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# Housing, Gangs, and Homicide

## What We Can Learn from Chicago

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Recent declines in homicide in Chicago have been seen as similar to earlier declines in New York City and Los Angeles. Popular explanations that policing strategies largely explain variation in rates of violence have been skeptically greeted by criminologists. However, no plausible explanation for persisting high rates of homicide in some cities and very low rates in others has been credibly presented. One reason for this may be the narrowness of criminological investigations. Explanations for violence internationally have included human rights, housing, and economic development among other variables. This article presents data from a study on homicide in Chicago and supplements criminological thinking on homicide by adding insights from urban and globalization research.

***Keywords:*** *gangs; housing; homicide; violence; globalization*

What accounts for sharp differences in the patterns of urban homicide? Most cities in the United States saw drastic drops in violence in the late 1990s, following historically high rates earlier in the decade. However, there were a few cities in which the historic highs were not followed by sharp declines. Detroit and Baltimore, for example, have remained among the more violent cities in the United States and in the world, with rates around 40 homicides per 100,000. On the other hand, San Francisco, Houston, Boston, San Diego, and New York City (NYC) saw their rates of homicide plummet in the 1990s to near-European levels of close to 5 per 100,000.

**Authors' Note:** This article is based on research sponsored by a Harry F. Guggenheim Foundation–funded study of why Chicago's and New York City's homicide trends have differed. Data have also been drawn from a study of the history of gangs in Chicago and a ten-nation study of children in organized armed violence, "Neither Peace nor War."



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A more peculiar case is that of Chicago, which has had homicide rates roughly equivalent to New York City's over the past four decades. However, in the 1990s, while NYC's homicide rate dropped to record lows, Chicago's remained high. Then in the new millennium, Chicago's rate finally dropped sharply, while New York City's rate continued a slow decline. However, by 2005, homicides in Chicago did not keep falling, but appeared to stabilize at a rate three times as high as New York City's.

In 2005, several other cities also saw their homicide rates sharply rebound, confounding law enforcement managers who claimed their policing policies had violence under control. Milwaukee, for example, saw increases of nearly 50% more than the 2004 rate, and in the same one-year period Houston had a 24% increase. Philadelphia's rate jumped back to its very high 1997 levels, and Boston had its highest rates in a decade. Charlotte, St. Louis, and Tulsa among other cities also saw a sharp reversal of previous drops.

Clearly there are idiosyncratic factors at work. This article looks at how institutionalized gangs and public housing policy interacted in Chicago to influence the specific pattern of Chicago's homicides over the past two decades. Housing policy is seldom considered when looking at rates of violence, and this case study suggests housing policy may play an important role in the incidence of violence, particularly in an era of vast changes in urban space.

## Literatures on Violence

### American Criminology

Both poverty and income inequality have been found to be related to homicide in quantitative studies, although the criminological literature is filled with debate on the topic (see Patterson [1991] for a review). Within the literature, there are few studies that look at differences between cities over time, content either with cross-sectional comparisons or with a national or regional level of analysis (e.g., Lafree 1998). When cities are the main unit of analysis (e.g., Short 1997; Blumstein and Wallman 2000; Reiss and Roth 1993), the central variable considered has most often been "city size." However, the crime drop in the 1990s does not fit into the previous patterns of higher homicide rate in larger cities, as Monkkonen (2001) has pointed out.

Many U.S. politicians and some criminologists (Kelling and Coles 1996) have claimed that police tactics have been mainly responsible for

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drops in homicide rates. They cite the "compstat" computer program in New York City and some version of "zero tolerance" to "broken windows" and petty crimes as decisive in the unprecedented drop in crime in that city. In 2002, NYC Police Chief William Bratton confidently took this vaunted approach to Los Angeles as chief, but embarrassingly, homicide rates subsequently increased rather than decreased.

Other criminologists have been more skeptical, pointing to homicide declines preceding the introduction of various policies or drops in violent crime in cities that did not adopt "zero tolerance" policies (Blumstein and Rosenfeld 1999). One careful meta-analysis argues that a "central myth" in law enforcement is the idea that "police have a substantial, broad and *independent* impact on the nation's crime rate" (Eck and Maguire 2000, 249). It is important to note that other contextual and idiosyncratic variables, such as community action, employment trends, and demographic changes accompany police actions, and the relative influence of each is difficult to discern.

Other explanations for the 1990s "crime drop" have been touted but appear to have little generalizability. Sampson's notion of "collective efficacy," based in the ecological tradition of neighborhood-level analysis (e.g., Park 1940; Bursik and Grasmick 1993) appears to explain *incremental* change in Chicago in the 1980s but does not account for *precipitous* changes in homicide in 1990s New York (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Is it reasonable to assume that neighbors banded together suddenly and so much more effectively in 1990s New York City than in Chicago and caused a sudden drop in crime in virtually all NYC's neighborhoods at once? Monkkonen's (2001) notion of murder "cycles" works well for describing changes in New York City and, if valid, would predict that Chicago's recent downward trend would gain momentum, similar to New York City. It is less effective, however, in explaining why the momentum of declines stop and increases occur, as they did in Los Angeles in the 1990s.

The rise and fall of drug markets as a reason for declines in violence has also been cited by scholars, beginning with Andy Hamid's prescient work (1990). Blumstein and Wallman (2000); Johnson, Golub, and Dunlap (2000); and Brownstein (1996) explain much of New York City's decline in homicide by the "maturing" of drug markets. Accordingly, their analysis would sensibly predict declines in violence in Chicago to take place a few years later than declines in New York City, since crack entered the Chicago market a few years later than it did New York City.

In Chicago, drug markets were dominated by institutionalized gangs who organized truces in 1991 and 1995 that were widely believed to be efforts to stop the fighting to create a better "business" climate. None of

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these mediation efforts succeeded for long, and high rates of violence persisted until recently (Venkatesh 2000; Popkin 2000). While all U.S. cities apparently experienced peaks and declines in violence corresponding to the intensity of crack wars (Blumstein and Wallman 2000), drug market cycles fail to explain why drastic drops occurred in some cities and only small declines in others.

U.S. scholars have also generally avoided contextualizing domestic violence internationally, except to point out that U.S. rates of violence are markedly higher than other Western countries (e.g., Zimring and Hawkins 1997). For example, both Gurr (1989) and Monkkonen (2001) have consistently compared U.S. violence to lower European rates but not to cities in the third world. Perhaps an investigation of factors influencing urban homicide rates on the global level is in order.

## Global Violence and Gangs

Internationally, violence has been on a steady incline over the past decade, from about 6 per 100,000 in 1990 to 8.8 per 100,000 in 2000 (Krug et al. 2002). This steady incline goes in the opposite direction from the U.S. pattern of overall declines in the late 1990s. As in the United States, however, global violence varies widely by place. Some cities in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and more recently Eastern Europe, are the most violent, with urban centers in the Middle and Far East, Europe, and Australasia the least violent. Within each region there is wide variation between cities.

Several scholars have given possible explanations for this overall international increase in violence. Ted Gurr's "Minorities at Risk" project has argued that since the fall of the Soviet Union, ethnoreligious violence has been more prevalent than East/West or class conflicts. This "explosion" of ethnoreligious conflicts, however, Gurr argues is not a recent one but "a continuation of a trend that began as early as the 1960s" (Gurr and Harff 1994, 13). Gurr is discussing explicitly ethnic, communal, or religious conflicts. His analysis also fits the patterns of large increases in homicide in Black urban ghettoes in the United States from the end of the 1960s to the 1990s.

Several scholars have described the role that racial and ethnic conflict play in violence in the United States. For example, Georgakis and Surkin's *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (1975) shows the relationship between the devastation of deindustrializiation, the failure of the civil rights movement, and skyrocketing rates of African-American violence at the end of the 1960s in Detroit (see also Sugrue 1995). Lane (1997) argues that violence in the United States rose in the 1970s with the decline of industrial-era discipline,

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though he has less to say about subsequent declines. For Lane, like Gurr, racial oppression is key to understanding violence.

In his more recent studies, Gurr (2000) has found that the rise of democratization and pluralism at the end of the twentieth century served to reduce ethnic violence. His conclusions are disputed by Snyder (2000), who argues that democracy has produced *more* ethnic strife. However, Gurr's quantitative analysis of a reduction in the *number of conflicts* is not challenged, while, as noted, *rates of overall global homicide* are on the increase.

What emerges from the analyses of Lane, Gurr, and Snyder is evidence for variation in levels of ethnic conflict and violence. How broader factors like democratization, development, and discrimination are handled in a given state, region, or city apparently matters. Few scholars internationally, however, take cities as their prime unit of analysis (notwithstanding Lane's generalizable [1971] and longitudinal [1979] case studies of Boston and Philadelphia).

One factor that has not been systematically studied is the influence of gangs and other groups of armed young men on rates of violence. While the direction of causality is in question, areas with persistently high rates of violence also appear to be home to institutionalized groups of armed young men. Some of these men are in gangs, others in paramilitary "death squads," others in drug cartels, and still others in fundamentalist militias (Goldstone 2002; Castells 2000). In Lebanon, such groups were disarmed by Syria (Khalif 1998) and rates of violence subsequently dropped; elsewhere, the failure of armed young men to give up their guns has meant continued violence (Hagedorn 2005). The "retreat of the state" (Strange 1996) results in growth of the underground economy, permitting various types of armed groups with material means to sustain themselves.

The international literature on the underground or informal economy (e.g., Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989) argues that off-the-books economic activity has not declined with "industrialization," as was predicted by modernization theorists. In parallel with Lane and Gurr's arguments, Portes, Castells, and other urban scholars argue that the demoralization brought about by the failure of modernity and the institutions of the state has led to the burgeoning of the underground economy, and, we might add, violence. For example, independence in Jamaica did not result in a steadily modernizing state but the creation of "posses" or groups of armed young men fighting for power alongside political factions (Gunst 1995). Indeed, Castells's (1997) discussion of the "black hole" of the ghetto, Wacquant's (2000) notion of an outcast ghetto, and Appadurai's (1999) examination of ethnic hatred implicitly link the inequalities of a globalized information economy to violence in "fourth world" ghettoes on every continent.

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## Urbanization, Housing, and Displacement

The world is becoming urbanized at exponentially growing rates. Mike Davis (2004) reports that in 1950 there were eighty-six cities with populations over 1 million. Today there are more than four hundred. The report *Slums of the World* (UN-Habitat 2003) points out that today nearly 1 billion people live in what can be characterized as slums. In many of these areas, such as the *favelas* of Rio de Janiero, the townships of Soweto, or hills in Port au Prince, the state's security functions are taken over by various groups of armed young men (for multiple case studies, see Dowdney 2003). As demonstrated by the 2005 riots in Paris, the concentration of economically disadvantaged ethnic minorities in high-rise housing projects has created conditions for violence even in Europe, where violence is historically very low (Caldwell 2005).

Most studies of cities link the global and the local, pointing out that local space has crucial functions in global cities. The spatial literature on globalizing cities is far too vast to fully review here. Changing physical and social spaces of the city have been explored by a set of urban theorists, beginning with Lefebrve (1996) and Harvey (1973). For Castells, Sassen (2002), and other urban scholars, the city has become the most important unit of analysis as the global economy valorizes some areas and marginalizes others. Cities across the world have seen major spatial changes as some groups are evicted to make room for others. What is important for our argument is that within cities and regions, certain factors such as slum clearance, gentrification, or other aspects of a city's housing policy may have an effect on social behaviors, including violence.

Displacement is one urban process that has been consistently linked with disorder in U.S. criminological theory (e.g., Skogan 1990). As urban populations grow, slums and ghettoes are created and expanded. But as the more affluent population also grows, this ghetto space needs to be reclaimed from the poor.[1] Marcuse (1997) finds the "citadel and the ghetto" as the norm for globalizing, divided cities. "Walls of segregation" (Caldiera 2000) mark the global era whether created by ethnic cleansing or merely as an attempt to make the city safer through gentrification and support for the "revanchist" state (Smith 1996).

The process of urban renewal is familiar in the United States and worldwide. It is often linked to increases in violence—for example, the Area Removal Acts in South Africa, which led to increased violence and the creation of institutionalized gangs in Cape Town (Pinnock 1984), and the conflict over the "rehabilitation" of the slums of Mumbai, home to between 5 and 7 million people (Mehta 2004).

International law also recognizes the potential of forced displacement to create social problems. The UN argues that moving populations for reasons of

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economic development is inevitable, but human rights must not be sacrificed. For example, Principle 8 of the UN Guidelines on Rights of Internally Displaced People states, “Displacement shall not be carried out in a manner that violates the rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of those affected.”

Ethnic cleansing and other forcible measures to sanitize areas for dominant groups are universally abhorred as violent violations of human rights. However, forced displacement due to gentrification, economic development, and for “crime prevention” reasons can also be violations of human rights and may lead to unintended consequences—including violence among those dislocated.

## Method

This study has both a quantitative and qualitative component. Quantitatively, homicide rates for Chicago for the past thirty-five years were compiled as well as trends in homicide for U.S. cities as presented in Uniform Crime Reports. Internationally, urban homicide rates were garnered from a variety of UN, public health, and local government sources. We note this data is somewhat inconsistent in form as a comprehensive longitudinal international urban homicide data set does not exist.

The Chicago Homicide data set was converted to annual rates and geocoded and mapped by community area. Homicide data was graphically integrated with data on the displacement of Chicago public housing tenants from the Chicago Housing Authority and various advocacy groups.

Qualitatively, interviews of fourteen current gang members, who had been personally involved with organized armed violence, were conducted with a special emphasis on understanding the effects of displacement and gentrification on violent gang activity. Respondents were selected on the basis of either living in housing projects that were torn down or in “receiving communities” where gang members moved after their public housing projects were demolished. These respondents were also chosen for their childhood histories of participation in organized armed violence. Other interviews, talks, and unpublished material on the history of gangs in Chicago, the focus of the principal author, were used to supplement the interviews with current gang members.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and entered into HyperResearch,™ a qualitative software program, where they were coded and analyzed. Study of the transcripts discovered themes of disruption caused by displacement and increased competition over drug markets, as well as fracturing and disorganization of gangs in the 1990s. Keywords found within transcripts that described topics of interest were in turn used as further search terms within the entire data set.

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**Table 1**
**Profile of Interviewees**

| Gender | Present Age | Gang | Ethnicity | Community |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Male | 21 | Unknown Vice Lords | African-American | Lawndale |
| 2. Male | 23 | Vice Lords | African-American | Lawndale |
| 3. Male | 21 | Vice Lords | African-American | Lawndale |
| 4. Male | 23 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Roseland |
| 5. Male | 20 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Roseland |
| 6. Male | 28 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Roseland |
| 7. Male | 19 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Public housing |
| 8. Female | 18 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Public housing |
| 9. Female | 21 | Black Gangster Disciples | African-American | Public housing |
| 10. Male | 21 | Satan's Disciples | Mexican | Little Village |
| 11. Male | 22 | Satan's Disciples | Mexican | Little Village |
| 12. Male | 20 | Satan's Disciples | Mexican | Little Village |
| 13. Male | 35 | Maniac Latin Disciples | Mexican | Humboldt Park |
| 14. Male | 28 | Latin Kings | Puerto Rican | Humboldt Park |

Respondents were "key informants," and the fourteen interviews were intended to explore the issue of the impact of housing policy on gangs and violence (see Table 1). They were therefore not representative of the population of gang members in Chicago.

This case study of Chicago does not necessarily imply that the reasons found in Chicago for high rates of violence will be identical in other cities (see Flyvbjerg 2001). By looking closely at the patterns of homicide in one city and its relationship to other noncriminological variables, such as institutionalized gangs and housing policy, we are offering a contextual approach to understand urban violence in the global era.

## Patterns of Homicide in Chicago

Chicago has had consistently higher levels of homicide than most U.S. cities and always much higher than the national average. Notably, Chicago's trends in homicide have historically paralleled those in New York City since the end of Prohibition and have had a similar trajectory to homicide rates in Los Angeles. But in the 1990s, a marked divergence emerged between the homicide rates in the three cities. This divergence has persisted and continues into the new century (see Figure 1).

We can rule out economic and demographic differences explaining Chicago and New York City's mid-1990s divergence in patterns of violence.

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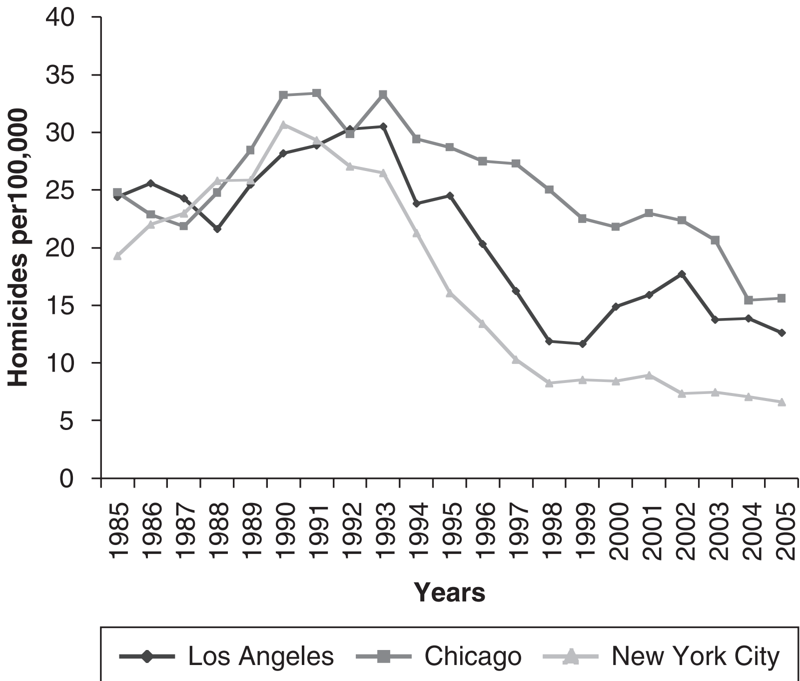
**Figure 1**
**Homicide Rates in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, 1965–2005**




Both cities have 19% of their residents below the poverty line (tied for twenty-fifth in the nation). They have similar within and between race income distributions. as well as similar rankings of segregation (Chicago third, NYC fifth). In both cities, about 15.5% of the Black population is between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years old—the most violent demographic group in both cities.

Certainly, minor differences in these variables cannot explain a sudden change in homicide in one city and not in another. For example, Chicago's much larger Black population proportionate to its size has been claimed as explaining differences in NYC-Chicago homicide rates, but why then were Chicago and NYC's homicide rates parallel between 1940 and 1995? The size of the of Black population also would not explain the rates in Los Angeles,

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where most homicides in Los Angeles are committed by Hispanics (though African-American have the highest *rates*).

Historically, since Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City were among the largest U.S. cities, their relatively high homicide rates were largely explained by city size (e.g., Short 1997). However, as we can see by the recent divergence in homicide rates, this explanation is no longer sufficiently explanatory. So what factors might account for the variation observed in Chicago?

## Institutionalized Gangs

Around the world, some cities, such as Rio de Janiero, are home to *institutionalized*[2] gangs and high rates of homicide; others, like Buenos Aires, do not have such gangs and have much lower murder rates. In Chicago, the gangs founded in the 1950s have persisted for more than half a century (Spergel 1995), as have the gangs in Los Angeles (Vigil 2002), but New York has seen gangs come and go. A Chicago Latin King describes the stable division of his neighborhood by gangs, which has lasted for more than forty years:

> If you look at Humboldt Park, you've got two side ends divided by Sacramento and Humboldt Boulevard. The east side of Humboldt Park is primarily Latin Folks, Latin Disciples, the Spanish Cobras, Dragons, Gents, and I don't know who else is over there. . . . On the west side its all Latin Kings.

In New York, gangs founded in the 1950s began dying out by the early 1970s. New gangs formed periodically, replacing older gangs (Schneider 1999). In Los Angeles, Mexican gangs have been institutionalized for more than sixty years (Moore 1978), and African-American gangs that formed in the 1960s have also persisted (Vigil 2002; Davis 1990).

The sales of crack in the late 1980s and 1990s were thus organized and conducted in New York City by groups with shallow roots to their communities and narrowly focused on the best way to sell drugs (see Johnson et al. 1989; Hamid 1990). Thus, when police "cracked" down on the drug crews, these gangs had little support in their communities and were successfully taken off the streets.

> Since the businesses had few neighborhood ties or enduring loyalties to its employees, they were generally unconcerned about the war of attrition waged by NYPD on their work force, so long as they were not prevented from

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> making a profit. Over time, however, as the NYPD ratcheted up pressure on the block through more frequent undercover operations and a greater uniformed presence, the quality of the workforce steadily deteriorated and the businesses incurred daily losses from employee theft and police seizures. (Curtis and Wendel 2003, 5)

As Bruce Johnson, Andrew Golub, and Eloise Dunlap (2000, 188) report, "the police . . . have successfully 'taken back the streets' from drug sellers and other disorderly persons in the 1980s." However, things were quite different in Chicago and Los Angeles.

In Chicago, police put pressure on gangs and drug dealers to an unprecedented degree in response to community outrage at levels of violence identical to New York City. But the arrest of leaders of institutionalized gangs not only failed to end the gangs but also may have backfired and temporarily increased levels of violence by destroying the gang structure, which had provided a check on gang members to keep violence from escalating too high.

> See, that's another thing that I want to tell you about. They think that they're so smart, taking all the cheese [gang leaders] off of the street, they just fucked up. You left a group with young wild peoples out here, don't got, cause we all was young, we ride, you left us out here with nobody to tell you. Because, back in the days, ask anyone, GDs [Gangster Disciples] had structure. The hundreds [far south side] had structure. There wasn't no you could do what you want to do. You could do what you want to do, gonna get your shit split. Then, once they took all the cheese away, it wasn't it. Now, you got outlaws. Everybody their own, you got all types of gangsters out there. It's a bunch of outlaws, because there ain't no order.

Rather than destroying gangs that had been in place for more than fifty years, the police pressure in Chicago fragmented them. As a result, the violence that had been primarily between rival gangs now occurred between members of the same gang. This Gangster Disciple leader explains the history behind it:

> *A:* But when they was out here, the leaders and coordinators and all that, when they was here, they was feeding everybody, all over the United States. But since they got locked up, Chicago went south, it just went south.
>
> *Q:* So, [the police] have been effective, then?
>
> *A:* Yeah, it was effective and then everybody went on their own thing. There ain't no laws, and there ain't no rules, and the same rules that applied, the stuff they don't want you to do, and the stuff they do want you to do . . . they still

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> apply, but who out here to tell you what's the plan? Ain't no more gang meetings, you see what I'm saying, ain't none of that. And it's like, everyman for himself now. You know what you is and you know what you have, but don't be *doing nothing stupid, but* . . .

In 1990s New York, police pressure apparently had the *intended* effect of taking the drug crew leaders off the street and reducing violence. In Chicago, the same policies had the *unintended* effect of fracturing more long-standing gangs and, at least temporarily, *increasing* violence. As Dixon and Johns (2001, 45) point out about a similar persisting gang situation in Cape Town, South Africa, "The symbiotic relationship between gang and community cannot be broken by force." The gangs in Chicago did not go away. Rather, they split into smaller, more violent and disorganized units.

Similarly, in Los Angeles, the vaunted "Hammer" policy of suppression apparently worked well enough in the mid-1990s to drive down homicide rates, but did not uproot L.A.'s gangs (Davis 1990). Indeed, L.A. gangs not only have a local market to exploit, but police and immigration pressure has extended the reach of L.A.'s gangs into Central America (Zilberg 2004), where they have become a truly global phenomena—moving between barrios from Los Angeles to San Salvador and beyond.

We can therefore conclude that the presence of gangs that have institutionalized and have a symbiotic relationship with the community in which they exist cannot easily be eliminated through criminal justice measures. Rather, attempts to destroy gangs that have institutionalized in this way may in fact have the opposite of the desired effect and lead to increased violence. Similarly, the housing policies implemented in Chicago had serious consequences for the city's homicide rate when they forced the displacement of the communities in which the gangs had institutionalized.

## Housing Policy

As we have seen, a profound redivision of space is occurring in cities around the world. As cities are being made safe for the affluent and the dominant ethnic or religious groups, the methods used to redesign the city vary. In this regard, the spatial and racial policies of Chicago differ markedly from those of Los Angeles and New York City. In the 1960s, all three cities saw massive displacement of African-American residents to make room for expressways and high-rise housing (Caro 1974; Cohen and Taylor 2000; Davis 1990). In the 1960s, a sharp increase in violence

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occurred coincidentally with displacement, economic restructuring and demoralization. Poor neighborhoods like the South Bronx in New York City, South Central in Los Angeles, and Lawndale and Englewood in Chicago became depopulated; the housing stock deteriorated or was destroyed by arson (Shill et al. 2002). Homicide rates shot up.

However, in 1985, after a struggle over the effects of the fiscal crisis and the Reagan-era gutting of the federal Housing and Urban Development budget, NYC Mayor Koch announced the largest urban housing initiative in the history of the United States—a commitment of $4 billion to build or renovate more than 100,000 housing units over ten years. The actual expenditures turned out to be larger—more than $5 billion and 182,000 units (Shill et al. 2002). One result was the reversal of the trend of depopulation in areas like the South Bronx, which saw an 11% gain in population in the 1990s and a reversal of its reputation as a U.S. "Beirut" to a "Comeback City" (Grogan and Proscio 2000).

Unlike Chicago and Los Angeles, New York's housing program focused on building affordable housing on the vacant and burnt-out land in the South Bronx and elsewhere. Such building programs are "in theory more likely than demand-oriented programs, like housing vouchers, to generate positive spillover effected in distressed neighborhoods" (Shill et al. 2002, 530) While housing scholars usually look at the impact of falling crime rates for housing values (Schwartz, Susin, and Voicu 2003), one "spillover effect" of housing construction may have been reductions in crime.

Whatever impact housing investment may have had on crime rates in New York, the refurbishing of housing in the South Bronx and elsewhere did *not* result in the displacement of residents. Rather, in New York's tight housing market, people wanted to stay in their neighborhoods, and the policy worked to allow them to do so as the neighborhood improved.

Housing policy in Los Angeles in the 1990s was marked by an increased exodus of Whites to "edge cities" and hardened defense of more affluent areas to contain crime (Abu-Lughod 1999). Rather than rebuilding older areas of the city where Mexicans and African-Americans lived, or upgrading public housing, these areas were allowed to deteriorate until they could be "reclaimed" by gentrification, displacing the prior low-income residents (Davis 1998).

Housing policy in Chicago followed yet another path. Rather than the reconstruction of housing units in previously devastated neighborhoods, Chicago decided to demolish the high-rise housing projects that had been built in the 1960s. Demolishing these projects represented a massive displacement of people. For example, one such project, the Robert Taylor

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Homes, housed twenty-seven thousand residents in twenty-eight 16-story towers at its peak. The Taylor Homes were part of a several public housing projects that consisted of the "densest concentration of public housing in the nation" (Cohen and Taylor 2000, 188).

Demolishing public housing disproportionately affected African-American neighborhoods in this very segregated city. In the 1950s, Chicago's mayor Richard J. Daley had refused to build public housing for the Black population in integrated areas and packed public housing into the ghetto that "reinforced the city's racial boundaries" (Cohen and Taylor 2000, 184). Almost all housing projects were built in areas with a 90%-plus African-American population.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, like Los Angeles and unlike New York City, the city of Chicago did not invest heavily in new housing. Instead, under Vincent Lane, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) moved monies from renovation to law enforcement, spending $250 million between 1994 to 1996 on Lane's Anti-Drug Initiative and up to $80 million a year on security alone. Lane's much ballyhooed and numerous sweeps cost a cool $175,000 *apiece* (Popkin 2000).

Lane's war on gangs did not work no matter how many sweeps and how much money he spent, and he was fired. HUD took over the CHA and began plans to demolish the housing projects. Coincidentally, as the downtown Loop had expanded and was now closer to the land on which the projects sat, developers were eager to "help"—and make a substantial profit as well. As the land became more valuable, police pressure on those who still lived there intensified. One Chicago police officer, in ordering a resident to move from the corner, blatantly said,

> Don't you know. This ain't the CHA anymore. It's the white man's land.[3]

The "Plan for Transformation" (CHA 2000) of Chicago's public housing reads as the exact reverse of New York City's earlier Ten Year Plan in several respects. In New York, the South Bronx and other deteriorated ghetto lands were renovated to provide a more attractive place for current residents to live. Conversely, in Chicago, demolition of public housing has resulted in the overall displacement of more than a hundred thousand African-American public housing residents.

This method of relocation of public housing residents involves using housing choice vouchers. Qualifying relocated tenants were given vouchers that they could use to obtain a subsidy to spend on qualifying existing housing. However, this does not mean that housing was available—the

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supply of low-income housing fell far short of demand. The decision to relocate tenants through housing choice vouchers means that building new housing, which could revitalize neighborhoods, was not the CHA's priority. As in New York City, housing project tenants wanted to stay in their neighborhoods, but in Chicago they were forced to leave, severing kinship and social ties, economic networks, and ties to local schools. In this way, housing policy in Chicago destroyed important social networks that may have served as a deterrent to violence by providing some type of support to residents.

The breakdown of communities due to housing demolition is massive in scale. The leveling of Robert Taylor Homes alone, completed in 2005, has meant the relocation of not only its twenty-seven thousand residents but also an estimated ten thousand more "nonleaseholders" or people living in the unit not listed on the public housing lease agreement (Venkatesh et al. 2004). The CHA reports that it intends to tear down twenty-five thousand housing units in ten years. There are plans for relocation of at best 15% of the residents, and 97% of those assisted with relocation have moved to other segregated "nonopportunity"[4] areas. These neighborhoods, as can be seen below, are also the areas in Chicago of the highest rates of homicide.

## Gangs and Displacement

These acts of resegregation had some startling, if unintended, effects. Qualitative analysis of our interviews found two factors that interacted in this situation to maintain high rates of homicide: (1) displacement of institutionalized gangs and (2) interruption of the normal cycle of drug markets.

As we have seen above, the gangs had been fractured, not destroyed, by Chicago police pressure. At the same time, gangs that controlled drug markets in public housing were forced to relocate into areas already claimed by existing gangs. While Chicago's crack market violence had peaked early in the 1990s, similar to NYC, the displacement of gang drug sellers into markets already claimed by other gangs kept drug markets in the mid- to late 1990s unstable and violent. Meanwhile, during the same period, homicide plummeted in New York City as drug crews were dismantled.

In the course of the past few years, it has been clear that displaced gangs moved to new turf and have violently attempted to carve out a niche in drug sales (see Venkatesh et al. 2004). As some housing projects came down, gang members migrated to other projects, like Harold Ickes Homes, and forced their way into that drug market. Popkin (2000) explain[s] what happened:

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> Without security, Ickes was particularly vulnerable to outside gangs. By 1996, the CHA was vacating and demolishing buildings in other developments along the State Street corridor (where Ickes and Robert Taylor Homes are located), displacing their gang members from their usual turf. The dominant Gangster Disciples had been weakened by the conviction of more than thirty of its top warlords on federal conspiracy charges related to drug sales; as a result Ickes did not even have an effective gang to fight off intruders. Without guards or gang members to protect the development from outsiders, Ickes quickly became a battleground. (p. 169)

This displaced Black Gangster Disciple from Robert Taylor Homes reinforces this point from his perspective:

> They building got torn down, and they moved out here, and the people got mad that the low end [Robert Taylor Homes] people that come down are trying to take over . . . and we say "Like, they can't get mad now, because our building got torn down, they moved us, the government moved us out here. Now, they can't stop us, we're going to serve in their set, sell weed or anything . . ."

And those gangsters who did set up shop in a neighborhood found drug sales to be different and more dangerous.

> A lot of them cashiers [drug dealers] coming down here from the low end, from the projects, they come down to the big city where it's at, but they don't even know they got the mentality of the project, when it's a block like that. You see what I'm saying? They're all used to living in a project, and now it's a block and it's going to change you're whole environment. So, they now they still think like they're living in the projects, getting tooled with some of the other gangsters or either they could be some opposition gang, and now they still think they're living in the project, project mentality. No, . . . that's causing wars, niggers is dying. You shooting people out here, shooting niggers, that moved out.

Other gangs on the west side were preparing for more wars ahead:

> As the projects come down, they gonna start movin' in, in like our neighborhoods, like our neighborhoods, probably some suburbs. That, that's gonna be a big, when all the projects get moved down, that's gonna be a, I'm talkin' about, man, a real, I'm talkin' about, man, a war, a war that you've never seen before, man. 'Cause niggers from the projects gonna come try to take over

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> niggers' lands and shit and, ain't nobody gonna let it, you know what I'm sayin'. . . 'cause you came from the projects. It's gonna be a lot of people dyin' and getting' shot and getting' hurt, robbed . . .

So in the mid-1990s, just at the time when drug markets were ripe to settle down, as in other cities, demolition of housing projects displaced gang members as well as thousands of residents. Arrest of older gang leaders left the gangs with younger and less experienced leadership. The gangs fractured, and drug markets were sharply contested by new arrivals with few organizational controls. This had the predicable result of increased conflict and high rates of homicide that took several more years to decline.

## Housing Policy, Displacement, Gangs, and Violence

In 2004, Miloon Kothari, the United Nation's highest-ranking expert on housing issues, visited Cabrini-Green, a Chicago housing project slated for demolition. He stated that "evictions of public housing residents in the United States clearly violate international human rights, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights." CHA tenants thus qualify as Internally Displaced People and would be entitled to special protection under UN guidelines (Coalition to Protect Public Housing 2004).

Not only does forcible displacement qualify residents for special protection, but their eviction and relocation into the areas of highest violence in Chicago also threatens their lives and security. This study supports the notion that in Chicago, policies of forced displacement, interacting with institutionalized gangs and segregated neighborhoods, produced, at the very least, a deadly delay in the declines in homicide that occurred in most U.S. cities by the mid-1990s.

This study does not rule out a simple lagged effect: that Chicago's crack markets began later than New York's or Los Angeles's and declines might logically be delayed. On the other hand, the interviews with gang members point to a major disruptive effect of the Chicago-specific displacement of public housing tenants and the internal migration of gang members looking to sell drugs in already established markets. The interviews also point out that the fracturing of Chicago's gangs, but not their destruction, exacerbated conflicts.

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Given the seemingly paradoxical experience of Chief Bratton, who implemented New York–style policies in Los Angeles only to see homicide jump, it is hard to fully credit Chicago police for homicide declines. Nor should they be solely blamed if it again increases. Measuring the relative weight of policing policies versus other factors is an important a topic for further research. At the very least, the increases in rates of violence observed in many cities and their stabilization in cities such as Chicago suggest researchers look at factors beyond policing tactics to explain variations in violence. This study strongly suggests that city-specific variables, and not always those based on traditional criminological factors, may be key to understanding patterns in urban rates of homicide.

Since a major redivision of space is occurring in cities throughout the world, attention to housing policy and forcible displacement may be more widely warranted, especially in cities with persisting gangs. The data in this study suggest the involuntary displacement of poor residents who "get in the way" of gentrification or the desires of the majority group for "safe," segregated social space may have serious, and sometimes violent, unintended effects.

Another important but less studied factor influencing rates of urban violence is why gangs institutionalize in some cities and not others. High rates of violence may be more stubborn in cities with persisting gangs—a hypothesis that would be supported by L.A. Police Chief Bratton, who blamed his inability to reduce violence in Los Angeles on that city's gangs. Therefore, a better understanding of why and how gangs institutionalize may help shape policies to decrease violence.

## Notes

1. Defensible spaces (Newman 1972), a concept developed to explain spatial engineering for crime prevention, may also be used to explain why some armed groups become entrenched in ghettoes, barrios, and *favelas*.

2. To say that a gang has *institutionalized* is to say that it persists despite changes in leadership (e.g., killed, incarcerated, or "matured out"), has an organization complex enough to sustain multiple roles of its members (including roles for children), can adapt to changing environments without dissolving (e.g., police repression), fulfills some needs of its community (economics, security, services), and organizes a distinct outlook of its members (sometimes called a gang "subculture").

3. Kicking the Pigeon, http://viewfromtheground.com/archive/2003/03/state-street-coverage-initiative-its-white-mans-land-now.html%20 (accessed March 8, 2006).

4. A "nonopportunity area" is defined as an area with poverty rates higher than 23.49% and more than 30% Black population. The major receiving communities in Chicago each have poverty rates in excess of 40% and are more than 95% Black.

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