various frames. The first column indicates the number of conversations in which the resource was introduced at least once in support of each frame.[10] The second column indicates the number of conversations in which the resource was used more than once.

Table A

Experiential Knowlege

	# groups using experiential knowledge	
	1x	>1x
FAULTY SYSTEM	16	8
SOCIAL BREAKDOWN	18	17
BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES	3	1
RACIST SYSTEM		
black groups	7	4
white groups	0	0
mixed groups	0	0

n = 20 groups

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[10] MEDIA VIOLENCE is not included in this analysis because of its relative obscurity in the transcripts.

We see that conversationalists readily drew upon their personal experiences and those of their family members to conjure FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. Likewise, participants in the groups of color frequently drew upon the resource to conjure RACIST SYSTEM. But participants in just three groups managed to introduce experiential knowledge in support of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, and participants in the white and mixed groups *never* introduced it to conjure RACIST SYSTEM.

Let us briefly review some of the kinds of experiences participants drew upon to support the various frames. The experiential knowledge typically used to bolster FAULTY SYSTEM consisted of narratives about encounters with either the police or the courts. Several participants apparently knew the outcomes of cases that personally affected them. For example:

Dean Avenue
Jane: A life sentence is only something like seven years, nine years.
Unknown: Give me a break!
Jane: I'm serious.
Susan: The guy that gets sentenced -- All right, our house was broken into, all right? The guy got 30 years. He was out in three.
Alex: He made a deal.

Others reported on delayed police response to 911 calls, neighborhood drug operations tolerated in spite of frequent complaints, and sightings of officers "schmoozing with construction workers." One woman reported on a trial for which she served as an alternate juror:

School Street
Janice: The young man whose trial I sat in on...this young man was sentenced to three years and [the judge] *suspended* the sentence for this young man. Now he was caught with the smoking gun and the bullets. They chased him and another one -- but it was the judge! It's the judges! It's the judiciary system!

The kind of experiential knowledge most frequently used to key or bolster SOCIAL BREAKDOWN consisted of comparisons between prevailing neighboring and child-rearing practices and those the speaker remembered from her childhood. In some cases speakers recalled their parents as "loving" and "supportive." But in most, parents and neighbors were recalled as strict disciplinarians, albeit affectionately. We encountered several examples of these narratives in chapter five.[11] They were told to make a point: Contemporary parents and neighbors, because of their reluctance to demand proper behavior, bear responsibility for delinquent children. Were today's community members as responsible and demanding as

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[11] See, for examples, the speeches of Martin, Alex and Sam.

their forebears, the problem of crime would be much
diminished.

We have also already encountered an example of
experiential knowledge used to support BLOCKED OPPORTUNTIES.
In chapter three we heard Charles recall that as a young man
he could easily find work at O.J.'s Car Wash or Rothstein's
Flower Distributors: "I didn't have to turn to crime to feed
myself or to feed my family." But the big news here is how
rare it was for participants to use experiential knowledge to
conjure this frame. While BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES' performance
was considerably weaker than either FAULTY SYSTEM or SOCIAL
BREAKDOWN, its key elements were expressed by at least some
participants in 13 of the 20 conversations. But in only
three of these did speakers draw upon their personal
experiences in support of the frame.

Interestingly, speakers in nine conversations introduced
experiential knowledge to *rebut* BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and in
five conversations they did so more than once. The
experiential knowledge used most frequently in these rebuttal
displays consisted of narratives about growing up poor. We
encountered examples of these narratives in chapter three.[12]
Their logic is straightforward: We grew up poor. If poverty
causes crime, then why are we not criminals? An additional
example:

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[12] See, for examples, the speeches of Clara and Alice.

Group: Hallibut Square

Janet: I can't buy that because you're poor that you have to
be a criminal. I can't buy that. Cause most of us that
grew up here on Mission Hill, we were poor.

Other types of experiential knowledge were also introduced to
rebut BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. For example, several African
American speakers related encounters with drug dealers in
which the latter stated their unwillingness to work a regular
job. For example:

Group: Concord Street

June: I was talking to one guy and I said "Why do you guys
do this?" You know? "If I found you a job would you --"
He's like "No, there *are* jobs." He said to me someone
called him for a job and I think it was paying like five
dollars or something an hour. He was like "I'm not
taking this job." I mean... he just picked, he just
chose to do this thing. Now he could have chose to go to
college or to take the job. Why did he have to pick the
crime?

Finally, recall that RACIST SYTSEM was conjured in seven
of the nine groups of color. In *every one* of these groups
experiential knowledge was introduced to bolster the frame.
Many of the anecdotes were about racism in general rather
than racism practiced by agents of the criminal justice
system. But these anecdotes were told in order to drive home

the point that racism is *pervasive* and hence *necessarily* reflected in the work of the police and the courts. Consider the following example:

Group: Woodman Road

Doris: The racism in Boston has to be dealt with. It has to be dealt a death blow...

Clara: Yeah but here, from the beginning of time, ever since I can remember, there was racism. When we're dead and gone Doris there's gonna be racism. But you know why? Because people are IGNORANT! All right? They let the color of somebody's SKIN -- you know -- and that's wrong. I remember years ago when I lived in Roxbury -- all up in here were nothing but white people. Very few black. All from Grove Hall all the way up. And I was up here by Mayflower Street visiting one day and this car full of white kids stopped: "Nigger, what you doin' up here?" Years ago you couldn't come up in this neighborhood -- not walking or catching the MBTA.[13]

Were we to use a more restrictive standard and include only experiential knowledge of a racist justice system, then we would count use of such knowledge in four conversations. An instance of *this* type of resource use appeared in chapter six, in the excerpt from the Pleasant Street group. Recall that Sharlene drew upon her experiential knowledge of open-air drug dealing to bolster a charge of conspiracy: "If it wasn't part of a plan they couldn't congregate like that in

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[13] The Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority is Boston's subway system.

any other neighborhood." Another instance of experiential knowledge of a racist justice system could be heard in the Concord Street conversation. Again, the speaker is June:

June: I feel that a white person *can* point and say, you
    know, that a black person did it. And I have been in a
    situation where I was with someone, and they was like,
    "You fit the desccription of so and so," and I was like
    "This guy was with me the whole time. What are you
    talking about?" There's this stigma. Just this
    stereotype that blacks are like that.

Media Discourse

Table B describes participants' use of media discourse to support the various frames. Note that the row for RACIST SYSTEM counts only media discourse used to bolster *strong* versions of the frame.[14]

The pattern is basically familiar. As was the case for experiential knowledge, the participants readily introduced media discourse in support of FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN, but rarely did so to support BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. With respect to RACIST SYSTEM the findings

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[14] Recall that weak displays of the frame charged racial discrimination in the handling of the Stuart case but failed to generalize from it. Strong displays, on the other hand, treated racial discrimination in the justice system as pervasive, a matter of routine practice. Use of media discourse in the former was ubiquitous; but this is uninteresting, as by definition weak displays were those that discussed what was essentially a media spectacle.

are also similar, but since only one white group conjured a strong version of the frame, this was to be expected.

	# groups using media discourse	
	1x	>1x
FAULTY SYSTEM	18	13
SOCIAL BREAKDOWN	15	9
BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES	6	2
RACIST SYSTEM		
black groups	6	3
white groups	1	0
mixed groups	0	0

Table B
Media Discourse

n = 20 groups

But if we compare the second columns in Tables A and B we do find some noteworthy differences. It appears that experiential knowledge is more compatible with SOCIAL BREAKDOWN than is media discourse, and that media discourse is more compatible with FAULTY SYSTEM than is experiential knowledge. It also seems that media discourse is more

readily introduced than experiential knowledge to bolster BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES.

Let us briefly consider the types of media discourse used to support the different frames. We begin with FAULTY SYSTEM. Direct references to news stories could be heard in 12 groups, making them the type of media discourse most commonly used to bolster the frame. In the context of a discussion of capital punishment, for example, conversationalists in the Dean Avenue group drew upon a sensational news story about a man who apparently cannibalized his murder victims:

Eleanor: They need to KILL some people -- I'm sorry.
Susan: This guy, now, Jeffrey, what's his face?
Unknown: Dahmer.
Susan: He's insane. What person in their sane mind would --
Eleanor: ...Dahmer may be innocent.
Unknown: Oh no!
Unknown: Oh PLEASE!
Alex: They caught him with a heart in his fridge!
Several: Auuuug!
Alex: He had things in the pot Eleanor! You know, he got
    caught with his hand in the pot!

Similarly, conversationalists in the Peach Tree Lane group recalled both talk-show and 60 Minutes episodes relevant to their discussion. The telephone to which Margaret refers in the following excerpt was apparently used by a prison inmate to keep track of his drug dealing operation from behind bars:

Ertha: They're too light with them. They smack them on the
    hand, even give them weekends to have a little get-
    together with their wives or their girlfriends. They
    have a private room and every doggone thing. Hey! People
    dying to get in jail to have the privilege [laughter].
    Seen it on t.v. It was on one of the talk shows, you
    know? They had their little private time.
Margaret: They're trying to keep riots down, you see. But I
    think they should man the prisons. That's what I think.
    Man the prisons and let that keep riots down instead of
    giving them all the privileges that they get. There was
    a 60 Minutes on about a telephone [laughter].
Ertha: This guy, wasn't he making all kinds of calls?
Margaret: A million dollars.

Slogans and catchphrases were used to bolster the frame
in seven conversations. The number would have been much
larger had I counted "slap on the wrist" or a number of
similar tropes as forms of media discourse. In the end I
decided to restrict the operational definition for media
slogans to those that are used exclusively to describe the
criminal justice system. Thus I counted as media discourse
the participants claims that prisons have "revolving doors,"
that crime victims are "victimized twice," that the justice
system protects the rights of criminals but not those of
victims, that the hands of the police are "tied," that
offenders are released on "technicalities," that if "you do

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the crime you should do the time," and that no one wants a prison in her "backyard."

Finally, several different kinds of spotlighted facts were introduced both to support and to rebut FAULTY SYSTEM. The latter are not represented in Table B but deserve attention. In two groups speakers commented that the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the developed world, and in one a speaker lamented the impact of mandatory minimum sentences on prison conditions. Spotlighted facts introduced *to support* the frame were of course much more numerous. Speakers discussed, for example, early release, plea bargaining, double bunking ("Quadruple bunk 'em!"), electronic monitoring, community service, restraining orders, community policing and "boot camps."

Turning next to SOCIAL BREAKDOWN, we must immediately deal with a problem. The most common type of media discourse used in the conversations also proved to be a borderline case. In five conversations speakers referred to "single parent families" or "single mothers." Am I justified in counting mere use of this trope as an instance of media discourse? The manner in which it appeared in two conversations led me to conclude that I am. Consider this evidence: In the following excerpt Sally is telling the others about her visit to the mother of a boy who set fire to her shed:

> *Group: Gordon Road*
> Sally: I did go over and talk to the parent. He had no
>   father. I don't know what you call them -- "one-parent"
>   I guess you call it?
> Martha: Single. Single parents.
> Sally: Single parent. And she said she'd take care of him.

Why does Sally grope for just the right phrase? I suspect that she is aware that a public discourse exists on "single parent" families -- one that she feels is relevant to the issue of crime. By reaching for the proper phrase she is attempting to render her bit of experiential knowledge relevant to the public debate.

A second bit of evidence can be inferred from a speaker who gets the trope wrong: "I came up in a single family home -- my father died real young." This speaker is not describing a quality of her childhood dwelling, so why the fumble? I suspect that the error stems from the speaker's attempt to appropriate a bit of media discourse that is not quite native. She too would like to render her experiential knowledge relevant to a public issue. Had she relied strictly upon the vernacular she might have avoided the slip, but her story would have also lost much of its value.[15]

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[15] The trope "single parent family" was the sole instance of media discourse in just one conversation. The reader who is unpersuaded by my argument can adjust the findings accordingly.

The other uses of media discourse were less equivocal. In four conversations speakers decried a crisis in "family values" thus keying a theme from the 1992 presidential campaign. And in two conversations each, speakers commented on "babies having babies,"[16] "Ozzie and Harriet,"[17] and Kitty Genovese.[18] Other uses of media discourse were idiosyncratic, including references to high divorce rates, television dramas and various news stories.

The media discourse used to bolster BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES in every instance but one consisted of spotlighted facts.[19] Because of the paucity of qualifying material, I decided to apply the criteria liberally. Thus, I regarded as a spotlighted fact the simple observation that "kids don't have jobs," but I drew the line at the less specific claim that "there are no jobs." In the public discourse on crime, the rate of juvenile unemployment occupies a prominent place, but the same cannot be said for the claim that no one has work.[20] The spotlighted facts used in the other conversations were

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[16] "Babies having babies" describes a public trend. It is thus a spotlighted fact in addition to a catchphrase.

[17] Ozzie and Harriet Nelson are characters on a once popular television series depicting a model American family.

[18] See chapter five.

[19] The one exception was use of the term "underclass" which I treated as a catchprhrase belonging to the frame.

[20] The reader who is unconvinced should subtract two conversations from Table B.

less marginal: Speakers in four conversations attributed crime -- sometimes obliquely -- to either Reagan budget cuts, poor day care and family leave policies, industrial flight, or a minimum wage that is too low.

Finally, we turn to media discourse used to bolster strong versions of RACIST SYSTEM. In chapter six I noted that Rodney King was mentioned in the conversations of five of the groups of color. This public figure was the most frequent type of media discourse used to bolster the frame. David Duke, another public figure, made an appearance in one conversation. Other types of media resources included things seen on television[21] and spotlighted facts.[22]

Popular Wisdom

Many analysts of discourse have noted the contradictory nature of popular beliefs. Gamson (1992) observes that competing maxims contribute to different framings of issues. Billig (1987) argues that the "dillematic" quality of common-sense is the foundation for arguing and thinking. Edelman (1977) argues that the contradictory quality of meaningful "symbols" and "vocabularies" enable people to identify with contradictory political positions. On crime, also, people

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[21] For two examples in a single excerpt, see the exchange between members of the Fisher Hill group in chapter six.

[22] For example, see Margaret's contribution to the Peach Tree Lane exchange in chatper six.

express popular wisdom that supports contradictory framings. But not all beliefs are equally resonant. In this section we examine the types of popular wisdom that appeared most frequently in the conversations and seem to be most important to the performances of the various frames. At the outset, however, I concede that the fuzzy boundaries around the concept "popular wisdom" make a rigorous accounting difficult. Accordingly, I will not quantify my findings but offer a strictly interpretive account.

Two types of popular wisdom appear in numerous discussions to bolster FAULTY SYSTEM. The first type stresses the importance of deterrence; it holds that in the absence of punishment, people will violate the rules. Analogies to disciplining children were a common mechanism for introducing this type of knowledge. Consider the following examples:

Group: Concord Street
(In response to the trigger statement [see Appendix B, question three, statement one]:)
Karen: I'll strongly agree with that, and that's something that Joy and I were just talking about. It's like if -- you know -- we were talking about teaching in the public schools and how, you know an analogy to that would be if the students knew they were going to be reprimanded for whatever they do wrong, then maybe they wouldn't do it. There has to be consequences.

Group: Meadowbrook Street

Jerry: I believe that if the justice system does not arrest, try, convict and sentence criminals, then they'll take advantage of that fact. So the question is, in answering the question, the question is, do I think that the criminal justice system is doing that job and doing it effectively. And I guess I don't think it is.

[One page down in the transcript:]

Jenny: I always wondered if [prison] was REALLY a miserable place to be and they really -- you had NO rights, in a sense, while you're in there, you were really being punished -- you know it's kind of like when we were younger and were told to sit in a corner, they didn't let you sit with a television in front of you. You had to sit in a corner and look at nothing so that you knew you didn't want to do it.

But in a few conversations speakers offered popular wisdom with the opposite message:

Group: Morton Road
Cast:
Judith, an assistant-manager with a college degree, in her late 20s.
(In response to the trigger statement:)

Judith: I don't think people specifically do something because they know they can get away with it. There are a lot of things people think of -- jeez, I can get away with this, but they know morally, y'know, it's not right so they don't.

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The second form of popular wisdom used to bolster FAULTY SYSTEM stresses the flaws inherent in all large bureaucratic organizations. Speakers extended their popular wisdom on corruption, nepotism, organizational waste and mismanagement to the particular case of the criminal justice system. Consider the following examples:

Group: Grove Hills Parkway
Ruth: My feeling is that -- I used to work for the news. You turn out a program every day and you have to produce stories every day. So you always have to come up with new ideas. It's sort of like a roller coaster that you get on and can't get off, because there is no time to get off of it. So sometimes you find yourself putting stories out there that maybe shouldn't be on the air for whatever the reason. But you have to put it on there, because of the roller coaster. You're still on the ride. Well that's the way it impresses me. What's going on right now in society is that we're on this roller coaster and we don't have time to stop, reflect, get off, and look and see where it's not working, because every day you have 100 people going to Roxbury Court, you know, being prosecuted for whatever crimes they've committed the night before. So no one has a chance to stop and say "Hey, this isn't working."

Group: Hallibut Square
Phyllis: They have to give some funding to the courts, too, because everybody is just passing the buck. First of all, you don't have any probation officers...

[A few lines down in the transcript:]

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Bob: They waste they're money on the most stupid -- like they redid Copley Square. For what? I thought it was fine just the way it was --

Phyllis: Didn't you love it when they were going to do the park?

Bob: -- and the new State House clock? How do you like that, huh?

Turning now to popular wisdom in support of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN, two types could be heard in multiple conversations. The first insists that in the absence of discipline and proper moral instruction, children will not learn to behave properly. For example:

Group: Gordon Road

Martha: It comes down to these -- teach the child right from wrong and what they should do and what they can't do. From when they're very young. Instill in them the way they did it to us. This way, you'll have a chance -- at least a 50-50 chance of getting a child to go right, to do the right things. In other words, the Golden Rule, "Do Onto Others." You have to start when they're very young.

In the next excerpt, this bit of popular wisdom is combined with the second type. The latter asserts that children who are either not "kept busy" or not properly supervised tend to get into trouble. We pick up in the middle of a discussion of the public schools:

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Group: Fisher Hill Road

Deborah: What about the younger kids with the educational
system. We were just talking about the school committee
and the mayor and all of that. The school system is
poor, inadequate.

Unknown: Very poor.

Deborah: So that certainly contributed. Their interests are
not being kept for those five, six hours that they're
there. So they walk out of there. Idle hands are the
devil's workshop, or something?

Georgia: That's true too, but I don't think that's an
offshoot of poverty. I think that's a person's, well,
bring it back down to the parents and stuff. If you
don't instill certain things in a child no matter what
you give them --

Deborah: O.k. I'll go on with that.

Georgia: -- I mean, if you don't have standards, you don't
have morals, you know -- you don't have basic beliefs,
everything's open to you. And those are the things I
think that have to -- that begin in the home at a very
young age.

Unknown: Yeah.

Georgia: And I don't think that's governed really by
poverty. I've known too many people that have been dirt
poor that have overcome so many --

Deborah: Obstacles.

Georgia -- adversity and stuff.

For BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, the most common types of
popular wisdom reinforced *rejections* of the frame. Two types
seemed to predominate. Both should be familiar; they have
appeared in many of the excerpts and are staples of American

cultural criticism on the topic of *individualism* (cf. Bellah et al, 1985; Carbaugh, 1989; Gamson, 1992; Gans, 1979, 1988). The first insists that people *freely choose* their own courses of action; it thus rejects all forms of determinism, including biological and economic. Christine's speech in chapter three ("It's a personal choice...It's just a choice you make whether you do [crime] or you don't") is an example of this type of popular wisdom -- as is June's first speech above in this chapter.

While an essential part of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES' negative incarnation, popular wisdom on the freedom to choose was sometimes expressed to reinforce FAULTY SYSTEM. Consider the following comment from a speaker who might well have been channeling the spirit of Cesare Beccaria:

Group: Grove Hills Parkway
Ruth: When I say the criminals, I mean people who've chosen
    that kind of behavior for themselves, for whatever
    reason. I don't think people are born criminal. It's
    just a name we give people -- I could be a criminal.
    People who want to do that, somehow the message does have
    to get out that, no, this cannot be done easily. The
    consequences are even more -- the price that they're
    going to have to pay for that activity is gonna be more
    than what they're willing to pay. Right now I don't
    think it is that way.

The second, closely related type of knowledge insists that the class/race structure in America is sufficiently open to permit upward mobility. This wisdom is often communicated

through the trope "You CAN make it." It is present in white and black conversations but seems, on the whole, more central to the latter. Vanessa's speech quoted in chapter five ("If you're a Black person there's no doubt that there's racism... You *can* overcome it and that's what you have to teach your children") is one example. Clara's speech in chapter three is another.

Finally, we turn to popular wisdom used to bolster RACIST SYSTEM. Two types were important to both strong and weak displays of the frame. The first insists that racism continues to operate in the society. In the conversations it was offered against the hypothetical interlocutor who might charge that the problem has long since been solved. Not surprisingly, this type of wisdom was expressed in eight of the nine groups of color but in just two white groups. When Clara (above, this chapter) insists that

When we're dead and gone ... there's gonna be racism.
But you know why? Because people are IGNORANT!

she is drawing upon this type of wisdom.

The second type of popular wisdom used to support the frame asserts that *everyone* fears young black males. In the conversations, this bit of knowledge was used to explain police and popular reaction to the Stuart murder. Speakers typically confessed to buying the "big con job" "hook line and sinker." By offering this confession they succeeded in

both lamenting the power of the stereotype and extending a bit of empathy to the police officers charged with mishandling the case. They were able to do so because of the shared notion that *everyone* fears the young black male. In chapter six we listened to Jane describe the stereotype with exceptional insight. In this final excerpt, we hear Alex make much the same argument:

Group: Dean Avenue

Alex: I really can't sort out clearly the various levels that this situation with Carol Stuart -- how it affected me. I do know, for example, that I bought the big con job. I mean, something in my head immediately reacted to the notion ... It was a knee-jerk reaction for me because I -- You see it's much easier for me to think of a black guy over at Mission Hill ripping -- making that happen than it would be if a white guy had done that. Somehow it made it more believable to me and --

Several: Yeah, that's what he planned --

Alex: -- gee whiz, so that there is a stereotype and because I felt bad that I was victimized by that stereotype too, and it doesn't mean that I felt any responsibility -- I didn't. That was an individual act. But that's what tripped me up at the very beginning.

* * *

We see that the set of expectations which framed this chapter are largely supported: The frames which performed most successfully in the conversations proved to be the ones most readily expressed through both personal and cultural

resources. These findings support the argument Gamson advances in *Talking Politics*. They are also consistent with Graber's (1980:74) observation that views on crime and the criminal justice system are "heavily attributed to personal experiences..."

But why would not/could not more participants find experiential knowledge and media discourse to support BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES? And why were participants in so many groups of color but so few white groups able to introduce both media discourse and experiential knowledge in support of RACIST SYSTEM? In a word, what factors governed the availability and attractiveness of resources to the conversation participants? If we can answer this question, then we can go a long way toward explaining frame peformance.

The nature of the media discourse clearly played a role in determining the likelihood that its elements would be used as resources to conjure the various frames. FAULTY SYSTEM was the dominant frame in the op ed sample and also the frame most frequently conjured in the conversations through use of media discourse (see page 203). At the same time, MEDIA VIOLENCE and RACIST SYSTEM were the least successful frames in the op ed sample and, together with BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, were also the frames least likely to be conjured in the conversations through media discourse.

Not only is the volume of media discourse on

each frame important, however, but so too is its quality. This is especially evident when contrasting the participants' use of media discourse to bolster BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES with their use of media discourse to bolster SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. The overall performances of the two frames were roughly comparable in the op ed sample, but SOCIAL BREAKDOWN was frequently introduced in the conversations through use of media disocurse while BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES was rarely introduced in this fashion. What accounts for this difference? I think the key lies in the fact that the media discourse on SOCIAL BREAKDOWN features memorable catchphrases and slogans ("family values," "babies having babies") while the media discourse on BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES consists almost exclusively of comparatively dry fact claims.

The nature of the media discourse, however, is not alone in determining whether its elements get introduced into conversation. Note, for example, that media slogans and catchphrases were frequently used in the conversations to bolster LENIENCY in spite of their relative inconspicuousness in the op ed sample. Note also that media discourse was used by groups of color to conjure RACIST SYSTEM but not by white groups. For a more complete explanation for patterns of resource use, including use of media discourse, we must look beyond the public discourse to the participants' dominant background characteristics. In the next section, we take a look at the participants' class and race backgrounds to see

how these may have influenced the availability and
attractiveness of resources for them.

RACE, CLASS AND RESOURCE STRATEGY

Class

Social class is important to the conversationalists'
discourse on BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and FAULTY SYSTEM. Two
types of influence can be observed but the more striking of
the two can be found only in the subsample of white
participants. It turns out that 50% of white participants
who graduated college expressed positive versions of BLOCKED
OPPORTUNITIES as compared to 9% of those without college
degrees.[23] The same relationship can be observed for
negative displays of FAULTY SYSTEM: 46% of the white
participants who finished college rebutted at least part of
that frame as compared to *none* of those without a college
degree. It thus appears that for white participants
graduating college is practically a necessary if insufficient
condition for expressing either BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES or the
negative version of FAULTY SYSTEM.

Why might this be the case? We begin with BLOCKED
OPPORTUNITIES. Derber and his colleagues (1990) argue that a

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[23] Twenty-three white participants reported having less than a college
degree, 26 a college degree or more and four left the item on the
questionnaire blank.

cleavage exists within the ranks of the professional middle class with respect to attitudes on government efforts to ameliorate poverty. On the one hand are professionals employed in the private sector who tend by a large majority to "show little sympathy for people on welfare" (176). On the other are the academic and public-sector professionals who tend as often as not to support "government intervention or planning to stimulate growth, reduce poverty and pollution, protect consumers and prevent economic breakdown" (180). The distinction between private and public sector professionals is useful: it turns out that 11 of the 13 white participants who expressed positive versions of BLOCKED OPPORTUNTIES fit into the latter category. They include people who work in the public schools, local government, non-profit organizations and academia. Their support for elements of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES is thus likely rooted in their common occupational subculture.

Another observation can be made, this one relevant to both frames. Members of the professional middle class, by virtue of their educational attainment, jobs, and class-culture, are exceptionally attentive to media discourse (Neuman, 1986). They are thus more likely than others to be able to make use of relatively obscure material. While positive versions of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and negative versions of FAULTY SYSTEM were present in the op ed sample, they were not expressed through memorable catchphrases or

public figures but rather through comparatively dry, spotlighted facts. Not surprisingly, therefore, it turns out that the participants who expressed these perspectives through use of media discourse were overwhelmingly college graduates.

The second influence of class is less directly observed but seems relevant to black and white participants alike. It stems from the fact that few of the participants were poor or members of the so-called underclass (Wilson, 1987). Studies of crime watch mobilizations (Skogan, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1987) demonstrate that participants tend to be homeowners or long-term renters with a stake in their community. This is also true for participants in this study. In chapter two I noted that all of the crime watch groups in the sample were located in relatively stable middle and working class neighborhoods, often abutting but always distinct from seriously run-down areas. Moreover, of the 110 participants, only 14 reported household incomes of less than $15,000, while 58 reported incomes of $30,000 or more.[24]

That relatively few conversationalists are poor has an obvious bearing on their discourse on crime: People who are

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[24] Eleven respondents reported household incomes of $15 - $29,999. Income information is missing for 27 respondents. Most of these left the question on income blank. A few departed the meeting prior to completing a questionnaire. Race differences are not conspicuous using the upper cut-off point of $30,000 or more, but African American participants were somewhat more likely to leave the question blank.

not poor cannot readily draw upon experiential knowledge to bolster BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. Hence the obscurity of this resource in discourse expressing the frame. But what of the many participants who report having grown up poor? Contrary to what one might expect, these participants did not tend to express empathy for the disadvantaged based on their common experience. But neither did they simply "blame the victim." Instead, they bore witness to the possibility of making it in spite of injustice and adversity. Apparently the experience of emerging from poverty encourages a view of the class structure as at least partially fluid. Thus, many participants expressed experiential knowledge supportive of the notion that people *choose* their peculiar paths, and that some people *choose* crime. This notion directly contradicts the central argument of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and hence militates against support for the frame.

Moreover, BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES is inconsistent with the dominant message many of the participants *cum* parents seem to want to impart to their children. If the class structure is truly open, then believing in the possibility of "making it" is essential to personal success. Indeed, if we add the caveat "by legitimate means," then it is also essential to avoiding crime. Hence, as parents, many participants regard the determinism implicit in BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES as anathema -- exactly the wrong message to communicate to children. To encourage young people to strive for personal success -- and

to dissuade them from crime -- it is imperative that they be made to internalize the message "You CAN make it!"[25]

There is an implicit assumption in the argument I am making that cannot be examined given the limits of the study sample. I am assuming that in a sample that included more people who are currently poor, expressions of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES would be more common. Of course, we might still expect to hear statements of faith in the possibility of upward mobility; American culture encourages even the poor to accept responsibility for their plight. But the experiential knowledge of current deprivation likely intrudes in the discourse of those at the bottom of the American class structure. Conversations among poor urbanites could test the soundness of this assumption.

Race

Race proved important with respect to RACIST SYSTEM and certain elements of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. Concerning the former, people of color share extensive experiential knowledge of racism and popular wisdom rooted in that knowledge. Some of this knowledge/wisdom is directly pertinent to the justice system; but knowledge of racism *in general* was treated by the

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[25] This latter point is discussed under the rubric of class because the trope appears in both white groups and groups of color but it is more important and powerful in the latter. Race is thus also relevant here. When expressed in groups of color racism is sometimes the obstacle that must be overcome.

conversationalists as relevant and frequently introduced.
Among whites, experiential knowledge of racism is much more
restricted and popular wisdom on the subject more likely to
be contested. No wonder, then, that people of color more
frequently used those resources to conjure RACIST SYSTEM.

But why did conservative versions of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN
perform disproportionately well in the groups of color? I
suggest two explanations. The first concerns the common
refrain among African American participants that laws
governing child abuse are criminogenic. This apparently
widespread sentiment is rooted, in part, in the experiential
knowledge of overzealous social workers who uncaringly remove
children from their families. That in fact children are
disproportionately removed from African American households
is well established (Currie, 1985). But in only one or two
conversations did speakers introduce direct experiential
knowledge of this phenomena. Instead, the typical mechanism
by which it entered the conversations was popular wisdom. It
seems that this piece of the collective experience of African
Americans has been transformed into a kind of cultural common
place.

The second explanation focuses on African American
culture more generally. Opinion research by political
scientists Robert Smith and Richard Selzer (1992:42)
indicates that across a range of "social issues" including
"the role of women in modern society, abortion,

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homosexuality, and school prayer," African Americans are more conservative than whites. It seems likely that this cultural conservatism extends to child-rearing techniques. Popular wisdom on the relationship between discipline and crime thus seems to reflect a broader cultural orientation.

Finally, I should note one additional way in which race seems to influence the conversations. Speakers, both white and black, seem eager to avoid stigmatizing African Americans by implying that they are disproportionately involved in crime. In many conversations, this desire seems to encourage participants to describe crime as a matter of individual choice (and hence not group membership) and to argue that crime is "everywhere" (and hence not concentrated in black neighborhoods).[26] The desire to publicly eschew a stereotype commonly regarded as racist thus provides a boost to FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN, the two frames most compatible with attributions to individual choice.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the frames that performed most successfully in the conversations -- FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN -- are the ones that were most readily expressed through both cultural and personal resource strategies. I want to stress that this need not have been the
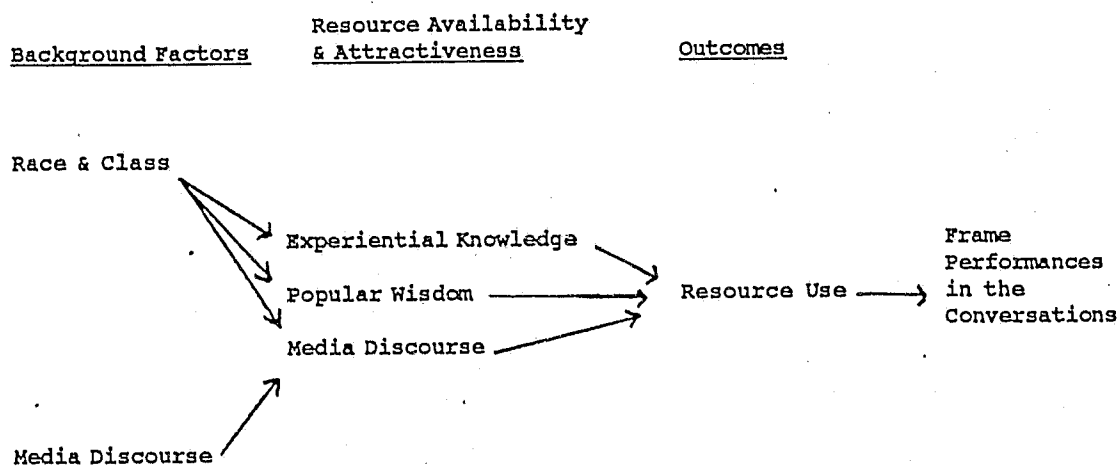
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[26] On the claim that crime is "everywhere" see chapter two.

case. We might imagine a state of affairs in which a frame would perfom strongly in conversations while typically being conjured through *either* a personal *or* a cultural strategy. However, as Gamson suggests, the frames that permitted conversationalists to combine knowledge that is valued because it is known first hand with knowledge that is valued because it is widely shared are the ones that proved most successful.

Further, I have argued that while the nature of the public discourse influenced its availability as a conversational resource, the participants' race and class backgrounds, in the final analysis, were more decisive in determining resource use. Race and class influence both attentiveness to public discourse as well as experiential knowledge and popular wisdom. Race and class were therefore instrumental in determining the availability and attractiveness of the various resources, and hence in determining the overall distribution of frame performances. This argument is illustrated in Figure A.

Figure A

FRAME PERFORMANCES IN THE CONVERSATIONS

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                        Resource Availability
Background Factors      & Attractiveness           Outcomes


Race & Class
                     Experiential Knowledge         Frame
                                                    Performances
                     Popular Wisdom                 in the
                                      Resource Use  Conversations
                     Media Discourse


Media Discourse
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In the next chapter we return to the central theoretical questions that framed this study.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

In the introduction, I argued that the theory propounded by critical sociologists and criminologists on crime as a political issue seemed convincing on its face but had not yet been subjected to adequate empirical scrutiny. In this concluding chapter, I would like to return to the critics' theory to see how well it stands up to the findings of this study.

Political Scientist Robert Elias is wrong in suggesting that media discourse on crime is univocal in support of a law and order perspective (see page 11). In my sample of public discourse, the subframe LENIENCY performed poorly in comparison to BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, and the conservative version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN was completely invisible. One could thus argue that conservatives are *less successful* than their liberal antagonists in getting their preferred frames into the public arena.[1]

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[1] Perhaps the source of discrepancy lies in the type of media discourse examined. Elias studied stories in newsweeklies rather than op eds. But the notion that media discourse supports a law and order outlook exclusively appears in other work as well, most notably in Hall et al' (1978). My findings are, however, consistent with Graber's (1980:68). She concluded that "crime and justice news... represents a medley of

The mass media also appears to be less decisive in its influence than the critics suggest. While LENIENCY and the conservative version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN performed relatively poorly in the media sample, both were very much in evidence in the peer group conversations. Similarly, the conspiracy component of RACIST SYSTEM was invisible in the media sample but expressed in four of the groups of color. Gamson's hypothesis offered at the conclusion of *Talking Politics* (1992:180-1) is instructive:

> People who use integrated [resource] strategies are selectively influenced by the relative prominence of media frames, responding to the degree that these frames are consistent with their popular wisdom and experiential knowledge. They are constrained by omissions from media discourse but relatively immune to differences in the relative prominence of visible frames.

Given that LENIENCY and the conservative version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN are broadly resonant with the popular wisdom and experiential knowledge of many of the conversation participants, it does not much matter that they are relatively inconspicuous in the media discourse. Of course, both get expressed in fiction and non-fiction television broadcasting, but I suspect that BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES and

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conflicting views and motivations." Against the expectations of Marxist criminologists, she writes that "it is the public, rather than the media, that perceives both criminals and victims as largely flawed in character, nonwhite, and lower class."

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the other frames do at least as well in those venues. Whether this is so, of course, is a matter for a different study.

All this is not to suggest that the mass media are irrelevant. As demonstrated in chapter seven, where the public discourse provides memorable catchphrases, slogans and public figures, such resources are more likely to be introduced into conversations. One reason for the weak performance of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, therefore, is the relative paucity of symbolically rich material that can be used to conjure the frame.

There is another media effect that warrants attention. Research in the agenda-setting tradition (Kinder and Iyengar, 1987; McCombs and Shaw, 1972) has shown that whatever the media's effects on what people think, they can be quite effective in determining what people think *about*. The salience of crime in television drama and the news media stems from a variety of factors including its dramatic quality and symbolic utility (Sparks, 1992). In the next section, I will discuss some of the political and policy consequences that follow from the way crime is constructed among ordinary people. Here I want only to note that the media, by rendering the issue persistently salient, indirectly intensifies these effects.[2]

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[2] There is also the possibility of other effects. The media sample used in this study represents public discourse on crime, not news

The critics are much closer to the mark in their treatment of popular discourse. People do indeed seem to have an "ingrained aversion to structural criminology," to borrow Scheingold's phrase (1991:6). Structural explanations that highlight the role of material deprivation contradict people's direct or vicarious experiences of upward mobility and their conviction that in spite of adversity a person who strives can "make it" without breaking the law. For many people, structural explanations broadcast exactly the wrong message to children; if crime is determined by external factors such as poverty and race, then why strive to be good?

Instead, people tend to argue that crime stems from moral decline, poor parenting, community disintegration and failures of the criminal justice system. These beliefs, to varying extents, are informed by media discourse. But perhaps more significantly, they are rooted in people's personal knowledge of parents who cannot control their children, neighbors who no longer look out for one another, and young men who would prefer to deal drugs than work a regular job. Thus, the critics are basically correct in arguing that people think about crime in terms of individual

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reporting of individual crime happenings. In his study of news media effects, Iyengar (1991) found that the decontextualized "episodic" framing typical of crimes stories encourages attributions to individual rather than societal causes. Graber (1980) makes a similar argument. To the extent that this is true, routine news coverage of crime likely bolsters popular wisdom supportive of FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.

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moral failure rather than as a consequence of structural inequality.[3]

If the critics occasionally err in their treatment of popular opinion it is only in overstating their case. The most noteworthy examples of this tendency appear in *Policing the Crisis* (1978), the encyclopedic study of an alleged "moral panic" over mugging in the United Kingdom. Author Stuart Hall and his associates occasionally suggest that "counter-hegemonic" discourses on crime circulate in English culture. But more frequently they insist that on the topic of crime, there is "ideological closure." Against this sort of hyperbole, I note that BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES was expressed in a positive fashion by at least one speaker in 85% of the conversations, and that it was the dominant frame among the highly credentialed public sector professionals. Moreover, I also note that RACIST SYSTEM performed quite well in the groups of color. While these frames were subordinate to the others in terms of overall performance, they were far from invisible.

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[3] At first blush SOCIAL BREAKDOWN may seem to be a structural interpretation of crime, but this is only true of its liberal incarnation. The non-ideological version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN is non-ideological precisely because it does not specify the antecedents of social breakdown. Thus parents and neighbors are implicitly depicted as moral agents largely responsible for their actions and hence also for whatever crimes their actions engender. For example, listen to Ruth from Grove Hills Parkway: "Family disintegration...it stems from the individual... we need to get stronger."

POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

These findings suggest that the critics are also more or less correct in their assessments of the public policy and political effects of how crime is constructed in American political culture. They argue, as noted in the introduction, that popular thinking on the topic encourages criminal justice expansion and legitimates existing inequalities. I would like at this point to reflect a bit on these arguments, and then to suggest two additional implications that follow from the manner in which urbanites think about crime.

Criminal Justice Expansion

The strong performance of FAULTY SYSTEM in both discourse samples suggests that public attention to crime will result in demands for improvements in the performance of the criminal justice system. The high costs of criminal justice operations will likely serve as a brake on these demands but not contain them altogether. The system's scope and punitiveness will thus likely continue to grow.

In my reading of the evidence, however, urban violence, drug dealing and crime cannot be substantially reduced through expanding the scope or increasing the punitiveness of the criminal justice system. The best documentation for this claim can be found in recent experience. Over the past twenty years, arrest rates have skyrocketed, most states have instituted mandatory prison terms for drug offenses, and

sentences for a wide variety of offenses have grown longer
(Currie, 1993; "Americans Behind Bars," 1992). The results
of these efforts include a nation-wide crisis in prison
overcrowding, a diversion of government resources from
education, health care and housing, and further marginaliza-
tion of the urban poor. Yet crime rates remain at all-time
highs.

Why traditional crime control strategies continue to fail
is beyond the scope of this study (see Currie, 1985, 1993).
What does deserve emphasis, however, is the point that
prevailing approaches to crime, in addition to being
ineffective and costly, likely have socially harmful
consequences about which we are, at present, only dimly
aware. As noted in the introduction, in 1990 nearly one in
four African American men, aged 20-29, was under the
supervision of the justice system, either on probation,
parole or behind bars. In Nevada and Washington D.C., the
proportion was two in five (Currie, 1993). Punitive anti-
crime measures have made the criminal justice system one of
our society's preeminent socializing institutions, especially
for the minority poor. We simply do not know what effects
this new state of affairs will have on American society.
But, at minimum, processing huge numbers of poor men of color
through the courts and prisons likely intensifies their
feelings of marginality and resentment. In practical terms,
it certainly undermines their capacities to find such work as

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is available to them and to sustain family and community relationships.

Legitimating Inequality

Public attention to crime may also undermine support for general efforts to improve the circumstances of the urban poor. Let me explain why. The conversation participants regard street crime as disproportionately the work of poor people and poor people of color. If they also interpreted crime as a result of structural conditions, then their perceptions of who does most crime might generate demands for alleviation of poverty or redistribution of wealth. But the conversation participants rejected all forms of determinism, including those implicit in BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES, and especially those that ascribe a crime-causing role to biological or genetic factors. Note that even participants who expressed positive versions of BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES tended to do so by depicting offenders as *innovators*, that is, as rational, calculating actors.

If participants view crime as disproportionately the work of poor people or poor people of color and at the same time reject interpretations that focus on social structure, what then? The *logical* implication is that poor people are disproportionately morally inferior. And, of course, if poor people appear to be morally inferior, then poverty does not

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necessarily appear to be so much an evil as a condition that is well deserved (cf. Reiman, 1990).

Probably sensing these implications, many participants argued that crime is *not* disproportionately the work of poor people or people of color. ".Crime is everywhere," they sometimes insisted. But these defensive claims fly in the face of participants' accounts of their fears and behaviors. Recall that in response to the Stuart question, many self-critically admitted to subscribing to the "stereotype" of the black male offender. Recall as well that many told of avoiding certain neighborhoods or blocks which they regarded as particularly dangerous. All this is not to say that attention to crime will necessarily or universally cause people to regard in-the-flesh members of the putative underclass as morally inferior or deserving of their status. Rather, it is only to suggest that such an outcome stems logically from the manner in which people talk about crime.

* * *

The findings reported in this manuscript have two additional sets of implications for politics and public policy. Though perhaps less significant than those discussed above, they nevertheless warrant attention.

Culture Wars

The dominant frames FAULTY SYSTEM and SOCIAL BREAKDOWN bolster imagery associated with the conservative position in what many political analysts call the "culture wars."[4] At a general level of abstraction, these frames attribute crime to failures of social control, formal and informal; in effect, to *permissiveness*. Their prognostic components call for reassertions of authority -- state, community, parental, and patriarchal. These images are broadly resonant with opposition to the many of the new social movements, including feminism, gay liberation and abortion rights. It is therefore possible that attention to crime, because of the manner in which the issue tends to get constructed, tends to strengthen the conservative positions on a range of so-called cultural or social issues.

Spill-over Effects

Finally, and this point is related to the last, there is the possibility of a spill-over effect from crime to other issues. Because crime is a dominant issue on the public agenda, the frames that are used to interpret it are likely handy for use in interpreting other issues that can be construed as related. To the extent this is so, variations

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[4] The term is Hunter's (1991). But see also Edsall, 1991; Ehrenreich, 1989; Faludi, 1991; and Graff, 1992.

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on SOCIAL BREAKDOWN can be used to interpret the problems of poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, health care, infant mortality, and so on. This tendency is readily observed in the writings of conservative intellectuals.[5] There is therefore the possibility that because of the salience of crime, and hence of the frame's used most readily to interpret it, other urban social ills will increasingly be constructed as essentially problems of breakdown and order rather than problems of inequality and social justice.

A STRATEGY FOR PROGRESSIVES

Critical sociologists and criminologists are understandably pessimistic about the possibilities for progressives on the issue. Start Hall and his colleagues write: "It is, perhaps, in relation to crime more than any other single area that the liberal voice is most constrained; that conventional definitions are hardest to resist; that alternative definitions are hardest to come by" (1978:90). Diana Gordon, in explaining her prediction that law and order approaches to crime will continue to preempt all others, writes:

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[5] For example, Bush Administration Attorney General William Barr, in a speech before the Heritage Foundation: "[F]amily breakdown is a moral catastrophe and is at the root of so many of the problems that beset our nation. In my view, the root cause of both crime and poverty is precisely this unraveling of the family" (Barr, 1992).

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No countervailing symbols to the myth of crime and
punishment have been found, no effective language of
opposition to the individual perspective on remedies for
crime. The values of tolerance, social protection and
brotherly love are currently no match for the justifiable
fear and outrage over street crime and the law and order
politics that exploits them (1990:41).

The situation for progressives is indeed bleak but not
hopeless. This research suggests some positions that
progressives ought to adopt and others that we ought to
avoid. I base my thoughts on the assumption that a
progressive crime control strategy would be one that 1)
reduces reliance on the criminal justice system, 2) reduces
social and economic inequalities, and 3) fosters community
empowerment and solidarity. I have already discussed the
deleterious effects of criminal justice approaches and hence
the rationale for principle one. Before outlining a strategy
for progressives, I would like to add a few comments on
principles two and three.

Reducing Inequalities

The core insight of progressive criminology is that
street crime results primarily from social and economic
inequality. Of course, like any category of human behavior,
breaking the law is *overdetermined*. In individual cases any
number of contributing factors can easily be identified. But
decades of research demonstrate that measures of deprivation

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correlate with participation in street crime across individuals (Reiman, 1990), urban geographic zones (Wilson, 1987), and nations (Currie, 1985). This is true for drug dealing and abuse as well as for offenses such as robbery, burglary and homicide. In explaining the intensification of drug dealing during the 1980s, liberal criminologist Elliott Currie offers the following account of the mechanisms by which inequality generates crime:

> Quite simply, life for many Americans had become bleaker, more stressful, less hopeful, and more atomized. These changes have been not only material, but cultural and familial...It is not simply that many people have become poorer, but that they have become poorer in the context of declining opportunities for ever attaining a better life. It is not just that more young people, especially young men, are out of work, but that more and more are increasingly locked in to a future without anything better. It is not just that material prospects have dimmed for the relatively young and poor, but that they have dimmed just when there has been an explosion of affluence and a growing celebration of material consumption at the other end. It is not just that families must contend with less, but that their sources of resilience and support have been sharply undermined. Never before in our recent history have so many been excluded from the realistic prospect of living the good life as their society defines it; never have so many been subjected to such severe and pervasive social and economic stress and such persistent insecurity; never have the public and private sources of help been so uncertain (1993:146).

In the final analysis, my reading of the evidence leads me to conclude that no strategy that fails to address these root causes of crime will make our cities safer.

Fostering Empowerment and Solidarity

Note that in the passage quoted above Currie goes beyond the effects of deprivation on individuals to discuss its effects on families, communities and public morality. In effect, he expresses what I have called the liberal version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. As a rhetorical strategy this marks a significant departure for liberal criminologists, one about which I will have more to say in the sections that follow. Here I would like to comment on the analytical merits of Currie's observations. He is arguing that deprivation in the context of a national culture of "strident consumerism" generates stresses that undermine family and community relationships. Neighborhood solidarity, incipient social movements, stable, loving families, are strained by a national culture that induces selfish grabs for personal success (cf. Derber, 1992). Thus deprivation amid plenty not only generates crime, it also reduces the potential for collective action on behalf of inclusion, equality and social justice. Progressives cannot wait until wealth and opportunity are redistributed to address this consequences of persistent inequality. Fortunately, it can be met head-on

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through organizing strategies that empower people to reconstitute community solidarity.

* * *

These three principles -- reducing the scope of the criminal justice system, reducing social and economic inequalities, and fostering community solidarity and empowerment -- must inform any serious effort to create a safer society. Each is also worthy of support for its intrinsic value. What can progressives say and do on the topic of crime that is both consistent with these principles and resonant with popular thinking? I suggest the following:

1) Take peoples' fears seriously. The number of left criminologists who attribute popular concern over crime to "moral panic," media hype, hysteria, racism, or political manipulation has been steadily dwindling since the early 1970s (but see Wright, 1985). Nevertheless, the notion that fear of crime is irrational or evidence of unexamined racism seems to have survived in Left political culture, especially among those whose social change activities do not bring them into direct contact with urbanites living in high crime areas. By way of evidence, I can report that the left press rarely addresses the issue of crime; when it does, it is typically to criticize prevailing practices rather than to discuss the scope of the problem or to suggest alternative

remedies.[6] I can also offer auto-biographical evidence. I begin my dissertation research with the intention of demonstrating that anti-crime mobilizations vary independently with actual crime rates. As I think back on that plan, I realize its basic assumption was that fear of crime is in some sense delusional. Of course, how people feel about crime is influenced by media imagery. Of course, crime watch mobilizations will not intensify and attenuate in perfect sinc with crime rates -- though measuring either with precision would likely prove impossible. But both of these observations seem inconsequential in light of the overwhelming truth that street crime, often violent in nature, is enormously widespread in American cities, and touches the lives of large segments of the urban population. Progressives, it seems to me, must first address the real impact of crime on people's lives before charging that concern about it stems from something other that a desire for personal safety and safety for loved ones. And if there are ethical issues at stake in how progressives approach this issue, there are certainly strategic ones as well. Urbanites who fear for their safety and that of their loved ones will continue to be unmoved by the charge that they are either

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[6] A recent issue of "The Nation" (January 31, 1994) leads with an editorial entitled "Jailhouse Crock." "Believe it or not," the editorial begins, "the United States doesn't have a crime epidemic." It then goes on to cite "inner cities" as the "great exception," but the editors' dismissive tone with respect to popular fears is unmistakable.

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hysterical or animated by unexamined racism. Progressives who fail to give up the ghost will lose whatever credibility they might otherwise enjoy on the issue.

2) Recognize the depth of popular aversion to the unqualified claim that poverty causes crime. As noted above, the claim flies in the face of people's personal knowledge of individuals who have lifted themselves out of poverty without breaking the law. As many people interpret it, it also implies that individual efforts to be good don't matter, and that poor people are *morally inferior*. The claim that poverty causes crime, so natural on the political Left, thus strikes many people as itself *immoral*. Progressives ought to recognize the depth of popular sentiment on this matter. This is not to say that we must abandon all efforts to frame the problem of crime in structural terms; doing so, after all, would be tantamount to abandoning a central principle of progressive criminology. Rather, we must encourage people to make the link between structure and agency, between social arrangements and the manner in which they touch peoples' lives. As it happens, poverty, racism and deprivation do not generate crime in a fashion that is without any mediation. Rather, the injustices built into the organization of American society strain morality and disrupt families and communities. Thus as progressives we have room to shift our rhetorical emphasis away from poverty without sacrificing analytical rigor.

What *ought* we say about crime? We should speak directly
to people's concerns about morality, family and community.
People are worried deeply about these matters. They feel
that the American moral order is unraveling; that people are
increasingly out for themselves; that discipline and morality
are fast disappearing. But urbanites do not share a common
analysis of the sources of societal unraveling. Indeed,
though participants in the peer groups routinely discussed
the "breakdown" of family and community, they almost never
tried to identify the sources of breakdown. Conservative
intellectuals, of course, attribute societal unraveling to
the cultural impact of the new social movements and to the
effects of government-sponsored social welfare programs. But
the conversation participants rarely mentioned either. In my
reading of the data, there is little ideological depth to
popular feelings about moral breakdown and societal
unraveling. And herein lies the opportunity for progressives.
Our case ought to be that the stresses on family and
community that people experience in their day-to-day lives
are ultimately rooted in undemocratic and unequal social
arrangements and an under-regulated market economy. In other
words, we must first recognize the legitimacy in popular
understandings of the state of American society, and then
focus our efforts on persuading people to adopt a structural
understanding of underlying causes. In my view this approach
has both analytical and strategic merit.

3) Demand a dramatic expansion of all public sector initiatives aimed at providing activities and opportunities for children. Such initiatives should improve public education and create staffed parks, youth centers, and street worker, athletic and after school programs. As much as people believe that the criminal justice system should "get tough," they believe that "activities" for children should be expanded. Here the views of progressives and the mainstream are indistinguishable. Moreover, I should note that improving public services for children is a way of reducing inequality.

4) Abandon the cause of drug legalization. Its potential contribution to the well being of the urban poor, who are the principal victims of drug abuse and the drug "war," is debatable. What is not debatable is the strategic disaster the position has proved to be for progressives. It is totally unacceptable to virtually everyone. Ordinary people, as I have noted several times, view crime as a result of weakening public morality. By legalizing drugs, most people think, the government would be acceding to moral decline; putting its imprimatur, as it were, on vice. That people view official pronouncements and policies in this fashion is evinced by the recent conflict over "gays in the military." Whether the government already sanctions vice through legal gambling and tobacco and liquor sales is beside the point for most people. By calling for an end to drug

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prohibition, progressives pursue a hopeless cause and in so doing lose public credibility.

5) Support community policing and crime watch. Let me address these in turn. There are many versions of community policing but its central features are clear. Community policing would assign officers to fixed geographic zones and insist that they walk a daily beat. Community officers would work with resident to address persistent problems such as incivility, litter, lighting, abandoned vehicles, unruly people and street corner gangs. Because their principle task would be "problem solving," community officers would focus less on arresting offenders and more on preventing crime. Advocates of community policing claim that it can restore community solidarity, reduce popular fear and prevent crimes before they happen (Skogan, 1990).

Community policing is easy to criticize. First, it is rooted in what some refer to as the "incivility hypothesis" (Lewis and Salem, 1986) -- the notion that fear stems from experiences of urban incivility and disorder rather than direct or vicarious victimization. This argument, in my view, is but another incarnation of the view that fear of crime is irrational or delusional. (People fear muggings because of the presence of litter and graffiti? How about the presence of muggers! Were the latter scarce, then maybe I would find the argument more persuasive). Second, community policing is as much a political strategy to chill

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community criticism as it is a policing strategy. A fully implemented program of community policing is almost inconceivable; it would be prohibitively expensive, as beat policing is labor intensive; it would generate corruption through shake-downs and protection rackets; and it would divert resources from 911 services and felony investigations -- policing tasks that the public will not suffer to be reduced. But all of these shortcomings aside, community policing is worth supporting if only because even a small cadre of community officers can help organize neighbors to do some of their own crime fighting. Thus, I turn to crime watch.

Some Left critics charge that crime watch is part of the criminal justice system's expansion and penetration of communities (Gordon, 1990; Cohen, 1985; Elias, 1993). They argue that it contributes to the militarization of public spaces (Davis, 1992) and that it is potentially a mechanism for keeping blacks out of white neighborhoods (Rosenbaum, 1987). This study is not the proper venue for a thorough response to these criticisms. But I will say this: The notion that crime watch is part of the "net widening" (Cohen, 1985) of the criminal justice system is hopelessly abstract. In practice, crime watchers are simply not typically appendages of the state. They routinely criticize politicians, police and the courts, and in fact sometimes serve as a source of trouble for all three. Progressives

should understand that as a form of collective action, crime watch is ultimately devoid of political content. Whether particular crime watch groups act in a fashion that abets criminal justice expansion or encloses public space depends upon their composition and the ideological orientations of their key organizers.

So much for why crime watch is not necessarily bad. But why support it? Crime watch is best viewed as a democratic and participatory alternative to private and state responses to crime. It is a form of what Donald Black (1988) calls "self help." I have already discussed some of the deleterious effects of state-sponsored solutions to crime. Private solutions -- still far more popular than crime watch -- include avoidance of strangers and public places, deployment of private security guards, flight from high crime neighborhoods, installation of alarm systems and window bars, and purchase firearms and Mace. Insofar as these private strategies militarize public spaces and undermine the social and economic infrastructures of urban communities, they are as potentially damaging as the evil they seek to combat. In comparison to private and state responses to crime, therefore, crime watch is clearly the *least troubling.*

But we need not take such a sorry view of crime watch. Many if not most crime watchers form their groups as a means of fostering neighborhood solidarity. They sponsor clean ups, picnics and activities for neighborhood children. They use

their groups as springboards for neighborhood associations that press more general concerns. And they frequently report increased commitment to their neighborhood as a result of the crime watch group.

Finally, anecdotal evidence indicates that crime watchers in densely populated neighborhoods can be very effective in driving out drug dealers and intervening to preempt muggings and assaults. And even where intervention is too late to stop a crime, it is often in time to restore the victim's faith in humanity, often among the more enduring casualties of street crime.

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Progressives who take my advice will still need to contend with persistent claims that the criminal justice system is too lenient on offenders, and that only by "getting tough" can crime be brought under control. Such claims are extraordinarily resonant with the public, in spite of what I consider to be compelling evidence of their bankruptcy. At the same time, it is worth noting that the rebuttal claim, that getting tough has been tried before and failed, is increasingly in widespread currency, at least in the elite public discourse (see page 86). There is no reason to believe that this rebuttal argument cannot, with repetition, prove effective in neutralizing at least the most strident versions of FAULTY SYSTEM.

THE CURRENT SCENE

At the time of this writing, crime is again at the top of the public agenda. The reasons for the current wave of concern are not altogether clear, but four factors seem to have played a role. First, concern about crime was an important factor in the string of Republican victories -- governorships in Virginia and New Jersey and the mayoralty in New York -- in the 1993 off-year elections (Walsh and Gest, 1993). Second, and this point is related to the previous, President Clinton delivered several autumn speeches on crime, apparently in order to represent himself as a "new democrat" . and to neutralize an issue that continues to serve Republican and conservative politicians so well. Third, a handful of truly sensational crime happenings -- including the Long Island Railroad massacre and the murder of basketball star Michael Jordan's father -- occurred in a relatively tight time frame. Lastly, both houses of Congress debated and eventually adopted versions of a comprehensive crime bill, thus providing journalists with a useful "peg" around which to organize media coverage of the issue.

And the media coverage has been staggering. By way of illustration, NBC dedicated significant space in every one of its news programs, every day for an entire week, to a series entitled "America the Violent." *U.S. News and World Report*

declared that "fear of crime has become the most urgent issue in the country" (Walsh and Gest, 1993). And *Business Week* pronounced crime "America's No. 1 problem" (Mandel and Magnusson, 1993). No wonder that by mid-January, more Americans cited crime than any other problem as the "main problem" facing the nation (Lacayo, 1994).

The nature of the public debate this time around, however, is not altogether conventional. Three new voices are making some -- and in one case all -- of the arguments that I've proposed. Before concluding, I would like to briefly reflect upon recent statements by Amitai Etzioni (on behalf of the nascent Communitarian movement), President Clinton, and Jesse Jackson.

1. The Communitarians. Founded in 1990 by sociologist Amitai Etzioni and Clinton domestic policy advisor William Galston, the Communitarians are a cadre of high profile academics and politicians seeking, in Charles Derber's words, to "transcend old Left-Right divisions, bring together the classes and heal the moral decay of a civil society in disarray" (Derber, 1993:28). Unlike so many of their counterparts on the Left, Communitarians take crime quite seriously, viewing it as a grave problem in its own right and as an indicator of more general social pathology. And like so many of the urbanites whose discourse was the subject of this study, the Communitarians attribute crime to the decline of family and community. In *Spirit of Community*, a book-

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length manifesto for the movement, Etzioni insists that
"...the level of crime is deeply affected by the total
community fabric. It is not enough for families to be
strong, or schools to be fine educational institutions, and
so on. To minimize crime, all of these elements must
reinforce one another" (1993:190).

Communitarians locate responsibility for revitalizing
families and communities first and foremost in the hands of
ordinary people. Government responsibility begins only where
the efforts of individuals, families and communities prove
inadequate. Consistent with this orientation, Communitarians
champion crime watch as an anti-crime strategy capable of·
fostering both security and neighborhood solidarity. In
Etzioni's words, "Crime watches, in which people undertake to
watch out for one another's safety and property, and citizen
patrols, in which people volunteer to patrol their
neighborhood, if properly carried out, are activities that
·contribute to a community need and build community bonds
among the participants" (Ibid:139).

In terms of the conceptual apparatus of this study, the
Communitarians express the *non-ideological* version of SOCIAL
BREAKDOWN. The problem with this rhetorical position is its
near silence on the structural sources of family and
community decline. In Derber's trenchant critique of
Etzioni's book, Communitarians are credited with correctly
identifying the corrosive impact of excessive *individual*

rights, but criticized for failing to see the corrosive effects of unrestrained *property* rights. As Derber puts it, "The expansion and abuse of property rights -- now exercised by multinational corporations on a global scale -- has produced abandoned plants and ghost communities all over America..." The Communitarians' silence on the economic and institutional sources of social breakdown, Derber concludes, leads them to neglect the role that government must play in cultivating large-scale institutional change. While individual and collective action against crime and other social problems are much needed, so too are the job creation, health care, child care and educational initiatives that only government can sponsor. Beyond seconding Derber's criticism, I would also like to add that in the absence of a compelling structural interpretation for the unraveling of family and community, conservative attributions to welfare, feminism, permissiveness, and so forth -- the unarticulated sentiments of Communitarians notwithstanding -- will go unchallenged.

2. President Clinton. According to press reports, Etzioni's book was on the President's desk during the weeks prior to the 1994 State of the Union address. That Clinton read the volume seems altogether plausible, as much of his rhetoric suggests a familiarity with Communitarian discourse and social philosophy. Consider this excerpt from the January 25th speech before the joint session of Congress:

In America's toughest neighborhoods, meanest streets, and
poorest rural areas, we have seen a stunning breakdown of
community, family and work -- the heart and soul of
civilized society. This has created a vast vacuum into
which violence, drugs and gangs have moved... Let's be
honest. Our problems go way beyond the reach of any
government program. They are rooted in the loss of
values, the disappearance of work, and the breakdown of
our families and our communities. My fellow Americans,
we can cut the deficit, create jobs, promote democracy
around the globe, pass welfare reform, and health care
reform, and the toughest crime bill in history, and still
leave too many of our people behind. The American people
must want to change within, if we are to bring back work,
family and community.

Like the Communitarians, Clinton views crime as an indicator
of moral decline, analyses it in terms of the frame SOCIAL
BREAKDOWN, and supports community policing and citizen-based
anti-crime activism. Ever the consummate politician,
however, he nods toward both conservative and liberal
interpretations concerning the roots of social breakdown. To
satisfy those on his left, he mentions "disappearance of
work" and insists on the need to ensure that "banks make
loans in the same communities their deposits come from."
But to please those on his right, he treats "welfare reform"
as a necessary ingredient in an anti-crime strategy,
implicitly conceding the argument that government income
support encourages family breakdown and crime.

Making matters genuinely grim, however, is Clinton's wholehearted embrace of FAULTY SYSTEM rhetoric and the policies it implies. In the same speech, he announced his Administration's support for the trendy "three strikes and your out" rule that would mandate life imprisonment for anyone convicted of three violent felonies. More significantly, he expressed support for the crime bill now before Congress. The Senate's version of that bill earmarks 22.5 billion dollars (a six fold increase in federal anti-crime spending) to hire 100,000 more police officers, build at least ten new federal prisons, and create "boot camps" for first time and juvenile offenders. The plan also expands by 52 the number of offenses punishable by execution, and makes three billion in new funding for state prisons contingent upon states' accepting the federal government's mandatory minimum sentences. Thus Clinton's positions on crime will accelerate rather than reverse the expansion of the criminal justice system.

3. Jesse Jackson. Journalists attribute Jackson's recent activism on crime to his family's direct experience of murder and robbery in their new Washington D.C. neighborhood. Jackson now routines points out that more African Americans are killed each year by one another than in the entire history of lynchings. In a recent interview with *Newsweek Magazine*, he communicated the seriousness of the situation in another, perhaps equally poignant fashion: "There is nothing

more painful for me at this stage in my life," said Jackson, "than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start to think about robbery and then look around and see it's somebody white and feel relieved. How humiliating" (Glastris and Thornton, 1994).

Jackson's analysis, like Clinton's and the Communitarians, expresses the key themes of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN. He urges young African Americans to "take responsibility" for their "families and communities" (Walsh and Gest, 1993). He calls upon school kids to turn in drug dealers. And he supports collective action. In meetings in his own neighborhood, Jackson called for a "victim-led revolution" to "take back the streets from the killers and drug dealers." In cities across the country, he is leading "Stop the Violence, Save our Children" rallies during which he describes the struggle against crime as the "next frontier of the civil rights movement" (Glastris and Thornton, 1994).

But unlike Clinton and the Communitarians, Jackson's version of SOCIAL BREAKDOWN is decidedly what I've termed *liberal*. He opposes the crime bill before Congress because of its failure to address "root causes." And he consistently treats family and community disarray as *proximate* causes of crime which, in turn, are rooted in "red-lining banks" and "heartless Republican presidents." "What some Conservatives want to do," Jackson reminds his listeners, "is see a guy in a hole down in a well and say,

'Behave down there. Do the right thing'" (Cose, 1994). Of the three new voices in the crime debate, Jackson's is the only one that insists on viewing the crisis in the moral order of American cities in terms of larger economic and institutional forces.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Progressives should support Jackson's efforts wholeheartedly. Meanwhile, we should urge the Communitarians and President Clinton to recognize the harmful effects of further expansion of state sponsored social control and to more thoroughly integrate a structural analysis into their SOCIAL BREAKDOWN rhetoric.

There are reasons for optimism. First, as noted, there is ample support in the public discourse for arguments to the effect that the "stick" of imprisonment has proved to be a costly and ineffective strategy for controlling crime. Second, regular folks, to the extent my sample of urbanites permits me to judge, are silent on the ultimate sources of family and community breakdown. Conservatives have apparently proved no more successful than liberals, thus far, in communicating their preferred explanations. A ripe opportunity therefore exists for progressives to reject criminal justice solutions and to identify growing inequality, racism, bad schools, bad health care, bad housing and bad jobs, as the sources of family and community

unraveling, and thus as the fundamental causes of high rates of urban crime and violence.

Appendix A

SCHEDULE OF PEER GROUP CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

QUESTION #1   (5 minutes)

Here's the first question. What crimes are you most concerned about and who do you think is doing them?

Question #2   (10 minutes)

Here's the second question. In general, would you say the crime problem is getting worse or better, and why?

Question #3   (15 minutes)

Next I'm going to read three statements about crime. After each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, or disagree, and why.

Statement One

Crime stems from the failure of the criminal justice system to apprehend and punish offenders. It's no wonder there's so much crime, criminals know that they can do whatever they please and get away with it! If we're serious about fighting crime then the police need to do a better job apprehending criminals, and the courts need to "get tough." Only when more criminals are made to do "hard time" will the message get out that "crime does not pay."

Statement Two

Crime stems from poverty, unemployment, poor education, bad housing, inadequate health care and discrimination. Inner-city kids turn to crime when they don't see any opportunities for legitimate work. If we're serious about fighting crime, we need to create more opportunities for disadvantaged kid. We'll only make progress in the fight against crime when we begin to seriously address these "root causes."

Statement Three

Crime stems from a breakdown of the traditional family and traditional community. In the past there was less crime because neighbors looked out for one another and parents supervised and disciplined their children. The best way to fight crime is for neighbors, in partnership with the police, to band together to restore order to their communities.

Question #4 (5 minutes)

We're ready to move on to question four. Experts disagree about the best way to address the crime problem. In general, what do you think should be done in the city of Boston to reduce the amount of crime?

Question #5 (5 minutes)

There are two more questions. This next one is about crime watch. Why did you get involved in crime watch and what do you hope to accomplish?

Question #6 (10 minutes)

I have one last question. This one is going to require
that you think back on something that happened in Boston
several years ago. Do you all remember the Charles and Carol
Stuart affair? In the few minutes that we have left, I'd
like you to address this question: What effect did the
Stuart affair have on the city of Boston? And what lessons,
if any, should Bostonians learn from the Stuart affair?

Appendix B

CODING GUIDE

Note: An "n" after a code denotes the rebuttal or "negative" form of the idea element.

FAULTY SYSTEM

Crime stems from the failures of the formal agencies of social control. People do crimes because they believe they can get away with them. The solution to crime must rest in improving the performances of the criminal justice system. This frame has two subframes which specify the nature of the criminal justice system's failings.

Leniency -- This subframe holds that the system is too lenient; sentences are too short; prison is too pleasant; judges are too lenient; laws protecting offenders are too restrictive. The result is inadequate deterrence.

1.1 "Get tough" slogans and calls for the system to "crack down" For example: "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime." "No more coddling offenders!" [1.1n = general rejection of the "law and order" approach.]

1.2 Demands for expansion and more frequent administration of the death penalty. [These can be distinguished from calls for more _efficient_ administration of the death penalty, which gets coded as Inefficiency].

1.3 Technicalities allow the guilty to go free and must therefore be eliminated. For example: the exclusionary rule; habeas corpus appeals; Miranda.

1.4 Harsh sentences are necessary as a form of "moral education." Retribution and public shaming are the proper purposes of the Justice System.

1.5 Sentences are too short; they amount to a "slap on the wrist." Offenders should serve out their entire sentences; there should be "truth in sentencing;" plea bargaining and parole should be abolished. Prisons have "revolving doors."

1.6 Prison is a country club. Inmates should be made to work. Bring back the chain-gang. Get rid of the weights and color televisions. Get rid of the college scholarships. Make them "bust rocks."

1.7 The proper solution to overcrowding is to build more prisons or double/triple/quadruple bunk offenders. We must keep offenders locked up as long as necessary. [Emphasis here is on ensuring that offenders are locked up for as long as possible. Compare to 2.9]

1.8 Serious youthful offenders should be sentenced as adults. Youthful offenders should be fingerprinted. Youthful offenders get off too easily; they do crimes because they know they won't be punished.

1.9 Calls for a curfew; vagrancy laws; recriminalization of public drunkenness; use of the national guard for

policing; or general anti-vagrancy "public order" type
policing.

1.10 Politicians, judges, the powers that be, are
permissive; they are reluctant to impose harsh sentences.

Inefficiency -- This subframe holds that the system is
inefficient. First time offenders go free for lack of space;
cases take too long to get to trial; offenders are "lost" in
the shuffle. Deterrence suffers as a result. This frame is
often implicit in statements that assume the solution to
crime lies in a more efficient criminal justice system.

2.1 Due to the inefficiencies and inadequate resources of
the criminal justice system, offenders are not getting
apprehended and punished; hence the crime problem. (This
general statement should be coded only if the more
specific claims that follow do not yield a close match).
[2.1n = General rejections of the inefficiency subframe,
as in, "The police can't reduce violence whose causes are
social."]

2.2 The police department/court system is top-heavy; too
much administration; too much bureaucracy.

2.3 Overcrowding means that some people are set free in
order to make room for others, and that first offenders
are rarely prosecuted. This undermines deterrence. The
system must be made more certain.

2.4 Delays in getting defendants to trial and in punishment undermine deterrence. The system must be made more swift.

2.5 Inadequate funding for indigent defense aggravates prison overcrowding and precipitates early release. There must be adequate provision for indigent defense in order to ensure swiftness and certainty.

2.6 Parole and probation rolls are overcrowded; as a result, parolees/probationers are not being properly monitored. Violators are not being returned to prison. More probation/parole officers should be hired so that violators can be either put under more careful supervision or returned to prison.

2.7 Advocacy of intermediate sanctions (community service, electronic monitoring, boot camps, etc.) as a response to prison overcrowding and the resulting practice of early release. Intermediate sanctions can alleviate overcrowding while still administering punishment. [Note: Where alternative sentencing is supported for moral rehabilitation, code SOCIAL BREAKDOWN; where it is supported for vocational training, code BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES; where multiple meanings are implied, use multiple codes.]

2.8 People do crimes because they know/believe nothing will happen to them. We need to do a better job communicating the risks of doing crimes.

2.9 We need to build more prisons to alleviate overcrowding

and thereby restore the promise of imprisonment for

criminal offenders. [Here the emphasis is on certainty

of punishment rather than severity; compare to 1.7]

2.10 Praise for, or advocacy of a new policing strategy/

program/ task force targeted at crime/ drug dealing that

seems promising. [Where advocacy of community policing

includes calls for a "partnership," cross-code with

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.]

2.11 Calls for hiring more cops or creating new policing

agencies such as a "police corps". Calls for fire

department patrols, and the use of city money to hire

private security. Calls for budget increases for the

police department.

2.12 Praise for, or advocacy of a new program/ task force/

strategy aimed at enhancing the performance of the court

system.

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES

Crime stems from blocked opportunities, especially

poverty, poor education, bad housing, lack of health care,

unemployment and discrimination. The solution lies in

ameliorating inequalities. One version of this frame focuses

on the elusiveness of the "American Dream": Americans are

taught by their culture to desire material things which they

cannot attain by legitimate means. They commit crimes in order to attain the American Dream.

3.1 Attributions of crime to "hopelessness," or "despair".
People do crimes because they do not see opportunities.
People do crimes because of "anger" and "frustration."
[These claims all focus on perception rather than underlying reality.]

3.2 Crime stems from discrimination or the accumulated effects of past discrimination.

3.3 Attribution for crime to "unemployment", "the economy", or "the recession". [3.3n = people do crimes because they don't want to work.]

3.4 Attribution for crime to "poverty", "deprivation", "desperation", "inequality".

3.5 For many people prison is not a deterrent because in terms of quality of life, it is an improvement. In prison you get three squares, heat and a room over your head.

3.6 Housing project architecture is a cause of crime.

3.7 To reduce crime, the U.S. ought to spend more on job training; job creation (eg. the Civilian Conservation Corps); education; and welfare. [3.5n = claim that the social welfare programs of the "Great Society" are a source of crime.]

3.8 Advocacy of rehabilitation in the form of job training.
Advocacy of intermediate sanctions where focus is on

vocational training. [Moral rehabilitation gets coded as SOCIAL BREAKDOWN].

3.9 Advocacy of other types of social welfare programming such as Head Start, health care, housing, etc.

3.10 Crime stems from advertising's hard sell of consumer goods.

3.11 Street crime is poor people imitating the crimes of the powerful in the only way available to them.

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

Crime stems from a breakdown of informal social control. The breakdown of the traditional family and neighborhood has loosened the controls that used to keep people on the straight and narrow. Parents and neighbors are no longer disciplining their children, teaching them the right values, and supervising their behavior. The solution to crime lies in instilling in young people proper values and restoring families and communities. There are liberal and conservative versions of the frame:

In the liberal version social breakdown is treated as a consequence of inequality, poverty, and, especially, joblessness. In other words, in the liberal version SOCIAL BREAKDOWN gets conflated with BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES. The liberal version also tends to prioritize the negative effects of community breakdown over those of family breakdown. 4.12 is the general code for the liberal version of the frame.

In the conservative version of this frame, social breakdown is treated as a result of a) the decline of religion; b) permissiveness engendered by the new social movements; c) indolence engendered by the social welfare system. 4.7 - 4.11 are conservative versions of the frame.

Note: Discourse on "community policing" only gets cross-coded as SOCIAL BREAKDOWN if the writer calls for a "police-community partnership".

4. Attributions for crime to community disintegration or family breakdown.

4.1 Crime stems from the proliferation of single parent families.

4.2 Parents used to do a better job raising their children (socializing children; instilling moral values in children). This generally appears in the form of a personal narrative, as in: "When (Lee) Brown was a boy, the family dinner table was where his parents 'looked me in the eye to see if I had done something wrong.' Now he says, if many young men eat with their families at all, it is cafeteria style."

4.3 Neighbors used to look out for one another; used to have "spanking rights" for neighborhood kids. This too usually gets expressed as a personal experience narrative. Typical is the claim that kids who did wrong used to get punished twice, once by the neighbor, then again upon returning home.

4.4 Personal experience narrative about a beat cop remembered from childhood _if_ emphasis of narrative is on the cops role as an _informal_ agent of neighborhood control.

4.5 Urbanization fosters anonymity and hence crime. Kitty Genovese. Crime watch helps create social networks that compensate for erosion of traditional ties.

4.6 Crime stems from absence of role models.

4.7 The welfare system encourages out-of-wedlock pregnancies and divorce, and hence the formation of single-parent families. It is therefore a cause of crime.

4.8 Absence of religious training causes crime. Decline of the church is a source of crime.

4.9 There is a general decline in authority at home, in church, at school. We need to return to respecting traditional authority.

4.10 Because by law the police can no longer keep undesirables off the streets, neighborhood residents must take on this job.

4.11 Parents should be held accountable for their kids' crimes. They should be prosecuted and fined or even jailed if their kids are repeat offenders.

4.12 Poverty, unemployment, inequality, etc., disrupt family and community life and thereby engender crime.

4.14 Schools should engage in moral education.

4.15 Advocacy of rehabilitation programs if focus is on

moral education.

4.16 Advocacy of street worker/ youth counseling programs if

emphasis is on moral guidance. Advocacy of parent-

counseling programs.

4.17 Advocacy of creation of better recreational facilities

if purpose is to keep young people occupied and

supervised.

4.18 Advocacy of citizen anti-crime activism: neighbors

ought to take back their streets; take back the night.

Advocacy of crime watch and related activities. One

person might not be able to do much, but an organized

bloc can work miracles. [4.18n = For example: "The

physical risks are too great to expect citizens to patrol

their own neighborhoods or drive off drug dealers."]

4.19 The idea of striking a "partnership" between community

residents, the police, and the city government to

eradicate crime. Cops can work with residents to create

strategies for driving out prostitution, drug dealing.

[This gets cross-coded with INEFFICIENCY. It gets coded

as SOCIAL BREAKDOWN because, in addition to police

action, it also emphasizes informal social control.]

[4.19n = Crime watch is a strategy foisted upon the

people by officials whose true aim is to pass the buck.

Fighting crime should not be the job of civilians but

professionals.]

MEDIA VIOLENCE

Crime stems from violence in the movies, on television, and in music. The average teenager has witnessed 100,000 murders on television by age 18. Violence on television cheapens human life. It makes violence appear an acceptable way of responding to conflict. Life imitates art. The solution to the crime problem must involve some controls on violence in the media.

5.1 The routine depiction of violence on television makes it seem like acceptable behavior. By age 18, the average kid has seen 100,000 killings on television.

5.2 Violence in the media desensitizes people; it cheapens life.

5.3 Misogyny in rap makes violence against women seem acceptable.

5.4 Technological innovation in the mass media and the expansion of media markets are a source of crime.

5.5 The name of an offending show or band, eg. 2 Live Crew or Miami Vice.

5.6 The cop shows and television glamorize the criminal lifestyle.

RACIST SYSTEM

The criminal justice system is racist; police target African American men for pat downs and harassment; judges sentence African Americans unfairly. The death penalty is administered in a racist fashion. In an extreme version of this frame, crime control in the U.S. is depicted as part of a general conspiracy to eliminate young black men.

6.1 Police fail to properly patrol back communities. This double standard increases violence in black communities.

6.2 Police violate Fourth Amendment rights of African Americans through coerced confessions, illegal searches, frame-ups, and brutality. Rodney King. [This code should only be used in connection with discourse about African Americans; general discourse on Fourth Amendment protections gets codes as part of FAULTY SYSTEM.]

6.3 The stereotype of the black male criminal encourages some young black men to act out the role.

6.4 Racism and police brutality generate frustration among young African Americans and hence crime.

6.5 Justice is not blind. The police are more apt to arrest and the judges to jail black people than white. Blacks receive harsher/longer sentences.

6.6 Conspiracy of silence. This is the weak version of the conspiracy argument: Police and politicians ignore the fact that drugs come from "outside the community", that

the big-time dealers are whites, and that most drug

purchasers and users are suburban whites.

6.7 Genocidal conspiracy: This is the strong version of the

conspiracy argument. Some organized entity is

orchestrating the flooding of black communities with guns

and drugs in order to eradicate young black men.

6.8 The only long-term solution to crime is racial justice.

6.9 The death penalty is administered in a racist fashion.

MEDIA DISCOURSE RESOURCES

This list includes all ideational material coded in the

transcripts as instances of Media Discourse.

FAULTY SYSTEM

Catch phrases:

Prisons have revolving doors.

Crime victims are victimized twice.

The system is set up to protect the rights of offenders not

   victims.

Police are handcuffed.

Offenders are released on technicalities.

No one wants a prison in her backyard.

If you do the crime you should do the time.

Spotlighted Facts, Positive --

Prisons are overcrowded, necessitating double bunking/early
   release.

Communities try to keep prisons out of their "backyards".

Offenders are often released before their terms are up.

Offenders frequently plea bargain.

Prison costs $xxx amount per inmate per year.

Boot camps and electronic monitoring as alternatives to
   incarceration.

Sentences are random/ not uniform.

A person must be arrested now multiple times before seeing
   jail.

Abusive men violate restraining orders.

Boston is launching a community policing program.

Spotlighted Facts, In rebuttal --

Effects of mandatory minimum sentences.

Crime rates have not come down in spite of prison building
   boom.

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rates in the world.

BLOCKED OPPORTUNITIES

Catch phrases:

Underclass.

Spotlighted Facts:

Deindustrialization has undermined job prospects for many.

The minimum wage is not a living wage.

Reagan budget cuts generated crime.

Day care and child care are inadequate.

Crime stems from the emergence of an "underclass."

Job opportunities for young people are inadequate.

Unlike Europeans, Americans have no family leave policy.

Health care is too costly and unavailable to many.

Public Figures:

Michael Milken (in rebuttal)

SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

Catch phrases:

Family values

Single parent families.

Babies having babies

Take back the streets/ take back the night.

Spotlighted Facts:

Proliferation of single mothers.

High divorce rates.

Neighborhoods in the past were more class-integrated.

Public Figures:

Kitty Genovese

Ozzie and Harriet Nelson

RACIST SYSTEM

Spotlighted Facts:

African Americans kill one another at higher rates than
whites.

Public Figures:

Rodney King

David Duke

APPENDIX C

CRIME WATCH IN BOSTON

The following description of the Boston Police Department's Neighborhood Crime Watch Program (NCWP) is excerpted from the program's occasional newsletter, "Neighborhood Observer" (NCWP, 1992):

> The Neighborhood Crime Watch Program has assisted in the formation of 595 crime watch groups to date. Each of these 595 crime watches is a small group made up of the people on one street, or even just one block. It is very important to "think small," because the most crucial aspect of a crime watch group is the link from neighbor to neighbor.
>
> One of our coordinators will attend a meeting held in someone's home on the street. We provide meeting notices to the host to distribute to neighbors. At the first few meetings we help the group to:
>
> 1. Identify the specific crime issues on the street and ensure that neighbors are informed of them
>
> 2. Establish a telephone network among neighbors
>
> 3. Learn to rely on one another when traveling to and from their homes, and to respond effectively to a signal for help
>
> 4. Establish procedures for contacting police regarding incidents and how to follow up

5. Take control of street lighting, trash, shrub-trimming and other maintenance issues

6. Adopt basic home security measures

7. Learn the skills an attitudes to operate as an organized and empowered crime watch

Afterwards, a group has the tools to be an effective crime watch. Residents can tailor these skills to meet the specific needs of their street. By monitoring crime incidents it will become apparent when or where to be especially vigilant. Clearly a crime watch will not completely eliminate crime, but an effective group does deter crime and reduce fear. A strong crime watch neighborhood is one that is very hard for a criminal to pass through unnoticed. Neighbors who are trained to react make their street inhospitable to someone intent on committing a crime.

The NCWP organizers report that most participants in crime watch meetings -- as many as 75% -- are female. This fact reflects a more general pattern. Manuel Castells (1983:68) attributes the overrepresentation of women in urban social movements to a "hierarchy of social tasks," deeply rooted in history, in which "Men took on the state and left the care of civil society to women."

Finally, the groups organized by the NCWP follow different paths of development. It is useful to distinguish three typical paths. The first includes groups that, after getting organized, continue to meet but restrict their

activities to crime prevention. At their occasional meetings, such groups typically exchange information about the neighborhood, update telephone contact lists, and discuss strategies for enhancing security. The second includes groups that branch out from crime watch to sponsor other types of activities such as neighborhood clean ups, picnics, job fairs, bloc parties and so forth. Some groups which pursue this path eventually metamorphose into full-fledged neighborhood associations. The third includes groups that cease to meet regularly after starting up but in the minds of their members remain in existence. Members of groups of this type typically describe their crime watch as "dormant" but insist that it could be easily activated should the need arise.

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