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Resident-Led Urban Agriculture And The Hegemony Of Neoliberal Community Development: Eco-Gentrification In A Detroit Neighborhood

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**RESIDENT-LED URBAN AGRICULTURE AND THE HEGEMONY OF NEOLIBERAL
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ECO-GENTRIFICATION IN A DETROIT
NEIGHBORHOOD**

by

THEODORE T. PRIDE III

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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Lazarus Ramontseng (2014) "Gardening"

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Vivian Pride, mother, Chong Hye Kim, and father, Theodore Pride Jr., who have guided and watched over me throughout my time as a doctoral student and Wayne State University. The miracles you have bestowed upon me do not go unrecognized. You have been with me every step of the way, and you will always be with me to the end.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Understanding Resident-led Community Development in the Age of Neoliberalism: Identifying Neoliberal Hegemony at the Grassroots

Resident-led community-based approaches are increasingly being utilized as the primary strategy to ameliorate poverty and other social problems plaguing many of America's urban environments. The ascendancy of localized, resident-driven problem-solving—which is partly due to neoliberal restructuring and reductions in state services and public goods—has helped to position residents living in poor neighborhoods as key actors in the highly contested arena of community-level social change. Because of these shifts in responsibility it is expected that the revitalization and resurrection of America's urban centers will be largely contingent upon the place-making vision and capabilities of everyday residents at the grassroots level.

Many scholars have noted that resident-led forms of community change function “differently” than top-down neighborhood development projects controlled by wealthy investors and government bureaucrats who intend to put profit over people. These scholars argue that neighborhood development controlled by residents—who have a personal stake in the development because they live in the neighborhood—allow groups who are often excluded from urban processes of place-making to produce socio-spatialities within the urban that more closely reflect the spaces and places desired, as well as needed, by marginalized urban dwellers like the poor and racial minorities. In this way resident-led neighborhood development serves as a radical alternative to capitalistic forms of urban place-making. It allows the voiceless to reclaim a “right to the city”, which has been lost under capitalist social relations.

Scholars have identified various forms of resident-led community change. These forms include formal approaches like community-based development and informal approaches like do-it-yourself urbanism. Community scholars have argued that community-based development, which is typically implemented by community-based organizations (CBOs), provides substantial advantages to poor neighborhoods through the bridging and building of social capital, economic development, and resident empowerment (Gittell and Vidal 1998). Likewise, scholars also suggest that do-it-yourself urbanism represents the empowerment of poor residents in the urban hierarchy as they find new ways to operate in the “cracks of capitalism” to appropriate the uses of urban space in ways that counter the ideological, spatial, and economic power of elites.

However, recently many social scientists have begun to criticize the theoretical merits and effectiveness of contemporary practices of resident-led neighborhood development as a model for social change (Imrie and Raco 2003; Defilippis 2001; Dixon, Dogan, and Sanderson 2005). Critics of the community-based development model approaches claim that its operational functions produce little to no real benefits for, specifically, poor communities, and in many instances it yields severe adverse socio-spatial and economic augmentations for poor residents. (Here, I refer to “benefit”, specifically as it pertains to poor residents, as improvements in material and class conditions. This involves upward movement in socioeconomic measures such as education, job prestige, income, and home value (Diemer et al. 2013)). They point out that, beginning during the Reagan era, corporate logic has infiltrated the realm of community-based non-profit work, prompting CBOs to function more and more like “businesses”. Cost-efficiency, productivity, and entrepreneurialism are increasingly

becoming the guiding principles in resident-led forms of neighborhood change. DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge (2010) argue that *current* practices of community-based work, operating with an explicit acceptance of free-market principles as the superior approach to the allocation of societal resources, lack the capacity, or rather, the appropriate ideological strategy, to effectively address the complexity of problems—which have been caused in part by the same free-market processes they covet—experienced by poor populations primarily because of the theoretical and practical contradictions that exist between social justice and capitalist objectives. Community and capital intend to produce urban space in disparate ways (Logan and Molotch 1987). Local residents seek to develop the use values of a place—the essential components of community life, like education, green spaces, health care, and religious institutions, that individuals *need* to enrich their lives and the lives of their families. In contrast, capital, operating under market principles, inherently aim to commodify social life through converting what people need in communities into profit. Community development for the specific benefit of residents (in terms of use values) then becomes drastically undermined by market pursuits.

For example, Fraser's (2003) study on community building in Chattanooga, Tennessee showed that the desire of political and business elites in the area to make the city "globally competitive" pushed CBOs to utilize market-centered initiatives to revitalize poor communities that economically improved formerly poor neighborhoods, making them more affluent, but failed to improve the socioeconomic realities of the poor residents themselves. The Community Impact Fund (CIF), the CBO leading the community-based efforts in Chattanooga, in gaining support from poor residents for the new plans, moved unchallenged in transforming Chattanooga's most economically depressed enclaves into

“business friendly environments”. One of the outcomes was the development of middle class homes at the expense of poor residents—as they were forced to relocate due to rising property values and absence of affordable housing for low income individuals (which was one of the demands of the local residents). Fraser demonstrates that, while poor neighborhoods as a bounded place can be “improved” (in terms of producing capitalist urban space) with CBO-led redevelopment, poor individuals living in such geographic areas tend to receive none of the claimed benefits.

The “self-help” philosophy of contemporary community-based work also limits the potentiality of transformative scenarios for the poor (Amin 2005). Central to formal community-based work is the inward development of social capacity, the construction of internal behavioral, cultural, economic, and political assets that enable marginalized communities to access resources needed to independently improve their socioeconomic conditions. This approach tends to endogenously focus on social change possibilities, primarily within the community, while subordinating exogenous features and fields of action that extend to larger—and many times more fundamental—structural causes of poverty and inequality. Myopic and narrow tactical decisions are formulated that localizes and individualizes the problem and solution, which constrains the ability of poor residents to address the broad and systemic forces associated with community decline (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010). There is also a tendency, through such an endogenized focus, to see the cultures and behaviors of the poor as the primary causes of urban decline, which indirectly labels the poor as deficient and the main perpetrators of their impoverishment.

Thus, contemporary forms of community-based development, because of changes in its internal dynamics and recently established functionalities, tends to undermine social change processes that can potentially transform the material and class positions of poor residents (see Table 1.1).

DIY urbanism has also been heralded as effective vehicle of social change for marginalized urban groups. Advocates of DIY urbanism argue that by “doing it differently” marginalized residents subtly create new forms of urban life that have the potential to replace existing oppressive systems and structures within the urban (Games & Soresen 2014). However, many critical scholars have noted that DIY urbanism, while it is growing, has not even managed to put a dent in urban inequality throughout, not only the U.S., but the world (Iveson 2013). These scholars argue that DIY forms of urban change, working through micro-spatial transformation, condense urban struggle to small localized processes which hinder their ability to create a wider urban politics that connects the struggles of disenfranchised people throughout the city. This leads to fractured and segmented urban battles that are unable fight inequality at the systemic level. Because of this, the small scale politics of DIY urbanism fails to truly counter the neoliberal urban logics of self-responsibility, property rights, and free market dominance. The end result is the production of urban space that, although initiated from below by disenfranchised urban dwellers, supports and reconstitutes capitalist urban processes that exploits and excludes the most vulnerable and powerless segments of society just as urban transformation spearheaded by elites who benefit from the neoliberal status quo.

Thus there seems to be a connection between formal and informal modes of resident-led community change within the current epoch of neoliberal urbanism. First,

because grassroots, bottom-up community change, either formal or informal, involves the downward shift of responsibility to residents, there is a tendency to endogenize the politics of oppression to the local while ignoring systemic causes of inequality. Second, because of this endogenized focus, structural logics of the urban, specifically market logics in the organization of urban space and place, remain unchallenged and even myopically become the mechanism of resistance to urban social problems plaguing poor residents. Lastly, the adoption of self-help and market strategies tend to, perhaps, improve place but not the socioeconomic positions of poor people. Rather, and more importantly, it tends to reproduce the same exclusionary and oppressive outcomes as top-down neoliberal development like gentrification.

Many social scientists have conceptualized this brand of community change as a form of neoliberalism. David Harvey (2007) states that neoliberalism “is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). Here Harvey highlights the supremacy of the market as a feature of neoliberalism—that the “social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions” (p. 3). Along with the ideological belief in market superiority, Bronwyn Davies (2005) sees neoliberalism as a shift in responsibility, where individuals, not the state, are responsible for their own well-being. She states that individual responsibility is a “crucial element of the neoliberal order—the removal of dependence on the social combined with the dream of possessions and wealth for each individual who gets it right” (p. 9). This shift in responsibility is key to neoliberal restructuring because it provides the

ideological justification for neoliberal economic and social policies that intend to dismantle the social safety net. Central to neoliberalism is the belief that a healthy economy is fostered by removing barriers to business investment, namely economic regulation and taxation. By devolving responsibility to lower and lower levels of society, government is able to, so the story goes, tax less, making the business community very happy—happy enough to invest and grow the economy. Thus there are two key dimensions of neoliberalism here: 1) the belief in the market in fixing all problems and 2) the belief that individuals are responsible for their own success as well as failure. Several social scientists have identified these dynamics as integral aspects of contemporary forms of community-based work (Mayer 2011, Defilippis 2008).

Neoliberal resident-led community development is *resident-led neighborhood improvement initiatives that intend to transform space and place using a free market approach while placing responsibility for the creation and eradication of neighborhood problems on individual residents.*

There is much empirical evidence supporting the inability of current forms of neoliberal community-based development to improve the lives of poor residents. Temkin and Rohe (1998) found that resident participation in CBOs has no significant effect on neighborhood economic growth and stability. Stoecker's (1997) study on community development corporations (CDCs) in the U.S. during the early 1990s found that, because they "are severely undercapitalized and cannot keep up with accelerating decay", CDCs were largely unable to generate long-term economic growth for the poor communities they intended to serve. Also, as previously mentioned above, Fraser et al. (2003) found that CBOs in Chattanooga succeeded in economically developing poor neighborhoods

but in the end only shifted poverty to other areas and did not produce the type of social change that poor residents could benefit from.

The growth of concentrated poverty since 2000 indirectly supports these claims of community-based work as an ineffective anti-poverty strategy. The Brookings Institute in 2014 found that between 2000 and 2010, the population in extremely poor neighborhoods—where at least 40% of the residents live below the poverty line—climbed by more than one-third, from 6.6 million to 8.7 million. During this period, the percent of poor people nationwide living in these sorts of neighborhoods grew from 9.1% to 10.5%. Furthermore, in addition to the creation of new poor neighborhoods, the study found that nearly all extremely poor neighborhoods in the decade before, in 1990, experienced further economic decline throughout the 2000s (Kneebone et al 2011). Because concentrated poverty is, by definition, a local phenomenon, one should expect the proliferation of community-based development—a localized anti-poverty strategy—to reduce the number of extremely poor neighborhoods or at the very least halt the deterioration, and eventually improve the conditions, of those neighborhoods designated as poor two decades ago. While studies have not directly linked current CBO strategies to a national failure to reduce concentrated poverty over the last 20 years (which this study will attempt to do), one could easily extrapolate—considering the massive growth of poor neighborhoods—that they have performed poorly in mitigating the overall spread of poverty at the local level.

Table 1.1: Paradoxical Dynamics of Neoliberal Community-Based Development as Social Change Strategy for Poor Residents in Capitalist System

Fundamental Components of Neoliberal Community-Based Development	Primary Outcome of Practice	Outcome Negation for Poor Residents
Market Orientation	<i>Production of Exchange Values (Market Economy)</i>	<i>Development of Use Values (Social Economy)</i>
Self-Help Philosophy	<i>Focus on Internal (individual behavior and community) Deficiencies</i>	<i>Focus on External and Structural Deficiencies</i>

Despite the limited success of resident-led community change, the practice has emerged as a common approach to poverty reduction by public and private institutions. This is evident by the fact that the number of CBOs operating in the U.S. has exploded over the last 40 years. The National Congress for Community Development (1999) found that the number of CDCs grew from only twelve in the early 1970s to over 3,600 by 1999—a 30,000% increase in roughly 25 years. Today it is estimated that over 5,000 CDCs exist in the United States. In addition, even though no official count of local development corporations (LDCs) exist, Green and Haines (2008) estimates that, because of their perceived advantage over local government in creating jobs and stimulating economic growth, the number of LDCs significantly increased during the 1990s to well over 15,000. They suggest that this number is much higher today. Other CBOs like neighborhood development organizations (NDOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and neighborhood associations have all recently experienced high levels of growth as well (Gilmore 2007). Moreover, the increased reliance on non-profit community organizations to provide social services has led to the expansion of the voluntary sector, or what some call the “third

way”. The number of these types of organizations, many of which are engaged in community-based activities, doubled from 1981 to 2006 to more than 1.5 million organizations (The Independent Sector 2009). As you can see, resident-led community development is booming.

In addition to the proliferation of formal resident-led community development, there has also been an explosion of informal resident-led community change. Scholars have pointed out that the abandonment of urban space has foster the growth of guerrilla urbanism, where residents take matters into their own hands and begin transform the city without formal authorization to do so.

Some scholars have argued that the rise of CBOs and community-based work has in large supported the neoliberalization of society since the 1970s (Harvey 1989). Critical theories, viewing current forms of community-based work as an “actually existing neoliberal moment”, contend that CBOs organizationally aid in the metastasization of neoliberalism in many ways. First, through romanticizing community-based work as a “cure-all” solution, CBOs place responsibility solely on poor residents to address the multitude of social problems tied to the neighborhoods in which they live. This simultaneously absolves the forces of capitalism as the main culprit in the generation of poverty and neighborhood decline while promoting the neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurialism and meritocracy—that “you get what you earn” (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003). The problems associated with place are then attributed to internal deficiencies of communities and pathologies of poor residents. This helps to further vilify the poor through images of welfare dependency and irresponsible citizens, which then works to support neoliberalism’s corrosive dismantling of the “Keynesian welfare model” and

transition to a “Schumpeterian workfare state” (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Second, private CBOs working as “replacements” for the state—in providing public goods, economic development, and community safety—reinforces the superiority of free-market approaches over government, thus further validating the privatization and corporatization of social provisions. It also allows for the exacerbation of devolution in that it assists in stripping municipalities of power while placing that power into the hands of capital. Lastly, CBOs, partly due to their often necessary relationship to private funders and corporations (as mentioned above), deploy non-confrontational tactics that endorse collaborating with corporate elites and powerful capitalists. As a result, capital is allowed to function unfettered without the threat of resistance and conflict.

While the benefits of community-based development to free-market capitalism explains why those in power support it and advocate for its expansion, it does not elucidate why poor residents have supported the practice and continue to utilize it as a strategy for social change considering its fundamental limitations as an anti-poverty tool as well as its propensity to produce outcomes counter to the needs of poor individuals. A fundamental component of community-based development is resident participation. But as presented above, past research strongly indicates that community-based work—while beneficial to capital—does not profoundly transform the circumstances of the poor. Yet over the past 30 years the use of and participation in this activity by poor residents has increased (Mansuri and Rao 2004). This problem/conundrum is of primary importance to this study. That is, why do poor residents participate in neoliberal community-based development when it does not in the end help them?

Prior studies on resident participation in community organizations and community-based work offer little insight to this question. They have mostly focused on the structure of participation opportunity (mobilization models) and how characteristics and attitudes of individuals impact civic engagement (behavior and attitude model) (Leighly 1995; Chinman and Wandersman 1999). These studies posit that resident participation hinges on 1) the ability of organizations to strategically and programmatically mobilize individuals (mostly by providing opportunities/incentives for participation) or 2) residents' perceptions of the "risks and rewards" of a particular community initiative or their level of competence to participate effectively. However, all of these studies start with the assumption that community participation is inherently "good"—that it is naturally beneficial for all residents and increased knowledge or accessibility are the key factors keeping them from the realization of its positive impact. What these theoretical approaches fail to acknowledge is that community participation is in fact not inherently "good", that its meanings and practices are socially contested and constructed (Pretty and Scoones 1995). The extant forms of community participation as a beneficial phenomenon is not objective, it is a matter of power and who gets to define such forms and expressions. In this way, resident participation does not simply involve rational actors making calculated decisions based on cost-benefit, but rather the subtle *coercion of actors* in a power latent struggle over the supremacy of ideologies and approaches—the entrenchment and re-entrenchment of dominant social change repertoires for poor actors at the community level. Thus, while old theories (ones that implicitly ignore power) of civic engagement can ostensibly explain why certain residents, acting in their own self-interest, participate in activities they

perceive as beneficial, they do not sufficiently explain why they think it is beneficial, and subsequently participate, when it actually works counter to their material or class interest.

However, there are some community scholars that have recognized the need to include an analysis of power in theorizations of community participation. Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1995: 373) posits that “the use of the concept of participation in development sometimes obscures real power differentials between “change agents” and those on the “receiving end” of the development relationship, and sometimes serves as a pleasing disguise for manipulation.” Likewise, Midgley et al. (1986: viii) suggests that participation is not an intrinsically beneficial act, but a “complex issue involving different ideological beliefs, political forces, administrative arrangement, and varying perceptions of what is possible.” These theorists, by inserting conflict in the analysis, conceptualize community participation as a power latent process to control community-level change. They content that, in understanding community participation as a struggle for power, poor residents should seek empowerment—the ability of residents to control decision making and initiative design—to truly benefit in any capacity. That is, “good” or beneficial resident participation is achieved when residents obtain the “power” to guide the social change process. Moreover, participation that does not genuinely empower residents can be explained by manipulation—elites “duping” or forcing residents to act against their own interest. Although these theories recognize that the benefits of community participation is a contested process, that all participation is not good participation, they, similar to structure of participation opportunity and community/resident capacity theories, assume that control is inherently good. Control of an initiative may give poor residents power to enact the type of social change strategy they desire but it does not necessarily mean it

will benefit them. For example, studies have shown that blacks now have far more political control over the places where they reside—as mayors, city council members, ect.—than during the 1970s but it has not fundamentally improved the class position of blacks (actually it has gotten worse) as the income and wealth gap between blacks and whites has widen over the last several decades (Reed 1995). Thus, while these theoretical approaches explain the need for power and control in participation (so poor resident will not be manipulated into something that does not help), it does not clearly explain why residents seek control (or are in control) of approaches that do not work.

Hence, there is a need to rethink the ways and, more importantly, reasons why poor residents engage in neoliberal community-based development. Gramscian theories of civil society may provide a viable theoretical framework to build on existing approaches to resident participation. These theories conceptualize the community sphere as the “ground that reproduces and maintains the hegemony of the bourgeoisie” (Cox 1999: 3). According to this approach, it is not necessarily force or direct manipulation which guides the action of social change agents but the cultural hegemony of the dominant class. In this way, residents are not being explicitly coerced by elites but rather *consent* to the utilization of social change strategies that do not help because of deeply embedded understandings and ideas of how the world operates. Using this framework we can introduce the role of the hegemony of capitalism in shaping the possibilities of change for poor groups and the subsequent actions they take to transform their oppressive conditions and position within the existing social order.

In addition, Gramscian approaches also suggest that civil society, or more specifically in this case, the community, is a space where an emancipatory counter

hegemony can be constructed. Various stakeholders and actors, seeking to gain influence and control over civil society, converge at the local level to either perpetuate capitalist domination or an alternative social order. Macdonald (1997) argues that in this “war of position” at the community level, “top-down” forces coming from political and corporate elites (the state) look to penetrate and coopt “bottom-up” organic, grass roots movements (civil society). The cultural hegemony of capitalism is infused into local actors operating within civil society through forces initiated by larger structural apparatuses seeking to maintain the social order. But also at the local level there exists the revolutionary potential, with residents using their human agency, to formulate new ways of thinking for the construction of a new social order. Therefore, in the context of resident participation in community-based work, there is an ongoing conflict between the state along with capital attempting to convince poor residents to cooperate for survival and civil society at the local level seeking radical, emancipatory transformations of the state and capital. This theoretical framework explicitly places resident participation within the larger political economy of society. That is, to fully understand resident participation in community-based work one should analyze the “war of position” that is taking place at the local level within the current capitalist system and how cultural hegemony impacts that social change repertoires devised and utilized by poor communities . Following this approach, a more fundamental question emerges: what are the forces that influence the social change choice(s) of oppressed groups? This study plans to provide some understanding to this question.

Consequences: Extending Neoliberalism in the City

The “war of position” mentioned above is extremely important to the current and future state of many U.S. urban areas. Cities throughout the U.S. find themselves mired in poverty, crime, and unemployment along with shrinking tax bases and extreme financial debt. Specifically in the case of Detroit, the narrative of this crisis has been manipulated by elites, those seeking to formulate new ways to expand and retain power, in an effort to further embed neoliberal logics within urban processes. Jamie Peck (2014) states:

“These are stories that effectively repoliticize the crisis, serving the ends of spatial containment and social targeting. (Every failure, the script goes, is homemade, typically at the hands of bad actors like corrupt local politicians, superannuated bureaucrats, belligerent public-sector unions, and the feckless underclass.) These are stories that discursively (re)distribute the costs and burdens of “adjustment,” for the most part regressively. And they are stories that endogenize and localize both the supposedly underlying causes of the crisis and the scope for politically acceptable remedies.”

By shifting blame to the enclosed and perceived internal dynamics of Detroit—fiscally inept and corrupt politicians or pathological poor residents—elites are able to obscure the external, larger structural forces—like capitalism and racism—laying at the roots of the crisis while also establishing and legitimizing neoliberal restructuring strategies as a new mode of urban crisis management that undermines and dismisses “every form of fiscal transfer or financial redistribution” (Peck 2014). That is, if Detroit is going to improve, it is going to have to do it by itself. This type of “pull yourself up from your bootstraps” vision for the city of Detroit is aided by the self-help discourse and practice of community-based work. At the community level CBOs reinforce the neoliberal restructuring of Detroit by also localizing the problem and solution while advocating for market principles as the primary philosophy to driving neighborhood redevelopment (as discussed above). Even in the

face of a virtual “hostile take-over” of Detroit, where elected city officials are stripped of power, city assets are put up for sale, pensions of city employees are cut to protect wealthy creditors, city services are privatized or cancelled, and businesses are given tax incentives while public institutions (schools and libraries) are defunded, poor residents living in Detroit, being helped by none of this, have still demonstrated unwavering support for CBOs and their anti-poverty approach which fits neatly into the city’s neoliberal restructuring plan. With CBOs legitimizing neoliberal social change at the community level, the necessary consent from the bottom will be achieved and the ability of the poor to mount a counter movement will be stymied, leaving elites to remake Detroit into a utopia for capital where the free-market reigns supreme.

The unique and unprecedented changes to the political economy of Detroit have serious implications for other cities traversing the same neoliberal path. Following the example of Detroit, it could be that such crisis introduces potentialities for social transformation, and those who control the discourse surrounding urban deficiencies and legitimate plans of action also controls the realization of a future metropolis. Powerful elites from the top manipulate the narrative but they also do this from the bottom-up with the help of CBOs. This study plans to understand how the crisis in Detroit has impacted CBOs, their ability to recruit residents, and their articulations of the problems of the city and possible solutions and how this discourse aids or impedes the neoliberal agenda for the city. Uncovering such may offer some clarification of the ways in which community-based work assists in the neoliberalization of urban space and place.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of Devolution and the Rise of Community-Based Organizations and Development, 1960-2000

The U.S. has a long history of resident-led community change, particularly as a development strategy of neighborhood organizations working to revitalize and improve poor areas (Alinsky 1971; Halpern 1995); however, its popularity and support significantly increased during the 1960s. While neighborhood organizations have historically been supported through various sources to address community problems, it was not until the early 1960s that the federal government decided to provide funding to service-based community groups and initiatives. During the 1960s, growing levels of poverty and racial inequality brought about several policies to improve the lives of poor Americans. From this agenda emerged “The War on Poverty” which sought to allocate federal dollars to disadvantaged neighborhoods for the purpose of providing better education, job skills, and social services to close the very visible and growing inequality gap between poor and affluent areas (Piven and Cloward 1971). This change in funding and federal support partly led to the propagation of community-based organizations and subsequently community building throughout the 1960s.

As part of the War on Poverty the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) established Community Action Agencies (CAAs), local private and non-profit organizations designed to implement and carry out government funded community-based, anti-poverty and neighborhood development programs. CAAs were expected to provide social service programs called Community Action Programs (CAPs) to the poor while at the same time including the poor in decision making processes aimed at poverty alleviation (Marris and Rein 1982). Resident participation was a fundamental social

reform strategy of the OEO. Poor groups from disadvantaged neighborhoods were recruited to devise, implement, and manage CAPs and other social service initiatives. Inclusion was seen as an effective anti-poverty strategy as it was expected to empower and mobilize formerly politically and economically excluded and marginalized residents to work, in part, on their own behalves to transform their circumstances of disadvantage, subsequently reinserting them into political processes shaping place and space (Gittell 1980). These early community organizations foreshadowed the functionality and organizational dynamics of CBOs which would later emerged as a consequence of devolution and new federalism during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Although the EOE's anticipated CAAs to be an effective empowerment mechanism to reduce poverty and address the growing inequality apparent in disadvantaged, typically black and Latino, urban neighborhoods, a great number of them proved to be quite problematic. In some cases CAA program leaders were unable to achieve their intended democratic, participatory outcomes which led to program failure. But more significantly the political mobilization efforts of CAAs often led to social protests and civil disruptions which targeted and threatened the power of local political elites (Mackenzie and Weisbrot 2008; Quadagno 1994). According to Fischer (2006), one of the most histrionic incidents resulting from these conflicts between CAA protesters and local governments occurred in 1966 when, following severe reductions in funding for a summer youth CAP, black activist Charles Sizemore and several other individuals burst into San Francisco Mayor John Shelley's office threatening massive protests if the necessary resources were not supplied to the summer youth program.

The conflict ensuing from protest groups organized by CAAs pushed mayors and governors from around the U.S who felt their political positions were in jeopardy to pressure the federal government to create legislation that would rein in the influence of CAAs. In 1967 Congress passed the “Green Amendment”, which gave local politicians the authority to decide which CAA received federal funding. Therefore, to obtain Community Action funding an organization would have to first be designated by local politicians, usually mayors, as an official CAA in their jurisdiction. Marwell (2004) suggest that this increase of control over community organizations by local politicians crippled the ability of CAAs to effectively address inequality because poor residents were not permitted to pressure local governments for social change, thus limiting the transformative capacity of community building during the late 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s, CAAs were dismantled and the program was dissolved due to severe cuts in government funding. Although the CAA “experiment” only lasted a few years and was largely viewed by many experts as a failure, it provided the service delivery and organizational framework for future community-based, non-profit organizations working in the field of community building. The privatization of social provisions by all levels of government over the last 30 years or so has resulted in an increased utilization of the former CAA model mentioned above (Seidenstat 1999).

In the early 1970s further devolution, mainly stemming from the Nixon’s administration’s New Federalism, nearly eradicated all of the community-based programs from the War on Poverty era. During this period the federal government began to allot more responsibilities to the state and local levels. This resulted in even greater control—above that seen due to the Green Amendment—in the hands of local politicians over the

allocation and use of funds and resources for anti-poverty programs. The creation of the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) in 1974 gave states and local municipalities more decision-making authority in how federal dollars for community development were spent. CDBGs required states and communities to spend at least 70% of the funds to: 1) benefit low and moderate income families; 2) remove or avert slums; and 3) meet disadvantaged community needs. This restructuring and very unspecific detailing of what constitutes community development subsequently evolved into local government-led community development that mirrored the broader interests of local political elites and not struggling neighborhoods and poor residents (Green and Haines 2008).

The devolution process was again endorsed and abetted in the 1980s with the Reagan administration. Again, changes in policies provided more autonomy to states and local political bodies, giving them more control over community development funds. The Reagan administration allowed states to allocate CDBG to small cities and other areas *they* defined as “distressed”. While governors argued that this new approach fostered a more equitable state-wide distribution of CDBG funds, the most disadvantaged communities in the state struggled as their funds for social programs and development were significantly reduced. This crippled the ability of community-based organizations working in poor inner cities, like Detroit, Cleveland, and Baltimore, to provide effective solutions to the growing problems of poverty and joblessness which proliferated throughout the 1980s (Rich 1993).

Along with these changes also came drastic cuts in federal-aid levels in entitlement programs as well as grants to states and local municipalities. By the end of Reagan’s

term in office federal assistance to local governments was cut 60 percent (Dreier 2004) and block grants were cut 25 percent (Conlan 1998). Such political restructuring has impacted community building in two dynamic ways: 1) increased need and reliance on private social welfare organizations due to the void left by government in the arena of social provisions and 2) private foundations became the primary funders of community-based organizations due to the severe reduction of federal dollars for social programs.

Welfare reform by the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s further expanded the role of and need for CBOs in poor neighborhoods. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which replaced the longstanding Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, required welfare recipients to participate in workforce development for the purpose of transitioning the poor from federal assistance to employment. As a result, states and localities began depending more on the expertise and capacities of CBOs to assist in training and educating poor residents for entrance into the labor market.

In addition, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 programmatically emphasized community building to develop local workforce services. It mandated that local community organizations, businesses, and politicians form alliances to synergistically operate in tailoring policies and programs aimed at improving human capital levels—in the form of job skills—in poor communities. This occurrence directly linked and introduced CBOs to various political and economic entities, those playing central roles in the construction of local place, in a way that made CBOs an influential voice and important piece in community development.

The Bush administration in the 2000s placed much emphasis on faith-based initiatives and the private sector in the facilitation and implementation of community development. This has further removed responsibility away from the federal government for the resurrection of declining poor neighborhoods. Thus the devolution process continued, leaving cash-strapped local governments to tend to the overwhelming complexities of poverty, problems that are more times than not too difficult, financially and socially, for them to solve single-handed. Throughout the 2000s CBOs have proliferated to assist local governments with community development projects. According to the Urban Institute's National Center of Charitable Statistics (2006), from 1994 to 2004 nonprofit human service organizations, which CBOs typically fall under, increased by roughly 35%.

Community building has been impacted by devolution and reductions in federal funds for social programs, the institutionalization of public participation as an anti-poverty strategy, and increased social unrest due to high levels of poverty and neighborhood degradation over the last 40 years. As a result the number of CBOs situated in low-income neighborhoods has grown significantly. Devolution, and changes in the way federal dollars are funneled through state and localities, have limited the autonomy of CBOs as most tend to be closely tied to local governmental institutions and the agendas of local political elites. This has hindered, to a great degree, the ability of CBOs to push for radical change as such change typically does not correspond to the interests of political elites who may benefit from the status quo. Also, devolution and the privatization of social provisions have created a greater reliance on CBOs to preform and carry out anti-poverty work in poor communities, work historically and otherwise done by the federal

government and the public sector. Furthermore, the community-based development model of neighborhood change has become the preferred approach of community groups. They have increasingly adopted neoliberal strategies to address the bevy of problems in poor and disinvested neighborhoods. This is partly due to the way in which elites have controlled grassroots processes of community change through the non-profit funding structure.

The Role of Do-it-Yourself Urbanism in Community Change

The governance shift in responsibility to lower levels of society—that of devolution—has brought about openings in the urban political nexus for “everyday makers”, ordinary citizens to shape urban environments (Bang 2005). Scholars have called this emergence of amateur, bottom-up, and informal mode of place-making many things. It has been referred to as “insurgent urbanism”, “guerrilla urbanism”, “everyday urbanism”, “pop-up urbanism”, “user-generated urbanism”, and “do-it-yourself” (DIY) urbanism (Haydn and Temel 2006; Borasi and Zardini 2008; Chase et al. 2008). For this study I will refer to this urban practice as DIY urbanism.

DIY urbanism has manifested in various ways: guerrilla and community gardening (Reynolds 2014); guerrilla architecture (Kinder 2014), housing and retail cooperatives (Tummers 2015); flash mobbing and other shock tactics (Douglas 2011); social economies and bartering schemes; “empty spaces” movements to occupy abandoned buildings for a range of purposes (Hou 2010); and subcultural practices like graffiti/street art (Visconti 2010). All of these DIY urban practices intend to explore the “city within the city” by transforming urban space and place identified as oppressive and undesirable to everyday, ordinary citizens. It is about remaking the city from below, without authorization,

to look and function in new ways that often counter hegemonic formulations of the city. Zardini (2008: 16) suggests that the unifying characteristics of DIY urban projects emanating from below among ordinary citizens “propose alternative lifestyles, reinvent our daily lives, and reoccupy urban space with new uses”. The goal is to, as suggested by Kurt Iveson (2013), reclaim the right to the city—for the common urban inhabitant to take back control over the urban. Most scholars have agreed with Iveson and suggest that the reclaiming of the right to the city gives way to alternative urban socio-spatialities which challenge dominant capitalist processes embedded into the urban political economy to, in a small incremental fashion, reimagine a more equal urban reality that serves the needs of all and just not those at the top (Holloway 2010).

What is rarely mentioned in this literature is the strategic linkage between formal and informal modes of resident-led community change, between community-based development and DIY urbanism. Resident-led forms of community change seemed to be constrained by its inherent self-help and localized focus within the current neoliberal order. More research is needed to understand how resident-led community change, either formal or informal, follows logics of place-making that produce similar outcomes.

Resident Participation: Theories and Perspectives

Community-based development depends on the active involvement of residents of a defined community. It is suggested that participation by residents in community-based initiatives allow for community representation and resident empowerment. Through these mechanisms residents are able to obtain greater control over social change process affecting their communities (Heller et al. 1984). Such participation roles in community-

based development include advisors, policy makers, and volunteers. They perform the work necessary for the construction, implementation, and maintenance of programs.

There are many theories of resident participation in community-based work. They explicate the motivations of why people participate, how people participate, and under what conditions people participate. This study is concerned with the theoretical approaches that attempt to illuminate why residents engage in community-based development and the factors/processes that constitute or produce beneficial outcomes for participants. There are three theoretical approaches that focus on these dynamics: 1) behavior and attitude model, 2) mobilization model, and 3) levels of participation model

Behavior and Attitude Model

Theories focusing on culture and psychological factors to community participation view the individual as the key factor in understanding participation patterns. These theories mainly entail rational choice and social being models. The former attributes individual behavior to calculative self-interest, the latter to culture and social norms (Cleaver 1999). Because of the focus on the individual type, factors such as socioeconomic status are said to adjust the cost rationale, skills, and cultural capital associated with participation. For example, Verba et al. (1991) posits that educational, occupational, and religious life experiences will determine an individuals' decision to participate because "high-status individuals are located in social environments which encourage and enforce positive attitudinal and participatory norms as well as civic skills, they are more likely to participate in politics than are low-status individuals.

Mobilization Model

In response to rational choice and cultural models, many scholars have made the structure of participation opportunity central in understanding resident participation behavior. These theorists posit that participation not only involves an individual's motivation but also the opportunities available to do so. These approaches emphasize institutional involvement in mobilizing potential participants through incentives and community capacity building (Leighly 1995). Participation is primarily viewed as a mobilization process in which community organizers/leaders assist residents in the realization of the inherent benefits of community engagement.

Levels of Participation Model

Arnstein's (1969) work is perhaps the seminal theoretical contribution in the field of community participation. The strength of her theoretical approach stems from an explicit recognition that there are various levels of participation. The "ladder of participation" ranges from manipulating as the lowest level of participation to citizen's control as the highest level of participation. Each level represents the degree of influence residents may have on initiate development and decision-making. Simply, it is posited that greater control in community-based development produces greater benefits for residents. Control is viewed as the desired goal of effective resident-drive social change.

Several community scholars have built on Arnstein's ladder of participation perspective. These theorists have mainly added complexity to each level of participation, arguing that within levels contains varying experiences and potential outcomes. Also, these theories place greater emphasis on the concept of "empowerment" in citizen control as genuine community participation. For example, Burns et al. (1994), elaborating on the

ladder of participation introduced by Arnstien, makes distinctions between types of control, showing that “entrusted” control, being allowed to make the decisions in a larger organizational structure, is less effective than “independent” control, operating autonomously as a social change agent. This approach posits that independent control involves the empowerment of residents to obtain the goals they genuinely seek.

Resident-led Community Change: Theories and Criticisms

There is much debate concerning the effectiveness of contemporary forms of resident-led, bottom-up community change. Proponents of community-based approaches suggest that local residents possess a panoply of capitals (or assets)—human, cultural, and most importantly, social—that can be used to improve a community’s capacity to effectively negotiate with endogenous and exogenous neighborhood entities for the obtainment of desired goals. Chaskin (2001) illustrates how the Harambee neighborhood in Milwaukee, WI was transformed through the community building efforts of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI) from a crime-ridden, socially disorganized, and economically depressed neighborhood to a place where the residents worked collectively to address issues of blight and disinvestment, thus bringing about safer and cleaner streets and economic development. Thus, through resident participation in community organizations, marginalized or disadvantaged populations “reinsert” themselves in political-economic processes—processes that they were once either excluded from or “opted” out of—that are fundamental to the function and instauration of place-bound communities. In this way, the community as a collective organism becomes empowered, building sufficient levels of leverage and influence to organizationally make local demands on capital as well as political elites. Similarly, proponents of DIY urbanism, as just

discussed above, suggest that it provides a right to the city for the oppressed, which works to empower the oppressed in the process of urban place-making. Thus the link here is that resident controlled change, either formal or informal, works to build and grow power for those who are powerless through a process of self-reliance and personal responsibility. When residents take it upon themselves to shape the urban, they work to locally challenge oppression to produce better outcomes.

Communitarian Theory

Communitarian theorists argue that local communities, rich or poor, are the primary and proper bodies of agency in the production of collective behavior necessary for social change (Sites 1998). The community-level is viewed as the proper site for the generation of democratic civic participation, trust and reciprocity between social change actors, and the development of shared goals and consciousness. According to these theorists, through these inner-directed participatory and social relationship building activities, communities gain greater control over socio-spatial and politico-economic processes that guide the fate of neighborhoods and subsequently the individuals who reside within their boundaries.

Following in the “footsteps” of communitarianism, several community-based models have emerged in support of localized self-help strategies for the eradication of poverty and neighborhood improvement. These approaches include social capital and community building (Etzioni 1995; Putnam 2000; Gittel and Vidal 1998), community asset and capacity building (McKnight 1995; Delgado 2000), and consensus organizing (Eichler 2007). Central to all of these approaches is the assumption that communities internally possess the necessary resources to transform their spatial, social, and economic

conditions, and such transformations simply depends on the proper actualization and mobilization of those resources. CBOs help to mobilize the inherent resources of communities—in the form of strong community ties and social networks, social organization, leadership development, and partnerships—to build a functional and effective civic infrastructure capable of locally resolving social and economic problems (Traynor 2008). Concretely, through the mobilization of such resources, CBOs are able to establish and manage pragmatic programs such as educational tutoring, job-skills training, and community gardens, as well as synergize with non-profits, corporations, and land developers willing to lend capital investment, services and expertise.

Critical Theory

Challenging the claims of communitarianism, community-building, and consensus organizing, critical scholars (mostly Marxists and regulationists) have argued that such theories and practices offer a myopic conceptualization of community-based social change that ignores broader systemic and deeply rooted historical forces as key factors in the creation and maintenance of community problems (Shuman 2000; Gunn 2004; Eisinger 2000; DeFilippis 2000). They contend that the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” model offered by proponents of social capital and community building simplifies the complexities of poverty, and other social problems, which extend far beyond the community and local level. Therefore, community action becomes depoliticized, localized, and constrained in that it abstains from seeking structural changes. Also, in doing so, the communitarian approach, argues critical scholars, works to promote the status quo within the current neoliberal context, thus establishing social order and not social change. DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge (2010: 10), focusing on contemporary

capitalism under the governments of Reagan, Thatcher, and Mulroney in the 1980s, posit that community-based social reform strategies “softened” and adopted elements of the “overall logic, structure, and policies of neoliberalism” in order to “win modest goals in what was seen by theoreticians and practitioners as required adjustments” to the hostility of capitalism. This adjustment by community-based social reformers functionally converted community-based work into a tool that aids neoliberalism in its mission. Community becomes a way to organize social provision, social control, and social reform in a time of restructuring the relationship between government and communities under an ideology of increased individual, family, and community responsibility for managing social problems. Furthermore, the implicit advocacy of social order attenuates and discourages conflictive social action at the community level that involves protest and other forms of disruptive repertoires (Mayer 2003).

Social Disorganization Theory

The solutions to inner-city poverty—the way in which place and space must be transformed—offered by proponents of community building are largely predicated on how they view the nature of the problem and the fundamental roots of the problem. Wilson’s (1987) explanation of inner city poverty has shaped the way in which many community development scholars view neighborhood decline. His theory suggested that deindustrialization and the exodus of businesses and middle-class families from the inner city to the suburbs led to socially isolated urban residents living in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. According to Wilson, a lack of positive institutions and role models, as well as the jobs and resources, characterize inner-city neighborhoods. Furthermore, he posits that concentrations of poverty, long-term unemployment, and

female-headed households may result in cultural and behavioral adaptations that may reinforce positions of disadvantage. While Wilson's theoretical argument is multidimensional, he views the problems of poor urban neighborhoods being mainly driven by the absence of social networks and mainstream institutions that provide opportunities for mobility.

Using Wilson's theory to frame the problem of poor, urban neighborhoods, the community building field has consequently focused on approaches that alleviate social isolation as well as promote social organization at the community level as an anti-poverty strategy. The strengthening of community-level structural features—educational, economic, religious, recreational, and nonprofit organizations—along with community-level processes—relationships between residents, external social networks, and resident engagement—function to build the missing social capital and institutional capacity necessary for the well-being and development of communities (Fraser, Kick, and Williams 2002). This approach posits that by getting residents to work closely with each other and connect to networks outside of the neighborhood the community as a whole can develop the collective will and ability to achieve their desired outcomes, improve their neighborhood and improve their quality of life (Putnam 2000).

The strong focus and emphasis on social capital and community capacity as an anti-poverty strategy by proponents of community building suggests that the problems associated with urban neighborhoods can, and should, be solved at the community-level through the actions of poor residents. Working together, forming stronger bonds between residents, creating linkages to and establishing relationships with external networks, according to community building theorists and practitioners, empowers residents to

change their community and lives themselves. Thus the community building model implicitly shifts responsibility to poor residents to transform and improve the socioeconomic conditions of poor communities.

The theoretical assumptions of the community building model as a solution to community poverty may be problematic for a number of reasons. First, the social capital perspective tends to ignore power, domination, and exploitation. It dismisses how opposing social relationships or social capital wielded by dominant groups have functioned to economically, racially, and spatially stratify less powerful groups, and how this process has led to the manifestation and maintenance of impoverished communities. By not considering how poor people are on the losing end of a larger set of power latent social relationships operating inside and outside of the community at various scales (local, state, national, global), community building proponents limit the “reach” of collective action by residents to engage in the proper, or at least contributing, social processes responsible community poverty and disadvantage. In this way residents are denied the ability to address issues of class and racial exploitation and domination that extend beyond local communities.

The Performative Agency of Resident-led Community Change: Radical or Not?

In looking at the link between formal and informal modes of community change, it is clear that self-empowerment through taking ownership over the urban is key. More clearly, the agency of the oppressed and their ability “fight back” is central to both. Thus, proponents of resident-led community change highlight the performative agency of oppressed groups as a key dynamic in understanding it as *resistance*. The language of resistance suggests that place-making initiatives designed, implemented, and maintained

by disenfranchised residents, as opposed to elites who explicitly work to subordinate them, demonstrates the power of the oppressed to shape their own realities, work in their own interests, and produce social, economic, spatial, and political outcomes that stand in radical opposition to oppressive structures in society. For example, in White's (2011) study of resident-led urban farming in Detroit, she argued that urban farming was a way for residents to resist against the oppressive food system in Detroit which turn many poor black neighborhoods food deserts where black residents are denied access to fresh and health food. She highlights the agency of the urban farmers as an indication of subtle and indirect resistance to oppression. Many other scholars argue that ideas, discourses and practices have great transformative power and that they transform "the map of what can be thought, what can be named and perceived, and therefore also of what is possible" (Swyngedouw (2007: 72). Resident-led community change is seen as a demonstration of this agency as the excluded faction of the city pushed the boundaries of what is possible.

However, there is the tendency in this articulation of resident-led change to *conflate agency with resistance*. Many critical scholars have suggested that such resident-led forms of community change within the current neoliberal political economic context function to actually undermine radical change and reproduce existing forms of oppression. In this way agency works not as liberating force, but as a force which further oppresses the oppressed. However, very few studies have investigated the demonstration of the agency of poor and disenfranchised residents living in oppressive urban environments as a counter revolutionary.

Resident-led Development as a Neoliberal Project

Several scholars have begun to conceptualize current forms of resident-led community change as a neoliberal process. Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that the destructive economic restructuring of the 1980s has created a window of opportunity for capital to push for new social policies and institutional forms that appear in the form of panaceas for crises but concretely function to extend and more firmly embedded neoliberalism in urban processes. Under the pretext of social development like community regeneration, these new reform discourses, transformations in urban governance and service delivery work, in simultaneous complexity, to bolster market logics, socialize individual subjects, and contain and discipline those who were marginalized and dispossessed by earlier forms of neoliberalism. Gough and Eisenschitz (1996) also argues that local, community initiatives have been subordinated to neoliberal aims and used by capital and the state to manage class tensions, allowing for existing capitalist class relations to be reproduced. These positions see resident-led community change as an arm of neoliberalism which works support its logics and functionalities in the emerging neoliberal urban political economy.

Within this political economic context, many critical scholars argue that the resident-led development is quite problematic. Guthman (2008) argued that the so-called radical intentions of resident-led community change functions to produce neoliberalism outcomes by filling the gap left by rollbacks in neoliberal urban governance. While filling the gaps left by neoliberal policies, these resident-led movements also establish discourses about self-reliance and self-responsibility that ideologically support neoliberal transformations. Pudup (2008) suggest that resident-led approaches socialize people to

engage in self-regulation, the self-adjustment to neoliberal economic restructuring which intends to devolve responsibility away from government and to the individual. This ideology is disguised as the power of individual free choice in the market which shifts people away from structural understandings of how such choices are allocated.

Another critique of resident-led community change, through its usage of neoliberal logics, is that it has the potential to exclude society's most vulnerable groups just like community change projects initiated by elites (Mayer 2009). Neoliberal forms of urban development advocated by elites like creative city urbanism and new urbanism have been shown to displace poor and vulnerable populations through class and racial reshuffling in the central city (Zimmerman 2008). These gentrifying processes, which elites claim is a part of urban progress, effectively commodifies the urban for middle and upper class consumption while taking away the poor's right to the city. According to this understanding of neoliberal forms of resident-led community change, it is, as discussed above, the agency of the oppressed which solidifies the neoliberal project of market domination and self-regulation within the urban sphere, further reproducing exclusionary and unequal urban ecologies which serve capitalist logics of commodification and accumulation. That is, residents, through their own actions, work against their own interest to produce a metamorphosis of space and place that diminishes their right to the city.

Eco-gentrification and Urban Neoliberalism

Many scholars have illuminated the ways in which resident-led community change works against the interests of poor and marginalized residents. One practice of resident-led change that has been shown to do this is urban agriculture. Urban agriculture has been used by many poor communities in the U.S. to transform abandoned and unused

land, produce food systems, and build community solidarity. There is now a growing body of studies that show urban agriculture has the potential to produce gentrifying effects.

Gentrification is central to neoliberal urbanism as it functions to produce new space for capitalist accumulation (Hackworth 2007). Urban agriculture as a transformative process typically emerges and unfolds in the vacant “lumpengeography” (Walker 1978) of poor and disinvested urban places. These places sit dormant, becoming more and more disinvested, until capital works its way back to redevelop it for profit. Neighborhoods like these are fertile ground for neoliberal spatial fixes in the form of gentrification, which is typically packaged and sold as creative city urbanism and new urban design (Hackworth 2007, Davidson and Lees 2009). Increasingly these neoliberal spatial fixes are employing greening strategies—green spaces, gardens, environmental sustainability—that provoke the rise in property values and exclusion of the poor (Dooling 2009). For example, Quastel (2009), showed how green development was used in downtown Vancouver to increase the value of high end condo development in the area. Discourses of environmental sustainability and urban gardening were used to rebrand the neighborhood and lure “green-minded” middle class consumers to the new development. Furthermore, in cities where abandoned and cheap land is plentiful—like Detroit—land grabbing by various groups has shined a light on the self-serving intentions of urban gardeners and farmers looking for profit and spaces to fit their lifestyles (Colasanti et al. 2012).

Middle Class Culture and Taste in Eco-gentrification

Demand-side theories of gentrification highlight how the culture, tastes, and values of middle and upper class groups impact the process of gentrification. These studies show

that gentrifiers, often characterized as “risk-takers” who are not dissuaded by poor and minority inner city neighborhoods, seek out very specific types of places (Zukin 1987). Neighborhoods that fit the preferential criteria (location, aesthetics, racial composition, etc.) are “potential targets” for gentrifiers. In this way neighborhoods that possess the proper mix of geography, amenities, and culture become sites for middle and upper class consumption, making them highly susceptible to invasion by affluent (mostly white) populations. Recently, studies have suggested that environmentally-conscious lifestyles have increasingly become en vogue among the middle and upper class (Bryant & Goodman 2013). These new “eco-gentrifiers” heighten the threat that urban agriculture becomes another “vehicle for consumers to virtuously display their knowledge and adoption of the latest values while also perpetuating social distinction” (Quastel 2009: 705). Thus, poor neighborhoods experiencing green development consequently become highly sought after destinations for environmentally-conscious professionals and higher income populations. This creates a struggle over space and place between incoming higher class, green-minded consumers determined to own a “farm in the inner city”, and the original residents who either do not share their green/agriculturalist identity or cannot afford the green/agriculturalist lifestyle. In the end, because of power differences with class and race, and how culture is mobilized through each, the original residents lose in this cycle of culture-driven eco-gentrification (Dooling 2009).

Research Questions

This dissertation explores the dynamics of resident-led community development enacted by CBOs in highly abandoned and disinvested urban neighborhoods. Specifically, this study plans to explain why low income residents participate in and utilize

neoliberal forms of community-based development, which tend to work counter to the material interests of poor communities. In doing so, it aims to show how the hegemony of neoliberal ideology shapes decisions of low income residents in the process of resident-led neighborhood change. This dissertation also aims to show how neoliberal forms of resident-led, bottom-up community change, through urban agriculture, can produce the same exclusionary outcomes as top-down neoliberal development initiated by typical neoliberal agents like capital and the state.

The key research questions that frame this investigation ask:

- 1) What are the forces that shape how low income residents living in Brightmoor respond to social, economic, and socio-spatial problems in their neighborhood?
- 2) What type of inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes are being produced by the performative agency of the residents of Brightmoor through resident-led community development? Specifically, what type of socio-spatiality is being produced by the resident-led urban agriculture in Brightmoor?
- 3) What does the performative agency of the residents of Brightmoor tell us about the hegemony of neoliberalism in community development?
- 4) How does neoliberal hegemony impact urban processes in the City of Detroit?

CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHODS

Data

This study examined the community-based development processes within the Brightmoor community located in Detroit, MI, while specifically focusing on the actions of Brightmoor residents and the CBOs Neighbors Building Brightmoor (NBB). In selecting the neighborhood and CBO to be included in the research, a number of criteria were applied. First, Brightmoor was selected because this study seeks to understand and illuminate community development participation by residents, in low-income, minority communities. Brightmoor's poverty rate is 32.5% making it one of the poorest neighborhoods in Detroit, and is 85.6% black. Brightmoor was also selected because it had a long history of community building as well as serving as home to numerous CBOs. The CBO NBB within Brightmoor was selected because it is resident-driven and controlled. Levels of participation theories posit that initiative control by residents represents the highest degree empowerment and reduces the occurrence of participant manipulation. Focusing on resident controlled CBOs and initiatives will theoretically eliminate manipulation, as posed by level of participation theorists, and allow the researcher to develop alternative understandings of how and why residents utilize community-based development for themselves. To do this the study analyzed why NBB was started by local residents as a grassroots organization to combat poverty in Brightmoor (and why other approaches were not used).

The Case Study

This study utilized a qualitative research design, including interviews and participant observations, to extricate the complex processes of resident participation in

neoliberal community-based work. The study site was located in Detroit, MI, where various crises—fiscal and social—have led to an increased role for CBOs in social provisions and urban redevelopment. Detroit was selected as the site for this study because 1) Detroit has a long history of what I call neoliberal community-based development (which I will discuss further below) that has, in some cases, produced adverse outcomes for poor residents, 2) Detroit has experienced unique and unprecedented changes to the political economy of place, which can be described as a neoliberal process, requiring institutional and grass roots support which CBOs can assist in providing through its ideological and organizational alignments to market logics and relationship to local elites, and 3) Detroit also has a long history of racial conflict over space and place.

Specifically, this study focused on resident-led community-based development in the Detroit neighborhood of Brightmoor. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the research participants. The Brightmoor community has largely been identified as one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Detroit. The poverty rate, unemployment rate, crime rate, and level of abandonment and blight are among the highest in the city and have been for decades. Several CBOs, attempting to address the myriad of problems plaguing Brightmoor, operate in the area including Neighbors Building Brightmoor (NBB) and Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development (NDND). This study will focus on the community change activities and decisions of Brightmoor residents within the context of resident-led community-based development.

Secondarily, this study also examined the CBO of NBB for several reasons. First, NBB is a resident started and controlled CBO. The resident-driven dynamic of NBB

suggest empowerment—which some community participation theorists view as a fundamental factor in producing benefits for residents. NBB provided a community-based organizational structure that exemplifies the theoretical standard in maximizing resident benefit. This allowed the study to analyze resident empowerment as a potential factor in the motivations and benefits to resident-led community development. Second, NBB initiated many community-building projects in the neighborhood. These projects allowed the study to examine the outcomes of resident-led community development to assess its ability to produce benefits for community members.

Furthermore, this case study aimed to connect the processes occurring in Brightmoor to the larger political economy of Detroit. Mainstream narrations found in local and national newspapers and other media sources concerning the problems of Detroit have helped to ideologically solidify neoliberal restructuring as the only solution to the city's crisis. Using these sources this study showed how these ideas have shaped the problems of Detroit as perceived by residents and how these understandings, being used by CBOs to frame the problem as well, impact resident participation and strategy selection in community-based development. Also, this study illuminates the mutually constitutive relationship between neoliberal restructuring from the state level and community-based work at the local level works and how this relationship works to promote the overall legitimization of neoliberal transformations.

Lastly, due to the racial context of Detroit, this study showed how these social changes may involve race. The case study builds on critical perspectives of community-based work by adding race to the analysis. Specially, the study explicates the various eruptions of race and racism that results from neoliberal community-based work.

Furthermore, and more importantly, the study illuminates how neoliberal community-based work is a fundamentally raced process.

Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered from two primary sources: 1) interviews and 2) participant observations. A qualitative research design using interviews were appropriate for addressing the research questions for a number of reasons. First, interviews are appropriate because this study seeks to understand the meaning(s) for community-based participation constructed and held by residents. Interviews function to illuminate the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. It functions to understand the meaning of phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective. (Kvale 1996). Thus, interviews effectively allow the residents to provide information and knowledge regarding their motivations and reasons for engaging in community action circumscribed by CBOs and contemporary community-based strategies.

Furthermore, to provide further depth and context, these data were also supplemented by documentation and archival records such as meeting minutes and agendas, project proposals, press releases, advertising texts, annual report and newspaper articles.

The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on topics related to program participation, perceived benefits and effectiveness of CBO initiatives, perceived neighborhood problems as well as appropriate solutions to such problems. Interviews mainly focused on why residents participate or decide not to participate in community-based development.

Interviewees were adult residents who physically live in the Brightmoor community located in Detroit, Michigan. The interviewees included both Brightmoor residents participating in NBB as well as residents who do not participate in community-based development. This was done to capture the complexity of social reality in the Brightmoor neighborhood—of those who do and do not engage in community-based development. All interviewees were at least 18 years old. All participants were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes. Some interviewees were asked to participate in follow-up interviews to gain clarification of ideas and responses from the first interview.

Approximately 49 participants were interviewed in total. Twenty-five of the interviewees were NBB members and 24 were non-members. Most interviewees were black, totaling 29 in all. Most of the black participants were non-members as 21 of the 29 black participants were not members of NBB. Below is a breakdown of the race, gender, and member status of the research participants:

Table 3.1: Research Participants by Race, Gender, and Member Status

	NBB Member		Non-member		Total
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
<i>Black</i>	2	6	10	11	29
<i>White</i>	7	9	1	2	19
<i>Other</i>	1	0	0	0	1
Total	10	15	11	13	49

The participants were recruited by use of purposive sampling. Participants were identified in the research records by a code name or number to protect their identities. Interviews were taped recorded to capture information that was unable to be fully capture using hand written notes. The researcher took notes during the interviews to document gestures and unseen elements undetectable by an audio recorder.

To gain a deeper understanding of residents' role in the community-based work in Brightmoor as well as the role of the CBOs, the study also used participant observations to collect data. Using participant observation involves:

“the researcher taking on a role in the social situation under observation. The social researcher immerses himself/herself in the social setting under study, getting to know key actors in that location in a role which is either covert or overt, although in practice, the researcher will often move between these two roles. The aim is to experience events in the manner in which the subjects under study also experience these events.” (Plummer 2005)

Researchers who employ participant observation as a research tool can uncover hidden processes and actions. It allows the researcher to experience the process first hand which may lead to a more nuanced understanding of the case under study.

For this study participant observation was an appropriate method for data collection for several reasons. First, since this study aimed to uncover “hard to find” processes associated community-based development, acting as a participant allowed for the researcher to experience processes only made available to those who are closely attached to the community and CBOs. Second, engaging in the actual community-based work functions to build trust between the researcher and participants which creates richer and deeper insights and responses from participants. Third, interviews may not be sufficient to gather all of the information needed to fully understand the multilayered processes attached to community-based work in Brightmoor. Participant observations worked to add depth to data collected from interviews while also providing data for triangulation during data analysis. This improves validity and reliability of data.

The researcher took detailed field notes as a participant observer. Brief phrases were jotted down while in the field to document and more complete notes were written

after leaving the research site. The notes reflected observed organizational dynamics, the participatory structure of CBOs, nature of the relationships between various actors, and the feelings of residents and other actors.

In writing field notes, this study followed Chiseri-Strater's and Sunstein's (1997) approach of what should be included in field notes: 1) Date, time, and place of observation, 2) Specific facts, numbers, details of what happens at the site, 3) Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, taste, 4) Personal responses to the fact of recording field notes, 5) Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language, 6) Questions about people or behaviors at the site for future investigation, 7) Page numbers to help keep observations in order

Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews were transcribed. Transcripts of interviews and field notes from observations were coded for analysis. Coding consisted of "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" for portions of the text in the transcribed interviews (Saldana 2012). When beginning the coding process, the researcher first identified the various data units for analysis. The researcher used three data units: 1) each sentence; 2) each paragraph; and 3) each response to each of the main questions. Summary codes for each unit was compared to each other to check for patterns and consistency. Categories were created by grouping and linking similar codes found across the various data units. Through combining and linking categories important themes and findings were identified.

Also, this study utilized NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, to analyze data collected from interviews. Such software assists in organizing, managing and analyzing

information. The advantages of using this software include being freed from manual and clerical tasks, saving time, managing huge amounts of qualitative data, having increased flexibility, and having improved validity and auditability of qualitative research. The possible problems associated with qualitative data analysis software include increasingly deterministic and rigid processes, privileging of coding, and retrieval methods; reification of data, increased pressure on researchers to focus on volume and breadth rather than on depth and meaning, and distraction from the real work of analysis (St. John and Johnson 2000).

CHAPTER 4: THE URBAN ECOLOGY OF THE BRIGHTMOOR COMMUNITY: IDENTIFYING A NEOLIBERAL SPACE OF ABANDONMENT

The Rise of Neoliberal Spaces of Abandonment in Brightmoor: Creating the Need for Resident-led Neighborhood Change

The neighborhood of Brightmoor, located in northwest Detroit, has a certain *je ne sais quoi* visual effect when one bears witness to the rural, woodsy ambience unostentatiously inserted amidst the concrete jungle of hustling and bustling city life. There is a unique hybridity present—sort of like the pastoral scenes of the popular 1970s TV show *Green Acres* meets the racialized and class saturated urbanism of *Good Times*. In July of 2014, Rollo Homig of *The New Yorker* wrote, "Much of Brightmoor matches what Detroit looks like in the popular imagination—an alarming amalgam of city dump, crime scene, and wild prairie". While the choice of words by Mr. Homig may appear to be controversial, they are, unfortunately, quite effective at painting the picture of Brightmoor's urban ecology. High levels of land abandonment and vacancy caused by massive disinvestment and population loss have assisted in creating the necessary conditions for such a peculiar socio-spatial transformation to occur. In some parts of Brightmoor there are no standing homes in sight and all that is left are empty plots of land like nothing ever existed in those spaces. While on other streets burned down houses dominate the landscape, giving the area the unsightly and astonishing semblance of a bombed warzone in Mogadishu. Trash and debris in the form of used tires, old furniture, and destroyed building materials clutter the interstices between one dilapidated edifice and the next. The next section will describe the extent of abandonment in Brightmoor.

Abandonment and Neighborhood Decline in Brightmoor

Burt Eddy Taylor, an associate of Henry Ford I and residential developer known for the production of small, wood frame houses, established Brightmoor in 1922 to provide cheap housing for workers of the expanding auto industry¹. By 1950, at the peak of Brightmoor's residential occupancy, there were roughly 20,000 functional housing units with nearly 30,000 residents living in the area (City Connect Detroit 2011). Since then Brightmoor has lost over 37% of its housing stock to arson, abandonment and neglect (Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development 2013). According to the Detroit Blight Authority, in 2013 there were 273 uninhabitable homes due to fire damage. These homes pose serious dangers as they are structurally unstable and could collapse, hurting potential squatters or curious children looking for places to play. They are tremendous eyes sores in the area as well, which discourage investment and homeownership, thus perpetuating existing patterns of neighborhood abandonment (figure 4.1). Furthermore, there has been a significant loss of housing over the last decade. From 2000 to 2010 the number of housing units decreased by 8.7%, totaling a reduction of 1,177 units. Also, vacancies almost tripled over that ten year period, rising from 1,276 to 3,094. The overall vacancy rate rose from 9.5 to 25.2 percent, which was higher than the citywide average of 22.8 percent (Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development 2013). Thus, since 2000 the problems of land and home abandonment have accelerated, making an already bad situation worse.

¹ Burt Eddy Taylor bought 160 acres of land, located one mile away from Detroit's city limits at that time in 1921. Taylor created Brightmoor as a planned community of inexpensive housing for migrants from the Southern United States in the early 1920s. The houses were mostly 1 to 2 bedroom wood homes to make them affordable. The subdivision opened in 1922. B.E. Taylor recruited workers from Appalachia with the lure of employment at one of Detroit's expanding automobile manufacturing plants. An additional 2,913 acres was added to the community between 1923 and 1924. "A Basic Community Profile: Brightmoor." (Archive) City Connect Detroit at University of Michigan.

Today there are approximately 7,737 housing units left in Brightmoor (Data Driven Detroit 2014). Most of these homes are one-story units struggling with upkeep and maintenance issues. That is, the houses that remain are rapidly deteriorating in quality. Many residents live in homes so seriously damaged that it looks like no one should be allowed to live in them. Homeowners reported that they simply did not have money to make the necessary repairs to their homes. Other residents who rented expressed that landlords were unwilling to invest in home improvement because they either “didn’t care” or were “greedy

Figure 4.1: Housing Blight in Brightmoor



In addition to the depletion and deterioration of the housing stock, Brightmoor has also experienced high levels of outmigration. From 1970 to 2010, the population in Brightmoor dropped from 27,564 to 12,836, a decrease of nearly 55% (table 4.1). Most of that population loss occurred from 2000 to 2010. During that decade more than 7,000 residents left the neighborhood. Large numbers of people continue to leave Brightmoor every year. According to a study conducted by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in 2013, Brightmoor loses approximately 100 residents a year. Because of this, large parts of Brightmoor are unoccupied by people, leaving large spaces of land completely void of any human activity whatsoever.

Table 4.1: Population Change in Brightmoor, 1970 to 2010

Year	Population
1970	27,564
1980	26,188
1990	23,775
2000	19,837
2010	12,836

Source: Data Driven Detroit

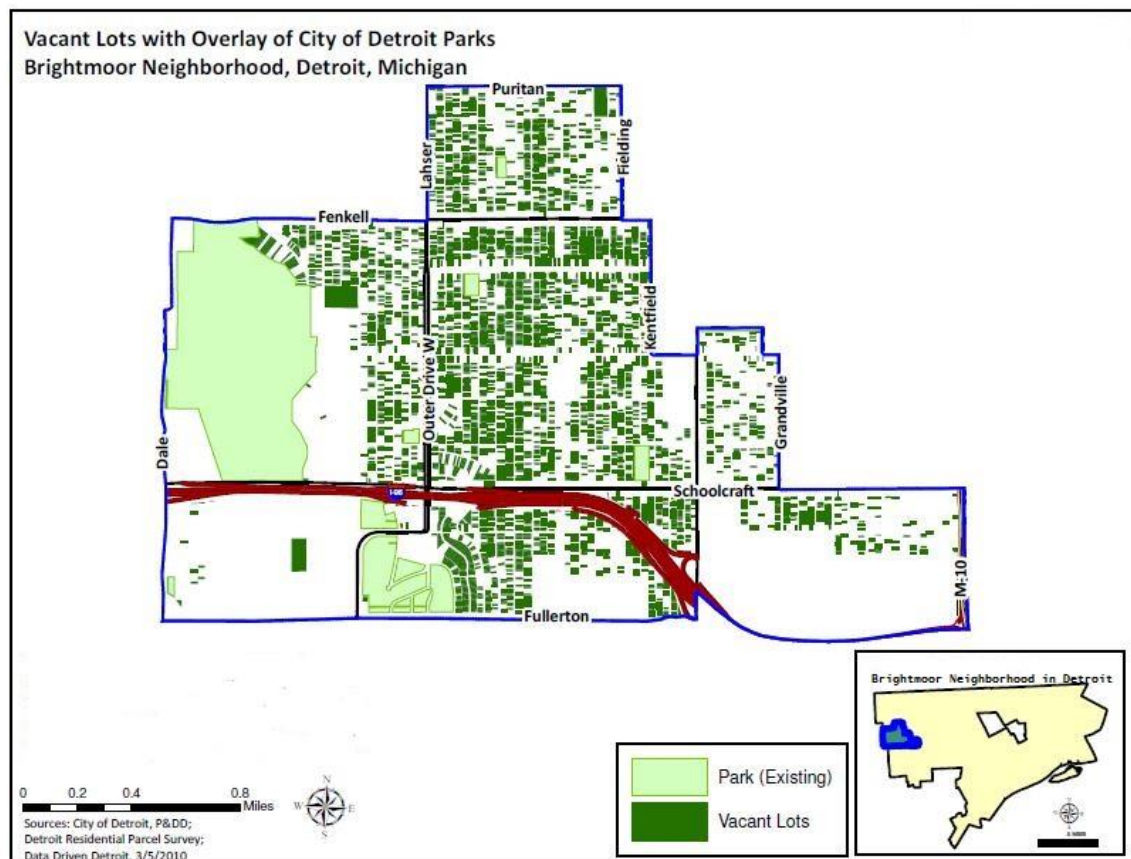
Also, increased vacancy over the years has given rise to numerous vacant lots throughout the community. As stated above, nearly 40% of Brightmoor' geographic area consists of vacant lots and abandoned properties (figure 4.2). The emptiness has seemed to encourage illegal dumping by people mostly living outside of Brightmoor. There are many vacant lots and spaces in Brightmoor blighted by garbage and debris. Some city officials have labeled Brightmoor the "most blighted neighborhood in Detroit", prompting some to nickname it "Blightmoor" (Detroit News 2009).

Neoliberal Moments of Restructuration in Brightmoor: Situated Knowledge at the Local Level

The socio-spatial changes that have occurred in Brightmoor are not due to the expected life-cycle of urban localities or the result of culturally deficient residents as suggested by earlier urbanists. The current conditions of Brightmoor did not emerge in a vacuum, detached from larger social, economic, and political forces. Deindustrialization, shifts in the economy from manufacturing to technology, and suburbanization certainly set the stage for Brightmoor' decline but, more importantly, changes in the urban political economy, in particular, changes in social and economic policy at all levels of government, from 1980 until now have: 1) exacerbated existing problems of disinvestment and poverty

and 2) created new crises of abandonment in Brightmoor marked by the absence of formal mechanisms of governance. However, residents have experienced these *neoliberal moments of restructuring* in a localized context, which has shaped the way they perceive and understand the emergence of such new crises of abandonment. This section plans to examine the emergence of neoliberal spaces of abandonment in Brightmoor and how residents from the area, based on situated knowledge at the neighborhood scale, view the manifestation of those spaces. The sections that follow will explain the larger impact of these processes on community change in Brightmoor.

Figure 4.2: Map of Vacant Land in Brightmoor



Source: Data Driven Detroit, 2010

Peck, Theodore, and Brenner (2009) argue that declining urban locations in the contemporary capitalist city is the direct manifestation of “actually existing neoliberalism”². They suggest that neoliberal fiscal and social welfare policies over the last 35 years, which is discussed in chapter 3, have not helped Detroit to recover from the deleterious effects it has suffered from the decline of the auto industry, outmigration of the middle class, and subsequent business disinvestment—it has only worked to amplify existing problems. These processes of actually existing neoliberalism have had a destructive impact on Brightmoor. Starting in the 1980s with Regan’s New Federalism, which redirected federal funds away from distressed urban locales to state governments, Detroit began to, because of huge reductions to the city’s operating budget, cut spending for anti-poverty and neighborhood redevelopment programs and public services at a time when crime, unemployment, and concentrated poverty were increasing (Citizens Research Council of Michigan 1989). During this change in urban governance in Detroit, Brightmoor, already heavily disinvested and depopulated, began a process of *hyper-abandonment* throughout the 1980s and 1990s which further entrenched and exacerbated existing patterns of concentrated disadvantage. With significantly fewer municipal resources to address the escalation of social problems and revitalize rapidly declining neighborhoods, residents and businesses, feeling unsafe, unsupported, and hopeless, left the city in droves while the severe dilapidation of the urban landscape continued to intensify (Neill 1995).

Because of these new dynamics, depopulation in Brightmoor exploded during the 1980s and 1990s (see table 4.1). From 1950, which marks the beginning of population

² “The notion of actually existing neoliberalism is intended to illuminate the complex, contested ways in which neoliberal restructuring strategies interact with pre-existing uses of space, institutional configurations, and constellations of sociopolitical power.” It is the “concrete” product, in the material world, of the ideological claims of neoliberalism. (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009; 54)

decline in Brightmoor, to 1980, Brightmoor experienced a 12% decrease in population (Data Driven Detroit 2010). However, that number more than doubled to 24.3% from 1980 to 2000. Brightmoor lost 6,351 residents in that 20 year span which was more than the previous 30 years combined. Longtime residents in the area reported that in the 1990s many dedicated Brightmoor homeowners decided to leave because “drugs and shootings just got too bad” and they felt the city was unable to protect them from violence. One 42-year-old white, female resident of Brightmoor told me:

“In the late 1980’s, like 88 and 89, with the Fords and GMs moving out and plants closed down, there was just no opportunities left—no jobs, no nothing. Plus things were starting to get worse, you know, with the drug dealers and gang stuff, you know. The police tried but it was just too much. I don’t think the city had enough man power to really stop what was going on. A lot of my friends left in the 90’s because they just couldn’t take it anymore. They just didn’t feel safe anymore. They got out while they could, you know. It is hard to raise a family and live with that type of uncertainty, you know. They gave up hope on the city that they could turn things around. And Detroit never did, never turned things around, so they left.”

Residents also reported that people fled in the 1980s and 1990s because of the absence of effective anti-poverty strategies aimed at improving the conditions of Brightmoor and surrounding neighborhoods. They stated that many residents “just go fed up” with the intensification of blight and poverty in the neighborhood. According to a 61 year old black female Brightmoor resident:

“The family who lived next door, they decided to leave because the neighborhood, the look of it, the people moving in, just really went down in the like the late 80’s, early 90’s. The houses that people moved out of were left vacant, just sitting there. Houses got burned down. It start turning into what you see now. The city did very little to neutralize the decline during that time and people here saw that. Yes, people moved. They moved to the suburbs where it was much nicer.”

As the neighborhood continued to decline, and residents realized that Detroit had no plans in place to reverse, or even halt, the downward trajectory of Brightmoor, occupants relocated, mostly to nearby suburbs like Redford and Dearborn. This set in motion a viscous cycle of decline and depopulation where residents migrated out of Brightmoor, thus increasing vacancy, which caused increases in blight as vacant homes turned into dilapidated, abandoned structures, which led to more residents migrating out of the neighborhood, which then started the whole process over again.

An examination of Detroit's executive budgets during the 1990's provides some empirical support for the claims made by Brightmoor residents. According to the Citizens Research Council Michigan, during the 1990's the funds allocated to planning and neighborhood development and neighborhood services personnel were significantly cut. From 1993 to 1995 neighborhood development was cut by 7% and neighborhood services personnel was cut by 25%. They also showed that state revenue sharing payments were significantly reduced in the 1990's which posed budgetary problems throughout the decade. This partly explains why blight was unaddressed in Brightmoor during the 1990s as residents suggested.

However, residents, situated within their localized positions in the "theatre of neoliberalism", were unable to connect the implementation of fiscal federalism initiated at scales beyond city politics to the unaddressed issues of crime and blight, and the subsequent exacerbation of neighborhood problems—like the reduction of state revenue sharing payments and other neoliberal changes in urban governance. While the City of Detroit was certainly experiencing budgetary complications with funding essential public services as indicated above, those deficits arose in a large part because of the devolution

of authority and service delivery initiated at the federal level as already argued. Thus we can begin to see here that residents, experiencing neoliberalism locally, developed perceptions of the Brightmoor' problem which were detached from larger, political and economic structural forces.

Social scientists who focus on how the representational dynamics of place shape the perceptions of human beings argue that “in order to *explain* human behavior one must deal with the ‘micro-episodes’ of everyday life and their embeddedness in the concrete milieu or contexts” (Agnew 1993: 261). These theories of place suggest that people do not experience life in the abstract context of “mass society”. Rather humans develop a situated knowledge of the social world based on the lived experiences at the local scale. According to Lefebvre (1991), there exist a “politics of space” in which individuals constantly negotiate the meanings of the material world through space which is live, conceived, and perceived. That is, the way a place or thing is conceived is not how it is necessarily lived and understood. From the perspectives of the residents of Brightmoor we can see that the manifestation of abandonment—or how it is *conceived*—is understood—or perceived—differently due to their lived experiences within the embedded localness of Brightmoor. Thus the local conceptions of neoliberalism, which gives neoliberalism a different representational form in Brightmoor than its form as an abstract macro-process, is internalized by Brightmoor residents as a failure of local politics and local actors. What is important, here, is that the problem of decline is then uniquely being framed through the locally bounded and situated knowledges of Brightmoor residents.

Other neoliberal moments of restructuration like the sub-prime mortgage crisis and ensuing economic recession in 2008-2009 led to further reductions in social provisions and anti-poverty, neighborhood redevelopment initiatives in Brightmoor. Federal funds bypassed failing neighborhoods in Detroit and went directly to plugging the budget deficits at the state level*. These were processes that Detroit had no control over. Furthermore, the municipal bankruptcy of Detroit in 2013 significantly intensified previously adopted fiscal austerity approaches which further gouged funds from the city's social safety nets and public services. The deepening of austerity measures and reduction of yet more federal funding to Detroit all but eradicated what services remained in Brightmoor which further exacerbated blight and outmigration. From 2000 to 2010 Brightmoor experience its biggest decadal population loss which was nearly 7,000 people. This was more than the two previous decades combined. The loss of funds for basic city services caused by the recession and bankruptcy is quite evident in Brightmoor. Residents reported they have noticed that since 2008 services like blight removal, garbage pick-up, the boarding up of vacant houses, street repair, even police services have decreased. A 43 year old black male resident stated:

“Like six or seven years ago, the city just stopped cleaning up the lots where people were dumping. I mean they weren't really cleaning it up before but at least the city would do something from time to time. I mean they didn't do nothing. People came here, put their junk wherever and there it stayed. We would call the city but they'd never show. I can't remember one time I called and they came. Yea, around 2008. They just didn't come ever. That's how it is. And, yea, more people moved out. The garbage, I mean, who wants to live next to garage?”

The recent bankruptcy and state appointment of an emergency manager in Detroit is something that residents also understood as having a negative impact on the

city's ability to provide necessary services to Brightmoor. However, the majority of residents felt that Detroit, through fiscal mismanagement and corruption, "dug their own hole", meaning Detroit's political leadership was primarily responsible for the debt crisis paralyzing the city. As one apoplectic resident indicated:

"We have had a lot of elected people in this city who have not done what they were hired to do. Kwame, the city council, Monica Conyers, they have taken the tax payer's dollars and done God knows what with it. Bankrupt the city. Now we can't get the lights on over here. That James Tate and his people, that guy, Andre, keep telling us the mayor ain't got no money right now to tear some of these houses down. They say, wait, just wait. I am tired of waiting."

Residents, while they did not explicitly attach the exacerbation of decline to shifts in economic ideology at the federal level, they did notice the reduction of support from the City of Detroit and how it significantly intensified abandonment and poverty. That is, residents understood and were aware of the ways in which new problems were being forged through hyper-abandonment along with the retreat of formal systems of governance and social provisioning, but only at the city-level. Here we see the representational dynamics of place, as suggested by Lefebvre, influencing how residents ascribed meaning to decline in Brightmoor. The lived experience of Brightmoor residents during neoliberal moments of restructuration, like the financial crisis and municipal bankruptcy, helped to shape the way they felt failures of local government were one of the primary causes of the problems plaguing their neighborhood. From their vantage point residents were unable to connect the failures of Detroit to forces outside the city, that being neoliberal policies and structural changes at the state and federal levels.

Also, neoliberal policies singularly focused on urban growth and market competitiveness as solutions to urban poverty have led to "neighborhood development"

projects which ignores poor neighborhoods and focuses on “stabilizing” middle-class and more affluent neighborhoods in Detroit (Peck 2014). Because of such approaches the escalation of problems in Brightmoor has been ignored in favor of improving the conditions of more “salvageable” neighborhoods. For example, in 2014 the City of Detroit established the Hardest Hit Fund. The money for this fund came from HUD’s Neighborhood Stabilization Grant which allocated approximately \$21 million dollars to Detroit to revitalize economically depressed neighborhoods (HUD). Instead of this money being spent on neighborhoods “hit hardest” by extreme poverty like Brightmoor, it went to relatively well-off neighborhoods like Rosedale Park located just a few blocks from Brightmoor. During a community meeting in Brightmoor, I observed a representative from Detroit’s Planning and Development Department explain to Brightmoor community organizers that the money from the Neighborhood Stabilization Grant was for “lending preemptive support to good neighborhoods to keep them from deteriorating like other neighborhoods around the city” and that Brightmoor was not eligible to receive any funds. The representative from Detroit’s Planning Department also explained that neighborhoods like Rosedale Park were ideal places to invest in as doing so “retained the tax base for the city” and “accentuated attractive residential areas” which made the city a more “desirable destination”.

The utilization of the Hardest Hit Fund is an example of how the city’s focus on competition of place and market-centered urban growth, which is a product of neoliberal shifts in social and economic policies that extend beyond Detroit, has led to the city further ignoring Brightmoor’ problems. However, residents attending the meeting were unable to see competitive urbanism established by neoliberal doctrine at higher levels of

government and decision-making as culpable forces in funneling much needed resources away from their neighborhood. Rather, they saw it as a decision Detroit makes based on which neighborhood “deserved” support. As stated by a Brightmoor resident during a discussion about the Stabilization Grant at a community meeting:

“The city of Detroit has consistently ignored this neighborhood for years. I guess they would much rather concentrate on neighborhoods that are worth saving—to them. But I understand. The people in Rosedale and Indian Village have kept their neighborhoods nice. They have shown they won’t just tear up the neighborhood. They deserve that money. I guess they have earned it. But we can do the same thing here. If everyone and I mean everyone, pulls together to save our own neighborhood then others will begin to care, too. If we don’t care, why should anyone else care?”

The residents felt that, not only was it the fault of the city that funds were not being allocated to redevelop Brightmoor, it was also the fault of Brightmoor itself, specifically the residents of Brightmoor. Here the decline of Brightmoor is now being attributed to residents, particularly those who did not “take care” of the neighborhood. Again, we see how representational dynamics of place and the local context in which residents experienced neoliberal moments of restructuring influenced how they understood the problem and consequently how they also assigned responsibility for such problems.

Conclusion

The culmination of neoliberal policies and changes in urban governance—the devolvement of social provisioning and public assistance to broke and money-strapped municipalities; the unabashed pursuit of “no holds barred”, deregulated industry; the single-minded focus on free-market mechanisms to provide solutions to social and economic problems—assisted in, not only exacerbating existing pathologies of urban malfunction, but also, manufacturing new and complex urban crises throughout Detroit.

These new urban crises are defined by the almost complete retreat of formal modes of governance and social provisioning in poor and disinvested neighborhoods (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003). What has emerged are *neoliberal spaces of abandonment* where the absenteeism of homeowners, capital, and government have collectively created a leadership vacuum, resituating neighborhood decision-making, provisioning, and strategic community development as the duty of poor residents.

This new crisis, irrespective of how residents perceive its emergence, has brought different challenges but it has also presented spaces of opportunity in which residents *seemingly* possess the ability to imagine alternative environments and socio-spatial configurations, where new collective spaces can be invented to resist and transform. In Brightmoor, in response to the absence of formal mechanisms of government, residents have filled these voids and begun to employ homegrown, do-it-yourself forms community development. These residents, living in neoliberal spaces of abandonment, with no other entities present to address the problems of Brightmoor, have now taken it upon themselves to create a new community, a new Brightmoor. Brightmoor residents felt had to “fix the neighborhood” themselves because the City of Detroit had proven they were unreliable and even unfit to properly and effectively address the problems of decline in Brightmoor. One Brightmoor resident engaged in resident-driven community-building stated, “How long have we been here, waiting for the city? They can’t help us so we have to help ourselves.”

Thus, various neoliberal moments of restructuration have impacted Brightmoor in two significant ways: 1) it has transformed the local political economy, creating neoliberal spaces of abandonment which has seemingly shifted neighborhood development and

anti-poverty provision duties to residents and 2) through experiencing neoliberalism in a localized context, it has uniquely shaped the way in which residents collectively frame that abandonment, detaching its emergence from political and economic forces at the national level and attributing it fundamentally to governance failures at the city-level. The way residents have framed neighborhood problems have influenced, of course, the way residents see the solutions. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DO-IT-YOURSELF NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT TACTICS IN NEOLIBERAL SPACES OF ABANDONMENT: NEIGHBORS BUILDING BRIGHTMOOR (NBB) AND RESIDENT-LED NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN BRIGHTMOOR

Introduction

With the emergence of neoliberal spaces of abandonment, residents are expected, or even forced, to employ do-it-yourself tactics to improve their surroundings. Many scholars have highlighted this process in declining urban localities (Iveson 2013). They tend to focus on 1) the creative tactics residents employ to address neighborhood issues and 2) the resident-driven and controlled nature of those tactics. Similarly, in this chapter I plan to discuss how Brightmoor residents have decided to address the abandonment in their neighborhood while identifying resident-driven processes of community change. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate, which differs from previous studies, *how* and *why* residents *chose for themselves* various approaches aimed at transforming neoliberal spaces of abandonment and urban decline. The illumination of the forces which shape the tactical decisions of residents engaged in community change can help to shed light on: 1) the performative agency of Brightmoor residents and 2) the existence of neoliberal hegemony in Brightmoor.

While several entities have descended on Brightmoor to claim stake to space for urban experimentation, Neighbors Building Brightmoor (NBB) is the only genuine resident-driven and –controlled community-based organization in the area. That is, the organizers and participants of NBB reside within the geographical boundaries of the Brightmoor neighborhood. More importantly, those who make decisions in NBB are all Brightmoor residents. Thus the *benefits* of the strategies, programs, and initiatives they develop and implement, and how they work in the interests of the neighborhood, are

defined by the people who live in the neighborhood and not external stakeholders with ulterior motives. This is significant to this analysis because past studies on community-building have highlighted the ubiquitous nature of the “non-profit industrial complex” and how these organizations tend to be exogenous—in terms of the location of personnel and “brick-and-mortar” organization—to the areas they claim to serve, thus allowing them, because they will not be affected, to develop community-building strategies that primarily function in the interests of stakeholders outside of the neighborhood. These types of community-building arrangements tend to not reflect the authentic interests and agendas of most residents and often work against their interests (Stone and Butler 2000). Therefore, focusing on NBB allows this study to uncover how residents themselves, uncoopted by so-called elites, create place in neoliberal spaces of abandonment.

Neighbors Building Brightmoor’s (NBB) Approach to Social Change in Brightmoor

Two longtime residents of Brightmoor, Sheila Hoerauf and Riet Schumack, established NBB in 2006 as a strategy to combat the rising crime in the neighborhood. It initially began as the Brightmoor Youth Garden, an urban gardening program designed to grow fresh fruits and vegetables and provide a healthy space for local children. The program used gardening to teach life skills, encourage academic achievement, and employ the youths of Brightmoor. The size of the garden increased from one city lot in 2006 to six lots by late 2009.

An increase in volunteers and resident involvement for the Brightmoor Youth Garden led to many initiative successes. They were able to cleanup several blocks, vacant lots, and beautify the neighborhood through floral planting and landscape design. Their efforts convinced many residents to stay and motivated new residents to move into

Brightmoor. Their success compelled the Brightmoor Youth Garden organizers to expand their operation to address other community problems. In 2009, they established NBB and applied for 501(c)(3) status that was finally granted in January of 2011.

NBB currently has four community-building programs: 1) Art Enrichment, 2) Youth Development, 3) Community Gardens, and 4) Housing Revitalization. The Art Enrichment program is an after school youth art program. It gives children the opportunity to engage in artistic activities and teaches them the importance of art. The program also integrates art into the community revitalization process through the painting of murals and other art forms throughout the urban farm locations. The goal of this is to encourage “more and more people to invest in the neighborhood, and stimulate community participation as well” (NBB brochure). The Youth Development program is a year-round initiative that facilitates the employment of neighborhood children in the garden and teaches them “not only gardening, but self-sufficiency and the value of hard work” (NBB brochure). The Community Gardens program is a resident-driven and controlled urban garden initiative that is used to eliminate blight and unused vacant land, beautify the community, provide fresh fruits and vegetables for the community, create and sense of community through participation, and stimulate economic growth through the sale of products from the garden. The gardens consist of 34,000 square feet of growing space. Lastly, the Housing Revitalization program involves the tearing down and boarding up of abandoned homes while leaving art or community gardens in their place. Vacant and dilapidated housing structures have typically served as a source of drugs, crime, and blight. By removing them and beautifying the space, it “serves as a source of pride of the neighborhood” and is an indication of positive community development.

Through face-to-face interviews with NBB members and participant observations, I deduced that NBB's community-based programs and their overall neighborhood change approach employed three basic strategies: 1) transform individuals into responsible residents, 2) establish positive land use through urban gardening, and 3) attract new residents to create new spaces of community growth. These neighborhood strategies aligned with neo-communitarian style community-building which focuses on the internal dynamics of neighborhoods—like social capital, community capacity, and community assets—to effectively redevelop poor neighborhoods. The aim of these strategies was to remove blight, build new community space, and assist in the revitalization of Brightmoor. Below I discuss these strategies in more depth. Below I discuss these strategies and their classification as community-building approaches to place-making.

Creating Responsible Residents

NBB programs like Art Enrichment and Youth Development are intended to build social, cultural, and human capital among residents. In doing so, these programs provide skills and opportunities to resident's and their children. While these programs were designed to explicitly transform the behaviors of individuals, embedded in almost every project were indirect ways in which NBB sought to modify the attitudes and actions of Brightmoor residents. Through community participation with NBB, individuals were expected to learn how to be *responsible residents*. Here NBB leader, a 61-year-old white female, talks about what the idea of responsibility means to the organization and neighborhood:

"I moved in this neighborhood in 1975, and back then the neighborhood was much different. People cared about the community, took care of their houses and yards. We didn't have much but what we did have was respect for each other and ourselves. We made the most

of what we had. And we worked hard. People around here worked hard for what they had and they wanted to keep it nice. It was a different type of person living here. I think now the people here, who live and moved here, do not have that same sense of responsibility. We need to restore the idea that people have a responsibility, a big responsibility, to their community and neighborhoods. We all need to do our part in fixing this neighborhood. A great deal of the work that we do in NBB is about changing the mindset of the people around us and the people in the community. We want to show them a different way to be, that taking pride in the place you stay and taking care of it is the first step to turning things around.”

The idea of responsibility here is presented as an obligation to community members, an obligation that was once a common element of Brightmoor and needs to be “restored”. This obligation involves maintaining the quality of the neighborhood’s housing stock and other community spaces. Exhibiting a concern for one’s own property and the property of others living in Brightmoor is a preventative action that retains the aesthetic and economic value of the neighborhood. Also, performing this act of neighborhood responsibility, maintaining the quality and standards of the neighborhood, functions as a panacea for urban decline and a strategy to reverse the effects of hyper-abandonment in Brightmoor. NBB plans to re-entrench a culture of neighborhood responsibility within individual community actors where everyone “plays their part” to reinvent Brightmoor.

This approach aligns with neo-communitarian versions of community-building. Specifically, the idea of the responsible resident is indicative of community capacity building from the neo-communitarian community-building model. Chaskin (2001: 24) and his colleagues, proponents of the community building model, argue that poor communities can, through establishing “normative functions” and “informal social control”, increase their ability to control the outcomes affecting their neighborhood. The building of community capacity involves the building of behaviors and culture among residents that facilitates healthy neighborhood development. It allows residents to development the

accomplish community goals for themselves. The establishing of “responsible behavior”, where residents work to maintain the look and quality of the neighborhood is being used by NBB to change the culture of the neighborhood to achieve its objective of reversing blight in Brightmoor.

Performing duties like removing trash from vacant lots, boarding up houses, and preventing people from stealing scrap metal from vacant houses were common acts of responsibility. A 31-year-old female member explained the things she did as a responsible resident:

“We all have to do our part. We have a responsibility to this community. Me and Bob, a couple of neighborhood kids helped us too, we boarded up these two houses there. Its nothing huge but it makes the area look nicer and it keeps people out of these houses. We painted it, too. Makes things more colorful around here.”

Many residents, using do-it-yourself tactics, boarded up properties that they did not own and also painted murals on abandoned homes (figure 6.3). This was a common act of resident responsibility. Another member, a 38-year-old white male, described his acts of neighborhood responsibility:

“That house over there, yea, scrappers destroyed it. That was before we in Brightmoor decided to put an end to stuff like that. This house on the corner, its been vacant, uh, for about 2 years. An elderly lady used to live there, moved out. I’ve been watching that place like a hawk. One day, actually a guy who lives nearby, went up in there, did his scrapping thing. When he came out with the metal and pipes, I told him to put it back. Of course he didn’t, so I followed him home to get his address. Called the police when I got home and haven’t seen him back since. You know this is how we show our commitment to this neighborhood. We look of for each other and the entire community.”

To NBB and its members, residents should demonstrate their responsibility to the neighborhood by using one’s own labor power, resources, and ingenuity to protect Brightmoor from further decline. Accordingly, doing so becomes an approach to

potentially transform the socio-spatiality of neoliberal space in Brightmoor. Linking this performative aspect of the responsible resident to the building of community capacity, here, we see that the capacity that is being developed—the construction of appropriate cultural and behavioral forms which enable group outcomes—is to transform space and place in Brightmoor through do-it-yourself urbanism. That is, the way in which culture and social organization in Brightmoor is being modified by NBB is to bring about the neighborhood’s capacity to perform as an urban “do-it-yourselfer”.

FIGURE 5.1: DO-IT-YOURSELF BLIGHT REMOVAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION



However, responsibility as a performative act that benefits the neighborhood also consisted of abstaining from certain behaviors deemed destructive to Brightmoor’s overall rehabilitation. Squatting, scrapping, and dumping were all considered irresponsible acts.

A 52-year-old black female NBB member states:

“We trying to get rid of some behavior in Brightmoor. We know many folks living here, no job, no money, I understand, they gon’ squat in these houses, they gon’ take what they need out of these houses. But we got to stop that type of behavior if we gon’ make it better here. It’s not responsible.”

Responsibility was also talked about in terms of appropriate adjustments residents should undergo to productively function in spaces where there was a retreat of formal modes of government and social provisions. Responsible residents were ones who understood the City of Detroit was not going to fix the problems of Brightmoor and that residents had to do it themselves. According to one of NBB's leaders:

“The city is not coming to help and we can't sit around waiting for them to fix everything. We got to do it ourselves, we got to. It's our responsibility now as citizens. If we don't do it, no else will. We (NBB) have taken it upon ourselves to clear out these lots and put nice parks and places where kids can play. The city didn't do that, we did. The police is barely here so we get together and do our own policing, watching our own community. These are just the things we must do for ourselves now.”

For NBB, assuming the duties that are typically the responsibility of the city of Detroit—like blight removal, neighborhood development, and even police services—is a necessary change that residents must accept, with or without the assistance of formal institutions, in order to properly recalibrate the social expectations of residents as citizens to fit within the contemporaneous civic conditions found in neoliberal spaces of abandonment. Thus to be responsible is to employ do-it-yourself urban tactics as a resident.

NBB conveyed the importance and role of responsibility to residents in numerous ways. First, responsibility was regularly discussed during community meetings. NBB encouraged residents to attend community meetings, which were held the first Wednesday of every month. In the meetings I attended (which was a total of 8), NBB members made it clear that taking care of the neighborhood was the responsibility of every Brightmoor resident. Second, the success of NBB's community-building initiatives were meant to serve as an example that personal responsibility is an effective strategy to rebuilding Brightmoor. For example, NBB hosted a bike ride through the neighborhood

that was designed to illustrate to the event participants—many of which were residents of Brightmoor—that the neighborhood was improving through resident-driven planning and program implementation. As I was told by a NBB leader, “It was to show the neighborhood that taking care of Brightmoor is our responsibility and it can be done with a little hard work and dedication”. Third, various programs were used to teach individuals how to be responsible residents. Fourth, murals and signs were commonly used by NBB to communicate the effectiveness of personal responsibility as a technique to combat poverty and decline. For example, NBB painted on the side of an old abandoned school, Dewey Elementary, located on the corner of Pierson and Clairborne, a mural with the words, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” (see figure 5.2)

Overall, creating responsible residents served as powerful strategy for NBB. It sought to establish behavioral and cultural norms among Brightmoor residents which entailed the acceptance of duties involving property maintenance, the denouncement of activities deemed destructive to the neighborhood, and the willing transition of citizens as the primary care takers of the neighborhood instead of the city. This strategy aims to prevent further deterioration and positions residents as key actors in the process of neighborhood/community development. Essentially it situated do-it-yourself culture as a normative a necessary component in NBBs capacity to transform space and place in Brightmoor. Also, the responsible resident, the do-it-yourselfer, follows a community-building model of community capacity building in that it focuses on the transformation of internal cultural and behavioral neighborhood dynamics to reverse neighborhood decline. Again, based upon my interviews with NBB members and observations in Brightmoor, I

can conclude that this strategy was one derived from Brightmoor residents (those aligned with NBB) and not external entities outside of Brightmoor.

Figure 5.2: Personal Responsibility Mural



Picture Taken by Author: 7/12/2014

Urban Agriculture as Positive Land Use

Central to the transformative agenda of NBB were strategies which utilized urban farming and gardening to redevelop abandoned and unused land in Brightmoor. Several scholars have documented the use of urban farming and gardening as new urban practices of self-determination and do-it-yourself urbanism (White 2011; Adams, David, and Hardman 2013; Reynolds 2014). These scholars highlight the politics of land use and the way residents negotiate that political terrain to produce alternative community spaces in opposition to perceived oppressive socio-spatial conditions. In the same way, NBB used urban farming as a transformative land use strategy to repurpose the excessive amount of vacant and empty space which extend through much of Brightmoor. As stated above, roughly 40% of Brightmoor's land-mass is comprised of abandoned, unoccupied housing structures and empty lots. NBB intends to fill these abandoned, unwanted, and unproductive spaces with useful places and activities that provide social, aesthetic, and

economic benefits to Brightmoor residents. A 41-year-old white male NBB member and urban farmer in Brightmoor states:

“Well, it’s a good thing for this area. There’s so much open land here, just sitting there and not being used. I think the gardens make good use of those spaces. They’re negative energy in the community, houses barely standing, graffiti all over it, vacant lots growing wild, people dumping their garbage in them. They do the community no good. Positive things can be put there. We can replace those things that bring the community down with positive things that help the community. I think that is a real thing that we do here. The farming is a big piece to it.”

The replacement of what many NBB members called “negative space” with “positive space” was a key aspect of NBB’s land use plans. Negative spaces were considered areas where houses with extensive fire damage, unused and unmaintained vacant lots, and dumping sites existed. These “negative spaces” were considered damaging to the neighborhood for numerous reasons. First, they posed dangerous and unsafe conditions which could cause serious physical harm to residents. Second, they encouraged illegal activity as these spaces were often used for drug trafficking, prostitution, and gang-related behavior. Third, they attracted undesirable people seeking to take advantage of Brightmoor’s abandonment like homeless individuals looking for a place to stay or “thieves” looking to steal valuable scrap metal. Fourth, they were aesthetically unpleasing which made it difficult for residents take pride in their neighborhood.

FIGURE 5.3 DO-IT-YOURSELF PARKS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS



Negative spaces, which only functioned to reinforce urban decay, were seen as major obstacles to effective neighborhood development for NBB members. Thus transforming these problematic spaces into positive spaces was essential to NBB's plans. Positive land use consisted of primarily three things: 1) urban gardens, 2) parks and green spaces, and 3) neighborhood beautification (i.e. murals, art sculptures) (figure 5.2). For example, the Brightmoor Farmway is a series of urban farms located throughout northeast corner of Brightmoor (figure 5.3). These urban farms were built to replace vacant and blighted lots—many of which are built on land NBB members do not own. NBB members felt that these positive land use approaches provided areas that allowed Brightmoor residents to engage in healthy and productive activities that built solidarity among residents and an appreciation for the neighborhood. As voiced by one NBB member:

“I love what she has done with the gardens and the others and theirs. People have real things in this neighborhood that they can do. They can feel these things. They can go right up here, down this street here, bring their family and pick tomatoes or hot peppers or whatever's there. See, that's adding to the neighborhood, not taking away. We come together on these things, we become closer as a community. And we can feel good about Brightmoor cause we putting what we need to put in Brightmoor.”

Urban gardens, and other positive land uses, were gathering places where residents could build a rapport with each other, create bonds, and develop constructive community relations. NBB members believed that the collective process coalesced around this type of community activity also helped to establish a positive sense of place in Brightmoor among residents. The strengthening of community bonds between residents, and the emergent affinity to place, were vital elements in forming the cohesion necessary to enact collective approaches to addressing the multitude of social and economic afflictions manifested within the spatial boundaries of Brightmoor. These activities were essentially

community-building approaches to build social capital internally among Brightmoor residents.

FIGURE: 5.4 BRIGHTMOOR FARMWAY COMMUNITY HOUSE



Source: Picture taken by author 6/23/2014

Furthermore, when examining the urban farming strategy of NBB, and the way it intends to remake space and place in Brightmoor, it is evident that its functionality is the same as the community asset building approach from the community-building model. Scholars and practitioners who advocate for the use of community asset building claim that all communities, rich or poor, possess valuable capital and assets that can be developed and cultivated for the purpose of neighborhood growth and regeneration. Green and Haines (2008) argue that poor communities can engage in “asset mapping” to determine the internal natural resources and environmental capital that can be transformed to redevelop the community. Here we see that NBB plans to use the excessive amount of abandoned land in Brightmoor—which is central to its environmental landscape—as a potential asset by transforming it into farmland.

Also, the construction of urban gardens was an ideal strategy for NBB's land use plan because they, as already stated, replaced unconstructive forms of land use, making the neighborhood safer and aesthetically more pleasing, but also because they, in establishing productive space for residents, fostered the development of desired skills that residents could pragmatically use as active participants in NBB's neighborhood development approach. These community-building skills were primarily gardening, cooperation, and responsibility. While showing neighborhood kids how to plant cucumbers, a NBB member commented on the usefulness of community gardens to Brightmoor and how it nurtures the development of effective community-building skills:

"Through gardening you can learn so much. And this is the main reason why we make our garden available to the entire community. We want them to come here to see how to work together, how to grow good food that they can put into their bodies and feel good. And it works. Oh, yes, gardening is a great way to teach responsibility, how hard work and teamwork leads to beautiful things. There are so many different aspects to gardening that has to be right in order for things to turn out the way you want them to. You have to take the soil, take care of the soil in just the right way. You have to follow through with all the small details. You can take these lessons and apply to them to any aspect of your life and find that they help with problem solving, or getting difficult tasks done. I believe with hard work and teamwork we can rebuild this community."

Through learning the skill of gardening it was expected that residents would sharpen essential community-building skills like responsibility and cooperation. I will not go over the role of responsibility as it has already been above discussed above. Cooperation, however, was, just as responsibility, very important to NBBs goals because it was perceived as the defining attribute of their brand of community work. As stated by one NBB leader:

"The change we're trying to achieve here can really only be accomplished with the cooperation of residents living here who want to do something, something that shakes this community to its core. So

we have to learn to work together, right? The only way we can do this is by working together. The community gardens, and we have a few, are places where we can build those skills. When we learn how to cooperate the right way, because we can do it ourselves, we will make this community better and safer and a place where people want to live. I have no doubt.”

The style of community change being attempted by NBB involved synergetic actions by motivated Brightmoor residents. As stated above, along with its contribution as a physical site to replace blight, urban farming was also a cultural site where residents learned “do-it-yourself skills” while building social capital—a community-building approach. Community-building theories of social capital claim that if poor residents just simply learn how to work together, it would enable them, as a community, to more easily achieve collective goals. Thus, we see urban farming as a community-building activity as it is being used to facilitate cooperation and relationship building.

Attracting New Residents

Depopulation in Brightmoor has led to massive amounts of housing blight, urban decay, and utter neighborhood desertion. As stated above, Brightmoor has lost over 11,000 residents over the last 20 years. The loss of homeowners and community members in Brightmoor has posed significant problems for the areas’ resurgence. The most crucial of those problems are that without people to live in the new spaces and places NBB intends to create, the revitalized sections of Brightmoor will still be unoccupied and unused, thus reproducing the socio-spatial dynamics of abandonment which currently plague the neighborhood. To address this issue NBB has attempted to attract new residents to Brightmoor. This strategy entails stimulating in-migration to Brightmoor to rebuild its occupancy levels, reduce housing vacancy, and restore an ethos

of community engagement. A NBB leader talks about the population loss in Brightmoor and why it is important to bring people back to the neighborhood:

“The fact that so many people have moved out of Brightmoor has made it extremely difficult to manage all of the blight. The people I’ve got here can’t live in all these houses or fix up these vacant lots and tend to the property day in and day out to keep it looking decent. Other people have to buy these houses and live in them. We have got to find people who want to be in Brightmoor, buy a home, fix it up, and live there. Once we bring people back the community will begin to flourish again. It’s beginning to do that already but with people moving back, it’s the final piece so to speak.”

Here we see that addressing blight caused by abandonment and the absence of occupants engaging in the active maintenance of properties involves replacing the lost population with new Brightmoor residents willing to socially and economically invest in the neighborhood. New homeowners would work to redevelop the area through repairing dilapidated properties and maintaining those properties. This creates a situation where space and place is being transformed not only by the addition of people in formerly abandoned spaces but also by the transformative capabilities and actions of these new agents of social change.

As discussed above, proponents of the community-building approach of asset building claim that poor residents can develop and utilize the inherent internal value of a community to foster growth and redevelopment. John McKnight (1995), a pioneer of the asset building approach, argues that instead of focusing on deficiencies, communities should focus on the strengths of the community—the things that can be used to improve the neighborhood. He suggests that residents can, by taking ownership of the community change process and the internal assets of their community, make their neighborhoods attractive sites for investment and economic development. Here we see NBB attempting to do just that. NBB, using the open spaces and abandoned blighted areas of Brightmoor

as potential farming sites for individuals interesting in urban farming, has effectively identified aspects of Brightmoor, which is potential farming space, which can be used to attract homebuyers. Again, we see a community-building approach being employed by NBB.

To attract new residents to Brightmoor, NBB was aggressively involved in marketing and advertising purchasable and vacant properties to potential buyers. Websites were utilized and developed to publicize available housing units and empty lots in Brightmoor. Whydontweownthis.com was one of the sites they used to list houses and lots. In 2013 NBB also partnered with Brightmoor Alliance to create Move to Brightmoor. A Facebook page was created for the Move to Brightmoor initiative to showcase different properties in Brightmoor along with information detailing the amenities, attractions, and new developments in the area*. These websites were a central feature in NBBs strategy to repopulate Brightmoor.

Many current residents moved to Brightmoor because of the website advertisements developed by NBB. Through my time in Brightmoor I encountered 33 people who had moved to Brightmoor within the last two years. Most of these people learned of Brightmoor through the websites mentioned above. A 23-year-old new resident of Brightmoor and NBB member said:

“My wife and I were looking to move out of Chicago. I had just lost my job and we just couldn’t afford the place we were living in. A friend of mine showed me the Move to Brightmoor page one day. I saw what they were asking for the homes and thought, I could totally do that. Plus I saw the farming that was going on in the neighborhood and all the other, just to me, really interesting stuff going on and thought I’d love to live there. And my wife, too. She loved the area so, you know, we packed up, and bought the house we wanted.”

Other mechanisms were also used to encourage relocation to Brightmoor. NBB often encouraged residents to inform people they knew about how to use the Michigan Land Bank Auction as well as public listings of tax foreclosed homes owned by the City of Detroit to purchase available property in Brightmoor.

Furthermore, NBB made a distinct effort to market the idea to potential homebuyers that Brightmoor was a site for the expansion of urban gardening and farming. That is, while NBB encouraged and made attempts to personally facilitate the movement of homebuyers to the area, they preferred that these homebuyers be gardeners who would contribute to the construction of urban gardens throughout Brightmoor. NBB used the vast levels of land abandonment found in Brightmoor to entice individuals looking to build urban gardens or desired to live a particular lifestyle centered around urban gardening and farming. I asked a NBB leader why was attracting people who were interested in urban gardening so important to NBB's mission:

"I really believe that farming is the solution, or a big part of the solution. We're not rich, we can't build expensive condos or lofts, so we're going to have to be creative in getting people back. We have to use the assets here. And what we have is open space to farm while also living in the city. Getting those people here will mean a lot for Brightmoor. It simply changes this community. It gets rid of the burned down houses and puts farmers there committed to making Brightmoor a better place."

In this way the land abandonment in Brightmoor, while central to many of Brightmoor's problems, becomes an asset that can be leveraged for its resurgence. The remaking of space and place here is unfolding through deliberate efforts to utilize the abandonment and poverty created by neoliberal urbanism as an attractive centerpiece possessing the uncanny ability to draw people into its orbit, collecting new explorers to repopulate a new frontier. The new Brightmoor, through the actions of NBB, will be a community of urban

gardeners, performing neighborly acts of responsibility, prepared to protect the neighborhoods newfound identity.

As discussed above, proponents of the community-building approach of asset building claim that residents can develop and utilize the inherent internal value of a community to foster growth and redevelopment. John McKnight (1995), a pioneer of the asset building approach, argues that instead of focusing on deficiencies, communities should focus on the strengths of the community—the things that can be used to improve the neighborhood. He suggests that residents can, by taking ownership of the community change process and the internal assets of their community, make their neighborhoods attractive sites for investment and economic development. With attracting new residents to Brightmoor we see NBB attempting to do just that. NBB, using the open spaces and abandoned blighted areas of Brightmoor as potential farming sites for individuals interesting in urban farming, has effectively identified aspects of Brightmoor, which is potential farming space, which can be used to attract homebuyers. Again, we see a community-building approach being employed by NBB.

Do-it-Yourself Tactics as Community-Building

Through the use of the do-it-yourself neighborhood development tactics mentioned above—transforming individuals into responsible residents, establishing positive land use through urban gardening, and attracting new residents to create new spaces of community growth—NBB intended to reinterpret neoliberal spaces of abandonment in Brightmoor, making them again livable and attractive spaces. Furthermore, the do-it-yourself approaches to neighborhood change were essentially community-building strategies. NBB members used community-building, as a form of do-it-yourself urbanism,

to negotiate among themselves the multiple tensions of neighborhood change, thus giving way to seemingly unorthodox and creative approaches to place-making and everyday resistance against oppressive conditions. However, while NBB has clearly articulated how they plan to transform Brightmoor's abandonment using these creative forms of resident-driven anti-poverty work and neighborhood development, the deeper question of why they chose these specific strategies is still unanswered. Although the crises embedded in neoliberal spaces of abandonment push residents to construct do-it-yourself tactics to address neighborhood decline, those circumstances *do not inherently and inevitably produce styles of resident-driven neighborhood change that function as neo-communitarian community-building* like the ones used by NBB. Thus considering the varying forms of neighborhood change that NBB could have employed, or simply the general possibilities of grassroots neighborhood change, what forces led them to respond to the socio-spatial and politico-economic crises situated in Brightmoor in the way they did? Addressing this question may shed light on the forces that shape the possibilities of place-making in the neoliberal spaces of abandonment. The next section will attempt to illuminate these forces.

Why Residents Choose Community-Building Strategies to Transform Neoliberal Spaces of Abandonment

Many social scientists have examined the efforts of poor urban residents living in highly disinvested neighborhoods to mitigate blight, social disorganization, and rebuild spaces and place of hyper-abandonment and physical deterioration. While studies have shown these activities of resident-initiated and controlled neighborhood change vary in form and function, nearly all of them share the basic tenets and principles of neo-communitarian community-building. This raises a critical question that has been relatively

understudied: Why do residents living in neoliberal spaces of abandonment who intend to develop resident-driven neighborhood development initiatives choose community-building strategies? As shown above, NBB, a resident controlled CBO, in an effort to reinvent neoliberal spaces of abandonment, developed for themselves anti-poverty and neighborhood development strategies that aligned with the community-building model. They choose to build community capacity and social capital through creating responsible residents. They also chose to build community assets and physical capital through urban gardening to attract new homebuyers to the neighborhood. Although NBB members felt these approaches were effective remedies to Brightmoor's problems, they were not, of course, the only actions that NBB could have taken. This section will attempt to explain why NBB members chose community-building strategies to transform Brightmoor.

Through field research in Brightmoor and working closely with NBB, I uncovered the various neighborhood development strategies NBB members and Brightmoor residents designed and implemented to address the array of social and economic problems afflicting their neighborhood. The strategies used by NBB are fundamentally community-building approaches. These strategies were: 1) transform individuals into responsible residents, 2) establish positive land use through urban gardening, and 3) attract new residents to create new spaces of community growth. I also uncovered the reasons why NBB leaders and members chose the specific strategies they did. There were three factors that directly influenced the decision-making of NBB leaders and members in the construction of neighborhood development strategies for Brightmoor: 1) how residents' lived experience in local place and space shaped their perception of the cause of neighborhood problems, 2) how normative discourses of neighborhood decline

in Detroit reinforced perceptions held by residents, and 3) the perceived possibilities of neighborhood change among residents. These three factors led NBB leaders and members to singularly focus *within place and people*. What I mean by within place and people is the transformative emphasis on local processes and phenomenon positioned within the boundaries of Brightmoor (within place) and behavioral and cultural attributes of people living within Brightmoor (within people). Because of such NBB subsequently adopted *individualized* and *endogenized* solutions, which is a definitive aspect of the community-building model. Thus, not being manipulated or forced by external entities as suggested by some critics of the community-building model, NBB still choose and used neighborhood strategies that studies have shown are ineffective or adversely affect poor communities. Below I discuss these factors that influenced why NBB chose to use a community-building approach.

Residents' Perception of the Cause of Neighborhood Problems

Previously, I discussed how residents perceived the rise of social disorganization, housing blight, and extreme abandonment—in terms of outmigration and the reduction of formal mechanisms of governance and social provisioning by local political bodies—in Brightmoor during specific moments of neoliberal restructuring. What was made clear was that residents framed the emergence of neoliberal spaces of abandonment in Brightmoor in a localized context, making salient failed local political leadership while detaching such changes and processes from shifts in the political economy at the national level. By viewing Brightmoor's abandonment as a failure of local government (not doing its job), residents were compelled to engage in do-it-yourself urbanism. Through the internalization of governmental devolution, residents accepted the transfer of former

municipal obligations to the neighborhood level and adopted community-building strategies to fulfill their newfound duties and responsibilities. However, the local experiences of Brightmoor residents reveal to us more than just why they felt it was necessary to fill the decision-making and governance void left by formal political agencies and employ do-it-yourself strategies to redevelop their own neighborhood, it also helps us to understand why they choose particular strategies.

Also in the previous section, theories of the representational dynamics of place and space at different scalar levels, that of Lefebvre and Agnew, provided explanations of how the socio-spatial positionality of Brightmoor residents at the local scale, which provide a unique context around how residents experienced neoliberalism (this is what I called local neoliberalism), shaped and informed their perceptions of Brightmoor's problems in a way that untethered its manifestation from structural forces, which are the primary cause of such problems, and designated blame to more micro, local, and individual forces. This helps us to understand why and how residents' framed Brightmoor's abandonment, which can then provide valuable insight into why they choose certain solutions to that abandonment. In discussing the municipal bankruptcy in Detroit, a moment of neoliberal restructuring, a NBB leader provides her opinion on what caused Detroit's financial crisis and how it directly impacts the conditions in Brightmoor:

"Detroit has had numerous opportunities to properly manage its finances just like any other city. Too many politicians have been robbing the city. When that happens, you get the absurd amount of debt that Detroit has. It's their own fault. Now we have to suffer. I am a tax payer, and many of us own our homes, we pay taxes. We counted on the city to take care of these properties, like we take care of ours. They let them go to hell. Most of it is theirs. Instead of stealing the money from the city, they could have done their jobs and taken better care of the abandoned, city owned properties. The city hasn't do its job, so this is what you get. That's why Brightmoor looks like this

and why people keep leaving and why nobody wants to buy a home here. So we can't wait around, waiting for the city to save us. They're not going to, they can't. That's why we take care of the properties now. A big problem here is that blight. If we can change it, we can bring people and business back."

Here we see two things occurring. First, because of the perceived pervasiveness of corruption and fiscal mismanagement within city government, liability for the metastasization of housing blight throughout Brightmoor is being applied to the City of Detroit for its inability to maintain city-owned property. Thus implicitly one of the problems of Brightmoor, according to residents, is *unmaintained property*. This leads us to the second point which is, in seeing unmaintained property as a key factor in the perpetuation and reinforcement of Brightmoor's decline, residents feel that improving space and place within Brightmoor is essential and necessary in curing Brightmoor of its abandonment and multiple deficiencies. That is, residents felt that proper land use—redeveloping and maintaining dilapidated properties—would fix Brightmoor's problems. Therefore, among NBB members there was a specific focus on the places and constructed socio-spatialities situated within Brightmoor's "community-scape".

In "scaling down" the causal mechanism which triggered Brightmoor's abandonment, residents from the area, in particular NBB, tended to focus on the internal social, economic, and political dynamics within the geographical boundaries of their neighborhood. Brightmoor itself—meaning the blight and abandonment it had become infamous for—became the problem as well as the people of Brightmoor. As stated by a NBB member:

"The problem is that people don't want to get up and work, they want stuff given to them, they tear up everything, they steal everything not nailed down, so what do you expect, yea, the community is going to be messed up. It's our own fault. We have turned this place into a damn ghetto. Look at it. If people just took more responsibility things

wouldn't be like this, you know? That is the difference between Detroit and uh, Bloomfield somewhere.”

Thus, not only were destructive uses of land in Brightmoor central to its demise, the residents themselves were perceived as causes of the problems associated with Brightmoor. Cultural deficiencies—which apparently entailed an aversion to work, welfare dependency, and criminal deviance—among certain residents were identified as individual behaviors which helped to transform Brightmoor into place of extreme blight and abandonment. The poverty, blighted homes, and “ghettoized” appearance of Brightmoor, according to many NBB members, was the “fault” of irresponsible residents.

In framing the problem as only existing within the spatial territory of Brightmoor, solutions were also place-specific, confined only to Brightmoor. Local land use strategies used by NBB like urban gardening and farming looked to transform various locations in the neighborhood from “negative spaces” into “positive spaces”. The rationale was, following a place-centered framing of the problem, by removing blight from the area and replacing it with attractive structures that facilitated productive activities, people would once again view Brightmoor as a desirable place to live, thus attracting new residents and businesses. Simply, because blight is the hindrance to growth and investment, getting rid of it will bring growth and investment. Furthermore, strategies that focused on adjusting the behaviors of people, like instilling a sense of responsibility in residents, and even recruiting “desirable” people to the neighborhood, intended to situate and position people within Brightmoor who possessed the cultural aptitude to maintain and actively produce and reproduce new spaces of growth and productivity.

Such place- and locally-centered neighborhood development approaches align with the tenets of the community-building model. Green and Haines (2011: 11), in

outlining the strengths of the community building model, suggests that poor communities seeking resident-driven solutions should focus on the things that can be done within the community, as these things are easier to gain control of and tend to make a direct and immediate impact on distressed communities. They feel communities should “direct their efforts toward the locality or place” as to prevent “resources from flowing outside of the community”. Similarly, Gunn and Gunn (1991) point out that effective community-building entails the work of local actors to cultivate and develop internal assets within the community. These community building scholars highlight the centrality of circumscribing development efforts within the geographical boundaries or established parameters of community-place mainly because these forces can realistically and pragmatically be impacted by local actors who lack economic capital. In doing so, as suggested by theoreticians of community building, barriers are identified within residents’ field influence that hinder growth and development and allows for local control of such processes which help to ensure that benefits flow directly to them.

Thus, with a singular focus on the local, community-building, which emphasize self-help, localized anti-poverty work, and the revitalization of properties within the community, became appropriate and “common sense” neighborhood development strategies for NBB. The localization of Brightmoor’s problems—the belief that dilapidated properties and the irresponsible management of declining properties by the city caused and reproduced Brightmoor’s problems—by NBB consequently steered them in the direction of placed-centered, community building solutions to neighborhood decline. It is important to point out here that while they did not explicitly set out to use the community building model to address the issues in Brightmoor, meaning they did not have any

preconceived strategic model in hand, NBB still chose for this approach. While other CBOs and non-profits go into poor communities with pre-established plans ripped from the community building “playbook”, NBB on the other hand arrived at the community building processes through how their lived experiences shaped how they understood the problems of their community. The point will be expounded on later to demonstrate the constraints and limitations of place-making for poor residents.

Normative Discourses of Neighborhood Decline in Detroit

Along with the lived experiences of residents, what they saw and experienced and how they negotiated the meanings of those experiences, normative discourses of neighborhood decline also shaped how NBB framed the problem and consequently developed solutions. That is, “master frames” constructed through how social problems in Detroit were normally talked about significantly impacted residents’ perceptions of the causes of the manifestation of neoliberal spaces of abandonment in Brightmoor. These normative discourses impacted residents mainly through three different pathways: 1) local media sources (television, newspapers, ect.), 2) interactions with neighbors, and 3) interactions with family and friends. These three discursive spaces also framed neighborhood decline as mostly internal and existing locally within neighborhood boundaries. Ultimately, the various spheres of influence surrounding residents helped to reinforce their own beliefs regarding the internal neighborhood dynamics central to Brightmoor decline and how to effectively address those problems. The master frame internalized by Brightmoor residents, which itself made primarily endogenous forces within Brightmoor as causes of decline, shaped why residents developed place-centered, community building-type strategies.

When directly asked why they perceived the problems of Brightmoor the way they did, many residents provided responses that indicated it was based on, as already discussed above, what they saw for themselves, but also what other people saw and how they framed Brightmoor's decline. Residents felt "justified" in their assessment of Brightmoor and Detroit because other people also shared the same perspective. While discussing this matter with a NBB member, he told me that:

"I talk about this issue a lot with people and it's always the same thing. People feel like I feel and how a lot of the residents in Brightmoor feel. The people living in Detroit, we have to do a better job taking care of the city. We have to stop making excuses. The people who care, the people left in the city who care talk about taking ownership over our communities, what happens here, how they look. So I'm not alone. Others feel the say way so there's got to be some truth to it."

The local discursive processes tied to Brightmoor residents seemed to produce a degree of "sameness", a shared system of meaning applied to local experiences and phenomenon regarding neighborhood decline. This shared interpretation of issues provided validity for the individual constructed meanings held by Brightmoor residents. Overall, it confirmed for residents that their interpretation was "normal" or common, and thus "correct". Colombo and Senatore (2004) posit that the normalcy of the subjectivities of community experiences is discursively constructed to establish acceptable community identities and actions. Normative discourses reinforced previously constructed meanings but also established the "proper" way to view Brightmoor's decline.

Also, the neighborhood decline discourses, according to residents, seemed to, like their perceptions based on personal experiential knowledge, framed the problem as irresponsible residents and excessive unmaintained properties which impeded business investment and the return of homeowners. This frame, of course, aligns with the problem identification style of the community building model. Again, here we see how the local

contexts of residents, this time local discourse, helps frame the problem, which then influences strategy selection.

Many residents reported that the local news influenced their feelings about the problems afflicting Detroit and their neighborhood. According to one NBB member:

“Every other day we hear in the news about a politician in Detroit stealing money. The corruption in Detroit has been well documented by the news, the Detroit News, Free Press, channel 2, channel 4. What has been established, and I think it is pretty clear, is that many of Detroit’s problems could have been avoided. They chased many of the jobs out of the city. People have no jobs. No tax base so they can’t take care of the city. They mismanaged their finances, borrowed too much, and the neighborhoods suffered. I have seen it with my own eyes here, the after effect. That’s why I believe it.”

This type of endogenous framing of Detroit’s problems was also prevalent among residents’ family members and friends. As stated by a NBB member, “when I talk to my family about these things, I can see they feel the same way about what happened to the city. This makes me feel like we are on the right track as far as what we’re trying to do to get Brightmoor back they what it used to be.” These collective and “trusted” perspectives reinforced the position taken by NBB members.

The multiple discourses framing the problem of neighborhood decline in similar ways provided, as stated above, a master frame which local actors viewed as a common sense explication of local problems. The master frames supported and provided a normalcy in viewing the problems as internal to the neighborhood. Factors such as irresponsible residents and dilapidated property were commonly viewed as the driving force behind Brightmoor’s decline. Thus neighborhood strategies were place-centered and focused on individuals to properly address what residents perceived as problematic to the neighborhood.

Perceived Possibility of Neighborhood Change

Resource mobilization theory used by social movement scholars contend that movement strategies depend on rational calculations made by social change actors (see Jenkins 1983; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Edwards and McCarthy 2004). It emphasizes the socio-psychological forces that influence decision making in the social change process. According to this theoretical approach, a significant psychological factor that influences decision making is *what people believe is possible*. That is, the rational process undertaken by social change actors evaluates the limitations of realistic social change based on resources, experience, and established norms. I found that community strategies in Brightmoor were established in a similar fashion. A NBB member tells me about how what she believes is possible shapes what she does to change the neighborhood:

“There are certain things I or our organization just can’t do. We aren’t millionaires. We can’t just throw up condos and luxury apartments. That is not within my abilities. But what I can do is be responsible for me and the community I live in. I can take care of the community and not destroy it. We can keep our community looking nice. That’s what the gardens do. That’s what the parks do. These are the things we can control and we make the most of it.”

Residents in Brightmoor had a clear understanding of the neighborhood processes they could and could not control. Personal behavior of residents and property maintenance were controllable features of Brightmoor. Since these pathways to neighborhood change were viewed as very accessible, Brightmoor residents believed they were viable and practical strategies to improve their neighborhood. This provides support for why creating responsible resident, urban gardening, and attracting new residents were the primary strategies employed by NBB.

Resources also shaped what residents believed to be possible. Many residents, as seen above, understood the role of capital in remaking and redeveloping neighborhood space and place. Due to their lack of financial capital, NBB member sought neighborhood development alternatives that did not required large amounts of money. Urban farming was a viable option as it was, according to a NBB leader and farmer, “a cheap way to quickly repurpose the vacant land” in Brightmoor.

This aligns perfectly with the emphasis on the building of “alternative capital”—social capital, cultural capital, physical capital—expressed by proponents of community-building. The most frequently utilized programmatic strategies among community-based organizers include: 1) social capital development which consists of resident involvement and program participation, as well as building relationships with outside businesses, investors, and political leaders, 2) human capital development such as job training and educational enrichment, and 3) physical capital development in the form of blight removal, housing construction and improvement, urban garden, and neighborhood beautification (Green and Haines 2008). Community-building theorists claim these activities fit the socio-economic reality of poor communities by providing effective strategies to “grow different forms of power” (Beck and Eichler 2000). For example, Robert Putnam (2000) suggest that the community-building model makes it possible for neighborhoods poor in financial capital to alternatively build social capital to compensate for disparities in wealth and power, and ultimately use such social capital to gain control over processes and resources that shape and influence the places in which they reside. The critical point here is that building social capital, and other forms of alternative capital, is not only viewed as possible strategies for community change, but, more importantly, as their only option due

to the constraints imposed on their ability to transform Brightmoor due to a lack of resources. I will return to this idea later in the dissertation.

Overall, the lived experiences of residents in local place and space, the reinforcement of perceptions through normative discourses, and the perceived possibilities of neighborhood change were all significant factors in understanding why NBB employed community-building strategies to improve their neighborhood. Collectively these forces framed the problems of Brightmoor and set the limits for possible solutions. Based on their lived experiences, NBB members perceived the main problems of the neighborhood as irresponsible land use and residents. Living in Brightmoor, they reported how they saw people “tearing up the neighborhood” and how blight “attracted criminal activity”. Also, their perceptions of the problems of Brightmoor were supported by how others viewed neighborhood decline in Detroit. This established a normative way to frame neighborhood decline in Brightmoor. Lastly, an understanding of what was pragmatically doable, in terms of neighborhood development, set the limits for what NBB members were willing to attempt. A lack of resources and the identification of what was controllable led NBB members to determine building alternative forms of capital among residents and using urban farming to replace unwanted forms of land use was the extent of possible neighborhood change in Brightmoor. Consequently, in framing the problem as internal and setting the limits of possible solutions as also internal, NBBs neighborhood development approach were only focused on processes within the boundaries of Brightmoor—the residents and the properties. The individualization and endogenization of neighborhood change led NBB to choose community-building strategies.

Conclusion

The recent rise of neoliberal spaces of abandonment—extremely disinvested and depopulated neighborhoods that lack formal modes of governmental provisioning and economic development—has produced a set of *sui generis* challenges for contemporary low-income communities in the U.S. This chapter has argued, using the neighborhood of Brightmoor as a case study, that the direct responses from community members to these emerging unequal urban geographies depends in large part on the bounded experiences of residents within the particular context of local place. Specifically, the situated knowledges that residents draw from to explain the world significantly impacts how they frame the problem of neighborhood atrophy, how they formulate solutions, and why they choose particular approaches to neighborhood revitalization. Thus, the tactical place-making activity undertaken by residents materializes out of the contested process of meaning-making among community actors.

In Brightmoor, many residents interpreted the manifestation of hyper-abandonment, disinvestment, and housing blight fundamentally as a function of ineffective city government, irresponsible citizens, and a lack of business investment. This led to four significant place-making outcomes for Brightmoor: 1) residents formed NBB, a resident-driven community organization, to respond to the perceived failures of city government and community, 2) NBB utilized do-it-yourself urbanism strategies that followed community-building approaches of social and cultural capital building as well as community capacity and asset building, 3) the community-building efforts of NBB produced renovation and revivification projects that primarily focused on endogenous neighborhood forces/factors like the personal behavior and culture of local inhabitants

and derelict community space, and 4) behavioral and cultural modifications as well as aesthetic improvements in the area were done to stimulate economic development in the area. These dynamics represent neoliberal forms of neighborhood development. That is, NBBs development approach sought to make individuals responsible for the outcomes in the neighborhood while striving to fix the multitude of problems in Brightmoor with free market solutions like attracting investors and homebuyers to the neighborhood.

Furthermore, this chapter also attempted to locate agency among the residents of Brightmoor. The work of NBB demonstrates the way in which low-income community actors negotiate the meaning of decline in their communities, and choose and develop for themselves “homemade remedies” as place-making cures for the oppressive conditions they endure as inhabitants of abandoned and disinvested urban space. Studies have shown how the influence of the “non-profit industrial complex” on resident-driven neighborhood development tends to produce outcomes that reflect the interests of elites and not the disadvantaged groups formal community initiatives portend to empower. Also, these studies suggest that elites either manipulate/coerce residents to adopt community-building approaches or powerful, well-funded organizations simply “highjack” the process and unilaterally implement community-building programs on behalf of marginalized populations. In contrast, the process of community change in Brightmoor provides evidence of how residents living in poor communities, not being coerced or manipulated by stakeholders outside of the neighborhood, select the same place-making, community-building approaches as used by elite corporatize entities to further entrench capitalist social relations and neoliberal ideology.

Here we see neoliberal hegemony shaping the tactical decisions of do-it-yourselfers in Brightmoor. The perceived superiority of a place-making approach that incorporated personal responsibility and as well as free market solutions to urban decline was thoroughly entrenched in the “common sense” of Brightmoor residents.

This raises a critical question: if do-it-yourself urbanism fundamentally consists of those place-making approaches which typically benefit elites and reproduce the current neoliberal social order, what type of place is really being produced by the so-called subaltern population—those groups who are most negatively impacted by such formal modes of neighborhood development? Scholars examining the phenomenon of do-it-yourself urbanism in poor communities have largely suggested that this form of place-making provides opportunities for alternative politics, hidden collective resistance, and the envisioning of innovative urban socio-spatialities for residents who have been historically excluded from the so-called American dream (Holloway 2010). Zardini (2008: 16), contends that do-it-yourself urbanism “opens the door” for the disempowered to create “alternative lifestyles, reinvent our daily lives, and reoccupy urban space with new uses”. Similarly, Hou (2010: 2) explains that residents can utilize informal approaches to urbanism to build new cities within the city, “injecting them with new functions and meanings”. These approaches tend to romanticize the self-help actions of the poor, viewing them as *inherently* liberatory and revolutionary without critically examining the actual object that is being produced from such actions within the context of the larger urban political economy. The next chapter will attempt to address this issue. Building on the points from this chapter, the next chapter will examine what type of place is being produced from the do-it-yourself urbanism efforts of NBB. It will interrogate to what degree

are these spaces and place “new” as suggested by some scholars or is it simply the reproduction of the status quo as typically manufactured by the controllers of capital?

CHAPTER 6: RESIDENT-LED URBAN AGRICULTURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF ECO-GENTRIFICATION: EXAMING HUMAN AGENCY IN THE REPRODUCTION OF EXCLUSIONARY URBAN SPACE

Introduction

The success of NBB in transforming their neighborhood into a viable site for green development through formal (community-based development) and informal (DIY) urban gardens, parks, and beautification projects has assisted in improving many areas of community life in Brightmoor. As illustrated in the previous chapter, with the conditions of neoliberal abandonment providing the potentiality for new socio-spatialities, Brightmoor residents, in a display of relative autonomy and human agency, mobilized so-called alternative forms of capital—social, cultural, and human—to alter unused, deleterious, and unwanted spaces into productive use values which could serve as community assets in the overall revitalization of the Brightmoor neighborhood. However, there is much evidence showing this brand of green development as a neighborhood development tool brings with it the possibility of displacement and exclusion, like any form of community change (Crouch 2011, Tortorello 2012). David Harvey (2010) suggests that when the urban environment is transformed, either by internal or external agents, through “creative destruction” within the neoliberal/capitalist political economy, the negative effects of such projects almost always disproportionately hurts the most marginalized sector of society—typically poor and racial minorities. In examining the resident-led (internal agents) green development in Brightmoor, it is clear that not everyone in the neighborhood equally benefited or will benefit.

The urban gardening and green space agenda of NBB has visibly motivated the in-migration of mostly white, middle-class residents. These new residents, in search for

suitable social and physical environments to partake in urban agricultural, shared an environmentally conscious identity (one based on environmentally sustainable lifestyles) which was also shared by the majority of NBB members. This has precipitated a cultural transformation of the community, whereby NBB, along with the newcomers committed to NBB's community development vision, has explicitly *rebranded* Brightmoor as "eco-chic" through urban agriculture. This rebranding of Brightmoor has not only attracted residents looking for a green-lifestyle within the city, it has also marginalized the cultural orientations and desired uses of community space (commons) of several residents in the area, restricting them from access to community space and place designated for "green consumption".

The replacing of community culture, identity, and function has the potential to produce negative outcomes for Brightmoor's most disadvantaged groups. Karl Linn (1999: 45) has shown how community gardens can be precursors to urban gentrification—"Trojan Horses setting in motion processes that will displace people of lesser means". Melissa Checker (2011) illuminates the forces at work in this process as she shows how urban agriculture can be discursively mobilized—by capital and other entities working in their interest—in the commodification of place to produce "trendy sites for cultural consumption". These sites which facilitate "bohemian-like" tastes become attractive to professional and high-income groups who can afford such a life-style preference. With NBB's cultural and place identity rebranding, this dynamic is quite apparent in Brightmoor. A process of "eco-gentrification", which excludes and displaces groups through the discourse and practice of environmental sustainability and green development, seems to be underway as community change through urban agriculture is

beginning to undermine the ability of poor and black residents to remain community members of the new Brightmoor.

Studies have shown—using demand-side theories—that the cultural tastes and neighborhood preferences of the middle and upper classes are driving forces in many instances of gentrification. These studies show that gentrifiers, often characterized as “risk-takers” who are not dissuaded by poor and minority inner city neighborhoods, seek out very specific types of places (Zukin 1987). Neighborhoods that fit the preferential criteria (location, aesthetics, racial composition, etc.) are “potential targets” for gentrifiers. In this way neighborhoods that possess the proper mix of geography, amenities, and culture become sites for middle and upper class consumption, making them highly susceptible to invasion by affluent (mostly white) populations. Recently, studies have suggested that environmentally-conscious lifestyles have increasingly become *en vogue* among the middle and upper class (Bryant & Goodman 2013). These new “eco-gentrifiers” heighten the threat that urban agriculture becomes another “vehicle for consumers to virtuously display their knowledge and adoption of the latest values while also perpetuating social distinction” (Quastel 2009: 705). Thus, poor neighborhoods experiencing green development consequently become highly sought after destinations for environmentally-conscious professionals and higher income populations. This creates a struggle over space and place between incoming higher class, green-minded consumers determined to own a “farm in the inner city”, and the original residents who either do not share their green/agriculturalist identity or cannot afford the green/agriculturalist lifestyle. In the end, because of power differences with class and

race, and how culture is mobilized through each, the original residents lose in this cycle of culture-driven eco-gentrification.

In addition to this emerging class distinction involving high-status cultural consumption embedded in space and place, urban agriculture is becoming more popular among private and public entities, making smart growth, community gardening, and green spaces preferred alternative redevelopment strategies used to carve out new urban spaces for capitalist accumulation in the 21st century (Hackworth 2007). Claims that such practices can successfully resize the city, curb social disorder, and stimulate investment have become more common, not only among municipalities, but real estate developers as well. Supply-side theories (rent-gap) of gentrification show that economic actors within the housing sector, looking to profit from price changes in resources and consumer demand, contribute to the displacement of low-income residents by producing attractive housing supplies in poor inner city neighborhoods for middle class homebuyers (Brown-Saracino 2009; Ley 1996). Simply put, as poor neighborhoods become once again profitable, land value will increase, pushing low-income residents out as they cannot afford rising rents. Coupling the consumption-side approach with the supply-side perspective, studies have shown that when affluent homebuyers target a disinvested neighborhood for high-status cultural consumption, the market will increase home prices in order to capitalize on the rent-gap and increased demand for products with limited supply (Slater 2004). In Brightmoor, along with the influx of white middle-class urban gardeners vying for space, the real estate market has responded to its “cool factor” as a site of green urbanism by increasing rents and home prices. While there are no signs that these rent hikes have led to the displacement of low-income residents in Brightmoor, it

does indicate the nascent stages of eco-gentrification, and the possible displacement of residents in the future.

With more inner city neighborhoods being transformed through urban agriculture, and as the unique socio-spatiality and cultural character it brings forth becomes a “chic” consumptive practice among affluent groups, new spaces of exclusion are increasingly forged under the guise of reinventing the city using environmentally conscious, creative and new urban designs. In this way urban agriculture, even when it is initiated by residents like in Brightmoor, is no different than private-led development that explicitly aim to transform neighborhood by class in pursuit of profit. Both processes lead to gentrification—the expulsion of those lacking class and political power. Therefore, there is too a process of struggle with community building among internal actors over “who is the community” and “what is the community for”. These aspects of the neighborhood necessarily shape the class and racial dynamics of place from the inside, producing certain place identities and cultures which motivate unintended outcomes which then undermine the inclusive and social justice agenda of the community building project. In this chapter, I will discuss the forces that contribute to DIY community-building as a classed and raced process of community change which works to exclude low income and racial minorities. I plan to use demand-side and supply-side approaches of neighborhood change to identify and explicate the early process of eco-gentrification in Brightmoor. In doing so, I will show how the self-help community development agenda of NBB to create space of inclusion is undermined through class, racial, and free market dynamics.

First, this chapter will discuss how NBB used methods of social control to establish acceptable behavior and community functions in Brightmoor. I will also discuss how this

process of social control by NBB rebranded Brightmoor, producing a new place identity based on urban agriculture. Second, I will discuss how this rebranding of community by NBB in Brightmoor using green urbanism gave way to the rise of what I call a “green-hipster” subculture in the area which continued to transform and concretize the identity of Brightmoor—how those inside and outside the community perceived the neighborhood. I will also show how the cultural transformations in Brightmoor attracted white middle class residents who identified with the green-hipster subculture. Third, I will discuss the class and racial dynamics of the influx of higher-status green-hipsters in Brightmoor, and the way in which spaces of exclusion emerge in this process. Fourth, I will provide some evidence of how the housing market has responded to Brightmoor’s rebranding and newfound middle class attractiveness by raising property values in Brightmoor. Fifth, I will discuss how these dynamics have initiated a process of eco-gentrification where low-income residents are made vulnerable to displacement through supply-side and demand-side forces of neighborhood transformation. Lastly, I will explicate how class, race, and market forces impact resident-led green urbanism to produce contradictory outcomes of exclusion for inner city residents engaged in community building projects.

Making Safe-space for Redevelopment: Curbing Social Disorder and Creating Social Order, But Order for Whom?

From 2000 to 2010, the neighborhood of Brightmoor lost nearly 7,000 residents—accounting for 25% of Brightmoor’s population loss since 1970. While the mortgage crisis during that decade certainly contributed to this figure, increases in crime, vagrancy, and other indicators of social disorder also influenced people’s decision to leave or not move into the neighborhood. During that decade, Brightmoor’s homicide rate increased by 8%. Also, the homicide rate in 2010 was 52.7 per 100,000, which was higher than the city’s

rate of 41.1 and the national rate of 5.5. The Suzette Hackney of the Detroit Free Press reported in November, 2011 that Brightmoor was a “hot spot” for homicide and other crimes. Using interviews from Brightmoor residents and local law enforcement, her article suggested that drug dealing, prostitution, and murder were among the most pressing issues driving the area deeper into destitution and desolation. These indicators of social disorder have plagued Brightmoor for decades, and have shaped how people perceive the neighborhood.

A 35 year resident of Brightmoor and NBB member told me that, “no one will live in Brightmoor because they are too scared to come here”. One of the primary tasks of NBB was to not only change the physical environment but also the behaviors of the residents. NBB’s fundamental approach to community change involved the notion that, as stated by a NBB leader, “communities are a result of the people who stay there”. There was the belief by NBB that Brightmoor was experiencing its decline *because of the increase in criminal and deviant behavior*, characterized as cultural deficiencies, among the residents during the last few decades. Thus the solution in NBB’s eyes was to recalibrate the culture of the residents of Brightmoor to reflect, as stated by a NBB leader, “people who are responsible and will take care of the neighborhood, not destroy it”.

Many social scientists have suggested, using social disorganization theory, that declining neighborhoods, particularly racially segregated black inner city neighborhoods, contain behavioral and cultural deficiencies which tend to perpetuate their position of disadvantage (Wilson 1987). According to the theory, “weak social networks decrease a neighborhood’s capacity to control the behavior of people in public”, and hence increase the likelihood of disorder (Kubrin & Wietzer 2003). This theory suggests the absence of

middle-class values, which generally support conformity to legal and social norms, leads to subcultural manifestations in the community which normalizes deviant behavior. Thus, implicitly, as a solution, social disorganization theorists propose the infusion of middle class culture in poor communities as a mechanism of control.

NBB's intention to interdict behaviors they saw as detrimental to healthy community function was a demonstration of informal social control to internally address social disorganization as a foundational obstruction to Brightmoor's successful revitalization. More importantly, as studies suggests, the implementation of social control by NBB, which was mobilized through DIY community building practices, involved the establishment and solidification of middle class tastes and values. The formation of middle class culture through social order was produced by NBB through two mechanisms: 1) social order through community function (what one can do in space) and 2) social order through visual cues (how place should look). While these efforts at social control worked to transform the community behaviors in ways that were beneficial to NBB, it also alienated and excluded many Brightmoor residents from being a part of the new spaces and places being produced to revitalize the neighborhood. I will discuss each mechanism in the following sections.

Social Order through Community Function

Getting residents to display an appreciation for the natural environment, working together to plant flower gardens, and engaging in urban agricultural activities to build community solidarity were significant dimensions to NBB's cultural revamping of Brightmoor. Old spaces in Brightmoor, like the "crap-house", which was an abandoned home many black males in the neighborhood used to socialize and gamble, were

intentionally replaced in favor of green spaces for community function. What I mean by community function is what the residents of the neighborhood do collectively through the use of community space and place. It consists of how people behave in collective spaces, how that behavior contributes to the everyday processes of the community, and how those everyday processes reinforce the social, behavioral, and cultural norms of the community. The production of new green spaces for social activity in Brightmoor was designed to facilitate the building of social and cultural capital. However, the social and cultural capital being built in community space consequently involved high levels of social control from NBB because they intended to institute a new set of acceptable actions while removing preexisting ones. That is, NBB had to deploy informal strategies of social control to both eradicate community behaviors deemed as deviant and (re)socialize residents to perform new forms of community interaction and accept new values and ideals about community life.

As discussed in chapter 5, abandoned space was typically used by residents as sites for squatting and scrapping. NBB viewed this use of community space by certain residents as a form of social deviance. NBB members would largely refer to this type of behavior as ghetto, irresponsible, and even criminal. However, many residents of Brightmoor—those who were not members of NBB—seen this use of abandoned space as a means of survival for economically marginalized individuals. As told to me by one resident, “they do what they have to do and I cannot knock their hustle”. Some residents even viewed this behavior as an act of subtle resistance to oppressive conditions. A 34 year old female resident of Brightmoor says:

“Where is the affordable housing? The HUD waiting list in Detroit is 2 years long. Some people can’t wait that long. People got kids, lives to

live, you know. So what are the options in this system? Be homeless or go sit up in one of these vacant houses nobody using. So because the system is fucked up those people are supposed to be homeless? No, they refuse to let the system jerk them any type of way and they do something about it. They squat.”

To support these perspectives, a 41 year old man who had been squatting in an abandoned home in Brightmoor for roughly 4 months told me:

“I lost my job in February. I want to work but ain’t nothing there right now. I ain’t doing this because I want to; I’m doing this because I have to. I am not hurting anybody and plus ain’t nobody using this house. It’s just sitting here. It’s never really been a problem around here. People know what’s up.”

Here we see that not everyone in the community viewed squatting as an unacceptable use of community space. More importantly, some residents felt that squatting was a normal activity in the neighborhood considering the lack of economic opportunities among the residents of Brightmoor. Pattillo-McCoy (1999) points out in her ethnographic study of a black suburban neighborhood near Chicago that many poor black residents engage in cultures of “everyday survival”, behavioral adjustments to generational economic deprivation, which are often viewed as forms of deviance because they do not reflect white and middle class normatives of social capital. Nonetheless, these cultural orientations operate to build the solidarity and collective efficacy said to be produced in white middle class manifestations of community (social capital), it just adopts a different cultural form. Likewise, Portes (1987) claims that while the behaviors of the subaltern in impoverished locales, most of which stem from participation in the informal economy, are viewed as deviant to elites, they are common, acceptable, and even necessary cultural practices to the poor occupants of these areas which allow for their survival in a unjust

and unequal economic system. Thus, community culture and function and its designated normativity seem to be a matter of power usually executed through class and race.

Despite well-established community norms which collectively sanctioned squatting, scrapping, and other informal uses of abandoned space, NBB deemed these activities as community disorder that necessitated its removal in order to prevent further neighborhood decline and bring about what they saw as positive community change (which was defined in the previous chapter). To replace what they saw as disorder, NBB transformed abandoned spaces in ways which facilitated acceptable behavior and community function. Abandoned homes were boarded up so to prevent squatters and scrappers from using those spaces and place. Vacant lots were turned into spaces for agriculture to eliminate old activities of community life and institute interactions built on farming and gardening. Old “hang out spots” of residents were replaced by new social space like flower gardens and parks to thwart “deviant socializing” like gambling and encourage acceptable behavior like family picnics and bike rides. Homes and lots were constantly monitored by NBB members to ensure unwanted activity did not occur. These forms of social control seemed to effectively dissuade many residents from engaging in behavior NBB seem as disorder. Thus they avoided the new spaces created and transformed by NBB. One resident said, “I understand what they are trying to do and its good, but I am not a farmer at all and don’t want to be, and that is not how I live so I rarely be over there in their stuff”.

NBB had a vision of how the community should function and created spaces to facilitate that function. These new forms of community culture largely advocated home ownership, the protection of property and property values, and urban agricultural

production and consumption practices. Moore (1994) finds that resident-led community development tends to advance middle class values of this kind because most people link these values with success and see competing cultural values of the working class as harmful to socioeconomic mobility. The result is that middle class values get realized in community development while other community lifestyles are uprooted and eliminated. Couch (2012) sees this type of social control through community development as a process of exclusion and inclusion by class. Those who have the cultural capital to support the desired functions of the newly realized community are afforded rights to space and place, while those who do not have such cultural capital or who are not willing to conform cultural are denied membership to the community. Accordingly, in Brightmoor, those residents who did not conform to the middle class function of NBBs urban agricultural project were consequently excluded from the community spaces and places re-appropriated by NBB.

Social Order through Visual Cues

Along with the social disorder, physical disorder was also targeted by NBB. Some social scientists suggest that the built environment can convey messages to insiders and outsiders alike about the attributes of the occupants of an area. If the neighborhood shows signs of decay and neglect through excessive blight, people will perceive the area as unsafe and its residents as unwilling to improve and take care of their neighborhood. Furthermore, studies suggest that pervasive physical disorder in poor neighborhoods undermine social norms and legitimize deviant forms of community life which reproduce a structure of disadvantage for poor residents at the local level. Wilcox et al. (2004) argues that “improper” land use, like marking places with graffiti, encourages disorder through

symbolic visual cues of community normativity which leads to criminal deviance. NBB, following this perspective, felt that the appearance of the Brightmoor contributed to the normalization of deviant behaviors. Thus, by altering the neighborhood's appearance, social disorder could be eliminated through symbolic representations of community which promoted middle class values and norms. However, the alterations to the physical environment performed by NBB not only intended to discourage social disorder, but also to establish visual cues that promoted the cultural normativity of urban agriculture. That is, these physical symbolisms in Brightmoor, just as "broken windows" signal and normalize disorder, intended to signal to residents (and non-residents) urban agriculture as the normal embodiment of social order in the community.

To establish social order through visual cues NBB sought to alter the appearance of blighted homes and vacant lots. Neighborhood beautification was used to decorate abandoned structures with colorful murals and other pieces of art. These artistically re-appropriated homes served to eliminate the appearance of decay and provide visual symbols of, as termed by a NBB member, "liveliness", which represented the community's collective efficacy and desire to improve the conditions of the neighborhood. According to a NBB leader, the beautification in Brightmoor was to:

"...provide sights and things in our neighborhood that make us feel good about being Brightmoor resident. All the blight, all the dilapidated houses, all of the uncared for homes indicate to us and everybody else that anything goes here. That someone can set fire to an old house, tag homes with gang signs, destroy things here and it's acceptable. So people did just that. The look of the neighborhood matters. How it looks now shows to people that those bad things won't be tolerated anymore. It shows that people care now and will do what is necessary to improve the neighborhood."

Here we see the replacement of old space for new space by NBB as a strategy to signal to residents and people outside of Brightmoor that the neighborhood contains people who care about the welfare of the community and are willing to act collectively to improve the community. It also shows the intention to change the perceptions of the neighborhood through the elimination of physical disorder as to discourage deviant behaviors in the community.

However, the elimination of physical disorder through neighborhood beautification was not only to project a changing level of collective efficacy, it also functioned to establish urban agriculture as a new form of social order and community life in Brightmoor. Beautification often entailed the production of physical structures that explicitly promoted its use as a site for urban agriculture. Abandoned homes were redesigned to advertise the urban agriculture in the neighborhood, signs were placed throughout the neighborhood indicating the location of urban gardens, and vacant lots were changed into open sites for gardening. These structures and spaces provided clear visual cues that Brightmoor was a neighborhood intended for the activity of urban agriculture. This not only altered the look of the neighborhood but also functions and the normative lifestyles of the community. With the physical environment signaling to residents that the area is designed for urban agriculturalists, those who are not were subtly alienated from the community. According to one Brightmoor resident, “you can see who this neighborhood is built for now—it’s for people who want a farm in the city and that’s not me”.

Succinctly, NBB viewed certain behaviors of residents as uncondusive to effective community redevelopment. NBB attempted to eradicate spaces which foster what they saw as negative activity like squatting and scrapping. In this way NBB served as one of

the “positive” institutions that social disorganization theorists claim poor communities like Brightmoor lack. Following the approach of social control, NBB intended to adjust the culture of residents while re-appropriating community space to those willing to display acceptable behaviors. In doing so, NBB sought to change the reputation of Brightmoor from a destitute and dangerous neighborhood to a flourishing and safe neighborhood through urban agriculture. However, this process also involved the exclusion of many Brightmoor residents who did not identify with personally with urban agriculture.

Green Community Rebranding: Informal Social Control, Place Identity, And Cultural Transformations In Brightmoor

Studies suggest that the manifestation of social disorganization in poor communities—the deviant behavior and actions of the residents—deters the in-migration of people of higher socioeconomic status because of their concerns with safety and property value (Quillian & Pager 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush 2004). Thus to rehabilitate declining neighborhoods, professionals tend to focus on curbing social disorder using a myriad of social control strategies like employed by NBB as discussed above. In producing acceptable forms social order in communities—typically that of which promotes middle class values as previously mentioned—positive perceptions about the community can emerge, which can then can be mobilized to attract investments and homebuyers to the neighborhood for the purpose of neighborhood development. This process of what I refer to as *community rebranding* was a key strategy of NBB’s community building project. NBB was able to use informal modes of social control through DIY community building to re-designate the uses of space for urban agricultural and re-appropriate these spaces for urban agriculturalists. In this way the internal methods of informal social control actively altered the place identity of Brightmoor—who the

community is for and what the community does. Consequently, this new identity and rebranding alienated those unwilling or unable to conform to the new identity of place.

People familiar with the neighborhood of Brightmoor often referred to it by its unofficial moniker, "Blight-More". Brightmoor's hyper-abandonment, physical deterioration, and social disorder have been infamous within the City of Detroit. Over the years the neighborhood had become synonymous with extreme urban decline. However, Brightmoor's reputation in and around Detroit is slowly being uprooted in favor of new labels that signify a reinvigorated community on the rise. Today, many people view Brightmoor, not as a neighborhood destined for destitution, but a neighborhood rebirthed by quaint community gardens, lively green spaces peppered with exotic florals, and colorfully decorated houses serving as canvases for local artists. Most of this rebranding in Brightmoor is due to the process of informal social control by NBB as demonstrated above. As people come to view Brightmoor differently, invoking different imaginaries for metro-Detroiters, taking on different meanings of space and place, it will consequently lead to differences in the people who visit and occupy the neighborhood. That is, going from a place known for dilapidated homes to one known for interesting green urban designs and community life will undoubtedly alter how it appeals to certain groups of people and who decides to live there.

Producing a place identity and positive perception is crucial in attracting residents to neighborhoods undergoing processes of revitalization (Urry 1995; Holcomb 1999). Without the proper reputational shift, declining and hyper-abandoned neighborhoods that intend to transform its social and economic dynamics may fail in repopulating the area with new residents who bring with them capital of different sorts to stimulate the desired

change of space and place. Studies show that the typical agents of neighborhood change—municipalities, non-profits, and real estate developers—use an assortment of tactics to produce the necessary image of place to attract consumers to fully complete the process of redevelopment. Marketing strategies are primarily used to establish discourses which legitimize and build interest for development projects. Left out of this literature are the ways in which DIY urbanists accomplish this same task. In Brightmoor, NBB followed this process of place-making just as performed by external agents, those stakeholders outside of the community.

Advertising DIY Urbanism as Collective Efficacy: Producing a Discourse of the Responsible Community

A significant part of changing the place identity of a neighborhood involves changing how people perceive the people who occupy the community (Ioannides & Zabel 2002). NBB's community building efforts were advertised in various ways to demonstrate the collective efficacy of Brightmoor and portray its residents as "responsible". Responsible means two things here: 1) the willingness of an individual to ensure their own well-being and not depend on others to do so and 2) behavior that is consistent with protection of property values (maintaining the quality of private and public property in the neighborhood). This was done to remove the neighborhood's tag of irresponsibility—that the condition of the neighborhood was due to people not properly caring for the community—and establish Brightmoor's new identity as a community comprised of people who were concerned about and actively participated in its improvement.

The responsible resident was shown in a few ways. First, the different place-based projects implemented by NBB were used as evidence to illustrate the collective efficacy of Brightmoor residents. Pamphlets were developed every month by NBB and distributed

to community members and local establishments (gas stations, convenience stores, diners, ect.) to provide information on the resident-led community transformations that were taking place in Brightmoor. It showed how residents working with NBB were effectively addressing the problems of land use and social disorganization in Brightmoor internally. Pictures of residents' homes were often display to show how homeowners took care of their properties. Second, NBB developed several community events that invited metro-Detroiters to the neighborhood to view and engage in the new urban agricultural spaces in Brightmoor. For example, NBB often held a bike rides through Brightmoor so locals could witness the redevelopment being enacted by residents. Visitors were escorted through the neighborhood by NBB leaders and shown properties that were renovated and cared for by residents. Lastly, the local media (and some national media) often reported on NBB's community building, portraying it as positive neighborhood change led by Brightmoor residents. In May 2013, the Detroit Free Press published an article entitled, "Urban Farming Invigorated Detroit Neighborhood". It stated:

"In seven years, that section of Brightmoor has transformed and been organized under the moniker Neighbors Building Brightmoor. Students tend two youth gardens and sell the food at local farmers markets. Adults grow everything from food to flowers in gardens called Ladybug Lane and Rabbit Run. Houses begging to be torn down are painted brightly, with inspiring prose. And young adults from elsewhere have moved in to start small commercial farms, gardens and parks on two- and three-lot stretches where the houses are long gone and the land was left barren."

News articles like these paint a pretty picture of the new Brightmoor and the urban agricultural development headed by NBB. Residents are portrayed as the primary agents producing the radical socio-spatial changes in the neighborhood. These actions effectively worked to rebrand Brightmoor, helping to change how people perceived the

area. Because of such, NBB was able to shed Brightmoor's negative reputation in favor of one that defined its residents as responsible, which was supported by the foundational role they played in Brightmoor's emerging urban agricultural scene.

Advertising Homeownership and Urban Agriculture as a Consumptive Practice

Bringing new, "responsible" homeowners to Brightmoor was a key component to NBBs place-making agenda. NBB brochures, website pages, and organizational meetings provided evidence of NBB's intent to address Brightmoor's abandonment issues through repopulating the area with what the founder of NBB described as "community-minded folks". There was an intention to "inject" Brightmoor with "ideal" residents who exhibited characteristics and cultural orientations that were desired by NBB and their supporters. This ideal type was an individual who could purchase a home, repair it if necessary, and maintain the quality of the property. The founder of NBB told me, commenting on the abilities of incoming residents and what was expected from them, that, "we don't do anything for people. This is your dream. We do whatever it takes to get you going. After that, you are on your own." The type of new residents NBB desired were those who possessed the resources to maintain a home and urban farm. Thus, there was an inherent class dynamic to NBBs pursuit of new residents. Clifford Clark (1986) suggests that home ownership is a middle class phenomenon and sees its diffusion among workers as a sign of the middle class character of American life. Furthermore, there are significantly more barriers to home ownership for low income individuals than high-status groups, thus creating a homeownership gap between the top and bottom earners in the U.S. (Shlay 2006). Adding to the way in which NBBs green urbanism was textured with class, Cadji & Alkon (2014) suggests that urban farming is an expensive

endeavor and these projects are difficult for low-income residents to sustain overtime. In their study of urban farming in a poor neighborhood in Oakland, California, it was shown that, because of a lack of income, poor residents had to give up their farming endeavors while the farming of the middle and upper class groups who recently entered the neighborhood flourished, eventually making these affluent groups the primary urban farmers in the neighborhood. We can see that urban farming is not class-neutral. Rather its insertion into the urban political economy make privileges it to those, not only cultural capital, but more importantly, economic capital.

Thus, NBB, albeit implicitly, targeted middle class residents who had a desire to engage in urban agriculture. When marketing Brightmoor as a resurrected community, NBB unambiguously made the amplex of open and unused space as a possible location for urban agriculture the key feature of the neighborhood's assets and value. Green urbanism was put forth as the "main attraction". NBB, through their actions, commodified their new urban agricultural space and place as a consumptive site for middle class consumers possessing lifestyle preferences that aligned with environmental consciousness and agriculture. The rebranding of Brightmoor by NBB through informal social control mechanisms from a community of disorder to a green community percolating with social capital produced a place identity in Brightmoor that signaled to outsiders that the neighborhood was an ideal location for urban farmers and also safe enough for middle class homebuyers. Proving to be effective, this recipe for community transformation initiated the movement of middle class homebuyers and green consumers into Brightmoor.

The Rise of 'Green-Hipsterism' in Brightmoor: Green is the New Black

As a result of the community rebranding initiated by NBB, over the last two years or so, Brightmoor has attracted several new residents as stated above. These new arrivals have mostly come to the neighborhood because of the recent changes to the area's social and physical environments. As told by a young woman who recently moved to Brightmoor, "I came here for what Brightmoor is now, the gardeners and gardens". The green urbanism implemented by NBB has made Brightmoor a highly desirable location for individuals who identify with agriculture and eco-consciousness, and who actively practice green lifestyles, consisting of gardening, farming, and environmentally sustainable consumer decisions (i.e. walking instead of driving). Similar to the bohemians, yuppies, and hipsters characterized in consumption-side gentrification research as subcultural types likely to venture into gritty inner city neighborhoods in search of unique socio-spatialities for consumption, Brightmoor has attracted its own "creative class" looking for ideal urban spaces and places that will support the lifestyles and consumptive practices they seek. This group, which I refer to as "green-hipsters", has descended upon Brightmoor, bringing with them their particularities, which has either directly or indirectly impacted the social, economic, and political climate in Brightmoor. They came because of the changes in Brightmoor, but their presence has continued to shape and alter the neighborhood.

Richard Lloyd's (2006) ethnographic study of neighborhood change in Chicago's Wicker Park detailed how the aesthetic and cultural attractiveness of an area, referred to as "coolness" in his study, can draw in people who view such socio-spatial dynamics as an extension of their identity. In cases like Wicker Park where the current residents are

largely poor but the outsiders that seek entrance are of a higher socioeconomic level, conflict over space and place will emerge. Also, because the outsiders possess more economic capital, they tend to have the upper hand in the conflicts over property and land use, eliminating the poor's right to the city. The next few sections discuss the characteristics of the new residents of Brightmoor—the green-hipsters—and how their presence complicates the right to the city for some residents in Brightmoor.

Being Different in Brightmoor: Green-Hipsters vs. Everybody

The green-hipsters in Brightmoor are easily identifiable. They stand out in a neighborhood that is largely comprised of black and low-income residents. I encountered 29 residents who had moved to Brightmoor specifically because of the urban agriculture in the neighborhood. These individuals were mostly white and middle-class professionals. Out of 29 residents, all were white except for one (that one being Hispanic). Most of the green-hipsters could be considered professionals. Their occupations consisted of lawyers, computer engineers, and teachers. When asked, they mostly self-identified as middle class.

These new residents—the green-hipsters—and their distinctive lifestyles dominate the scene in the southeast corner of Brightmoor. Besides gardening on their property, as well as maintaining community gardens throughout the neighborhood, the green-hipsters displayed environmentally conscious lifestyle choices through organic food consumption as a daily dietary regime, using environmentally sustainable products, and reducing carbon dioxide emissions through walking and bike riding instead of driving (many residents had hybrid cars as well). Also, adding to the agricultural motifs of the

neighborhood, it was quite common to see livestock—chickens and goats—in the backyards of green-hipsters.

These very apparent lifestyle differences of Brightmoor’s green-hipsters seemed to divide the neighborhood spatially and socially. Walking into the southeast part of Brightmoor—called the Brightmoor Farmway—was like walking into a totally different city all together. It was clear that the Brightmoor Farmway section of the neighborhood was space specifically designated for Brightmoor’s urban gardeners. Nearly every new arrival to Brightmoor who moved there because of urban agriculture resided in this section. Residents in the area were aware of this designation and felt, as stated by one resident, that “the Brightmoor Farmway is not for the whole neighborhood, it’s only for the white farmers”. I must state here that residents reported they felt welcomed in the area by the newcomers. However, they did not feel the space was designed for their entrance or specific benefit. The Brightmoor Farmway represented a spatial division as what I will call “non-gardening residents” largely avoided that section of the neighborhood. Also, not only did non-gardening residents rarely com into the Brightmoor Farmway, the green-hipsters rarely traveled outside of their “domain” to other parts of Brightmoor. In addition to the green-hipsters being separated spatially, they were also separated socially. Non-gardeners and green-hipsters, from my observations, rarely interacted. For example, there was a group of non-gardening residents who used an abandoned commercial space on the edge of the Brightmoor Farmway as a daily gathering spot to socialize. When speaking to these residents, who gathered at this space every day near the Brightmoor Farmway, I learned that *they knew no one from NBB or the newly arrived green-hipsters.*

On the other side, when speaking to NBB and the green-hipsters, I found they knew no one from the group gathering everyday right outside of their homes and gardens.

The “Well-Meaning” White Urban Gardener: Racism and Color-Blind Community-Building

As stated above, a large majority of the green-hipsters were middle class whites. Many of the white residents who moved to Brightmoor came there mainly for urban agriculture but also to engage in community activism and, as stated by one of those new Brightmoor residents, “make Detroit a better place”. Moving to Detroit, from their perspective, supported the City’s reemergence because they added to the tax base, bought and maintained abandoned homes, and brought along with them social, cultural, and economic capital. However, their movement into Brightmoor, although with good intentions, produced some adverse effects for Brightmoor’s black residents.

Many of the black residents in Brightmoor reported that they felt the neighborhood was definitely divided by race. The Brightmoor Farmway was largely comprised of white residents, with many of those residents being the green-hipsters. Black residents who lived outside of the Brightmoor Farmway did not feel they were being explicitly restricted from the area because of their race but did feel it was a “white safe space” in a majority black neighborhood. That is, white green-hipsters felt comfortable living in an area where they were surrounded by other whites. Some black residents felt they did not occupy other sections of Brightmoor because they would feel uncomfortable living on a block with majority blacks. These residents internalized this as a form a subtle form of racism by the green-hipsters. However, when I asked the new white residents if they felt more comfortable living in the Brightmoor Farmway because of its racial composition, they answered no.

Along with indirectly avoiding living in sections of Brightmoor that were mostly black, the green-hipsters displayed another form of subtle racism through their well-intentioned activism. A large number of green-hipsters were actively engaged in NBB's community building to address the poverty and disinvestment in Brightmoor. However, the good intentions of the white newcomers to transform vacant space into urban gardens also functioned to inadvertently reproduce racial disadvantage in the neighborhood through color-blind activism. As stated previously, the primary development strategy employed by NBB involved the elimination of social disorder through behavioral and cultural adjustments. In this way the social problems in the area become attributed to residents who are mostly black. Covertly what is being transmitted is that Brightmoor as a black neighborhood is poor because of the deficiencies of its black residents and not due to systemic racism.

Many social scientists suggest that this type of color-blind community development is raced and actively produces racialized bodies (Davis 2007). Duggan (2003) suggest that contemporary forms of community development that ignore race mask racial inequalities by repositioning racially constructed socioeconomic disadvantage and relocating identity-based prejudices from the systemic to the personal domain. This in turn alters the racial landscape in a way that reduces race as a fundamental organizing principle of society and creates deracialized movements that promote color-blindness by implicitly establishing the unimportance of race in community revitalization and poverty amelioration. Moreover, this process legitimizes post-racial ideologies in a period of neoliberalism where identity (class, race, or gender) is rejected as the impetus for success (or failure), and individual hard work and personal competencies are viewed as the

principal characteristics responsible for achievement. In doing so, it effectively denies social agents within communities the ability and ideological framework to meaningfully challenge oppressive social relations based on race which structurally produce and reinforce disadvantage for non-white communities (D'Souza 1996).

In Brightmoor, the dominant discourse on poverty and social problems produced by NBB and the green-hipsters they attracted to Brightmoor ascribed causality to community deficiencies, mainly the lack of social capital among residents. Thus the cure was to motivate cooperation and strong social ties between residents to build the necessary synergy to collectively improve the circumstances in Brightmoor. This approach ignored the already existing social relations between black residents in Brightmoor and implicitly marginalized their informal networks for community building in favor of the more cultural normative forms of social capital introduced by the white residents. Furthermore, the promotion of discourses by black residents which situated the problems of Brightmoor as manifestations of systemic racism were largely marginalized in favor of color-blind diagnoses which deracialize the socio-spatial and economic conditions of the neighborhood. As stated by a white new resident and NBB member:

“We can focus on race and racism but the truth of the matter is that the people living here must care more about the community they live in. Racism does play a role in the production of poverty in neighborhoods like Brightmoor, but here, in this neighborhood, I don't think that's the real case. The problem is that we have given up. We haven't properly cared for our own community. If we build social capital and inspire people to change the things around them then things will improve. They already are.”

The quote above shows causality being attributed to the behaviors of the residents—who are mostly black—and the diminishing of racial factors as causes to Brightmoor's impoverishment. Such understandings and actions by the new white residents of

Brightmoor perpetuate and legitimize post-racial discourses and constrain the ability of black residents to address the systemic roots of their oppression.

Urban Agriculture as a Positional Good: Green-Hipsterism as a Social Class Distinction

There is evidence to suggest urban agriculture is becoming more popular among middle and upper class groups as a lifestyle preference. These studies show that urban agriculture is becoming chic and hip among the middle class. Over the last twenty years or so, environmentally sustainable discourses and urban policies (i.e. smart growth, green development, new urbanism) have shifted the consumption practices of middle and upper class groups. Consumption-side gentrification research has conceptualized place as a positional good (Bridge 2002). A principal tenet of this research is that a “variety of esthetic and evaluative orientations for goods—such as preferences for housing styles and location—are both a mark of, and also reflective of, consumers’ performances and drives to establish their social class positions” (Quastel 2009: 705). Applying this lens to sustainable consumption positions the green-hipsters as consumers of place looking to reaffirm their class status.

Green-Hipsters as Consumers of Place and Eco-Gentrifiers

Thus far we have seen that the green-hipsters’ migration into Brightmoor created unintended cultural, class, and racial divisions in the neighborhood. Their distinctive lifestyle practices, which centered around urban agriculture, created clear social and spatial divisions between them and the existing residents who did not culturally identify with environmental communitarianism. Also, their class status, which allowed them to purchase homes and vacant land, renovate property, and financially operate agricultural space, gave them access to the new green development undertaken by NBB. Those residents who did not possess the financial resources were indirectly denied access to

the redeveloped green space of the Brightmoor Farway. Furthermore, because an overwhelming majority of the green-hipsters were white, space and place in Brightmoor became noticeable racialized, with the Brightmoor Farmway—the section where the green-hipsters resided—being protected white middle class space and the rest of the neighborhood being poor black space largely seen as socially disorganized. Thus there seems to be a process of spatial inclusion and exclusion by class and race occurring through NBB's resident-led, environmental-centered neighborhood redevelopment.

What is occurring in Brightmoor is what I have identified as *eco-gentrification*. Sarah Dooling defines the process of eco-gentrification as “the displacement of vulnerable human inhabitants resulting from the implementation of an environmental agenda driven by an environmental ethic” (Dooling 2008: 41). Eco-gentrification is also when environmentally driven land development excludes low-income people from neighborhoods they would have lived in if the development did not occur. The literature shows that this process happens mostly through the replacement of low-income neighborhoods with parks (Bryson 2013) but some scholars also show it often occurs through green urbanism projects like the one in Brightmoor headed by NBB (Linn 1999). However, few studies have illuminated the role played by what I call eco-gentrifiers—those individuals who benefit from the neighborhood changes due to environmental-driven development—in the process of eco-gentrification. Consumption-side approaches to gentrification focus on the values and lifestyles of gentrifiers and how they operate to motivate a renewed interest in inner city neighborhoods as desirable locations for middle and upper class groups (Mills 1988). In this approach place as a commodity serves to accommodate the consumption preferences of gentrifiers. Using this framework, we can

then view the green-hipsters in Brightmoor as eco-gentrifiers seeking land, property, and community space that satisfies their middle class consumer preferences. As shown above, the urban agriculture implemented by NBB worked to attract middle class white residents who shared an agriculturalist identity. They specifically came to Brightmoor, not just to live in Detroit, but to engage in urban agriculture—they wanted their own urban garden in the city. Acting as consumers of place, green-hipsters migrated into to Brightmoor to buy their way into a community that contained values and lifestyles that aligned with their own. It is the self-fulfilling act of a consumer.

While the eco-gentrification in Brightmoor has produced a racialized spatial terrain, positioning whites within the boundaries of Brightmoor's green development and blacks outside of the emergent agricultural community, the main mechanism in which exclusion occurs is through class. Green consumption as a place-based phenomenon within the current urban political economy is contingent upon not only an agriculturalist identity or a green lifestyle preference but monetary access to space, resources, and amenities. That is, with the commodification of place materially presenting neighborhoods as a consumptive object available for purchase and exchange, those groups with higher incomes and economic capital will *always* be inherently more privileged to space (neighborhoods)—both access to and control of space—to those groups with lesser economic means. The green-hipsters, because of their class position, were able to gain control of the land, and redefine its use values in the neighborhood to fit their consumer preferences. The lower income residents in Brightmoor had little power to challenge the way in which the green-hipsters were altering the landscape and use values of the community. In this way, it did not matter what type of community the most economically

marginalized residents of Brightmoor desired. What mattered was, and what drove Brightmoor's transformation, is what the higher class occupants of Brightmoor wanted as consumers of place—and what they wanted was an urban farming community. Through class, poor residents of Brightmoor were denied rights to the city and equal access to community space.

Market Forces Producing Eco-Gentrification: The Rise Of Property Values and Possible Displacement Of Low-Income Residents in Brightmoor

Thus far I have demonstrated how resident-led urban agriculture as a community building strategy can initiate a process of eco-gentrification in which low-income residents are excluded from community space by higher class groups acting as environmentally-minded consumers of place. Green urbanism as an approach to revitalize poor neighborhoods of color potentially has the ability to attract self-fulfilling middle class whites in search for cheap land to engage in urban gardening, environmental communitarianism, and green consumptive practices. Consumption-side theories of gentrification explain how the alignment of neighborhood characteristics and cultural values among the middle class can turn inner city neighborhoods into attractive destinations for affluent groups. In Brightmoor, the resident-led community organization NBB used urban agriculture as a strategy of social control to transform the place identity of the neighborhood from one known for blight, poverty, and black residents, to one known for urban gardening and new white urban gardeners. This reputational shift in Brightmoor triggered the in-migration of green-hipsters—mostly middle class whites—to the area. As eco-gentrifiers, these green-hipsters were able to further take over space in Brightmoor for their use while marginalizing the input of the original residents—most of which were

low-income black residents—on how to use community space and directly and indirectly excluding them from the agricultural community space controlled by the eco-gentrifiers.

The dynamics of exclusion in this process involve more than the battle over space and place between eco-gentrifiers and poor residents of color. As eco-gentrifiers pour into poor communities, it is highly probable that property values will increase, eventually pricing out low income residents. According to the rent-gap perspective, “gentrification is explained in terms of the changes in the utility (profit-maximization potential) for landlords and developers to reinvest in land”, determined in part by the “potential post-development rents” (Quastel 2009). Here the economic forces explain the transformation of poor areas into affluent areas, which eventually displace poor residents. However, some scholars have combined supply-side and demand-side theories (structure and agency) to show that the change in the profit-potential of disinvested land is highly impacted by demand for that land by affluent groups (Hammett 1991). In Brightmoor there is some evidence that the movement of middle class residents to the neighborhood has led to increases in property value. These increases in property value may potentially displace the poor residents of Brightmoor.

Changes in Land Prices: Market Response to Green Consumer Demand in Brightmoor

Before NBB implemented their green urban design and re-appropriated the commons of Brightmoor as space for urban agriculture for green-hipsters, Brightmoor had some of the lowest housing costs in Detroit. According to a study of land rents by Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development (NDND) in 2006, the median home price in Brightmoor was \$21,450. Based on real estate data from Zillow, today the median home price in Brightmoor has risen to \$45,000. Over the last year the median home price

increased by 51.5%, from \$29,700 to \$45,000. This ranked Brightmoor third out of all Detroit neighborhoods in median home price percentage increase over the last year. Also, over the last year the average price per square foot increased by 263.2%, from \$19 to \$69.

The Possible Displacement of the Poor in Brightmoor

While property values in Brightmoor are still relatively low, if the home prices continue to increase the way they have over the last few years, low income residents will certainly be pushed out of the neighborhood. A few residents of Brightmoor told me that they have noticed increases in their monthly rents. These residents were low-income individuals who relied on the very low rents in Brightmoor to survive. According to one female renter in Brightmoor:

“Even a \$10 hike in rent is going to mess me up. I have a tight budget with food, electricity, gas, stuff for my kids. I don’t have a lot of extra money to juggle around and pay more rent and still take care of me and my family. I’ve been here 3 years and every year my landlord raises the rent here. Pretty soon I’m going to have leave and find some place cheaper.”

Residents like the one above are being slowly priced out of Brightmoor. Not only are affordable homes being replaced by urban gardens, rises in rent are making homes unaffordable for Brightmoor’s poor, which make up roughly 60% of the population. While I cannot empirically connect the green urbanism of NBB to the rise in property value and rent in Brightmoor (at least not in this study), I can assert that the rises in property value will not constrain the green-hipsters ability to live in Brightmoor. Rather, it will only filter out the poor, leaving only the urban gardens and urban gardeners wealthy enough to stay.

Conclusion

Phrases like “blank canvas” (Karoub 2014) are often used to describe the possibilities that exist within the emptiness of “left for dead” Detroit neighborhoods (Beshouri 2013) to paint vibrant, new pictures of community and urban life. As the previous chapter illustrated, NBB, operating in the neighborhood of Brightmoor in Detroit, using DIY urban place-making tactics to respond to the deleterious social, spatial, and economic problems of hyper-abandonment, attempted to transform blighted and unused neighborhood space into community gardens, parks, green spaces, and localities for social, cultural, and human capital development. This often unauthorized and informal re-appropriation of neighborhood space by NBB involved the mobilization of alternative forms of capital—mainly social and cultural forms which are key transformative tools of the community-building model advocated by well-funded non-profits. Thus what was demonstrated were the ways residents living in low-income neighborhoods, those poor in economic/financial capital, can deploy the localized and network-centered neo-communitarian style of community-building to normalize and homogenize specific forms of DIY urbanism within the contested arena of neighborhood change. To that extent, in the case of Brightmoor, such processes allowed the few Brightmoor residents of NBB to acquire *control* of the new character, meanings, and socio-nature design being erected to replace old visages of post-industrial local disinvestment and outmigration. Viewing Brightmoor as one of those “blank canvas” neighborhoods primed for creative reinterpretation, NBB tactically asserted themselves as the internal actors gifted to apply the first brush strokes to the reimagined fresco of space and place in Brightmoor.

Thus what I am arguing here is that Brightmoor as a bounded social and geographic area, with its spatial and socio-political configuration of place textured as a *neoliberal space of abandonment*, where “formal” and “normative” modes of place-making vanish (i.e. capital), is a site of contestation between various potential “do-it-yourself actors” seeking access to the informalized processes of neighborhood transformation. That is, the neighborhood of Brightmoor, like other neighborhoods, are not inherently homogenous human environments that singularly articulate monolithic wants and expectations of the use value (and exchange value) of place. Rather, in every corner of Brightmoor’s abandonment, along with the potentialities of urban life that lay dormant, ready to be animated in those corners, resides a high degree of group atomization, where community identity and interest diverge in multiple directions, making the DIY project in neoliberal abandoned space a process of internal struggle over place, culture and identity. In this way community—who they are—and the agency of community—what they do—in the context of DIY neighborhood transformation within neoliberal abandoned space must be understood through a framework of inclusion and exclusion. That is, community change never reflects the interests of everyone—rather it reflects those who have power or are privileged through the inherent logic of the socioeconomic and political system (Fasenfest 1986). Interrogating “do it”-“yourself” urbanism as a contested process—what is being done (do it), who is doing it and who is it being done for (yourself)—illuminates endogenous power dynamics as well as systemic biases at the local scale of place.

Furthermore, as residents and groups in neighborhoods impacted and disrupted by neoliberal abandonment discover opportunities for reinterpretation, there is too a process of legitimization which occurs, where the emergent culture of place becomes the

dominant identity and character. That is, the neighborhood as a place becomes identifiable and defined by the “new” community cultures and functions established through the contested process of DIY community change. In placing these dynamics of place—the way in which the reputation and dominant associational elements of place transform—within the larger political economy, it becomes clear that such forms are not detached from sites of power such as class and race. New forms of community in hyper-abandoned neighborhoods display class and racial dynamics that interact with systemic processes—that of the free market and white supremacy. It is important to connect these lines when analyzing and determining the extent and fashion of change occurring through DIY community development. The main focus of such an analysis should be on the ways in which DIY urbanism and resident-led community change alters the socio-cultural dynamics of the neighborhood, and how these changes impact the process of inclusion and exclusion through class and race within the current social order. What can then be identified is hidden manifestations of displacement and further marginalization of disenfranchised urban populations either through intended or unintended ways.

This chapter has attempted to identify these hidden mechanism of exclusion associated with DIY community building. Using the neighborhood of Brightmoor as a case study I have attempted to show how the DIY community building methods of NBB, the mobilization of social and cultural capital, worked as a form of social control which marginalized the cultural contributions and behaviors of low income and black residents identified as deviant. This process of social control worked to rebrand the community and produce a middle class place identity through urban agriculture and green consumption. As a result, Brightmoor emerged as a chic site for urban agriculture, attracting middle

class whites to Brightmoor, thus further excluding low income and black residents from the process place-making and access to the former commons created through earlier disinvestment and abandonment.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Crumbling ruins which used to serve as homes and businesses for blue-collar, working-class communities of color are demolished in favor of brand new lofts and coffee houses for creative professionals, newly urbanized hipsters in search for utopian spaces of conspicuous consumption neatly embedded in a revitalized urban decorum just dangerous enough for their liking to be cool and authentic but safe enough for them to be comfortable. Former residents, usually poor and disenfranchised, are subsequently and purposely uprooted and pushed out of their communities in the name of economic development and progress. However, this all too familiar narrative of creative city politics and gentrification typically unfolds in urban locales like midtown and uptown and is led by wealthy real estate developers in search for bigger and bigger profits. The rest (and the vast majority) of the city and its many actors go unnoticed along with the many battles taking place over control of abandoned space—who transforms it, how and for what reason.

This study ventures into one of those rarely observed and often ignored spaces of urban contestation to demonstrate the way in which low income resident and racial minorities are excluded and displaced through unconventional approaches to neighborhood development in the form of DIY, resident-led urban agricultural and green urbanism. While some scholars highlight the “agency of the oppressed” in these DIY projects as a revolutionary act which provides the disenfranchised a right to the city, the ability to create urban space and place that liberates them from oppressive socio-spatial arrangements in the city, this study, however, has attempted to show that agency does

not inherently equate to resistance or the production of alternative spaces of inclusion. Rather, agency, in the case of this study, works as the consenting force of the oppressed in the reproduction of capitalist social relations embedded in the urban which suffocates the rights to the city for poor and marginalized residents.

In chapter 2 I posed several research questions which sought to uncover the forces that shape the tactical choices of residents in DIY, community-based development. Specifically, I wanted to know why residents living in low-income and disinvested neighborhood choose neoliberal tactics—those approaches which highlight the deficiencies of individuals instead of focusing on structural forces and rely on free market logics to improve the neighborhood—considering that such an approach tends to further marginalize poor communities. That is, I wanted to know why poor residents, not being forced or manipulated by elites as suggested by popular theories of community participation, *consented* to the use of capitalistic, bourgeoisie forms of community change that reproduce social relations which subjugate and disempower the poor and working class. Thus my aim was to demonstrate the ways in which neoliberal hegemony manufactured consent to bourgeoisie ideologies of neighborhood development among poor residents living in poor communities. Furthermore, in looking at the force of hegemony as a mechanism to better understand the acceptance and usage of neighborhood development approaches that work counter to the interests of a people, I also wanted to understand the ways in which human agency operates to support the capitalist logic of place-making in urban areas.

This chapter will discuss the role of hegemony in resident-led community development. Specifically, I will connect the neoliberal community development choices

of NBB to the process of eco-gentrification in Brightmoor to show how development of poor neighborhoods, even among the poor living in such communities, is constrained and dominated by neoliberal logics of place-making. The point here is to argue that the logics of urban design and socio-spatial production are deeply tied to a “neoliberal ethic” that continuously reproduces the neoliberal urban structure—one that excludes the poor and seeks to generate profit for the capitalist class. Thus, in the context of such a hegemonic force, urban development, either lead from the top by capitalist or, as shown in this study, from the bottom by everyday citizens, will, as suggested by David Harvey, create outcomes that tend to disproportionately hurt the most marginalized and vulnerable sectors of the city.

Connecting Agency and Neoliberal Hegemony

Over the last decade many scholars have documented and attempted to explicate the various transformative potentialities of resident-driven, do-it-yourself urban tactics. These studies highlight the “performative agency” of “everyday social agents”—mainly low-income residents—as bottom-up manifestations of resistance against oppressive social structures. Holloway (2010) sees the “agency of the poor” in “everyday-making” as “practical struggles” for social change within the “cracks and fissures of power”. Here, Holloway tries to identify a small-scale politics of the subaltern operating in the interstices of capitalism that challenges bourgeoisie hegemony by “doing things differently” and redefining dominant forms of behavior, place, and social life. For example, in his study of do-it-yourself urban place-making in Kingston, Ontario, Crane (2012) shows how guerrilla gardeners turned vacant lots in their neighborhood into communal sites for collective use through the unauthorized reappropriation of urban space. These sites, according to

Crane, fostered the subversive refutation of existing ecological configurations of poverty while also producing new socio-spatialities and functions of community which allowed residents to bypass capitalistic systems of food production. This body of research has attempted to show how human agency—demonstrated through localized, resident-driven approaches—subtly disrupts the logics and flows of free-market urbanism in order to reembed production and consumption with meaningful social relations, create new spaces of inclusion, and establish a right to the city for the everyday urban dweller.

However, agency does inherently equate to resistance or radical change. It is important to not just identify the agency of the everyday maker, identifying it as the poor reclaiming a right to the city in a liberatory way, but to see what outcomes that the agency of the everyday maker is producing to determine its validity as resistance, as a real counter to the status quo. For example, Kimberley Kinder (2014), in her study on guerrilla architecture in Detroit, shows how everyday citizens make unauthorized alterations to the built environment in their neighborhood, like boarding up abandoned houses and building fences around vacant lots, because the city and investors have neglected to provide services and maintain the various blighted properties in their neighborhood. She argues that the neoliberal context, where the state has left it up to citizens to solve their own problems, has pushed poor residents to take up the place-making duties of the state. Kinder also argues that these DIY tactics show how poor residents, engaging in self-provisioning, combat urban decline and disinvestment by protecting the houses from squatters and scappers. She sees this DIY as a form of resistance to the oppressive conditions of urban disinvestment. However, in looking at the actions of the residents in this study, what Kinder neglects to point out is they are engaged in acts which

fundamentally work to protect private property, which is central to the logics of capitalism. The agency of these residents does not demonstrate something revolutionary. Rather, it shows that the belief in private property is so deeply engrained into the ideological base of society that those who are oppressed by the existence of such social relations will, if given the opportunity, work to protect those social relations, even if they have to do it “illegally”. To make a simple argument here: because of the hegemony of neoliberalism, if given the opportunity, people on the bottom of the social hierarchy will transform/redevelop the city just as elites who are on the top of the social hierarchy.

Thus, more accurately, agency, in the case of urban agricultural redevelopment in Brightmoor, headed by NBB, was not a demonstration of resistance but, rather, *collective adjustment* to neoliberal logic. By adjustment I mean the behaviors and social actions necessary for actors (proletariat) to function within neoliberal urban space.

Likewise, in Brightmoor, there was a focus by NBB on the importance of protecting private property from “deviants”—squatters and scrappers—and improving the neighborhood through market strategies. NBB intended to, using market solutions to address urban decay, stimulate economic growth by rebranding the neighborhood through green development. The aim was to use urban agriculture to lure residents back to Brightmoor—to get new residents to move to Brightmoor, buy the abandoned homes, and invest in those homes. With the arrival of new homebuyers, the expectation was that they would fix up and maintain the existing housing stock, thus eliminating and reducing blight and abandonment in the area. However, the appropriation of abandoned space by NBB for the use of urban agriculture in order to protect and improve private property, also led to the exclusion of Brightmoor’s most vulnerable residents. A process of eco-

gentrification, which was discussed in the previous chapter, occurred in Brightmoor through the neoliberal tactics employed by NBB.

The main argument of this study is that through the process of neoliberal urban transformation, the restructuring of politics and socio-spatialities in cities like Detroit, a particular “common sense” articulation and understanding of the urban is being constructed which significantly reformulates the lived experiences of residents, how they perceive the problems of the city, see the solutions, and execute change. Neoliberal abandonment and normative discourses of government incompetence, personal responsibility, and market superiority has altered the subjectivities of urban agents of change at the local level and reshaped the boundaries of the potentiality of new urban realities. A new normality is emerging in the world of resident-led community change. In Brightmoor, DIY urban actors expressed this normality through their myopic acceptance of community-based development strategies which promote neoliberal principles of individual responsibility, competition, and development through the free market. Powerful and penetrating ideological apparatuses surrounding these residents—like the media, community, and family—legitimized, reinforced, and validated the common sense of neoliberal change. The deeply embedded narratives of irresponsible Detroit residents causing blight through neglect and destructive behavior, increases in poverty and disinvestment resulting from the loss of jobs and the movement of capital out of the city created by Detroit’s “business-unfriendly” economic policies, and the lack of city services and municipal budget deficits being caused by fiscal mismanagement and corruption by Detroit politicians and leaders has established and concretized the notion that government and individuals are responsible for the decline of Detroit and not capital.

Furthermore, the only viable solutions to such urban decline becomes narrowly articulated through market mechanisms which intend to remake Detroit into a neoliberal urban utopia designed for bourgeoisie consumption and capitalist accumulation.

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ABSTRACT**RESIDENT-LED URBAN AGRICULTURE AND THE HEGEMONY OF NEOLIBERAL
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ECO-GENTRIFICATION IN A DETROIT
NEIGHBORHOOD**

by

THEODORE T. PRIDE III**May 2016****Advisor:** Dr. David Fasenfest**Major:** Sociology**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation employs a Gramscian framework as an alternative approach to understand the utilization of neoliberal community-based development—which advocates free-market schemes to development, and a refocus from institutional and structural causes of poverty to endogenous community forces (social capital and community capacity building)—by low-income residents in hyper-abandoned and disinvested urban neighborhoods. Using a case study of resident-led neighborhood development in the low-income neighborhood of Brightmoor in Detroit, Michigan, I show how “everyday discourse” of urban decline in Detroit and the possible rehabilitation of the city shape the “common sense” understanding of the “problem-and-solution equation” associated with the process of neighborhood development. In doing so, I show how neoliberal interpretations of neighborhood development by residents can produce spaces of exclusion. Specifically, this study demonstrates the way in which resident-led urban agriculture, functioning through a “neoliberal ethic” of development, can trigger the process of eco-gentrification, causing the displacement of the most economically

vulnerable residents in the neighborhood. Using this framework, I discuss the role of the hegemony of capitalism in: 1) shaping the possibilities of neighborhood change for poor communities and 2) establishing and legitimizing neoliberal restructuring strategies as a new mode of urban crisis management.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

THEODOORE T. PRIDE III

Theodore Pride received his bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Minnesota-Morris in 2002. He received his Master's degree in Urban Studies from Minnesota State University-Mankato in 2007. Mr. Pride's research interests are largely based on the role of urbanization in social change under capitalist and racist social relations and accumulation. Mr. Pride's research seeks to investigate the process of neighborhood transformation in urban areas through resident-led community building, informal economic participation as resistance strategies against capitalist exploitation and domination, barriers to social movement mobilization among poor and African American populations, and the impact of racial and class spatial segregation on urban poverty and racial inequality. Mr. Pride's future research endeavors will continue to explore the processes of exploitation and domination under capitalism and white supremacy.