People and Their Problems:
An Exploratory Study of the Quest for Democratic Citizenship
in the Administered Society

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(ABSTRACT)

What does informal problem solving in neighborhoods – when people act
collectively, but without much formal organizing – look like? Does or can problem
solving at this level contribute to the democratic capabilities of citizens? If so, how,
and does public administration, as the part of government most involved in the daily
life of citizens, have a role to play in building this informal capacity for self-
government? The communitarian agenda in the United States assumes the
importance of indigenous action, but on the basis of little evidence. To find out more
about the existence and value of this mode of community problem solving, I
conducted an ethnographic field study of problem solving in and around mostly
black, inner city neighborhoods in Roanoke, Virginia in the mid 1990s. I found that
while informal action appeared to have once been the main form taken by problem
solving in the African American community, it had fallen on hard times. Three sets
of factors seemed most to account for this decline: the aging of the population in
these inner city neighborhoods, aided by the influence of both urban renewal and
desegregation; the increasing professionalization of community problem solving
through formal organizations; and a habitual use of civility in public affairs that
reinforced professional dominance and reduced the motivation of inner city residents
to act on their interests. I use these findings to set forth a novel conceptualization of
both informal and formal community problem solving. This conceptual scheme
draws on the psychological theory of self-determination and the pragmatic
philosophy of John Dewey to show how the informal and formal play different roles
in the formation of individual and group identities and how both are needed in
human development. I conclude by suggesting that, although the informal domain
has atrophied in places like Roanoke, it might have an opportunity to reassert itself
if public administration, as the engine of formal problem solving in communities,
were to focus more on its own performance. A more effective public sector, achieved
by replicating proven programs and practices, would increase the legitimacy of
public administrators, making their example influential in inspiring citizens to
undertake complementary efforts in their neighborhoods.

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Chapter I

Introduction and Overview

The communitarian critique of American society looks to less formal associations and groups as a way for individuals to address the problems and aspirations of where they live. It is an attractive preference that speaks to citizens' capacity for self-government, a central tenet of our democratic credo. But, at this point, despite the intrinsic appeal of the idea, communitarians' confidence in informal, neighborly ways appears to be based more on hope than reality.

While communitarians see key roles being played by formal institutions such as schools and churches, the revitalization of civic culture they advocate begins, in an important sense, on the block, in the neighborhood, among one's kin and friends.[1] Indigenous action by neighbors working together forms a cornerstone of the more communally oriented democracy communitarians want. Though communitarian aims cannot be met by neighborly conduct alone, or perhaps even in large part, that conduct is nevertheless generally assumed to be an essential ingredient in the mix of

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[1] See Robert Dahl, "Participation and the Problem of Civic Understanding," in Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective, ed. Amitai Etzioni, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 268; Amitai Etzioni, "Introduction," in New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities, ed. Amitai Etzioni, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 5-6; John W. Gardner, National Renewal, (A joint publication of Independent Sector and National Civic League, 1995), p. 6; Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 193-206; Daniel Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), p. 117; Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy, (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 8-18.

required elements. As Berger and Neuhaus put it in a statement that prefigured the contemporary communitarian movement, "Real community development must begin where people are."[2]

However, largely unknown is how, and how well, the indigenous level of activity actually operates as a form of problem solving. Though anecdotes abound and arguments for neighborly action resonate with common sense and our American ethos, little systematic evidence has been produced to substantiate the communitarian belief in informal associations. Absent that knowledge, communitarians have difficulty validating the appropriateness of their vision for society. And even if we are persuaded on philosophical or moral grounds they are onto something, limited understanding of the actual functioning of less formal, neighborhood problem solving raises doubt about how to put their perspective on strengthening civil society into practice.

The present study seeks to clarify the capacities of indigenous problem solving. It does so for the purpose of launching a secondary exploration into how the development of less formal problem solving in and by neighborhoods might be fostered, as a further realization of the democratic way of life, by the character and actions of public administration. This is a fitting challenge for public administration as the domain of our democratic regime closest to the day-to-day activities of citizens. As Woodrow Wilson expressed it more than a century ago: "Administration is the most obvious part of government; it is government in action; it is the

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[2] Berger and Neuhaus, To Empower People, p. 9.

executive, the operative, the most visible side of government."[3] Arguably at least, public administration is in a key position to help or hinder neighborhood work. While the field of administration has paid some attention to the problems and challenges of involving citizens in the affairs of government, neither in research nor practice has it focused much on any responsibility it might bear toward indigenous capacity.

The study is based on an ethnography of indigenous activity in several of the predominantly African-American, low and moderate income neighborhoods of Roanoke, Virginia during a ten-month period in 1993 and 1994. Located in the mountains of southwestern Virginia, Roanoke was chosen for this purpose because of its reputation as a small city that has been successful engaging its citizens, including those who are black and of limited economic means, in problem solving at the neighborhood level.[4] If indigenous action shows signs of being inclusive and effective in Roanoke, then it would be reasonable to assume that other communities either do now or could be enabled to achieve similar or possibly even better results. This outcome would give the communitarian argument added weight in our nation's civic discourse and practice.

I conclude, however, that while showing some limited signs of vigor, indigenous problem solving capacity in Roanoke's low and moderate income black

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[3] Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 1887), p. 2.

[4] References to Roanoke's reputation for excellence in citizen participation can be found in Francis Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois, The Quickening of America: Rebuilding Our Nation, Remaking Our Lives, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), p.172, and Richard C. Collins, Elizabeth B. Waters, and A. Bruce Dotson, America's Downtowns: Growth Politics & Preservation, (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1991), pp. 103-114.

neighborhoods seemed trapped in a state of persistent underdevelopment. Historical forces that have altered the demography of the community and, at the same time, a strong trend toward increasing professionalization of community problem solving, have impaired the will and ability of people in these neighborhoods to act for their common good. These findings do not necessarily undercut the basic legitimacy of the communitarian position. Rather, they suggest that creating a more communally oriented society may require a defter touch, more perseverance, and more honesty than contemporary advocates of the communitarian cause seem to realize. For neighborhoods like those I studied in Roanoke to develop greater indigenous capacity, the external institutions that condition their existence, that have been shaped by many of the same historical forces, and that have spurred the professionalization of problem solving may need to change in more thorough-going ways than typically assumed by communitarians. Public administration in particular, because of its ubiquity and proximity to neighborhood life, may need to take a lead role in this process of institutional redesign.

The Communitarian Critique

Though as old as the country itself, the communitarian critique in the United States has gained intensity during the past two decades.[5] Communtarians on both the left and the right of the political spectrum have found common ground questioning the premises and practices of modern liberalism and its tendency to elevate the

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[5] See Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," in New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 52-53.

individual at the expense of community and civic culture.[6] They have argued that excessive individualism is eroding the moral order of American society, giving rise to an acute sense of incoherence, even futility, in the face of persistent social problems, weak communities, and complex global challenges. Communitarians have invoked ideals of community and citizenship to project an image of a renewed civil society occupying a place distinct from the state, the market, and private family life. All three of the latter are seen to be responsible, to one degree or another, for the troubles that individualism, and its commercial and bureaucratic concomitants, have brought upon us. This civil society is, among other things, the realm in which neighborhoods and the entities within them, from churches to informal associations, function and can become, if they are not already, meaningful places of identity and action. In the communitarian framework, effective neighborhoods make for effective communities, with the cumulative outcome intended to be an antidote for the individualistic excess which threatens our well-being as a people.

To bring about a revitalized civil society, communitarians have relied mainly

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[6] See, for example, Amitai Etzioni, The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993); James Q. Wilson, The Moral Sense, (New York: The Free Press, 1993); Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community; William Galston, Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991); William Sullivan, Reconstructing Public Philosophy, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Carol Pateman, The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Michael J. Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

upon strategies of moral exhortation and policy prescription. Their hortatory efforts have focused on the perils that individual self-absorption pose for the continuation of American democracy and on the improvement in individual and societal welfare that can come from a reawakening of civic spirit.[7] The positive side of this exhortation has been illuminated by the gathering and telling of stories about the different ways in which groups and communities have pursued renewal.[8] Communitarian policy advocacy has centered on altering the incentives and constraints facing persons and formal organizations to encourage more civic-mindedness.[9] The popular expression "there should be no rights without responsibilities" captures well the communitarians' policy interest in modifying the legal and moral framework that sets the rules for American civil society.

Interestingly, rigorous empirical research to better understand the reality communitarians want to change and to test the feasibility of the changes they desire

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[7] See Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, & Steven M. Tipton, <u>The Good Society</u>, (New York: Knopf, 1991).

[8] Disseminating stories about successful citizen action is central to the renewal strategies of groups such as the Alliance for National Renewal, a broad coalition of organizations brought together by John Gardner, a former health, education, and welfare secretary in President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet and founder of Common Cause and Independent Sector, the Points of Light Foundation, a private sector group created at the outset of the Bush Presidency to promote volunteering, and the Civic Practices Network, an internet web site established by several communitarian activists.

[9] See Etzioni, <u>The Spirit of Community</u>; Bellah, et al., <u>The Good Society</u>; Mary Ann Glendon, <u>Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse</u>, (New York: The Free Press, 1991); William Sullivan, <u>Reconstructing Public Philosophy</u>.

to make has not received much consideration.[10] This is not to say that science has been ignored by communitarians. Rather, while they have drawn upon available knowledge to try to make their ideological case, they have done little empirical research of their own to fill gaps in their argument or to verify their assumptions.[11] Thus, communitarian claims for neighborhood capacity have been justified with examples from various sources and with evidence from research done for other purposes, but not, for the most part, through well-structured, objective inquiries specific to the communitarian agenda itself. One result has been an underconceptualized and empirically thin account of indigenous problem-solving. Another has been limited appreciation of the possibility that neighborhood capacity and informal association may be shaped by government's institutional character as much as or more than by its particular and changing policies.

Example or case building activities, while suggestive of the possibilities for neighborhoods, have not been used to probe deeply and critically into indigenous capacity and how the forms it takes are affected by larger institutional forces. Cases have been compiled chiefly, it would seem, for the purpose of advancing the interests of the communitarian movement. Good science has usually not been the aim. As a

[10] See Robert D. Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 87.

[11] Sociologist Amitai Etzioni, the founder of what is officially titled The Communitarian Movement, has published several books and articles on communitarianism. While these materials cite much evidence for the communitarian position, none of the evidence stems from systematic research which either Etzioni or others have done to test or explore objectively the movement's claims. See, for example, Etzioni's program statement for the movement, The Spirit of Community and two recent volumes which he has edited, Rights and the Common Good and New Communitarian Thinking.

result, we have been presented with cases that tend to exaggerate the potential of indigenous efforts, or the speed with which such potential can be realized, or the ability of these efforts to persist within a culture and social structure that contain elements inhospitable to them. Without more searching inquiries, it is hard to assess the truth of the stories that communitarians tell.

More rigorous kinds of research conducted for other purposes have provided insight into indigenous activity, but, since these are not designed *per se* to test communitarian claims for neighborhood problem solving capacity, they have yielded limited views. Research within social work and community psychology on informal care giving and natural helping networks in neighborhoods has revealed how such activities may arise as a function of interpersonal relationships. This research, however, has ignored the moral and political dimensions of the phenomenon, dimensions that would appear to be crucial in understanding whether and how care giving and other forms of indigenous problem solving can be made to happen by design, one of the hopes of communitarians.[12] To some extent, the moral and political picture has been addressed by studies within political science on neighborhoods as political entities.[13] The shortcoming here has been a tendency to

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[12] See Martin Bulmer, <u>Neighbors: The Work of Philip Abrams</u>, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Donald I. Warren, <u>Helping Networks: How People Cope with Problems in the Urban Community</u>, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[13] See Jeffery M. Berry, Kent E. Portnoy, and Ken Thomson, <u>The Rebirth of Urban Democracy</u>, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993); Harry C. Boyte, <u>CommonWealth: A Return to Citizen Politics</u>, (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Clarence N. Stone, <u>Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988</u>, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989); J.C. Thomas, <u>Between Citizen and City: Neighborhood Organizations and Urban Politics in Cincinnati</u>, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986); and Matthew A. Crenson, <u>Neighborhood</u>

narrow the meaning of problem solving to a function of the pursuit of power and interest. The plausible possibility that nobler, less deliberate, or more complex motives than power may be significant in indigenous action has been largely neglected in the relevant political research. Inquiries within organizational theory on self-help and other semiformal organizations have identified some of the non-political, structural factors that may affect neighborhood problem-solving.[14] But, because this work has generated mostly descriptive and static portrayals of neighborhood entities, it has provided few clues about the dynamics of action at this level.

Although each of these three bodies of research compensates for some of the limitations of the other two, combined they still represent only pieces of the puzzle. An integrated, more holistic, and more penetrating account of indigenous problem-solving remains to be developed.

Absent a more complete picture, communitarians have tended to divide rather easily into two camps that promote competing and, arguably, oversimplified visions

Politics, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[14] See Carl Milofsky and Albert Hunter, "Where Nonprofits Come from: A Theory of Organizational Emergence," (A paper prepared for the annual conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Volunteer Action, San Francisco, CA, October 20, 1994); David Horton Smith, "A Neglected Type of Voluntary Nonprofit Organization: Exploration of the Semiformal Fluid-Membership Organization," Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 251-269; and Carl Milofsky, "Introduction - Networks, Markets, Culture, and Contracts: Understanding Community Organizations" (pp.3-15) and "Structure and Process in Community Self-Help Organizations," (pp.183-216) in Community Organizations: Studies in Resource Mobilization and Exchange, ed. Carl Milofsky, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988).

of local democracy. One camp, on the left side of the communitarian spectrum, has looked to the indigenous realm as a partner of the larger community and its government.[15] Those adhering to this perspective have seen the main issue as how to enable citizens to play a more significant role in public decision making. Here, all the important choices in a community or neighborhood are public ones and ought to benefit from broad and open participation by concerned citizens. The other camp, on the right, has been inclined to view indigenous activity as a separate province, less likely to be a partner of government than an alternative to it.[16] Its followers have urged further restraints on public authority, so that more organic ties among people in their families, neighborhoods, churches, and ethnic groups have the opportunity to form and flourish.

While each camp has added something useful to our understanding of the normative significance of neighborhoods in our political culture and social order, neither has come fully to grips with the effects that the institutionalizing presence of a large public sector may have on indigenous problem solving. As Steven L. Elkin notes, government consists of institutions that act "as a matter of course and over time."[17] Rendering public decision making accessible to all citizens, as the left-

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[15] See, for example, Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place; Boyte, CommonWealth, Pateman, The Problem of Political Obligation, and Benjamin B. Barber, Strong Democracy, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[16] See, for example, Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice; MacIntyre, After Virtue; and Berger and Neuhaus, To Empower People.

[17] Steven L. Elkin, "Constitutionalism: Old and New," in A New Constitutionalism: Designing Political Institutions for a Good Society, eds. Steven L. Elkin and Karol E. Soltan, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.20.

leaning communitarians urge, is necessary in a regime that seeks to be democratic. However, doing so addresses only a part of what government in our society does, that is, make decisions, and emphasizes only one of the settings where civic capacity may be learned and exercised. Likewise, trying to keep public authority from overreaching, as proposed by right-leaning communitarians, while essential in a republic, underplays the immutable reality that the institutions of the modern state, not only define the character of the regime, but help to bound and inform the political, moral, and communal identity of its citizens. Conceivably, a more searching assessment of the indigenous level could introduce into the thinking of both camps a more realistic and shared sense of the nature and potential of less formal modes of local association and action in a society where these modes can neither be completely subsumed by nor wholly insulated from our political culture.

Questions Pursued

In conducting the research for this dissertation, my aim has not been to develop a definitive account of indigenous problem solving. Rather, owing to the lack of empirical research specifically on the subject, I sought, in one community, to understand it as deeply and fundamentally as possible. Since the conceptual boundaries of indigenous activity are amorphous, I attempted to comprehend and concretize it by distinguishing its structure from the structures taken by more formal and even market-based forms of problem solving. I was interested in seeing whether the cultural and social patterns associated with indigenous effort – the ways in which its meaningfulness to people is embedded in their life together – could be clearly discerned and rendered more intelligible by distilling these patterns from the larger community context where the patterns of other modes of problem solving also exist. How does indigenous problem solving differ from these other modes? How is it like them? This seemed to be a useful way to try to make sense out of a poorly

conceptualized phenomenon. Such an exercise in comparison and differentiation also afforded an opportunity to gather concrete data on the role of public administration in local problem solving, thus helping to inform the other half of the dissertation's dual purpose.

Aside from the general aim of identifying the existence of indigenous problem solving, the research I undertook had a more specific, normative intent. That intent concerned the contribution of this form of local action to the development of democratic capacities and habits. Since communitarians see neighborhoods as one of the well-springs of democracy, I wanted to explore in what ways this may be so. My interest went beyond the conventional democratic concerns with fair and open participation to focus more particularly on the functions of rationality and other personal and collective attributes or virtues that may be necessary or desirable in trying to solve community problems in a democracy. What competencies and qualities of character do people demonstrate in indigenous efforts compared to other kinds of problem solving? Here I was seeking data that might shed light on insights drawn from the philosophical school known as American pragmatism, especially the work of John Dewey, regarding the seemingly paradoxical importance in a democracy of both the solidarity of neighborly attachments and the open-mindedness of science. For Dewey, the roots of democratic character form, develop, and receive continual nourishment in the face-to-face, communal relations of family and friends,[18] while science provides the method of applying the intelligence of free

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[18] The role of the face-to-face community in shaping character is an important theme in many of Dewey's explicitly political works. See in particular John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems (1927)*, in <u>The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953</u>, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Vol. 2, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

people to the succession of problems and opportunities that shape human life.[19] Character helps to forge the necessary moral order, science supplies the means of adjusting that order in response to the changing human experience. I was curious how well the actual attributes of indigenous problem solving might match this pragmatic hope. My assumption was that to the extent the reality falls short of the hope, that would reveal how far, at least in places like Roanoke, we have yet to go to realize a more communitarian style of democracy. This gap would as well point to a potential target of opportunity for public administration, which in both its closer relationship to citizens than other domains of government and its own technical habits and inclinations may be in a unique position to advance pragmatism's democratic agenda.

The field research occurred over a ten-month period spanning 1993 and 1994. During this time, I was in Roanoke almost weekly, interviewing people, attending meetings and events, obtaining and reviewing relevant documents, and generally observing the scene. While mine was not a constant presence, I averaged three days a week for those weeks I was in the city and got to know many of my informants on a first-name basis. I interviewed and developed relationships with both people in the inner city neighborhoods that were my focus and people in government, nonprofit organizations, and business who were involved in community problem solving. My efforts to establish rapport were made somewhat easier than they might have been by the fact that my entry into the community occurred under the auspices of a large, well regarded local nonprofit agency. I remained close to this organization and my

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[19] On the role of science in a democracy, see especially John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture (1939)*, in The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Vol. 13, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).

main contact there throughout the field investigation. To further legitimize my presence and gain sufficient exposure to people and activities, I also occasionally participated in problem solving efforts within this entry organization, in other nonprofit organizations, and in one of the neighborhoods. While I played a modest role in these efforts, they provided valuable opportunities to observe problem solving as a more continuous experience than is usually evident from individual interviews and discrete meetings alone.

Patterns Found

The most noteworthy finding from my field research was the evidently limited extent of less formal, indigenous problem solving in the neighborhoods I studied. There were a few outstanding examples of indigenous organizations, but these tended to be entities which, though they had begun in informal, organic ways, had evolved into more conventional, formalized nonprofit organizations with paid staff, detailed budgets, strong ties to the world outside the neighborhood, and, importantly, limited involvement of people within the neighborhood. There was also a handful of more evanescent indigenous efforts that had left an imprint on their neighborhoods before becoming relatively dormant or simply vanishing. But all in all, the amount and variety of activity appeared to be modest. The Tocquevillian notion of people constantly forming temporary associations in response to one need or another — a notion often evoked by communitarians today — was not much in evidence.

I came to conclude that three factors seemed to account most for the limited development of indigenous problem solving capacity and effort in these neighborhoods. One is the aging of the civically active African-American population in Roanoke. While the neighborhoods I observed were relatively poor, inner city

communities, they did not suffer from the desolation we commonly associate with the poorest neighborhoods in larger cities. They were, for the most part, comprised of fairly well maintained homes and safe streets. What most marked them demographically was not so much their poverty as the disproportion of their residents who were old, some, but not all of whom, were also economically poor. Although these residents had the time for neighborhood affairs, they often seemed to lack the fervor they once evidently had for indigenous work. And yet, there appeared to be few middle aged and younger adults ready to assume or grow into this responsibility. Many of those in this younger age group with the same strong attachment to middle class, neighborly values as the older population had migrated out of the inner city as the walls of segregation came down beginning in the 1960s. Some of the more dynamic efforts I witnessed or was told about were mustered by people in this younger category. However, such efforts were few and far between and seemed to occur without deep roots in neighborhood life or enduring ties of other kinds. There was little assurance that they represented a sustainable form of problem solving.

A second factor was the reality that problem solving in Roanoke has become mainly the province of professionals. The professional dominance of problem solving appeared to me to be so complete as to suggest almost a form of hegemony. It was difficult for residents in the inner city neighborhoods of this small city to mobilize for action or to contemplate that possibility without showing deference to the existence of professionalized organizations and systems. There was a generalized sense among the neighborhood members I encountered that the professionals knew more and better how to address the contemporary challenges of the community. This did not necessarily stop inner city residents from acting, but it made them doubt their potential for making a difference, encouraged them to think

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that professionalizing their own efforts, if that could be made to happen, represented a superior strategy, and rendered them quite vulnerable to being co-opted by outside forces. Indigenous problem solving, in which the preservation of friendships often takes precedence over more instrumental purposes, appeared to be a poor match for the more robust, ostensibly knowledge-driven problem solving conducted by more formal, professionalized organizations in the community.

Lastly, while a large enough social space for the expression of dissent might have kept before these neighborhoods and the larger community the possibility of pursuing alternatives to the professionalized mode, the high value placed on civility in Roanoke seemed to prevent this space from developing.[20] The cultural system that has evolved over time to establish the primacy of civility here was remarkable in its thoroughness in shaping people's conduct and expectations. It was not that neighborhood residents lacked opportunity to state grievances against local government or private employers or to offer opinions outside the mainstream, but how quickly and almost habitually their voices were silenced or muted by the mechanisms created to reinforce civility in public matters. At a time when the breakdown of civility in relations among races, ethnic groups, and political partisans has become a cause for concern in the larger society, Roanoke projected the ironic picture of a community in which the institutionalization of civility had led to a less honest sort of local democracy, in which truth becomes more elusive. Under such circumstances, neighborhood people, especially if they are not knowledgeable in the way professional problem solvers claim to be, are apt to lack the motivation to tackle

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[20] Richard Sennett suggests that strong communities arise from continually revealing and working through differences and conflicts, not by their obliteration or denial. See R. Sennett, The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 143.

significant issues that could bring them into sustained conflict with others. Indigenous ambitions thus remain modest, and because they are modest, inspire only mild commitment in a setting where professional problem solvers, owing to their claims to knowledge and the status those claims confer, have reason to be more ambitious about and more committed to ongoing action.

In a democracy, indigenous problem solving has intrinsic value as at least one of the ways in which citizens may fulfill their desires for self-government. Where groups of citizens are prevented, either directly by material restraints on their freedom or indirectly by institutionalized ways of thinking and acting, from realizing these desires, then a presumptive argument can be made for seeking means to remove the impediments.

Of the impediments to indigenous development in Roanoke, the one that looms largest in the analysis set forth in this dissertation is the professionalization of problem solving. Ironically, professionalization may also be the only avenue through which the very obstacles it creates can be overcome. In a society and culture where knowledge is of such dispositive importance in nearly every domain of life, and increasingly so, neighborhoods may be able to hold their own amidst the more formal and professional forms of problem solving only by becoming more like them. For poor neighborhoods where education levels are low and professional level skills are in short supply, this solution poses an obvious dilemma. Since no institution is more responsible for and invested in the professionalization of problem solving than public administration, it may need to play a special role, stepping outside of its usual functions, to help enable inner city communities to acquire greater, durable, more pliable problem solving capabilities. Such a democratization of problem solving capacity may be the only way in which the communitarian vision will ever have a

chance of being effectively realized.[21]

Within the study of public administration, citizenship has occupied a somewhat contested place. Mostly, scholars and writers have been preoccupied, especially since World War II, with administration as a form of technical action — as a legal, instrumental means of dispensing goods and services.[22] Although citizen participation in public decision making became a more prominent part of the agenda beginning in the 1960s, citizens still tend in the administrative literature, as well as in administrative practice, to be treated as recipients or consumers of public actions or as unenlightened outsiders. Even those who have argued in the democratic mode that administrators should share power and authority with citizens, typically have done so within a framework oriented to bolstering the legitimacy of the administrative state, rather than one aimed at activating and nurturing the capacity of citizens for responsible autonomy.[23]

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[21] Democratizing problem solving capacity seems akin to what John Dunn has in mind when he calls for "the democratization of prudence, a spreading out of the burden of judging and choosing" as the way in which a society makes it possible for people to create a good life for themselves, rather than trying to create it for them. See J. Dunn Interpreting Political Responsibility (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 214.

[22] See, for example, Orion F. White and Cynthia J. McSwain, "The Phoenix Project: Raising a New Image of Public Administration from the Ashes of the Past," in Identities and Images in Public Administration, eds. Henry D. Kass & Bayard L. Catron, (New York: Sage, 1990), pp. 23-59.

[23] A nicely executed and informative example of this literature is the volume edited by Cheryl Simrell King and Camilla Stivers, Government Is Us: Public Administration in an Anti-Government Era, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

This study attempts to push our understanding of the administrative state beyond the limited horizon which the quest for legitimacy entails. It seeks to gain greater insight into the democratic potential of public administration by viewing it from the standpoint of that presumed source of democratic dispositions, the neighborhood. In so doing, the study also tries to introduce into communitarian thought a fuller, more realistic sense of the possibilities that administrative institutions may hold for helping to bring the reality of indigenous action more into line with the communitarian hopes for it.

Limitations

A number of limitations require that the research reported here and my efforts to develop its implications for communitarianism and public administration be regarded as, at best, provisional. My investigation was, after all, a qualitative exploration of a single case. While such investigations, when done with rigor, can put us on a path toward truth, they can never be more than illuminating and suggestive. Though it is likely the problem solving patterns I found in Roanoke exist in other small cities similarly situated, larger cities are apt to manifest noticeably different patterns shaped by their greater scale and diversity. For example, it would be plausible to assume that in big cities formal problem solving is able to exercise less hegemony over so vast and complex an arena, thereby giving indigenous efforts more opportunity to emerge and develop. This is not to imply that the conclusions I draw from Roanoke are inapplicable to other types of geographic settings. Demography, professionalization, and civility are all likely, in non-trivial ways, to influence problem solving in any urban environment. I will argue as much in reflecting on how the findings from this single case can point us toward a deeper understanding of the possibilities for advancing the communitarian cause through

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changes in the character of the administrative state. Nevertheless, it is still only a single case, and its epistemological value needs to be appropriately circumscribed.

The limitations of the particular methods I employed to gather data also need to be noted. Through interviews, meetings, document reviews, and observations, I have sought to construct a picture of the institutionalized — more or less stable and fixed — patterns that problem solving assumes in a community. It is quite conceivable that I did not probe deeply enough, broadly enough, or long enough to gain a sufficiently firm grasp of this reality. To be sure, I tried in the course of data gathering to correct for these potential deficiencies. To garner depth, I focused mainly on the inner ring of predominantly African-American neighborhoods in Roanoke, rather than attempt to develop detailed data on problem solving throughout the city. To achieve breadth, I did not ignore this larger community altogether, but sought to obtain the kind and level of data about it that would allow me intelligently to make some relevant, albeit rough comparisons of poor inner city areas with more affluent areas and of the indigenous problem solving efforts of the former with the more formal, professionalized problem solving regnant in the broader community. To acquire some insight into how problem solving might occur or change over time, I made a special effort to develop information, through interviews and library research, on the history of Roanoke and its black population. While this retrospective look was probably less useful than spending more time in the community would have been, it was better than nothing and actually turned out to be rather revealing of how indigenous capacity had "evolved" to the somewhat developmentally stunted condition in which I found it. Despite all of these deliberate corrections, however, I have to accept the distinct possibility that my lens may have missed or distorted important aspects of the problem solving reality in Roanoke.

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One final limitation should be mentioned, as well. Although I had set out in the field research to document market-based approaches among the modes of problem solving operative within the community, I was unable, due to the combination of time constraints and limited opportunity, to locate and examine a sufficient number of these to make this mode a significant part of the analysis. Given the political currency today of looking to the market to solve all sorts of problems that have heretofore been the province of government or nonprofit organizations, this is an unfortunate shortcoming. However, since I was able to observe at least a modest amount of business involvement in community problem solving and interview some business people active in community affairs, the business perspective will enter my analysis where it helps to clarify points being made about the indigenous and professionalized modes, which were and have remained my primary focus.

Description of Chapters

In the next chapter, I review the three strands of literature that have defined the context for the present study and that have given rise to the gap I have endeavored to narrow. One strand is the relevant communitarian and related literature that has celebrated the putative significance of indigenous problem solving while neglecting its empirical development. Here I also assess the applicability and limitations of research that has been done on natural helping networks, on neighborhoods as political entities, and on self-help and other semi-formal organizational forms. The second strand focuses on public administration as an institution, specifically, the failure within research and thought on this subject to deal in a more full-bodied way with questions about the problem solving capacities of citizens in a contemporary, democratic regime. The final strand invokes both old

and more recent work within pragmatism, particularly the naturalistic social and political views of John Dewey. I attempt to show that pragmatism may offer a useful way to parse the reality and potential of indigenous action in a society where "administration" has come to occupy so much of the problem solving space.

In Chapter Three, I specify the methodology I employed to gather and analyze qualitative data on patterns of problem solving within Roanoke. Mine is an effort in interpretive ethnography. One of the dilemmas ethnography often faces is the difficulty of trying to craft something meaningful out of the elusive inner thoughts of individual informants. I tried to mitigate this problem by focusing on the social, rather than personal, structures into which community problem solving congeals. In other words, I looked more for that which is relatively fixed or stable in the ways problem solving occurs than that which is more variable or fluid. Further, to judge the fit of these structures with communitarian-style democracy, I called upon pragmatism and, in a much more limited way, some related aspects of so called critical theory as an evaluative overlay for my findings on the institutional dimensions of problem solving. Chapter Three sets forth these assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of my research design and details the process through which I entered the field, obtained data, and tried to make sense out of what I found.

The direct findings of my field work are reported in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. In Chapter Four, I delve into the effects that the aging of the African-American leadership in Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods appears to have had on indigenous capacity. I use this as an opportunity to discuss the history of the city and the larger economic, political, and social forces that have shaped it. While much that I present is straightforward, factual material, I also devote space to describing how this historical and demographic reality seemed to be understood by people active in

problem solving, especially those among my informants who either because of personal experience or otherwise heightened awareness perceived a past Roanoke that was categorically different from the one which exists today.

Chapter Five discusses my findings on the professionalization of problem solving. The analysis here differentiates between the knowledge or epistemological claims made by less formal, indigenous problem solving and those made by more formal, professionalized problem solving. With indigenous problem solving, particularly in the kind of neighborhoods I studied, the dominant form of knowledge concerned particular people and places. While professionalized problem solving accorded some weight to such personal knowledge, more abstract forms of knowing and the methods by which it can be acquired were, at least symbolically, regarded with far more importance. The presumed power of this latter sort of knowledge not only gave the professional mode a clear advantage in most problem solving circumstances, but made it the *de facto* standard by which all problem solving was to be judged in the community. The epistemological claims of indigenous problem solving resonated weakly in the larger community, even among indigenous problem solvers themselves, except in those situations where indigenous action itself was becoming more "professional."

When one views reality as a succession of problems to solve (as, for example, Dewey did), knowledge figures prominently. But it is not the only thing of value. Character and morality also matter. Knowledge alone cannot produce solutions to particular problems. It must be applied by people through their exercise of judgment and habit. In Chapter Six, my attention turns to the moral dimension of community problem solving — to what I was able to observe regarding the ways people related to one another in the less formal, indigenous domain, in the more formal,

professionalized domain, and between the two domains. Looking at problem solving from this perspective reveals the advantage indigenous action seemed to enjoy of being perceived as more sincere, honest, and value-driven than professional action. However, it also brings to the surface the role that civility played in keeping this moral edge from becoming more of an advantage for inner city neighborhoods than it was. I will argue in Chapter Six that the heavy emphasis on civility, in both witting and unwitting ways, appeared to prevent the moral force latent in Roanoke's black neighborhoods from trumping, as it were, the epistemological advantage which allowed professionalized problem solving to control activity in the community in a more encompassing fashion.

In Chapter Seven, I extrapolate from the findings and interpretations presented in the three preceding chapters to posit a more basic conceptualization of the less formal, indigenous form of problem solving in contrast with the more formal alternative. The thrust here is to explore how individual and group identities appear to differ between the two and how these different identities lead to different imperatives in acting to solve or ameliorate community problems. The epistemological advantage enjoyed by professionalized problem solving and the moral advantage enjoyed by indigenous problem solving are only the more observable manifestations of what seem to be fundamental differences in the identities that people develop in each realm. I suggest that these identities produce contrasting ways of experiencing and understanding the realities of community life. To oversimplify, the indigenous identity is largely preserving and communal, while the professionalized identity is mainly liberating and individual. The former appears to represent a seemingly passing way of life, while the latter appears to represent what life is becoming, at least in advanced societies like ours. And yet, there is, as I found in Roanoke, resistance simply to doing away with the old and trepidation

about giving into the new altogether, and for an arguably good reason. The two identities do not represent different evolutionary stages, but rather, different, indelible aspects of the same human nature.

This philosophical discussion of identity sets the stage for examining in Chapter Eight how public administration might appropriately respond to the tension between the indigenous and professionalized forms of community problem solving. I propose that, although there can be no complete answer to this problem, changes in how the institutionalized administrative state conducts its business may be able to help citizens discover ways in which they can consciously and continually work at aligning the old and the new, the indigenous and the professionalized. In contrast with contemporary political debate, the issue I raise concerns not so much the size of government as its nature. If the reality of indigenous problem solving is to evolve toward the communitarian hopes for it, then our government must, in its day-to-day operation, function differently.

Chapter II

Communitarianism and the Informal World

Two terms orient this study, indigenous and informal. Of the two, indigenous is the easier to define. In the context of community problem solving, it denotes actions and identities that arise from within a neighborhood or group of neighborhoods, as opposed to actions and identities introduced or prompted from without. By comparison, informal is a more abstract, less easily deciphered term. A look in the *Oxford English Dictionary* at its definitions, as well as those for formal, suggests a twofold concept. One sense refers to that which lacks a definite appearance or order. In other words, the informal is hard to see or discern, as an informal organization or group is apt to be less evident to an observer than a formal organization is. A second sense points to what is done or exists without any or much conscious design. Informal actions (e.g., retrieving the mail for a sick neighbor) and things (e.g., relationships among families on the same block) are, in this definition, taken as more natural or unplanned than their formal counterparts. The two senses are related. Groups or activities not readily apprehended also often seem to exist or occur without being fully intended.

Indigenous and informal, while not holding exactly the same meaning, are close enough to be used interchangeably to describe the subject of my inquiry. Within a neighborhood, indigenous action tends to be informal action — action that appears to occur naturally among the people there. Although formal efforts can and do take place in neighborhoods, it is hard, with few exceptions, to see these efforts as intrinsic to the setting, that is, as emerging on the basis of forces only or primordially at play within the neighborhood. The exceptions might be extraordinarily cohesive groups, such as geographically specific gangs or cults,

where formal rituals and rules are established internally to assure members' loyalty and to distinguish themselves from others. Similarly, while informal activity exists to some extent everywhere formal activity does, only in the indigenous realm does its desirability appear to be unchallenged as the expected way for people to interact. Indeed, if it lost its informality, the indigenous level might no longer be regarded as a meaningful category of problem solving.

There is no literature as such on indigenous or informal problem solving. Undoubtedly, the difficulty of observing this kind of work in action has kept researchers and interested observers at bay.[24] In a society thickly populated by formal entities, it is, in one sense at least, easy to understand why not much has been written about the less formal ways in which local people address the challenges of life together. Nonetheless, the subject becomes harder to ignore as communitarians focus our attention on the need to replenish our communal attachments.

In the next section of this chapter, I review what communitarians have said about indigenous or informal action and the evidence they are able to evoke in behalf of their claims. Since the evidence is slim, I examine three additional sources of knowledge that might be called upon — and sometimes are by communitarians — to provide a weightier, empirical basis for these claims: findings within the fields of social work and community psychology on natural helping networks, political

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[24]Students of the nonprofit sector commonly point out that we know least about the most common type of voluntary organization: the informal and semi-formal grassroots association. See Peter Dobkin Hall, Inventing the Nonprofit Sector, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.140, and David Horton Smith, "A Neglected Type of Voluntary Nonprofit Organization: Exploration of the Semiformal, Fluid-Membership Organization," Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 3, p. 251.

science research on neighborhoods as political entities, and the work of organizational researchers on self-help and informal organizations. Valuable insights can be found in each of these areas, but they still, even when taken together, leave a sizable gap in our understanding of the indigenous or informal level of problem solving.

Having reviewed the directly applicable literature, I turn in the following section to matters of context. My purpose here is to describe how the mainstream understanding of the American administrative state, by viewing citizenship through the attenuating lens of political realism, seems to shortchange the possibilities for indigenous action. Comprehending democracy as something to be maintained in a complex, modern society rather than continuously developed or enhanced, realism urges that we hold no more than modest expectations of citizens and their capacities. While this understanding has room for the motivating symbolism of active citizenship, it appears to be deeply ambivalent about its practice. The chief alternative to the realist position is that of participatory or direct democracy. While "strong democracy," as it is sometimes called,[25] conjures an appealing ideal of committed, involved citizenship, its workability is an open and, as yet, substantially unanswered question. I summarize the thinking and evidence mustered on each side of this realist vs. idealist debate, in order to show that, while each position has something to recommend it, neither seems to delineate a satisfactory context for informal problem solving. They are each in their respective ways blind to important features of the indigenous sphere of activity.

Between the poles of realism and idealism lies pragmatism. In the

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[25] The term "strong democracy" is taken from Benjamin Barber's book by the same title. See B. Barber, <u>Strong Democracy</u>.

concluding section of the chapter, I set forth how pragmatism may be more revealing than either of the poles of how local, informal action does and could work in a free society. Dewey receives most of the attention here, since his thought, more than any other developer of American pragmatism, assumes politically interested form. In Dewey's naturalistic view, democracy stands as that way of life which allows a people to grow, through the testings provided by continuous experience, into ever more complete, fulfilled human beings. Pragmatism, then, represents a perspective which may be more hopeful than realism and less wishful than idealism about the prospects for democratic, citizen-led problem solving in an age of technocratic influences over much of life. I identify and assess relevant aspects of Dewey's thought, both by engaging his writings directly and by appropriating and reacting to what modern proponents and critics of pragmatism have to say that may be germane.

What Communitarians Claim about the Informal Domain

Communitarians have neither taken the informal dimension for granted, nor, on the other hand, analyzed it systematically. Instead, it has tended in their writings to appear in brief, affirming statements about the role of neighborliness and association in the formation of vital communities.[26] The picture painted is of small-scale, face-to-face groups where people can come to know one another fairly well,

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[26] For example, see comments by Robert Dahl, "Participation and the Problem of Civic Understanding," in <u>Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective</u>, ed. Amitai Etzioni, p. 268; Amitai Etzioni, "On Restoring the Moral Voice," in <u>Rights and the Common Good</u>, p. 274; John W. Gardner, <u>National Renewal</u>, p. 6; Daniel Kemmis, <u>Community and the Politics of Place</u>, p. 122; Harold M. McDougall, <u>Black Baltimore: A New Theory of Community</u>, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), Chapter 8; and John McKnight, "Regenerating Community," in <u>Social Policy</u>, Winter 1987.

not as holders of particular roles, but as whole persons. They are bound together principally, not by explicit purposes, but by the affection and trust that come from interacting day-to-day.

For communitarians, these informal ties play a crucial and continuing role in moral and political socialization. They serve as an extension and reinforcement of the character forming function of families. In arguing for a "natural communities" policy, family sociologist David Popenoe suggests that strong organic communities have the same qualities as strong families: both are "enduring, cohesive, and mutually-appreciative."[27] Communities of this kind provide the opportunity for children to learn, apply, and adapt moral values, such as empathy, obligation, care, and trust, in a variety of relatively secure situations. The aim is to prepare them for functioning in the larger world. Clearly, though, children are not the only beneficiaries of the "natural" community. The interdependency or mutuality that arises among neighbors is regarded by communitarians as the root of a healthy sense of citizenship for all people. The empathic understanding — the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes — on which effective democratic citizenship rests must first exist in one's relations with family members, neighbors, and friends before it can be effectively extended to society or humanity in general.[28] Daniel Kemmis,

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[27] David Popenoe, "The Roots of Declining Social Virtue: Family, Community, and the Need for a 'Natural Communities Policy'," in Seedbeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character, and Citizenship in American Society, eds. Mary Ann Glendon & David Blakenhorn, (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995), p. 82.

[28] See Don S. Browning, "Altruism, Civic Virtue, and Religion," in Seedbeds of Virtue, p. 109; Philip Selznick, "Personhood and Moral Obligation," in New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities, ed. Amitai Etzioni, pp. 110-125; and Alan Wolfe, Whose Keeper? Social Science and

the former mayor of Missoula, Montana, makes the point neatly: "Before they become citizens,...people are neighbors."[29]

Selznick's Theory of Core Participation

One of the rare methodical examinations of informal, neighbor-like relations within the communitarian framework can be found in sociologist Philip Selznick's *The Moral Commonwealth*. In this complex, thoughtful book, Selznick includes these relations within the compass of what he calls "core participation."[30] In the modern world, Selznick suggests, people participate in society in two basic ways. One form of participation is segmental; here individuals invest only a part themselves in cooperative schemes with others. Contracts of one kind or another (e.g., through employment) would be a typical example. Segmental participation generally entails a sense of limited obligation and a measure of psychological and moral distance from others. Core participation, by contrast, involves the whole person and relationships of more intimate association. Commitment to others within core participation, while not total, is deeper and more reliable than in the segmental kind.

To delineate core participation, Selznick sets forth a summary account of the established sociological concept of primary relations. In their idealized form, primary relations are ones in which persons are well known by each other, are valued for who they are, are trusting and trusted, are engaged in reciprocal and open-ended

Moral Obligation, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

[29] Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place, p. 117.

[30] Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, pp. 184-193.

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obligation, and share a common identity. Selznick acknowledges that in real life such ties are not always positive. They "are subject to many conflicting pressures and temptations; they are vulnerable to the destructive effects of openly expressed feelings and emotional demands; and much in the dynamics of interaction may inhibit communication, stunt growth, and impoverish obligation."[31] Nevertheless, primary relations are essential to human development. They supply the affiliations that help the individual form a cohesive identity and a healthy sense of responsibility toward others. The sustained, reliable ties of primary relations "temper and mediate participation in the larger society."[32]

Although Selznick makes a persuasive, logical case, he does not muster specific evidence of the actual operation of core participation as a problem solving mode in contemporary society. Instead, on the basis of a broad, interpretive survey of societal conditions, he concludes that core participation and organic action are being forced into decline by the tendency of mass society to encourage segmented identities. While his conclusion appeals to educated observation and common sense, no empirical research is reported on how core participation is actually functioning — or not — today. Of course, it is no different for others working within the communitarian frame. The necessary research has yet to be done. As a result, it is difficult to get clear about what the specific domain of neighborly relations looks like and how it operates. In the work of Selznick, Popenoe, and others, these relations, at least in terms of their normative function, often seem to conflate with the family. While it is true that all primary relations, by definition, share certain essential features, it is also true that what goes on within one's home and what occurs in

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[31] Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 192.

[32] Ibid.

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relations with one's neighbors and friends cannot be the same phenomenon in all respects. There is good reason to assume that the qualities which Selznick ascribes to primary relations do not operate in precisely the same way in each type of relation covered by the category. Only by developing a sharper understanding of how the informal neighborly type works can we see clearly where the most useful intervention points might be in the communitarian quest to stimulate (or assume the strength of) the less formal underpinnings of civic life.

Communitarians' Evidence

When communitarians do cite evidence of the value of indigenous work, it is usually in the vein of anecdotes or cases. To the extent that communitarians can be said to have conducted original research, it would be the stories used by many of them to illustrate their arguments. Rarely, however, are these accounts of actual experiences treated analytically in the search for whatever provisional truths, negative or positive, they may reveal. Rather, they are told for the express purpose of inspiring enthusiasm for communitarian claims about the necessity, or at least appropriateness, of and the potential for nurturing a more robust civil society. Some examples may help to illustrate and buttress the point.

Among the most ardent of communitarian thinkers is John McKnight of Northwestern University. For many years, McKnight has been attempting to make the case for building local associational life in low-income neighborhoods as a way to counter the forces of the professional service culture. The latter, in his view, has used its presumed expertise as a cover for exercising control that disempowers economically embattled communities by turning their members into "clients."

McKnight makes an interesting conceptual argument about the ways in which

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external institutions undermine low-income neighborhoods. Some aspects of this argument resonate with my discussion in chapter five on the professionalization of problem solving. But, as with other communitarians, McKnight relies mainly on anecdotal accounts for evidence of the potential of local associations as the cure. In a popular book written in 1993 with John Kretzman, on how to build community assets from within neighborhoods, McKnight cites numerous brief stories of presumably successful efforts. But a reader looks in vain for anything like systematic data that might provide a more objective basis for appreciating the prescriptions which the authors offer.[33] A more recent compendium of McKnight's writings does refer to studies done on the nature of healthful local communities by him and his colleagues at Northwestern University's Center for Urban Affairs.[34] However, nearly all of the hard evidence cited from this research is about the external systems and agents impinging on low-income communities, and not about the internal resourcefulness of the communities themselves. While McKnight has been content to work mainly in the essay mode, where one has more leeway in expressing opinions and less obligation to present evidence, his normative theory about the importance of local associations would no doubt be more compelling if supported by balanced, empirical research grounding the truth of his claims.

Among the most prolific of contemporary communitarian writers has been sociologist Amitai Etzioni, the founder of The Communitarian Network, a

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[33] John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets, (Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993).

[34] John McKnight, The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits, (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

nationwide association for intellectuals interested in the subject. Through a series of popular books which he has authored,[35] other edited volumes,[36] and his editorship of the Network's quarterly journal, *The Responsive Community*, Etzioni has compiled an impressive ideological argument for the communitarian cause. While less preoccupied than McKnight with the importance of associational life and more intent on adducing the available evidence for his position, Etzioni essentially resorts, when discussing the informal community domain, to the same concise, story-telling style. For example, in his first book-length statement of the communitarian agenda, he extrapolates from Jim Sleeper's case study of race relations in New York City this way: "Even in large metropolises...there are neighborhoods in which many people know their neighbors, their shopkeepers, and their local leaders. They are likely to meet one another in neighborhood bars, bowling alleys, and places of worship. They watch out for each other's safety and children."[37] The shortcoming of this terse, uncritical reporting of a complex story is that it conveys little useful information and generalizes from a single, thin case. It appears designed to induce in the reader an affective acceptance of the resilience of indigenous relationships, rather than a hard-headed appraisal of the particular functionality of such relationships in modern urban life. To be sure, Etzioni, like communitarian scholars in general, has been

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[35] The Moral Dimension: Towards a New Economics, (New York: Free Press, 1988); The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993); The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society, (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

[36] New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities,; Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective.

[37] Etzioni, The Spirit of Community, p. 120. Also see Jim Sleeper, The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.)

handicapped by the fact that in-depth research on this functionality has not been done. In light of the gap, though, it seems the proper position to take would to be acknowledge that good scientific investigations of such problem solving have yet to be undertaken and that absent more and better evidence, firm conclusions about it, pro or con, should be regarded with healthy skepticism.

Enthusiasm, as opposed to rigorous evidence gathering, also seems to characterize organized efforts that have been made by advocates to build collections of cases demonstrating various aspects of the communitarian position. While these collections focus predominately on formal activities, informal relationships do receive some attention, especially as the starting ground for more formal undertakings.

The Alliance for National Renewal was formed in 1994 by Common Cause founder John Gardner, now a professor emeritus at Stanford University, to spur collective action to strengthen the country's civic infrastructure. Among other activities, the Alliance, which is managed by the National Civic League, has been accumulating stories of community and neighborhood renewal efforts.[38] Deliberately cast in the mold of positive news, these short stories, available on the Alliance's web site, emphasize the attributes of success and generally avoid critique. Informal problem solving emerges as intact and strong in the Alliance's journalistic accounts of local action. However, because the purpose is not to offer objective analysis but to counter cynicism and inspire belief, a convincing, scientific basis for drawing this optimistic conclusion does not emerge.

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[38] These stories are reported through the Alliance for National Renewal's website at http:/www.ncl.org/anr and its newsletter, The Kitchen Table.

A similar, but somewhat more exacting approach to case building has been initiated by The Civic Practices Network, an online project founded by academics at Brandeis University and the University of Wisconsin. The Civic Practices Network provides Internet access to detailed stories about innovative ways in which citizens are working to improve their communities and contribute to public work.[39] While most of the case studies included are, in their upbeat tone, like those listed by the Alliance, the usually greater length of the stories allows on occasion for more searching examinations. For example, one case reported on the Network concerned an effort in Dorchester, Massachusetts to achieve more balance in responsibility and control for child welfare between professional service agencies and neighborhood residents, including fostering more informal supports for children among neighborhood families.[40] The case's author summarizes the results of a limited evaluation of the initiative showing that, though the project had realized some success, there were many challenges in bridging the gap in power and sophistication between professionals and residents and in developing indigenous leadership where it had not before existed. A more meticulous look at the formal and informal relationships in this case would have better grounded the author's concluding advocacy for the Dorchester model. Nevertheless, the simple fact that evaluation results were reported seems to set this story apart from the relentlessly optimistic, anecdotal norm in the communitarian literature.

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[39] The Civic Practices Network's website is located at http:/www.cpn.org.

[40] See John Lippitt, Communities, Children and Family Support, (Waltham, MA: Heller School of Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Brandeis University, 1996), /Lippitt.htm.

Other Bases for Communitarian Claims

To be fair, communitarianism is a movement, and movements are typically driven more by the motivational appeal of their ideas than by exercises in scientific validation. But it is reasonable to ask whether the communitarian movement can be sustained unless its ideas for action and change come to be more firmly rooted in carefully developed theories and facts. People may be initially drawn to the movement by its emotional pull, but they are apt to stick with it only if enough of the steps they are motivated to take produce positive outcomes. The surest path to that kind of success begins with the formation of a knowledge base which accurately describes and explains the various dimensions of community life — including the informal — under contemporary conditions. As organizational sociologist Carl Milofsky states, "it is important [for both theoretical and practical reasons]...to learn how local cohesion arises, how voluntarism identifies and attacks social problems, and how indigenous resources can be mobilized to promote social betterment."[41] If such knowledge can be developed, communitarian activists should be able to chart more effective lines of action on the basis of a hardier understanding of the opportunities and constraints they face.

Some help in this connection has been provided by research conducted largely outside the communitarian camp but with communitarian implications. These are investigations of neighborhood capacity and informal life that have been undertaken for other purposes than deliberately trying to prove, disprove, or illuminate specific communitarian claims. This is not to say that their authors would

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[41] Carl Milofsky, "Introduction: Networks, Markets, Culture, and Contracts: Understanding Community Organizations," in Community Organizations: Studies in Resource Mobilization and Exchange, ed. C. Milofsky, p. 12.

shun the communitarian label. Whether or not any or all of them subscribe to the communitarian cause is unknown to me. Rather, the point is that their studies appear to have been guided more by established or emerging issues within their particular intellectual disciplines than by any self-conscious attempt to address explicitly the communitarian agenda.

Natural Helping Networks

Informal efforts by neighbors to assist other neighbors experiencing problems have been the subject of research within social work and community psychology focusing on natural helping or support networks. Scholarly interest within these two disciplines in how neighbors and friends come to one another's aid first arose in the 1970s. Amidst growing political doubts about the efficacy of formal, professionally provided human services and inflation induced controls on public spending for these services, researchers began looking into natural helping as a means to improve the impact and extend the capacity of service systems to care and support people with needs.[42] While the active pursuit of the topic may have been prompted by external pressures, it was perhaps inevitable that disciplines closely associated with formal methods of social problem solving would, sooner or later, become curious about the more informal, localized ways in which people help each other.

The research that has been done, while hardly extensive,[43] has provided

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[42] For example, see James K. Whittaker, James Garbarino, and Associates, <u>Social Support Networks: Informal Helping in the Human Services</u>, New York: Aldine Publishing, 1983).

[43] As social welfare scholar Arnold Gurin notes, "There is growing recognition of the important role played by informal caretakers, especially families, in the social service system. This level of informal support networks is the least explored of all the elements in the public-private relationship." From A. Gurin

useful insights into how such natural support systems appear to function. Studies have found that when people have unmet needs, they are apt to turn first to other family members, friends, and neighbors (i.e., to informal sources) before seeking assistance from more formal sources.[44] The help provided informally may include companionship, emotional support, guidance and advice, material assistance, or regulation.

The extent of the help given appears to depend on the type of neighborhood in which people live. According to research by the late British sociologist Philip Abrams, reciprocal care among neighbors is most likely to grow in relatively isolated, closed, and threatened social settings consisting of persons who are similar to each other socially and economically.[45] In this particular circumstance, people have information about and trust with each other but limited access to outside resources for satisfying their needs. Abrams also concluded that natural care is best thought of, not as spontaneous, even though that may be how participants describe it, but as a predictable function of the social norms governing relations among people who know one another.[46]

"Governmental Responsibility and Privatization: Examples from Four Social Services," in Privatization and the Welfare State, eds. S.B. Kamerman & A.J. Kahn, (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 197.

[44] See Rudolf H. Moos & Roger E. Mitchell, "Social Network Resources and Adaptation: A Conceptual Framework," in Basic Processes in Helping Relationships, ed. T.A. Wills, (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp.213-232.

[45] Reported in Bulmer, Neighbours, p. 93.

[46] Bulmer, Neighbours, p. 26. For a related discussion of the reasons people need stable networks of social relations see Peter Marris, Loss and Change, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1975)

On other aspects of natural helping networks, however, research has been inconclusive or led to findings that are difficult to reconcile. Some analyses, for example, have suggested that lay care, much of which can be construed as informal, may be superior to professional services in a variety of relevant ways (e.g., being better able to foster self-esteem in the person helped, offering more efficacious role modeling). The explanation that has been given is the greater rapport and voluntarism likely to exist among equals in lay care situations.[47] Other studies, by contrast, have indicated that the networks through which this care occurs are delicate structures, easily corrupted or undermined by external influences, such as linkage to formal services.[48] This second set of findings has introduced a degree of caution into the consideration of natural helping arrangements as an ingredient in community building. Community psychologist Donald Warren has argued, on the basis of his own studies, that calling upon a neighbor may be "less an act of affirmation of a

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[47] See Thomas Ashby Wills, "Nonspecific Factors in Helping Relationships," in Basic Processes in Helping Relationships, ed. T.A. Wills, (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 397-399. Empirical evidence that lay care may be more effective than professional care is limited and in dispute. For the 'pro' position, see J.A. Durlak, "Comparative Effectiveness of Paraprofessional and Professional Helpers, Psychological Bulletin, No. 86 (1979), pp. 80-92, and J.A. Durlak, "Evaluating Comparative Studies of Paraprofessional and Professional Helpers: A Reply to Nietzel and Fisher," Psychological Bulletin, No. 89 (1981), pp. 566-569. For the 'con' position, see M.T. Nietzel & S.G. Fisher, "Effectiveness of Professional and Paraprofessional Helpers: A Comment on Durlak, Psychological Bulletin, No. 89 (1981), pp. 555-565.

[48] See Bulmer, Neighbours, p. 131; James Garbarino, "Social Support Networks: RX for the Helping Professionals," in Social Support Networks, eds. J.K. Whittaker & J. Garbarino, (New York: Aldine Publishing, 1983), p. 16; and Donald I. Warren, Helping Networks, p. 397.

sense of community, than it is a testing of what is out there."[49] In other words, it may simply be the immediate, pragmatic response to a felt need and not a self-conscious expression of or desire for belonging.

For the most part, the research on natural helping networks has been conducted by scholars interested in these entities as a resource that professional services should take into account in the pursuit of their own ends. The results and advice produced have been mainly intended for the use of organizations and practitioners operating within formal systems that design and deliver services. "Our purpose," states James Garbarino in the opening chapter of a book which he and James Whittaker and their associates wrote synthesizing the research on natural helping systems, "is on social support networks that a professional can find or initiate, become part of or at least connected to, and then collaborate with in achieving human service missions."[50]

It is not surprising then that, although suggestive in places, none of the research carried out has examined informal care explicitly within a political or moral framework. The studies by Warren and Abrams have come the closest to doing so. They each give deliberate attention — not unlike John McKnight, although with more scientific distance — to the realities of power in the relations between informal and professional helpers. Largely ignored by them, however, is how power functions

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[49] Warren, <u>Helping Networks</u>, p. 397.

[50] Garbarino, "Social Support Networks: RX for the Helping Professionals," in <u>Social Support Networks</u>, p. 5. A similar point of view shows up throughout Wills' edited volume of articles by mental health scholars and published at roughly the same time as the Whittaker and Garbarino book. See footnote 47.

within the informal setting itself.[51]   The danger in not attending to the moral dynamics at work within natural helping situations — that is, in not attending to issues of power and control and the regulation of normative conduct among the actors within such situations — is a susceptibility to treating informal support networks too uncritically. While Warren and Abrams cannot be said *per se* to exhibit this tendency, others studying natural helping have been liable simply either to assume the intrinsic value of the informal kind of support[52] or to assert that value on the basis of narrow comparisons with professional helping.[53] They have not tried to get at it by scrutinizing the larger context within which both forms of help (and power) occur.

In social work and community psychology, natural helping networks and informal support systems have of late lost some of their cachet as a focus of research. As the center of gravity in social policy has shifted the past twenty years from the federal government to states and localities, scholarly attention in these fields has turned toward approaches to social problem solving that emphasize local services integration, development and prevention rather than remediation, and greater

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[51] Lippitt takes a preliminary look at the role of power in informal settings in his report on an effort in Dorchester, Massachusetts to increase neighborhood involvement in the promotion of child welfare. See J. Lippitt, Communities, Children, and Family Support, pp. 11-16.

[52] See, for example, Alice H. Collins & Diane L. Pancoast, Natural Helping Networks, (Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1976). This basically uncritical examination of the topic is what initiated the spate of interest in informal support systems that played out over the next decade.

[53] The volume edited by T.A. Wills attempts to compare professional helpers and lay helpers on a variety of clinical dimensions. See Wills (ed.), Basic Processes in Helping Relationships.

community control. [54] Within this shift, the informal dimension still exists, but even more than before as a background factor. Indeed, it could be said that political decentralization, by transferring more of the choices for formal action to the local level, has possibly made the informal even less visible to social researchers.

Neighborhoods as Political Entities

The devolution of the domestic policy agenda has increased the importance of understanding communities and neighborhoods from a political perspective. It is this perspective that has, not surprisingly, figured most prominently among communitarian activists. Unlike social work and community psychology, which have, at least until recently, explicitly investigated the indigenous response to human needs, political research has not addressed informal problem solving as a separate topic. Instead, it has dealt with the informal as a piece of a broader examination of neighborhoods as places of political action and identity. While this research has given us a better grasp than the human service disciplines of the role of power in the indigenous realm, it has been hampered by its own myopia. In this case, the very lens that has enabled political science to situate informal action within the larger dynamic shaping the distribution and use of power in local political life has tended, reductively, to define this action as solely motivated by "interest."

The political research on indigenous activity has focused primarily on the

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[54] Perhaps the most sophisticated work in this new genre is the applied research being carried out by analysts at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. See, for example, Robert J. Chaskin, Defining Neighborhood: History, Theory, and Practice, (Chapin Hall, 1995), and Joan Wynn, et al., Children, Families, and Communities: A New Approach to Social Services, (Chapin Hall, 1994).

question of whether it is possible to widen and deepen democratic participation in a society where power and authority have, over time, become more concentrated in public and private bureaucracies. In this perspective, neighborhoods and grassroots groups are identified as possible sources of countervailing influence, places where ordinary citizens might be enabled to play a larger role in shaping the communal choices and actions that affect them. The assumption throughout the literature has been that a neighborhood is an appropriate way to classify a certain set of interests and that the purpose of research is to understand how these interests are defined and exercised.

The findings of research on the efficacy of neighborhoods as political settings have been inconclusive. Recent detailed studies of Atlanta and Cincinnati, for example, reveal that neighborhoods in these two cities have had difficulty competing with the influence of more organized, cohesive interests, such as business elites (Atlanta) and property owners (Cincinnati).[55] While a neighborhood or neighborhood group might be able, on occasion, to get its way, it lacks the systematic capacity for sustained action which more effective sources of power possess. As Clarence Stone observed about Atlanta, "The downtown elite....responds to unforeseen and unwanted developments in the context of a policy strategy that, though, flexible, is long in term and broad in scope...No other element of the community has a comprehensive strategy, and even if some other group did, it would have difficulty mobilizing sufficient resources to act."[56]

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[55] On Atlanta see Clarence N. Stone, Regime Politics. On Cincinnati see J.E. Davis, Contested Ground: Collective Action and the Urban Neighborhood, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[56] Op. Cit., p. 134.

Other research draws a more optimistic conclusion, seeing neighborhood entities as capable of more serious participation in local decision making. In a large scale study of participatory democracy in the United States funded by the Ford Foundation, Jeffrey M. Berry and his colleagues at Tufts University found that workable mechanisms for expanding opportunities for neighborhoods and citizens to join in and affect public policy do exist and could be developed in more urban communities.[57] Their findings do not dispute past research indicating that relatively few people participate actively in civic affairs. Even in those cities in their research with the strongest participatory schemes, participation rates were not especially high.[58] What these cities had, though, were neighborhood organizations that appeared able to play a continuing role in public decision making and to enjoy either the support or acquiescence of large percentages of non-participating neighborhood members.

My purpose in noting these two sets of studies is not to try to reconcile them or suggest who has the better argument. Instead, they are included to illustrate the tendency in political research to define neighborhoods narrowly, as entities bearing interests, rather than as a more complex social phenomenon of which interest-based political activity is but a part. This narrow perspective would appear to limit the light that a political understanding can shed on informal action.

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[57] Jeffrey M. Berry, Kent E. Portney, and Ken Thomson, The Rebirth of Urban Democracy.

[58] The authors report that only "about 16.6 percent of the people in the four cities with citywide participation programs have been active in a neighborhood association during the previous two years." Ibid., p. 77.

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For example, in the investigation by Berry et al., when pondering the question of why decentralization of political power has not drawn more citizens into political action, the authors suggest that participation may simply require more effort than most citizens are willing to expend.[59] While this explanation has surface plausibility, it appears to miss or severely attenuate — because of the constrictive view of pluralistic politics being employed — the fuller context in which the political identity of neighborhood members is situated. Conceivably, a lot is happening at any given time in a neighborhood or community that influences the willingness and ability of people to participate more formally in political work. The effort they do or do not expend arises, in ways yet to be explained, out of the social circumstances in which neighborhood members find themselves.

One attempt to fill the gap is research that Matthew Crenson has conducted on neighborhood politics in Baltimore.[60] Unlike the studies of Atlanta and Cincinnati or the broader examination by Berry and his colleagues, Crenson focuses in Baltimore, less on the power of neighborhoods in the overall political dynamic of the community, and more on the nature and scope of political activity within neighborhoods. His purpose, however, is to understand how this internal activity leads to political capabilities that are used to get things done both inside the neighborhood and in its relations with external people and institutions. Thus, the difference between his approach and that of the researchers mentioned above is one of degree rather than kind.

Crenson's findings spark interest because of the strong support they appear

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[59] Berry, et al., The Rebirth of Urban Democracy, p. 97.

[60] Crenson, Neighborhood Politics.

to give to the political perspective as the most useful way of understanding what urban neighborhoods are. In other words, one may read his findings as an empirical defense of the narrowness I have just expressed doubt about above. In a careful analysis of detailed data drawn from surveys and observations, Crenson concludes that urban neighborhoods are best thought of as political societies consisting of citizens competing and cooperating in shaping their common environment. He contrasts this depiction with a portrait of neighborhoods as private social groups in which participants are tightly cohesive. While members of neighborhoods may form strong ties with one another, this, Crenson argues, is more a consequence of personal characteristics than of the particular neighborhood in which they live.[61] Because of the great extent to which services and resources citizens need are located outside their neighborhoods, and because of the large role that outside forces play in defining the neighborhood as a distinct geographic area,[62] the political skills and connections of residents are more important than their neighborliness in determining the relevance of local problems and finding solutions to them.[63]

Crenson offers a provocative view of urban neighborhood life. And it may reflect the actual conditions in many neighborhoods. But his conclusions need to be regarded with caution. Because most of his data are drawn from surveys asking respondents for their perceptions and recollections, he never develops an in-depth

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[61] Crenson, Neighborhood Politics, pp. 71-72.

[62] The ways in which the larger urban environment can symbolically define and bound a neighborhood is the subject of Albert Hunter's study of communities in Chicago. See A. Hunter, Symbolic Communities: The Persistence and Change of Chicago's Local Communities, (The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[63] Ibid, p. 155, p. 186.

account of how people in a neighborhood deal, formally and informally, with the real problems they face. There are no detailed, first-hand descriptions of neighborhood members interacting with one another around a particular issue over time. Moreover, underlying the limitations of the data is an evident conceptual shortcoming. Crenson assumes what happens in neighborhoods is either a private matter or a public matter. There is no middle condition lying between private and public, nor did the research evidently seek to determine whether one exists.[64] Yet, the existence of a middle ground is central to communitarian theories about civil society and community. As writer Wendell Berry explains in discussing the relevance of this middle area to freedom:

> "To define freedom only as a public privilege of private citizens is finally inadequate to the job of protecting freedom....It fails to provide a circumstance for those private satisfactions and responsibilities without which freedom is both pointless and fragile. Here as elsewhere, we need to interpose between the public and the private interests a third interest: that of the community."[65]

Arguably, then, in interpreting the data, Crenson misses nuances that speak to aspects of neighborhood life, beyond the consideration of power and interest, which

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[64] To this point, Crenson writes in the preface that, "An unknown but certainly significant share of the public services consumed by the society is generated by the consumers themselves....When neighborhoods are generating some of their own public services, it means that neighbors have formed political relationships with one another. The residents who argue about the loudness of a radio...are not engaged in merely private business. They are shaping and creating public goods, and for that reason they are performing a kind of political work." (ix).

[65] Wendell Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 147.

give shape and substance to the informal level of problem solving. None of these points should be taken to detract from the value of his study as an incisive look at contemporary urban neighborhoods from a political perspective. Rather, they are made simply to suggest that more of relevance may be going on in such communities than his particular lens was able to see.

Power and interest, the main constructs animating political research, cannot explain all of the non-private action that occurs in neighborhoods. When people step out of their households and interact with their neighbors and friends, power and interest may indeed come into play, but they also may not, and even when they do, they may be mediated or limited in their influence by other aspects of social life. Indeed, some examinations of civil society define power as the enemy of community.[66] Its presence is believed to undermine the trustworthiness that people hope for in themselves and look for in others. "It is power," suggests philosopher Annette Baier, "the opportunity to acquire power after power and to sustain monopoly of power, that is a proven corrupter of trustworthiness and so of networks of trust."[67]

Power may conflict with formation of the kind of neighborhood that Popenoe

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[66]For example, see J.L. Cohen & A. Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 466-473. Interestingly, this book, which focuses on the phenomenon known as "small social movements," does not regard interest in the same negative way that is does power. Perhaps this is because, as function of its sociological framework, it devotes little attention to the internal workings of small groups where "pecking orders" and other micro-level manifestations of power are present.

[67] Annette C. Baier, Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.160.

sees playing a crucial role in teaching values and shaping moral character.[68] For example, in John Lippitt's report on the efforts in Dorchester, Massachusetts to engage low-income neighborhoods in the work of fostering the welfare of their children, he notes how organizing residents led to power struggles that reduced trust all the way around — between residents and community organizations and among residents themselves. He explains the dilemma as a failure to find the proper leaders.[69] Though he may be right, it is also conceivable that, no matter who the leaders are, there will be an inevitable tension between the neighborhood as a place where power is exercised and the neighborhood as a place where people care about one another. The perspective of pluralist politics, while it may acknowledge the latter function, has a hard time crediting it. Some political communitarians go so far as to worry that giving too much space to mutual care and moral development as a defining ground of civic action may undercut the more substantial, hard-working role citizens need to play to advance the common good. That is, these observers recognize the tension between the two but believe the power and interest variable in the equation should be weighted more heavily because it deals with ostensibly more important matters.[70]

What seems clear from this brief review of relevant political research and theory, is that when the focus is interest or power, there is a tendency to discount or

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[68] Popenoe, "The Roots of Declining Social Virtue," in <u>Seedbeds of Virtue</u>, p. 82.

[69] Lippitt, <u>Communities, Children, and Family Support</u>, p. 8.

[70] Harry C. Boyte has been among the most articulate spokespersons for this perspective. See Harry C. Boyte and Nancy N. Kari, <u>Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work</u>, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

downplay the more organic, intimate ties that may root people in their communities and that, arguably, constitute a primary influence within informal problem solving. It is worth noting, however, a possible, but largely uninvestigated, exception to this tendency, before moving onto consideration of the research on informal and self-help organizations.

The work of the late Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, particularly its organizer in the American southwest, Ernesto Cortes, has attracted a good deal of attention in recent years from communitarians.[71] IAF's explicit concern is empowerment of disadvantaged communities. Cortes has approached the task, not through traditional methods of mass mobilization, but by cultivating participation household-by-household. It is a slow process aimed at identifying particular interests and building trust, so that when the people in a community are collectively ready to act they are able to do so in supposedly genuine solidarity with one another.

While Cortes' method is appealing, and he is able to tell compelling stories of communities that have used the method successfully, it is unclear whether the approach truly builds political capacities that are sustainable and whether it resolves the tension mentioned above between exercising power and providing care. There are, as I've already suggested, at least theoretical reasons for entertaining doubt. And there is as yet too little hard evidence on which to judge the efficacy of the IAF

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[71] See Ernesto Cortes, Reweaving the Fabric: The Iron Rule and the Industrial Areas Foundation Strategy for Dealing with Poverty Through Power and Politics, (1993), Unpublished paper.

approach.[72]   Cortes may be right about the necessity of taking time to build relationships, and his stress on common religiously informed values may be key in fostering trust among those community members who opt to get involved. But closer, more objective scrutiny of the experience with this means of mobilizing people from within their neighborhoods will need to occur before it can be said with confidence that a way has been found to reconcile power and trust noninstitutionally.

Informal and Self-Help Organizations

In the research on informal and self-help organizations, power shifts from being the central concern that it is in political research to being approached more contextually, as one factor among many affecting the design and behavior of less organized groups. Clubs, associations, support groups, and other informal bodies exist in most communities, serving as particular vehicles through which indigenous problem solving occurs. Although there has been even less research on informal organizations than on natural helping networks and neighborhoods as a political form, the perspective offered is more variegated. The field of organizational studies is able to draw on insights from a variety of other disciplines, and this leads to an angle of analysis which seems capable of both more breadth and more subtlety. While the organizational view may be less useful than the other two orientations discussed here in exploring forces that shape the larger neighborhood environment, it appears to offer a surer grasp of the individual collective entities populating this milieu.

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[72] The only piece of relatively objective scholarship I have found on IAF's work is a doctoral dissertation. See Mark R. Warren, Social Capital and Community Empowerment: Religion and Political Organization in the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 1995, Cambridge, MA).

Much of the research on informal organizations has been at the most basic level: defining what these organizations look like. Since their informality makes them unobvious, the definitional task is especially important. Calling these bodies self-governing associations, Milofsky defines them as typically "small, loosely structured, voluntaristic, and....democratic."[73] In a general survey of nonprofit research, Peter Dobkins Hall describes grassroots, voluntary organizations as numerous, "frequently informal, unincorporated, and transient."[74]

A more exhaustive, but comparable definition comes from David Horton Smith:

> "Grassroots associations tend to be more informally structured, easier to form, quicker to die, usually unincorporated, directly much less likely to be registered by the government, often member-benefit oriented, strongly dependent on their elected officers and committees for leadership, membership-based with a voluntary compliance structure, focused on solidary and purposive incentives, intermittent in activity, generally low in activity level overall, and dependent on internal fund-raising."[75]

While none of these definitions dwells exclusively on informal entities, it is clear that informal and less formal organizations constitute the lion's share of the

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[73] Milofsky, "Introduction," <u>Community Organizations</u>, p. 3.

[74] Hall, <u>Inventing the Nonprofit Sector</u>, p. 140.

[75] David Horton Smith, "The Rest of the Nonprofit Sector: The Nature, Magnitude, and Impact of Grassroots Associations in America," (Paper prepared for the 1994 Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action), p. 3.

community associations the authors have in mind.

The organizational research on informal or grassroots activity has for the most part been motivated by both an empirical interest in attempting to draw some boundaries on what is evidently a large but not well understood population of organizations and a normative interest in the role such entities play in preserving and advancing democratic behavior. On the latter score, fears have arisen around the possibility that increased formalization in society, and the hierarchy that tends to come with it, represent a threat to the informal domain and its embodiment of participatory, self-governing forms of activity. The dilemma is posed starkly by Selznick in the terminology of core vs. segmental participation discussed earlier:

> "In today's mass society, core participation....is bound to weaken. People are absorbed directly, as mobile, separated, interchangeable individuals, into a world of symbols dominated by mass communication; and into the large organizations that manage work, politics, education, and leisure. Segmental participation is the order of the day..."[76]

Unfortunately, the research on informal organizations, limited as it has been to trying to identify the structural characteristics of this form, has been unable to validate, falsify, or even much illuminate the encroachment hypothesis. This would require looking less at static features and more at the dynamics of informal action and of the relationships between it and the formal realm. [77]

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[76] Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 193. Also see Carl Milofsky, "Structure and Process in Community Self-Help Organization," in Community Organizations, ed. C. Milofsky, pp.205-209.

[77] Milofsky and sociologist Albert Hunter have made a start at a theory of nonprofit organizational dynamics in a paper on how voluntary entities emerge. See

Some beginning insight into such dynamics has materialized in studies of voluntary organizations more generally.[78] There the focus has been on how the lure of public dollars for nonprofit work influences the structure and practice of voluntary agencies. The research suggests that community organizations induced to compete for public funding, and the influence that goes with it, tend to develop more formal structures. They also often become less connected to the indigenous community that spawned them. As they deepen their stake in the systems of professionalized services that monopolize the control and use of hard resources, their grassroots tend to weaken and they assume the characteristics of non-indigenous formal organizations. The actual extent to which informal organizations are implicated in this dynamic is unknown. While surely many formal voluntary entities in the hunt for public funding get their starts informally, the available research says little about the natural history of these organizations — which ones become more formalized and which do not and, in each case, why. Nonetheless, the investigations which have been done give reason at least to suppose that many informal efforts in neighborhoods end up

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C. Milofsky and A. Hunter, "Where Nonprofits Come from: A Theory of Organizational Emergence," (A paper prepared for the 1994 Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action).

[78] In addition to Milofsky's edited volume Community Organizations, credible examples of this literature would include: Kirsten A. Gronbjerg, Understanding Nonprofit Funding: Managing Revenues in Social Services and Community Development Organizations, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993); Donald F. Kettl, Sharing Power: Public Governance and Private Markets, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993); Steven R. Smith & Michael Lipsky, Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jennifer R. Wolch, The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition, (New York: The Foundation Center, 1990); and Malcolm Bush, Families in Distress: Public, Private, and Civic Responses, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

following this path: becoming more tightly structured and rule-governed in order to compete effectively for limited resources in the wider world. Yet to be described and explained is under what circumstances this is most likely to happen and what the consequences turn out to be over time for these organizations and groups and for those informal bodies that, for whatever reasons, never enter the fray.

Limitations of Available Evidence and Theory

The research on natural helping networks, neighborhoods as political entities, and informal and self-help organizations reveals some important aspects of indigenous problem solving. The studies reviewed here show that: the informal domain of problem solving does exist and has value for those involved in it; when such problem solving occurs, it tends to be done by people who know one another fairly well and who are alike in many ways; it is organized more or less democratically and flexibly; it is, however, not immune to struggles for power and control; and it is quite vulnerable to external influences. While these findings are helpful, they do not amount to a robust understanding of what informal problem solving is and how it functions. We know little about the full scope of indigenous, informal action, its dynamics, the characteristics of its practitioners, the specific and real purposes it attempts to fulfill, or its true impact in solving problems. Nor are the theoretical underpinnings of what is known developed beyond a preliminary stage. Each of the three areas of research has, in the main, conceptualized informal action deductively, according to extant analytical categories within their respective disciplines. There has been limited effort in the other direction, toward extracting inductively from examined experience at the indigenous level to derive insights that might extend, alter, or otherwise change the frames these disciplines use to plumb reality. And none of the disciplines has recognized, in a serious way, the work of the

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other two. I could not find any cross-references in the literature I reviewed. The overall result is relatively thin, disconnected slices of theoretical understanding of informal problem solving. Put simply, there does not appear to be an intact, comprehensive account in the available literature of what happens and why when people in a neighborhood or community take collective action informally.

The Administrative State

In all of the writings I encountered on natural helping networks, neighborhoods as political entities, and informal organizations, public institutions are almost always dwelling in the background as an undifferentiated force somehow shaping, for better or worse (mostly worse), the relevant environment for neighborhood action. The same can be said for the explicitly communitarian literature where indigenous problem solving gets discussed. Government is present in general in these works, but usually not in the form of specific types of agencies and agents whose conduct may or should affect, directly and indirectly, the formation, activities, and fate of informal efforts by neighbors to solve local problems. In the absence of more fine-grained analysis, it is all too easy to rely on conventional notions about public bureaucracy and its agents as: limited in problem solving competence (natural helping networks); potentially intrusive and always powerful (neighborhoods as political entities); elaborately manipulative and controlling (informal and voluntary organizations); or impersonal and remote from the citizenry (communitarianism). All of these sharp-edged images contain a measure of truth, but in none of this work is there a fully developed framework for understanding what the function is or should be of administrative institutions in affecting the environment for indigenous action. There is no wrestling with the issue, no subtlety in the imagery invoked.

The Institutional Character of the State

It was not always this way. Two centuries ago, the founding debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists focused, fundamentally, on the consequences a new form of government would have for community in America. "The main reason for the Anti-Federalists' dissent," writes constitutional scholar William Schambra, "was their belief.....that republicanism was possible only with public-spirited or virtuous citizens....This kind of virtue arose only in a genuine community, where citizens sensed their oneness with their fellows."[79] The community in question was not the formalized, segmented place encountered today. It was, at least for a time in our history, a more organic setting — a setting in which people related to one another on the basis of well-established, tacit rules governing social roles and moral responsibilities. The Anti-Federalists saw in this face-to-face community the well-spring of a good society. In opposition, the Federalists claimed that the new nation could not count much on such "informal" ties — on the organic functioning of the civic domain — to bring about the social order which all desired. For the Federalists, order was something which had to be created through the plan of the Constitution and through the results, such as a sound public administration, that could be expected to flow from its proper execution.[80]

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[79] William A. Schambra, "The Roots of American Public Philosophy,"<u>The Public Interest</u>, No.67, Spring 1982, p. 39.

[80] Some contemporary commentators trace the evident decline in civic involvement to the "realist" move by the Federalists to assume, in designing the new government, that people will be guided by their baser motives. The Anti-Federalists took a more optimistic view of the possibility of finer desires shaping conduct so long as local civic life was allowed to flourish. See, for example, Robert C. Sinopoli, <u>The Foundations of American Citizenship: Liberalism, the Constitution, and Civic Virtue</u>, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Russell L. Hanson, <u>The</u>

Though the Federalists won the argument two centuries ago,[81] their success did not bring an end to the issue of how government as a set of institutions does or should relate to citizens in their more natural, neighborly associations. The institutional character of any state is never a finished work. As John Dewey said, "There is no antecedent universal proposition which can be laid down because of which the functions of a state should be limited or should be expanded. Their scope is something to be critically and experimentally determined."[82] By implication, the relationship between the institutionalized state and the most basic level at which people act communally remains, perforce, an open issue.

From the start, American politics has, by design, placed a premium on the intentional achievement of order and stability. That is after all why a constitution was written and debated so thoroughly. With the beginning of the modern period in the late nineteenth century, it could be argued, the quest for stability became even more important politically than at the time of the founding. New complexities and uncertainties caused by industrial and urban growth called into question the adequacy of existing means to achieve order. It was in this climate of doubt about the efficacy of tradition that Woodrow Wilson penned his famous essay calling for

Democratic Imagination in America: Conversations with Our Past, (Princeton University Press, 1985).

[81] Herbert J. Storing, What the Anti-Federalists Were For, The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

[82] John Dewey, Excerpts from *The Public and Its Problems*, in Joseph Ratner (ed.), Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy, (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), p. 385. For an interesting take, from an organizational science perspective, on the notion that political orders are by definition incomplete, see James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics, (New York: The Free Press), Chapter 9.

the institutional separation of the supposedly stabilizing and purifying influence of administration from the turmoil of partisan politics.[83] Wilson hoped that the former, freed from close political control, would hedge the excesses of the latter.[84] Inherent in his politics-administration dichotomy was the ironic idea that democracy must be preserved by resorting to means — bureaucratic control and elite rule — which are ideologically its contrary.[85] Later, in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II and with the onset of the Cold War, the mainstream of political science openly wrapped itself in this realist mantle. Realism was perceived and received, not only as an accurate description of how American politics works, but a sound prescription, more or less, for how it should.[86] Since then, realism, and its tendency to emphasize stability over the unpredictability of self-government, has continued to exert strong influence on our political self-understanding and desires.

The pursuit of stability has been aided by the ascendence of modern science.

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[83] Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 197-222.

[84] A useful analysis of Wilson's interest, from a constitutional perspective, can be found in John A. Rohr, To Run a Constitution: The Legitimacy of the Administrative State, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), Chapter 5.

[85] The relationship between administrative values and democratic values is discussed in David H. Rosenbloom, Public Administration and Law: Bench v. Bureau in the United States, (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1983), Chapter 1.

[86] Realism as description and prescription is the subject of Raymond Seidelman with Edward J. Harpham, Disenchanted Realists: Political Science and the American Crisis, 1884-1984, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985). For an historical count of the tension between realism and pragmatism while Dewey was alive, see Robert B. Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially Chapter 9.

What the cleric was to medieval life, the scientist or expert has become to our own time: the principal interpreter of human affairs.[87] Science, in its rise to dominance in western culture, has given credibility to the idea that society as whole is amenable to rational direction through the application of objectively developed knowledge. Since the middle of the 20th century, Americans have been party to a persistent search through instrumental science for broad solutions to societal problems. While the search has been less than routinely successful and has vacillated in its intensity, science has not, in consequence, lost any of its luster in the popular mind. To the extent that pushing the edges of knowledge can be considered an indelible feature of human aspiration, science has been, and will likely remain, among the most important of our cultural accomplishments.

Along with the technological search for solutions has come the gravitation of power and authority to the centrally located institutions of the state and its agents. Given the increasing complexity of modern social life, people as individuals have become more prone to skimp on trust in one another and place their faith instead in the formal world of political, economic, and social institutions.[88] The operation of these institutions and the rules they promulgate have been placed in the hands of people claiming expertise of one kind or another. Put simply, the concomitant rise of science and individualism has enabled knowledge and authority to be joined in the regulation of society.

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[87] On this point and its relevance to the problems of modern bureaucracy, see Joel F. Handler, The Conditions of Discretion: Autonomy, Community, Bureaucracy, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1986), p. 290.

[88] See John Dunn, Interpreting Political Responsibility, (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 68.

For the administrative arm of government, the attachment to science has elevated the value that professional status holds for civil servants.[89] Technical expertise has become prized as the principal measure of bureaucratic competence and the chief means by which administration seeks to aid the cause of American democracy.[90] Needless to say, the democratic results of professionalizing the public work force have been mixed. On the one hand, reliance on technical knowledge and skills has provided administrators with a degree of autonomy from arbitrary political control, partially fulfilling Wilson's hope. On the other hand, a claim to expertise has secured bureaucrats' freedom at the expense of distancing them, morally and psychologically, from the citizenry they ostensibly serve. "It is the bureaucrat's professional faith in technical expertise and the possibility of comprehensive solutions," laments public administration scholar Camilla Stivers, "that make him or her hesitant to turn to the citizen."[91] Impartiality in administration has been achieved to a substantial degree when compared, say, to the old Jacksonian spoils system, but at a cost in terms of the ability of administrators to know and relate to citizens. This cost in turn has interfered more generally with the formation of public trust in government. Wendell Berry gives the dilemma blunt expression from the citizen's perspective: "We don't trust our 'public servants' because we know they

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[89] One of the best analyses of civil service professionalization can be found in Frederick C. Mosher, Democracy and the Public Service, Oxford University Press, 1982.

[90] For an even-handed critique of this development see Dwight Waldo, The Administrative State: A Study of the Political Theory of American Public Administration, 2nd Edition, (New York: Homes & Meier Publishers, 1984).

[91] Camilla M. Stivers, Active Citizenship in the Administrative State, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Center for Public Administration and Policy, 1988, Blacksburg, Virginia, p. 202.

don't respect us. They don't respect us, as we understand, because they don't know us; they don't know our stories."[92]

The distancing between state and citizen has been reflected significantly in the pursuit of social welfare, the arena within which many of society's most pressing challenges are addressed. Here the governmental relationship with citizens has over time become ever more direct and pervasive. Even the current turn toward federal devolution has not altered the basic reality of an expansive public sector role in trying to affect citizens' well-being. It has simply tipped the balance of this role from the federal level to state and local governments and their nonprofit and commercial assignees.

Whatever its locus, the welfare state has, in the spirit of individualism, trained its policies and programs mainly on individuals and their needs. Noticeably less attention has been devoted to communities. Yet, communities have historically been the places in which citizenship typically attains its moral force in relation to the state. Public institutions have found it easier to achieve technical mastery in responding to the concrete, definable needs of individuals than in addressing the more complicated, nuanced circumstances of local social groups and the settings to which they belong.[93] Social theory, which might be expected to offer correctives to this bias in state conduct, has been of limited help. "To the extent social theory has been recruited to attack social problems," Milofsky writes, "the targets have been

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[92] Wendell Berry, What Are People For?, (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1990), p. 157.

[93] For a further analysis of the limitations of the welfare state as a means of addressing needs that exist "socially," see D.P. Racine "The Welfare State, Citizens, and Immersed Civil Servants," Administration & Society, Vol. 26, No. 4 (February 1995), pp. 434-463.

issues that affect whole societies, large, formal institutions, or, at the opposite extreme, individuals." We have not developed, he says, "powerful ways of thinking" about the collective units of community life.[94]

It can be argued, with some credence, that the technological, individualistic orientation in administrative theory and practice has, itself, played a role in the weakening of neighborhood life. While many reasons have been offered for community decline, there appears to be little doubt that one direct factor has been the conduct of the state.[95] Reference has already been made, for example, to research showing how community organizations, as they compete for public money and influence, may lose their local roots and become shaped more by the behavioral and attitudinal norms of the state system of official, professionalized provision.[96] Indeed, on occasion these organizations, it appears, may become so much a part of the state that indigenous, communal responses to social needs are no longer assumed to exist or, perhaps, even be desirable. This seems, for example, to have been the upshot of the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan's comment in his dissenting opinion in DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services (1989). In that dissent, Brennan contended that if the county agency did not act — here on

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[94] Milofsky, "Introduction" to Community Organizations, p.3.

[95] This theme has been sounded by many scholars. Helpful analyses and reliable mustering of the available evidence can be found in Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, 1992; Alan Wolfe, Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation, 1989; Michael Walzer, "Socializing the Welfare State," in Democracy and the Welfare State, ed. Amy Gutmann, (Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.13-26; and Martin Bulmer, Neighbors: The Work of Philip Abrams, 1986.

[96] See footnote 78.

suspicions of child abuse — there was no one else who would do so.[97] It is hard to imagine a more emphatic statement of how responsibilities have flowed out of neighborhoods and into official institutions.

The Emergence of Modern Citizen Participation

Of course, the public sector in the United States has not been blind to the problem that community decline and greater distance between state and citizen pose for governmental legitimacy. Admittedly, in its earliest, self-conscious formulations in the late 1940s and 1950s, political realism downplayed the involvement of ordinary citizens in public affairs, either as a way of enhancing responsiveness or aiding civic education.[98] Proponents of realism, such as Walter Lippman and Harold Lasswell, looked to a new breed of policy scientists and opinion leaders, not citizens, to be the guardians of democracy in the Cold War era. However, by the 1960s, domestic circumstances — the growing awareness of poverty in the world's richest nation, the pressures and visibility of the civil rights movement, a new generation of political leaders — made this overtly elitist stance increasingly untenable. In a more populist climate, citizens could not be so obviously excluded from the making of public decisions that might affect them. With the advent of the War on Poverty and its community action programs, citizen participation in public choice became an important tenet in the popular democratic creed. In public administration, recognition grew that governmental responsiveness to public needs — a distinguishing feature of democracy — warranted citizen representation, in one way or another, within the workings of the administrative state. As political scientist Emmette Redford wrote

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[97] DeShaney <u>v.</u> Winnebago County Department of Social Services, 109 U.S. 998 (1989).

[98] Seidelman with Harpham, <u>Disenchanted Realists</u>, p. 136.

at the time, "The attainment of the democratic ideal in the world of administration depends ....on the inclusiveness of the representation of interests in the interaction process among decision makers."[99]

The modern history of citizen participation has been, by most accounts, a checkered one. Citizens in many instances have shared authority with public officials in making public decisions. Participation requirements have been attached to a wide variety of governmental programs. And, as we have already had reason to note, effective ways to engage citizens in public decision making, especially at the community level, do appear to have been created in some places.[100] However, despite these advances, it has been difficult as a practical, general matter to keep citizen involvement from becoming an effort aimed more at legitimizing public action symbolically than at cultivating the capacities of people for democratic self-government.[101]

In the face of this mixed experience, a movement and literature have arisen aimed at countering the cynicism of political realism and fostering a more genuine

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[99] Emmette S. Redford, <u>Democracy in the Administrative State</u>, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 44. For a balanced analysis of this effort to democratize administration, see William T. Gormley, Jr., <u>Taming the Bureaucracy: Muscles, Prayers, and Other Strategies</u>, (Princeton University Press, 1989), Chapter 3.

[100] Berry, et al., <u>The Rebirth of Urban Democracy</u>.

[101] For evidence on the tendency of bureaucratic institutions to seek to coopt citizens, the seminal work is Philip Selznick's <u>TVA and the Grass Roots</u>, (1949, reprint, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984). For more up-to-date material on this phenomenon see M. Gittell, <u>The Limits of Citizen Participation</u>, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980) and M.G. Kweit & R.W. Kweit, <u>Implementing Citizen Participation in a Bureaucratic Society</u>, (New York: Praeger, 1981).

form of citizen participation. The advocates of participatory or direct democracy have promoted their cause as a means of communitarian renewal, of reversing the flight or exclusion of citizens — not least the most marginalized such as poor people and women — from civic engagement. In some versions of this position, the ancient Greek *polis*, where equal citizens supposedly deliberated and reached agreement together, is evoked as the loose ideal toward which participatory, democratic politics should strive.[102] Others, taking a less sanguine view of the possibilities for consensus among diverse interests, envision a messier, noisier, more competitive struggle.[103] However, they still hold out the hope, like their more upbeat colleagues, that through participation and debate, citizens may achieve at least temporary enactments of the common good and learn the meaning of self-government.

The challenges posed by participatory democrats to political realism mirror, in a sense, the opposition mounted by the Anti-Federalists to the Federalist Constitution. The Anti-Federalists believed, as noted earlier, that a necessary function of the state was to nurture the virtue of its citizens. For them, republican government could not persevere if the moral competence of the citizenry was left

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[102] See, for example, the favorable nod toward the concept of the *polis* in philosopher William M. Sullivan's widely read Reconstructing Public Philosophy, and, in a work closer to the field of public administration, Kemmis' Community and the Politics of Place. The polis also appears to be the underlying idea animating the articles in King & Stivers (eds.) Government Is Us.

[103] This "realist" slant on democratic idealism has been conceptually addressed in the works of political theorist Benjamin Barber. See especially his Strong Democracy and The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times, (Princeton University Press, 1988). For a more prescriptive version of the same point of view see Harry Boyte's Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics.

unaddressed.[104] A polity defined by interest counteracting interest, the approach favored by the Federalists, was insufficient to what the Anti-Federalists considered to be the essential public task of moral development. A national government was too remote to carry out this task effectively. Political historian Herbert Storing sums up their position this way: "The Anti-Federalists saw...the insufficiency of a community of mere interest. They saw that the American polity had to be a moral community if it was to be anything, and they saw that the seat of that community must be the hearts of the people."[105] The task was apt, according to the Anti-Federalists, to be fulfilled only in a community of relatively equal persons acting as the sovereign power.[106]

The equalitarian, moralistic thrust of the Anti-Federalists has continued to inform, if often only indirectly and tacitly, much of the thought of contemporary proponents of participatory democracy. Most recently, this thought has taken an interesting turn, within public administration, in discussions of the co-production of public services. Under traditional notions of participation, citizens and officials deliberate more or less together on an issue, but then the state is left the job of acting on the outcome of those deliberations. In co-production, citizens and officials share the responsibility for acting on decisions. Some analysts believe the experience of joint production, by familiarizing citizens with the realities of public work, may

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[104] See on this point Sinopoli, The Foundations of American Citizenship, pp. 147-148.

[105] Storing, What the Anti-Federalists Were For, p. 76.

[106] See Centinel, "Letter I" in The Anti-Federalist, ed. Herbert J. Storing, (The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 16.

actually help to make them better deliberators, as well.[107] Community policing is perhaps the best known contemporary example of co-production. The child protection experiment in Dorchester, Massachusetts cited earlier in this chapter also entailed elements of co-production. Although prompted partly by the need to compensate for tightening limits on public resources during the past two decades, co-production also has emerged as a reaction by a concerned citizenry and sympathetic public officials to the growing professional control of service provision and its arguably undemocratic consequences.[108]

From the Anti-Federalists to today, "strong democracy" has been an attractive ideal to many. It has appealed to that unique American sense of equality, in which we are all as citizens considered essentially the same. In historian Gordon Wood's plain words about the revolutionary generation: "Ordinary Americans came to believe that no one in a basic down-to-earth and day-in-and-day-out manner was better than anyone else."[109] Yet, like many ideals, strong democracy has been elusive as a practicable measure. The literature critical of the ideal has pointed to realities that raise important questions about the feasibility of achieving deep citizen participation on a broad basis in the modern world.

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[107] See, for example, Michael Walzer, "Socializing the Welfare State,"Democracy and the Welfare State, ed. Amy Gutmann, pp. 21-25, and Charles H. Levine, "Citizenship and Service Delivery: The Promise of Coproduction," Public Administration Review, Vol. 44, Special Issue, March 1984, p. 181.

[108] See F. Stevens Redburn & Yong Hyo Cho, "Government's Responsibility for Citizenship and the Quality of Community Life," Public Administration Review, Vol. 44, Special Issue, March 1984, p. 160.

[109] Gordon S. Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 234.

Participatory politics seeks human fulfillment through common public endeavor. However, it is in the nature of modern, liberal, commercial society for citizens to be drawn away from "the commons" and toward a widening variety of private sources of happiness.[110] People in this kind of society face particular difficulties mustering and sustaining the moral energy demanded by intense political involvements that can offer no guarantees of success or reward for the time invested.[111] Further, when they do opt to participate, they may often find their voices muted and their political wishes blunted by those with more skill in the art of deliberation. As James March and Johan Olsen comment in their study of political institutions, "Reasoned debate is particularly vulnerable to misuse and manipulation by individuals and groups with special talents at argumentation or rhetoric."[112] This outcome, for obvious reasons, adversely affects the poor and uneducated more than it does the affluent, thus extending inequities from the economic to the political domain. Further, when citizens do manage to get heard and gain influence, the result may not necessarily be a deepening of their sense of fraternity with fellow citizens.

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[110] For an insightful exposition of the *de facto* meaning of liberty in modern, commercial republics, see John Dunn, Interpreting Political Responsibility, Chapter 5. The tension in liberal society between the call to civic engagement and the temptations of private indulgence receives detailed treatment in Robert Bellah, et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.

[111] For evidence and analyses on this issue, see Judith Shklar, American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Albert O. Hirschman, Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action, (Princeton University Press, 1982), and K.E. Soltan, "Generic Constitutionalism," in A New Constitutionalism: Designing Political Institutions for a Good Society, eds. Steven L. Elkins & K.E. Soltan.

[112] March & Olsen, Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics, p. 133-134.

Indeed, as Bernard Yack has pointed out, the opposite may be just as likely to occur, as fighting among different factions often widens differences and distrust among participants.[113] Co-production, because it can be more readily adapted to the unique skills and interests of particular individuals and groups, would seem to offer a partial way out of this dilemma. However, it, too, is prone to significant limitations. Professionals may resist the intrusions of amateurs, citizens may become apathetic after the excitement of starting a new initiative wears off, and people overall may view joint delivery as nice but not really essential to getting public things done.[114] Finally, there is, as James Q. Wilson has suggested, the possibility that participatory politics, in a pluralistic society, simply becomes a way for officials to identify more unmet needs for government to address.[115] This is the thrust of the classical critique of American pluralism, perhaps best embodied in the work of Theodore Lowi.[116]

In the final analysis, participatory democracy runs into the problem that in a republic the real authority to decide governmental matters (aside from voting)

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[113] Bernard Yack, <u>The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought</u>, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

[114] For the difficulties that coproduction can present see Redburn & Cho, "Government's Responsibility for Citizenship and the Quality of Community Life," <u>Public Administration Review</u>; K.,E. Walker, B.H. Watson, & L.Z. Jucovy, <u>Resident Involvement in Community Change: The Experiences of Two Initiatives</u> (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, Summer 1999); and J.C. Thomas <u>Between Citizen and City: Neighborhood Organizations and Urban Politics in Cincinnati</u>, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

[115] James Q. Wilson, <u>The Moral Sense</u>, (New York: The Free Press, 1993), p. 247.

[116] Theodore J. Lowi, <u>The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States</u>, Second Edition, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979).

resides with public officials, not lay citizens. Public agencies invite or allow citizens to participate. Often this may be with the best of intentions. But participation, by definition, cannot trump a government's need to exercise and preserve its legitimate authority to act.[117] Citizens can engage in the process, but they know going in or, if they do not, come to discover that their involvement is but an input for choices which can or will be made by officials or — as Stone has shown in Atlanta and seems likely to be the case in other communities — by an oligarchy consisting of small numbers of officials and influential private individuals.[118] To have an impact most of the time, citizens must learn how to cooperate with and use the rules that have been established by this governing coalition. When they seek to organize apart from or counter to the mainstream, their likelihood of success diminishes. And yet, when they mobilize in conjunction with the mainstream, they may be prone to being co-opted and to losing sight of their real interests.

At the least, these realities (which, admittedly, are not ever-present everywhere) prompt the issue of whether participation, in and of itself, can satisfy the strong democrat's, and I would add, the communitarian's expectation of a more broadly engaged, active citizenry working to strengthen civil society. Can the engagement with official power, and its susceptibility to lead either to co-optation or confrontation, nurture public virtue in a time of community decline? Can it foster an increasingly intelligent and abiding desire for the common good? Can it enable citizens to become successful problem solvers in their own right? Direct democracy may speak to our fondest political hopes, but its advocates have yet to demonstrate, either theoretically or empirically, that it can successfully answer such questions.

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[117] See Selznick, <u>TVA and the Grass Roots</u>.

[118] Stone, <u>Regime Politics</u>, p. 134.

The Importance of Social Organization

Alexander Leighton, in his classic study of Japanese internment camps during World War II, concluded that laws and rules depend for their enforcement on, but cannot create, social organization.[119] As he put it, "Do not expect people to adopt behavior or carry out programs for which they have no social organization."[120] Leighton believed that people must be bound together by habits, customs, and patterns of interaction, that is, they must have an organic relationship with one another, to feel that a requirement coming from outside is appropriate for them and deserves their obedience. In the internment camps, the external rules promulgated by the United States government often did not have their intended effect because they failed to take into account the social organization which the Japanese brought with them into or created in this new setting.

Rousseau made a similar observation two and a half centuries ago. The French philosopher argued that while laws may stop men from doing wrong, only *moeurs* (i.e., customs) can make them good.[121] Several centuries before Rousseau, Thomas Aquinas expressed a comparable sentiment, when he noted that "the mere change of law is itself prejudicial to the common good; because custom avails much for the observance of laws, seeing that what is done contrary to general custom...is

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[119] Alexander H. Leighton, The Governing of Men, (Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 328.

[120] Ibid.

[121] D.E. Cullen, Freedom in Rousseau's Political Philosophy, (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), p.

looked upon as grave."[122] In our own time, sociologist Alan Wolfe has suggested that our feeling of obligation to distant others — as required, for example, by the welfare state — depends on the strength of our moral ties in the immediate social world through which we conduct our daily lives.[123] Unless we are appropriately connected to those we can know because they are physically present to us, we have a difficult time genuinely identifying with the needs of those we do not know. Although each of these writers states the point somewhat differently, they all agree with Leighton that well functioning social organization (i.e., civil society), defined in significant measure by citizens' informal relations with one another, must precede or undergird the legitimate and effective functioning of the state.

When civil society has weakened, as seems to be the case today, the question arises of whether there is anything the state can do to strengthen it. If my assessment of the literature so far is correct, then citizen participation requirements and inducements, even the strong variety advocated by the purveyors of direct democracy, do not appear to be a particularly good bet for boosting people's commitment to the common good. Such laws and rules cannot establish the foundation on which their own effectiveness is predicated. The more intimate spheres of life where the virtues and sentiments, habits and customs precedent to good citizenship have their roots, appear to lie mainly outside the ken of the common practice of public policy making and administration.[124]

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[122] Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 22, Q. 97, A. 2, (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), p. 109.

[123] Wolfe, Whose Keeper?, pp.

[124] This appears to be consistent with what Richard Bernstein has in mind when he says, "A community...is not something that can be made or engineered by

This does not mean citizen participation is useless beyond the symbolism that realists value. There are obviously occasions when and settings where formal engagement with public issues not only improves public outcomes, but has an empowering effect on citizens — an effect which may, for a time, bring out the best in their moral capacities, enrich their sense of the common good, and generally make their world more coherent. This seems to have occurred, for example, in the Industrial Areas Foundation's work in San Antonio, Texas,[125] in some of the cities that Berry and his colleagues studied,[126] in the community health agencies that Camilla Stivers investigated,[127] and in collective problem solving described by Daniel Kemmis in Missoula, Montana.[128] However, whether deep, serious involvement by citizens is sustainable remains to be shown, in these cases and otherwise. Nor is it clear, based on the available evidence, that such involvement boosts the general level of citizen action rather than resulting mainly in the emergence of a few, new civic leaders.

All of which is to say that the civic renewal which motivates the interest of communitarians may depend more on what occurs within the boundaries of civil society itself and less on what happens when its members, in the quest for citizen

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some form of *techne* or by the administration of society." See Richard J. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Practice, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 226.

[125] Cortes, Reweaving the Fabric.

[126] Berry, et al., The Rebirth of Urban Democracy.

[127] Stivers, Active Citizenship in the Administrative State.

[128] Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place.

participation, cross over into the world of official power looking to control or gain resources for themselves. No matter how legitimate or desirable crossing over is, it may not have the power to generate the necessary social organization, if this organization is already weak or developing in a counterproductive or contrary direction.

The Alternative of Pragmatism

Citizen engagement mechanisms may not be able to do much, on their own, to shore up civil society, but are there other ways in which the state, as a set of institutions, might positively affect the social organization of citizens, the more informal domain where people know one another as neighbors and friends? A possible answer may lie in the thought of American pragmatism, especially John Dewey's naturalistic social and political philosophy. Deweyan pragmatism rejects political realism's willingness to accept things as they are, while at the same time seeking to avoid the utopian illusions of the more ardent participatory democrats. More to the point, it accords greater weight than either to the connection between social organization and political capacity.

Dewey's Thought

Dewey's thought shares important points of intersection with both realism and participatory democracy. As Richard Bernstein comments, "Dewey was always seeking critically to appropriate what was still viable in the traditions that have shaped us."[129] Dewey is at one with realism's commitment to scientific method — broadly defined in Dewey's case as systematic inquiry — as a critical path toward

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[129] Richard J. Bernstein, Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 263.

usable knowledge.[130]   Making the world more predictable by systematically discerning its patterns is the essential agenda of the realists. While pragmatism in Dewey's hands holds other values, such as freedom, as high or higher, it, too, seeks to bring the flow of human events under scientifically informed direction. Philosopher Sidney Hook makes the case succinctly: "Pragmatism is the theory and practice of enlarging human freedom in a precarious and tragic world through the arts of intelligent social control."[131]

With participatory democracy, Dewey's pragmatism shares a strong commitment to public enlightenment and the possibility of reaching common accord among diverse interests.[132]   Democracy for Dewey is not a static affair but a condition always needing to be worked on and improved to keep pace with the changing human situation. This is a sentiment with which most contemporary strong democrats would likely agree.

But Deweyan pragmatism diverges from the realist and strong participatory positions in its attempt to join their strengths while disposing of their faults. Scientific method and the knowledge it produces are crucial in getting a purchase on complex reality. From the pragmatic standpoint, science is even, contrary to the argument of scientific positivists, an aid to making the value judgments about what

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[130] See James Campbell, Understanding John Dewey, (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995), p. 101.

[131] Sidney Hook, Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life, (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 25.

[132] For a discussion of Dewey's views on the relationship between education and the democratic treatment of interests see Robert Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, Chapter 4.

we should do, not just how we should do it.[133] But scientific practice, as Dewey regards it, cannot be allowed to harden into the kind of expertise that contravenes the purpose of democracy to promote the freedom and growth of individual citizens.[134] For pragmatists, what can be known, whether by science or other means, is never absolute. Rather, knowledge is grounded, as Selznick notes in his commentary on Dewey, in the ongoing and changing "problem solving experience of human communities."[135] Put simply, knowledge is revisable. Science and professional expertise are tools to be used in disciplining human experience so that it can be intelligent and responsible in pursuit of answers to the problems people encounter.[136] However, these tools are alienating and ill used when they become the province alone of specialists empowered or otherwise claiming to tell citizens how to live. Viewed in pragmatism's light, the Lasswellian project of employing science and technology to control, and thereby preserve, democracy must be seen as a contradiction in terms.

Nor for Dewey does the intense involvement in public affairs promoted by strong democrats represent an adequate embodiment of democracy. Pragmatism sees the ability and opportunity to influence state power and join in public deliberation as a necessary but not sufficient condition for realizing a democratic existence.

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[133] See Campbell, Understanding John Dewey, p. 109, and Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, p. 145.

[134] See Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, p. 107, p. 164, p. 188.

[135] Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 16.

[136] On this point, see Ralph W. Sleeper, The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy, (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 204.

Dewey holds that self-aware human nature requires people to make more choices about the conduct of their lives. The teleology these choices follow is the continuing growth of the individual. Democracy fosters self-awareness and its developmental consequents more completely than any other form of organization. Democracy is thus, within the framework of Deweyan pragmatism, not only a principle for the structure of government, but the guiding basis for the organization of all institutions in society.[137]

Indeed, for Dewey, the democracy required for the flourishing of responsible self-awareness has its particular home, not in the design of government, but in the institution of the "neighborly community."[138] "Dewey tells us there are social agencies that lie deeper than the political," observes philosopher James Campbell, "and that our deeper needs must be met by means more fundamental than our traditional political institutions."[139] As one of the most important of these means, the informal community is where, through face-to-face intercourse among family members, friends, and associates, the roots of character are formed and nurtured. Dewey's own words state the case clearly:

> "In its deepest and richest sense, a community must always remain
> a matter of face-to-face intercourse. This is why the family and

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[137] This is the conclusion that Steven C. Rockefeller draws from his reading of Dewey. See S.C. Rockefeller, <u>John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism</u>, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 429. On this point also see Bernstein, <u>Philosophical Profiles</u>, pp. 261-269.

[138] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems (1927)*, in <u>The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953</u>, Vol. 2, ed. JoAnn Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981-1990), p. 368.

[139] Campbell, <u>Understanding John Dewey</u>, p. 173.

neighborhood, with all their deficiencies, have always been the chief agencies of nurture, the means by which dispositions are stably formed and ideas acquired which laid hold in the roots of character."[140]

Pragmatism is not alone in thinking so. Democratic theorist Robert Dahl writes with Edward Tufte that "very small units seem...necessary to provide a place where ordinary people can acquire the sense and the reality of moral responsibility and political effectiveness in a universe where remote galaxies of leaders spin on in courses mysterious and unfathomable."[141] Historian Carol Stock makes a similar observation in her study of Dakotans' handling of rural modernization following the Great Depression. She notes how crucial small groups were as the venue where people "learned the ideals and practiced the skills they brought to the community as a whole."[142] James Q. Wilson has organized a substantial body of empirical evidence demonstrating, by his lights at least, the centrality of close relationships in shaping our moral sense, a point stated more theoretically in my earlier summary of Selznick's comments on primary relations and core participation.[143]

In Dewey's understanding, the main task of intelligent human effort is to

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[140] Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, p. 368.

[141] Robert A. Dahl & Edward R. Tufte, Size and Democracy, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 140.

[142] Carol M. Stock, Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 58.

[143] Wilson, The Moral Sense.

"make the stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events."[144] Life is always in flux, but it is kept from becoming chaotic by our human need and ability to affix purposes and patterns to it. The rationality called for here is more one of habit than innate intellect.[145] It is, in this sense, within every person's reach. As historian Robert Westbrook says in his biography of Dewey: "In a democratic society, every man had to be his own scientist."[146] From a pragmatic standpoint, habits are not mindless performances. Rather, they are, quoting from Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, "open-textured and generalized ways of tending to the things of daily experience....the skilled 'application' of embodied 'know-how'."[147]

For Dewey, the habits of heart and mind needed in a democracy activate and discipline the experimental posture that makes experience an opportunity for discovery and growth. These habits originate in the "natural" community of family, friends, and neighbors — those largely unmediated relationships in which familiarity, continuity, and trust make moral learning possible. This community is, as Dewey points out, necessarily "restricted in range."[148] It extends beyond one's

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[144] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature (1929)*, in The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-53, Vol. 1, ed. JoAnn Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), p. 49.

[145] See James Gouinlock, Excellence in Public Discourse: John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and Social Intelligence, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), p. 71.

[146] Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, p.169.

[147] Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn, Politcs/Sense/Experience: A Pragmatic Inquiry into the Promise of Democracy, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 191.

[148] Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, p. 368.

family but is less than one's whole social network. It seems related to what Roger Lohmann calls the commons: "social spaces outside the home and away from family and independent of political states and economic markets."[149] It is where respect, openness, imagination, personal responsibility, and other forms of "embodied know-how"[150] associated with democratic practice appear to be not so much taught, like geometry or spelling, but experienced, assimilated, and shaped in the course of being with, watching, and emulating others.[151]

This is the close or at-hand community. Its very informality is what may give it an advantage in certain problem solving situations. Where and when results are difficult to predict, work is hard to subdivide into discrete tasks, and the contingencies are numerous — conditions defining many community dilemmas — informality may be an asset.[152] Such problem solving situations may be what Joseph Dunne has in mind, at least in part, when he speaks of the good existing in "hidden

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[149] Roger A. Lohmann, The Commons: New Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1992), p. 272.

[150] Kaufman-Osborn, Politics/Sense,/Experience, p. 191.

[151] The idea that character is primarily a "natural" product of social relations is an important theme in Thomistic philosophy. See Daniel Mark Nelson, The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

[152] See Martin Rein, "The Social Structure of Institutions: Neither Public nor Private," in Privatization and the Welfare State, eds. Sheila B. Kamerman & Alfred J. Kahn, (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 54.

places."[153] From a Deweyan point of view, specific, quiet, and useful character forming and sustaining practices may be at play in much of what counts as indigenous problem solving. These practices may be, as Kaufman-Osborn suggests,[154] known and evident to the people involved in them, but they lack the formality, fabricated structure, and publicity that allow other institutions — for example, the state or its agents — to claim or imply an existence independent of the community. In such embedded or hidden practices, one person is apt to care more about how another person feels, what he or she believes, and what moves him or her than about that other person's observable actions.[155] The relationship in itself counts more than any extrinsic results it obtains. When these conditions exist, social problems may be identified and addressed, not so much as abstract technical challenges, but as grounded, subsidiary functions or extensions of the relations into which persons have already entered. A problem is, in this respect, mainly an opportunity for the people in a neighborhood to act on, reinforce, and possibly enrich their ties to one another, and in thus interacting, to enact and refine the moral structure of the community and the consequences it has for the character of each member.

Communitarian scholar Mary Ann Glendon suggests that "both the welfare

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[153] Joseph Dunne, Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 380.

[154] Kaufman-Osborn, Politics/Sense/Experience, p. 191.

[155] This seems to be one class of the practices William J. Goode has in mind when he distinguishes noncontractual social relations from contractual ones. See William J. Goode, The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Control System, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 39.

state and our experiment in democratic government rest to a great extent on habits and practices formed within fragile social structures — families, neighborhoods, religious and workplace association, and other communities of memory and mutual aid."[156] The political participation urged by strong democrats cannot be the basis for civil society; the dependency flows, as I indicated above, in the other direction. As Dewey observes, democratic governance relies on the "vital and thorough attachments" which evidently can develop only in the small units of collective life where people may come know one another well.[157] From the perspective of Dewey's pragmatism, informal neighborhood life would appear to perform an indispensable role in the continuing democratic experiment.

The Critique of Pragmatism

The neighborly community described by Dewey must be regarded, in some sense, as an idealization. Dewey's buoyant view of community, democracy, science, and human nature — with its roots in the simpler time of the 19th Century — is not easily reconciled with what we have learned the past fifty years, often with the aid of realism's lens, about the tragic side of the human condition.[158] We have seen how the solidarity of communities and local associations may evolve into provincialism and intolerance toward others. Left to their own devices, people tend to form

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[156] Mary Ann Glendon, "Rights and Responsibilities Viewed from Afar: The Case of Welfare Rights," The Responsive Community, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 41.

[157] Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, p.368.

[158] Several scholars who are otherwise favorably disposed toward Dewey acknowledge this shortcoming in his body of thought. See Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 172-175; and Daniel F. Rice, Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

homogeneous groups that are constrained in their relations with others who differ from them in distinct ways.[159] Often, tight cohesiveness has provided security and stability at the expense of individuals thinking for themselves.[160] The achievement of communality or mutuality has not infrequently masked realities that people would rather not face. When sociologist Kai Erikson, for example, visited Buffalo Creek, West Virginia after a coal mining disaster wiped out the town, he found how vulnerable previously strong ties were to being sundered by a cataclysmic event that made the world as a whole suddenly less reliable.[161] We have learned from social science of the emotional burdens that strong ties can create; in close relationships, more of a person's life is available to be judged by another and more demands may be made on a person's time and energy than wished.[162] As a result, it has not been uncommon for people in modern times to seek out less demanding social settings in which to conduct their lives. Consider: retirees congregating in their own communities and away from family members, or working couples spending more time in the less emotionally challenging environments of their jobs, leaving the children to be cared for by others or forgoing having children altogether, or people

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[159] For empirical evidence on this point, see Pamela A. Popielarz & J. Miller McPherson, "On the Edge or In Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 101, No. 3, (November 1995), pp. 698-720.

[160] This theme receives careful analysis in Mary Douglas, How Institutions Think, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), especially Chapter 8. The danger that strong ties pose to the economic progress of ethnic minorities, especially in ghetto areas, is the subject of an essay by Alejandro Portes, "The Downside of Social Capital," The American Prospect, No. 26 (May-June, 1996), pp. 18-21.

[161] Kai T. Erikson, Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976).

[162] See Goode, The Celebration of Heroes, pp. 313-314.

forming their own so called "lifestyle enclaves"[163] where they enter into a superficial type of solidarity with others like themselves. Even where parochialism or narrowness has been leavened by a more cosmopolitan outlook in communities, continued domination of local decision making by elites has seemed to cast doubt on the possibility of a fuller realization of democracy.[164]

Nor has the problem solving capacity of the informal domain itself been convincingly demonstrated. While the empirical evidence one way or the other, as I've already argued, remains modest and unclear, plausible arguments can be made that the lack of formality may lead to unreliable and less enduring responses to people's needs.[165] It has also been noted that informality may make for a diminished ability to fend off the influence or control of more established organizations which exist in the larger community. Further, it is unclear that people ordinarily have the ability to become the sort of practical scientist which Dewey envisioned as essential to democratic citizenship. Even if this role were attainable, a valid issue can be raised — and was by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in his public dispute with Dewey fifty years ago[166] — as to whether knowledge would ever be sufficient "to constitute

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[163] This term is from Bellah, et al., Habits of the Heart.

[164] For considered presentation of the evidence for this conclusion in at least one city, see Stone, Regime Politics.

[165] For example, see Robert Pinker, "Social Policy and Social Care: Divisions of Responsibility," in Support Networks in a Caring Community, eds. J. M. L. Jonker & R.A.B. Leaper, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995), p. 109, and Smith & Lipsky, Nonprofits for Hire, pp. 215-216.

[166] On the specific dispute between Niebuhr and Dewey, and for a more general critique of Dewey's faith in science, see John Patrick Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority, (The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

a challenge to power"[167] and to the necessity of some measure of coercion in political and social life.

The realist reaction to Deweyan optimism points to the fragility of those "hidden places" where the good may exist in communities, especially given the systematizing times in which we live. But nor, on the other hand, does the critique of pragmatism prove that character, democratic habits, and effective community life can be formed successfully and broadly without these places. All it demonstrates is that such places may not be able to compete with the superior power and sweep of the modern state as presently constituted.

Assuming, then, that, as Dewey argues, democracy cannot do without the neighborly community — cannot persevere in the absence of a healthy informal domain — the question is whether the institutional character of the state, given its influence in contemporary society, might be changed to better enable this community to do its job as the groundwork of social development. Citizen involvement in the affairs of the state may not be the answer, but are there other ways in which administrative institutions could further this form of self-government? For example, is there a way for the state to help make the experimenting intelligence advocated by Dewey and other pragmatists[168] a more vital part of the associational life of neighborhoods? Would doing so mitigate the myopia and prejudice that often thwart the indigenous pursuit of responsible self-government? The intent of this study is to point toward possible answers to these and related questions by exploring more

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[167] Ibid. p. 9.

[168] On this issue, see Hans Joas, Pragmatism and Social Theory, (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 248.

closely what happens in a community's informal problem solving efforts, those occasions when the ties that bind are aroused and seem to become a more potent force in human development. A better understanding of these activities and the settings in which they occur should sharpen our insight into what the state, particularly as a set of administrative institutions in a day-to-day relationship with citizens, might do or not do to strengthen civil society.

Chapter III
Study Design

Communitarianism is not a scientific field or an established school of thought. It has not to date, as we have seen, provided much of a home for defined research projects or efforts at the cumulative, systematic building of knowledge. Rather, communitarianism is an ideology. It is a stance taken in contradistinction to modern liberalism. Communitarians' characteristic forms of written expression have not been data tables or searching descriptions of phenomena, but essays and philosophical statements contending with one or more aspects of the liberal standard in American society. In the words of sympathetic political scientist Robert Putnam, "Remarkably, this wide-ranging philosophical debate [between communitarianism and liberalism] has so far taken place almost entirely without reference to systematic empirical research."[169] Even within communitarianism, contentions have tended to take a broad form, amounting mainly to disputes over how the tenets of the ideology should be defined and which should receive more or less emphasis. Disagreements over what might be considered the normal issues of science, such as what topics to study, whose data best represent reality, and whether appropriate methods of inquiry have been employed, rarely surface either in the confrontation between communitarianism and liberalism or in clashes within the communitarian camp itself.

The intent of the research conducted for this study was not to generate evidence that might settle any of these debates. The ground covered by communitarianism is too complex and sweeping to be encompassed in a single study. Moreover, the tension between the community and the individual — the fundamental

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[169] Putnam, <u>Making Democracy Work</u>, p. 87.

tension in the communitarian-liberal argument —is a very old and enduring one. Research cannot end or resolve the tension. All it can do is offer understandings and insights that, for a time, might help to inform opinions, perhaps making them less arbitrary than they would otherwise be.

Toward this end, my research sought to separate out and scrutinize one dimension of the communitarian perspective, the less formal realm in which neighborhoods function. Because this realm is difficult to observe and has not been adequately conceptualized, I needed a research design that would enable me to get close to it, to watch it in action. Further, it had to be a design which would bring public administration sufficiently into the picture as an empirical matter, so that I could discuss, in more than just a speculative way, the desirable nexus between the administrative state and indigenous problem solving. In short, I needed to be able to observe both informal action and the relevant workings of local public institutions at essentially the same time and in the same place.

This chapter describes the research methods I used. Since the basic approach was ethnographic and interpretive, in which methodological standards are more elusive than for more quantitative approaches, it is important to be clear and specific about what I did and why. In what follows, I set forth the relatively open framework with which I began the research, the questions to which I wanted to obtain answers, and how my research strategy changed in the course of the investigation. Where I got data from, how I obtained them, and their limitations are also discussed. I devote more than a little attention to how I went about analyzing data from the field, both because this is where I tried to make sense out of what I had seen, heard and felt, and because here is where I had to be especially mindful of the force that tacit biases might exert on my interpretions. The chapter concludes with a systematic description

of the conceptual structure I ended up with as my way of naming and trying to understand the patterns in the data. This structure sets the stage for the discussion in succeeding chapters of my key research findings and their meaning in light of the central questions that have informed the study.

The Choice of Ethnography

Ethnography recommended itself for my work since the territory I aspired to map was largely unchartered. When a subject or phenomenon has not yet been empirically defined and clarified, the ethnographic case study makes sense because it affords the researcher the flexibility to go wherever the data may lead.[170] In the course of data gathering itself, false trails can be abandoned and new, more promising paths followed in pursuit of a more coherent grasp of what is going on. The aim is to build a case — to identify the patterns present but presumably hidden or only dimly perceived in the phenomenon under study — inductively, rather than to go looking for data to confirm or disconfirm a set of preconceived hypotheses.

Among the shortcomings of the limited previous research on informal problem solving, as reviewed in the last chapter, was a failure to produce any holistic, what might be called, "insider" accounts. Every study more or less presumed, on the basis of its particular disciplinary interests, what about the indigenous level of community life would be worth examining. Social work and community psychology looked at helping behavior and its motivations, political science at power and interest, and organizational science at static structural features. The more explicitly communitarian literature, while not confined by particular

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[170] See R.K. Yin, Case Study Research: Design and Methods, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), p. 23.

disciplinary boundaries, sought out local stories that would support the movement's philosophical claims. In each case, the research aim was less about trying to understand informal action from the perspective of those implicated in it and more about analyzing it from the perspective of the segmented, intellectual interests of external parties.[171] Missing was a picture of the phenomenon as the kind of whole, less differentiated thing that people actually experience. The only way to get at this wholeness would be through the sort of immersion that one finds traditionally in ethnography.

Immersion is a tricky aspect of ethnographic work. The hope of trying to see things exactly as the "natives" do is, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz observes, an illusion.[172] The only way to perceive as they do is to be one of them, and that's not something even several years immersed in their habitat makes possible. What is within the ethnographer's reach, though, is an opportunity and, hopefully, an ability to understand what those in the indigenous situation perceive with, "the symbolic forms — words, images, institutions, and behaviors — in terms of which....people actually represented themselves to themselves and one another."[173] Teasing out these perceptual devices is still in itself no easy matter. The richness and variation in human activity— the simple fact, for example, that words may mean different things to different people even in the same group — make the ethnographer's interpretive

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[171] It is worth noting the evident parallel between the segmenting tendencies of academic disciplines — the tendency to slice life into narrow strands — and Selznick's observations about the rising dominance of segmental participation in society discussed in Chapter 2.

[172] Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 58.

[173] Ibid., p. 58.

task an inherently complicated one. The challenge is deepened, in a sense, when the setting of the research is not some exotic or deviant culture or group, the usual subjects of ethnographic research, but, as in my case, the investigator's own (at least in a broad way). Here the ethnographer may miss important information, not because it falls outside his or her perception, but because it is too perceptually embedded, so familiar and unexceptional that it fails to get noticed. In this case, a high level of self-monitoring is called for, and data from the field must be analyzed and reanalyzed enough times and with enough rigor for the researcher to have confidence that they have been interpreted as accurately as possible to yield meaningful results. Grounded theory, as developed by Anselm Strauss, represents one such disciplined approach to acquiring and assessing qualitative data. Some aspects of this approach turned out to be helpful in my research and will be discussed more specifically later in the chapter, when I describe my field work and analytic procedures.[174]

The ethnographic method suited the purposes of this study because it allowed me to get closer than other approaches to the inside of a setting which otherwise remains mostly hidden from external observation. It also had the advantage of letting me range freely across not only the informal world, but also the more formal and unhidden one.

I had determined before entering the field that the formal domain would be significant in at least a couple of ways. One was, as already noted, the access it would provide to public institutions in the community. It was important to see how such institutions might be affecting the indigenous level, whether directly or

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[174]Anselm L. Strauss, Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists, (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

indirectly, and vice versa. Secondly, and somewhat concealed in the first, I assumed that I could not get at an adequate understanding of informal problem solving without also training my ethnographic senses on its formal counterparts. While I wanted to see the informal domain from the inside, from the vantage point as much as possible of those people and groups constituting it, I wanted as well to situate it within the broader array of options available to the community for working on problems. How did it stack up against other approaches? Were there circumstances when the informal way was appropriate and others when it was not? A comparative approach would make it possible to explore answers to such questions.

Constraints on Ethnographic Purity

It is important to acknowledge that my research methods did not conform to the ethnographic ideal. The popular image of the ethnographer is that of an intellectual adventurer who enters the field ready for just about any and all experiences, without much in the way of preformed notions about what he or she will find there. This could not be my strategy for two reasons. One was the simple reality that ethnography "from scratch," so to speak, takes considerable time, and time was not something of which I had enough to satisfy this standard. Given other demands on my time, I could afford to spend about nine to ten months collecting data on roughly a half-time basis but not more. This time constraint, however, dovetailed with a second, and more important, reason for my compromise with ethnographic purity: the normative concern that had sparked my interest in informal problem solving to begin with. I had been drawn to the subject by the possibility that within indigenous action lies a significant source of the democratic capacities and habits on which the more civically active society wanted by communitarians depends. Even though my time for field work was limited, I still might be able, I thought, to develop

a useful understanding of the informal dimension if I took this normative interest as a boundary condition for the research.

Thus, rather than approach the community as an open-ended proposition, I chose to confine the investigation to the somewhat narrower task of probing for stable symbolic patterns that would be suggestive of the contribution different modes of local problem solving, especially the informal, make to democratic development. In other words, I entered the field assuming that such patterns exist and that I could get at them by talking with and observing community members. This necessitated backing away somewhat from the traditional ethnographic preoccupation with the inner thoughts and feelings of individual informants. While it was important to learn how different people in Roanoke made sense out of their problem solving experiences, I was less interested in the perceptions of particular individuals and more interested in the extent to and ways in which they formed common understandings around the different modes that problem solving assumed. Specifically, I was looking for shared understandings that had acquired an institutionalized presence, that had become self-activating and, thus, were not something people felt the need to debate.[175] My sense was that such settled meaningfulness would be a good indication of the inherent moral and political resources contained in each mode, whatever those resources turned out to be. The obvious expectation was that the informal mode would be, in some degree at least, distinguishable in this deep-seated way from other modes. I did not define in advance

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[175] For an illuminating discussion of institutions as self-activating social processes, see Ronald L. Jepperson, "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism," in The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, eds. Walter W. Powell & Paul J. DiMaggio, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 143-163.

precisely how it would be distinguishable. I simply assumed that it would be.[176]

Purposes of the Study

Problem Solving as Practice

In essence, the research had a twofold purpose. One purpose, and the more basic of the two, was a straightforward descriptive task. I needed to see whether informal action could be usefully differentiated as a form of problem solving practice. The operative question was, "What appears to be the distinguishing features of informal problem solving, and how meaningful are they?" The pursuit of this fundamental query was guided by a stylized definition of what it means for something to be a practice. I drew directly on an approach used by philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his widely read book on modern morality, *After Virtue*. There he defines a practice as:

> "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."[177]

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[176] It is important to keep in mind that the practical aim of my study was to identify ways in which public administration might further the development of informal, indigenous problem solving. For the latter to be doable, informal action would have to reflect relatively stable patterns of meaning and behavior that could be worked with and improved or strengthened.

[177] Alasdair MacIntyre, <u>After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory</u>, 2nd Edition, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 187.

Three aspects of this definition struck me as particularly relevant to the subject of my study. One was the emphasis on coherence. For a form of problem solving to be considered a distinct mode, it would need to cohere internally to some extent — how it works and toward what ends would have to make sense to those involved in it and would need to do so on a relatively consistent basis. A second aspect was the focus on the internal, as opposed to external, goods or benefits to be derived from performing the practice. It seemed to me that a given mode of problem solving could be deemed to exist if there were evidence of its sustainability and that such sustainability would depend on the presence of some level of intrinsic satisfaction among its practitioners. People would not keep at it if the rewards were only extrinsic ones, since the latter tend to hinge on more than what practitioners themselves do. Thirdly, the stress in MacIntyre's definition on the possibility of a practice evolving over time implied that a problem solving mode would need to have not only internally generated sustainability. In a dynamic world, it would also have to be able to adapt in response to changes in its surrounding environment while remaining essentially the same practice.

None of the literature I had reviewed spoke directly to the idea of problem solving modes as practices in the rich, tripartite way described by MacIntrye. The closest was the research on natural helping networks, but there the meaning of practice was limited to effectiveness, a largely extrinsic standard of judgment.[178] Although the available literature could provide some clues and starting points, MacIntyre's definition appealed to me as a more thorough framework in trying to see whether informal action could be meaningfully distinguished among the assortment

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[178] See Footnote 47.

of problem solving approaches employed in a community. I did not regard this as an absolute test, so that if informal problem solving failed to meet all of the criteria in MacIntyre's definition of a practice, it could not be considered sufficiently distinct to stand on its own. I was, as indicated above, not trying to confirm or disconfirm a specific hypothesis or proposition. Rather, the intent was the more modest and practical one of relying on the definition, in a heuristic sense, to sharpen my attention as I interviewed people and observed them interacting.

The Normative Issue

The other purpose of the research was to reach beyond the task of describing informal action to explore whether and, if so, how indigenous problem solving provides opportunities for people to develop the skills and sensitivities needed in a democracy. In a way, this second purpose functioned as an evaluative overlay on the first. Informal action might be a distinct practice, but is its distinctiveness valuable from the standpoint of nourishing democracy?

To orient my thinking on the possibilities of a relationship between indigenous problem solving and democratic capacity, I looked both to pragmatist Dewey and, in a smaller way, to Jurgen Habermas, one of the most prolific and visible of the modern exponents of what is know as critical theory. In a sense, this may seem an odd pairing. Dewey, during his lifetime, was known as a modern liberal, a zealous believer in democracy and the development of the individual. Habermas is, by contrast, a quasi-Marxist with collectivist and idealist sentiments. Although their differences are not unimportant, what drew me to both is their shared

concern to situate democracy within social reality.[179]   For each, democratic development depends on recognizing the profound influence that society, community, and culture exert on individual identity and action. Legal definitions of democracy are crucial in the overall political constitution of society, but social definitions are needed to translate democratic aspirations into the thoughts, habits, and practices constituting everyday life. The latter is, of course, the arena in which informal problem solving takes place. If informal action does or can contribute to the democratic development desired by communitarians, then the evidence for this must be adduced through a socially informed understanding of on-the-ground democratic possibilities. It is this social prism that both Dewey and Habermas afforded my research, albeit in somewhat different ways in each case.

What drew me to Dewey for this purpose is his focus on the social conditions necessary for the continuing development of the human individual.   As an intellectual leader of the progressive movement in American life at the turn of the century, Dewey opposed traditions (e.g., organized religion) that he believed kept people from adapting successfully to a world being changed rapidly by the waning

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[179] Dmitri Shalin draws neatly the general distinction that separates Habermas' idealism from pragmatism. He notes that: "Habermas wants to clear communications of inarticulate sentiments, private interests, logical inconsistencies, and similar distortions as inimical to reason. Pragmatists find these essential to keeping one's sanity amidst the semi-chaotic disorder that surround us...(p.270)" See D.N. Shalin, "Critical Theory and the Pragmatist Challenge," American Journal of Sociology, Vol.98, No.2 (September 1992), pp. 237-279. While the distinction is real, it is also the case that Habermas has been directly and deeply influenced by American pragmatism. See R.J. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 178.

of agrarian society.[180] The world was becoming a more dynamic, unpredictable place. While society still could and should receive some guidance from its collective institutions, more of the necessary adaptation needed to occur locally and individually, given the complex conditions in which people increasingly found themselves.[181] A more complete sort of democracy was, in Dewey's view, well suited to this task. It could grant ample space for the development of each person in cooperation with the inescapable others who comprised his or her social situation. It could also nurture the freedom of thought and exchange that would advance scientific inquiry as a widespread, pragmatic response to the changing human situation.

What specific qualities within individuals would this more complete democracy make possible? Dewey emphasizes qualities that are socially obtained, that is, acquired and applied through interactions with others. He says with co-author J.H. Tufts that: "When selfhood is taken for what it is, something existing in relationships to others and not in unreal isolation, independence of judgment, personal insight, integrity and initiative, become indispensible excellencies from the social point of view."[182] These qualities are not artificial creations, as if imported into

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[180] Dewey's disappointment with traditional religion is a principle theme of his *A Common Faith (1934)*, in The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 9, ed. JoAnn Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: South Illinois University Press).

[181] The balance between institutional guidance and local and individual adaptation — the tension between the Great Community and the local community — is the central thrust of Dewey's The Public and Its Problems, op. cit., p.63.

[182] John Dewey and James Hayden Tufts, *Ethics (1932)*, in The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 7, ed. JoAnn Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 300.

the human situation through some kind of deductive logic or process of discovery. Rather, they are intrinsic to the natural condition of human being. "When [man] perceives clearly and adequately that he is within nature," Dewey writes, "a part of its interactions, he sees that the line to be drawn is not between action and thought, or action and appreciation, but between blind, slavish, meaningless action and action that is free, significant, directed, and responsible."[183]

As for scientific inquiry, we have already had reason to note in the last chapter Dewey's belief that, in a democracy, everyone needs to be their own scientist.[184] Although Dewey acknowledges the existence and need for esoteric science, his main concern is the democratization of a broad scientific mentality more akin to disciplined common sense.[185] What makes something scientific, Dewey contends, "is its power to yield understanding, insight, intellectual at-homeness...by filling events with coherent and tested meaning."[186] This definition calls forth from each person an experimenting intelligence and also, since meaning is socially determined, a willingness to subject one's thinking to the community or communities to which one belongs.

Within the context of my research, I was curious about the existence or absence of such democratic and scientific qualities of experience in the different

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[183] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature (1929)*, in The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953), Vol. 1, ed. JoAnn Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), p. 324.

[184] See Footnote 146.

[185] On this point see James Campbell's discussion of Dewey's views on the scientific spirit in Understanding John Dewey, pp. 99-110.

[186] Dewey, Experience and Nature, p. 129.

modes of local problem solving. How pronounced is independence of judgment in each mode as it is practiced? How free is the action which occurs in each mode? What is the nature of the experimental mindset in the different modes? These were the type of questions Dewey prompted as I entered the field and carried out my investigation, looking for connections between informal problem solving and democratic capacity building.

While Dewey offered, I thought, a useful, overall conceptual structure for examining the democratic possibilities of day-to-day experience, his thinking lacked the degree of specificity I believed would be needed to identify the stable symbolic patterns that would indicate the presence of these possibilities in the different modes or practices of problem solving. For that I needed concepts with a more operational content. Here is where Habermas came into play. While Habermas' writings, like Dewey's, cover a broad subject matter (and are equally turgid), what most interested me is his account of communicative rationality.

Habermas argues that human beings act within three spheres of communicated meaning.[187] One sphere is goal-oriented, involving purposeful action directed at what we take to be objective reality. Rationality in this sphere turns on how well our actions comport with what is understood to be true and whether they realize the ends at which they are aimed. A second sphere concerns the values we share with others, in which reality is grasped intersubjectively, that is, on the basis of agreements we have about how we are to relate to one another. In this case, rationality is a function of the legitimacy or appropriateness of our actions, viewed from the standpoint of the norms and rules governing interpersonal relations.

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[187] See Jurgen Habermas, <u>The Theory of Communicative Action</u>, Vol. 1, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), pp. 75-101.

Finally, a third sphere is the dramaturgic or expressive one, through which each person makes known his or her subjective states of mind. The criterion of rationality in this sphere is how sincere or authentic we are in expressing our thoughts and feelings.

While Dewey speaks of the central role played by intelligence in democracy and gives this idea a generous construal, he does not provide a coherent, analytical scheme by which one might actually explore the topic in real settings. Habermas does. It seemed to me that his account of communicative rationality represents a fairly tangible set of guideposts for trying to understand local problem solving, in whatever mode, as a social phenomenon. At the least, looking at a full span of qualities of "rational" communication, such as its correctness, usefulness, reliability, insightfulness, and sincerity, would, I assumed, be consistent with my interest in developing a more holistic grasp of the informal scene. It may be worth mentioning that I was initially attracted to Habermas' ideas about rationality because of his well known intellectual commitment to promoting democratic freedom. For Habermas, free and undistorted communication is the operational essence of the democratic way of life. Much of his intellectual project over the years has been devoted to analyzing the larger social, economic, and political forces that interfere with and undermine or, alternatively, enhance rational communication.[188] This emphasis on larger forces fit with my hope to discern any institutionalized patterns of meaning that had formed around different ways of addressing community problems. I wanted to be able, if at all possible, to relate local experiences with problem solving to broader structural factors at work in the community and surrounding society. Doing so would help to

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[188] While Habermas' writings are extensive, his *magnum opus* is generally considered to be the two volumes of The Theory of Communicative Action, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981 & 1987), translated by Thomas McCarthy.

explain why, to whom, and under what circumstances a given pattern of action or understanding attained meaningfulness.

Data Collection

Thus, I entered the field seeking to find out whether informal problem solving could be differentiated as a practice and what its role might be in the social development of democracy. My entry into the field was itself an exploratory act. I had decided to conduct the field work in Roanoke partly for reasons of convenience — it is less than an hour's drive from where I lived. Roanoke was also, I had discovered, a small city with a reputation for having a healthy civic infrastructure. In their book on democratic activism in the United States, published at the time I entered the field, Francis Lappe and Paul DuBois identified Roanoke as "an outstanding example of bringing citizens into the [public] planning process."[189] The city had in the recent past twice won distinction as an All-America Community by the National Civic League (and since won for a third time). While I had no independent validation of Roanoke's strength in citizen engagement, I was intrigued by the prospect that within its assorted neighborhoods lay solid clues about what indigenous problem solving should look like when it works well. At the least, it was worth investigating further to see whether the appearance of civic strength would hold up under a deeper examination of the reality.

Through connections, I arranged an interview with the prominent volunteer chair of a well established nonprofit agency in Roanoke. It so happened that this organization devotes a considerable part of its time and resources to helping

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[189] Francis Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois, The Quickening of America, p. 173.

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individuals and groups in the lower income neighborhoods of the city. The chair cleared the way for me to meet with the top staff of the agency, to explore with them how I might best study problem solving in the community. In the course of this latter meeting, two things happened that shaped the direction of the field research which followed. First, I started a relationship with the person who would become my main informant throughout the study. This person, an African-American staff member of the agency, spent much of his time in the predominantly black, low to moderate income neighborhoods of Roanoke and was friendly with many of the people there. Second, because of his ties to these neighborhoods, they became the principal venue for my research. When designing the study initially, I had not decided to concentrate in particular on minority or poor communities. But it became clear early in the field work that the African-American section of Roanoke afforded good possibilities for gathering data from interviews and observations. It would also, or so I surmised, allow me to examine possible relationships that might exist between larger structural forces — in this case, the political, economic, and social effects of a group's status as a racial minority — and forms of problem solving.

Consequently, the field work came to center primarily on four contiguous inner city neighborhoods of which low to moderate income blacks constituted the single largest population. I also gathered data, although less intensively, on problem solving in two, mainly white inner ring neighborhoods, one lower middle class and the other more well-to-do. It seemed important to have at least some information for comparing the black and white neighborhood experiences, to see whether any relevant differences emerged along racial lines. In addition to this attention to neighborhoods, I was intent on learning what I could about the more professionalized or formal domains of problem solving in Roanoke. To this end, I spent considerable time obtaining information on the problem solving activities and perspectives of

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actors within public and nonprofit agencies in the community. I extended this effort as well to a small number of business people, on the assumption that the proprietary sector's approach to community problem solving might bear distinctive marks of its own, in addition to the resonance it might have with the professional mode. While I managed to acquire some data along these lines, I was never able to pursue this avenue fully enough with a large enough sample of business people or related experiences to formulate an adequate account of a market-based perspective. It thus became secondary part of the analysis.

Data Sources

I gathered field data from four types of sources. Tape recorded interviews consumed roughly a third of my time. I conducted semi-formal, scheduled interviews with a total of 47 individuals representing the different domains of problem solving of interest to me. These included: 13 senior staff representing a dozen nonprofit agencies; nine government officials at various levels; 18 community members active in neighborhood problem solving; four business people; and three others, two of whom were journalists and the third an acquaintance of mine who lived in the Roanoke area. Interviewees were selected initially by asking my main informant who I ought to talk to if I wanted to learn more about problem solving in the community. After that, I sought interviews with people who I'd come to know casually or who had come to my attention in some other way. All respondents were people involved at one level or another in civic affairs, broadly defined to include both community-wide and neighborhood-based work. Most held leadership positions, although about a fifth did not. And I interviewed as many blacks as I did whites, although there were more whites in the nonprofit agency category and more blacks in the neighborhood category. In the other categories, the proportions were

about even. My planned interviews lasted from one and a half to three hours and focused on respondents' perceptions of their own involvement in community problem solving, their awareness of other forms of problem solving, and their views of the broader conditions shaping problem solving in the city. In addition to scheduled interviews, I had ample opportunity to engage in informal conversations, on other occasions, with many of these same people as well as a score of others representing the different problem solving venues. All in all, I had repeated, in depth exposure to some fifty people during my stay in the field.

While interviews and conversations constituted the single largest source of data, I also derived much useful information from my attendance at a wide variety of meetings. During the ten months of field work, I sat in on 41 formal and informal meetings of neighborhood groups, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations. I audiotaped the proceedings whenever I had permission to do so (and the acoustics of the meeting room allowed it).

A substantial number of the 41 meetings was related to the organized activities of Roanoke's ultimately unsuccessful effort to be named an "enterprise community" by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Shortly before my field research began, the federal government had passed legislation to grant funding and regulatory relief to a limited number of communities around the country for the purpose of revitalizing distressed neighborhoods. To be designated as either an empowerment zone (restricted to large cities) or enterprise community, a city had to develop a comprehensive, citizen-driven plan for community improvement. Within a couple of months of my arrival, Roanoke city government had made the decision to compete for enterprise community status. It then orchestrated an intense community planning process, spanning five months and

involving numerous committees and subcommittees and actors from nearly every area and sector of the city. This process and the meetings it generated became an important source of information for me on the perspectives and experiences of different groups. The activities attracted not just people with strong formal problem solving orientations, but also many whose main affiliations were rooted in the informal, neighborhood domain. In a real sense, the effort to become an enterprise community created a stage on which the different modes of community problem solving were dramatized in juxtaposition, at least for a time. It brought these modes into sharper relief than might have occurred had I only managed to garner data on the modes independently of each other.

Another distinctive, although slightly less fruitful, source of data produced by meetings arose from activities in which I temporarily sublimated my role as a disinterested researcher and became an actual participant in community problem solving. During my tenure in the field, I was involved in two efforts by a non-profit agency to prepare applications for grant funding, assisted a group in one of the African-American neighborhoods with some of its planning, and served as an official member of a temporary advisory committee which a local non-profit organization had formed to review the performance of other social agencies in the community. The chief value of these activities was the combination of their intensity and continuity relative to the other ways available to me for gathering data. They afforded the opportunity to examine problem solving in a more fine-grained manner than discrete interviews and passive attendance at meetings could.

A third source of data came from documents that I collected while in the field. These consisted of official government papers and reports, enterprise community planning materials and previous community plans, descriptions and

evaluations of non-profit agencies, agendas and minutes of meetings, newsletters published by neighborhood groups, newspaper clippings, and letters and memoranda pertaining to activities of the neighborhoods in which I spent most of my time. I also conducted research on the history of Roanoke and its African-American community at the city library. All told, I reviewed documents encompassing some 3,000 pages of material.

The fourth and final source of data were general observations I made of the neighborhoods and the city as a whole. When I had the opportunity to drive or walk around, I was able to take notes on things that I thought might be germane to how people perceived or felt about community problem solving. For example, how well streets or homes were maintained might suggest how much or little residents cared about a neighborhood or block. Or where teen-aged and young adult males hung out, whether in a park or on a street corner, might be indicative of people's sense of order in a neighborhood. I did not approach these more general observations with the same systematic purpose I did the other data sources. I simply wanted to be open to the possibility that this somewhat amorphous form of impressionistic data might contain insights that could help to shed light on my subject.

Adapting to the Field

At no point in the development of data in the field did I overtly attempt, for those with whom I was interacting, to draw clear boundaries around the formal and informal modes of problem solving. I tried to be mindful not to interject what might be seen as an artificial and abstract distinction, what Heinz Kohut refers to as an

experience-distant concept, into my discussions with people.[190] Rather, I was interested in obtaining from them, in words or behavior otherwise, their own understanding of what constitutes community problem solving. In interviews, I encouraged respondents to talk freely about their problem solving experiences in the community and to tell me what they thought about the kind of problem solving that goes on in settings other than the one in which they were primarily situated. My expectation was that by interviewing and observing people in different types of settings, at least one of which could be seen as presumptively informal, that is, the neighborhood, I would be able to develop a relatively rich picture of the differences and similarities across modes of problem solving.

This is not to suggest that my data collection efforts remained the same throughout the course of the field work. Indeed, exactly the opposite occurred. In interviewing people and observing them in meetings or elsewhere, I was always updating my questions and focus based on what I had learned to date. If one interview revealed an important issue of which I was previously unaware, I then brought that issue up in the next interview if it seemed the respondent might have something to say on the topic. For example, in one early interview, a male Caucasian nonprofit official pointed out to me the relative absence of a strong contingent of young, up-and-coming African-American leaders in Roanoke. This topic seemed relevant to the inquiry in general, so I pursued it, in some fashion, in most subsequent interviews. I practiced a similar adaptive strategy in monitoring

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[190] Kohut distinguishes between experience-distant concepts, the more abstract language of experts, and experience-near concepts, the ways in which people express themselves in day-to-day social life. Kohut's distinction, which emerged from his experience as a psychoanalyst, is discussed by Clifford Geertz in Local Knowledge, pp. 57-58.

meetings, in this case simply keeping new ideas and information in mind as I observed or participated in the action. All the themes in my findings took shape in this accretive fashion.

To the extent possible in using the updating method, I tried, as Strauss recommends in his framework for grounded theory research, to be systematic rather than casual.[191] As time permitted, I would go through my handwritten notes from interviews and observations, doing some rough coding and generating in writing or on tape loose theories in an attempt to explain what I was seeing, hearing, and feeling. I would then in subsequent data gathering put these theories to further testing. This discipline did not achieve, though, the complete rigor for which Strauss argues. Because of delays in obtaining transcriptions of my recorded interviews and meetings, I never had full, up-to-date data on which to perform the requisite analyses while still in the field. In an effort to compensate after the field portion of my research ended, I processed all of the data through several recodings. What I may have lost in opportunities to refine my emerging understanding of community problem solving through further data collection in the field, I at least partly made up for afterward by using the same iterative technique to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

For purposes of analysis, I had all field data rendered in computer readable form. All interviews, observational notes, and notes speculating on theoretical explanations for what I was experiencing were transcribed. The thousands of pages of documents I had obtained were scanned into a computer format. This made it

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[191] The systematic character of the grounded theory method is explained in the introduction to Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists, pp. 1-39.

possible for me to aggregate all of the data in a set of linked files, where the data could then be coded more easily. For data organization and coding purposes, I used a software program called Textbase Alpha. This qualitative research program let me code and recode the data several times, without losing any of the codings. It also allowed me to take all of the data — from interviews, observations, and personal notes — falling under a single code and locate them in one file for ease of further analysis. There was no practical limit on the amount of text that could be accommodated under a given code or on the number of codes that could be used. Simply stated, Textbase Alpha proved versatile in manipulating the rather large amount of qualitative data I had gathered in the course of the field research.

The data were put through three separate codings, or efforts at grouping them into appropriate conceptual categories. Each recoding was an attempt to correct for what I perceived to be analytical deficiencies in its predecessor. In ethnography there is no clear standard for determining when to stop the analysis. It is a subjective judgment driven by the researcher's sense that he or she has been able to see in the data patterns which reveal something important about the subject of the inquiry. Thus, my coding ended when I believed I had found a way to interpret the data that appeared to be meaningful and not capable of further significant improvement through additional recoding.

First Coding

In the first coding, which overlapped with the final stages of my field work and, thus, included most but not all of the data I eventually ended up with, the codes used were based on issues that had arisen when I designed the study. Before entering the field, my methodological concerns had centered on how different modes of problem solving might be constituted by various forms of symbolic communication.

Three of these forms — unique vocabularies, rituals and ceremonies, and myths — had defined the original study design. My expectation was that by focusing on these kinds of displays and expressions, I would be able adequately to distinguish between informal and formal problem solving. When it came time to do the initial coding, I supplemented the three categories with five others suggested by my emerging, albeit still nascent, grasp of the data. These were hero, conflict, hidden, rationalization, and symbol. I was led to include hero because of the frequency with which the people I interviewed and observed seemed to attribute the positive outcomes of problem solving efforts to given individuals. Conflict was added because of the significant extent to which respondents spoke of their problem solving experiences as entailing a reaction to something or someone with which or whom they disagreed. The reason for using hidden as a code was its seeming theoretical importance to understanding the informal domain. I wanted to see whether hidden could stand, on the basis of the data, as its own coherent, conceptual category, since it, like informal, is not a developed construct within the literature. Rationalization was incorporated as a code when it became clear to me from a casual reading of transcribed interviews and notes, that myth, a form of rationalization, was too narrow a concept to encompass all the ways in which people tried to reconcile the contradictions and inconsistencies present in their common beliefs about community problem solving. Symbol was a code for a similar reason, namely, I concluded that the other seven codes would not be sufficient to comprehend all of the data I perceived to be relevant. In other words, symbol became a residual category, a way of retaining data that might turn out to be meaningful, but for which a more specific code did not yet exist.

The problem with these initial codes was that they resulted in unmanageably large subsets of data. The file on myth, for example, ran to some three hundred

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pages. The vocabulary, rationalization, and symbol files were equally massive. That the two fallback categories in the coding structure — rationalization and symbol — included such large amounts of data, I took as a sign that something was amiss in my analytical framework.   Finding meaningful patterns with these codes proved unproductive. While they familiarized me with the data to an extent I had not been able to achieve during most of the field work, it was clear that a different coding scheme was needed.

Second Coding

Since the initial codes resulted in such large subsets of data, my next pass at coding resorted to much narrower categories. And because they were narrower, there was a far greater number of them. They are listed in Table 1.

In carrying out this second coding, the intent was to focus on issues that had emerged as possibly germane during the first coding. These were conceptual categories that struck me as more entailed in the data than were the categories stemming from my original design. They seemed to relate more directly and concretely to important dimensions of people's experiences with community problem solving, both formal and informal. To take one example, consider religion. It became clear to me, as a result of the initial coding, that it was almost impossible to talk sensibly about the African-American problem solving experience in Roanoke

Table 1. Second Set of Codes

Time Management — how people explicitly manage time.	*Marginalization* — statements and actions indicating lower status.
Efficiency — explicit concerns about time and money.	*Religion* — explicit indications of religious commitments or values.
Legitimacy — whether the credibility of people or actions is important or at issue.	*Initiative* — the intentionality of actions taken.
Emergence — indications that something has not been planned.	*Resources* — whether money is the focus of statements and actions.
Impression Management — when appearances seem to count more than realities.	*Relationship* — situations in which how people relate to each other is stressed.
Perpetuity — statements and actions revealing a commitment to preserving relationships.	*Inclusivity* — whether a sense of being included or excluded from a defined activity seems important.
Representation — situations where the representativeness of a group or action is at issue.	*Competition* — statements and actions indicating a desire to win over someone else.
Authority — statements and actions indicating control or questions about control.	*Competence* — where issues of a person's or groups abilities are revealed.
Planning — specific references to planned action.	*Imitation* — statements or actions that reflect a desire to copy the sentiments or behaviors of others.

without placing it in the special context of African-American Christianity, especially black Protestantism.   Every black person I interviewed or otherwise had the

opportunity to observe more than once had ties, often strong ones, to a church, and the church appeared to be a key influence on his or her views of problem solving, not to mention also serving as a setting in which a good deal of problem solving took place. By using religion as a code, my hope was to try to develop a detailed enough picture of the ways in which a religiously informed outlook and affiliation helped to define the different modes of problem solving. It was the same for each of the other categories in this second and much more elaborate coding scheme. They each addressed an emergent theme from which I thought an appropriate understanding might be constructed.

The second coding drew me into the data in much more depth. At the same time, however, the scheme itself, with its eighteen codes, lacked sufficient coherence as a whole. Codes overlapped in their meaning (e.g., relationship and inclusivity, efficiency and time management), and I could discern no overall conceptual architecture for sorting them into logical subgroupings for purposes of analysis and reporting. I knew that with eighteen codes I was dealing with more complexity than desirable for good qualitative research. While my intimacy with the data had been greatly advanced by the effort, a more general, conceptually streamlined way of framing the analysis needed to be developed.

Final Coding

It would be reassuring, from a scientific standpoint, to say that I reached this final framework through a highly defined series of subsequent moves to organize and interpret the data. That, however, is not what happened. Instead, I kept sifting through the eighteen categories of data, in the hope of eventually alighting upon or intuiting a simpler way to think about the themes, issues, and insights they contained. What clarified as I did this sifting was the hybrid form into which my research

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design had evolved. It was this realization that brought a third and conclusive coding structure into view.

At the outset, I had structured my inquiry in fairly conventional ethnographic terms. The intent was to enter a single community and learn enough from it to develop some meaningful understanding of informal and formal problem solving. The approach was, of necessity, broad. However, shortly after the field work began, it became evident that, unless I was prepared to spend much more time in the field than I had planned, some tighter parameters had to be imposed on my data gathering. This is when I began looking more closely at the applicability of the grounded theory method to the inquiry. Typically, grounded theory, as a highly structured form of qualitative research, is used to analyze more narrowly defined, comprehendible contexts than whole communities or neighborhoods. For example, much of Strauss' work using the method has been in the study of medical settings.

What I realized as I searched for a better coding scheme was the need for conceptual categories that blended the strengths of these two methodological orientations. Traditional ethnography represented for me a quest to grasp the most fundamental ways in which a people function in, and construct and interpret, reality. It is, by design, open-ended and intuitive in its analytical posture. Grounded theory represented a quest for systematic understanding of more delimited phenomena, for the purpose of identifying testable hypotheses. With a narrowed lens, analysis can proceed with more explicit and methodical attention to detail.

Traditional ethnography addressed the need for making a basic distinction — that between informal and formal — in the broad setting of a community, while grounded theory served as a winnowing fork to separate from the wide-ranging data

of a broad investigation the patterns that make this distinction meaningful. Had the intent been to look for all the ways in which the formal and informal were the same and not the same or stable and in flux, the rigor of the grounded theory approach might have been too confining. Had the intent been to comprehend problem solving, say, on a given block or in a particular organization, the exploratory breadth afforded by traditional ethnography might have too inefficient. As it was, I compromised and tried to integrate approaches in the hope for both adequate breadth and rigor. When I saw that this integration of methods was, in fact, what I had been doing, a more useful way to code the data came to mind, a way that would respect the full range of the inquiry I had undertaken while also giving it stronger coherence than the two previous passes at coding.

Ontological, Epistemological, and Moral Categories

The scheme that suggested itself then, and became the framework used in the following chapters to organize my findings, was to conceptualize the data according to three basic philosophical categories. At the most fundamental level, I had data that revealed something about the relationship between people's identities and the mode of problem solving in which they operate. This coding category, which might be thought of as ontological, deals with how the members of different groups had their sense of themselves and their potential for and role in problem solving action, shaped by the different ways in which time and space seemed to function for them in each mode. Do they show concern for the future? Are they more rooted in the past? Do they see themselves as Roanokers or something else? This ontological category addressed the most basic means by which people comprehended their own identity and that of others, depending on whether the setting is informal or formal or some blending of the two. It spoke to the motives for action or inaction that people

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attributed to themselves and others, and to the results they expected from their problem solving investments of time and energy. These ontological factors played a large role in determining a mode's boundaries and the elasticity of those boundaries.

A second code evident in the data pertained to the knowledge claims associated with each type of problem solving. What do people need to know to be successful operators in the different domains? If the ontological category is about personal and group identities, this second, epistemological category is about the kinds of knowledge considered useful in solving problems by those who possess such identities. A code for knowledge claims seemed appropriate for at least three reasons. One was the obvious fact that problem solving, by definition, requires knowledge. This notion resonates with Dewey's view of human beings as primarily problem solvers, for whom science, in its capacity to produce useful knowledge, is the best method. A second reason comported with Habermas' distinction among forms of rationality. Each form entails a different claim to knowledge or truth, which might, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, be present in different ways and to different degrees in formal and informal problem solving. Thirdly, an epistemological category would speak to the ascending role being played by knowledge in the larger world, especially within advanced economies, like our own, where so called "knowledge work" is perceived as the dominant wave carrying us into the future. Given my interest in examining the connections between broader institutional forces at work in society and local forms of problem solving, it made sense to accord special attention to the role of knowledge in the latter.

With one category focused on identities and another on the knowledge associated with such identities, there was a logical need for a third code which would

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help to situate these first two socially. The problem solving that concerned me was not what individuals undertook but what occurred among people acting in groups or as group members. This is what made it community problem solving. Thus, I fashioned a final category, a coding for morality, to address how people relate to each other as fellow problem solvers or participants in problem solving situations. It encompassed both the norms of conduct which people espouse and the norms embodied in their actual behaviors toward one another, again with attention to how the espoused and real vary between modes.

It bears mentioning that these three categories also seemed to match up well with MacIntyre's account of practices. MacIntyre's definition focuses on the role of practices in constituting persons (identity), the excellences that practices entail (combining skill and knowledge), and the social, cooperative nature of practices (morality). Thus, if the analysis was to deal effectively with the basic descriptive aspirations of my study, something like this coding scheme had to emerge and become operative.

Structure of Findings

The next three chapters, where I report the findings from the field research in detail, generally conform to this three-part coding structure. The next chapter delves into questions of identity. It particularly emphasizes the challenges to identity experienced by African-Americans in Roanoke as they have pursued informal and formal involvements in community problem solving. The subject of identity figures prominently as well in chapter seven, where I try to conceptualize the informal and formal problem solving terrains largely as a function of different identities. After considering the evidence on identity in chapter four, attention turns in chapter five

to the findings on knowledge claims. I describe how knowledge claims differed between modes, but also how the claims of the more formal way of addressing community problems appeared to be eroding the value and legitimacy of the unique claims of informal approaches. Finally, I use the sixth chapter to report what I discovered about the moral dimension of problem solving in each mode and especially in those places and situations where and when the modes and their practitioners intersected.

Chapter IV

The Old and the New Community

"We caught a couple of boys breaking up a store one night," explained Paul
Moyer matter-of-factly when I asked him how the Inner City Athletic Association
(ICAA) began. He continued:

> "Me and this other fellow, we was going out. Went over to his house
> to either watch football or boxing or something, and we caught these
> youngsters breaking into a store. We knew the boys. I guess they
> didn't have anything better to do...So, we got all these other
> kids...and started a football team. The thing about it, the man I
> worked for then, they were breaking into his store. He brought
> jerseys for the team."

The year was 1967. Blacks were not taking to Roanoke's streets to protest civil
rights as they were in many bigger cities at the time. But the racial climate was still
uneasy in this usually quiet Appalachian community. In the previous decade, two of
the poorest black neighborhoods bordering downtown had been demolished by
federally funded, but locally executed urban renewal. The remaining inner layer of
neighborhoods, where most low and moderate income black Roanokers lived, were
deteriorating as well. Residents there feared the urban renewal bulldozer might level
their homes and businesses next. Despite living in a small city known for its mildly
progressive and commercial ways,[192] African-American citizens felt threatened by

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[192]This was urban planner Jean Gottman's impression of Roanoke in an
assessment he was commissioned to do of the State of Virginia in the early 1950s.
See his Virginia at Mid-Century, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955), p.
506.

changing governmental and economic forces over which they believed they had no effective influence. Amidst these uncertainties, the ICAA arose informally but purposefully. It was an effort by black men — who had grown up in the more intact black community predating desegregation — to keep their younger counterparts off the streets, in school, and involved in something constructive.

In the years since its founding, the ICAA has enjoyed a level of success which by almost any measure would have to be considered remarkable. The teams fielded by it in various sports have won numerous city, regional, and state championships. Many of its teenage track athletes, both boys and girls, have participated in national amateur competitions. Some youngsters coming through its program have even gone onto careers as professional athletes. Yet, in accomplishing all this, the ICAA has retained much of its informality. Its leaders have for the most part known one another for years, many having grown up together in Roanoke. Several of the directors on its board are coaches with enduring roots in the community. No accident, their longevity has been a deliberate choice to preserve continuity: the organization's bylaws state that the term of a director "shall be perpetual until death, resignation, or removal."[193] The ICAA's budgeting and finances have been uncomplicated, with resources sought mainly when needed for a specific upcoming activity rather than in anticipation of growth or future organizational challenges.

When I visited Paul Moyer in the spring of 1994, however, the ICAA was in the process of changing. It had recently begun to infuse the board with new blood, particularly people connected in the upper echelons of Roanoke. The organization

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[193] Bylaws of Inner City Athletic Association,Inc. (undated), p. 1.

was also beginning to take longer term, strategic fund raising seriously. Simply put, the ICAA was becoming more formal in order to sustain its success. Although the change was felt to be necessary by those involved, it called upon the organization's leaders, now in their forties, fifties, and sixties, to assume responsibilities unlike the indigenous coaching role that had got and kept them involved for so long. They had managed, far longer than might have ever seemed imaginable, to avoid a significant shift into a more systematic, structured mode of operating. But their own aging, stiffer competition for resources in the community, and growing difficulties in attracting and keeping youth were making the old, informal ways of operating harder to uphold.

A Community in Transition

The ICAA emerged in my field work as a distinct example of the gradual, and yet powerful, change through which black community life in Roanoke was being transformed into a new, uncertain order. The men who created and ran the organization had been born and raised in the period before the earnest beginnings of desegregation in the 1960s. They knew, from this, a way of community life that was at once more isolated because of racial discrimination and more cohesive at least in part for the same reason. They welcomed the equality that desegregation conferred on them as citizens, but at the same time fought against the loosening of social bonds made possible by greater individual freedom for African-Americans. As John B. Claytor, Jr., a prominent, retired black doctor in Roanoke, succinctly put it: "Integration was a two-edged sword."[194] He was not alone in feeling this way.

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[194]Quoted from an interview with Dr. Claytor in records assembled for an oral history entitled "A Hidden History: The Black Experience in the Roanoke Valley" (Roanoke, VA: Harrison Museum of African American Culture, 1994), p. 17.

The men of the ICAA sought to reproduce, in their work as coaches, the close ties and regular presence of responsible adults that had evidently suffused the childhoods of many of them and had made them who they believed themselves to be, namely, good men. And, for a long time, they had routinely succeeded in doing so for many youngsters. As Paul Moyer observed, "You got young men who came up through the program, who we coached,....who are coaching now....That's what make us feel good about it." But the job of passing on this moral tradition was getting noticeably more complex.

Segregation was deeply wrong, but the strictures it placed from without on the black community seemed to have the perversely positive effect of enabling organic ties to flourish within as the principal way of shaping a day-to-day moral order on which members could count.[195] It was evidently natural and unquestioned that adults should take responsibility for children and for their own social behavior. "I don't guess I ever thought of anybody in my friends as a child....from a broken home,"explained an older woman interviewed for a recent oral history on black life in Roanoke"[196] Yet, as the strictures of segregation slackened, the exercise of responsibility inside the community became in a sense less natural. To be maintained, responsibility required a more conscious and creative effort. This was, of course, why and how the ICAA had come into existence. The organization was an intentional response to the fraying of the social fabric of the black community beginning in the 1960s. Fortunately, the ICAA's coaches did not have to design, as

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[195]Similar evidence on the community building effects of segregation are reported by Clarence Stone in his study of Atlanta. See his Regime Politics, p. 18.

[196]Harrison Museum, "A Hidden History," p. 20.

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it were, their basic methods of relating to youth and one another. They could still call upon the embedded memories of their own upbringing under more organic conditions to tell them how they should carry on their work with the young athletes in their care. Habits acquired early in life gave them the know-how and wherewithal to be effective coaches of inner city youth later on.[197]

But when a moral tradition must be transmitted in so self-conscious a way, as something freely chosen and thus capable of being rejected rather than taken-for-granted, it is apt to embed less deeply in each succeeding generation. Alternatives and revisions to the tradition arise and persist within the larger community and society, making the job of its purveyors harder and more artificial. At the time I observed it, the ICAA was contending with the limitations of its informal methods in making the right things happen in a contemporary social world that had become less reliable.

The experience of the ICAA has not been unique. Nearly all of the indigenous problem solving efforts I was able to identify in Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods were going or had gone through a similar transition. Two populations dominate these neighborhoods today: the older generation of African-Americans whose formative experiences occurred forty to seventy years ago and poor young families and individuals who have no or very little first-hand knowledge of what life was like before desegregation. When I asked a black professional woman in her twenties, who had grown up in one of these neighborhoods, what was different about her old neighborhood today, she replied: "Now the people in the neighborhood

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[197]My use of the concept of habit here is consistent with Dewey's definition of a habit as an active, learned predisposition. See his *Human Nature and Conduct (1922)*, in The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 14, pp. 31-32.

are either old or young, there's no one in between." The older generation has stayed in the inner city either because they could not afford to move elsewhere or preferred to remain on familiar ground and among friends, while poor young families have settled there because it offered the only housing within their means outside of Roanoke's public housing developments.

As the older generation has shrunk in size and energy, they have taken with them some portion of that sense of shared responsibility and perseverance which had defined life together for African-Americans in Roanoke before racial integration began to lift up and unbind the community. The younger generation, lacking this connection to a more cohesive and accomplished past, and more enmeshed in poverty, has been disinclined to fill the gap.[198] "The young people is not for a lot of [community] work," one older inner city woman, a neighborhood leader, explained to me. "They want an easy and quick way." Or as another active woman in the same neighborhood complained to me: "Nobody [here] want to get involved. Nobody concerned about their kids." This woman, in her late forties, felt that families with children simply had no part, and wanted none, in working on the neighborhood's

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[198]In the 1990 census, the poverty rate for Roanoke's inner city stood at 33.4 percent, more than twice the level for the city as a whole and more than three times the level for the metropolitan area. The poverty rates for the census tracts constituting the inner city ranged from a low of 26% and a high of 46%. See City of Roanoke, Enterprise Community Strategic Plan: Putting the Pieces Together, June 1994, p. i. However, it is important to note that, despite these relatively high poverty levels, none of the four inner city neighborhoods in which I spent most of my time looked like a slum. Aside from an occasional abandoned or dilapidated house, the neighborhoods were relatively well-kept. The kind of underclass neighborhood that William Julius Wilson describes based on studies of Chicago's poor communities was not evident to the naked eye in Roanoke. See W. J. Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy, (The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

problems.

The net result of an aging and dwindling older generation combined with a poor and apathetic younger generation appeared to be a marked decline in the amount of informal problem solving occurring in the community. In its place had emerged what struck me as a greater tendency to turn the regulation of social life and the development of the community over to more formal structures and processes. At the least, positing a decline in informal problem solving helps to explain the fact that I found so few, truly indigenous undertakings during my several months of trying, and this in an urban space arguably small enough to be plumbed in that period of time.

To be fair, the loss of organic cohesiveness in Roanoke's inner city areas, while obvious, seemed to differ mainly in degree, rather than kind, from what many people I spoke with described as the overall condition of the city and its environs. One active and influential white human service professional, when asked about the situation in African-American neighborhoods, responded more generally that:

> "Part of what has happened in kind of being really mobile as a society, you don't have an extended family to count on. And so then you think, you got neighbors, but you're not really living in one place long enough to establish that kind of trust, or you might not want to for whatever reason."

In short, the individual success and well-being made possible by affluence have

reduced the felt necessity of the community.[199]

For older inner city blacks, their geographic and cultural community had once been their boundary. Its very inescapability had been, in no small way, the source of its necessity to them. But as the boundary has become more permeable with the greater movement of blacks into the middle class and integrated neighborhoods, the community and the informal processes that once held it together have become less sure. All Roanokers have at some level sensed the lessened dependability of community life. But for many blacks living in the inner city, this change has had special poignance as the erosion of what had been a, if not the, crucial ingredient in the formation of their identities. In the words of one inner city black man who spoke to a newspaper reporter I interviewed: "If I dropped over dead...., nobody would contact any help."

Or consider the story conveyed to me by another reporter, for the same newspaper, The Roanoke Times & World News, who had written a column asking people to tell her about acts of kindness they had experienced or witnessed at the hands of strangers. One letter she received described an appreciative black woman who had fallen ill late one night and went from door-to-door in a predominately African-American, northwest Roanoke neighborhood looking for help. The woman

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[199]Peter Berger and his colleagues speak of the "lesser quality of necessity" that describes the functioning of modern bureaucracy. By this they mean that one can always envision alternatives to it for the accomplishment of goals or satisfaction of needs. The modern American community appears increasingly to be evolving into a similar social form. Amidst relative affluence and freedom, a community's members are able to find other ways of obtaining the sorts of fulfillment that matter to them. See Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, & Hansfried Kellner, The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 41.

knocked on several doors, but either no one answered or the occupants refused to let her in. Finally, she came to a house where a man and woman, after hesitating given the lateness of the hour, opened their door to her and got her the medical attention she needed.

These two instances of indifference stand in contrast with the community of fifty years ago, at least as remembered by those who lived in it. Then, an ill or injured person, more likely than today to be known by others in the community, would have been picked up by Roanoke's black volunteer ambulance squad, one of the first of its kind in the country. That person would then have been taken to the black hospital and treated probably by black doctors and nurses.[200] But with the passage of time, all this has disappeared. The squad was put out of business in the 1960s when, needing to look outside the community for financial support, it was turned down for funding by the United Way for serving only African-Americans. As for the hospital, it was converted into a nursing home several years ago.

Institutions that both constituted and symbolized the black community have vanished or weakened, and with them has gone a measure of the community's readiness to care for its own. The very embeddedness of members in the old, more institutionalized community is what seemed to enable them to act with evident dispatch when confronting shared problems. In the emerging community, embeddedness has been in decline. The result has been that problems more often may be ignored and, even when they are not, greater effort is required to coordinate

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[200]Harrison Museum "A Hidden History," p. 6.

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action across community members who do not know one another that well.[201] "A community does not come together by a covenant, by a conscious granting of trust," writes environmentalist Wendell Berry. "It exists by proximity, by neighborhood; it knows face to face, and its trusts at it knows."[202] Although it once apparently exhibited these qualities, the inner city black community in Roanoke has been gradually moving away from being a place where people know one another because they share a common space.

Neighborhood Struggles

During my field research, the difficulty of preserving or recreating a black communal identity was being played out subtly but forcefully at the neighborhood level. Prior to desegregation, the African-American community in Roanoke was largely confined, and crowded into, several contiguous blocks northwest and

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[201]Embeddedness has emerged as an important concept in economic sociology, employed to show how social relationships shape economic activity. It can also, I am suggesting here, be useful in understanding the dynamics and associated costs of community problem solving under different degrees of solidarity. For appropriate discussions see Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 91 (1985), pp. 481-510; Jane Dutton & Joel Baum, The Embeddedness of Strategy: Advances in Strategic Management, (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1996); Brian Uzzi, "Social Structure and Competition in Interfirm Networks: The Paradox of Embeddedness," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 42 (March 1997), pp. 35-67.

[202]Wendell Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community, (New York: Pantheon, 1992), p. 161.

northeast of the city.[203] The northeast was the poorer of the two areas (and, not surprisingly, the focal point of urban renewal), and there were no doubt class distinctions among blacks just as there were among whites.[204] Still, segregation had created the condition in which nearly all blacks sensed that they shared the same fate. "It was all one big black community, with every social class and personal philosophy packed together," writes local journalist Mary Bishop in describing what the community was like before urban renewal reshaped it beginning in the 1950s.[205] People could talk about "the black community" and it meant something very real, because spatial, to them. With desegregation, this community has spread north and west, covering a much greater geographic area. As it has, cohesiveness has become harder to maintain, since relationships require more physical effort with the loss of propinquity. The African-American community has settled into different

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[203]The concentration of blacks in a limited and mostly contiguous geographic area of the city is evident in city planning maps developed at different times during the century. See City Planning and Zoning Commission, Comprehensive City Plan, Roanoke, Virginia, 1928, and Roanoke City Planning Commission, Neighborhoods of Roanoke: A Physical and Social Analysis, 1962. Between 1928 and 1950, the maps indicate very little change. By 1962, however, blacks had begun to move out of the northeast section of the city and further west and north into formerly all-white neighborhoods.

[204]For an interesting look at the role of social class among blacks after the Civil War see W. B. Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). Gatewood observes that white resistance to black success intensified after the turn of the century in response to rising economic and geographic mobility among blacks. The result was increased segregation of all blacks, regardless of class, from the white world (p. 348).

[205]Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block," Roanoke Times & World-News, January 29, 1995, p.3. This lengthy newspaper report provides an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the history of urban renewal in Roanoke and its negative consequences for the black community.

neighborhoods defined by economic status — smaller geographies of several blocks in which social intercourse among similarly situated people can be carried on and sustained. Since the late 1970s, these neighborhoods have been a key setting for waging attempts to hold onto a black communal identity. Leading the way have been older blacks who know what it was like to occupy the tighter space that defined African-American existence in Roanoke before the walls of discrimination began to come down. In their neighborhoods they have sought to maintain or resurrect what to them had once been the manner of life for the black community as a whole.

By 1993-1994, when I was there, the leaders of the black inner city neighborhoods I studied were all in their late sixties to early eighties. Retirement had given them the time to devote to neighborhood affairs, but age was sapping their vigor. And there appeared to be few middle-aged blacks, familiarized by experience with the stronger solidarity of the old community, waiting in the wings to replace them. The latter had either moved elsewhere, were too busy with jobs and families to give the health of the community much mind, or had simply been denied the opportunity to lead. As one relatively new, white nonprofit executive suggested to me, "Roanoke has been lacking and remiss probably in spending a lot of time developing younger black leaders." The aging leaders of the African-American neighborhoods had for two decades been trying to fend off the forces of social decay pressing in on the disadvantaged inner city. They had done what they could to keep their neighborhoods from degenerating into slums and had managed some notable success. But time, it appeared, was beginning to overtake them.

The most visible of the neighborhoods were two just north of downtown Roanoke. They were studies in contrasting styles of neighborhood activism. One, organized under the banner of the Northwest Neighborhood Environmental

Organization, was an exemplar of steady progress and a cooperative spirit. The other, Gainsboro, the site of the first major settlements in the area more than two hundred years ago, was the scene of contentious debate among blacks and between them and the city's power structure. A third neighborhood, Loudon-Melrose, though less visible than either NNEO or Gainsboro, also figured prominently in my research.

Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization

The Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization (NNEO) had formed in 1980. It was one of the initial neighborhood associations brought into existence under the aegis of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, an effort by city authorities to improve citizen participation at a time when trust between residents and municipal government had broken down. The NNEO was led by its main founder, Florine Thornhill, a soft-spoken, Bible-quoting older black woman dedicated to keeping her neighborhood from becoming a slum. "Mrs. Thornhill," as she was known throughout the city, was a quiet leader whose willingness to work in a friendly, open way with municipal officials and business leaders had attracted the investment of relatively substantial outside resources in developing housing and other amenities in her section of the city. The work had earned more than the usual accolades. For example, the day before I first interviewed her, Mrs. Thornhill had won a prestigious annual award bestowed by President Clinton for outstanding volunteer service. As we sat in her living room, she was getting ready to go to the White House to receive it in a few days. The award was a noteworthy accomplishment for a woman who left school in the eighth grade and had worked for most of her life as a domestic. Over the past fifteen years, she had succeeded, with the support of the mostly senior people constituting the active membership of her organization, in bringing the neighborhood back from the edge of urban blight. The

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neighborhood's housing was generally in good repair, its park was clean and attractive, and the streets were relatively free of the stereotypical signs of decline such as jobless men loitering on corners, drug dealing, and truant youth. All of this had been achieved through an organization that had evolved from informal beginnings into the most formal and effective structure I found among black neighborhood organizations. And yet, the future of the Northwest Area Environmental Organization was far from assured.

Mrs. Thornhill, its dominant personality, was in her seventies. There was no one waiting among her equally senior membership to ascend into her role when she could no longer function as the leader. She and her members, many of whom, like her, had moved into the neighborhood from the poor northeast section of the city years ago, had managed to build a healthy black community out of their common cultural inheritance and experience. What they apparently had been unable to do, though, was transmit their taste for solidarity to the next generations of the neighborhood's inhabitants. There appeared to be few stable, middle-aged residents available, willing, and able to carry on the work of the NNEO when its current participants, in the not-too-distant future, died or were forced by increasing frailty into inactivity.[206] Mrs. Thornhill was making an effort to attract younger, responsible families to the neighborhood by improving the housing stock, but the gains so far were modest.

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[206]The absence of younger leadership was common to all the predominately black neighborhoods that had neighborhood organizations in Roanoke. For a general comment on the "graying" of urban neighborhood associations in communities contending with drug problems see Steven Rathgeb Smith, Seminar Report: Civic Problem Solving and Substance Abuse, September 29-30, 1997, p. 11, Sponsored by Join Together and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Gainsboro

If the NNEO was a portrait in harmony, the Gainsboro district was anything but. It had become a lightening rod for black disaffection from city government and Roanoke's commercial establishment. Home to some of the oldest housing in Roanoke, Gainsboro had started as a white community in the nineteenth century with blacks living close by.[207] By the 1880s, though, it had evolved into the main location for blacks in the area as whites moved south and west into the newer town called Big Lick, named for the salt licks in the area. African-Americans settled in Gainsboro in growing numbers, established a thriving and diverse business district for themselves, and set up the churches that most black Roanokers attended. When urban renewal demolished the poor black neighborhoods in northeast Roanoke in the 50s and 60s, it stopped at the edges of Gainsboro, a community with a greater mix of low income, middle class, and upper middle class black residents. In the hearts and minds of many blacks I spoke with, Gainsboro was emblematic of what black community life at its finest had once been and, they hoped, could again be.

The problem was that while the neighborhood served by the NNEO had been able to fend off the juggernaut of decay, Gainsboro had been allowed over the years to deteriorate more. As its business district fell into disuse with desegregation and the emergence outside the community of super markets and shopping malls that blacks could now patronize, Gainsboro seemed to lose the pivot around which its neighborhood life had once revolved. With an older population than other black

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[207]Most of the historical facts I've been able to gather on Gainsboro were compiled by a local black amateur historian, George Heller. They are reported in a mimeographed document, called "Highlights of Historic Gainsboro Preservation District" (undated), given to me by a Gainsboro resident. I 've also relied on Mary Bishop's descriptions of historic Gainsboro in "Street by Street, Block by Block."

neighborhoods at the time, it had seen its leaders fade into old age and death somewhat sooner. The housing stock of mostly two and three-story family-owned homes converted more quickly into multi-unit dwellings for rent and the more transient population that rental properties draw. By the start of the 1970s, Gainsboro was marred by pockets of blight. These were evolving toward the kind of slums for which so many elderly blacks there and elsewhere in Roanoke expressed animated distaste in my discussions with them.

City and business leaders sought to change Gainsboro's fortunes through a slower, more subtle form of urban renewal than that which had wiped out the neighborhoods in northeast Roanoke. "The Gainsboro project would be a far cry from old-style urban renewal," asserted the editorial writers for the Roanoke Times & World News in 1971. More emphasis was to be placed on neighborhood preservation and rehabilitating old properties.[208] Redevelopment began in Gainsboro in 1973, five years after urban renewal had ended in the Kimball and Commonwealth neighborhoods of northeast Roanoke. While, contrary to promises, little was actually done over time to restore rundown properties in Gainsboro, residents who moved out fared considerably better economically than their counterparts in northeast: they received three times as much money in exchange for the demolition of their homes and businesses.[209] By 1990, hundreds of buildings had been torn down in Gainsboro, mostly in the northern half of the neighborhood, making the way for new industrial development, apartment buildings, and single family homes.

When I arrived in 1993, city leaders were rallying around plans to restore the

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[208]Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block," p. 5.

[209]Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block," p. 6.

Hotel Roanoke on Gainsboro's southeastern border and increase the flow of traffic through its streets. Some community activists had come to believe these plans would bring economic benefits to the African-American community as a whole. Though initially opposed, they had negotiated agreements with the project's developers on job set-asides for blacks and other concessions, which they now felt made this new step worth taking. But other black citizens, mainly those living in Gainsboro itself, were profoundly opposed to the hotel restoration and especially the planned road improvements. The following woman's comment appeared to reflect the feelings of many local residents: "I think their is a lot of deceit....City officials deliberately keep one neighborhood quiet while they're destroying this one and then once they get what they want there, they going to march right on up the road." Experience over the preceding years had led her and others to distrust municipal authorities and business people promising jobs and neighborhood preservation. That these were not just the rants of people in the flush of emotion after losing a long fight was confirmed by a well-regarded white political figure. He suggested to me privately that the city had "much more in mind in the long run [for Gainsboro] than meets the eye." During my ten months in the field, the battle over Gainsboro attracted almost daily news coverage. By the time I left, the contest, at least this round of it, was effectively over as work began on restoring the hotel and widening the surrounding streets. Still, the neighborhood remained in turmoil over the desirability of the changes that were underway.

Gainsboro was a setting where the black community seemed to fight within itself over more than land use. Little had occurred there akin to the internally led revitalization of the NNEO, two neighborhoods west. The commitment to practical, incremental action to improve the neighborhood appeared weaker in Gainsboro. Instead, it seemed more a place for expressing the tensions and fissures within

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Roanoke's contemporary black community over how to deal with the process of change. The neighborhood that most symbolized black communal identity was undergoing an uncertain metamorphosis. For many blacks, especially those with memories of times gone by, even if rose-colored, uncertainty about Gainsboro's fate at the hands of "progress" dismayed them because it struck at the root of whom they thought they were. Others, perhaps seeing the world more pragmatically, were more willing to let progress take its course, if the outcome were improved economic conditions for blacks overall in Roanoke. The result was to leave Gainsboro, as the proving ground of the symbolic black community, divided and troubled.[210]

Loudon-Melrose

Between the extremes represented by the NNEO and Gainsboro, a third African-American neighborhood — Loudon-Melrose — drew a considerable amount of my attention. Just to the west of the area served by the NNEO, the Loudon-Melrose neighborhood (named after its two main streets) was perhaps more typical than either of these other two of what may lie ahead for Roanoke's inner city residents. Like NNEO's area, it had a core group of older black homeowners who had moved from Gainsboro and northeast. Like Gainsboro, it had a large population of younger, more transient black families and single adults. But Loudon-Melrose also differed from both the NNEO and Gainsboro neighborhoods in important respects. Compared to them, it had a higher level of commercial, mostly retail, activity in which black owners and workers figured prominently but not exclusively.

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[210]My observations on the political fragmentation of Gainsboro are echoed in Reginald Shareef's analysis of the effects of urban renewal in Roanoke. See his unpublished report, "An Evaluation of the Impact of Federal Urban Renewal and Redevelopment Programs on Three Roanoke, Virginia Neighborhoods," 1991.

Similarly, it had more white residents. Crime was higher as well, evidenced by the visible signs of drug dealing and a neighborhood park that was well known for attracting an unruly crowd. Loudon-Melrose was a neighborhood in the grip of change, both positive and negative, and it was difficult to tell which direction would prevail in the long-run or whether neither would.

The Loudon-Melrose Neighborhood Organization (LMNO) had been around almost as long as the NNEO, but it was organized more loosely and informally and functioned intermittently. Its membership reflected the split composition of the neighborhood. The ranks were dominated by increasingly less active older residents, but there was also a modest representation of younger adults, mostly singles, in their twenties and thirties. Interest in developing the area's commercial sector had led in 1993, with outside nudging by Total Action against Poverty, Roanoke's community action agency, to the formation of a semi-autonomous spin-off from the LMNO called the Melrose Avenue Residential/Business Revitalization Advisory Board (MARBRAB). It, too, functioned somewhat informally, with a fluid membership and aims that were still being clarified when I left the field in mid-1994. Although the LMNO and MARBRAB were positive forces, they had yet to achieve concrete results of the kind and magnitude that had been attained by the NNEO in its area, and nor was it clear that they would. They lacked the stable, effective leadership and membership base that had seemed to enable the NNEO to congeal into a formal structure with relatively well-crafted purposes and plans. Nor did the LMNO and MARBRAB engender the high profile, galvanizing quality of factious debates over community preservation that made Gainsboro a continuing focal point of black concern. The Loudon-Melrose neighborhood, which had been a mostly moderate income white community until the early 1970s, had no place in the historical identity of black Roanoke. Its fate evoked limited interest within the larger African-American

community. And yet, one had the sense that the indeterminate condition of Loudon-Melrose reflected what the other two neighborhoods might eventually become: an inner city territory poised indefinitely between stability and change.

The Old Order

Throughout the NNEO, Gainsboro, and Loudon-Melrose neighborhoods and, for that matter, Roanoke generally, while styles of community organizing varied, there was remarkable similarity among African-American residents raised before desegregation in a longing for the old internal order of the black community. The oldest remembered a community in which family and neighborhood served essentially the same functions. "We had strong family values," exclaimed one elderly black woman.[211] "You were not only a member [of your own family], you were a member of an extended family. You belonged to the neighborhood." Middle-aged blacks recalled a life as children in which they felt more secure. As one woman in her forties told me, "I grew up in a neighborhood [in Roanoke] where all the doors were unlocked...I lived in a very close-knit neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody and everybody helped everybody." People spent their lives mostly in the same places, day-in and day-out, with limited movement beyond the *de facto* boundaries of the black community. One man, a former city official, told me how he had grown up in the 1950s, when "folks attended the same churches, went to the same doctors and dentists, and their kids went to the same school." Within these close confines, the sense of collective responsibility was evidently strong. One older woman, in discussing Roanoke's now defunct black volunteer ambulance corps, spoke of how in the past: "One person couldn't do a thing. He had to touch the lives of some more men...And they were all dedicated men, and it came from here,...from

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[211]"A Hidden History: The Black Experience in the Roanoke Valley," p. 3.

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the heart."[212]

It is tempting to dismiss or downplay such statements of belonging, security, predictability, and shared responsibility as nostalgia. Indeed, even many of the blacks I got to know or spoke with often mixed their longing for the past with mature recognition of the inevitability of change. "You can't stand in the way of progress" was a common refrain I heard from older residents. They had misgivings about the communal losses that came with desegregation, but many years had taught them that, as one civically active older woman put it, "nothin's permanent, not in this life." And yet, it would be a mistake to see in their acceptance of the fact of change, an acknowledgment that their wishing for the "old days" was merely sentimental.

Political philosopher John Euben suggests that "nostalgia may be less an irrational refusal to adapt and adjust to modernity...than an instinct for cultural and personal identity."[213] Blacks in Roanoke who had experienced another way of living together before, who felt inextricably linked to this older way, and who perceived in it virtues that were eroding in the present, could not be accused of wanting the impossible or chasing after an allusion. For the more active among them, the challenge was not so much how best to cope with change, as if the conduct of their lives were mainly a reaction to unexpected contingencies. Rather, the challenge was how to wrestle with the forces of change to retrieve from their common sense of history the values that could replenish in the present a communal identity for them and their decedents. The appropriateness of this task did not depend on having a

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[212]"A Hidden History: The Black Experience in the Roanoke Valley," p. 15.

[213] J.P. Euben The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 13.

factual, and only factual, grasp of their own history. I had no doubt that the fond memories people conveyed to me about the past told only part of the story. Black community life in Roanoke before desegregation could not have been the fully harmonious existence my informants often tried to portray for me. What mattered to their identities was not historical truth *per se*, but what their moral imagination could extract from this shared past as the principles to live by in the present.

A healthy identity, as we saw in chapter two, has a hard time forming amidst constant and pervasive change. It benefits from the hearty soil of reliable relationships and an established social structure in which to take root and develop — what Dewey refers to as "vital and thorough attachments."[214] The older and middle-aged blacks I met in Roanoke remembered a past community which, though checked by outside forces, managed to maintain a proper order within. This was a created order whose participants felt that, within the strict limits imposed by the surrounding society, they were still in important ways collectively controlling their own fate. As one woman lamented, comparing this prior time with the more unruly present: "It wasn't anything natural, like it is today." To combat "sinful" nature, in her view, meant teaching and reinforcing respect and care for others in the community. "If anything happened in one family [back then]...," this woman said, "neighbors were gathered around to help and assist."[215] One is reminded here of my earlier discussions of Selznick's notion of core participation and Goode's thoughts on noncontractual social ties, in which relationships are among whole persons

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[214]John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, p. 368.

[215]"A Hidden History: The Black Experience in the Roanoke Valley," pp. 5-6.

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intimately connected to one another.[216] A community characterized by high levels of core participation or noncontractual ties will be one in which people are able to rely on one another, trust one another, and predict one another's behavior more readily.

How this more cohesive order actually came about in Roanoke's black community is difficult to pin down. The formal historical records on African-American life in Roanoke before the middle of the century are sparse. Two factors, working in tandem, probably played a part, though.

Modeling the Majority

One factor was imitation. Roanoke officially incorporated in 1882 under the impetus of the Norfolk & Western Railway. A mining boom in this part of Appalachia made Big Lick, the settlement that occupied the spot before Roanoke, an attractive site for shipping coal east into Virginia's Tidewater area and eventually elsewhere. [217] Roanoke became the headquarters for the N & W, and for the next three-quarters of a century the railroad set the pace in the local economy.[218] Its dominance of the economic landscape gave the company important influence over political and social life. One has the impression from the historical record and from adults in the 1990s who themselves or their families were affected by the N & W that

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[216]Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, pp. 184-193; Goode, The Celebration of Heroes, p. 39.

[217]Jean Gottman, Virginia at Mid-Century, p.126, p.503.

[218]Gottman notes that Roanoke was "created by the Norfolk and Western Railway" [in the early 1880s]. Seventy years later, when writing his report on the State of Virginia, he states that the railway was still by far the largest employer in the area. Jean Gottman, Virginia at Mid-Century, p. 503, p. 505.

a benevolent hierarchy governed the railroad, and that the city itself was apparently managed in much the same way, with an eye to commercial advantage and rational order.[219] In short, the railroad helped to create a stable and yet enterprising local regime. As urbanologist Jean Gottman observed in the 1950s, "Roanoke has a reputation among Virginia cities for being more 'Midwestern' than others. It has undertaken greater things industrially, it has showed more local initiative...." The black community had this clear example to draw upon in forming its own internal governance. Working for the railroad was considered a good, steady job for a black man.[220] So, African-Americans who were employed by the N & W and who therefore had absorbed its way of doing things to some extent, would have had influence in the black community. Along with black professionals, small business people, and preachers, they would have constituted the leadership ranks of black Roanoke. The

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[219]My understanding of the history is drawn from Gottman's account, in which he describes the railway as mainly an affirmative, overall force in Roanoke. See J. Gottman, Virginia at Mid-Century. While Gottman does not specifically explore the effects of the railroad on local government, there are indications from other sources that the organizing logic of the railway was replicated in the conduct of municipal authority. For example, Roanoke, despite its remote location, caught the wave of city planning that was spreading through the country early this century as part of the municipal reform movement. In the late 1920s, it engaged a city planning expert to help it develop a systematic land use plan, and an outside welfare authority to help it formulate a sensible scheme for managing social problems in the community. A comment from the welfare authority, F. W. Huffer, is typical of the rational direction the city was hoping to achieve: "Nothing is more important than to build firm foundations of fact and social intelligence under the whole welfare structure in the community (111)." Echoes of Deweyan pragmatism reverberate through this statement. See City Planning and Zoning Commission, Comprehensive City Plan, Roanoke, Virginia, 1928 and F. W. Huffer, Public and Private Welfare - Roanoke, Virginia, Roanoke City Planning and Zoning Commission, Roanoke Community Fund, & Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, 1928.

[220]Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block," p. 4.

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railroad's quest, and apparent success in obtaining, a relatively well ordered community in general would have set a strong precedent for this leadership group to follow in the more specific instance of the city's minority population.

A Sense of Pride

At the same time that blacks were affected by the "railroad town" mentality, they were likely also inspired, by their own sense of pride, to create a community contrary to white stereotyping of blacks as degraded and threatening.[221] I have already mentioned how older black people I met spoke of the importance of keeping their part of town from becoming a slum. The word "slum" rarely showed up in the vocabulary used by middle-aged African-Americans I interviewed or heard speak. But for older folk it obviously had potent meaning, referring to more than just the physical appearance of the community. It was a moral judgment of the place where they lived and thus of themselves as a people — a way of distinguishing them unfairly and disparagingly *en masse* from the rest of society.[222]

Those who lived in the cramped black section of town before World War II would have known how easy it was for the Caucasian majority in Roanoke to judge the moral quality of the minority African-American community as a whole on the basis of a few dilapidated buildings. Late in the 1800s, for example, two adjacent

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[221]On white stereotyping of blacks during the first decades of the 1900s, see Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920, p. 7.

[222] For a helpful discussion of the social significance of the word slum in describing low income communities, see S. B. Warner, Jr., "Slums and Skyscrapers: Urban Images, Symbols, and Ideology," in Cities of the Mind: Images and Themes of the City in the Social Sciences, eds. L. Rodwin & R. M. Hollister, (New York: Plenum Press, 1984), pp. 181-195.

hills in the community, where tenements were located, somehow acquired the name "the ape yard" in the press and common culture. This damning label, still, not surprisingly, alive in people's memories a hundred years later, was no doubt intended as a critique not just of the designated blocks, but of black Roanoke in general. Pejorative labeling, along with a steady stream of other insults, both large and small, from the majority community, would have given the responsible members of the black community a healthy reason to demonstrate, if only to themselves, the opposite of what the stereotyping suggested. Through the development of their own institutions — schools, churches, businesses — made all the more possible by the separation of black people from the rest of Roanoke, they were able to mold an indigenous order that gave a relative and positive solidity to community life. By persevering in a hostile environment, they acquired a strong sense of their own capacity to create, preserve, and nurture a decent moral order.[223]

Unmaking the Community

Many of the civically minded black people I heard from grew up in Roanoke at a time when the geographically bounded black community was still actively building its basic institutions. That they took from this creative experience of comity

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[223]Psychologist Albert Bandura writes: "If people experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort." This is an apt explanation of the persistence I witnessed among many older blacks in Roanoke, who seemingly had been involved in community-building work of one kind or another all their lives. Having prevailed together through the dark years of segregation, they remained committed to trying to make their neighborhoods good places to live, even in the face of empirical circumstances that pointed to decline and their waning abilities. See Albert Bandura, "Exercise of Personal and Collective Efficacy in Changing Societies," (pp. 1-45), in Self-efficacy in Changing Societies, ed. Albert Bandura, (Cambridge University Press 1995).

and struggle a keen sense of the values which, however imperfectly, informed it, is not unusual. Nor is the fact that they wanted those values to live once again in the present. The trouble was that the present seemed less amenable than the past to institution-building efforts. As one man said to me epigrammatically, "Everybody's gone." He meant that often the most significant parts of people's lives today are led outside of both family and neighborhood. The problem of creating and maintaining communal solidarity among Roanoke's blacks had evolved into something more complex and possibly beyond the ken of older residents whose formative experiences had occurred in a different era and, in a sense, a different place. The unstated question one sensed in their minds was whether durable institutions, and the proper habits they instill, could emerge in this more unpredictable environment.

During the period when the African-American community in Roanoke was being built up, there was never any doubt that internal control rested on the thin reed of acquiescence by the majority white community. Constant reminders of white authority, from higher arrest rates for blacks[224] to the siting of the city incinerator in the black section of town, made clear to blacks the constraints under which they could function as a community. Yet, within the boundaries set by these routinized displays of power, Roanoke's minority population had freedom to shape their own social world, and they did. From the early days of Gainsboro into the 1950s, black residents seemed able to craft a community for themselves that represented at least an approximation of the kind of life together their values called for. This changed dramatically, however, with urban renewal.

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[224]Maps prepared by F. W. Huffer for his welfare report in 1928 show a considerably higher concentration of adjudicated delinquent youths in the black section of town than anywhere else in the city. F.W. Huffer, Public and Private Welfare, Roanoke, Virginia, 1928, unnumbered page.

Urban Renewal

As if by the snapping of a finger, the majority strategy of persistently reminding the black community of who was really in charge metastasized in the 1950s into a direct assault on the community that blacks had created, and all, bizarrely, in the name of progressive public policy. Institutions that African-American citizens had spent years building in the neighborhoods upended by renewal were razed, not just physically, but psychologically and socially. The sense of control blacks had developed over their communal affairs could not but erode under the force of this act, by political powers, to appropriate "black land" for the supposed benefit of Roanoke as a whole. It was discouraging enough that many of those blacks who were displaced never received adequate compensation for the homes and businesses they left behind. More significant for the African-American community overall was the diminution of its power to create and maintain itself. "People were robbed not only of their homes but their communities and...identities," I was told by a retired professional woman who had been raised in a middle class Gainsboro family. "They were forced to disperse, so their sense of togetherness, their sense of family and community was gone."

It is difficult for a community, once physically destroyed, to be reconstituted. No matter how close residents were to one another beforehand, the loss of their common place eliminates a critical ingredient in what held them together. Sociologist Kai Erikson reports how in the wake of the coal mine disaster at Buffalo Creek, everything was experienced as "unreliable, even other survivors, and that is a very fragile base on which to build a new community."[225] Of course, the destructive effects of urban renewal were far less immediate — occurring as they did

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[225]Erikson, <u>Everthing in Its Path</u>, p., 228.

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over many years — than those of the one-day mining disaster in Buffalo Creek. The slow process gave the black residents of the Commonwealth, Kimball, and Gainsboro neighborhoods time to adjust to the reality of being uprooted, to soften the blow. Yet, what made renewal dispiriting to the black community was the very fact that it was not, like Buffalo Creek, an accident waiting to happen that could be chalked up to normal human error. It was not a physical cataclysm with social consequences. Rather, urban renewal was an intentional, supposedly humane, social and public choice forced on that community by other human beings — a choice which blacks were practically powerless to affect.

The implied message of urban renewal was that even the limited control blacks thought they had over the building of their community and its institutions could no longer be counted on. In the final analysis, their community did not really belong to them, but to something amorphous called the "public interest." It was this public interest that eventually led to the demolition of 1,600 of their homes, 200 of their businesses, and 24 of their churches.[226] As the uprooted assumed residence in other neighborhoods, black Roanokers, regardless whether they were directly affected by renewal, had to wonder about their ability to continue to maintain the integrity of their community.

Adding to that doubt at the time were the signs of decay in other parts of near north Roanoke were most blacks lived. The neighborhoods eliminated by urban renewal were perhaps the most blighted, but they were not the only ones where slum-like conditions existed or were forming back in the late 50s to mid 60s when renewal

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[226] See Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block, January 29, 1995, p. 1.

was at its peak. An elderly woman in the neighborhood served by the NNEO said that "things started deteriorating [in her area] around about,....60 or 65....Those who had better jobs moved on up, bought bigger homes in other neighborhoods that had started opening up [to blacks]." She said that blacks had begun moving into the neighborhood after World War II. It was a "bad and run-down" part of town at the time. "The people who moved in," she observed, "wanted to be homeowners. So they bought homes, fixed um up, and then the neighborhood was flourishing." But as better off blacks moved out in the 1960s into white neighborhoods that had been off limits to them before, the neighborhood became poorer and more transient. Owners and landlords stopped taking the same good care of their properties. Deterioration continued for several years, until the late 1970s. It was then that a core group of residents decided they had enough and initiated the organizing efforts which led to the formation of the NNEO.

Desegregation

By the mid 1960s, the physical decline of inner city neighborhoods in Roanoke and the total elimination of two of them by urban renewal stood as poignant, tangible symbols of the ebbing of black control over the communal life they had built for themselves. It was thus ironic that at the very time their success as community builders was being eroded by larger forces, African-American's value as individuals was being bolstered by official desegregation. As a further irony, the forces at work in each case were, in a way, difficult to tell apart if you were a black citizen concerned about the continued viability of the black community.

The destruction wrought by urban renewal and the individual rights gained through desegregation were both perpetrated or allowed to happen by those in power, namely, white people. Though blacks fought for civil rights, the decisions to grant

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those rights were made principally by whites. To the black resident of inner city Roanoke, these majority power holders were, fundamentally, an undifferentiated "they" or "them." Listen to how one woman described for me restrictions on where blacks could live in Roanoke following World War II:

> "After World War II, there were nowhere for us to live. Integration had not come about, so therefore, *they* could not send us, we could not move where we wanted to move. So, *they* designated a place for us to live and that was over here."

That the "they" in question were also capable of doing good for black people in a post-segregation society is evidenced by this woman's favorable reference later in the same interview to the "they" who had organized the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership and its program of "mini-grants," from which her organization had benefitted.

Good or bad, though, it was a dissociated "they" who were seen by blacks as determining one way or the other the fate of their community. This reality was conveyed tellingly to me by a black man in his 70s, who had served on a small biracial committee in the 1960s to help desegregate downtown Roanoke. He spoke of this committee as "they," despite the fact of his own membership in the group. "*They* worked out a strategy," he said, "to integrate everything downtown without incident." The clear hint here is that, although this man was involved and formally an equal of his white counterparts, he believed the real power to decide laid, as it always had in his experience, with the white majority. He knew his fellow white members by name, and even something about their lives, but he evidently did not really know them as persons (nor, in all probability, they him).

Blacks could perceive the powers behind both urban renewal and civil rights

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as one, undifferentiated "they," because with civil rights, just as with renewal, the effect was to diminish blacks' power of self-determination as a community. Desegregation gave blacks the equal rights they wanted, while simultaneously, through those same rights, enabled blacks to escape from the inner city cloister that had been their lot for so long. Those possessing the necessary desire and ability (typically, those who had most of their chronological life still ahead of them) could relocate to safer, cleaner, more upscale neighborhoods. They could, as one middle aged black woman, a professional, said to me, "spend their money elsewhere." They could put behind the toil of trying to preserve a black geographic community under difficult circumstances and concentrate instead on their betterment as individuals and families. "The good things happened to those who went on and forgot about those who didn't get any," explained an older black woman to me. "They forgot about what's back here."

What this woman did not say was that the leavers also included her own children. In this she was no different from many of the older inner city African-Americans I met. They had seen to it that their children took advantage of the greater opportunities afforded them by desegregation. The result was a next generation who chose, because they could, to live away from the inner city.

The effect of desegregation, along with urban renewal, has been to help push the black community in Roanoke into a long process of "deinstitutionalization." Nearly every black person I spoke to whose life had spanned the segregated and desegregated eras saw integration as a mixed blessing. To them, while individual blacks gained, the black community lost. As one black man said to me, "The principle of being able to do whatever I wanted to do within the law should have been fought for. But the reality of how that played out [negatively] on the

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community was something that people did not foresee."

Social commentator Gerald Early suggests that "social development, by its very nature, is ambivalent, characterized by a sense of exchange, of gaining and losing."[227] The practical question always is how the gains stack up against the losses. Although none of the older blacks I met said they wanted to turn back the clock to the days before civil rights, they worried that the institutional grounding they had helped to create for their community was slipping away. The unquestioned norms of mutual obligation that had governed their formative experiences, the black schools they had attended in their own neighborhoods, the black businesses they or people they knew operated in close proximity to where blacks lived, the black churches in which they all worshiped — these were institutions which they had helped to establish and which were now, if not things of the past, fading from view or changing in ways that made them less reliable.

They were also the relatively stable mechanisms through which informal helping and problem solving had taken place as a natural and common expression of communal sentiment. They had provided the "authoritative structures and motives" that Salkever describes as "a means to forming the moral virtues, to eliciting those excellences of character that can make life desirable."[228] To help one another day in and day out was nothing exceptional, because nearly every institution in the community expected and reinforced the habit. "Everybody knew the preacher," a man said to me. "If someone was doing something wrong, and they saw

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[227]Gerald Early, "Understanding Afrocentrism," <u>Civilization</u>, July-August 1995, p. 39.

[228] Steven Salkever, <u>Finding the Mean</u>, p. 118.

the preacher coming, they'd [stop]." Children could not stay out of school, explained an older woman, because "the teacher would tell you when your child wasn't there." Mutual aid was a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life in black Roanoke. And although people no doubt appreciated and even hoped for praise for the help they gave others, lending a hand was considered simply the right thing do, regardless whether your efforts were recognized or not. One could say, without exaggerating, that informal problem solving was the way in which most of the work of the community got taken care of from one day to the next in the old order.

By the 1990s, what inner city blacks who had experienced this earlier time could not figure out was how, or whether, the institutions necessary to an organic, morally nurturing way of living together could be reproduced or constructed anew in the unstable present. The combination of urban renewal and desegregation had led to a communal existence that seemed to feel irretrievably transitional to many of them. It was certainly not the placid order of the settled middle class community, with its occasional block parties, neighborhood watches, and kindly but rarely close relations among households. Nor was it the tight solidarity of the insular community that forms in response to alienation from the larger world. The former was what many of those leaving the inner city had moved into. The latter was what older blacks had known in the days before racial integration and now existed only in a curtailed form in neighborhoods like that of the NNEO. Neither the former nor the latter seemed possible for the inner city in the foreseeable future. And because they did not, it was unclear on what basis a robust community could be created. To cast the dilemma in Dewey's idiom, there was no obvious path by which the efforts of inner city blacks, in this transitional state, could "make the stability of meaning

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prevail over the instability of events."[229]   From where would a new, legitimate communal order come, if it were to be other than superimposed?

Paths to "Reinstitutionalization?"

Three possibilities for developing an appropriate institutional undergirding for the black inner city were evident but unproven during my time in the field. One was the churches. Religion has long been a powerful presence for blacks in Roanoke, as elsewhere in the United States. Another possibility was the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, the city's attempt to help transform the places where residents live into socially cohesive, civically active neighborhoods. A third source of hope was publicly funded or otherwise supported programs and opportunities that give poor black neighborhoods access to tangible resources. In theory, some of these resources could be used to nurture a stronger sense of community.

The Churches

The churches have been, not surprisingly, the leading institutions in Roanoke's black community. I met few African-Americans who were not regular churchgoers. While black church attendance in the U.S. may be declining overall,[230] for blacks active in the community in Roanoke religious participation appeared to be a significant part of their lives from one week to the next. They spent a large portion of every Sunday (or Saturday in Adventism) in church. Wednesday evenings

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[229]John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* in <u>The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-53</u>, p. 49.

[230]See Emmett D. Carson, "Church Support of Individuals and Organizations: Patterns of Black and White Giving," Paper prepared for the 1989 Spring Research Forum: Philanthropy and the Religious Tradition," Chicago, IL.

were given to prayer meetings. Choir practices were held on Monday or sometimes Thursday nights. When blacks needed to be represented in dealings with the city or business leaders, their pastors often did much of the talking. What church you attended and your role in that church played an important part in your identity and status. For example, one young black professional, with an excellent singing voice, told me of the controversy that ensued when he opted to change churches. His former church felt cheated, while his new congregation acted as if they had acquired a valuable competitive advantage.

Although it was plain to see that the church as an institution stands at the center of black social life in Roanoke, the inner city churches as distinct organizations have played a more ambiguous role when it comes to the neighborhoods where they are located. Evidently, while many of these churches in the past had been deeply involved in their neighborhoods, they were less so now. The churches had fed the aspirations of their members, and as those members prospered, they moved out, to safer, higher status middle-class communities. Many of those who had left still came into the inner city for church activities but, no longer living close by, had begun to see their church as existing apart from its neighborhood. One pastor of a prominent inner city congregation said that, although a majority of his members lived within walking distance when he started his ministry there in the 1970s, most had moved and now "commuted" to church. Another pastor, when I queried him on how many members of the neighborhood's civic organization — in which he was an active leader — belonged to his church, responded that he could think of only one. Nearly all of his congregants lived outside the inner city, he said. It is worth noting that, like their members, neither of these pastors lived in the neighborhood where his church was located.

With their members no longer living in the vicinity, Roanoke's inner city churches have been, I was often told, devoting less and less attention to ministry and outreach in their neighborhoods. As one city official declared during our interview: "I can probably count on two fingers the number of neighborhoods [in Roanoke] that have real church involvement." A similar sentiment was expressed by an older black woman active in the Loudon-Melrose Neighborhood Organization. When I asked what the churches were doing in Loudon-Melrose, she replied: "Not much in this area."

When most black church members lived in the inner city, it was natural for a church to see its neighborhood as an opportunity for Christian service. For in serving the neighborhood, the church was essentially serving itself. But as members have relocated in growing numbers out of the inner city, the churches there have seemed to turn inward more. Compelled by the established bonds of long association and plain economics to serve existing members first regardless where they live, the churches' have tended to define their neighborhoods as a secondary interest. As one middle-aged black man, a longtime and active churchgoer himself, averred: "You got a lot of churches, they're just religion. They could do a whole lot more than what they're doing in the neighborhood." He added, looking back in time, that "when I was coming up, the churches didn't have money, but they always worried about the young folk [in the neighborhood]."

What the inward turn appeared to mean practically was that the churches were increasingly being defined by their formalities — worship, Sunday school, prayer meetings. These were the "services" they offered to keep their members commuting from neighborhoods and homes elsewhere in the city and suburbs. The role of the churches as an active day-to-day presence in the inner city was, one could

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plausibly argue, being displaced by one in which they planned and hosted a limited number of formal weekly events for people, many if not most of whom live outside the community. They were evolving from integral, neighborhood-based institutions into providers of a commodity. And as service providers, they needed to remain attuned to the demands and changing tastes of those who consume their services. The indigenous identity possible for blacks under these circumstances seemed, compared to the past, fragile and thin — an identity which constantly needed tending just to be maintained in its delicate condition.

A black pastor expressed the problem pointedly: "Most pastors focus on their congregations in the sense that, 'This is what I do for my livelihood.' They're really not community-oriented." To reach out into the neighborhood and try to be helpful would be to court disaffection from the congregation, he said. Since he was committed as a matter of religious faith to working in the streets, his own strategy was a slow process of exposing his church — a mainly middle-class congregation consisting of commuters — a project at time to what could be done to improve the neighborhood. By the time I left the field more than three years into his ministry in Roanoke, he had made only modest headway on this agenda. "I haven't really brought my church into it yet," he said to me when I formally interviewed him. He remained firm in his conviction that knocking on doors and being in the community was what his faith called him to do, even if his congregation did not yet fully share this perspective. Since his national church body discouraged their pastors from serving a given congregation more than a few years, it was unclear he would have the opportunity to see if his view would eventually prevail.

In their recent study of citizen involvement in American politics, Sidney Verba and his colleagues point to the important role churches play in "providing

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opportunities for the development of civic skills to those who would otherwise be resource-poor."[231] While this observation probably rings true in a general sense for the black inner city churches in Roanoke, the gradual decoupling of these churches from their neighborhoods raises a question about how effective they can continue to be as "classrooms of democracy." When the intimacy and immediacy of accountability to the neighborhood are lessened, do parishioners still learn skills that are directly useful in tackling tangible neighborhood problems? Or are the skills they assimilate from their church involvements (along with those they acquire through education, paid work, and family life) better suited to relating to the larger, educated world outside the inner city? Do their vocabulary and understanding become, to borrow Kohut's phrase, more "experience-distant," reflecting the more abstract means of expression common to experts and professionals, and less fluent in the "experience-near" linguistics of the urban neighborhood?[232]

Arguably, as the churches have become more cosmopolitan in an attempt to retain members, their members have become increasingly cosmopolitan themselves, and their affinity with indigenous interests has become less necessary and more voluntary. This need not mean the churches stop showing concern for the inner city neighborhoods where they reside. The concern may be there, and even grow stronger

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[231] Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, & Henry E. Brady, Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 18.

[232] Heinz Kohut's ideas about experience-distant and experience-near vocabularies are discussed in Clifford Geertz's Local Knowledge, pp. 57-58. Selznick seems to be after a similar, although somewhat broader, distinction when he says that "In almost every sphere of life there has been a movement away from densely textured structures of meaning to less concrete, more abstract forms of expression and relatedness." See Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 6.

in some ways as more sophisticated leadership and connections are able to muster resources for church- and race-based inner city programming such as youth clubs and tutoring centers. But it may turn out to be the case that such efforts are more appropriately characterized as "doing for" the poor inner city, rather than the old way of "doing with." A common racial and religious heritage may not suffice to preserve the strong sense of working together for the good of the community that had shaped the efforts of the current generation of older blacks in Roanoke and their forebearers.

Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership

As the inner city churches have evolved away from their neighborhoods, other, more secular avenues have arisen to provide the black residents there with possible ways of replanting and nurturing the institutional roots of their community. The most prominent of these since the early 1980s has been the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership. The RNP came to my attention early in my field work, and it remained an important focus throughout, since it represented a concerted effort by municipal government in Roanoke to cultivate local civic capacity at the grassroots level.

In the late 1970s, Roanoke was suffering as a polity. "The city, as an economic entity, had lost a lot of its sizzle," a former municipal executive told me. It was losing population, its tax base was eroding, and, as mentioned earlier, there were growing signs of urban decay. Residents of the hard hit inner city were increasingly unhappy with the state of affairs. "There was a lot of unrest, particularly in the lower income communities," according to one man active in city politics at the time. Blacks felt the city was not doing right by them. Having weathered urban renewal in the northeast part of town, blacks now believed they were being denied appropriate services in their remaining neighborhoods by

unresponsive municipal agencies. And the problems, this time around, were not just confined to the inner city, a reality which lent increased political salience to their protests. As a later report from the RNP pointed out, "There was a general feeling that the government was not spending taxpayer dollars efficiently."[233] To an unusual degree for this normally peaceful community, citizens were taking their complaints to the one place that had to give the appearance at least of listening to them, the elected city council. "Everyone was going to the council about everything," a woman explained to me, "and the council was screaming back at them."

Into the fray stepped a new city manager, Bern Ewert, with his plan for the RNP. The public justification for the Partnership was to provide citizens with a formal, direct means of bringing the concerns of their neighborhoods to the attention of city authorities. "The perception up until that time was pretty much that citizens weren't allowed to talk to the city about their neighborhoods," I was told by a leader of a mostly white, upscale neighborhood. "Ewert could sense that and said something needs to happen, these people need to be heard from, especially the black community." Ostensibly, the idea was to create a mechanism that would enable neighborhoods throughout the city and municipal government to work together to improve Roanoke. The designers hoped the result would be, as a prominent politician described it to me, an "equitable sharing in the city's [limited] resources."

The reality has turned out otherwise. Many people pointed out to me that, contrary to its expressed purpose, the RNP has actually served a dual, and conceivably, less noble intent. First, its designers wanted to reduce the extent to which citizens were bringing their grievances, both small and large, to the city

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[233]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, <u>Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership: Yesterday and Today</u>, 1991.

council for resolution and, thus, before the media. In the words of one public official I spoke with, if the Partnership functioned right, "neighborhood people [wouldn't] ever need to go to the city council." The council was not in a position by dint of either time or expertise to hear, let alone respond in a competent manner, to the myriad specific complaints being made. It needed a politically palatable way, and quickly, to deflect the energy of citizen protest away from itself and the visible public forum it provided, and back toward city agencies. The latter were, after all, purportedly subordinate, and thus answerable, to the council, not to mention more directly responsible for local public services. Shifting the burden in this way dovetailed with Ewert's additional interest in shaking up the municipal bureaucracy. As a former official explained it to me, the city manager wanted "to change the way city agencies did business...to have citizens more involved." The council's desire to get out from under the heat of citizen protest gave Ewert further leverage in trying to make local government services more accountable and adept at relating to the broad public.

Second, rather than fostering an equitable distribution of limited resources, the RNP's actual thrust has been to get citizens to do more for themselves. The late 1970s, when the idea for the Partnership was hatched, was a time, in Roanoke as elsewhere in the country, when the new orthodoxy of more limited government was beginning to settle in following the freer public spending ways of the 1960s and early 1970s. Earl Reynolds, the city's planning director at the time, who helped to organize the RNP, expressed this perspective candidly in a sidebar quote in the Partnership's official manual: "We [municipal government] don't have any money, but what we do have is a burning desire to work with you in terms of building this

community."[234] By encouraging neighborhoods to help themselves, city officials hoped the pressures on the municipal budget might ease.

Simply stated, the Partnership came into being to defuse local political tensions and get citizens to look less readily to city government for solutions to the problems in their neighborhoods. No aspect of it has necessitated or provided strong incentives for changing the distribution of public resources or even the means by which these resources get allocated — what citizens, especially those living in the inner city, most wanted back in the late 1970s. On the contrary, the unspoken assumption in the crafting of the RNP was that the burden of improvement principally belonged to citizens. To be sure, Ewert did put pressure on city agencies to become more open to citizen participation and input. But this effort was, from what I could determine, almost entirely a function of his authoritative role and powers of persuasion. It led to no significant changes in the formal structure and operation of city government that one could construe as complementary to the RNP's activities with citizens. Ewert himself was evidently aware of the limited reach of his strategy. A person who worked with him for several years said Ewert worried that the openness he had created would dissipate after he left. "Bern often asked," this former colleague told me, "'What happens when I'm no longer city manager?'"

In this sense, the RNP was from the start not designed to meet the test that Berry and his associates show, from their extensive study of civic engagement in the United States, should be met for citizen participation to be workable and effective:
"[Public involvement] must first be a political reform....The rewards

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[234]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership in Action: A Self-Help Manual, 1993.

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> to administrators of operating effective [citizen participation]
> programs and the sanctions for failing to do so must be significant.
> Otherwise symbolic efforts will prevail as administrators act,
> understandably, to preserve their authority."[235]

When I arrived in Roanoke in 1993, the RNP had been in existence fourteen years. Ample time had passed for it to have instigated or participated in helping city government make the kinds of more fundamental changes to which Berry et al. allude. Instead, it had itself become more bureaucratic and institutionally confined, a subject to which we will return in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to underscore the limited nature of the RNP's reach as a vehicle for citizen participation in municipal affairs. This factor shaped how it was perceived within the inner city black community.

Among the inner city blacks I spoke to about the RNP, while some embraced it, most regarded the Partnership warily or with apathy. The NNEO, which joined the Partnership at its outset — in fact, was partly created by it — and had taken full advantage of the limited access it provided to outside sources of funding and expertise, saw the RNP favorably. Inner city neighborhoods that joined later have generally derived less from their membership in the RNP. And they have been, not surprisingly, less sanguine about its value. An involved woman from one of these neighborhoods seemed to express the opinion of many when she said to me, "We have no control over the Neighborhood Partnership. They make you think they're doing a lot for you. But we get the crumbs, not the cake."

It was as if, for the disadvantaged black community, the Partnership had a

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[235]J.M. Berry, K.E. Portnoy, & K. Thomson, The Rebirth of Urban Democracy, p. 44.

limited stock of social capital at its disposal. The NNEO enjoyed a kind of first mover advantage in tapping into this capital at the beginning in 1980. Black neighborhood groups who signed up subsequently found themselves, in essence, competing with the NNEO. Though it would be difficult to say that the NNEO had a lock on the good will of Roanoke's dominant white establishment toward inner city blacks, the organization was a hard act to follow just the same. Yet, for some African-Americans, the issue seemed to go deeper than merely a feeling of being behind the curve set by the NNEO. To them, as one well-placed informant suggested to me, the NNEO had been co-opted by the white establishment. They believed it reflected the interests, not of inner city blacks, but of a single neighborhood that, after having gotten entre for itself to the local power structure through the RNP, became afraid to risk that access in more assertive pursuit of a fair deal for the black inner city overall. Whether they were right about the NNEO made no difference. It was the perception that counted in fostering a climate among inner city African-Americans of ambivalence toward the RNP.

It could not have helped matters that most of the black groups which formally organized after the NNEO, arose in neighborhoods that were not really of their own making. Even the NNEO'neighborhood was a somewhat artificial creation. Prior to the formation of the RNP, Roanoke as a whole had relatively few areas that functioned as distinct neighborhoods with well-defined boundaries and clear identities.[236] This was not unusual given the relatively small size and youth of the

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[236]Schoenberg and Rosenbaum define a neighborhoods, among other things, as "an area in which a common bounded territory is named and identified by residents." The significance of being able to name an area is amplified by Al Hunter: "To be able to name an area is in no small way to know it. A name distinguishes a area as unique. It is a symbol, a shorthand abstraction, for denoting some mutually perceived and mutually shared communality." See S.P. Schoenberg & P.L.

city. There had been assorted efforts dating back at least to the early 1960s to envision Roanoke as organized into a set of cohesive neighborhoods — driven mainly, it would appear, by U.S. Census requirements to subdivide the city into census tracts. But the results of these efforts seemed to have limited meaning beyond the city planning documents reflecting them.[237]

The absence of neighborhood identities was peculiarly true for the black community. As blacks moved out of northeast and near northwest Roanoke, either by choice or urban renewal, they typically relocated to parts of north Roanoke that had previously been occupied by whites only. As I observed earlier, re-establishing a sense of community in these new settings would have been, at best, a slow process for most of them. Thus, when the Partnership came into existence, it was faced with the problem that many African-Americans lived in areas that had not yet gelled into cohesive neighborhoods. Even some of those who had managed to reside in the same place a long time might have felt uncertain about what their neighborhood was and was not as economic decline rendered parts of it unstable.

The RNP's designers responded by subdividing the inner city into several

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Rosenbaum, Neighborhoods that Work: Sources of Viability in the Inner City, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), pp. 5-6; A. Hunter, Symbolic Communities, p. 68.

[237]See, for example, City Planning Commission, Neighborhoods of Roanoke: A Physical and Social Analysis, 1962; and City Planning Commission, A Development Plan for Roanoke, 1964. Prior to the establishment of the RNP, I could find no consistent references in local literature to distinct neighborhoods in Roanoke, other than Gainsboro, South Roanoke (where wealthy whites live), and the West End. Why the latter should be so designated was, evidently, a function of the fact that it is bounded on the north by railroad tracks, on the south by the Roanoke River, and on the east by the central business district.

modest-sized neighborhoods — areas considerably smaller in scale than just about any of the designated neighborhoods outside the inner city. What constituted an inner city neighborhood was based on obvious boundaries, such as major thoroughfares, rivers, and industrial development, and in a few cases at least, whether families in these areas had known one another in the old areas from which they had relocated. However, only once the neighborhoods had been defined in this way were residents given the chance to push for changes if they felt city officials had erred. As a former city executive who participated in these decisions explained to me: "We took a shotgun approach..., because we had to get started. We then sort of allowed people to refine and in some cases redefine [the neighborhoods we had proposed.]" The outcome was that while some redefining did occur, most blacks simply acquiesced to the boundaries of their neighborhoods as specified by city planners. That this led to something less than strong identification with one's neighborhood was confirmed for me on more than one occasion by neighborhood leaders who did not know precisely where their area ended and the next began. For the most part, inner city neighborhoods as defined by the RNP were not natural territories that had formed over long years, but new constructions to which residents had yet to develop resilient ties.

In the face of this manufactured social geography, it was not hard to see why blacks might be additionally suspicious of or indifferent toward the RNP. The Partnership's behavior in defining neighborhoods for them was a further sign that African-Americans in Roanoke, particularly in the inner city, were in a weak position to shape their own environment.[238] If a neighborhood — one of the most fundamental

[238]Although not directly relevant to this study's focus on informal problem solving, it is worth noting that the segmentation of the black community into neighborhoods had the additional effect in Roanoke of making it difficult for blacks

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units of association outside the family — could be specified by city fiat, what confidence could black residents have that the RNP would ever genuinely be on their side?

Resources

Of course, what the RNP most lacked was what the poorer inner city by definition most needed, namely, hard resources. The Partnership provided small grants to help neighborhoods with modest projects, such as starting a community newsletter or repainting houses in need of refurbishing. But this funding was not of the kind or level to support or stimulate the institution building that civically active residents believed was needed for a vibrant community to exist. Although the NNEO parlayed its early participation in the RNP into access to significant external resources for housing rehabilitation and other physical improvements, it was, for all intents and purposes, alone among inner city neighborhoods in having done so.[239]

Before the Partnership came into existence, several black churches uprooted by urban renewal had managed to work out with white leaders the building or occupying of new churches in the neighborhoods to which African-Americans were relocating. This good will gesture by the majority community no doubt eased to

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to organize politically on a citywide basis. Stone observed a similar phenomenon in the development of neighborhood planning units in Atlanta. See Clarence Stone, Regime Politics, pp. 131-132.

[239]In one other black inner city neighborhood, an old school about to be torn down had been preserved and converted into senior housing and the site for the local African American heritage museum. However, this development project benefitted from involvement by black leaders all over the city and not just from the neighborhood. From what I could tell, little other development had occurred in this neighborhood.

some extent the uncertainty for blacks of relocation. To have one's place of worship up and functioning in the new neighborhood would have been a source of comfort to those struggling with the anxieties of resettlement. At the same time, however, there was a transparency to the true motives of Caucasian leaders in giving priority to the re-establishment of black churches, the institutional anchor of the African-American community. Compared to the limited compensation most blacks received for their homes and businesses destroyed by renewal, the rebuilding of churches was a relatively "cheap" way to mollify the community. "Old churches were helped to get new property, and I think that silenced them [in the wake of urban renewal]," one person who had studied the history told me. Although difficult to condemn publicly, the rebuilding's more subtle and cynical aim to manipulate black sentiment was not lost on those who knew better. As one man told Mary Bishop for her newspaper story on urban renewal, while he was glad his church had been able to rebuild in Gainsboro, he didn't think the overall Gainsboro project had done much for the "development of minorities."[240]

Although no one I met said so, it could be argued that by having their new churches, in effect, given to them, African-Americans missed some of the important social benefits that institution building provides. For older blacks who had been involved in establishing their congregations years ago, to be furnished with a new church building was a beneficence which they could appreciate but recognize as not fully their own doing. They might convince themselves that this is what they were owed at a minimum for putting up with the devastation of urban renewal. But to obtain something so central to communal life through exchange with another, more powerful community differs categorically from obtaining it by the group's own

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[240]Mary Bishop, "Street by Street, Block by Block," p. 11.

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creativity and sweat. Unlike the proverbial barn-raising, where neighbor helps neighbor and in so doing community is enhanced, new churches for the black inner city in Roanoke were the product of what amounted to a political deal — an arms-length transaction between semi-hostile, unequal parties.

In its essence, the arrangement exemplified the resource dilemma into which inner city African-Americans had and have generally fallen. Before urban renewal and desegregation, when the black community was more concentrated and cohesive, a large part of the tangible resources it needed had come from within. This self-sufficiency was, with the rebuilding of the churches, getting to be increasingly less true. Not only was the black community becoming less unified as people moved from the inner city. African-Americans still there were having to turn more and more to outside parties for help. Rising poverty levels propelled a greater need for individual and family welfare services. But more than that, the black inner city as a community — poor together with not poor — had to look beyond itself for the resources needed to keep going. This is what the new churches, in a sense, represented: a dependency on the white majority for key ingredients to the reconstruction of the community. By the 1990s, the quest for such resources had evolved to the point where it was dominating the civic interest of inner city blacks. It was a pronounced theme in every interview I had with neighborhood people. It defined, more than any other factor, blacks' participation in shaping Roanoke's application to become a federally designated Enterprise Community, a subject to which I will return in the next chapter. The difficult, but largely unacknowledged, question was whether a strong, inner city African-American community could ever be built through dependence on outside assistance.

The optimistic view of the question could not have been expressed more

clearly than in this comment from an older woman I interviewed:

> "I always say, just give us some money. We'll show you what we
> can do. We don't want a penny of it, we just want to use it. We puttin
> money into the organization. We're not taking anything out for
> ourselves."

For this woman, external resources were an investment which she and the neighborhood organization of which she was a part would manage for the good of her community, a good she equated with the good of Roanoke as a whole. In NNEO's neighborhood, for example, an investment orientation had paid off to a degree: a community on the brink of becoming a slum was pulled back from the precipice through improvements in housing stock and public spaces orchestrated by leaders of the neighborhood with resources from local banks and public programs. While other neighborhoods had been notably less successful, if the resources were available, it's possible that they, too, could have produced comparable achievements. With adequate funding, many things could be done to improve just about any neighborhood.

Unclear from NNEO's experience or that of any other black inner city neighborhood in Roanoke, however, was whether such improvements would or could lead to a greater measure of the self-sufficiency which the African-American community as a whole once enjoyed. NNEO learned how to master the art of obtaining grants, and this, no doubt, had given those involved a stronger sense of being able to negotiate the larger environment in which they have to function. But it was a mastery contingent on the cooperation of outside forces. And that made it more unreliable — less trustworthy — than if its origin and reach were wholly or more completely contained within the neighborhood.

Many inner city blacks I encountered were more ambivalent, than suggested by the optimistic view just described, about their dependence on outsiders for the welfare of the community. They recognized, like the optimistic view, the community's need for resources. At the same time, they sensed that this dependence was making the community less and less their own. If the old community was an extension of themselves and they of it, the new community coming into existence felt more artificial to them and less securely tied to their own identities.

The more worldly among them seemed to believe the loss of control was the price you have to pay for being in need in an unfair world. "They say the city wants to control [the Enterprise Community]," an elderly woman told me. "And I say, well, you know, the city's the one that got the money. You gotta go with the money." She recognized what the community was giving up by being dependent but felt there was no alternative.

Others indicated less willingness to concede principle to reality. They wanted the need for resources to remain secondary to needs more fundamental in their view to the building of community. To them, moral betterment and spiritual attention was the main challenge in bringing about a stronger sense of community. A preacher explained the position to me this way, "The government, that's programs. It's program can't empower you, because that comes from within...And if you, in your mind, feel weak and powerless, than that's what you are." For this minister, other black clergy, and fellow believers, the chief resource in strengthening the African-American community was seen as residing within individual souls, in their relationship to God. The cultivation of this resource, as they saw it, could only occur in relatively intimate, largely informal association with others sharing the same moral values and experiences day-in and day-out. The family, the church, the block,

the neighborhood, the school — these were the main places where a black person, or anyone for that matter, developed the moral foundation from which empowerment arises. Unacknowledged by the preacher, but implicit in his remark, was the prospect that when the primary institutions of the community weaken or die, there is no obvious path to revitalizing them. Institutions that had emerged from the thick web of organic ties may be difficult, if not impossible, to create in any other way. Dependence on external resources cannot solve the problem, and may make it worse if the consequence is to instill in residents a belief that the institutional order of their community exists largely or exclusively by the will of powers other than their own.

The Next Generation

In all three of the alternatives I have just discussed — the church, the Neighborhood Partnership, and external resources — while there were elements of hope in my conversations with people and observations of the inner city, the doubts were more obvious and stronger. It was unclear that any one of the alternatives or even all three combined could give inner city blacks the steadfast community which they appeared to want and need. Older African-Americans had experienced this kind of well-ordered community before. Although they yearned for it in the present-day, their ability to bring it about was limited. They were getting tired and giving less time to civic affairs. But more than that, the community was changing beyond them in a way.

An older woman active in the Loudon-Melrose neighborhood described the change for me:

> "We in the process of getting...some younger members if we can. But, you see, the young people that's in the neighborhood, they wants to get out fast.....They wants to have parties, rap sessions, dances on

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the weekend. You know, that's not what I'm about."
She also worried that when it came time for the older leaders of the neighborhood organization, including herself, to step aside, younger adults would balk at taking on the responsibility unless they got paid. As she put it, "People want money now."

The community was becoming the province of younger people, but the leadership has remained in the hands of older blacks. One Caucasian man, commenting on the leadership of neighborhood groups throughout the city, remarked to me somewhat comically that: "If you look at the current leadership, they're all gray-headed people ...one-foot from the grave." Another white man griped that the black neighborhood group in his area was "a bunch of little old ladies who had tea at church once a month, talked about what they wanted to do, but did very little about it because they were scared."

My point is not to emphasize the obvious, that in Roanoke as elsewhere there was a generational divide. Rather, it is to propose that, with the passing of the current generation of older blacks, the African-American community's capacity for developing its own, for enabling its members to acquire a meaningful identity and sense of moral worth and neighborly responsibility, was being changed in an uncertain direction. The neighborhoods I visited in the inner city were, for the most part, not strong as places of indigenous problem solving, but nor had they yet given themselves up entirely to despair. If the next generation were to build more vital neighborhoods, where might they turn in addition to the legacy passed onto them by older blacks?

One possibility was suggested by the aggressive tactics of a white inner city activist. He had waged a successful campaign to reduce crime in his racially mixed

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neighborhood, using unorthodox means, from vigilante-like street patrols to videotaping drug deals. While his methods worked and garnered support from both white and black residents, they appeared to depend heavily on his personal willingness to take risks. Some might see this as effective leadership. But there was reason to question whether, after all was said and done, the neighborhood itself was left with more problem solving capacity than when the campaign began.

Another possibility was demonstrated by a group, consisting mostly of African-Americans in their twenties and thirties, who had organized across inner city neighborhoods and public housing areas to contend with the AIDS epidemic through education. Although the group had a name and got mentioned in the newspaper a couple of times during my tenure in the field, it was formally structured in only a limited sense. Its membership appeared fluid and evidently went for long periods without doing much. It represented less an indigenous, neighborhood-based approach, then an issue-driven one that attracted participation more on the basis of race than place. While this group was not dominated by AIDS professionals, its educational orientation seemed more akin to the professionalized mode of problem solving than to the informal, neighborly way preferred by older blacks.

In its broader geographic reach and issue focus, the AIDS education group was like the Inner City Athletic Association. The ICAA was not tied to a neighborhood or even a specific set of neighborhoods. And it had a narrow mission helping African-American youth stay out of trouble through excellence in sports. Both groups had drawn together people throughout black Roanoke to address a specific need.

What seemed most to differentiate them was the ICAA's investment in a

particular practice, namely, coaching and the absence of a practice base for the AIDS education group. The adults who participated in the ICAA shared more than an interest in at risk youth. They came together around the time-honored role of coach, a role which they were able to imbue with significant meaning drawn from both its instrumental value in shaping young lives and the common life experiences of those black men who performed it. The norms that emerged over time to define and govern this role were the glue that had held the ICAA together and that had, for so long, minimized the need for more formal means of organizational control and development.

By contrast, the members of the AIDS education group appeared bound together by a thinner set of norms. These were norms concerning what was right and wrong in the community and even about possibilities for action. But they were not the norms of a practice, with its shared know-how, traditions, and standards of excellence. This limitation raised the question of whether the AIDS group would or could endure. Would the urgency of its issue and the racial affinity of the group's members be enough to keep them at their chosen task for more than a few years? To survive, would they have to become more structured and self-consciously professionalized? In trying to function in a more professional manner, would they be able to evolve beyond experience-distant ways of relating to the inner city and toward a more genuine, indigenous form of practice like that embodied in the work of the ICAA? We turn to these and similar questions in the next chapter, where I report on my observations of the professionalization of community problem solving in Roanoke. With the passing of the older generation of African-Americans and their manner of living, professionalized conduct was assuming growing importance in addressing the challenges of the inner city.

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Chapter V

The Professionalization of Problem Solving

"Between the time of statehood (1889) and the Great Depression," observes historian Carol Stock:

> "Dakota culture had two main focal points: ideals about work and individual success and ideals about community and the common good. Although they rarely agreed on the means....for most Dakotans the end was the same: a rural society filled with self-sustaining and hardworking men and women who, while they strove for individual success, shared a cooperative vision of community life. This ideal was reinforced by social organizations and public rituals that emphasized equality, fraternity, charity, loyalty, and faith."[241]

The rural towns of Dakota seventy years ago seem, and were in many ways, a world apart from the historical black community of Roanoke portrayed in the last chapter. But, the obvious differences between them should not be allowed to obscure important similarities in their outlooks on life and the forces that shaped those views.

Roanoke's blacks, like the white rural population of the Northern Plains, managed through time and effort to form a harmonious community based on shared values. To be sure, differences existed among individuals and groups in the African-American community, just as they did in the towns studied by Stock. But, in both cases, the differences occurred within an overall institutional scheme where, to borrow Stock's words, "diverse peoples decidedly and emphatically celebrated their

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[241]Stock, C.M., <u>Main Street in Crisis</u>, pp. 42-43.

unity."[242] The depression upset the stability of Dakotan life, in the same basic way that twenty-five years later the combination of urban renewal and desegregation would undermine the harmony of Roanoke's black community. Economic collapse "placed the imperatives of need and power over those of equality, community, and traditional morality."[243] Further, and more relevant to the purposes of the present chapter, the depression brought into being the New Deal and its new middle class of professional problem solvers.

> Stock writes:
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> "...the New Deal era saw an unprecedented increase in the absolute number and the cultural authority of the men and women of the new middle class. In work, in residence, in values, in aspirations for their own and their nation's future, and in their 'ways of seeing,' the members of the new middle class were notably different from many of the people they sought to help....The New Deal was...a period of exhilaration for the experts of the Roosevelt Administration...feeling good about the work they did, they came alive amidst despair."[244]

There was, of course, no "new deal" for black Roanokers after urban renewal erased a good part of their community. Rather, renewal and its aftermath were essentially the old New Deal extended — a further step in the direction of centralizing and professionalizing social problem solving. They continued the trend of placing more power and authority over the African-American community in the hands of the well-

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[242] Stock, Main Street in Crisis, p. 13.

[243] Stock, Main Street in Crisis, p. 126.

[244] Stock, Main Street in Crisis, p. 127

educated. These were people who operated, by and large, within formal organizations that, rather than growing out of the community, were infused or forced into it. And the trend was not altered any by desegregation. Indeed, the lifting of racial barriers made it possible, beginning in the 1960s, for minorities to join the ranks of the new middle class in growing numbers themselves.[245]

Roosevelt's New Deal did not create the professional mode of problem solving. What it did was to elevate and further define tendencies already well-established in occidental culture. The continuing accumulation of knowledge of all kinds made the New Deal, as well as the new middle class, almost, in retrospect, seem inevitable. Advances in science and technology contributed to a more complex society with more complex problems. At the same time, they fed belief in the capacity of schooled intelligence to find appropriate solutions whatever the problems happened to be. Solutions to existing problems begat new problems, which in turn prompted the search for fresh solutions within the ever expanding compass of scientific and technological expectations. The New Deal, and the urban renewal produced in its wake, were manifestations of the same ideology: a conviction that the direction of society could be appropriately controlled through the rational use of knowledge.

In Stock's Northern Plains, the New Deal accompanied and furthered a permanent transformation in local culture. No longer were the clergy, along with

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[245]One of the main ways in which blacks gained access to middle class jobs was through government itself. For example, the federally funded community action program in the 1960s and 1970s hired many inner city blacks, giving them jobs and pay levels beyond what they might otherwise have obtained. See Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 343-353.

independent farmers and small businessmen, the only or even principle voice for "the moral education and the moral evaluation of local citizenry."[246] Government and the new middle class of professionals became a rival source of moral authority. Their's was an authority rooted less in local ways and knowledge of local people and more in the distant reasoning of science and the official sanction and weight of public policy formulated elsewhere. The professional problem solvers thought, felt, and acted on the basis of a different, more abstract worldview. Their very existence, amplified by increasing numbers during the hard times of the depression, called into question the communal order established by local culture and the capacity of local intelligence to solve problems.

It is perhaps a testament to the resilience of localism, in the face of its very value being questioned, that more than half century after the New Deal commenced, the indigenous black community in Roanoke has not completely succumbed to the influences of professionalization. Local culture and local intelligence, though anemic, have retained a measure of influence. The Inner City Athletic Association and, to a lesser extent the neighborhood organizations described in chapter four, have kept a perspective and way of functioning which continues to be, at least in part, organically reproduced.

But, as we saw, these local lines of action, too, have been losing ground over time. They have been outmatched by the rising power and reach of the formal organizations through which professional problem solvers act. The changeover has not been complete, and in that lies the possibility of informal work being renewed and strengthened. But it is only a possibility.

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[246]Stock, Main Street in Crisis, p. 126.

The passing of older generations of African-Americans has meant the loss of problem solving dispositions and methods that grow largely from local life. As indigenous approaches have weakened, the professionalization of problem solving has gained a further advantage in Roanoke's black community. Up against the aggressive knowledge claims of the professional mode, informal problem solving, despite its own, quite different advantages rooted in interpersonal ties, has appeared generally inadequate, even to many of its own practitioners. The transformation of which Stock recorded the beginnings in the towns of the Northern Plains earlier in the twentieth century has reached a further stage of maturity in Southwestern Virginia decades later.

An important theme in the last chapter was how the historical black community in Roanoke established indigenous problem solving by embedding that capacity in institutions. Institutions have been equally important in the rise of the more formal, professional style of problem solving. The metamorphosis from the former to the latter has been slow, since, as a rule, the process of creating and displacing institutions is long and accretive. Those cultural and social institutions people regard as relatively enduring and unquestioned form, at any point in time, no small part of the context within which a community or neighborhood defines and acts on its problems. As the professional mode has persisted and gained footing in more and more problem areas, it has developed a firmer institutional hold on the community, blacks included. We look in this chapter at the forms these institutions have taken in Roanoke and the manner of their evident advantages over more informal, organic methods.

The Institutionalized Advantages of Formal Problem Solving

Although all problem solving involves a creative element, institutions of various kinds play a role as well. Conventions of language, collective habits of thought, norms of conduct, interaction rituals — numerous institutions define and shape every problem solving situation in a community. People need institutions because, as George Klubertanz observes, "the problems of living are too involved to be resolved all over again each time they come up."[247] Institutions simplify experience and reduce the burdens of judging and choosing.[248] Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre goes even further, suggesting that reason itself is partly the product of institutions, and is incapacitated when severed from its institutional moorings.[249] The rationality applied to solving a community problem, he argues, is apt to be unreliable unless those exercising it share an institutional frame of reference in which much about the problem and its solution has already been settled.

If we take MacIntyre as our starting point, we can describe the change in problem solving methods that has occurred in relation to Roanoke's black community as the gradual displacement of one kind of institutionalized rationality (i.e., the informal) by another (i.e., the formal). As professional reason, with its analytic techniques and formal knowledge, has accumulated influence, it has further secured itself through institutional ways of thinking and acting that have made the institutions of indigenous reason less viable. To become institutionalized, or taken-

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[247] G. Klubertanz, Habits and Virtues: A Philosophical Analysis, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), p. 129.

[248] On this point, see Mary Douglas, How Institutions Think, pp. 91-109.

[249] A. MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 104-145.

for-granted as the way in which problems should get addressed, the formal mode has needed to cast doubt on the validity of informal action, to make the latter appear unsatisfactory or simply wrong in the face of the contemporary challenges of community life. While there has remained some hope of reconciling the two modes, as evidenced, for example, by the formation of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, the task has been made difficult by the incongruity between their different kinds of rationality and the premises from which they operate. They have clashed in an almost zero-sum game, with the more formal, professional mode gaining the advantage. It has done so in three ways: by cultivating both a self-perception and a broader public perception of its own superiority; by turning these perceptions into ambitions that far exceed the narrower and smaller aims of indigenous action; and by getting control of those community structures and processes through which such perceptions and ambitions may be further reinforced, legitimized, and protected from criticism.

Perceptions of Superiority

Indigenous Ineptitude

One way in which a new mode of practice seems to advance itself is by creating doubts about the efficacy of the alternatives to it. When a new mode, such as professionally driven problem solving, comes into being, its position in society is uncertain. This is so in part simply because it is new and in part because its concepts and methods, owing to its being new, are not yet fully elaborated. To gain an advantage where it does not have one, it must make cultural room for itself. It accomplishes this by putting down its rivals for the allegiance of the community. After all, if rivals were effective, there would be no or little need for the new mode to exist. The rivals' perceived weaknesses are what, to a degree, give impetus to the

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development of the new mode. This perception of weakness, because of its early, seminal role in creating a path for the new mode, becomes part of the mode's mythology, a way in which it continues to justify its place in society. Even if the perception is inaccurate or distorted, or becomes so (i.e., rivals improve or the new mode struggles with becoming more effective), it remains an important element of the tacit credo to which practitioners of the new mode subscribe.

Whether this scenario is always true in a general sense, it has been evident in the rise of formal problem solving and the decline of its informal counterpart in Roanoke's African-American community. While many professionals I met there were reluctant to explicitly criticize indigenous capabilities in the black community, those who did seemed to represent a sentiment widely held, albeit to varying degrees, among practitioners of the formal mode. It appeared that those who openly expressed their doubts were only being honest about views which others shared privately but, for reasons of etiquette or a lack of trust in me as an outsider, were reluctant to divulge. The fact that few of the professionals I interviewed or heard took the opposite tack — of celebrating neighborhood capacity beyond stating platitudes — gives additional credence to the notion that the doubters may have been speaking for more than themselves.

Professionals' skepticism about the informal strengths of black neighborhoods generally took two forms when people conveyed it to me. One was to be disappointed in the leadership capabilities of neighborhood residents. "These people are backwards," was how an African-American professional bluntly described his experience with many leaders in the inner city neighborhoods. Another professional, a white woman, seemed to point to the burden this alleged backwardness put on the professional problem solvers themselves: "Let me tell you

about these neighborhoods. These folks need hand-holding. They don't even know step one." The explanation for inadequate leadership from within the neighborhoods appeared to be partly generational. Neighborhood leaders were described as being "caught in the era" associated with urban renewal, unable to move beyond it and deal with the presumably different circumstances facing the black community today. One retired neighborhood woman's discomfiting behavior at a meeting, described for me by another participant — a paid professional — seemed to sum up the concern of those professionals who wanted more from the indigenous black leadership:

> "Ms. X crashed the meeting last night, a closed meeting. She denounced the whole process. We tried to convince her that there's a legitimate process for participation. It all underscores the need for a leadership council or institute to train neighborhood folk in working, in affecting, the system. Ms. X has no formal training in this kind of political engagement."

As this quote makes clear, there were professionals involved in community problem solving who were not so much against the participation of neighborhood residents as frustrated by its continuing inadequacies. In fact, they generally were strong advocates for participation, so long as the aim was to enable residents to become more like themselves, that is, trained, formal problem solvers. This helps to explain why an exception like Florine Thornhill, the head of the Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization who we met in the last chapter, was viewed positively by many professionals (although apparently not quite as favorably by her indigenous brethren). While she did not have anything like professional education or experience, she aspired to mirror that approach to problem solving and made extensive use of technical experts in her association's work. Her support for their approach provided a degree of indigenous validation for professionals, and they, in turn, saw her as an

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exemplar of what neighborhood leaders should be like.

The other form skepticism took was to have general reservations about the appropriateness of what professionals regarded as the usual neighborhood perspective in addressing community problems. This concern, while it did not altogether rule out the possibility of developing the formal problem solving capacity of neighborhoods, seemed to raise a more fundamental question about the nature of the indigenous world, as the following comment from a professional woman suggests:

> "I really find it would be difficult to have a citizen-driven program, because they don't have the knowledge you need to come up with a community plan like what the city is trying to do [in its application to become an Enterprise Community]. Neighborhood people really get on the emotions and the personal experiences, whereas professionals doing planning, we can't focus on that. We have to focus on the problems and what's causing them and how to solve them."

This person worried that inner city residents had difficulty being dispassionate and objectively seeing their own experiences in light of the broader patterns shaping life in community and society. She questioned whether residents were capable, because of their parochialism, of commanding the abstract point of view which defines the professional stance and which, from her perspective at least, is necessary to successful problem solving.

A high-level city official seemed to express a similar opinion, observing how the main benefit of resident participation in community problem solving was not more indigenous capacity, but an "uplifting of confidence in government."

> "I think there's a strong education process that happens that allows a citizen to see the issue in a more broad and more depthful perspective. ...the citizen sees that it is not quite as simple an issue as they thought. They begin to see that rather than having a bumbling bureaucrat trying to deal with a simple problem, they have a more competent person or persons or team who are working for them."

This official appeared to be saying that, while participation may enable neighborhood members to improve their understanding of community issues, what they gain does not so much make them truly better problem solvers, but rather, better able to appreciate what the professionals, like himself, are trying to do. The implication was plain: residents and their informal ways are less effective.

While these are only the comments of particular individuals, that they may reflect a more general perception of the inferiority of indigenous problem solving gains further, albeit indirect, support from the fact of relatively little participation by inner city people on the boards, committees, and task forces of major, professionally led community organizations. Although occasionally there were inner city residents on such bodies, they tended to be the same handful of people from one situation to the next, and they never, from what I could gather, played significant roles. The executive of a prominent nonprofit organization admitted to me that his group had done little to gain representation from the very neighborhoods its work most sought to help. "We have not given much attention to getting clients on our board," as he put it. A professional woman suggested that this was a common problem for service organizations in the community: "Most of our providers do not even know where to begin to get them [clients] involved." It was not clear whether these two people were genuinely acknowledging a problem, or whether, in light of the evidence noted above, simply confirming the modest regard professionals in general had for

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indigenous capacity. From the professional perspective, while it was nice and probably morally right to have inner city residents involved in formal community problem solving, such citizens were seen to lack the knowledge and skills necessary to make a strong contribution. To admit otherwise — to believe that inner city members were able to participate effectively without need for this know-how — might have obligated professionals to put their own claim to significance in doubt. And that was not something any I met seemed willing to do.

What Professionals are Known for Knowing

Professionals are society's experts. We expect them to command a technical body of knowledge and disciplined ways of applying that knowledge to reduce the possibility of their acting only on the basis of their own, subjective interests. Outwardly, professional standing is established through educational credentials and job titles. Those who have college degrees or certificates from accredited training institutions and hold positions with titles which sound like a formal education is a prerequisite are generally seen by members of a community as professionals or part of the professional class. To be a professional does not mean that one is necessarily wiser or smarter than others who are not professionals. However, because of the technical knowledge professionals are supposed to possess, the facts which they muster, and the judgments which they make presumably based on those facts, tend to be granted a certain deference by the other people in a community.

In general, the people I met and observed in and around Roanoke's African-American community placed high value on professional know-how in contending with problems and needs. Mention has already been made of Mrs. Thornhill's positive attitude toward and use of experts in the work of her neighborhood organization. As one professional said of her: "If she thinks you can help...., she'll

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call you to help her, [and] after calling you [she's] willing to listen and to accept the assistance that you have provided." Mrs. Thornhill was hardly alone. In the neighborhood immediately west of her's, Loudon-Melrose, the Melrose Avenue Residential/Business Revitalization Advisory Board was chiefly created to provide a vehicle for professional involvement and leadership in dealing with pressing community challenges that seemingly exceeded the grasp of the indigenous members of the neighborhood organization. An older woman who helped to start that neighborhood organization rued her lack of the technical competence which she assumed to be more and more necessary to address community issues: "I know I don't have all the answers or the education." Her lament appeared to stem not just from her advancing age, but also from realizing that the problem solving landscape was changing toward a greater reliance on professional skills. Sympathetic white leaders looking on the African-American community from outside shared the sentiment. As a white activist in a revived, upscale neighborhood bordering the inner city told me: "The number one challenge [facing Roanoke's black neighborhoods) is getting talent."

The importance and influence of professional knowledge were played out forcefully in a meeting I attended of one of the longstanding black organizations in the city. A key member of the group, a working class man, reported that he had been talking with a former inner city youngster from Roanoke, who he had once mentored, who was now a professional sports star. The athlete was willing to come to Roanoke, this man said, to do an event for local youth, although there were questions yet to be resolved about how the event would unfold and be financed. He felt that all of the issues could be worked out satisfactorily because he was a friend of the celebrity. At this point, several other participants in the meeting, all educated professionals, jumped in to question the efficacy of relying on the friendship as the

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basis for negotiating an appropriate contract with a professional athlete. To them, the opportunity to engage the star in a local event was foremost a legal matter. The member who initiated the discussion immediately backed down, possibly recognizing either that his associates' arguments had merit or that, whether they had warrant or not, he was unprepared to offer a trenchant rebuttal to their position. In essence, the deliberations shifted beyond his competence, into a realm dominated by those with better education and professional standing in the community. Ironically, among these other members, only one was a lawyer, and his branch of law, corporate, did not equip him with particular expertise for negotiating contracts of this kind, a fact to which he referred in the meeting. In other words, it was not that these other members actually knew more about the technical issues of contracting than the person who initiated the discussion, but that their claim to professional status gave them a leg up in moving the conversation in a technical direction.

This was not an unusual situation. I witnessed the same dynamic often in meetings where both indigenous people and professionals were in attendance.[250] It appeared that so long as a problem or issue could be defined technically — as appropriate territory for the kind of systematic knowledge that professionals claim — the chances were good the discussion would become dominated by this perspective. Racial differences did not seem to matter. For example, a white, college educated businessman explained to me how he had gotten involved in helping an inner city organization run mainly by white social workers:

> "I got a phone call from someone who said, 'Would you like to come

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[250] Professional dominance of settings where both professionals and neighborhood people come together as supposed equals has been observed by others. See R. Stone, (ed.), <u>Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives</u>, (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 1996).

and be on the board of [name of the organization]. It's having
financial problems.' So, I went to a meeting and I asked, 'Where's
your budget? Where are your goals and objectives?" And they kind
of looked at me [he gapes]." The executive director did not like the
idea of having to map everything out and where the money was going
to come from and where the money was going to be spent."

Not long after this businessman joined the board, the disgruntled executive director
left and a new leader was hired who was more willing to plan and budget.

In this example, as well as in the above description of contracting with a
sports celebrity, the point is not that the professionals were necessarily wrong to
insinuate themselves as they did or that their advice or opinions were somehow
detrimental. They appeared to raise valid issues in both cases. Rather, the point is
to show the relatively easy way in which a professional claim to knowledge asserted
its dominance in community situations where indigenous interests and capabilities
were also present and *a priori*.

This is not to suggest inner city people readily acquiesced to professional
control. Inner city neighborhood members often expressed resentment, privately and
sometimes publicly, about the tendency of professionals to control community
problem solving. The woman above who said she lacked the necessary education
followed up that comment with a dig at those among the professional problem
solvers who did not seem to respect what she had already accomplished in her
neighborhood. In the numerous public meetings held to develop Roanoke's plan to
become an Enterprise Community, neighborhood people occasionally complained
openly about how the deliberations were being controlled by city government and
its professional minions.

But these gripes tended to be more about power and who holds it, than about whether or not the know-how professionals say they have is legitimate. Not once did I hear an inner city resident express any doubts about the applicability of professionals' knowledge claims. On the contrary, the aspiration to acquire such knowledge seemed to exist among most groups I encountered.

Even if some approached this aspiration less enthusiastically than others, the community's public rhetoric routinely fed and reinforced a perception of the indispensability of technical competence. The planning for Enterprise Community designation was particularly interesting in this respect. The plan was to be driven by citizens, but as the planning effort's steering committee stated at a meeting with neighborhood representatives early in the process: "Citizens have to set the values and direction, *but* [emphasis added] they will need to rely on people who work with these problems on a day-to-day basis to contribute facts and figures, technical expertise, and issues to bear in mind when planning." Put simply, citizens cannot be successful on their own; they need professionals' expertise. The manual of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership emphasized neighborhoods becoming more professionally competent in tackling their problems: "The [neighborhood members] have learned new skills and they have gained confidence to act. Neighborhood folks who had no experience running a meeting or managing a bank account are now, in effect, city planners and housing developers."[251]

Not surprisingly, neighborhood organizations often appeared to celebrate most those of their successes that involved complex challenges where professional

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[251]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership Manual, (Department of Planning and Community Development, City of Roanoke, 1994), p. 12.

talents were more important than indigenous ones, even though this category usually constituted only a small and irregular part of their overall efforts. For example, during my time in the field, the Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization (NNEO) was no longer touting the neighborhood cleanup projects that had launched it in 1980 and that required no particular skills other than an able body. Instead, it was pointing to the progress it had made building new housing, a feat which could not have been achieved without imported technical competence. The neighborhood just north of NNEO's had a while back turned an old, historically black school into a African-American heritage museum and apartment building for seniors. This notable but dated achievement continued to be virtually the only accomplishment neighborhood leaders would point to when asked about neighborhood problem solving. In both the public rhetoric of the community and in the expressed beliefs of inner city residents and professionals alike, technical ability appeared to be viewed as the thing most necessary (next to money) in solving local problems.

Mystifications

The public rhetoric of the community was part of a larger institutional pattern that tended to legitimize the virtues of professional problem solving beyond what it might be due on the basis of its actual performance. Professionals are typically more knowledgeable about the practical subjects in which they have been trained than are indigenous residents of inner city communities. This is a plain fact. But, in Roanoke, it was less evident that professionals, despite this knowledge, were regularly or on average more effective in solving community problems than the members of inner city neighborhoods. There was no explicit, systematic accounting of the relative impact of the two modes of problem solving. For example, in the

course of Enterprise Community planning, ample opportunity existed for the many professionals involved to point to their previous successes in improving community conditions. However, they had little hard evidence to show for their efforts beyond the numbers of people their organizations served. As in most communities, the professional problem solvers in Roanoke could not demonstrate that their work had measurably changed key indicators of local well being. This does not mean they were ineffective, only that by and large they could not as a group prove the opposite. What appeared to keep this absence of objective evidence of success from diminishing the status of professionals in the community were symbols that enunciated and reinforced the value of formal problem solving and its practitioners — symbols that protected its positive image from the intrusions of reality.

One of these was the belief that a higher education is equivalent to competence. A well-regarded business woman, active on a number of nonprofit boards, stated this belief in a way notable in its confidence: "I went to an elite private school. And the marching orders there were, 'You are the elite. Therefore you have the greatest obligation to invest your skills in the community.'" While obviously attempting to demonstrate her commitment to Roanoke, her words betrayed the dubious assumption that elites are, by definition, capable in relevant ways. Many inner city black residents I spoke with shared a similar belief, as they understandably boasted of the educational achievements of their children and friends' children. Although an advanced education can never, in fact, guarantee professional effectiveness, this appeared to be a distinction without a difference among those involved in mustering the symbols of community problem solving. To be educated was taken to mean that one's capacities for problem solving were supposed to be superior.

Another frequently manifested symbol involved having professionals either run the meetings in which both professionals and inner city residents were present or be given the first opportunities to speak at public gatherings. The meetings I attended of one neighborhood organization were chaired by a professional, a local pastor who did not live in the community but whose church was located there. Prior to his arrival a couple of years before, the meetings had, from what I could determine, always been led by residents themselves. Every meeting of MARBRAB was chaired by another pastor, also not from the immediate neighborhood. The numerous meetings I attended to plan for becoming an Enterprise Community were led by one professional or another not living in the targeted inner city neighborhoods, even though the planning was supposed to be citizen-driven. When the funding needs for this planning came before the city council for action, five speakers were on the docket, four people from inner city African-American neighborhoods and the city manager. The mayor, though, opted to have the city manager speak first. In all of these ways, formal, professional problem solving was habitually given first place whenever the two modes were represented at the same time.[252] The effect was routinely to grant it a standing which it did not necessarily merit on the basis of its accomplishments.

A further and very important way in which formal problem solving gained symbolic significance above and beyond what it seemed to merit was documentation. Most professionally led efforts generated a continuing stream of memos, letters, and reports, in contrast with the almost complete absence of such in informal problem

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[252]The fact that professionals were accorded first place even in situations which seemed to demand priority be given to residents may be an example of what psychologist Ellen Langer has aptly labeled the absence of "mindfulness." See Ellen J. Langer, <u>Mindfulness</u>, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1989).

solving. The Enterprise Community planning effort alone produced hundreds of pages of materials which made their way into the hands of members of the community. From a symbolic perspective, the actual content of these documents was less important than their existence and style. Volumes of paper written in the dry, passionless prose of formally educated people striving to appear neutral and objective gave weight (literally, as well as figuratively) to professionals' claim of value. It was evidence, to them, that they were hard at work pursuing the interests of the community. Although formal problem solvers might not be able to demonstrate their effectiveness, the document trail buttressed their self-perceptions and others' perceptions of them as worthy of the respect which they received.

Unrivaled Ambitions

The symbols and rituals that made professional problem solving appear superior to its informal counterpart seemed to have the effect of inspiring professionals and their organizations to reach far in defining community problems and setting out to solve them. It was almost as if, to justify the community's perception of their superiority, they had to have ambitions to match. Superior talent should have superior goals. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the dominance of the professional mode appeared to be its addiction to always aiming high, to always purporting to make a bigger difference than could be supported by reason or experience. While indigenous residents of the black inner city might as a matter of course focus, for example, on cleaning up a park, the operators of the formal mechanisms of problem solving in Roanoke homed in on the need to transform neighborhoods or the entire community.

Rationalize Arrangements

The ambitions of professional problem solving generally appeared to take their point of departure from the perceived irrationality of what inner city neighborhoods would do if left to their own devices. The underlying value that formal problem solvers sought to assert against this irrationality boiled down mainly to efficient use of limited resources. From the professional perspective, the community tended toward anarchy, with different people and groups each wanting their own activities and services and unable to see how to make decisions that would benefit the whole. Although professionals were surely capable of pleading their own narrow interests, by dint of their identity as professionals they were far more likely than indigenous residents to sympathize with the putative need to rationalize problem solving arrangements in the community. Their sympathies leaned toward architectonic means to tame the community's supposedly chaotic tilt and apply resources sensibly to problems.

For obvious reasons, this need was felt most acutely by professionals involved in making important resource allocation decisions. "I guess the challenge in Roanoke," one of them said to me, "is that everybody is running around setting up acronyms and alphabet soup kind of organizations that deal with every perceived problem — teenage pregnancy, homeless, anything you can think of." This man was exasperated by having to contend with so many supplicants for the always limited resources his organization controlled. He wanted to find a way through professional agreement to mete out funds to assure that all relevant needs got addressed, but without what he saw as the current fragmentation of community services. Roanoke would be better off, he seemed to imply, if the efforts of people to solve problems could be consolidated and streamlined.

Particularly telling on this point was my interaction with a leading nonprofit board member, a business executive, on the subject of competition in social services:

"DR: Competition has always had a role in the human services, but we have a hard time talking about it.

BM: Yes, and I think we have a hard time justifying it, too. When you feel, especially, that you're supporting double administration stuff, that's very difficult.

DR: So, the reality is that resource limits demand a greater emphasis on cooperation, whereas in business the market determines?

BM: That's right, exactly right. And here social services, I mean, we don't have the market buying services. We have charity."

The executive of another resource providing agency described how they had issued a request for proposals and gotten 14-15 responses from 14-15 organizations planning to institute 14-15 different programs. This was not acceptable, in his view. "So, the next step for us," he said, "is to use one of our grants to perhaps convene a coalition or a seminar or a workshop on why can't there be one or two...programs that 14 or 15 different agencies work through." A similar rationalization was used by Roanoke's community planning council, a nonprofit entity, to discourage Boys and Girls Clubs from getting started in the city. The council believed that with resources constrained, the first priority for funding should be given to existing organizations and programs. Why add to the current fragmentation, they seemed to by saying, by starting something new.

The need to allocate limited resources wisely is clearly a legitimate concern, as it would be in any community. But notice how the legitimacy of the concern can become a way of privileging the formal problem solving mode. The concern arises from professionals' belief that the natural forces at work in the community — forces

which operate more closely to the indigenous level of problem solving — are dissipative. These forces must be channeled in a more productive and efficient direction, something which can only be achieved through formal decision making led by professional problem solvers.

The professional's need to counteract the perceived messiness of the less formal realm was revealed persuasively in an exchange I witnessed during a meeting of one of the Enterprise Community planning subcommittees. At a previous meeting of the group, which I also attended, the members had agreed to a vision statement. This earlier meeting had been contentious, as various participants argued their points of view and people quibbled over wording. But in the end, they all appeared to be satisfied with the result, a highly variegated vision for making Roanoke's neighborhoods strong and sustainable as worthy places in which to live and work. At the later meeting, however, the chair, a paid professional who had been present at the earlier discussion, started by explaining that: "Our task today is to look at the vision statement. The current one is very long, very detailed. Other groups have shortened their's to one or two sentences." This prompted a testy response from an inner city member of the subcommittee, who asked rhetorically: "Why should anything be deleted?" It so happened that this particular subcommittee had the strongest representation from inner city neighborhoods of any of the planning groups. The other subcommittees, populated by more professionals, had developed simpler, more abstract, and arguably more public relations worthy vision statements for their topics. The professional chairing the meeting wanted to bring the group's work more into line with the stylistic consensus that was emerging elsewhere within the Enterprise Community planning structure. But, the unacknowledged aim appeared to be to replace or mitigate the more particular and less synthetic perspective of neighborhood people with a more "professional" one.

Far-Reaching Visions

This particular planning meeting revealed a further paradox of relevance to the line of argument I am advancing. The dispute over the wording of the subcommittee's vision statement appeared not just to be a conflict over styles, but also an attempt by professionals to keep the pursuit of large ambitions for themselves. The inner city majority of the subcommittee had formed an ambitious, idealistic, even if somewhat incoherent agenda for neighborhood development. Its statement was explicit about what this meant, identifying each element (twenty in all) of what the members deemed to be a sustainable community. These ranged from agreeing on the maintenance of historic properties to the desire for a school of nursing in one neighborhood. The professionals on the subcommittee did not oppose these elements on substantive grounds. If anything, their contention, on the surface, was merely over aesthetics, over how to render the vision to put it in the best light. But equally, if not more, ambitious, they wanted to restate the vision in more ambiguous language. Why? Conceivably, they did so because broader wording would advantage them when it came time, after the planning was done, to act on the statement — when it came time, that is, to shift from direction setting, the supposed and temporary job of citizens, to execution and the ongoing ownership that comes with it, the job of professionals. Ambiguity would give them more latitude in interpretation while preserving their identification with the community's ambitions.

With Enterprise Community planning, the specific stimulus to reach far did not originate with local professionals *per se.* It started with their counterparts at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington, DC. As HUD's guidance to interested communities put it: "The vision must be strategic: It must

coordinate community needs and assets in a comprehensive fashion so that economic development, housing, community development, public safety, human and social services, and environmental needs all contribute to civic spirit and mutual responsibility among all residents."[253]

Yet, for local professionals there was nothing especially novel or challenging in HUD's language. They had heard it many times before in one form or another and appeared to identify with it completely. Roanoke had professionally formulated numerous community plans in the past, most structured along similarly wide-ranging and wishful lines. In 1907, the city's first comprehensive plan stated that: "The problem that confronts the people of Roanoke...is no less than the remodeling of the existing city and the remoulding of the large area around it so that it both may better serve present and future generations."[254] Two decades later, the next comprehensive plan cast a comparably dramatic vision: "The plan of 1928 has been prepared for a still greater Roanoke, for a city of splendid appearance as well as a strong industrial and commercial center. It contemplates the growth of the city and region for a generation ahead."[255] Plans in 1964, 1979, and 1985 were also sweeping in their hopes. The 1985 plan, the most recent prior to planning for the Enterprise Community, included 31 major recommendations and scores of smaller ones

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[253]Quoted in memo dated February 11, 1994 from John R. Marlles, Chief, Planning & Community Development, to Ted Edlich, Executive Director, Total Action Against Poverty, and Phil Spark, Acting Chief, Economic Grants, City of Roanoke.

[254]Quoted from Remodeling Roanoke (1907) in Roanoke Vision: Comprehensive Development Plan for Roanoke, Virginia 1985-2005. (Roanoke City Planning Commission and Roanoke Office of Community Planning, 1985), p. 28

[255]From Comprehensive City Plan, Roanoke Virginia, 1928.

encompassing every aspect of city life. So, for Roanoke's professionals, HUD's quest for broad impact did not instill any new disposition in them. Rather, it reinforced predilections already present and well-developed within the interstices of the community's formal problem solving culture.

Aiming far and wide was a hallmark of the professional problem solvers I observed or heard about in Roanoke. It was an expectation they repeated to one another and to the larger community time and again when they were called upon to chart a course for the future. As one executive of an influential nonprofit organization stated casually: "In a community this size…, we ought to be able to solve all of our problems." Even though there was little evidence that the resulting plans, like nearly all such broad plans, were ever more than minimally fulfilled, the professionals showed slight inclination to modify their rhetoric of comprehensiveness. Any given professional might spend most of her days in a narrowly defined job, but she did so within a professionally defined context that gave point and purpose to that work as part of a larger enterprise aimed, symbolically at least, at transforming the community. To the extent inner city residents gravitated toward this same context, their interest seemed chiefly to be a function of piggybacking on professional problem solving rather than a *sui generis* pursuit of their own making. On their own, the indigenous members of Roanoke's moderate and low-income neighborhoods generally aimed at more modest, near-term ends, such as getting the police to patrol a particular street more often or holding a neighborhood picnic or launching a summer program for neighborhood youth. Despite the lip service given to citizen-led planning, the professionals were the real masters of the community's mechanisms for setting visions and goals. Seemingly out of habit, they construed that role generously.

Control

Professionals controlled much more than vision-setting, however. They were in charge of most aspects of community problem solving. They not only dominated local planning processes and service delivery, as one might expect. In so doing, they established their form of practice as the standard to which inner city neighborhoods should themselves aspire. To be in such a commanding position, however, was not without its burdens.

As I indicated above, the superior attitude and ambitiousness of the professional mode were not necessarily justified by its concrete successes. Many, if not most, community problems do not lend themselves to easy and lasting solutions. They are always needing to be worked on, and the gains against them tend to be incremental, reversible, and uncertain. There was little that professional problem solvers in Roanoke could do to change this basic reality, short of a quantum leap in the effectiveness of their know-how. On the other hand, they could not simply let the reality have free reign in shaping the will of the community, for that would undermine the dominance to which they were accustomed.

I have described how certain symbols, such as the universal importance attached to higher education, helped to keep the lack of evidence of professional effectiveness from eroding the standing of professional problem solving in the community. This was only a part of a more elaborate set of means used by the denizens of formal problem solving to protect their position of control and to retain, or if at all possible further, their legitimacy in that role. These were means that had evidently evolved slowly over time as professional problem solvers sought, discovered, or stumbled upon the requisites of power.

Meeting Management

Notice has already been taken of the important role that meetings played in the relationship between professional and indigenous problem solvers. Meetings were the principal setting where the two came together and, thus, where each, in potential, had the opportunity to shape community discourse. But there was more to it than that.

In her book on the sociology of meetings, Helen Schwartzman explains: "Meetings...may be most important in American society because they generate the appearance that reason and logical processes are guiding discussions and decisions, whereas they facilitate relationship negotiations, struggles, and commentaries."[256] The meetings I observed in Roanoke were a stage where professionals and inner city residents went through the motions of jostling, usually subtly, for position, but where the professionals prevailed routinely. At the least, the professionals never allowed themselves to be perceived as being bested by neighborhood people. This does not mean there was no give and take between the two. Indigenous people spoke up in meetings and occasionally signaled their displeasure with being outdone. Nor were the professionals oblivious to them. Each meeting, in theory, represented an opportunity for renegotiating their relationship, had that been what anyone desired. But the very setting of any meeting seemed customarily to favor those with formal problem solving credentials and skills.

Not only were most meetings that involved both groups chaired by professionals. The physical setting itself almost always appeared to advantage the

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[256] H.B. Schwartzman, The Meeting: Gatherings in Organizations and Communities, (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), p. 212.

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professionals or to disadvantage indigenous participants. For example, most meetings were held with members seated around an oblong table. This meant the professional chairing a meeting at the "head" of the table would be the easiest for those in attendance to see and communicate with — a position of control. Joint meetings, regardless of size, were hardly ever held in living rooms or kitchens, the places most familiar to neighborhood people. Instead they were regularly convened in rooms designed for formal assemblies.

One meeting to obtain input from inner city residents on the Enterprise Community plan was a small study in ways to manipulate the physical environment to give the edge to the professionals running it. The meeting was held in the gymnasium of a neighborhood school. The professionals in charge had not produced enough agendas to go around, so many participants did not know the order of business. If someone wanted to speak, they had to sign-in at the registration desk beforehand; spontaneous discussion was, by implication, discouraged. No arrangements had been made for a microphone, so people who were by temperament or voice unprepared to talk over the normal din of such a gathering were unlikely to volunteer a comment. Participants sat in bleachers and were expected to direct their comments to the mostly professional group sitting at a table in front of the bleachers, not unlike witnesses testifying before a legislative committee. Although one might chalk up this series of *faux pas* to a simple case of bad planning, the fact that it was an early meeting in the Enterprise Community planning effort, when the paid professionals responsible were relying mainly on their prior experience to guide their decisions, suggests the situation was not an unusual occurrence.

Meetings were held in both downtown offices and inner city facilities, usually churches. Not surprisingly, indigenous folk appeared to be more at ease when the

meetings took place in their own environment. Even then, while they might be more comfortable and feel freer to talk, the professionals still typically held the reins. Whether by managing the agenda or taking discussions in a technical direction once a topic got introduced, the professionals held sway. They did not necessarily, or so I assumed, plan for this to happen. It appeared simply to be a well established habit, an automatic pattern of behavior into which most actors fell when professionals and inner city residents came together at a meeting, whatever the setting.

Rule-Making Talents

If formality, in one sense, is the use of explicit rules, then it stands to reason that professionals — formal problem solvers — would have a penchant for attempting to bring order to community situations in which they perceived it to be inadequate. This was clearly the case in the way in which joint meetings were structured and occurred, as the previous discussion suggested. But rule-making worked even more profoundly, as that part of professional logic which professionals most sought to infuse into indigenous work. As the antithesis of the informality characteristic of indigenous action, rule-making (or its absence) seemed to be what most distinguished the two modes. It was thus what professionals appeared most eager to see changed in the conduct of inner city actors and their neighborhood organizations. To increase the rule-making capacity of neighborhoods would align them better with the professional way of doing things, further establishing professional control of community problem solving.

The desire to make neighborhoods more rule-governed came through clearly in the manual of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership. The fact that this document was labeled a "manual" suggests the pro-rule bias built into it. The authors of the manual undoubtedly had in mind that neighborhood organizations should, in a basic

sense, operate much like the work organizations to which they, as professionals, belonged.

Here, for example, is how the manual describes the importance of neighborhood organizations having by-laws: "By-laws are the fine print details of exactly how the members of an organization agree it is to be run. They include the official name of the organization, the official purpose of it, and much, much more."[257] The "much, much more" essentially conjures an image of a potentially vast array of rules to cover the many aspects, both large and small, of establishing and running a formal organization among people who do not know one another particularly well, as would be the case with most organizations in which professionals work. The fact that in a neighborhood, certainly the low-income inner city ones of Roanoke, many of the active residents would have known one another, often intimately, for years seemed to be ignored or, at best, muted.

Later, the manual makes even clearer that its desired image for neighborhood organizations has little to do with the special qualities which make a place a neighborhood, but very much to do with how professionals design their own organizations:

> "You need issues to organize around, but issues alone are not enough.
> If your group is going to keep going beyond an initial crisis or controversy, you need an organizational structure. You need ways of communicating with your neighbors. You need rules to govern the proceedings of your organization. You need a way to divide up the work among a number of people. And you need a mechanism for

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[257]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership Manual, p. 49.

handling money."[258]

Although the image originated with professionals, the neighborhood people I observed appeared to go along with its expectations. At a minimum, they wrote by-laws for their organizations and made some formal attempt to manage whatever funds these organizations had. It was not evident that they felt as strongly about such formalities as the professionals did. Their acceptance of greater formalization seemed to be less a matter of understanding the value of rules and structure and more a matter of conforming to the controlling professional interest in the community. In other words, they appeared to adopt these practices more for normative reasons than for reasons of actually expecting to perform more effectively as neighborhood groups.[259] Nonetheless, their very act of acceptance reinforced the professional problem solving stance as the prevailing stance of the community.

Planning as Control

The professional's use of rule-making to control community problem solving tended to function quietly. It seemed to be regarded as such a normal part of the professional domain that no one, including the indigenous people of the inner city, was apt to question its appropriateness. The same could not be said for planning. It joined rule-making as part of the professionals' stock-in-trade, as something they did

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[258]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership Manual, p. 36.

[259]Normative diffusion, where ideas are adopted because they are popular, is one of the three types of diffusion identified by March. The other two are coercive diffusion, in which practices are imposed on their users, and mimetic diffusion, in which direct contact between parties leads to one party adopting the other party's behavior. See James G. March (with Barbara Levitt), "Organization Learning," in The Pursuit of Organizational Intelligence, ed. James G. March, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999), p. 86.

as a matter of course. But planning had a far more stylized role in the control process, and thus attracted attention. While rule-making operated mostly out of the range of daily awareness, planning was an explicit, formal activity that people actively discussed and in which they participated. Because it was a more conscious activity, it was contested terrain. Neighborhood people never, in my hearing at least, expressed a desire to be more involved in rule-making, but they did seek to have more of a say in planning. That, of course, only furthered their dependence on the professional way of doing things in which the planning process was embedded. As one neighborhood woman, who very much wanted to influence community planning decisions, said to me: "Planning is the city's baby."

Professionals' rhetoric tended to imbue planning with almost mystical power. Given their deep identification with the process, extolling the wonders of planning helped to shore up their own sense of importance and mastery. The manual of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, as a key source of professional advice to neighborhoods, sang the praises of planning and, by extension, the professionals immersed in its culture : "Planning seems like magic when it leads to real projects — big or small — that change your neighborhood for the better."[260] In other words, if neighborhood people wanted to get results, they needed to plan like professionals.

Professionals did not necessarily want to do the planning for neighborhoods, although that was sometimes the case. What they most seemed to desire was for the neighborhoods to act professionally and plan, even if the process was done a little differently and with less sophistication than official city planners might muster. A municipal employee involved in the Partnership explained this posture: "We made

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[260]Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership Manual, p. 109.

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[the planning process] generic enough and simple enough that it could be done in one meeting. That should be enough to give somebody, to make it work for them, not the way we want it, but to give them enough structure that they can make it work." By "dumbing" down the process, planning could be made more accessible to the limited capabilities of neighborhoods. It might not be as fruitful as full-scale professional planning, but it could still be productive. Stated differently, the magic would not be lost, since the real power of planning is in basic elements that all planning processes, from the modest to the grand, presumably share. The unstated aim of the Partnership seemed to be to make the neighborhoods planning apprentices to the professional community. Not necessarily sorcerer's apprentices, but beholden just the same to those with more mastery of the mysteries of the planning craft.

However, professionals' confidence in their mastery was not complete, which gave them even more reason to protect it. There were shadows of doubt that their faith in planning might not be fully merited — that planning might not always lead to worthwhile outcomes. The evidence for this was the almost mantra-like way in which professional leaders of the Enterprise Community planning process kept telling the community, from the outset, that Roanoke might not get selected by HUD, but that all would not be lost because they would still have a plan. "Even if we don't win, we will have a blueprint," was how one planning official put it. Or as another said when speaking to an inner city neighborhood organization, "Even if designation does not happen, there's going to be a strategic plan [that will] impact tremendously on community and economic development in this neighborhood." It became *derigueur* to preface Enterprise Community planning meetings with this excuse, as if to say that the judgment of higher authority (i.e., HUD) should not be construed as a reason to question the value of the plan or the work that would need to go into its formulation. The very fact that the professionals felt the need to say this revealed

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their worry about how a negative judgment from HUD might chip away at the community's longstanding reliance on their own judgment in planning matters. At a deeper level, it seemed to show at least a modicum of concern that one more plan, in a long history of unfulfilled plans, might not amount to much. Faced with the possibility of a public declaration of failure, though, the professionals dug in their heals, surrounding their planning process with a special, pre-emptive rhetoric of justification to try to preserve its, and their own, legitimacy.

Do Not Measure

Although professionals appeared to be somewhat addicted to planning, they were the opposite when it came to measuring their performance. Not only was evidence of professional effectiveness thin, professional problem solvers generally appeared averse to having any developed. To have their performance documented objectively would have undercut their ability to control how they were perceived within the community. Planning, which is all about possibilities yet to happen, was one thing. Evaluation, which is all about whether possibilities have been realized or not, was quite another.

An interesting demonstration of professionals' fear of measurement unfolded during my fieldwork. About the time I arrived, the local United Way contracted with the Community Planning Council to begin an effort to assess the performance of agencies that received United Way funding. I was invited to serve on one of the committees formed to review agencies. Essentially, the agency my committee examined had no official performance data beyond the numbers of people it served. Nor was it enthusiastic about beginning to capture systematically information on the concrete value, or lack thereof, that it was producing for the community. It believed that the very fact it had existed for many years and raised enough revenue to stay in

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operation were proof enough of its worth.

A planning council official described for me how they had hoped agencies would embrace an opportunity to talk about what they were doing and the meaning of the performance data they had on their work efforts. But this expectation was quickly disappointed: "For some of the agencies, they've just been hostile. They've run in the other direction like crazy." There were exceptions, to be sure. Some agencies had been evaluated before, had been found effective, and were comfortable with the idea of being assessed. But the norm appeared to be to regard the measurement process as threatening and something to avoid.

Inherent difficulties in measuring the results of community problem solving obviously could have accounted for some of the reluctance of local agencies to have United Way scrutinize their work and contributions. The impact of social interventions can be notoriously hard to gauge. Nonetheless, the adverse reaction to the measurement initiative seemed to stem from more than just such well-known methodological problems. It was clear that agencies were accustomed to and preferred being judged on grounds other than their effectiveness. So that, even if a sound basis for measuring their performance were to emerge, it would likely be resisted. Sociologist Kirsten Gronjberg, in her study of the financing of social agencies in Chicago, found that: "The difficulty of evaluating effectiveness results in the use of stand-in measures that reflect little more than reputation, legitimacy, and credibility of image."[261] This was evidently the case in Roanoke. And the result was self-induced pressure on professional problem solving agencies to maintain the *status quo* — a regime with which they were comfortable because it permitted them

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[261] K.A. Gronbjerg, <u>Understanding Nonprofit Funding</u>, p. 308.

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to stay on top and in control.

What "Informals" Know

I have used several examples to show how indigenous residents of inner city neighborhoods tried, sometimes and in certain ways, to be like the community's professional problem solvers. But no amount of trying appeared able to change the one thing that distinguished the less formal kinds of problem solving residents tended to practice (on those increasingly infrequent occasions when they got involved) from the formal alternative practiced by professionals: a grounding in relationships. Of course, relationships also mattered in professional problem solving. But they always appeared secondary to or at least conditioned on the epistemological claims and methods that give formal problems solving its distinctive character. Informal action was not about methods or technical know-how, the *forte* of formal action. It was about the people with whom one did it. Professional problem solving, in its aspiration to dominate, recognized the special power of such intimate ties and sought to understand or maybe even absorb this dimension into itself. But its efforts seemed largely in vain. Formal and informal were different worlds with different styles of action and different ways of knowing.

Distinguishing Marks

The informal problem solving efforts of inner city residents were predicated on the relationships they had with one another and the personal knowledge stemming from those relationships. These were often longstanding ties, and even when they were not, they were conducted within a context defined by the more historical relationships among the people in a neighborhood. It was the people who had known one another the longest who usually led the way and provided the center of gravity

for community work. Several important conditions were associated with this reality.

One condition was the strong preference for action among inner city people. They did not mind investing some time in forethought or planning, but they had difficulty appreciating the tremendous amount of energy professionals seemed to spend getting ready to do something as opposed to doing it. "You know, we talk for so long," one neighborhood woman remarked to me. "We spend more time with conferences, paper wasting, and programming and all that, instead of just going on out there and doin the work." The significant part of professional planning that was oriented to helping form relations and expectations among participants was often of limited or no use to neighborhood members, who were already often on quite familiar, even intimate, terms with each other.

Nor, within the confines of their neighborhoods, did they show much regard for the inclusiveness that seemed to be a constant concern of formal planners. Making sure that all potentially affected interests had an opportunity for input did not appear to weigh significantly on the minds of informal problem solvers. As one inner city leader stated: "When you try to get everybody, try to satisfy everybody, you don't get anything [done]...You've got to go on with a few people who're willing." For neighborhood residents, to act — to go out and tackle a particular problem on a given day — was the outflowing of their interpersonal ties. To plan and consult at length were not. And thus, too much effort given over to planning and talking felt awkward to them, as if they were being expected to renegotiate something (i.e., what they meant to one another) settled basically long ago.

In preferring to act, informal problem solvers in the inner city neighborhoods responded to the dictates of the relations among themselves. In a sense, action was

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the way in which their connections to each other became real. Planting a neighborhood garden or shoveling snow from the stoops of the homebound or calling one another on the phone were simply the next iteration of a continuing solidarity. Neighborhood members involved in informal work appeared to honor most the mere fact of acting, regardless of the results. Action demonstrated a commitment to the relationship, a form of devotion to one's neighborly group.[262] At the informal level, know-how and credentials, the basis on which professionals are judged, did not count for as much, for these are individual possessions. What counted was how you showed your sense of affiliation.

There was in this form of mutual obligation a profoundly conservative quality. The people involved in informal problem solving did not seem to be as dedicated to change as they were to preservation. To the extent they were open to change, it was mostly as a means to the end of a holding reality in place, of trying to keep time from rushing inexorably forward. Partly, as we saw in the last chapter, this was driven by a desire to recapture in the present some of the better things from the past. But equally, it seemed prompted by a need to keep one's more intimate ties, the work of long years, from needing to be refashioned. The satisfactions of being known and knowing others were the chief good of informal action. To neighborhood members, boosting these satisfactions seemed less motivating than retaining them.

Professional Envy

Professional problem solvers recognized the advantage such closeness

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[262]Studies comparing volunteers and professionals suggest that volunteers are recognized for their dedication, while professionals tend to praise skills, knowledge, and credentials. See J. L. Pearce, <u>Volunteers: The Organizational Behavior of Unpaid Workers</u>, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 81.

conferred on those who were party to it. The harmony and predictability of neighborly relations in the inner city areas I studied represented a privileged realm to which professionals had minimal access. This, to be sure, did not stop them from trying. Among some of them at least, there appeared to be growing appreciation for how the greater trust that comes with strong ties might contribute to easier, less conflict laden problem solving.

For the most part, the efforts of professionals to identify with the inner city took the form of spending time in neighborhoods trying to get to know the people. This was animated by a belief that in order to serve inner city folks better you have to know what they want. Total Action Against Poverty, the local community action agency, had long sought a kind of intimate connection with Roanoke's low-income neighborhoods. Throughout much of its history beginning in the 1960s, it was located on the edge of a poor neighborhood, having moved to its present downtown site only in 1992. TAP's community outreach staff devoted much of their energy to cultivating ties with inner city neighborhood leaders and attempted to stay on top of neighborhood opinion by conducting surveys and attending meetings of neighborhood organizations. Their longstanding work in behalf of the inner city gave them unique access unmatched by any other major professional problem solving organization.

While TAP enjoyed a special connection to the neighborhoods, other organizations were making more of an effort of late. An African American professional in his 30s, working for a well-established nonprofit service provider, explained to me how, in spending more time in the neighborhoods the past two years, he had learned to defer to the interests of the people he was trying to help: "You can't go in, if you go in with a set agenda saying, 'I'm going to do this, I'm going to

do that,' without asking them if that's what they want. You're going to lose out." Another professional, a white woman, told me how her agency slowly had come to the conclusion that its staff needed get out from behind their desks and talk with people in their neighborhoods about what they perceived their needs to be. These two organizations appeared to be among the small vanguard of agencies, not counting TAP, that were beginning to reach out in new, more personal ways to Roanoke's inner city. Their endeavors appeared well-intended and certainly a break with the more remote posture of other professional organizations. But it was too soon to tell whether they would succeed in bridging the gap between themselves and the neighborhoods they served.

Clouding the hopes for success was the specter that more focused outreach would become just another way to maintain professionals' control of problem solving. Getting out into the community and developing a sharper sense of residents' desires is what any good marketer might do to pitch better what he has to sell. Without a deeper connection between professional and neighborhood members, one that goes beyond a "working relationship," formal problem solvers' efforts to become more familiar with low-income neighborhoods appeared prone to treating the indigenous as consumers to be manipulated rather than fellow problem solvers. This may not have been their aim, but it was a risk inherent in a situation of such unequal parties. Even TAP, the closest thing to an ally the inner city had among the elite institutions of Roanoke, could not entirely avoid acting for, rather than with, the neighborhoods. The power of the professional orientation, and its institutionalized and hidden ways of shaping the behavior and attitudes of its possessors, made democracy in community problem solving difficult to achieve.

Professional Neighborhoods

Interestingly but not surprisingly, this was untrue in the middle and upper class neighborhoods where professionals, themselves, tended to live. There was no inequality here, because the two groups — professional problem solvers and neighborhood members — were one in the same for the most part. These neighborhoods seemed to be governed less by the deep solidarity evident in the inner city than by a more deliberate, formal way of tackling problems. Residents of middle and upper class neighborhoods seemed to address problems at home in the same professional manner they used while at work. It made their neighborhoods appear, at least on the surface, to be places that were managed and purposeful, rather than organic.

The one neighborhood of this kind in which I spent time was Old Southwest. Bordering the southern edge of the inner city, Old Southwest had been a well-groomed upper-middle-class community earlier in the century. It fell into decline sometime after World War II as the lure of suburban development drew better off residents out of the city and lower income people moved in. In the 1970s, a growing population of young urban professionals slowly began buying and renovating the spacious but rundown homes that lined the area's streets. Gentrification transformed the neighborhood into an architectural showplace, gaining it protection under historical preservation laws. The area took the name Old Southwest and incorporated.

Old Southwest's original efforts to organize itself in the 1970s had faltered. The upscale people moving into the neighborhood at the time were relatively few in number and scattered, making communication difficult. But as their numbers rose, it became possible to form a more cohesive effort centered essentially on the goal of

restoring the neighborhood to its former architectural glory. New residents put their professional talents to work. They created a formal neighborhood organization, with a well-defined charter and offices filled through periodic election. To sustain the organization, members paid dues and held fund raisers. Even people outside the neighborhood were permitted to join, showing their solidarity with the organization's historic preservation theme and benefitting from its monthly newsletter. Organized by and laden with people competent in a variety of useful, technical subjects (e.g., public relations, law, architecture, management), Old Southwest was able to wring concessions year after year from city officials that made restoration and preservation efforts easier. No inner city neighborhood had ever enjoyed such success.

Yet, Old Southwest was only unique in its particularly high profile. Other middle class neighborhood organizations, while not as visible, appeared equally as well organized. They had formal charters, elected officers, periodic newsletters, and approached their task as one might approach the challenge of managing any somewhat complex enterprise. One of these neighborhoods, for example, had had a problem with basements flooding. Its association, rather than barnstorming city hall, conducted a survey of residents that allowed them to produce a systematic picture of the problem. With the evidence in hand, they were able in a civilized manner to get municipal authorities to act. Another neighborhood, in its bimonthly newsletter, had announced that the president's role would change from organizing activities to functioning as a volunteer chief executive who reports to an executive committee and oversees the work of other volunteer managers. Evidently, with a more corporate-like structure, they felt they could do a better job of serving the needs of the neighborhood. These were neighborhoods where the forms and styles of professional work organizations — the forms and styles to which their residents devoted many of their waking hours — were the most ready at hand. The

professional approach to neighborhood organizing made it possible to harness the energies of people who were, arguably, less deeply connected to one another than many inner city blacks appeared to be and who had many demands on their time, of which being a good neighborhood was only one.

The professional approach tried to compensate for the lack of strong, organic ties among neighborhood members by creating formal structures and processes. Its emergence in Roanoke raised the question of whether inner city neighborhoods would have no real choice but eventually to turn to this mode of organizing as their older residents, on whom solidarity seemed most to depend, died off. This prospect, in turn, would lead to other questions: What would be the consequences for the moral quality of community life if natural solidarity were supplanted by the more artificial and hierarchical kind engendered by professionalization? How would people regard one another in a local regime where organic ties and informal ways no longer served as a principal avenue for solving problems? In the absence of strong, informal norms governing problem solving, what would motivate people to participate in the work of their neighborhoods?[263] In the next chapter, I begin to explore such questions as attention turns to the different moral spaces occupied by the informal and formal approaches.

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[263]Sociologist Alvin Gouldner describes the situation at an Indiana gypsum plant, where new managers sought to use hierarchy and rules to gain control of informal work groups and thereby boost productivity. Instead, productivity declined as workers, deprived of control over the means of production, lost their motivation to strive. See A. Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, (New York: Free Press, 1954).

Chapter VI
Friendships and Civility

The informal problem solving I observed among black citizens in Roanoke, or learned about from their past, occurred mostly among friends. These were people who knew one another well and often for many years. They had shared life together — births and deaths, marriages and divorces, children going off to college, leaving home, or getting into trouble, Sunday church services, shopping at the same stores. Working on neighborhood problems was a natural expression of their bond, their sense of obligation to each other, another act in a countless series of mostly small acts that unfolded over time.[264]

By contrast, relationships among formal problem solvers who I met or heard about seemed less sure. They required more deliberate management and calculation. While formal participants might know about aspects of each other's lives outside the workplace, they seemed to share less of themselves with each other. More of who they are and what happened in their lives appeared to be held back, retained in self-kept memories or divulged only among a few intimates off the job. As one professional said to me, "You want your privacy." The problem solving in which they engaged was typically and mainly a result, not of friendship or interpersonal

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[264]Small acts may be meaningful to their transactors mainly because they are small and hard to measure. As Susan Gallagher writes in her study of volunteering: "The little things done for others may be valuable, then, not because they have great cash value, but precisely because they do not. To recognize the time and tasks involved in giving care, to articulate the work involved in helping others, begins to put too much of an economic face on this labor and runs the risk of robbing it of some of its worth." (P. 134) S.K. Gallagher, <u>Older People Giving Care: Helping Family and Community</u>, (Westport, CN: Auburn House, 1994).

obligation, but of formal duties authorized by the organizations where they worked.

Aristotle describes three kinds of friendships. The commonest, he suggests, are those based on pleasure and utility. In these cases, he writes:

> "Those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant."[265]

Put simply, friendships of pleasure and utility are self-centered. And because what is pleasurable or useful changes frequently, these friendships tend to be unstable. By contrast, the most desirable friendship, Aristotle's third kind, while it may yield pleasure and utility as a by-product, is based on mutual commitment to goodness, to doing the right thing. In this better sort of friendship, each person wishes what is good for the other and seeks to bring that good about.[266]

In the African-American neighborhoods of Roanoke that I studied, informal problem solving transpired through friendships where those involved appeared, much of the time at least, to seek the good of each other. Pursuit of a shared goodness served as a key motive, even if it was not always the only motive at work. This was less evident within the ranks of formal problem solving. There, utility seemed to hold sway, as friends and associates on-the-job pursued the goals of their organizations or other instrumental purposes that elicited their interest. A greater capacity for the

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[265] Aristotle, <u>The Nicomachean Ethics</u>, D. Ross, Trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1156a14-17.

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Aristotle, <u>The Nicomachean Ethics, 1156b7-24.</u>

better kind of friendship gave the informal, neighborly domain a moral advantage over the formal system in the community. The caring and trust among indigenous problem solvers went deeper than appeared to be possible under the more utilitarian conditions governing professional work.

But the continuing erosion of the informal domain described in the previous two chapters threatened its role as home to the better sort of friendship. The fragmentation of the black community, its growing distance from a more cohesive past, and its receptivity to the demands and inducements of the larger world were depleting the intrinsic moral assets of its inner city neighborhoods. Informal problem solving among friends still occurred but less often and with seemingly less significance. The accumulating strength of the utilitarian formal system made indigenous action seem less necessary, and because of this, a greater effort was required to motivate neighborhood friends to act. One African-American neighborhood leader expressed the view of many when he said at an Enterprise Community gathering: "My biggest problem is getting people to come to the meetings of my neighborhood organization." Or as another said at the same meeting: "Folk express a lot of concerns from their homes, but when asked to come out, they don't."

The resulting frustration and anger felt by the dwindling numbers still struggling to tackle neighborhood problems might, under freer circumstances, have led to open, ongoing conflict with Roanoke's formal powers and authorities, who many inner city residents tended to see as responsible, at least in part, for their dilemma. And this conflict might have provided further impetus for neighborhood people to get involved. But the culture of the city worked against it. A deeply ingrained commitment to civility in public matters seemed to sap the will of the

black-populated neighborhoods to contend, other than mildly and episodically most of the time, with the local power structure. The high value nearly all segments of the community attached to maintaining an appearance of propriety in public conduct discouraged sustained debate and the hardening of differences into competitive interests.[267]

So, neighborhoods already weakened by a variety of other factors saw the moral strength they derived from lasting friendships further abraded by cultural tendencies that thwarted their giving voice to the feelings of loss this weakening induced. The solidarity they had most counted on in the past to get them through hard times could not as readily fight a condition — civility — on which their good friendships themselves were predicated. The city's habit of civility worked subtly, but pervasively, to stunt the motivation to invest further in indigenous problem solving.

Love Lost

The moral strength of the inner city neighborhoods in Roanoke appeared to stem, in large part, from the religious faith shared by their members. As I reported in chapter four, church and faith were central to the lives of the active African

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[267]The one seeming exception to the penchant for public decorum was the group that had formed to preserve the integrity of the Gainsborough neighborhood. It persevered in its fight with city government over commercial and roadway improvements, openly expressing its distrust of municipal leaders. But the fact that it was unable to recruit more than a handful of people into its active ranks, and that it was both outnumbered and out-maneuvered by another, less contentious organization claiming to represent Gainsborough, suggests that it was an exception that proved the rule. The necessity of acknowledged differences to the formation of community is discussed in R. Sennett, The Corrosion of Character, pp. 136-148.

American citizens I met. That many of them had enjoyed longstanding friendships, while partly a function of time and proximity, gained point and purpose from their shared Christianity. To them, Jesus' sacrifice of himself so that humanity might be saved from sin and death gave inner city residents not just a powerful example by which to orient their own lives with each other. It is also infused them with the belief that God would, through an abiding Holy Spirit, empower them to act in selfless regard toward the well-being of others. As an older, deeply religious woman in NNEO's neighborhood put it to me: "The only thing that will keep us together, it's love for one another, caring just as much for another person's child as you would care for your own. You see that other in trouble, you go to that person and help them." To her and others, Jesus' example of selfless love was not just an ideal but an active principle by which to try to live one's life.

How closely inner city folks came to realizing this principle, I cannot say with any precision. There was, however, ample evidence that it was more than a mere hope, that a form of Christian love did, in fact, characterize important parts of social life in the black neighborhoods I visited. One woman told me how every day she talked on the phone with her entire network of close friends, all of them African-American, as they checked on each other's well-being. She appeared not to exaggerate: during the two hours I interviewed her at home, the phone rang twice, each time from a friend making the daily call. Another woman who had left Roanoke as a young adult and come back in middle age spoke of how in her old neighborhood (Loudon-Melrose), where her parents still lived, mutual aid was just the way things are. "That's been going on a long time," she said, "sharing the support of each other." Speaking of the same neighborhood, a different woman talked about neighbors routinely helping out with home repairs and cutting one another's grass when necessary, forms of sharing that were regrettably getting harder as the

population got older. I listened as a young black man, a professional, told a leading member of another neighborhood, who also happened to be a member of his church, that he loved her. "You know I love you," he said. Given the context of the conversation, his words seemed less intended as a reassurance than a common refrain of religious kinship. And then there were the men of the Inner City Athletic Association, who, though less given to using the word, nonetheless seemed to demonstrate love in their long years of volunteer work with youth. One of ICAA's founders had been a pastor, and from what I could tell, all or most of its leaders were religious men.

The point is not that such selfless acts and expressions of love were unique to Roanoke's inner city. African American neighborhoods enjoyed no monopoly on virtue that I could discern. Nor, for that matter, did they appear any less prone to vice. But what did make them special was the seeming ubiquity of the faith held by their active members. They appeared to live their faith daily and quietly or at least to try to do so. It was not reserved for weekend worship services or prayer meetings or necessarily specific to the particular churches to which they belonged. It was more communal than that, more an ingrained feature of their common life as the black minority. The strong ties on which informal problem solving depended were anchored in a shared religion that seemed to make being there for each other more than a matter of calculated or learned reciprocity.

However, because the main holders of this faith-informed neighborly lifestyle tended to be older residents, it seemed to be dying along with them. Many people despaired over the lost unity in the black community. To be sure, this was partly and simply a statement of fact. But it also seemed to reflect a more spiritual dilemma, of how the fragmentation of the community could not be separated from faith

commitments, which themselves appeared increasingly unmoored from life in the inner city neighborhoods. So long as these neighborhoods were dominated by people who had lived there many years, who had come to know each other as friends, and who shared the same religious convictions, the spiritual cohesiveness of the community held. The ideal of selfless love remained alive and influential. But with the passing of the older generations and the migration of better off blacks to more affluent neighborhoods, the ideal appeared to be losing its grip as a defining characteristic of the inner city's moral capacity.

An African-American pastor in his late forties, who had served the inner city for nearly two decades, appeared to sense the problem. It was not his words, but his actions, which signaled a recognition that circumstances were changing, and not for the better. From the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, he had been a leading figure, not only in the black community, but in the city at large. He was involved in many public issues and community organizing efforts, and was often looked to as a spokesperson. By the late 1980s, however, he had begun to curb his civic activities, devoting more time to his pastoral function and less to political engagement. When I met him in 1994, while still under pressure from other blacks to assume more visible leadership, his public persona had dimmed markedly from what I understood it once had been. When I asked him about this, he replied:

> "If I inspire one person to be a better person, then I've made change
> come about without me having to be out there. I'm just convinced
> that's the only way we're going to produce effective change over the
> long haul."

Was his retreat from public life simply a mature recognition of how hard social change is to bring about? I had no reason to doubt his sincerity. But it was also the case that the conditions under which he worked had shifted significantly during his

tenure. His church's neighborhood was not the same. It had become older, and more of his congregation was dwelling elsewhere. His advocacy of Christian living was becoming less specific to the neighborhood and more cosmopolitan in order to accommodate the growing diversity of his church.

Other pastors who had also been around a while seemed to be in a similar bind. As I alluded to in Chapter Four, many people I interviewed expressed sadness over the growing number of preachers who, unlike the "old days," cared for their own churches at the expense of the surrounding community. Faced with a choice between church and neighborhood, these clergymen evidently opted for the former, which was, after all, the object of their calling. If the church could be induced to serve the neighborhood, so much the better. But if not, then serving the congregation would suffice to fulfill their responsibility.

It was interesting in this connection to observe, by comparison, a relatively new inner city pastor who had not experienced the transformation that appeared to be redirecting the energies of his more established clerical colleagues away from the neighborhoods. He walked the streets of his church's neighborhood knocking on doors and introducing himself. He made a dedicated effort to breathe new life into a moribund neighborhood organization. He participated in civic meetings and events, and in the work of local nonprofit agencies seeking to improve conditions in inner city areas. But even he, barely three years into his Roanoke ministry, was beginning to feel as if he were swimming upstream. As he said at an Enterprise Community meeting:

> "I have to be quite frank with you. I have concerns about all of these [social] issues, but I don't know what to do about them. Our greatest need is to bring unity to the community. Our biggest problem is

fragmentation."

One imagines him making different remarks had the meeting occurred twenty years earlier. Then, he would have found a neighborhood declining economically but holding on, in large part because of a shared, active faith embodied in close, enduring friendships. The fragmentation he bemoaned in the mid 1990s represented the surface of a deeper problem more spiritual than political: the ebbing of the community's moral cohesion. To him and other pastors all was not lost, because there is always hope. But the signs of spiritual weakening were clear enough to warrant concern and a measure of skepticism about what would replace the religious harmony that had, arguably at least, helped Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods survive a difficult past.

Civilized Ties

Relationships among active citizens in the shrinking informal world of the black neighborhoods were defined by a common religious ethic that put the relationship first. By contrast, in the formal system relationships were more instrumental, formed to serve ends other than the relationship itself. This is an obvious distinction that would be unworthy of comment were it not for the fact that the instrumental orientation of relationships in formal problem solving was the seedbed for the civility which appeared to help keep democracy from advancing in Roanoke.

Historically, the power of the informal domain is what had given African-Americans here a purchase on self-government. Denied opportunities to participate in the larger white-led society, they at least had the care of their own community to some degree. With desegregation, the barriers to participation began to come down, and the black community and its neighborhoods became increasingly permeable to

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the rules and norms of the formal system. While a common faith had helped to keep them from succumbing completely to the requirements and enticements of this system, the ebbing of informal community work was making resistance harder. More and more of black life was falling within the jurisdiction of formal problem solving, where relationships tended to be treated as means to ends rather than ends in themselves.

This reality seemed not particularly obvious to many African-American citizens. And it was Roanoke's penchant for civility, more than any other factor I could identify, that appeared to make it so. Civility was the moral code that overlay the instrumental agenda of the formal system. "Civilly" was how formal relationships were to be conducted. When the formal system had to make hard choices, it struck a "civil" tone to try to keep public perception and response within manageable limits.

This was nowhere better illustrated than in the Enterprise Community strategic plan. In the course of planning, several African-American participants voiced their lack of confidence in city government in the strongest possible terms. They called the process "futile" and labeled municipal officials as "deceptive" and "distrustful." But when the plan was written, it sought to mute these accusations, though without denying them altogether. "Throughout the development of the strategic plan," the document stated, "there were some disagreements and differing points of view but few actual disagreements of substance." The plan went on to describe how the planning process had "repaired" broken relationships and "reduced" mistrust, as if a few months of discussion in the abstract could begin to overcome years of concrete misgivings. By acknowledging the problem, the plan created the appearance of being honest. By defining the problem as readily solvable,

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it appeared pragmatic and optimistic. In short, the plan struck the right tone of reasonableness. Those deigning to dispute its conclusion about race relations in Roanoke would be easy to paint as troublemakers bent on conflict rather than working for a better community. That there was almost no public outcry from blacks in the wake of the plan's ratification showed the power of the norm of civility to mitigate resistance.

An aggrieved African American community could complain all it wanted about some wrong inflicted on it, but if its problem required the formal system, then it had usually to play by the rules of civility that governed that system. The African-American community could have fought, and on occasion did, as for example, in the continuing battle over Gainsboro. But by and large it went along, for civility was as much a part of its religious morality as it was of the secular ethic of the formal regime. The difference was that for many inner city blacks civility was a quality of the relationships through which they led their lives, while for the city it was a device for managing dissent.

Civility made Roanoke a place in which openness and emotion were not welcomed in public settings. The advantage in getting things done went to those who took a reasoned tone and did not make a habit out of challenging elites. As one black neighborhood leader who subscribed to this approach said: "You've got to learn how to negotiate and talk together. 'Come, let us reason together,' and then you get something done. Fussing won't get us anywhere."

There was tactical soundness in this woman's point of view. But at the same time, her posture seemed insensitive to the possibility that important concerns and issues might not even surface in an atmosphere where civility is the only workable

game in town, where there's too little room to be different, where creativity, to the extent it arises, must follow a fairly narrow path. "One thing I really have a hard time dealing with is nobody really wants to just say what they mean or mean what they say [in Roanoke]," was how a young professional women described the problem. One white person who had been in the city awhile and who had spent a good deal of time in the black community told me that, from what she had learned: "Expressiveness is very low around here. People do not express themselves." When I asked her why, she replied:

> "You look at our government. Hardly anybody goes to the meetings.
> And they don't say anything when they do. And I don't know if it
> goes back to the railroad culture, where you just kept your mouth
> shut and you had some security and you minded your own business...
> I can't tell you how many people say, 'They control you here,
> everybody's controlled.'"

Simply stated, civility can be control by another name.

Two factors seemed most to make control through civility the strong and abiding force that it was Roanoke. One was the oligarchic tendencies of the formal problem solving system. The other was the need the city's oligarchy had to manage how its intents and actions were perceived by the public.

Oligarchic Ways

Relationships in informal problem solving were essentially democratic. While there were informal leaders, they were usually regarded as the "first among equals." Most of the neighborhood groups that I observed and semi-formal organizations like the ICAA operated in an egalitarian manner.

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Although organizational democracy was not absent from the formal world, by and large the relationships within it were oligarchic. Authority, power, and money were the capital of the formal system, and they were, unsurprisingly, not shared equally. Formal problem solving was in the hands of hierarchical organizations composed of superiors and subordinates. Among these organizations, some were more influential and better endowed than others. Further, some of their individual leaders wielded more power and control than others did. The stewardship of the community seemed to lay in relatively few hands at any given time.

While membership in the ruling levels of Roanoke was not entirely static, the distribution of influence seemed to have changed but slowly over time. One longstanding human service leader told me, with evident pride, that he was part of a group of executives running the city's main human service organizations who had been together since the last 1960s. An influential business person said, in describing her version of Roanoke's informal oligarchy: "There is a, I call it the best lunch club in town, the United Way meeting once a month, because you've got all the top people in town meeting and visiting each other." Continuity in leadership provided for both more trust among leaders and for the solidification of their influence over the affairs of the community.

The ruling group in Roanoke was not indifferent to the needs of the African American community. Indeed, it even included some black citizens. For example, when Roanoke began feeling the pressures to desegregate in the 1960s, the local oligarchy took decisive, if quiet action, to eliminate the key sources of discrimination. "The reason that happened," a civic leader explained to me:

"is because you've got the publisher of the newspaper, who also is the owner of the biggest bank in town, saying, 'We are not going to have

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a problem here. We are going to figure out how to do this without having a problem, because it's not good for business.'"

Under the publisher's guidance, a committee was formed of six whites and six blacks to work out a strategy for gradually opening downtown businesses to black commerce. As a result, Roanoke made it through the most intense period of the civil rights movement without riots or any serious outbreaks of civil disobedience. A few blacks I spoke to suggested it might have been better -- the black community might now be in a stronger position — had riots taken place. But most appeared to regard the peaceful resolution of the problem as the way problems are taken care of in Roanoke.

The local regime was also beginning to move the delivery of services from downtown offices to inner city neighborhoods where they could be more directly accountable to residents. When I arrived in 1993, community policing had been recently instituted. While it mainly served public housing developments where crime was most severe, it had made some forays into other black neighborhoods and was generally in demand among inner city civic leaders. Some mental health and social services were also beginning to explore ways of being more attached to the neighborhoods where those they served lived. The most prominent of these efforts was the West End Center, a multi-service agency located in the West End neighborhood, a mixed race, low and moderate income community that was among the most unsettled and disorganized in the city. Led mainly by whites, it served a mix of black and white poor children with tutoring and recreation programs, similar to a boys and girls club. Although a formal organization in most respects and governed by a board comprised of leading citizens, it retained on a day-to-day basis an informal atmosphere lacking the clear status hierarchy common in other significant human service organizations in the city. Arguably because of this, it garnered the

goodwill of many black people in the neighborhood, who considered it trustworthy and committed. Interestingly, there appeared to be no other organization like it in Roanoke. So, it's value did not extend beyond the transitional West End neighborhood to the more solidly black inner city neighborhoods that lay to its north.

Although the oligarchy had its benevolent side, it also was wont to act aggressively to stem dissent when pressed or when it felt its control being threatened. Local coalitions, for example, posed a particular challenge because it was difficult to predict what a cobbled together, temporary group might do. As one local leader put it to me: "You've got to have somebody go to coalition meetings. You've got to make sure that they don't go out and screw around and go after fundraising that somebody else is going after." Keeping the peace by muting competition was a key role played by civic elites. So was diverting citizens' complaints from the political arena where the unwanted attentions of the media could raise uncomfortable questions about elite intentions. As we already saw, this was one of the chief reasons for the creation of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership. Needless, to say, preventing competition and keeping neighborhood issues from becoming politicized seemed to serve the interests of the local oligarchy at the expense of democracy.

The oligarchy's assertiveness was vividly displayed during the planning for the Enterprise Community. At one point in the proceedings, planners for the city unilaterally removed from one subcommittee's draft report a recommendation that the city adopt a ward system to have neighborhoods, particularly those in which most residents were African American, better represented in local electoral politics. The planners felt this provision would only rile the city council and city manager. But whatever their motives, their actions brought into question whether citizens were, as required by HUD, really leading the way in the planning process, or whether, as

some suspected, city officials and prominent civic leaders were the ones controlling what got into the plan and what did not.

Another incident during the Enterprise Community planning effort further demonstrated the hidden clout of the local elite. The city had hired a former municipal official and a private planning organization to facilitate the EC process. In the course of its deliberations, the subcommittee that produced the recommendation to establish a ward system also insisted on several related proposals which one way or another reflected its belief that municipal authorities in Roanoke were not trustworthy. At a meeting after these proposals had been developed, the facilitator got into the following heated exchange with several of the members:

> *Facilitator*: Nothing is coming out of this group that can be included in the plan.
>
> *Member A*: You make it sound like we're the bad guys because we have the audacity to question."
>
> *Member B*: Success does not come easily. The guts of this program is citizen trust and participation. To have sustainable communities, people must trust their governing officials.
>
> *Member C*: Any time city can have so many plans to destroy our neighborhood, you shouldn't wonder why the word trust comes in.
>
> *Facilitator*: I've not seen that we, citizens, will do something to foster the trust. You're going about this in a way that will scare the city off.

The exchange continued like this for several minutes more. It was clear that the facilitator, a white woman professional, was working hard to get the subcommittee, whose neighborhood members were almost exclusively black, to bring their views more into line with what she thought the ruling people in Roanoke would find

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acceptable.

This particular incident, while seemingly unique in the intensity of the emotions it evoked, essentially characterized all the meetings of the subcommittee. There was a constant struggle by the facilitators to moderate neighborhood members' strong views about city government. Although, in the end, compromises were reached, what was obvious but undiscussed was how the facilitators did not so much facilitate the subcommittee's deliberations, as represent the interests of parties not at the table, namely, the ruling oligarchy. There was nothing wrong with having those interests represented. The trouble was that the job of doing so seemed to fall, as if by habit, into the hands of the supposedly neutral party tasked with running meetings and drafting the plan.

A disputatious Enterprise Community planning subcommittee might seem to suggest that dissent was alive and well in Roanoke. In one sense it was. Citizens were free to express their views. The question was whether they would be heard if they did.

As it happened, the subcommittee in the above example appeared to have attracted among its small membership those few blacks willing to stand against the city's rulers. Other subcommittees, I was told, did not have debates about trusting city government or, if they did, the debates tended to end quickly. There were fewer inner city residents involved in these subcommittees, and those who did serve were apparently inclined to go along with the mainstream view. Most African American citizens who participated in the Enterprise Community planning process seemed, in their behavior if not their minds, to agree with this statement from a black male professional: "If you're willing to sit at the table and say, 'I'm willing to negotiate

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for change,' then come to the table with some degree of civility." That is to say, if blacks wanted to be heard, they had to honor the standard of civility, which meant, in truth, not expressing views that would be likely to alienate the ruling elite. In reality, civility was not just a norm of conduct but a substantive expectation of agreement.

The heavy weight accorded public decorum by most civilly active blacks was brought into sharp relief by the willingness of the one inner city neighborhood organization led mainly by whites to blatantly oppose the local power structure. This group, especially its leader, took pride in using strong, atypical measures (e.g., publicly threatening not to pay taxes) to force municipal officials to act in their behalf. "Many [neighborhood] people have noticed," the group's first newsletter announced, "the renewed effort by city work crews in trash cleanup and extra police units. See, it just goes to show that if you holler loud and hard that the city will do something."[268] Subsequent monthly newsletters usually found some way to celebrate the neighborhood's taste for *avant garde* action and independence from the city's rulers.[269]

For African Americans in the adjoining neighborhood, this group was viewed

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[268]West End News, Vol. 1, Issue 1, February 1992, p. 1.

[269]While this white-led group was a novelty among inner city neighborhood organizations, it seemed to be regarded by the local regime more as a nuisance than a serious challenge. Its aggressive tactics did not lead to any significant changes in public policy or in the city's level of investment in the West End neighborhood. An apt explanation for its inability to make a difference is suggested by Stone's notion that in a regime designed to produce rather than to control, "opposition is inconsequential unless it can be organized on a mass basis and transformed into an alternative capacity to govern." See. C.N. Stone, Regime Politics, p. 228.

as far too aggressive, with too little time in the community to be legitimate. It violated their well-worn sense of how to conduct civic business. While they were no less disturbed by municipal government, they preferred a less confrontational approach. It was what their own experience and values favored.

Managing Impressions

When power and influence are concentrated, as they are in an oligarchy, members of the ruling group must contend with the possibility of challenges to their ability to act from those outside their sphere. That was what, in essence, occurred with the subcommittee described above: it opposed the existing distribution of power. To hold control, leaders in oligarchic circumstances must work at maintaining their legitimacy. How they are perceived by the larger community whose support and acquiescence they require cannot always, or even much of the time, be taken for granted. They must make an effort to project and maintain a favorable public impression. If they do not, they are apt to lose credibility, making it easier for others to displace them. In an otherwise democratic system, power is always more vulnerable when it is concentrated.

In Roanoke, the exercise of impression management by those with influence took many forms. For example, there was a notable tendency to keep poor performance by important community organizations from being made public. The performance reviews that the community planning agency conducted of organizations funded by United Way were designed for the private consumption of each organization and the United Way. There was no intent to publicize the results. When I asked a leader involved in this effort to explain the approach, he responded: "We're much more likely to, instead of confronting someone publicly for doing a bad job, we would find someone on their board to go to. The point is not to

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embarrass them." In this kind of situation, the civility involved in keeping the lid on things can serve the useful purpose of preventing irresponsible disclosure of information from which the public is not likely to benefit (e.g.,an agency missed its tax filing deadline by two weeks) . Yet, it could do the opposite as well — keep concealed what should be made public (e.g., an agency prematurely terminating services to people in need in order to save money).

Efforts to keep organizational performance from damaging reputations appeared to be more important within the city's oligarchy than in the relationship between it and the inner city. A white banker, active in inner city revitalization, seemed to have a clear, albeit untroubled sense, of the double standard intrinsic in his *noblesse oblige*:

> "Anything you do...right or wrong, will be appreciated by [the black people in the inner city]. These people are not used to having anybody that cared. So whatever you do, you will be appreciated.
>
> You will fail, but they will appreciate that, too, because you tried."

While failure among elites elicited a significant investment in impression management, elites seemed to have little anxiety about either the prospect or reality of failing African American neighborhoods. The neighborhoods had no serious power over them, few ways to sanction them if and when their acts of charity faltered. In this sense, elites appeared to be saying to themselves and to the larger community that, in their efforts directed at the poor and minorities, what mattered most was not results but intentions. This, at least, was the impression they sought to establish.

Creating an impression of fairness and balance also appeared to be a common aim within the formal system. The United Way threatened to defund the local

branch of the YMCA because its board was not adequately representative of the community.[270] There was no evidence that the Y's board composition had impaired its ability to provide useful services and in a fair way. The issue was not one of service effectiveness but appearance and conforming to local norms. In another instance, the Inner City Athletic Association was contending with an effort by the municipal recreation authority to break up youth athletic teams every year so that particular teams would not be able to dominate over time. This commitment to enforced parity went against the grain of the ICAA's devotion to athletic excellence. In the words of an ICAA board member: "What they're doing is trying to please everybody, and they can't do it." Apparently, the city recreation department believed, to the contrary, that if it did not deliberately maintain balance among teams, its own legitimacy, and thus ability to govern, would be compromised.

Fairness, balance, and openness were part of Roanoke's general mythology about citizen participation. White leaders seemed inclined to exaggerate the nature and scope of the opportunities available to any citizen, black or white, to participate in the affairs of the city. "To the extent you have any interest in contributing whatsoever, there's always an opportunity," one of them said to me. "There's just a general ethic in town that we use our citizens to solve problems." Another went so far as to say that race relations in the city were "just very positive," mainly because the city had had an African American mayor for several years.[271] Successful runs at

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[270]United Way of Roanoke Valley, <u>YMCA of Roanoke Valley: United Way of Roanoke Valley Admission Study</u>, June 1993.

[271]There was some indication that having a black mayor did not noticeably change the objective conditions of the black community, but rather, simply made it harder for blacks to criticize the city. See Mary Bishop, "Black Movement...," <u>Roanoke Times and World News</u>, p.A1, August 1, 1992.

the All America City Awards sponsored by the National Civic League had given Roanoke an external reputation for broad and healthy citizen involvement. Community leaders used this validation by outside sources to buoy local opinion, providing further protection against any doubts that might be raised within the African-American community or among low-income Caucasians.

Black leaders tended to be somewhat more circumspect about citizen access and involvement, although they, too, often sang the praises of the progress the city had been able to achieve. A former African American official described for me how during the 1970s, relationships between city government and black neighborhoods had soured significantly because of missteps by the city:

> "Public officials weren't used to talking to citizens, and they didn't know how to do it. They were very accustomed to holding public meetings and public hearings, where someone would walk up to a mike and just lay everybody out...And all of that rhetoric was recorded. And people left those meetings with no more sense of what was really going to be done than when they came in."

He then went on to explain how the Neighborhood Partnership and the effort that led to its creation were initially met with skepticism by some in the black community:

> "So we had to create, along with the process, we had to create incentives where people could see immediate payoff for participation. And they came into the process of participation, not as victims or clients or objects, but as equal partners. That was a hard sell, because people had not been accustomed to that."

Although this leader conceded to me that the Partnership had met its share of bumps along the way, he believed that it represented a discernible improvement in citizen-

government relations. To him, the Partnership supplied what was lacking in the past: a strategy for responding to the desire of the neighborhoods, especially in the inner city, for empowerment. While other blacks, as I have said, were more inclined to see the partnership as barely a half-measure, their unwillingness to go public with their concerns enabled the Partnership, and the participation mythology of which it was a part, to stand essentially unchallenged.

Horns of a Dilemma

Oligarchy exists everywhere formal organizations do.[272] In this sense, it shapes the political world of big cities, as well as it does smaller ones like Roanoke. However, in larger urban areas, the oligarchy itself tends to be broader and less cohesive. More room exists for voices of dissent to find real opportunities to influence local decisions and obtain a measure of power themselves. In small cities such as Roanoke, the ruling group seems apt to be more limited in size, narrower, and more cohesive. Because here the ruling group represents a more united front, there is less opportunity for dissenters to gain traction in their struggles against it. As one elite figure pointed out to me: "When you're a small community, you have to work with each other. You can' just rear back and attack." The oligarchy's legitimacy in the small city gives it more control over whose opinions will be accorded value and whose will not. "If you have an idea, if you don't think the same way other people do, " a middle-aged black women complained to me, "then it's never accepted as just being different...It's received as an attack." Contrarian views become known more quickly in a small city, increasing the chances that power-

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[272] This is the essential insight of Michel's "iron law of oligarchy." R. Michel, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchic Tendencies of Modern Demoracy, (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1915/1949).

holders will nip them in the bud or channel them in more innocuous directions.

The ability of the ruling group to control debate and decision in Roanoke placed the inner city black neighborhoods on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, if they opted to fight, they would need to be prepared to persevere and risk losing something they valued. The consequences of bucking the mainstream were real. The ICAA, for example, appeared to have lost out on United Way funding because it choose to go its own way rather than consolidate with other youth recreation leagues in the community. A related fate befell the more strident element in Gainsboro. Having worn out its welcome in elite circles, its influence within the community waned.

On the other hand, if the neighborhoods or groups within them cooperated with the oligarchy, they were prone to being co-opted and possibly losing their sway among other blacks. Florine Thornhill of the NNEO suffered from this problem to some extent. One local observer who had talked with many residents in the inner city neighborhoods said that: "A lot of other people in the black community say she's [Mrs. Thornhill's] just, you know, she's been sort of pampered and treated like a queen. I'm sure a great number of people think she's done some good things in her neighborhood..., but the rest of the community, they don't buy it." The fact that there were no other inner city black residents with Mrs. Thornhill's access to and influence within the formal system only reinforced the impression that she was, at best, a person of divided loyalties. As philosopher Annette Baier notes: "Pathologies of trust occur where there is the will to monopolize and hang on to power, to keep the underdogs under, to prevent inferiors from advancing."[273] It was not unreasonable

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[273]Annette C. Baier, Moral Prejudices, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 147.

to perceive Ms. Thornhill's privileged position as an attempt by powerful elites to create an illusion of trust between themselves and the black inner city.

Concerns that neighborhood organizations had a difficult time being independent of Roanoke's authority structure were not isolated. A civically active white women living in one of the inner city neighborhoods complained that, as far as she was concerned: "The city government had co-opted the neighborhood organizations." In an adjacent neighborhood, an African American couple long active in the community described the Partnership as ineffective and unburdened by the needs and problems of the inner city. In Mrs. Thornhill's neighborhood, a black woman I interviewed explained that she had tried to contribute to the NNEO but had been rebuffed:

> "If somebody like me have ideas about my particular neighborhood,
> it's going to be a real problem, because they [NNEO] are already
> established. It's almost like any kind of idea, they come and we're
> overstepping them if you try to do anything. If we even go downtown
> or anything, we should of went through them first, because the people
> downtown know them."

As this comment suggests, a neighborhood organization like NNEO, as it becomes more formal, may also become more controlling.[274] The democratic

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[274]In his evaluation of Great Britain's Good Neighbour program, Abrams found that informal neighborhood groups were highly prone to co-optation by the style of local authorities: "Our...study...points to almost reckless enthusiasm among the...organizers of the vast majority of schemes to surrender their fragile projects to the superior managerial powers and resources of established statutory and voluntary agencies. The commonest and almost ubiquitous 'need' of the schemes reported to us by their organizers is for an injection of paid, professional management (131)." See Martin Bulmer, Neighbours.

character it has at its informal beginning is gradually replaced by a more oligarchic manner and spirit that make its connection to the neighborhood more artificial. This need not mean the organization becomes less effective. On the contrary, it may become more successful because it enjoys a greater ability than a more organic organization to attract resources from outside. But it also must work harder than its more informal counterpart to maintain legitimacy. As an oligarchy, it cannot simply assume that it is always acting on the basis of the will of the neighborhood.[275] It, like the ruling group to which it now owes a certain allegiance, must endeavor to manage the impressions others have of it. And sometimes, this may mean distorting or denying the truth.

Notice how in the following comment the successful neighborhood leader who made it to me was apparently unaware of the contradiction created by her desire to cast a favorable impression: "My members respect me and they love me and they tell me, 'You go ahead and find out what's good for us. We'll support you.' None of us try to be higher than anyone else." Possibly troubled at some level by the discontinuity between her growing authority and the democratic origins of her group, she sought to assert the value of both, as if by expressing each in the same statement their incompatibility could be overcome. Neighborhood organizations in Roanoke's inner city appeared prone to getting caught in this posture of gaining and losing at the same time if they chose to deal in any significant, sustained way with the city's oligarchy, and not quite knowing how to manage the resulting tensions without resort to ledgerdemain.

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[275]Crenson found that when a neighborhood invests its civic energy in a single, focal organization that organization is less likely to register residents' concerns accurately than in other neighborhoods were there are more diverse outlets for the expression of views. M.A. Crenson, <u>Neighborhood Politics</u>, p. 231.

In his treatise on communitarianism, Philip Selznick extols the benefits of civility:

> "To be civil is to be guided by the distinctive virtues of public life. These include, especially, moderation in pursuit of one's own interests, and concern for the common good. More particularly, civility signals the community's commitment to dialogue as the preferred means of social decisions."[276]

In one sense, it is hard to argue with the value that Selznick finds in civility. Indeed, civility appears so intrinsically good and right that to raise any kind of doubt about it seems foolish. But, as I have tried to show in this chapter, it is possible for a community to be "too civil," to use civility less as means to facilitate healthy public debate and action and more as a device for taking the passion and honesty out of civic life and enabling elites to maintain control.

Aristotle made the point millenia ago that, with few exceptions, people can have too much of a particular virtue, that excesses are often as bad as deficits.[277] Too much of the virtue of civility in Roanoke appeared to have habituated the black inner city neighborhoods to a modest role and modest expectations in community problem solving. Where once they had depended mainly on themselves and their strong ties with one another to make their neighborhoods decent places in which to live, they now were more dependent on the outside world and less confident in their indigenous capacity to meet the challenges of contemporary life. Civility kept them from feeling as strongly as they might have otherwise about their condition, and even

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[276]Philip Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth, p. 391.

[277]Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, 1104a10-b3.

when it did not temper their feelings, it seemed to undercut their motivation to act on what they felt. Respect for appropriate conduct in civic life held them at bay. Institutionalized civility succeeded in socializing black citizens in "the rules of appropriate behavior and .... the moral and intellectual virtues of the polity."[278] And the price they paid indirectly was the further lessening of the necessity of the informal, neighborly ways that had carried them for so long, through good times and bad.

However, the African-American community was not the only group to lose from the decline of informal ways. Roanoke as a whole seemed to be paying a cost. Indigenous work was the province of robust friendships. It arose from close, stable relations among residents. As informal problem solving lost ground to the ever increasing reach of the formal system, the best kind of friendship was giving way to more friendships based on utility and pleasure, to friendships that are, by definition, less sure. The one remaining example of abiding solidarity in the city was being displaced by ties of a more cosmopolitan sort. If good character depends, as Aristotle suggests, on having good friendships, then the changing landscape of friendships in Roanoke offered the specter of people being deprived of a crucial means by which they learn to be good and are sustained in that learning. In the move away from informal problem solving, one might say, without exaggeration, that nothing less than the morality of the city was at stake.

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[278]James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, <u>Rediscovering Institutions,</u> p.161.

Chapter VII
Informal and Formal Identities

When I first went to Roanoke in 1994, I expected to find a vibrant world of informal problem solving undergirding the civic activism of the black community. Roanoke's reputation for strong neighborhoods and citizen participation led me to believe that something approximating self-government might be as alive and well there as anywhere. As I have tried to show in the preceding three chapters, what I found disappointed that expectation, at least as far as Roanoke is concerned.

I encountered an African-American community in which informal action had, as far as I could determine, once been the dominant mode of problem solving, but was no longer. The cohesive and reliable social world needed to sustain indigenous action had noticeably weakened. Urban renewal and desegregation signaled the change; the aging of that part of the community with the strongest neighborhood ties furthered it; and then, into the gaps thereby created, the influence of professional problem solving continued to pour, taking up more and more of the space once occupied by informal work. Though it sensed the problem, there was little the African-American community felt compelled to do about it; the over-regard for civility in Roanoke worked against the formation of those habits of heart and mind needed to enable and manage dissent successfully.

The late sociologist James Coleman rued the loss in the 20th century of those informal community structures that make for reliable social relations. But he did not see that loss as retrievable and urged social science instead to turn its attentions to helping build formal institutions to take the place of the old, more natural order. In his *magnum opus* on social theory, Coleman wrote:

"Primordial social organization has depended on a vast supply of

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social capital, on a normative structure which enforced obligations, guaranteed trustworthiness, induced efforts on behalf of others and on behalf of the primordial corporate bodies themselves, and suppressed free riding. That social capital has been eroded, leaving many lacunae...The new social science is necessary, then.....as an aid in the reconstructive task of filling the voids created by the erosion of social capital and the mode of social organization it supported."[279]

Beginning in this chapter and concluding in the next, I want to explore this reconstructive idea, but with a different aim. My purpose will be to argue that the informal and formal worlds of community problem solving need each other. They are not as separable as Coleman implied, because they manifest fundamental, albeit different, aspects of the same human nature. The decline of cohesion in Roanoke's black community has not eliminated the desire for the goods which that cohesion supplied. The desire persists because it exists naturally. The institutions of formal problem solving cannot satisfy it adequately through their own powers, because its consummation depends on an intact and resilient informal order. What the informal order produces – value through close ties – cannot be generated satisfactorily in any other way, nor, arguably, can the democratic competence that appears to depend on it.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the different forms that human identity takes in the informal and formal spheres, how wholeness in life depends on reconciling the two, and the consequences of not obtaining that reconciliation. In the next chapter,

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[279] James S. Coleman, <u>Foundations of Social Theory</u>, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 651.

I use this analysis of identity to describe how one set of formal institutions, those of public administration, might be deployed to foster the conditions for the emergence of a new informal order. This is an order that would be better suited to the times in which we live than the old one but still able to awaken in us a good measure of the old order's spirit of enduring fellowship.

Psychological Predicates of Identity

A well-regarded school of psychological thought, self-determination theory, assumes that human beings have three basic needs: for autonomy, relatedness, and competence.[280] Autonomy arises from an individual believing that her actions are hers to cause. The more you internalize the regulation of your behavior, the more autonomous you can be said to be. Competence stems from believing that when you act, you are or will be effective. Relatedness concerns your perception of being accepted and supported by others who matter to you. These three needs, according to Ryan et al., "quite parsimoniously account for the nurture and growth of the human psyche."[281] Self-determination theory works particularly well as an explanation in Western culture. In the West, the greater freedom afforded individuals naturally produces tension between self and social needs. And it is this tension which is key to understanding the modern misalignment that has arisen between the formal and informal realms and that inspires the debate between liberalism and

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[280] See Richard M. Ryan, Kennon M. Sheldon, Tim Kasser, & Edward L. Deci, "All Goals are Not Created Equal: An Organismic Perspective on the Nature of Goals and Their Regulation," in The Psychology of Action: Linking Cognition and Motivation to Behavior, eds. Peter M. Gollwitzer & John A. Bargh, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), pp. 7-26.

[281]Ibid, p. 17.

communitarianism.

Needless to say, we are not born free in the psychological sense. Autonomy exists as a potential which must be elicited through development. Our first experiences are primarily of relatedness (i.e., the infant's attachment to his mother), and then of competence (e.g., the baby's delight when he is first able to pull himself up). Autonomy emerges as the child begins to experience himself as the cause of some of his actions (e.g., he recognizes he is the one doing the pulling) and as he gradually becomes conscious of himself as a whole being. In this developmental sense, autonomy is a growing away from the initial condition of the child as embedded in a small web of close relationships supplying all needs and upon which he is completely dependent. As autonomy develops, relatedness shifts from dependence to interdependence, to an acceptance of mutuality in dealings with other people.

Just as autonomy is not the starting point for human life, nor is it primeval to the human condition. In traditional societies, people live fundamentally as groups, not as autonomous individuals. Relatedness is their dominant condition from birth through the end of life. A person in a traditional culture never becomes autonomous, but instead, grows essentially into a full member of some pre-existing social aggregate, such as a clan or tribe. In the 1970s, the psychologist Julian Jaynes advanced the novel and controversial thesis that consciousness itself – a prerequisite for individuality and thus autonomy – did not even emerge until around 3,000 years ago in Mesopotamia.[282] One need not buy Jaynes' theory in its entirety to accept the basic truth that human beings' sense of themselves as autonomous, conscious

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[282]Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976).

individuals is something of a late development in the grand scheme of human social evolution. Human sociality came first and, one might argue, continues to have the more irreducible influence on our conduct. In other words, autonomy is an accomplishment both for our species and for any given individual within it at any particular time.

Autonomy means as much as it does to us because it is something achieved rather than given. From the time Augustine famously articulated the role of the individual mind in apprehending truth,[283] human society has striven, through one transformation or another, to make more room for autonomy against the forces that would limit it. The Protestant Reformation, the English Civil Wars, the American Revolution, the Sexual Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, the collapse of the Soviet empire, the democracy movement in China – the history of the past several hundred years is replete with attempts by men and women to break free from the received wisdom of tradition and convention to shape their own lives as they see fit. This is clearly the spirit that animated the pragmatist Dewey's fervor for a more vital democracy in the first half of the last century and that has spurred the work of contemporary proponents of radical democracy like Habermas. It represents a continuing quest not to be bound in a mindless existence to a social order not of one's own making – to push back against a predictable world in which the choices are foreordained.

But always, amidst the striving to be free, there is the underlying, primitive pull of relatedness. Social solidarity can be suffocating and parochial, but it also offers a reprieve from the indeterminacy that comes with autonomy. In a world of

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[283]Frederick Copleston, S.J, <u>History of Philosophy: Volume II - Augustine to Scotus</u>, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985), pp. 40-80.

autonomous individuals, behavior is less predictable and trust requires more work. Like a child who leaves the security of his mother's lap to explore the surrounding world and then returns to her warmth a few moments later in response to some newly felt anxiety, individuals in pursuit of autonomy repeatedly experience a need to return, as it were, to the fold, to a social space where they can feel secure and less differentiated from other people. And when this need is not being met naturally by the informal world of more intimate relations, people have shown great inventiveness in creating new forms of association in the hope of satisfying it. From self-help groups[284] to the temporary social set some gab with daily on the commuter train, individuals continually seek safe havens from a life of autonomous striving.

Yet, we know, at some level, that these invented solidarities, products of human competence, regardless of the good they may yield, do not quite compare to the real thing, to the taken-for-granted, primordial ties that once defined communal life and social roles. They are more transitory and less reliable. Because they require more deliberate effort to maintain, they are more vulnerable to failures of motivation and losses of self-confidence. In that, they differ only in degree, rather than kind, from the formal institutions and systems that have been erected in the name or spirit of advancing and protecting autonomy.

Thus, the worlds of informal and formal action converge but not happily. The informal becomes more dependent for its existence on the formal. Roanoke's black neighborhoods, once places of sustained ties and strong solidarity, become extensions of the formal work of the larger community and lose their inward

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[284]For a revealing look at the modern phenomenon of the proliferation of self-help groups, see Robert Wuthnow, Sharing the Journing: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community, (New York: The Free Press, 1994.)

competence. At the same time, the formal arena, in its urge to encompass all possibilities, senses the loss of solidarity in the community. It seeks to revitalize the sinews of fraternity through fabricated means, like the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, that are experienced as half measures and may even do harm. Under these circumstances, neither relatedness, nor autonomy, nor competence is apt to achieve mature expression. Relatedness weakens and, as it does, autonomy becomes less responsible. Competence is left, so to speak, "holding the bag," and struggles to find or create answers that will work. We can see more clearly the interdependency of autonomy, competence, and relatedness by taking a closer look at the forms that individual identity assumes in informal and formal problem solving.

The Need for Autonomy

Autonomy is about agency, that is, the extent to which and how individuals are the agents of their own being and actions. It speaks to who a person perceives himself to be, what makes that specific person who he is, and at what that person's life is aimed, since people establish their identities, not once and for all, but through time. In the informal order of the cohesive neighborhood, autonomy exists but appears shaped and constrained by the priority given relationships, history, and morality. In the formal arena, relationships, history, and morality are also influential but evidently in less exacting and more uncertain ways, so that individual autonomy has more room but also less direction.

How People See Themselves

The active members of Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods made it clear that they looked at themselves, as least historically, as embedded in a web of close ties with people like themselves. They were on intimate terms with others, both family

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and friend, an intimacy made possible by a shared history and a shared place in which most aspects of their lives had been conducted. Individual identities did not appear to blur by being so situated. Indeed, the very fact that identity took shape largely within the social and physical boundaries of the African-American community seemed to give it a special clarity. The roles and responsibilities individuals assumed helped to define who they were for others and gave their behavior a predictability it might not otherwise have obtained. To be predictable was not regarded so much as a forfeiting of autonomy as it was a harmonizing with others to get the deeds of the day done. It was, in essence, a productive quality.[285] In being predictable, longstanding neighborhood members seemed to be saying, "I want those around me to be able to count on me."

Under circumstances of cohesive informality, constancy is a virtue, even a necessity.[286] It is one thing to act badly. A bad action can be forgiven or tolerated, if done by people known in the community for being wayward. As Wendell Berry notes: "[A genuine community] knows that some of its members are untrustworthy,

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[285]Conventionally, conditions that induce predictable behavior have been thought of as a form of social control. I follow political scientist Clarence Stone in seeing it as a form of social production, as what it takes to get things done. See Clarence N. Stone, Regime Politics, pp. 8-9.

[286]Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre sees constancy as something of a lost virtue in modern morality. Referring to the writings of 18th century English author Jane Austen, MacIntyre argues that: "constancy requires a recognition of a particular kind of threat to the integrity of the personality in the peculiarly modern social world...charm is the characteristically modern quality which those who lack or simulate the virtues use to get by in the situations of characteristically modern social life." See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 242.

and it can be tolerant, because to know in this matter is to be safe."[287] But it is another matter to act erratically. For normally responsible members to act irresponsibly upsets the order on which successful informality is based.

For example, the Christian black community in Roanoke for many years accepted, without much fuss, the street within it devoted to the "fast life." Henry Street was a *mecca* for entertainment, from gambling and drugs to jazz and movies. Indeed, many older, church-going people to whom I spoke regretted its downfall in the wake of urban renewal. They saw Henry Street's demise as a sign of lost vitality in general. But while a known, "bad" place like Henry Street could be treated with forebearance, there seemed to be far less tolerance for individuals who acted out of character or violated norms of the specific group to which they belonged. A city official who had spent a good deal of time in Roanoke's black neighborhoods said that ostracism could be deep and long for those who acted contrary to expectation. "They don't give you an opportunity," he said, "to prove yourself again."

In the cohesive community, immorality can be accommodated when predictable and confined, but not when it arises suddenly and autonomously. Amidst the intricate and delicate complexity of well-established identities in the close quarters of a confined community, deviation is a poison apt to provoke the antidote of aggressive disapproval and even social expulsion.

People see themselves differently in formal problem solving. Professional identity or its equivalent takes precedence. Professional problem solvers perceive their value as entailed mainly in the skills they are assumed to possess. Even relationships can be a kind of possession, an instrumental means through which one

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[287]Wendell Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community, p. 161.

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is able to make things happen. The more skillfully one uses relationships, the more credit one earns. Close and thorough ties are possible in this domain but rare and unsteady. When sustained intimacy exists, it does so against the grain of the social milieu in which formal action usually takes place.   Strong ties – or, more specifically, the emotional bonds they express – tend to be seen as dangerous to the objectivity that is supposed to govern formal work. Professional problem solvers are expected to be skilled and impartial, leaving intimacy to the recesses of their private lives.

In the absence of strong ties, the formal world can make but limited demands on its participants. Professionals only give parts of themselves for the simple reason that they can. In a very real sense, their identity can be seen as one of withholding. Inducements (e.g., money, prestige, access) become necessary to get them to give more, but as a rule they never seem to give close to all they have.

The withholding nature of the formal problem solving role makes the autonomy of which it is capable more fulsome than that possible in indigenous problem solving. The individual functioning in the formal domain has more control over his or her identity, or more precisely, more decisions to make over what that identity will be. Because these can be choices with profound consequences for who one is or becomes, individuals in formal problem solving are often careful not to overcommit, to keep their options open. Constancy, an essential virtue in the informal domain, becomes not just elusive, but perhaps even undesirable in the formal world. It gets in the way of the flexibility the professional needs to navigate amidst the unpredictable flow of community problem solving. In a sense, greater adaptiveness is obtained at the price of less integrity. An African-American pastor's critical comment about elected officials could probably be applied as well to many

other actors in the formal arena: "I don't think you can be honest and be a good politician." To function effectively, all formal actors have to be, to some extent, politicians.

Because formal problem solving allows people to withhold significant parts of their identities, it tends to tolerate a wider variety of identities and more ambiguous identities than informal action. There is a flux to identity formation in the formal domain that makes it more open and less sure. Members have access to more ideas in shaping and filling out their own identities, and this leads to greater experimentation with who individuals are trying to be. Individual creativity and excellence are more likely here, in contrast with sustained informal problem solving where innovation can, for the most part, only occur if willed by the group.[288]

At the same time, however, the combined force of partial identities and individual striving make the formal sphere a difficult social space in which to coordinate action. Enormous effort goes into trying to keep individual and shifting identities aligned in order to get things done. The solidarity of informal action, such as that carried out, for example, by Roanoke's Inner City Athletic Association, is a chimera to professionalized problem solving, which must continually struggle to produce common action from the efforts of diverse individuals.

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[288]Individuals in informal problem solving situations may act creatively, but usually only under conditions of relatively low solidarity. The white activist in Roanoke's West End, who I described at the end of Chapter Four, did many innovative things to root out the drug traffic in his neighborhood, but more as a lone agent than as a builder or reinforcer of neighborly capability. One could logically predict that his innovations would end when he did.

What Makes a Person Who He Is

The struggle to produce coordinated action is, of course, why formal structures and deliberate routines proliferate within the professional domain. Informal order exists within this domain, but as a reaction to the limited capacity of formality to meet human needs. Within the formal arena, informal relations are residual rather than primary, and because they are, informality always appears to formal problem solving as a sign of its own inadequacy. In response, formal arrangements are constantly being adjusted, if not always successfully, to bring what is informal under formal regulation – to make the inadequate adequate. This is clear both within formal organizations as well as in the overall orientation of formal systems of community problem solving toward the informal world of neighborhood work.

Since these formal systems are ever-changing structures because of the complex interactions of their many members, they provide a weak basis for the development of the continuity on which individual identity depends. To be sure, members can and do identify with the formal organizations to which they belong. But not only do these identities tend to be partial (or as Selznick might say, segmented), as I've already argued, they also tend to be uncertain, because they depend on organizational schemes that are themselves unsure. Institutions, such as professional norms and public laws, obviously help to make this shaky reality more predictable than it would be otherwise. Yet, it remains in people's experience an intrinsically unreliable state of affairs, because it can change without them being able

realistically to do much, if anything, about it.[289] Under these conditions, individual problem solvers feel a greater burden to define themselves, to look inward for sources of identity, since the outer world cannot be counted on as much as a "stay and support." Identity arises from individual histories that, more often than not, remain largely unknown to others, a product of personal rather than shared memory.

In indigenous problem solving, individuals find their identities to a large extent in their common history. People who spend long years sharing most aspects of their lives develop identities that fit together. The active black citizens I met in Roanoke spoke mostly in historical terms, even when I asked them questions that did not call for an historical answer. Whether old or middle aged, they tended to see themselves as individuals situated within a larger, informal context in which their identities reached back in time. They came from a certain block or a certain neighborhood or were members of a particular church. Such social connections were the stuff of their identity. Even if they had left Roanoke at some point to make their way in the larger world, when they returned they entered a social situation in which who they saw themselves to be appeared to take more direction from their historical roots there than what they had done in the time they were gone.[290] Their identities

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[289]A. O. Hirschman observes that members have three primary responses to organizational conditions they perceive as undesirable. They can either leave, voice their concerns, or hunker down and try to ignore the problem. None of these actions is especially empowering. See A.O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[290]I interviewed two black women who had left Roanoke as young adults to pursue professional careers elsewhere and had returned, in one case upon retirement and in the other because she wanted a slower paced lifestyle. Despite trying, I could get neither of them to talk much about their experiences outside of Roanoke. They kept coming back to the time before they left and the time since they returned.

were set in a community of memory, and that memory – a memory of other people, ties, things done together – appeared to constitute a large part of what made their lives meaningful.

At What Identity Aims

While the dedicated occupants of the indigenous order may pursue selfish interests, they are inclined to see their individual good as inseparable from the collective good of their social circle. This necessarily restricts the range of the problems they are willing and able to tackle. Only what has salience collectively can become a proper object of their joint action and commitment.

Consider the contrary example of Florine Thornhill of the Northwest Neighborhood Environmental Organization. When she decided to build new housing in her neighborhood, she did so with the acquiescence of her members, but it would be a stretch to say she had their heartfelt investment. In leaving the work to her, they seemed to be saying, by implication, that they saw their collective good as residing among themselves, not in the more abstract and uncertain terms of bringing new blood into the neighborhood. They could accept her reasoning, but they could not sincerely place themselves in the problem as much more than bystanders.

Perhaps if they had a common memory of building homes in the historical black community things would have been different. A shared past in the practice of coaching youth was, after all, what bonded the members of the Inner City Athletic Association to each other. There was no reason why other practices could not serve a similar unifying and motivating purpose. But they had to be practices with a history, in which members could place themselves or their families as credible participants. As Alasdair MacIntyre notes: "To enter into a practice is to enter into

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a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice."[291] A practice is not a practice unless it extends back in time and provides narrative continuity to the life experiences that occur within it. There appeared to be too few practices of this kind still at work in Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods, serving as the means by which situations get identified as problems and then addressed.

The formal realm essentially experiences no limit on the problems it might consider tackling, for the simple reason that it is guided by a more expansive but less coherent view of what constitutes the common good. Participants of informal action tend to take on only those problems with which they have had abiding experience. But professional problem solvers are not so confined by collective experience. They function in an arena which values their autonomy and rewards their individual success. This does not give them licence to go after any problem they want, but it does make the system of which they are a part ambitious and forward-looking, willing to sally forth into territories unchartered or where the requisites of efficacy are elusive. As a result, the problem solving agenda of formal action becomes increasingly variegated and complex. A professional may be able to build a personal problem solving history of some continuity and perhaps even success, at least in terms of the impressions she creates. Yet, because the agenda to which she contributes lacks stable coherence, the true value of her contributions is hard to ascertain. There is the ever present risk that what one did before may not count for much now because the agenda has shifted or evolved. Under these conditions, a deliberate strategy of staying the course in response to a problem or in extending a practice is more likely than not to go unrewarded. Strivers in the formal realm will

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[291] <u>After Virtue</u>, p, 194.

usually be better off moving on, seeking out new opportunities to be relevant and significant and reinforcing the willingness of the community to credit symbolic accomplishments when tangible ones are hard to come by.[292]

In the domain of indigenous action, by contrast, people's contributions are mainly embodied in their shared histories. Achievements tend to be direct extensions of prior experience, and because of that, small and observable to those involved. Informal problem solving is inherently conservative in the true sense of the term. It's conserving nature makes for a social world which coheres more tightly and countenances less risk. Consequently, indigenous actors construe the future and the possibilities for action in relatively narrow terms. This tends to be among their sharpest differences with the formal system.

It is their attitude toward the future that especially advantages professionals in community problem solving. In a dynamic world where change is relatively constant, those who look upon the future with anticipation will always appear more relevant, readier to cope with what may come, more vital. Informal problem solvers, especially if they are motivated by eschatological beliefs, as black citizens seemed to be Roanoke, approach the future with less ebullience and more doubt. They, like their professional counterparts, want life to be better. But better means the

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[292]The processes of attainment in a community function much like a vortex, the force of which it is difficult for actors within the formal system to resist. Lower level members find it useful to imitate higher level members. If higher status actors change, then others will tend to follow suit. This is in one sense at least how the formal problem solving system actually works like a system. See David Strang and Sarah A. Soule, "Diffusion in Organizations and Social Movements," in Annual Review of Sociology, eds. J. Hagan & K.S. Cook, Vol. 24, (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 1998), p. 275.

preservation of the more intact social world they know or the re-creation of the one they knew, not its evolution in new, unknown directions. Faith-based neighborhood problem solvers generally try to live in the here and now, to act out their creed in present time, to love and care within the interstices of the relationships they know, not the ones that might develop. True, African-Americans in Roanoke hoped for a future free of racial discrimination. But many were ambivalent about the price this achievement seemed to cost them in lost cohesion and moral disorder.

Friedrich Nietzche insisted that, since the time of Copernicus, human beings have been moving away from a centered, bounded existence towards an unknown, amorphous future.[293] The work of indigenous problem solving runs counter to this tendency. It seeks to hold on against the forces that would pull it apart, to resist the "rolling away" that Nietzche described. Rather than building up individual talent as in the formal realm, the informal order concentrates on safeguarding the moral capital of abiding relationships. Its explicit hope is to store this capital for future generations, not in conscious opposition to individual autonomy but as its necessary complement.

Black neighborhoods in Roanoke's inner city did not stand in the away of individuals wanting to advance themselves. Indeed, they routinely celebrated the successes of their outstanding performers. Yet, they did this essentially as an expression of solidarity. The community wanted its individual members to succeed in the terms of the larger society, but it also wanted them to remain within the compass of the old order – to be individuals, not in some free floating sense, but as

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[293]Friedrich Nietzche, The Will to Power, Volume I, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 7.

continuing members in good standing of the group from which they had come. To the active black citizens of inner city Roanoke, individuality appeared meaningless without strong roots in the soil of longstanding ties.

<u>The Need for Relatedness</u>

While relatedness is a basic human need and prior to autonomy in the order of human development, the form it takes varies. A healthy structure of interaction among persons nurtures and supports the continuing maturation of those involved. An unhealthy structure fosters insecurity and stymies personal growth. Although individuals can, to a large degree, control the pursuit of autonomy, the direction in which the structure of interactions among persons evolves is less manipulable. While individuals can change how their needs for relatedness get met, this is far more easily done by associating with different people than by trying to alter existing relationships. Once established, relationships have an inertial force that makes intentional change difficult.

Many factors influence the direction that the structure of interaction among persons takes. When the purpose of relating extends beyond relating itself, as in community problem solving, the structure is affected by how authority and power arise and are used to prompt and guide action; by expectations about the qualities of personality or character that individuals should manifest as they relate to each another in action; and by the criteria participants use to differentiate good or right actions from bad or wrong ones. In and of itself, the need for autonomy has no moral implications. It is only when it becomes juxtaposed with the need for relatedness, that morality comes into play as a crucial determinant of human identity.

Authority and Power

In the early 1990s, I helped to launch the Points of Light Foundation, the private sector effort inspired by then President Bush to promote volunteerism in the United States. Toward the end of its first year, to raise public awareness, the foundation orchestrated a two-week long event, in cities around the country, celebrating the work of community service volunteers. The kick-off for the event was a press conference at a hotel in Washington, DC. In addition to the usual luminaries, a young woman from a program in Boston called City Year spoke at the press gathering. City Year involves young adults, across races, in a year of full-time community service. This woman talked about how, for most of her teen years, she had been deeply troubled and depressed. She had attempted suicide and had been in and out of treatment institutions. Then, one day, she noticed an announcement on a bulletin board at her high school that City Year was seeking volunteers. She decided to enroll. She soon discovered that spending her time helping others in the community, rather than dwelling on herself, was the best therapy she could have. She described at the press briefing how her own problems and needs faded in importance as her relationships with other City Year volunteers and people in the community continued and deepened. She became less self-absorbed and more other-directed.

This young woman's experience, although manifested under the auspices of a formal organization, seems to typify the kind of informal collective action that used to occur regularly in Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods. Where strong, informal ties are allowed to form, the ties themselves become the focal point of individual initiative. Studies of volunteers in organizations show that the affiliative benefits of relating to other volunteers is what often draws volunteers to the role and keeps them

there.[294] Volunteer affiliations tend to be less emotionally demanding than family relations and, yet, less depersonalizing than professional work. Both the family and professional work may pressure individuals to focus on themselves. The family can do this by asking too much, so that individual members feel their right to themselves is being compromised. Professional work can do it by making individuals focus on their own performance if they want to succeed. By contrast, informal social relations in the community free individuals from having to dwell so much on themselves and their own needs.

It is because informal ties give priority to the development and maintenance of the ties themselves that they tend to be governed by what Mary Parker Follett termed the "authority of the situation."[295] People who are closely interconnected and used to one another, as in indigenous problem solving, do not feel a need to vest authority – the right to act – in a person or upper echelon, but act collectively on the basis of what they perceive the situation requires. When the Inner City Athletic Association was formed in Roanoke, it was not an individual leader who made it happen, but a group of men from the community who together decided something needed to be done to provide a constructive alternative for teenage boys in the inner city. Years before when the volunteer ambulance service was created to serve black Roanoke, there was no "hero" battling the lack of motivation of others to bring the service into being. Instead, the idea for it arose out of the interactions of people who knew one another, lived in close proximity in the same communal space, and were

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[294]Joan L. Pearce, <u>Volunteers: The Organizational Behavior of Unpaid Workers</u>, p. 79.

[295]Mary Parker Follett, "The Giving of Orders," in <u>Classics of Public Administration</u>, eds. J.M Shafritz & A.C. Hyde, (Oak Park, IL: Moore Publishing Company, 1978), p. 33.

able jointly to perceive a common need and how it could be met.

In informal problem solving, expertise resides in the relationships binding the participants. An individual is deemed an expert when, in his field, he is able to readily understand the problems it addresses and generate appropriate solutions. The function of expertise is similar in the world of informal social action, with one important difference: the expertise cannot be possessed individually but exists only in association. While some individuals may be better than others at grasping the requisites of a situation, when the indigenous domain is operating well this capability can only be properly exercised by a cohesive, local group. Drawing upon its common historical experience, the group decides what counts as a problem and arrives at a relevant solution. Individuals who interpret situations on their own may be quite incisive in identifying problems and solutions, but their actions upset the organic order of the informal setting. And thus, their efforts neither reinforce nor add to collective capacity. The community may sometimes be better off in a material sense because of these individual contributions, but the authority of expertise entailed in social relations will have been weakened as a result. When an individual decides what the "law of the situation" is, he takes authority from these relations and appropriates it to himself, transforming it into a different sort of capability. Every individual act of this kind is an act of individual will, an exercise of power, that places the individual, and his needs, in tension with the shared will and needs of the group to which he supposedly belongs.

No modern informal setting is ever completely free of this tension. It is, of course, far more pronounced in the formal system, but it affects all social arrangements were people come together. While some informal groups are more organic than others, none are so fully socialized that individuals and their needs and

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desires do not exist. In Roanoke, the African-American community, even in its more intact past, did not subsume all individuality to collective will. Preachers certainly stood out as special persons carrying authority that did not reside in their ties with others. They held and exercised that authority as individuals. When people complained to me about black pastors who, in more recent times, attended to their congregations but eschewed involvement in the neighborhoods where their churches were located, they seemed, at least in part, to be acknowledging the intrinsic authority of the clerical role. Preachers did not need to be legitimized by their participation in embedded social relations to exercise individual authority within the community. Legitimacy came automatically with their position.

Black residents appeared to feel the same way about the police, although this was evidently a more recent development. The police were the one external authority that active black citizens welcomed into their neighborhoods as a way to control what they no longer could: the threat to order posed by the unruly and criminal. They invited this outside authority in, but in doing so they were tacitly admitting the loss of the authority they once held themselves to regulate conduct effectively in their community through strong, informal ties.

Informal, shared authority declines when its participants perceive problems they cannot solve. So long as problems fall within the ken of the indigenous group, the group is able to maintain itself. Common norms are adhered to, behavior is predictable, and authority can remain the possession of the group. When a problem comes into view for which group members do not see themselves as prepared, the group's usefulness, and thus integrity, are no longer assured. This seemed to be the case, for example, in Mrs. Thornhill's neighborhood. It had no official organization until 1980. Prior to that, the neighborhood dealt with its challenges informally. Only

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when it became evident to key residents that the problems were outstripping the capacity of the informal system to solve them, did the neighborhood seek to organize itself differently. The informal authority shared by all was replaced by an arrangement in which authority became largely the province of one person, Mrs. Thornhill. It was she who seemed to articulate best the threats to the neighborhood and how to act against them, and who appeared willing to give significant time to the effort.

Mrs. Thornhill used her personal power, her ability to have an effect on others, to legitimize herself as the voice of the neighborhood.[296] Authority came to rest with her, and no longer resided with the neighborhood collectively as it had when things were taken care of informally. Once authority was individualized in this way, a more formal way of operating became necessary. In the absence of collective efficacy based on the old informal order, the neighborhood would have to organize formally to have an impact on conditions within it. Its starting point for this transformation was to turn to someone, Florine Thornhill, willing to take charge and chart a course through the unknown territory of novel problems. The resulting formal organization, however, would ever after be subject to the instability that affects all structures in which authority and power are concentrated.

In informal problem solving, authority and power are undifferentiated. Authority, the right to act, and power, the ability to act, exist as one in the same

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[296]It is worth noting that Mrs. Thornhill justified her authority as not only being granted to her by her neighbors, but also as a function of her obedience to God. "The only way you can succeed in life," she said, "is to believe that someone's greater than you that can guide you through life and tell you what to do." Good Christian that she was, she sought to exercise her authority based on what she believed to be God's will.

social phenomenon. The ability subsumes the right, and the right subsumes the ability. Thwart one, and the other falls, too. When the residents of Mrs. Thornhill's neighborhood realized that the social problems plaguing the community had grown beyond their competence (i.e., their ability to act), they ceded their authority to her. As professional problem solving acquired more and more authority in Roanoke, inner city neighborhoods lost much of the power they historically had to affect their own circumstances.

Efforts by neighborhood members to exercise power without authority, or for the purpose of acquiring authority, disrupt the informal order. When the white activist in the West End neighborhood went to battle against local drug dealers, he was unable to get much done informally. He had to organize formally. And even then, while his endeavors demonstrated a certain power or effectiveness, they were viewed with suspicion by many responsible black residents. Partly, blacks distrusted him because he was white. But partly, as well, it was because he acted as an individual, outside the sanction of enduring neighborhood groups and their normative order.

Dewey argued that insecurity, such as that created by local drug dealing, would prompt people to use their intelligence to search for solutions. The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, a contemporary and critic of Dewey's, countered that insecurity would lead people to want power first.[297] We see each of these consequents – the simultaneous pursuit of both intelligence (and the authority it bestows on its possessor) and power – in the work of the West End activist. But the outcome was

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[297]On the debate between Dewey and Niebuhr, see John Patrick Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority, (University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 280-291.

an unstable combination, situated as it was in his network of relatively weak rather than strong ties. He was not known well by many people in the neighborhood, and because he was not known, he could not be trusted. Without trust, the authority of intelligence appears dangerous to those subject to it (i.e., the informal order), and when coupled with a quest for power, even more so.

Character

The most obvious virtue of informal action is trust or, more exactly, trustworthiness. Trust, explains philosopher Annette Baier, is "the pleasant feeling that others are with us in our endeavors, that they will help and not hinder us." Distrust, she goes onto say, is "the unpleasant anxious feeling that others may be plotting our downfall or simply that their intentions are inscrutable."[298] In the setting of informal problem solving, the actors know each other, know what to expect from one another, and can therefore afford to count each other as trustworthy. As suggested earlier, if someone in a cohesive, enduring group acts contrary to expectation, the trust others had in that person is apt to decline or evaporate. Trust holds the informal order together. Distrust weakens it and may even destroy it, as Kai Erikson's exposition of the Buffalo Creek coal mine disaster showed.

Knowledge of others is what produces trust and trustworthiness. The kind of knowledge involved cannot be obtained except over time in the same place. In the informal world, relationships solidify and deepen with the passage of time. Relaters have histories containing both common events and private experiences that become known and shared with close others. To demonstrate knowledge of these histories

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[298] Annette C. Baier, <u>Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics</u>, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 131.

is an important aspect of character for those who occupy this domain. Ignorance of them signals that one is insufficiently familiar with the lives of others to be able to act toward them reliably. If a person willfully sought to avoid knowing about others' lives – as, for example, might be the case with a recluse – that person could not be trusted and would likely be ostracized by the informal order (thus, only deepening his reclusiveness).

In the indigenous context, knowledge and the trust that accompanies it make more of one's life available for inspection. People are more exposed than in formal settings where delimited roles (or segmented identities) hide large parts of the self from others' scrutiny. Because participants in informal problem solving are more exposed, they are more vulnerable. With more of their lives known, they run the risk that others, prompted by bad motives, will use this knowledge to harm them in some way. At the same time, however, vulnerability also means informal problem solvers are susceptible of influence, open to learning from new situations and to the words and sentiments that others use.[299] Vulnerability of this more positive sort helps to build the mutuality of informal relations, a dissolving of separate selves to the extent necessary to create a common good.

Vulnerability appears to be the root from which arise other distinguishing virtues of indigenous actors. In my interviews and observations of active members of Roanoke's inner city neighborhoods, I witnessed, or heard people talk about others in terms of, kindness, empathy, forbearance, fairness, honesty, piety,

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[299]The notion of vulnerability as a positive attribute is discussed by Martha Nussbaum in her essay on Henry James' book *The Ambassadors*. She suggests that to perceive particular circumstances accurately depends on a degree of vulnerability. See Martha C. Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature, (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 180.

conscientiousness, and similar qualities normally associated with healthy moral character. While these virtues were not shared equally by everyone, they were, arguably, evident enough, and certainly subscribed to enough, to count as the intrinsic moral tendencies of cohesive informality. They were common because of the willingness of individuals doing informal work to be affected by their neighbors and friends, especially those who were older or more experienced.   The original coaches of the Inner City Athletic Association passed on to a younger generation of coaches not only their knowledge of coaching but also their moral habits. Vulnerability made it possible for members of the informal order to learn, and to keep learning, from life's unfolding experience how to be friends to one another.

To be open to influence is the essence of childhood. As we become adults, our openness naturally declines. What we learn through experience narrows the kinds of influences to which we will succumb. The arena of formal problem solving goes further, however. It teaches individuals to want to be invulnerable, not susceptible to influence. In a competitive environment that rewards the pursuit of personal excellence, individuals are encouraged to believe they can control their own fate, at least in part, by attempting to ward off others from controlling them. Concealing motives and thoughts, rather than sharing them in an expression of vulnerability, provides self-protection against the potentially unscrupulous behavior of others we do not know well enough to trust fully.[300] Formal settings do value knowledge of others and trust but only up to the point where participants' sense of invulnerability is threatened. In Roanoke, many formal problem solvers envied the trust that existed

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[300]The ways in which members of formal organizations conceal what they are thinking but not saying has been a favorite topic of organizational scholar Chris Argyris. See for example Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, Organizational Learning II, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1996).

among indigenous actors. Professionals sought to foster something like that trust by establishing more open, personal relationships with neighborhood members. But their success was modest because they were unwilling, for the most part, to go so far as to share their own lives with the people they felt they were trying hard to help.[301] They could not let go of the self-protective behaviors that fundamentally shaped their existence as formal problem solvers.[302]

Within stable informal settings, the blank openness of childhood evolves into the mature vulnerability of adulthood. Informal actors are less afraid to reveal themselves, to make more of their lives known, because they are not competing as much for personal achievement. A more robust kind of morality is able to take root and develop in a setting where people do not fear one another, where equality governs social relations, where the willingness to be influenced is a habit learned in childhood and extended into adulthood. By contrast, in formal settings, a basic urge to protect oneself provides poorer soil for the rooting of communal virtues. Such virtues can and do exist, but they are likely to be inconstant, reflected in occasional acts of goodness rather than steady habits. And other attributes, like cleverness, that enable individuals to be successful, are apt to be more common than in strong informal settings. These factors are what make formal settings more morally

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[301]It should be noted that because professional problem solvers did not make their lives an open book, they could not enter into the kind of close relationships that lead to the development of shared competence.

[302]Survey research shows that informal groups are associated with higher levels of trust, while formal structure does not contribute to the formation of trust. Further, trust is lower in heterogeneous groups, such as those typical of professional work, than in homogenous groups, such as informal neighborhood associations. See Robert Wuthnow, "The Foundations of Trust," Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Affairs, July 7, 1998, p. 3.

complex and variable.

Informal actors like Mrs. Thornhill, who seek to function well in both realms, face the dilemma of trying to reconcile the different moral requirements of each. It is difficult to do and still maintain one's integrity. It is hard, for example, to be trustworthy and clever at the same time. Conceivably, it is possible to be vulnerable and trustworthy in the informal realm and self-protective and clever in the formal, and not have one moral orientation affect the other. But the result would be a schizophrenic existence, with the distinct possibility that one is unable to belong fully, and thus feel at home, in either place.[303]

Right vs. Wrong

Another way of looking at the difficulty a person has functioning well in both informal and formal problem solving is that moral behavior is more apt to be determined by character and situation in informal settings and by calculation in formal settings. For cohesive informal groups, each situation in which action occurs bears a strong resemblance to situations experienced before. Informal participants are perceived to act the way they do because of the kind of persons they are known to be. A novel situation or someone's uncharacteristic behavior changes the group's reality and makes it more unsure of itself. In the formal world, reality is taken as more variegated and unpredictable to begin with. Character still counts, but not as

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[303]Being caught between the informal and formal orders seems to me to be a special case of what Pamela Popielarz and J. Miller McPherson refer to as occupying the uncomfortable boundary between distinct social niches representing different forms of voluntary association. See Pamela A. Popielarz and J. Miller McPherson, "On the Edge or In Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 101, No. 3, November 1995, pp. 698-720.

much. Amidst greater and more frequent change, it becomes harder to discern the virtues called for in any particular situation. Since formal problem solvers expose only limited parts of who they are to one another, who a person is makes less of a difference to others than how and what one decides.

Consequently, the informal order, owing to the limited range of the situations it countenances, is a place of clearer rights and wrongs. It may be, as it was among Roanoke's inner city blacks, a Biblically informed order. Invoking the Bible's views of right and wrong in day-to-day activity imbues social life with a lucid and familiar moral orientation. One need not refer to any specific Biblical proscription or command, but simply to the "good book" in general or to Jesus or to God to make its full moral weight felt in action. Morality anchored in a rich, coherent, historical source plays a more profound and constant role in shaping behavior than one based on abstract rules.[304]

In the formal realm, the distinction between right and wrong tends to be less obvious more often. What situations demand morally is not always clear and may sometimes be rather obscure. In seeking to do what is effective or useful, a formal problem solver may cut moral corners or employ an ends-justify-the-means logic. The rules that every formal organization invents are an attempt to establish a normative order where it has not naturally arisen to the extent necessary to keep behavior within acceptable limits. Because it is an invented order, it lacks the depth and durability of the morality of the informal order. The informal order may fall away because the larger environment no longer favors it. But so long as it exists, its moral code remains intact and strongly determines behavior. The formal order, on

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[304]Selznick, The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community, p. 197.

the other hand, is necessitated by changes in the larger environment, yet produces a thinner and less constant morality. It persists as a form of social organization somewhat alien – at least compared to the intact informal group – to those whose behavior it affects.

The Need for Competence

If the need for relatedness is primordial and the need for autonomy evolutionary, then the need for competence might appropriately be thought of as the bridge between them, and in that sense, partaking of the essential nature of each. The need to perceive oneself as capable applies both to one's relationships and to one's individual strivings. And when there is a conflict between social and personal demands (e.g., should I go the ball game with my friends or train for the marathon I'm running in a month?), competence affords the mechanism through which a resolution is attempted. The need for competence existed with the first human being and has evolved along with the emergence of people as autonomous individuals. Unlike the needs for relatedness and autonomy, which a person can have too much of, the need for competence has not limits.

In a basic sense, the need for competence functions the same in formal and informal settings. Whereas the need for relatedness seems stronger in the informal realm and the need for autonomy stronger in the formal arena, the need for competence appears essentially the same in both settings. Where the settings differ is, of course, in the types or content of competence they demand or encourage. The informal domain privileges competence associated with relationships. The formal domain favors competence that abets individual success. The distinction is not absolute, however. The informal setting not only depends on the skills of individuals, it is, today, penetrated enough by the norms of the professional world to

accommodate ego-motivated striving for skilled performance. The formal setting not only must get work done by coordinating individual efforts, it often seeks to create a stronger culture of relatedness aimed at interpersonal ties that moderate autonomous striving.

Does this mean the content of competence needs is converging between the two settings? Not necessarily, but it does represent a hopeful sign or at least the possibility that, by deliberate effort, the informal and formal domains could evolve toward having enough in common to collaborate genuinely in strengthening communities. This, indeed, is the premise of my final chapter. Here I want to elaborate on the different competencies of the two settings. Three ideas structure this discussion. First, competence tends to be more habitual in informal than formal problem solving settings. Second, competence tends to be more visible and demonstrative in formal than informal settings. And third, competence in both settings is socially situated, that is, learned from others, and, similarly, always has others as its object in some sense.

Habitual Competence

At this point, I want to draw upon pragmatism in a more forthright way to help explain the different tendencies of informal and formal settings for community problem solving. In the second and third chapters, I invoked Dewey's thought as possibly providing a more serviceable handle than other perspectives on understanding the place of informal action in developing democratic capability. Since those chapters, Dewey has appeared only occasionally, and I have relied upon him sparingly in the earlier sections of the present chapter. I have done so mainly because, to my way of thinking, his most pertinent ideas for this study bear on the issue of competence. While Dewey did not have explicitly in mind the threefold

framework of self-determination theory that I have used here, he recognized the tension between the needs for autonomy and relatedness and believed that evolving individual and social competencies would enable people to manage it effectively.

Dewey broke with the psychological mainstream of his day in his definition of human habits. The essence of habit is not mere repetition, he claimed, but "an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response."[305] In this sense, habits may be routine, but they may also be intelligent. Dewey saw the mechanism of habit underlying much of human behavior. "We need," he said,

> "a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity."[306]

Habits are the grooves into which thought and behavior continue to evolve through a persons's interactions with his environment. A person matures, not *per se* by doing away with habits, but rather, by acquiring through learning an expanding variety of habits that, as Dewey's put it, increase "susceptibility, sensitiveness, responsiveness."[307]

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[305] John Dewey, "Habits and Will," in <u>John Dewey's Philosophy</u>, ed. Joseph Ratner, (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 736.

[306] Ibid, pp. 734-735.

[307] John Dewey, <u>Experience and Nature</u>, (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p. 281.

Dewey's way of talking about habits resonates with Hans-Georg Gadamer's equally unusual appropriation of the concept of prejudice. Gadamer, a twentieth century German philosopher, argued that prejudices "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience."[308] They are the judgments we make "before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined."[309] Just as habits may be good or bad, Gadamer thought of prejudices as being either blind or enabling.[310] Prejudices are the habits of thought that form our initial apprehension of whatever we encounter.

Dewey construed habits primarily in biological terms, as the human organism's response to environmental stimuli. Gadamer took a more sociological approach, seeing prejudice as the way in which the traditions into which we are born help to define who we are. Dewey's formulation revealed the mechanism by which action and thought become predisposed. Gadamer situated this mechanism historically, suggesting that habits, at least of thought, are often inherited. Both perspectives are useful in understanding how competence arises and functions differently in informal and formal settings.

The competence entailed in informal action is essentially habitual because it is acquired without one's fully intending its acquisition, and it is employed the

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[308]Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Philosophical Hermeneutics</u>, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), p. 9.

[309]Hans-Georg Gadamer, <u>Truth and Method</u>, (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 240.

[310]Ibid, p. 247. Also see the discussion of this point in Richard J. Bernstein, <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Practice</u>, pp. 128-129.

same way. Indigenous competence occurs mainly as a byproduct of being around other people and engaging in activities with them. Through participation that is both intensive and extensive, one gradually learns the ropes of the informal setting, of how to relate to its other participants. There is a didactic component to this, of course. More experienced members, shaped by their own collective history (Gadamer's traditions), show less experienced ones how they're supposed to behave. But this teaching occurs in the normal course of experience; it is opportunistic rather than planned. Because learning to be competent in informal action occurs accretively, it is more conducive to the formation of habits. Further, the resulting habits are evoked situationally without one having to think twice. The older woman I described in chapter six, who called her network of intimate friends daily, did so out of unreflective habit. Church-going blacks who parted on the phone or after meeting on the street with expressions of love for each other did so customarily.

I proposed earlier that informal expertise resides in the relationships among members of the informal group, rather than being possessed individually. While the habits through which this expertise is manifested do exist within individuals, such habits have little value or life apart from the group (other than as objects of contemplation perhaps). Association activates them, for they are the competencies of association. They are the competent habits involved in understanding and speaking the local idiom, assimilating the local moral code, remaining in the neighborhood rather than leaving, knowing the life stories of one's neighbors, going to church and prayer meetings, being respectful of elders, organizing efforts for the good of the neighborhood or its subpopulations (e.g., children), and the many other ways people in the same place achieve a cooperative order.

This capacity to cultivate the habits of association is what makes informal

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settings important to democracy. In the healthy informal order, members are not equal in all respects, but they regard each another as equals fundamentally. Some may be smarter, richer, better looking than others, but when it comes to the needs of the neighborhood or group, differences largely fall away, to be replaced by a commonality of purpose and ability. Planting flowers and shrubs in the neighborhood park requires no special skills; all can participate and share together in the social benefits thereby obtained. The participating and sharing are the competencies that matter. Such competencies – competencies that cannot be owned by individuals – supply the foundation of democracy. They ground status in habitual other-regarding behavior, not in demographic categories or symbols of personal attainment.

The formal arena does not rule out associative habits. Indeed, it could not function at all without its participants being predisposed to cooperate with one another. But the habits of association here are not as robust as they are in healthy informal settings, for the simple reason that they must compete with other habits in the daily activity of the professional problem solver. Although Dewey expected the individual to acquire a growing system of habits through time, he did not adequately account for the possibility that a person might accumulate habitual behaviors that were not each of equal influence in shaping conduct. A person's social situation could play a significant role in eliciting some habits more than others. In the formal setting, where the historical competition for status, resources, and the like makes the individual more important, habits obtained to advance individual interests impede the activation of associative habits. A lawyer sits at his desk all day preparing a *pro bono* brief, due the next morning, on the siting of a supermarket in an inner city neighborhood, unaware of the fact that his secretary nearby is mourning over the recent break-up with her boyfriend. A wealthy civic leader gladly accepts having a

new recreation center for local youth named after her. A boss has to decide whether to fire a low performing employee to protect the boss's reputation. In these and seemingly countless other ways, a community's formal problem solving system, the result of its own accretive process, encourages habits that are disassociative.

For any given individual in the professional domain, the composite of associative and disassociative habits may lean toward the associative. But it also may not. Conceivably, with an increasing variety of habits, the composite becomes more complex and, hence, less predictable. In two similar situations occurring at different times, an individual formal actor may act habitually one way one time and a different way the next. More likely, habits fall into patterns around particular relationships. One set of people brings out an individual's associative habits (e.g., coworkers), while another set evokes the disassociative ones (e.g., superiors). Thus, we have a further explanation for why the virtue of constancy has a more difficult time getting established within formal settings.

Demonstrative Competence

It would be wrong to suggest that the individually oriented habits of the formal system do not entail competence. Many formal problem solvers are quite competent at advancing their individual interests. Morally and socially, however, those who are too obviously self-interested attract disapproval. To be habitually competent in a self-regarding way is not the principal kind of competence overtly favored by the professional arena.

The formal problem solving system of a community calls upon its participants to be competent in abstract forms of knowing and the rational application of that knowledge. Expertise obtained formally through training and

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work is perceived to provide the systematic capacity to solve the community's complex problems. It is regarded as more objective than the particular knowledge of particular people and places valued in informal settings, and consequently, more able to look at the community's situation impartially and dispassionately.

Formal expertise provides the path both to economic rewards and to a positive reputation. If a person wants to get paid for the work she does, that work must, most of the time, champion rationality. Activities that stress moral obligations and community ties over know-how are not as likely to warrant remuneration.[311] Even when professionals function as problem solving volunteers, they typically do so by trading on their expertise.

The value attached to formal know-how is high enough that many people invest considerable energy in trying to create the impression they are competent, whether or not they are. Most professionals quickly learn that it will be to their advantage to demonstrate, symbolically if not in fact, that they belong to the league of the competent. Because many forms of professional competence are difficult to judge, a great deal of importance attaches to projecting a publicly acceptable image.

Dewey saved some of his most passionate rhetoric for his confidence in the scientific mindset to manage life's ever changing problems:

> "Because intelligence is *critical method* [emphasis added] applied to
> goods of belief, appreciation, and control, so as to construct freer and

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[311]This is the key insight of Bonalyn J. Nelsen's and Stephen R. Barley's study of paid vs. volunteer emergency medical technicians. See B.J. Nelsen & S.R.Barley, "For Love or Money? Commodification and the Construction of an Occupational Mandate," <u>Administrative Science Quarterly</u>, Vol. 42, No. 4, December 1997, pp. 619-653.

more secure goods, turning assent and assertion into free communication of shareable meanings, turning feeling into ordered and liberal sense, turning reaction into response, it is the reasonable object of our deepest faith and loyalty, the stay and support of all reasonable hopes.[312]

Dewey worried about expertise becoming powerful in its own right, but he perhaps did not clearly enough see the extent to which formal competence would be too insecure, in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world, to rely on "critical method" alone as the basis for its claim to a singularly legitimate voice.

He underappreciated how variable intelligence could be, both across individuals and through time for any given individual. The uncertainty of its results would make practitioners wary of being held strictly accountable. All professional problem solvers would benefit from a social system that grants them power without being overly demanding in its expectations of performance. Dramaturgy would pick up where competence leaves off.[313] Put simply, intelligence could be used, not just in solving problems, but in orchestrating the community's perceptions of professionals' work whether problems are actually being solved or not.

There is no doubt that communities are visibly contending with this dilemma today. United Way's effort while I was in Roanoke to begin measuring the outcomes

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[312]John Dewey, <u>Experience and Nature</u>, (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 437.

[313]Habermas suggests that in dramaturgic action participants attempt mutually to regulate how one another is perceived. This view draws on the social interaction perspective of George Herbert Mead, Dewey's pragmatist contemporary, but employs that perspective more for purposes of critique than pragmatism was originally wont to do. See J. Habermas, <u>The Theory of Communicative Action</u>, p. 85-86.

of organizations it funds is part of a broader movement – although never quite articulated this way – to make formal problem solvers more accountable. It is an attempt to penetrate the layers of dramaturgic defense that have arisen around the formal system and get a more precise reading of its effects. Since the movement is young, it is too soon to tell whether it will succeed, or whether, if and when it starts sharply questioning the value of professional activities, professionals will simply become more sophisticated in their acts of self-protection. There is some evidence that the latter may already be occurring.

The push for outcomes accountability has emerged at the same time that communities are being encouraged by many professional problem solvers to engage in comprehensive transformations. The premise of the comprehensive approach is the defensible one that so many problems in communities are interrelated. The difficulty is that just because problems are interrelated doesndoes not mean they can be solved in an integrated way. Formal competence has had limited success solving problems narrowly defined. Why should it have more success tackling them comprehensively? Success cannot categorically be ruled out, of course. It is just that defining their agenda more broadly provides formal problem solvers with more opportunity to conceal the ways in which they may be ineffective. Comprehensiveness lets them focus the community's always limited attention on where they appear to be making a difference in the short-run and away from where they may be or are failing. Outcomes accountability and comprehensiveness do not fundamentally moderate professionals' need to manage how they are perceived.

Socially Situated Competence

In common usage, we think of problem solving competence as something an individual has. Even when we deal with competence that is social in nature, we tend

to understand someone as either knowing or not the right thing to do in situations with other people. We do not accord enough weight to the reality that competence itself is a social product – that its emergence and application are socially determined.

In the case of informal settings, the social orientation of competence is obvious enough. Indigenous problem solving entails competencies that are, first and foremost, relational. A community garden depends on one or more residents knowing how to plant and nurture, but that know-how comes into being only through relationships. The relationships come first, giving the know-how its purpose and determining the manner in which it will be applied. Know-how that is not subordinate to the relationships threatens them; it creates the possibility that the garden can be established, or some other local problem solved, by a lone individual and thus lose its status as a communal product.

The competencies of informal problem solving are embedded in the relationships among the actors involved. The relationships bring these competencies into being and serve as the principal venue for their expression. While individuals may take what they learn informally and apply it elsewhere in their lives, this abstracted form of competence represents something weaker, less reliable. Dewey observes that "in the abstract, there is something lacking which should be recovered."[314] The separation of informal competencies from their home setting deprives them of their concrete object: the familiar faces of friends, neighbors, and family members.

Consider, for example, the coaches of the Inner City Athletic Association. They have created among themselves an implied compact about the moral rules they

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[314]Dewey, Experience and Nature, p. 162.

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want the young people in their charge to observe. These rules are as much a reflection of what the coaches expect from one another as they are a framework of moral instruction for child athletes. An ICAA coach carries this set of moral competencies with him wherever he goes, but he faces greater uncertainty about realizing them when he steps outside his informal world. The people he deals with there are not the other ICAA coaches with whom he has a compact built and elaborated over time through common experience. They are people he is not likely to have known as long and as well. For him to achieve the depth of moral unity with them that he has with his ICAA colleagues, he will need to form close relationships that are continuous and enduring. The odds of this happening are small, since the time he devotes to his ICAA relationships is time unavailable to other relationships, and even if he has time, he is emotionally equipped to handle only a limited number of close ties anyway. Richard Rorty puts the point with characteristic irony: "Our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as 'one of us,' where us means something smaller and more local than the human race."[315]

In other words, the ICAA coach, or for that matter any indigenous problem solver with longevity, has a hard time being as socially competent outside the informal setting as he is inside. The people with whom he has grown close over time are, in a real sense, an integral part of his competence. He knows how to act when he is among them, and is less sure when he is not. The difference may for some persons be small, but it is nonetheless a difference.

For the formal problem solver, competence is commonly perceived as

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[315]Richard Rorty, <u>Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity</u>, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989). P. 191.

independent of particular relationships. It is, rather, seen as portable, as something an actor carries with her as she moves within the formal system. This perception makes the competencies involved in formal problem solving appear more robust and versatile. And in a sense, they in fact are. A person who writes well, for example, can apply that skill in many different ways under many different circumstances.

But just like the informal actor, the formal problem solver's competence is not fully engaged, is not completed in its execution, without other people as its object. The talented writer needs other people as her audience. Even when that writer says she is writing for herself, her perspective comes not from some isolated, perfectly individualized place in her psyche, but from a place which has been socially shaped – that is, shaped by her relationships through time with other people. Their cacaphony of voices speak through her words. So, when she says she writes for herself, she is actually writing for them, or more precisely, for the parts of them that have made their way into her own outlook. Her participation in formal community problem solving brings these social connections out even more completely. For then, to be well-regarded, her writing must explicitly take into account the views and orientations of the other formal problem solvers with whom she is engaged.

Though her competence is social in its origins and aims, it typically does not embed as deeply in her relationships with others as competence does in informal settings. There are at least two reasons for this. One is that a cultural bias in favor of individual achievement encourages her and others to regard her competence as something individually held. The rewards go to her for doing well, but she also becomes liable when her performance is poor. Even though her use of her competence depends, directly or indirectly, on the help of others, she is still held

individually accountable. This leads to well-known difficulties within formal organizations in efforts to induce their members to act effectively. The other reason is that every other formal actor is governed by these same rules and norms. While they cooperate with one another most of the time, they tend not to count on each other as much as indigenous actors do. Relationships among formal problems solvers are more fluid and evanescent.

Despite the fact that competence in formal settings is thoroughly social, its relational foundations are weak. This spells uncertainty in the application of competence. Uncertainty is not altogether bad. It motivates people to be creative in pursuit of more reliable and effective ways to get things done. But creativity cannot, it would seem, overcome the tenuousness of relationships in the formal domain. There is something inherently incomplete about the mustering of competence in formal problem solving, as if one can never be competent enough. Relationships elicit competence and fulfill its promise in informal settings, but they leave it unsure of its direction in the formal world. Martin Luther said that people, in their natural state, could never have enough security. The quest for competence seems to be a search for that security today in a setting where only limited security can be found in relationships.

Informal problem solving works, when it does, because its competence is synonymous, essentially, with the relationships that exist among informal participants. It falters when problems arise that fall outside the reach of these relationships. When large numbers of people in a neighborhood are out of work, there is not likely to be much the informal problem solving system of that neighborhood can do to get these people jobs. The burden shifts to the formal problem solving system of the community, which has a richer variety of

competencies to call upon and a wider network of relationships through which to connect people with employment. But the relationships tend to be weaker than those among informal problem solvers, and thus, the affected individuals, while they may get jobs, are not apt to form the kind of ties that will make those jobs secure.

This scenario leads to an important question, a question that will take us into the next and final chapter: is there a way to extend the competence of informal problem solving so that it can, in the spirit of the formal system, affect a wider range of the challenges that confront people where they live today? And a second question follows from the first: can extending informal competence be done without undermining the strong ties that enable informal problem solving to exist at all? If both of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, a more vibrant, evolving form of democracy may yet have a chance in our political culture.

Chapter VIII
Paradoxical Solutions

A robust informal order in a free society makes for good people and good citizens. It helps individuals develop a healthy identity. It teaches people how to care about and listen to one another – not perfecting these tendencies necessarily, but surely making them better than they would be otherwise. Perhaps more than any other human domain, the informal order defines life socially, as a shared project of equals. Lacking the insistent intimacy of the family and the enforced hierarchy of formal organization, it holds people together more voluntarily through friendship, familiarity, history, and collective competence.

We live in a time when this neighborly life appears to be in a state of retreat, at least if my observations in Roanoke are any indication. Informal life persists, of course. Indeed, it always will. But it lacks the salience for us that it once had. We can now give it less without suffering the opprobrium of our neighbors. Or we can give it more. The point is that as a self-conscious choice, as something we can individually opt in or out of, it becomes less sure. And like all things of value that become uncertain, its maintenance requires constant attention. When something necessitates vigilance, its costs to us become more obvious and, when obvious, more potentially burdensome and, hence, more subject to deliberate avoidance.

The decline of the informal order in communities means the decline of one of the main ways in which democratic capability develops. Political theorist Jean Cohen suggests that "only associations of equals" may be able to "develop the

communicative competence and interactive abilities important to democracy."[316] Although some formal organizations at times approximate equality, oligarchy is by far the more normal and constant condition within the formal system.[317] While prodding and pushing the system toward more democratic behavior is desirable, it is unlikely ever to achieve the leveling that Cohen seems to have in mind. Relatively enduring associations of equals appear only possible informally, where relationships and their maintenance take priority over the exercise of power or the pursuit of money. In other words, formal problem solving can never, it would seem, be the equal of informal problem solving as a cultivator of basic democratic habits.

This, then, leaves us with the question that has been the pragmatic preoccupation of the present study, of how to re-energize the informal order, for democratic ends, in an age which appears more unfriendly or indifferent to it. The answer I'm going to suggest in this final chapter revolves around the idea of allowing the development of expertise within the informal domain – not just any kind of expertise, but expertise rooted in practices that are distinctly and strongly social. It is the sort of expertise displayed by coaches in Roanoke's Inner City Athletic Association, or by neighborhood members when they watch out for one another's children without being asked. Informal action needs to regain competence along these lines. It needs to reclaim some of the problem solving space it has ceded to the formal system through the growing reach of the administrative state. Neighbors need

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[316]J. L. Cohen, American Civil Society Talk, (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, July 1998), p.4.

[317] See David Krackhardt, "Constraints on the Interactive Organization as an Ideal Type," in The Post-Bureaucratic Organization: New Perspectives on Organizational Change, eds. C. Heckscher and A. Donnellon, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p 215.

to rediscover their ability to shape their life together in a more complete and resolute way. But there is a limit, I will argue, to what we can do to achieve this communitarian objective by design. More can probably be accomplished by redrawing the boundaries of the formal system, of which government is the centerpiece, to create room for informal action to redevelop.

These boundaries will not change properly as an act of mere retrenchment, however. Pulling in the lines of the formal system simply to reduce its scope will be fervently, and to some extent, rightly resisted by those who stand to lose. The arbitrary nature of many efforts to cut-back the size of government in recent years has shown the self-limiting effects of such a strategy.

An arguably more productive approach would to be to make a deeper commitment to effective formal practice. Formal problem solving should evolve toward a standard of excellence that rules out the mobilization of large-scale resources behind forms of action of unsubstantiated value. Simply stated, the formal system should tackle only those problems it has the real capacity to resolve or substantially alleviate.[318] It should try to avoid or take only a modest, exploratory role in problems in which it lacks the know-how to achieve a demonstrable difference. Into the gap thereby created, informal problem solving would have opportunities to reassert itself, and in relation to a formal system with enhanced legitimacy.

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[318]Public administration theorist Dwight Waldo averred that "to the extent...our social science is inadequate, we simply, literally, don't know how to do some of the things we are trying to do through public administration (43)." Dwight Waldo, The Enterprise of Public Administration, (Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp, 1980).

The primary role in making such a reform happen belongs to public administration. It is, first and foremost, the main engine of the formal problem solving system in communities. It does not always drive the action. Elected officials, business people, and civic leaders more often assume that role. But public administration is the means through which most of the choices of the formal system are executed. In Roanoke, as elsewhere, public administrators hold important power. They can use this power to either perpetuate the current imbalance in which indigenous efforts struggle to survive or pave the way to new opportunity for the informal domain. Public administration bears important responsibility in our society for assimilating and reflecting the larger public interest. Were the change I'm proposing to occur, it would have to be done in the public interest, and thus, public administration would have to be the chief agent of that interest.

In the next section, I elaborate on the importance of expertise in our culture and how the force this represents needs to be used for the good of local informal work, rather than rejected or resisted. In the section that follows, my attention turns to how we might, as a society, go about enabling the formal system to become more effective, and through greater effectiveness, more credible. This involves three aims: having a clearer idea of what effectiveness means; developing the capability within public administration to replicate what has been shown to be effective in solving social problems; and remaining alive, in replicated programs and strategies, to the need for informed adaptation in the face of changing realities.

In the penultimate section, I discuss what strikes me as the main alternative to my approach to promoting democratic citizenship: the current effort to make the public sector more entrepreneurial. The "new public management" or "reinvention movement," as this effort is alternatively called, assumes that democracy is

strengthened when government becomes more business-like. I try to show that, while the focus on public sector performance is commendable, there is little in this movement, as presently designed, that will enhance democratic capabilities.

I end with a short exploration of neighborhood practices. I offer a tentative answer to the question: if the formal system were to become more effective in a narrower way, how might we anticipate competence developing in the informal order? My answer, more conceptual than practical, outlines a method for thinking about the possibilities. Among these, interestingly enough, is a positive, if modest, role for public administration in encouraging indigenous capabilities.

The Necessity of Expertise

A rising tide of expertise characterizes the present age. Culture, in just about all ways imaginable, pushes everyone to become expert in at least something. Schooling, almost from beginning to end, aims at preparing individuals for productive work in the economy. Both secondary schools and colleges and universities divide the realm of expertise into increasingly finer segments, each representing an ostensible career path. The news and entertainment media tend to characterize persons, first and foremost, by the particular work they do. The adults in most families spend large, concentrated parts of each weekday (and often weekends) plying the expertise for which they get paid. Children observe this coming and going, growing to realize rather soon in their lives that this will be their lot, too.

In the country's agrarian past, the ways to earn a living took relatively few forms. Today, the choices are numerous and growing all the time as so called "knowledge work" has come to dominate the economy. "The basic economic resource...is no longer capital, nor natural resources..., nor labor," says commentator

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Peter Drucker. "It is and will be knowledge."[319] While human beings can apply their physical abilities in only so many ways, the application of knowledge is virtually limitless because knowledge itself is limitless. There is always something more that can be known and potentially converted into remunerative work. When people were strongly rooted in their communities, their identities depended less on the particular kinds of expertise they had. But as the pull of community has slackened, expertise has become a more important – indeed, it is probably the most important – source of identity.

Living life for one's expertise is not, as I have emphasized in discussing professional work earlier, an unmixed good, of course. People pursuing their vocations too easily lose the deeper connection with others that they need for a wholesome existence. The power that comes with expertise can be, and often is, abused. And yet, the specialization and commodification of work has something of the inexorable about it. It is the way in which each person finds a niche in an increasingly crowded society and world. It is how the evolving body of human knowledge gets the chance to become useful.

Being expert at something is what people more and more come to expect of themselves, regardless of the setting – be it formal or informal – in which they happen to be. They want to make, or at least want to be perceived as making, a skilled effort or contribution. In neighborhood work, this is what seems increasingly to draw out people on a sustainable basis, to make them willing to devote the time and energy necessary. Social norms of help-giving, such as were operative in Roanoke's African-American community in the past, no longer appear to be

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[319]Peter F. Drucker, Post-Capitalist Society, (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993), p. 8.

sufficient. Individuals must perceive that they will, with a fairly high degree of reliability, succeed in making a difference.[320] In this sense, expertise is more than the "publicly verifiable method" by which pragmatists might define it.[321] It must also be efficacious, if not in fact, than at least in perception.

Today, the community is often, in communitarian thinking, pitted against expertise. Experts are seen as those who want to tell the community how to act. Professional planners in Roanoke ruled over the residents of inner city neighborhoods. The community of supposed non-experts responds, or is encouraged to respond, by attempting to control the experts, as we saw, for example, in HUD's expectations that enterprise community planning would be "resident-driven." Or, alternatively, experts are taught or nudged to be more accommodating of or like the community. Either way, the solution is one that deals only with the surface reality of unequal power. There is no fundamental alteration of the fact that the experts claim to have problem-solving know-how and the indigenous, economically insecure community can make no similar claim in most cases, a truth Florine Thornhill seemed to recognize by routinely drawing upon expertise from outside her neighborhood. The community may be experientially closer to its own problems than the experts are, but "experience" in and of itself, as organization sociologist

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[320] A.O. Hirschman observes that people in modern times tend to expect too much or too little from their civic involvements and are therefore easily disappointed. I'm suggesting here that involvement based more on expertise or competence may be more sustainable. It depends less on the enthusiasm to do good, which is often blind to the reality that making a difference takes time and effort. See A.O. Hirschman, Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action, pp. 92-120.

[321]James Campbell, The Community Reconstructs: The Meaning of Pragmatic Social Thought, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 52.

James March reminds us, "is often a poor teacher."[322] Complex human situations are difficult to get a handle on simply by living in or through them. Disciplined observation and reflection are required. The experts may not do this especially well all the time, and they may also tend to exaggerate their abilities, but claiming to act thus, usually gives them the advantage in legitimacy in the information age.

If the indigenous community is to fare better in this contest, it cannot rely alone on the moral power of its own plight. In a culture ever more driven by the expectation of expertise, neighborhoods need expertise of their own if they are not going to continue to be overrun by the juggernaut of the formal system. Wendell Berry seems to have something along these lines in mind when he says: "When a community fails, so must fall all the things that only community life can engender and protect: the care of the old, the care and education of children, family life, neighborly work, the handing down of memory, the care of the earth." Rebuilding the capabilities of neighborhoods to meet more of these needs seems indispensable to their self-preservation and to the sustenance of informal life and the goods that life can provide.

Let me hasten to add that such rebuilding will not be achieved easily given the vast social forces currently arrayed against it, from the unending quest for economic security that turns neighborhoods into mere bedroom communities to the rampant fear of crime that seals people in their homes. Nor will it, in all likelihood, ever reproduce exactly the kind of primordial informal problem solving that once prevailed in Roanoke and places like it. This will inevitably be a somewhat more contrived pursuit necessitating deliberate, and thus not always dependable, effort

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[322]James G. March, The Pursuit of Organizational Intelligence, p. 195.

from neighborhood members.

But if the requisite sorts of indigenous expertise can be allowed to arise (e.g., Berry's list above), they are apt to carry their own momentum. In them, people will rediscover, in a sense, the value of social cooperation. They will find the greater equipoise that comes from having more of their life less subject to the relentless pressures to achieve individual success that rule the arena of formal organizations. Informal problem solving will be, as it always has been, more transparent and honest about its social origins, purposes, and manner of execution. That is its appeal. That is why the current path we are on that weakens social ties and informal work need not be, so to speak, the last word.

Formal Effectiveness

The Meaning of Expertise

What makes a person an expert? Though having a credential demonstrates that someone has achieved a measure of expertise, it communicates little about how that person functions in practice. The following definition provides a clearer and richer sense of what real expertise looks like. It is also a definition that seems to fit with common sense:

"1. Experts are capable of perceiving larger patterns of meaningful information in their domain that novices cannot perceive.

 2. They are fast at processing and at the deployment of different skills required for problem solving.

 3. They have superior short-term and long-term memory for materials related to their domain of expertise.

 4. They typically represent problems in their domain at deeper, more

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principled levels.

5. They spend more time assessing the problem prior to solving it."[323]

Obviously, time, experience, natural ability, and effort influence the level of expertise one attains. But context matters, too. A context which encourages expertise defined in these ways will, everything else equal, normally be the scene of better solutions to problems than one which does not.

The formal problem solving system in communities has an uncertain relationship with expertise. Although it claims to apply expertise to problems, the performance of the expertise it actually musters varies, and much more than a little. Partly, this stems from the fact that the knowledge which different types of professionals are able to bring to bear varies in its reliability. The five-part description of expertise above comes from studies of medical practice. Medicine draws upon relatively firm knowledge based in biological science. The knowledge undergirding other domains of professional practice, which tend to be more prevalent than medicine in community problem solving, often isn't as sure. For example, social workers trying to help troubled youth or abusive families must depend more on art than science. Yet, while the depth and extent of knowledge may vary across disciplines, the taste for it seems to vary even more.

The professionals most involved in trying to solve Roanoke's community problems appeared, as a group, to be more concerned about holding power and

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[323]Vimla L. Patel, Jose F. Arocha, and David R. Kaufman, "Expertise and Tacit Knowledge in Medicine," in <u>Tacit Knowledge in Professional Practice</u>, eds. R.J. Sternberg & J.A. Horvath, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), p. 81.

projecting an image of efficacy than about actually being effective.   At the least, they expressed no doubts in public about the adequacy of their knowledge to tackle the problems before the community.   While many of them surely felt the need to know more and to be more up-to-date in their professional practice, there was little public value attached to that need. It seemed more important to them to appear good at what they do, to maintain the myth of their effectiveness. To openly admit the limits of their knowledge would, they likely feared, diminish their influence. But, of course, only by so admitting would they have reason to aggressively pursue better know-how.

To be sure, many, perhaps most, community problems lack clear solutions. Nor even when a problem appears solved is it apt to stay that way; circumstances change, necessitating new solutions. But in the face of the difficulty and complexity of community problems, the responsible stance is to not hide behind or overstate one's claim to professional capability. Nor is it to regard all such problems as essentially political and thus adequately "solved" through the exercise of power alone. The responsible stance is to be guided by the best knowledge available. This – a commitment to excellence – is what seemed missing from the general orientation of formal problem solvers in Roanoke. Wendell Berry only slightly exaggerates when he says: "Professional standards, the standards of ambition and selfishness, are always sliding downward toward expense, ostentation, and mediocrity."[324] Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Roanoke's community professionals on the whole seemed content with performance that did not reach much beyond the mediocre. So long as the main sources of influence in the community did not demand more, this was a safe harbor for formal problem solvers.

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[324]Wendell Berry, <u>What Are People For?</u>, p. 90.

The Meaning of Effectiveness

I am not claiming absolute objectivity for the knowledge that can be, but often isn't, applied to community problems. All knowledge falls short of complete objectivity, because it is constructed by fallible human beings. But the important thing, in seeking the good of the community, is to strive for objectivity, to go with that knowledge which has emerged as the best that rigorous methods can produce. This is where community problem solving in Roanoke fell short, and it is where public action often appears to falter today. Rather than finding out what's fully known about a problem and the possible solutions to it, communities typically either invent their own answers, fall for fads, have an answer imposed on them by higher authority, or stick with answers they have inherited from the past. Around these responses they build structures and settle into routines that become difficult, sometimes impossible, to dislodge in the face of evidence that some other approach may or will work better. Indeed, frequently they remain unaware, even deliberately so, that such evidence exists. An example may help to demonstrate how this conservative dynamic works.

During the past twenty years, home visiting by trained workers has re-emerged as a way to help young families learn how to care for their children. For a good part of the 20th century, until the 1960s, friendly visitors and visiting nurses were used in many parts of the country to bring needed services and care to isolated or needy families.[325] The practice fell out of favor as welfare provision expanded and social services became more rationalized. To control costs and assure that people

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[325]K. Chavingy & M. Korske, "Public Health Nursing in Crisis," <u>Nursing Outlook</u>, 31: 312-316, 1983.

receiving public aid were treated fairly and uniformly, service delivery became more office-based and bureaucratic. However, in the early 1980s as concerns about the effectiveness of social provision intensified, studies began to appear which suggested that home visiting could be a way to prevent a variety of complex problems for young families, from learning deficits to child abuse.[326] The idea was that by seeing such families, who were often poor, in their own environments, the helper would better understand their circumstances and be able to establish rapport with them.

Because, at the time, so little appeared to be effective generally in fighting poverty and the variety of social ills associated with it, evidence that home visiting might actually be helpful spurred rapid development of programs and organizations advancing it as a key response to the needs of vulnerable families. In an environment starved for real solutions, people quickly mobilized behind an approach for which the science, while encouraging, was hardly yet compelling.[327] Moreover, the evidence was regarded more as a license to design programs and policies in any number of ways, so long as they included home visiting, than as entailing a set of rules that needed to be honored if the resulting services were to be effective.

While home visiting programs and interests expanded their reach, the cutting edge of the scientific study of home visiting proceeded on a separate track through the 1980s and into 1990s. It showed, with increasing confidence, that nurses, when using a particular model, could be effective in preventing and delaying an assortment

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[326]D. Olds, C. Henderson, R. Chamberlin, & R. Tatelbaum, "Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Randomized Trial of Nurse Home Visitation," Pediatrics, 78: 65-78, 1986.

[327]D. L. Olds & H. Kitzman, "Review of Research on Home Visiting," The Future of Children, 3: 51-92, 1993.

of problems for low-income, first-time families and that the positive effects could be long-lasting.[328] However, the science was less sanguine about the effectiveness of other types of home visitors, both professional and paraprofessional, and on models that were less rigorously defined.[329] Ironically, though, it was non-nurse visitors and these more loosely specified models that had become the principal objects of the home visiting field's growth. In essence, national home visiting systems had already been created when the evidence came in indicating that an approach different from any of these was what would work best.

In the past few years, the nurse home visiting program for which the evidence is strongest has started down its own growth path.[330] The reaction from the existing home visiting systems has been fear and disdain. Fear that, when compared to the demonstrably more effective nurse program, they will not fare well in the minds and choices of policymakers. And disdain for the unwillingness of the developers of the nurse program to put the interests of the home visiting field, as chiefly embodied in these other systems, above its own interest in expanding. Although efforts have been and will probably continue to be made to achieve comity among these different

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[328]D.L. Olds, C.R. Henderson, H. Kitzman, J. Eckenrode, R. Cole, R. Tatelbaum, J. Robinson, L.M. Petit, R. O'Brien, & P. Hill, "Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses: A Program of Research," in Advances in Infancy Research, Vol. 12, eds. C. Rovee-Collier, L.P. Lipsitt, & H. Hayne, 1998.

[329]D.S. Gomby, P.L. Culross, & R.E. Behrmann, "Home-Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations–Analysis and Recommendations," The Future of Children: Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations, 1999. 9(1)4-26.

[330]The views expressed in this paragraph are personal reflections based on close observation of the main home visiting programs made possible through my employment at Replication & Program Strategies. RPS has provided technical support in the expansion of the nurse home visiting model.

approaches, and some learning across systems has occurred and will likely continue, there is a good chance competition will undermine full use in the public interest of the ample evidence for the nurse program. The non-nurse programs and their public supporters will stay with their own approaches, making adjustments only at the margins. To do otherwise would be to admit that they are not as good and thus not as worthy of public support.

This situation arose largely because, when home visiting came again into good currency twenty years ago, its proponents sought to fill a policy vacuum quickly rather than effectively. Concerned, perhaps, that the moment of favorable public will would not last, they rushed to design their programs and build their systems, glossing over what the science actually could be used to support. There were no generally accepted standards in place for deciding whether the evidence was good enough to warrant such escalation. No judgment was made as to what the most appropriate response to the available science might be.[331]

The experience of the home visiting field is not unique. A similar dynamic has, for example, shaped the field of youth mentoring. For many years, Big Brothers Big Sisters was essentially "the only game in town" when it came to formal mentoring. Then, as evidence accumulated, beginning in the late 1980s, that BBBS's approach makes a measurable difference for youth, social entrepreneurs started to enter the mentoring field in growing numbers. Often, they claimed Big Brothers Big Sisters as their model, while actually providing a cheaper service with less structure and few or no standards, and no independent assessment of effectiveness. The social marketplace, in this case, has shown limited capacity for differentiating between the

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[331]D. Olds, R. O'Brien, D. Racine, J. Glazner, & H. Kitzman, "Increasing the Policy and Program Relevance of Results from Randomized Trials of Home Visitation," Journal of Community Psychology, 25: 85-100, 1998.

good and the not so good.[332]

A little evidence can go a long way in legitimizing social action initially. But if, given time, the action does not visibly produce the promised results, then not only does the legitimacy of that action come into question. Its inadequacy becomes one more example to a skeptical citizenry of our collective inability, vested fundamentally in government, to solve important community problems. In this day and age, it is not enough that government organizations reflect important public values or claim to function in a professionally legitimate way. They must also be effective in their work. As the Volcker commission on public service recently observed: "Citizens are more interested in results than in reform."[333]

Public investment decisions need to be based on a more complete understanding, than is typically employed now, about what it takes to achieve effectiveness in resolving some problem or meeting some need. Effectiveness begins, although it does not end, with lines of activity that have been shown, through careful evaluation, to work. Public policy and administration should generally prefer undertakings that have the weight of science behind them. Of course, science is neither error-free nor unbiased. But its discipline and the transparency of its methods – the strengths that the pragmatists attributed to it – give science a leg up over other forms of experience (e.g., the anecdotal) as a basis for actions intended to affect many people, the kind of actions in which governments engage. Wisdom that

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[332]D.P. Racine, <u>Growth and Change: Lessons Learned from Business Planning with Big Brothers Big Sisters</u>, (Philadelphia, PA: Replication & Program Strategies, 2000).

[333]Panel on Civic Trust and Citizen Responsibility, <u>A Government to Trust and Respect: Rebuilding Citizen-Government Relations for the 21st Century</u>, (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, June 1999), p. 17.

extends beyond the know-how of science is still necessary in making good public decisions. But such wisdom comes from mixing judgment with knowledge, not from merely exercising judgment alone. Niebuhr was clearly right, in his criticism of Dewey, to doubt that knowledge could constitute an effective challenge to power when power wants to have its way. However, the question neither of them answered satisfactorily is whether power can learn to prefer a way based more on knowledge than mere opinion.

The answer, I believe, lies in making the methods of science more accessible to governmental actors at all levels. As science has become more esoteric and specialized, it has gotten harder for public decision makers to understand the adequacy of the evidence presented to them. Concerned mainly about relating to (and impressing) each other, scientists have spurned communicating their work in ways which allow the public to comprehend it fully. There is, however, nothing necessary about the insularity of scientific communication. Since so much science depends on governmental support, it would be a relatively straightforward matter for public officials to insist on the comprehensibility of scientific evidence when it has potential implications for public action. This would mean not only conveying the evidence intelligibly, but being simple and direct in explaining how the evidence was derived and the scientific merit of those methods.[334]

Effective public action is not achieved only by basing it on approaches that have been shown, scientifically, to work. It also requires capable organizations and

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[334]Academics and scholars dispute endlessly about the relative merits of different methods for gathering and parsing evidence. Many think this is an arcane debate better kept out of politics and public affairs. But, in a world increasingly driven by claims to knowledge, often rival claims, political actors need to be able to understand the methodological debate in order to make thoughtful, responsible choices about the "data" they will employ in making their decisions.

an accommodating environment. Although this seems obvious enough, the actual realization of these conditions is, at best, infrequent.[335] To take a program which has been found through experimentation to be effective on a small scale and to make it work on a large scale requires organizational (i.e., human) capabilities that are rarely mustered in public action. Implementation typically proceeds down well-worn paths lacking in the resources needed to achieve excellence. Lead times are short, staff are not trained sufficiently, feedback loops about performance are ill-developed, work conditions are unaccommodating. While successful enterprises in the commercial sector appear to invest heavily in the implementation process, public and non-profit organizations normally stint because the public seems to expect them to get by on the cheap. It may take Wal-Mart two or more years to determine the location for a new store before even breaking ground, but a new public program fundamentally affecting thousands of people in scores of communities is supposed to be up and running in a state within a few months.

Several reasons are conventionally offered to explain the hasty pace and resource-limited ways of public sector implementation. And while these reasons reflect a measure of truth, they are not the whole story. One reason offered is that elected officials, because they have to face the voters frequently, need to see things happen sooner rather than later. They feel compelled to show a demanding electorate they are making a difference. Another expressed reason is that taxpayers are unwilling to pay more than they already do for publicly funded services. They object to government spending more on administration. Besides, implementing public policies isn't "rocket science," many a critic asserts. It should be possible to do it well

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[335] For a trenchant critique of how the public sector fails to organize itself effectively to address social needs see Lisbeth B. Schorr, Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), pp. 3-154.

without expending a lot on administration.

This last reason, though, reveals most the limitation of the conventional view. Indeed, implementation is not rocket science; it is generally harder. Building workable rockets requires reconciling numerous scientific and engineering variables, but the number and interactions of the variables pale in comparison to the complex of factors involved in mobilizing larger numbers of individual, willful human beings to implement a given program or policy. Why this reality has not been sufficiently appreciated within public administration is mainly a function of not having adequate resource-based models of what it takes to replicate effectiveness. When a state decides to implement a new program statewide does it develop a detailed map of the path it must follow to give itself the best chance of making that program effective in every locality? Typically, the emphasis of such implementation plans is on how quickly services can be scaled up and on the numbers of people who will be thereby reached. Consistent effectiveness is a hope but not a concrete objective most of the time, or at least not an objective which agencies "move mountains" to try to achieve.

The outcomes-based accountability movement in the public sector has begun to shift attention away from this accounting mentality and toward measurement of results. But the movement tends to leave up in the air – or, more precisely, up to the public agency – how results will actually be obtained. There is little demand that the agency go with what available scientific evidence supports. Rather, it is hoped that by setting outcome goals, public organizations will be moved to create the strategies and programs needed to meet them. This may involve adopting well-tested programs and practices from elsewhere, but often, seemingly more often than not, it doesn't. Essentially, it is an approach which assumes that the main barriers to public sector performance are motivational rather than cognitive.

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The Use of Replication

I want to suggest that while spurring motivation is important, the complexity of many, if not most, of the problems the public sector seeks to redress makes knowledge even more critical to performance.[336] The replication of effective know-how is the key to effective public administration in the present age. Formulating ambitious, substantive goals alone, a relatively inexpensive implementation strategy, will not be enough. To achieve excellence public organizations must be made more capable, and this costs money. And elected officials and their voters are more apt to support the necessary and sustainable investment when it is tied to a specific, evaluated program whose implementation requirements have been carefully defined, than to a public agency's generic commitment to doing the best it can to meet its goals, however persuasive and concrete those goals may be.

Consider again the nurse home visitation program. The developers of the program at the University of Colorado early on attempted to control the diffusion of the program, so that they could have a firm handle on what it would take to get it working effectively under the messier circumstances existing outside the confines of experimental research that had been its home for fifteen years. Though this tack of gradual expansion worked relatively well initially, it was seriously challenged in one case. Oklahoma, after a short pilot in Oklahoma City, decided to implement the

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[336]In an interesting study of the diffusion of new knowledge within fairly large business organizations, Gabriel Szulanski found that their receptivity was influenced more by the knowledge people already had than by their motivation to regard new information positively or negatively. While this study does not speak to the effective use of knowledge, it suggests that cognitive factors may be more important than previously thought in whether organizational members assimilate the know-how needed to be effective. See Gabriel Szulanski, "Exploring Internal Stickiness: Impediments to the Transfer of Best Practice within the Firm," Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 17 (Winter Special Issue), 27-43, 1996.

program statewide (77 counties) in a couple of years' time. Because the developers at the University of Colorado were not equipped to provide training and support for so large an effort, the Oklahoma Department of Health took on the bulk of the task, even though they lacked the knowledge to do it well. Generous funding from the state legislature allowed the department to provide resources, such as desks and computers, that had seemingly never before been so available to a new program. But otherwise, implementation appeared to unfold as it had in the past. Local health administrators were not consulted on how best to get the program established. The rich clinical information system built into the program model, instead of being used by local program staff to monitor their performance and aid problem solving, quickly became a way for state officials to police local operations on a limited set of financially related variables. Few new staff positions were created at the state level to oversee and support implementation.

Not surprisingly, within a couple of years of start-up, performance of the program in Oklahoma was running well short of what the science suggests is possible.[337] The legislature's funding support was beginning to weaken. Conceivably, had the state waited to scale up until more was known about the program's implementation requirements, and then provided the funds to meet those requirements, its chances of reproducing the effectiveness which attracted the legislature to the program to begin with would have been higher.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma is not unique. Indeed, it seems that every

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[337]It is often the case, of course, that the effectiveness achieved through a carefully controlled clinical trial cannot be reproduced under more "real world" circumstances. However, it is important to note that places which aimed at a smaller and slower build up of the nurse home visiting program than Oklahoma have generally performed better.

government is a little or a lot like Oklahoma in its tendency to underestimate what it takes to do something well consistently. So long as the public sector does not make primary in its decision making the evidence of what works (and how to make it work), it will continue to invest in mediocre programs and services much of the time, yielding performance which fails to reach the level necessary to convince the public and their elected and appointed officials of the indispensability of sophisticated administrative capability.

Government is the one sector in our society where the wide replication of what works should predominate. Most public action aims to affect a large group of people or the entire populus. Government is, up to a point, expected to be fair and uniform in its treatment of individual persons, families, households, and communities. Large, highly structured, relatively stable bureaucracies are the primary vehicle through which public action occurs. Needless to say, much of this description has been used over the past forty or so years as the prelude to characterizing the administrative function of government perjoratively. But, despite all the criticism of "bureaucracy," little fundamental reform has actually resulted. Change has occurred at the margins, not at the core of how public organizations operate. The reason for this Sisyphian result, I believe, stems from the fact that we have been trying to change the wrong things.

A plausible case can be made for seeing most public organization change as misguided experiments in institutional economics. Such experiments have tried to make administrative government more effective by redesigning its structure and incentives. The effort has assumed, essentially, that if you alter the external conditions under which people work, they will work better. But if civil servants (and their nonprofit and commercial contractees) do not have the specific tools and know-how to solve the specific problems with which their agencies have been tasked, that

is, if they lack the requisite expertise, it is difficult to see how manipulating the work environment alone can consistently result in improved performance. No incentive scheme, administrative upgrading, or improved organizational climate can compensate for inadequate or incomplete line practitioner knowledge. This is where replicating what works becomes relevant.

Replication is already the common, albeit unacknowledged, implementation mode of most public organizations. It is simply another way to describe the uniform application of a new policy or program. When Oklahoma implemented the nurse home visiting program statewide, its aim was to replicate approximately the same service in every locality. While all public policies and programs are to a degree adapted and adjusted as they spread, one way to look at what makes a policy or program "public" is its similarity from one instantiation of that policy or program to the next. Replication produces similarity, thereby preserving the legitimacy of the public label on those efforts to which it is affixed.

Redescribing public sector implementation as replication elevates to greater awareness, as I noted before, the qualities of what gets replicated and the capabilities of the organization that does the replicating. Implementation is a neutral term. Anything can be implemented, and just about is. But replication forces recognition of how good the practice to be replicated is. To qualify for replication, a policy or program needs to have proved its value in a fairly strong way. It needs to be reliably effective, and how it achieves that effectiveness (which defines the organizational capabilities required to carry it out successfully) needs to be demonstrated or at least well theorized. Otherwise, it would not be worth reproducing across distinct places and over time.

It is the emphasis on value that differentiates replication from

implementation. An implementation ethos enables public organizations, whether on their own accord or through edict from external political authorities, to take on more and more responsibility. Implementation capabilities are generic to the organization. They can supposedly be used, with tweaking here and there, to execute any received or invented directive. By contrast, replication capabilities must arise, first and foremost, from the specific program or policy to be executed. It is only because the program's or policy's value has been clearly enough established that it may warrant the *de nova* creation or significant enhancement of organizational capacity. Returning again to Oklahoma's implementation of the nurse home visiting program, we can see more clearly how the difference between replication and implementation works in practice.

There were several ways in which the replication requirements of the program distinguished it from the general, historical manner in which the Oklahoma state health department wanted to implement it. Nurses and their supervisors needed an extensive amount of training in the program model, which is specified in detailed visit-by-visit guidelines created by the developers in Colorado. It was far more training than the health department was accustomed to providing its employees, and because of that, was resisted by many state and local administrators. To become a competent practitioner in the program, given its complexity and detail, was felt by the developers to take roughly 2-3 years of experience, the length of time a nurse works with her initial cohort of participating families from pregnancy through the child's second birthday. Although department administrators and legislative overseers accepted the need for a learning curve, they saw it ending much sooner. To gain proficiency, nurse visitors need routine access to the data generated by the program's clinical information system. But the department's implementation habit was to regard data access and interpretation as the prerogative of top officials. Data

tended to flow upward in the health bureaucracy, with minimal feedback flowing in the other direction. Nurse visitors need certain work conditions to be effective, such as flex-time (since many mothers in the program are unavailable for visits during the day) and cell phones and beepers (in order to stay in touch with the office while out visiting). Although the department encouraged these conditions and made some resources available to supply them, actual use varied significantly around the state. Many local administrators balked on the grounds that such changes were inconsistent with normal department practice.

The health department was not acting without sense in these matters. It was simply following the routines it already had, routines established through implementing other programs in the past. For many, perhaps most, in the agency nurse home visiting was just another program, to be treated like all programs previously. Sure, the program had unusually strong evidence in its favor, but that fact alone didn't warrant a new approach to implementation. To make a significant exception for the home visiting program would have suggested the inadequacy of the agency's other programs and their mode of implementation, a disruptive, and thus unacceptable, conclusion. Though few, if any, of these other programs had the kind of science undergirding them that the home visiting program enjoys, that was not reason enough to justify more than incremental accommodation of the latter's requirements.

The domestic public sector in the U.S. has relatively few remarkable success stories to its credit. It has built a reliable nationwide transportation system, reduced poverty among the elderly and disabled through Social Security and Medicare, and created effective arrangements for responding to disasters. But against a variety of other problems, which might all fall under the label "social breakdown," it has not

fared particularly well. A principal reason, implied in the argument I have outlined above, is that it hasn't known enough about solving these problems to have a significant and sustainable impact on them. In the 1960s, the Great Society strategy of the Johnson Administration relied, to a larger extent than government had before, on social science, and the strategy failed, at least in terms of public perception, to fulfill its promise of ending poverty and disadvantage. Ever since then, social science has been under a cloud as a source of knowledge on which to base public policy.

But science, when done well, is a cumulative enterprise. It gets better with time; knowledge deepens and becomes more reliable. In this sense, the social science of today is, I would contend, generally more informative and useful than the science done forty years ago. We should still, as always, initially treat any claim to knowledge with healthy skepticism, but more as an aid to understanding it and exercising care before employing it, than as a stubborn refusal to be moved because of past failure. Public administration could have more success stories to its credit if it were less held back by its history and acquired a renewed devotion to employing knowledge in the service of the public interest. It would find, in doing so, that not all problems have good answers at present. But some do, and these are the problems that should garner the kind and level of resources needed for successful replication of the strategies that can alleviate them. Consider brief examples of both sorts.

We do not yet have dependable ways to help those addicted to drugs and alcohol kick their habits permanently. While the crime rate has come down across the nation of late, we cannot say with confidence that we know how this has happened and whether any common steps taken by governments have contributed to the improvement. By contrast, we know a good deal about helping disadvantaged

families get their young children off to a good start in life.[338] We also are learning more and more about the prevention of high risk behaviors among youth living in tough environments.[339] The public sector cannot avoid dealing with substance abuse and crime, but the most sensible posture might be to regard these as problems warranting further exploration. Mass mobilization behind new strategies should be deferred until further research can credibly show the way. This does not rule out, of course, individual states and municipalities continuing what they are already doing or trying new approaches. Meanwhile, though, public investment in early childhood and youth development might justifiably increase and be directed toward expanded use of specific approaches that have passed scientific muster.

It's important that what gets replicated are specific approaches instead of more general strategies.[340] The mistake often made in replication is to define programs in broad terms so that they can be adapted to accommodate differences across states, localities, and organizations. This sounds logical, but it leads to two types of errors, one obvious, the other less so.

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[338]For the most recent evidence see, J.P. Shonkoff & P. A. Phillips (eds.), From Neurons to Networks: The Science of Early Childhood Development, (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000).

[339]There have been several recent meta-analyses that identify youth development programs with good evidence of their effectiveness. See D.S. Elliot, Blueprints for Violence Prevention, (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1996); R. Catalano, M.L. Berglund, J.A.M. Ryan, H. Lonczak, and J.D. Hawkins, Positive Youth Development in the United States (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Social Development Research Group, 1998); S. Halperin & D. Walker-James, Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth, (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1997).

[340]For more on what makes a program replicable see D.P. Racine, Investing in What Works, (Philadelphia, PA: Replication & Program Strategies, 2000).

The obvious error is that distilling a program into a general form for replication purposes may elide essential features. Rarely do we know from the science on an effective program exactly what makes it work. With the use of systematic observations of how the program functions in practice, aided by relevant theory, plausible or better explanations of how it gets the results it does can be constructed. But these are probable causes, not absolute ones. This reality argues for sticking with the tested model as precisely as possible, since that, and not some distillation of it, is what has been found to be effective.

The second, less obvious mistake is to assume that good programs will not spread successfully unless they are flexible. At one level, this assumption is quite true. A good program needs to be able to flex in response to variations in the life situations it has been designed to ameliorate or improve. If it can't adapt in this way, it probably is not worth replicating. The nurse home visiting program equips nurse visitors with a substantial body of know-how, but then leaves it to them to apply that knowledge adaptively depending on the needs of the family at any given time. Within a carefully defined structure of accountability and supervision, Big Brothers and Big Sisters have a great deal of freedom in how they spend their time with the youth they mentor.

The error arises from failing to differentiate between the flexibility needed for a program to work well and any additional flexibility believed necessary for it to gain adopters or be universally applicable. This latter belief makes sense only if the purpose of replication is to maximize a program's market appeal or reach. But, if the purpose is to reproduce effectiveness, then weakening a program's requirements to increase its attractiveness or applicability seems rather unwise. There is nothing immovable keeping public organizations from replicating programs with fidelity to

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the effective models on which they are based. However, if a given organization cannot or will not replicate with fidelity, then the simple rule of thumb should be "don't." Good programs should diffuse through replication where the adopting organizations or jurisdictions are willing and able. So long as such programs are adequately supported in policy and financially, their chances of gaining widespread and effective application will be fairly strong.

Adaptation and Innovation

Specificity in replicable program design, a consequence of the underlying science, is not the enemy of adaptability or innovation. On the contrary, a strong case can be made for concluding that specificity aids change and creativity in purposive undertakings. Science and art need not be opposed in the affairs of public administration. Indeed, it is their intentional reliance on one another that seems to produce the best work.

Specificity makes a program easier to understand, adopt, and operate. People will learn a specific design, in which a program is defined in terms of its constituent processes, more readily than they will a general one. Concrete information is easier to assimilate than concepts. When a program has been well-specified and translated into practice, desired performance can be defined more accurately, and those involved in implementing the program are likely to be more aware of the ways in which it can go wrong. Make it a program which also coheres (i.e., the parts work together well), and replicators are better able to see how one part of it going wrong will affect other parts and how changes to the program will affect its overall functioning.

In studying education reform designs disseminated under the auspices of New American Schools, researchers at the Rand Corporation in California found early

replication most successful for models that were spelled out more concretely and completely.[341] The best explanation for this is that administrators and teachers could more readily grasp models closest to their own operating experience. In so doing, they were able to move quickly to raising probing questions about how these models would work in practice, a step which gave them a sense of command of the subject matter and put them on more equal footing with the models' developers. By contrast, broader, more conceptual designs – the kind that are intrinsically flexible across the board – were perceived as more abstract and harder to get a handle on operationally.[342]

Specificity and coherence root out ambiguity. It is when programs and practices are too ambiguous that changing them becomes difficult. Practitioners become reluctant to undertake mindful adaptations even if they perceive the need, because they are unsure about what to change.[343] The same logic seems to apply when the need or desire for change is more extensive, and an innovation is in order.

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[341]S. Bodilly, S. Purnall, K. Ramsey, & S.J. Keith, Lessons from New American Schools Development Corporation's Demonstration Phase (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-729-NASDC, 1996).

[342]Although the Rand study did not speak to it, one might also reasonably conclude that broader, more conceptual designs were cloaked with a greater sense of mystery. This quality conceivably would increase the power of their developers, since the mystery would increase adopters' need for translation of the concepts.

[343]In a study of the start-up of a large cellular company in Italy, researchers found that employees who had previously worked on similar tasks in other organizations with less highly developed procedures reporting having a hard time altering those procedures in their prior jobs because of the ambiguity. See A. Narduzzo, E. Rocco, & M. Warglien, "Talking about Routines in the Field: The Emergence of Organizational Capabilities in a New Cellular Phone Network Company, " in, The Nature and Dynamics of Organizational Capabilities, eds. G. Dosi, R.R. Nelson, & S.G. Winter(Oxford University Press, 2000). p. 41.

An innovation is apt to be more reliable and effective when what gives impetus to it is a well-defined, rather than ambiguous, existing practice or situation. "Before change can occur," explain Kenwyn Smith and David Berg, "the patterns to be change must be *established* [emphasis added]."[344] This is a further argument for regarding the replication of good, specific programs with fidelity as central, not only to enhancing the effectiveness of public administration, but to enabling it to continue to develop and grow in effectiveness over time.

Conceivably, following such a course would not shrink the boundaries of public action but allow them to remain the same or even expand as better ways are found for dealing successfully with a whole host of problems. I think this result is unlikely, however. Though we live in a fast-paced world, science, when done well, takes time. For example, impelled by political pressures to approve new drugs more quickly, the Food and Drug Administration has found that expediting the process can lead to shortcutting the depth and extent of science needed to assure that a new drug is safe.[345] While many forms of social problem solving do not lend themselves to such clear-cut tests of workability as health safety, it is possible – and, as I'm suggesting, desirable – to be more exacting in deciding when knowledge is sure enough to support the broad use of a particular program or practice under public auspices.

Waiting several years for the science around a problem to mature before considering replication, as implied by the example of home visiting, has a good

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[344]Kenwyn K. Smith & David N. Berg, Paradoxes of Group Life: Understanding Conflict, Paralysis, and Movement in Group Dynamics, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987), p. 145.

[345]St. Petersburg Times, December 28, 2000, "Change in FDA Approval Policy Led to 7 Deadly Drugs."

chance to become a more influential standard if it can be shown to produce better results than the more slovenly approach which has tended to color public affairs to date. As policy makers see the replication of well-tested programs producing measurable effects, there is reason to believe they will become more aware and committed to evidence-based public action. Reluctance to act, at least on a large scale, will become more likely under circumstances where the evidence is lacking.

The evolution will not be perfect or quick. Pressures to act hastily or in favor of powerful interests will continue to shape public decisions. But even if a small amount of change occurs in the direction I've proposed, it will likely create more room for informal problem solving than currently exists. If the standard for public investment is that a program must be shown through rigorous evaluation to be effective, than governments will attempt fewer things, and what they do attempt will likely make more of a difference. More opportunity will be created for informal lines of action in neighborhoods, and neighborhoods will have the heightened excellence of public endeavor as an example to inspire their own efforts.[346]

Another Way to Advance Democratic Citizenship?

During the past several years, there has been a resurgence of interest in making government, especially public administration, more business-like. The idea behind the new public management has been to increase governmental effectiveness and efficiency by making public organizations less bureaucratic and more

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[346]I am thinking here, for example, about the way in which the sound governance of the city of Roanoke under the watchful eye of the Norfolk & Western Railroad informed the way in which the black community went about organizing itself during the first half of the century.

entrepreneurial.[347] The enthusiasm for outcomes accountability is one manifestation of this trend. The application of business thinking to public management is nothing new. In our deeply and lastingly capitalist culture, it never lurks far below the surface, ready to break through whenever the public tires, which it inevitably must, with government practice as is. Transforming public administration into a lean, dynamic, and innovative enterprise offers a resonant, if conventional, solution to the appearance of bureaucratic lethargy.

The reinvention movement emphasizes that public organizations must be responsive to their citizen consumers. In the same way that businesses must compete for the loyalty of their customers, government agencies must compete for the satisfaction and support of those who consume their services. Indeed, one is almost more likely to hear the words "we're customer driven" in a public agency these days than in a commercial business, as market jargon penetrates the vocabulary of the public sphere.[348]

It is good and necessary that public organizations are responsive to the citizenry. In a democratic republic, the institutions of government must be accountable to the people from whom they fundamentally derive their authority. But

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[347]The movement's principal treatise is the popular book by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector, From Schoolhouse to Statehouse, City Hall to Pentagon, (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1992).

[348]The federal government has taken to measuring customer satisfaction with its agencies on an annual basis. The most recent survey, released in December 2000, showed that people gave federal agencies an average score of 68.6 on the American Customer Satisfaction Index. The same rating they gave it in 1999. The private sector did slightly better in 2000, with a score of 71.2. See Jason Peckenpaugh, "Government Narrows the Gap on Customer Service," GovExec.com, December 22, 2000.

being responsive to citizens and satisfying customers, while they overlap to some extent, are not the same thing. And because they are not, they do not contribute to democratic capability in the same way.

In the commercial marketplace, consumers make mistakes. They buy what they do not need. They buy too much of some things and too little of others. They buy to keep up with their neighbor or to impress others. They buy on a whim. So long as what they offer sells, businesses care little whether consumers act reasonably or not. To some extent, the very purpose of advertising is to get consumers to buy what they otherwise do not really need. Although some businesses seem sincerely to want their customers to make informed buying decisions, there is a limit to what any business will do to facilitate the realization of this end. In the final analysis, businesses succeed by distinguishing themselves from their competitors. That is a process through which a firm cannot help but seek to manipulate the awareness and understanding of consumers. In our high consumption culture, every consumer at some level knows this reality – that is, knows that he or she is the target of manipulation induced by competition. In the absence of perfect and complete information, there is no other way in an open market.

When we apply customer-driven thinking to government, the same likelihood of perverse consequences exists. "Effective, entrepreneurial government insists on customer satisfaction," exclaimed Vice President Al Gore in the first report of the National Performance Review, the Clinton Administration effort he led to reform the federal government.[349] But satisfying citizens as customers lends itself to the very same manipulative tendencies evident in the free market. Government agencies will

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[349]Al Gore, <u>From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government that Works Better and Costs Less</u>, (Washington, DC: Report of the National Performance Review, September 1993), p. 7.

look for ways to make their consumers happy. Yet, if anything if fickle, human happiness is; it changes from one time to the next. What makes for one person's happiness need not work for another. Employers and employees do not necessarily see eye-to-eye when it comes to occupational health and safety rules, for example. Under competitive pressures to perform sooner rather than later, public organizations may seek short term gains in consumer satisfaction at the expense of what might be in the longer term public interest (i.e., public action becomes biased in favor of those whose needs can be met now).[350] Because achieving satisfaction can be elusive, agencies will be inclined, just as businesses are, to try to make consumers "believe" their desires have been or are being fulfilled. It is hard to see how democratic capability gains much under these more market-like circumstances.[351]

Being responsive to citizens is one thing. A government that claims to be democratic must be that. But being driven by them in their role as consumers or customers is quite another. Satisfying the wants of people, however necessary to promote the public's welfare, is apt to do little to strengthen their sense of fairness

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[350]For analysis of this and other problems with the distributive results of reinvention, see R.T. Green & L. Hubbell, "On Governance and Reinventing Government," in Refounding Democratic Public Administration, eds. G.L. Wamsley & J.F. Wolf, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 51-57.

[351]The logical counter to treating citizens only as consumers is to empower them to participate in public decision making or to take more mattes into their own hands. Citizen empowerment is clearly part of the reinvention creed. As Vice President Gore stated From Red Tape to Results, "It will take dedicated citizens, willing to work long and hard, to improve the government (p. 124)." While popular in rhetoric, empowerment has been much harder, evidently, to put into practice. One recent study found that funding neighborhood groups was among the most difficult reinvention actions for local officials to undertake. See R.C. Kearney, B.M. Feldman, C.P.F. Scavo, "Reinventing Government: City Manager Attitudes and Actions," Public Administration Review, Vol. 60, No. 6, November/December 2000, p. 542.

and equality, empathy and regard for others. Indeed, it can have the opposite effect, by reinforcing one's sense of entitlement and self-interest. In stressing public sector performance, the reinvention movement has called attention to an important problem, one that my advocacy for replicating effective programs shares. But the all-to-easy answer, of making government more like business, is unlikely to advance the cause of American democracy very far, if at all.

Neighborhood Practices

If public administration were to do only what it is good at doing, neighborhood practices might evolve to fill the resulting gaps in at least a couple of ways. One way would be a direct trade-off. What the government no longer supports, the neighborhood might supply, more or less. This is often what political conservatives envision from cutbacks in public spending. If something needs doing and government stops doing it, citizens in their private capacity will act. But such an approach can have draconian consequences. Citizens and their organizations, such as churches and civic groups, may not have the desire or wherewithal to fill the gap adequately. The result may be increased misery if the good or service in question affects the basic well-being of people.

But a direct trade-off between public and private provision need not be the only way to reinvigorate informal problem solving. Neighborhoods could instead fill gaps as a positive response to the effective programs that government provides. Rather than substitute for public action, the neighborhood supplements or complements such action when it works. What the neighborhood does grows out of or in direct reaction to public sector success, not government failure or withdrawal. The following suggestive example shows how this second, more hopeful way of rebuilding informal capacity might work.

Assume that a model for reforming elementary education has been found, through careful evaluation, to be reliably effective. The program focuses on making sure that students do not exit first grade without knowing how to read. While it deals to some degree with issues of broader school governance, it mainly addresses the classroom curriculum and teaching practice. Assume further that a state has decided that all of its elementary schools will adopt this reform model over the next five years. Significant funding is supplied to facilitate adoption and assure that implementation is of the highest possible quality. After a few years, performance on statewide tests by students in schools that have assimilated the reform show noticeable and sustained improvement. Change is especially dramatic in schools serving children in low to moderate income households. As performance improves, parents of students in these latter schools become more hopeful than in the past that their children will have a good chance to succeed in life. That hope slowly brings more of them out to more school functions, where they meet other parents and friendships form. Since many of these parents live in the same neighborhood near the school, they begin spending more informal time together and finding common interests. One of those interests turns out to be making sure that each of their children has a safe, supportive place to go to after school if his or her parents aren't at home. Gradually, more competence develops in caring for children in the time between school closing and parents returning from the workday.

This is, admittedly, an oversimplified example. There would be many more complications to take into account in assessing the probability of parents assuming more responsibility for each other's children. If, for example, the community were well served by a wide variety of formal after school programs, parents might be less likely to step into the gap. The existence of significant crime or drug problems in a neighborhood might interfere with the willingness of parents to get involved. It is

in the face of such complications, however, that the school might play an additional, useful role.

The school's *raison d'etre* is to educate children. To be successful, the school cannot operate in "splendid isolation." It has to be aware of those things outside of its immediate sphere that can interfere with a good education. If children having a safe and supportive place to go after school is one of those things, as it, in fact, often is, then the school has an interest in overcoming that obstacle. However, rather than the school treating the challenge as its own, it might be better off doing what it can to make it easier for parents to tackle the problem. The fact that the school, at least in my example, has demonstrated it can help children succeed increases its legitimacy in serving as a mild catalyst to parental action. It can connect parents with each other, both directly and through events that it sponsors at the school. It need not, and perhaps should not, make after school care the explicit agenda of these networking activities.   The school should let parents discover for themselves the need and the opportunity to share in the care of one another's children.

Today, there is noticeable intellectual enthusiasm for the idea of social capital, the trust and good will that people develop in their relations with one another. Putting aside the ambiguity of the concept as a theoretical and measurable construct,[352] as a metaphor social capital has struck a responsive chord among those concerned about the breakdown of community. It focuses attention on what often seems to be missing or undeveloped as communities struggle to solve their problems. While not synonymous with the informal order, social capital has its roots there.

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[352]For an insightful critique of the utility of social capital in the construction of social theory, see Alejandro. Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," in <u>Annual Review of Sociology</u>, eds. J. Hagan and K.S. Cook, Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 1-24.

There is no basis yet for believing that social capital can be deliberately created, just as there is no basis for believing that informal capability can be. It seems necessary that it arise organically or naturally, as a function of people being around each other. The challenge in a community is to make it possible for people to spend more time together. Public administration stands a much better chance of facilitating that possibility by performing well itself and using the heightened credibility that comes from success to nudge citizens in the right direction, than by adding the development of social capital to an already overfull agenda. In my example, the school would probably not be very effective in energizing parents if it were not already doing an effective job of education. Take any public agency and enable it to be effective at what it can really be effective at, and its influence with citizens will grow. Then, instead of using that influence to expand its mission and take on more responsibility, it could use it to create opportunities for citizens to locate each another. In this way, we may yet find our way back to a greater measure of informal effort in the conduct of our civic lives and thereby replenish the well-springs of democracy.

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Vita

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Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
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Center for Public Administration and
  Policy

Ph.D. (2001)

[Dissertation -- "People and their problems: An exploratory study of the quest for
     democratic citizenship in the administered society."]

University of Illinois at Urbana
  School of Social Work

M.S.W. (1975)

University of Illinois at Urbana

B.A.   (1974)
Individual Study in
Social Systems --
Graduated with High
Honors/Distinction

Current Employment

<u>President, Replication and Program Strategies, Inc., Philadelphia</u>

January 1995 to Present

Replication and Program Strategies, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization,
established with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood
Johnson, Knight, and Pinkerton Foundations, that helps promising social, health,
and education programs realize their potential for growth. The President serves
as the chief executive officer responsible for the development, overall direction,

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and public representation of the organization. For more information about RPS, see its website at replication.org.

Employment History

Positions with Points of Light Foundation, Washington, D.C.

POLF is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping solve social problems through citizen service.

May 1992 to January 1995　　　　*Advisor to the President*

Oct. 1990 to May 1992　　　　*Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer*

April 1990 to Oct. 1990　　　　*Founding Staff Member*

Positions in Political Staff Work

April 1989 to April 1990　　　　*Legislative Director to U.S. Senator John C. Danforth (Mo.), Washington, D.C.*

Nov. 1986 to April 1989　　　　*Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey, Trenton, N.J.*

Positions with American Public Welfare Association., Washington, D.C.

APWA (renamed the American Public Human Services Association in 1997) is the national organization for state and local human service agencies and their officials.

July 1979 to June 1986　　　　*Director of Government Affairs and Social Policy*

Oct. 1978 to June 1980　　　　*Project Manager*

Jan. 1978 to June 1979　　　　*Senior Policy Analyst*

Nov. 1975 to Dec. 1977　　　　*Administrative Assistant*

May 1975 to Nov. 1975   *Graduate Student Intern*

Other Positions

Jan. 1975 to May 1975   *Research Assistant*
                               University of Illinois
                               School of Social Work
                               Urbana, Illinois

Jan. 1974 to Aug. 1975   *Staff Analyst*
                               Illinois Department of Public Aid
                               Springfield, Illinois

June 1973 to August 1973   *Field Researcher*
                               University of Illinois
                               School of Social Work
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Other Work Experience

Member, Evaluation Advisory Panel, Free to Grow: Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-free Communities, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University (2000 - Present).

Member, Advisory Group, Campfire Boys and Girls Extending our Reach Project, Kansas City, Missouri (1997-1998).

Member, Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee, Educating Children for Parenting, Philadelphia (1996).

Volunteer Consultant, Points of Light Foundation, Washington, DC (1994-1995).

Volunteer Consultant, Total Action Against Poverty in Roanoke, Virginia (1993-1994).

Committee Member, Council of Community Services for the Roanoke Valley (1994-1994).

Paid Consultant, American Public Welfare Association (1986).

Paid Consultant, Louisiana Department of Health and Human Resources (1983).

Instructor, Virginia Tech, Center for Public Administration and Policy in Northern Virginia (1982).

Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois, School of Social Work in Urbana (1973).

Selected Publications

Racine, D.P., Investing in What Works: A Guide for Funders, Philadelphia: Replication & Program Strategies, Inc., November 2000.

Racine, D.P., Growth and Change: Lessons Learned from Business Planning with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Replication & Program Strategies, Inc., October 2000.

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------(1987).<u>New Jersey's Employment Challenge: Preparing a Productive Work Force for the Future</u> (December). Authored for New Jersey Governor's Task Force on Employment Policy and distributed as a model to all states by the National Governors Association.

------(1985). <u>A Future for Social Welfare in the United States</u> (November). Paper prepared for the Ford Foundation project on Social Welfare and the American Future.

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------, D. Colton, A. Kelly, and E. Wells (1982). Public welfare. <u>Book of the States: 1982-83</u>. Lexington, KY: Council of State Governments.

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------- (1976). Review of <u>Social Service Budgets and Social Policy: British and American Experience</u> by H. Glennerster. In <u>Social Work</u>, 21,4 (July 1976): 335-336.

<u>Memberships</u>

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