

## **Governing the “New Hometowns”: Race, Power, and Neighborhood Participation in the New Inner City**

**Jeff Maskovsky**

Department of Urban Studies, Queens College,  
Flushing, New York; Ph.D. Program in Anthropology, The Graduate  
Center, USA and City University of New York, New York, USA

*Inner city residents, once shunned and ignored by city planners, are now seen as a vital resource in United States urban redevelopment plans. This shift in perspective has come at a time when municipal elites routinely champion the neoliberal strategies of privatization, marketization, and consumerism across the urban policy spectrum. In this article, I draw upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a gentrifying neighborhood in Philadelphia to illuminate the ways in which race, power, and neighborhood participation shape urban governance. Against the governmentalist approach, which tends to present a totalizing vision of neoliberal rule, this article emphasizes the failures and instabilities of urban governance under contemporary conditions. In particular, I direct attention to the overlooked dynamics of racial politics as they play out at the neighborhood level, where attempts to encourage self-governance on the part of inner city residents are predicated upon post-civil rights era notions of diversity and multiculturalism. The imposition of this politics produces new forms of racial inequality and class division that, paradoxically, undermine neoliberal rule itself.*

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“We have been waiting for 38 years for the City to replace our library,” announced the flyer distributed at a rally in the Southwest Center City section of Philadelphia in the spring of 2001. Combined with the block party to dramatize the library’s importance to the neighborhood fabric (and to bolster attendance), the rally saw dozens of residents gather in front of an abandoned post office where they envisioned that the new library would be built. They chatted, ate hot dogs, and gave out balloons to children. They then embarked upon what organizers described as a “dignified” march through the neighborhood. Knocking on doors and approaching passers-by, the marchers encouraged residents to sign petitions and write letters to Philadelphia’s mayor to “tell the city that we need and deserve a library.”

The library issue proved wildly popular throughout the neighborhood, tapping passions and capturing interest across lines of race and class. In addition to the African American homeowners who were in the majority at the rally, David Hirschel,<sup>1</sup> a white resident of a gentrified block in the neighborhood and owner of several investment properties there, played a prominent role in organizing the event and in promoting the library project. He had brokered a deal between the South of South Neighborhood Association (SOSNA), the officially recognized neighborhood association in the area (on whose board he then served as treasurer), and a real estate developer who agreed to partner with the city to purchase the old post office from the federal government and to renovate it as a new branch of the Philadelphia Free Library. At a time of fiscal austerity in Philadelphia, with the public library budget threatened with deep cuts, this project was bold and visionary. By leveraging minimal public investment in the library project, the plan would, it was argued, help revitalize not just the neighborhood, but also the city as a whole. At a community meeting held a few weeks before the rally, Hirschel made this point explicitly:

A library on South 19th Street may stimulate and attract private investment in new housing and new businesses there. Whatever the city has to spend on staff or other costs for the library could be more than offset by new homes and new businesses paying taxes. . . . Chicago has made new library construction the focal point of redevelopment. New libraries in various Chicago neighborhoods have produced thousands of new housing units and new businesses. Chicago gained population in the recent Census, while Philadelphia lost population. Maybe there's a lesson there.

While Hirschel saw the library project as a strategic catalyst for private sector investment in the neighborhood and for city-wide development more generally, Elsie Robinson, a block captain for more than thirty years in a primarily lower-middle-class, African American part of the neighborhood, supported the library project for very different reasons. For Robinson, a new library would signal a reversal of a historical pattern of racial segregation and black neighborhood neglect by the city. At the same community meeting, she stood up and declared:

It's time to stand up for our neighborhood. We owe this to our children. We deserve the same level of service that other areas enjoy. Our neighborhood deserves the best. We don't have a library, a supermarket, or a post office, but other neighborhoods have them. This is a quality of life issue. They tell us that it is okay for our kids to cross Washington Avenue to get to the library. But it is unsafe. They don't tell them over there near Rittenhouse Square that their kids have to do that.

For Robinson, as for many African American residents in Southwest Center City, Washington Avenue and Rittenhouse Square are symbolic markers of Philadelphia's racial and class geography. Washington Avenue is a wide commercial thoroughfare lined with abandoned warehouses, small factories, and construction firms. It divides Southwest Center City from a less affluent black neighborhood to the south. In contrast, Rittenhouse Square is an affluent white neighborhood immediately to the north of Southwest Center City. In making this comparison, Robinson suggested that her own neighborhood is not given the same public amenities as is a white neighborhood because the majority of its residents are black. In short, for Robinson the library project was a matter of racial justice.

I begin with this example to open up a discussion of the dynamics of urban governance in the inner city today. In the wake of the racist pattern of displacement associated with the urban-renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s (c.f., Boyer 1986; Jacobs 1992 [1961]; Solnit and Schwartzberg 2000), and in the context of a postindustrial pattern of urban restructuring that has further decimated many inner city neighborhoods (c.f., Wilson 1987), neighborhood-based action like the rally has become an integral part of the contemporary urban landscape. For their part, inner city residents, once shunned and ignored by city planners, are now seen as a vital resource and asset in what is often referred to as community planning (Fainstein and Fainstein 1991; Kromer 2000). The "bottom-up" strategy of allowing residents to make decisions about different aspects of neighborhood life such as policing and redevelopment has largely replaced the "top-down" planning agendas associated with urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. Notably, this shift has come at a time when municipal elites routinely champion the trickle-down strategies of privatization, marketization, and consumerism across the urban policy spectrum and extol the virtues of entrepreneurial management techniques applied to government administration (Logan and Molotch 1987; Osborne and Gaebler 1992). In this article, I am interested in how inner city residents have responded to—and become implicated in—this new urban agenda. I draw upon fieldwork conducted in Southwest Center City to examine how neighborhood participation produces and reproduces urban governance at the neighborhood level.<sup>2</sup> An ethnographic investigation of residents' discourses and practices of neighborhood participation illuminates the complexity of new power relations and political imaginaries that are reshaping the urban core in cities like Philadelphia. Why did the two residents discussed above, with their differing visions of neighborhood life and redevelopment, unite behind the same project, and what are the implications of this convergence? What can their

participation tell us about the contested nature of urban governance, the construction of new urban political subjects, and the emergence of new patterns of inequality?

The case of Southwest Center City directs attention to issues of racial inequality and class divisions in the inner city and relates them to the question of contemporary urban governance. Specifically, the dominant view of the inner city is that its postindustrial status, combined with racial and class divisions, make it ungovernable. Both conservative and liberal perspectives tend to represent inner city neighborhoods, particularly those inhabited by African Americans, as places where criminals, drug dealers, the chronically unemployed, wayward children, and unmarried women—in a word, the “underclass”—live in a state of unproductive pathological dependency. On the one hand, conservatives point to a pathological culture of poverty associated with welfare dependency (Murray 1984). On the other hand, liberals claim that these neighborhoods have been so utterly devastated by chronic joblessness and the affirmative-action-induced flight of middle-class role models that their civic structures have been eviscerated. Eli Anderson, for example, argues that law-abiding civic-minded “decent” families must abide by the codes of “the street” in order to survive in violence-ridden neighborhoods (Anderson 1999; see also Wilson 1987). However, by emphasizing the closeted respectability of many “decent” African American families, this work overstates the influence of violence and danger in shaping social and economic arrangements in urban neighborhoods. As is widely noted in the literature of urban anthropology, and contrary to the blinkered perspectives of both conservative and liberal analysts, the underclass debate has focused too narrowly on the “behaviors” of black urban residents. As a result, the question of neighborhood participation in the context of changing urban political economy has hardly been addressed.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, a growing ethnographic literature illuminates how discourses and practices of neighborhood participation produce and reproduce different forms of urban citizenship and community belonging on the one hand and different forms of exclusion and “othering” on the other (Caldeira 2001; Cattelino 2004; Clarke 2004; Gregory 1994, 1998; Maskovsky 2001; Schaller and Modan 2005; Williams 1988). In this article, I contribute to this ethnographic tradition by examining transformations in political subjectivity and “community” among African Americans in a gentrifying neighborhood.

The case of Southwest Center City not only demonstrates the inadequacies of the underclass concept to account for neighborhood participation in the inner city, but also points to the limitations of current theorizing about neoliberal governance. Neoliberal governance has been conceptualized to help make the crucial link between the broad

economic changes often referred to as “globalization” and the actual ideological and political practice of governance at the municipal level in the wake of those changes (cf., Maskovsky and Kingfisher 2001; see also Raco 2003; Ruben 2001). To put it another way, if globalization describes a new form of production that creates postindustrial cities, then neoliberalism describes the manner in which social relations are shaped and reproduced to suit the needs of postindustrial urban economies and landscapes. In this vein, we may understand as neoliberal the urban agenda that dominates American cities today.

What is important here is that a central part of the neoliberal agenda is to gain broad-based support for and participation in urban restructuring plans through governmental “reforms” designed to mobilize urban residents as entrepreneurs, consumers, and neighborhood citizen–volunteers. With respect to inner city residents, it is precisely through the “empowerment” of their “community” that they are now encouraged to be included as active participants in urban governance. Indeed, the terms upon which inner city residents are allowed to be visible and the avenues available to them to participate in political deliberation and dissent are increasingly defined in terms of their own abilities to govern themselves *as a community*. It is my contention that the “community” associated with neoliberal rule poses a significant challenge for African American urban residents.

The dominant theoretical perspective on neoliberal governance is based on the concept of governmentality. This perspective, which many now call the governmentalist approach, has focused on the connection between the emergence of urban policies that replace welfare state programs with market-based strategies for managing different subject–populations on the one hand and changes in political subjectivity among the people who are impacted by such policy shifts on the other (Cruikshank 1999; Fraser 1993; Peterson 1996; Raco 2003; Rose 1992, 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Shore and Wright 1997). This literature has made a significant contribution to our understanding of how policies “influence people’s indigenous forms of conduct so that they themselves contribute, not necessarily consciously, to a government’s model of social order” (Shore and Wright 1997: 4). Likewise has Nicholas Rose asked us to recognize “community” as an essential “problem-space” of contemporary governmental rationality. For Rose, the governability of individuals is linked through membership in communities, which, he suggests, have replaced society as the preeminent site where new relations of persons and authorities are established. He writes,

[Advanced liberal rule] does not seek to govern through “society,” but through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as

subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualization and self-fulfillment. Individuals are to be governed through their freedom, but neither as isolated atoms of classical political economy, nor as citizens of society, but as members of heterogeneous communities of allegiance, as “community” emerges as a new way of conceptualizing and administrating moral relations amongst persons (Rose 1996b: 41).<sup>4</sup>

For Rose, community is an important feature in the operation of “governance from a distance,” where citizens are not the direct objects of state action, but rather learn to govern themselves through the internalization of new neoliberal codes of conduct (see also Cooper 1998).

This article assesses the strategies that have been adopted to governmentalize an inner city neighborhood *as a community* and the responses of different residential constituencies to the new social and political contexts of neoliberalism. I wish to highlight here the importance of ethnography in gauging how new forms of governance play out in particular social and political contexts and in assessing how and why different subjectivities are adopted or contested “on the ground” in the contexts of policy implementation and political deliberation.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it is my contention that ethnographic analysis can reveal the limits of neoliberalism. For in much recent work on the topic, neoliberal governance is treated as a unified, totalizing set of discourses and practices. Despite much emphasis on the networked, dispersed relations of governmental authority that the Foucaultian perspective implies, neoliberalism nonetheless tends to be discussed as if it is imposed seemingly from above or from the outside on target populations, who have no choice but to resist it or to accommodate themselves to it absolutely.

Against this perspective, John Clarke (2001: 10) argues for a view of neoliberal governance as a “social-political project that *attempts* to conform the world to its logic” (emphasis in original). Clarke encourages us to think of neoliberalism as a set of hybridized and unstable governing practices that are not utterly dominant or imposed unproblematically from above. He writes,

To view neoliberalism as a hegemonic project, we need to think about how it goes about trying to make the world conform to its desires. In particular this means thinking about the different sorts of articulations it attempts to construct: the (re)making of political-cultural formations to the extent that neoliberalism can command the ‘taken for granted’ fields of common-sense; the construction of political blocs to sustain and carry through the project; the colonization of social and political institutions so that they both embody and emanate its orientations. In the process it is also necessary to pay attention to the processes by which

existing, older projects, their political blocs and forms of institutionalization have been disarticulated, dislocated and demobilized (Clark 2004: 89).<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I wish to argue not only that neoliberal governance has had a mediocre track record in converting residents into idealized subjects in the inner city. I also want to make the case that we must continue to pay close attention to the dialectically related histories of political action and governmental intervention at the neighborhood level, particularly to the ways in which race and class have shaped these dual histories. They play a central role in shaping the particular form of community-centered governance that emerges in cities like Philadelphia. My specific contribution to this discussion will therefore be to specify how class-inflected racialized discourses and practices articulate with neoliberal rule to mask the persistence of racial inequality and class divisions in the inner city. Following Gregory (1994: 150), I focus on how “racial inequalities and class asymmetries are secured, negotiated and contested in the everyday lives of urban African Americans” (see also Gregory and Sanjek 1994; Mullings 2001; Williams 1988; Williams and Prince 2002).

### **The new inner city: From dependent place to investment space**

For decades, urban development policies has sorely neglected poor and working-class neighborhoods in cities like Philadelphia. Treated as an undesirable, “blighted” part of the urban landscape, inner city neighborhoods have been viewed as dependent places, as repositories of unproductive residents who are at best extraneous and at worst impediments to the ability of a city to gain a competitive advantage in the new global economy. The problem of inner city blight and the difficulties of developing effective anti-blight policies has been particularly pronounced for Philadelphia, a city that, like other so-called second-tier cities, has undergone a postindustrial transformation that differs significantly from that of well-known, oft-studied “global cities” like New York, Miami, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>7</sup> If Philadelphia ever was a “global” city, it had lost that status by the early nineteenth century, with political power shifting to Washington, DC, and commercial and financial supremacy shifting to New York. Up to the early twentieth century, Philadelphia achieved significant economic success and global integration as a port and non-durable manufacturing center, but this did not give the city world-class status, as industrial development was accompanied by such extreme political

cronyism that the city's image remained notoriously backward, provincial, and "privatist".<sup>8</sup>

Deindustrialization and the transition from a manufacturing to a service economy exacerbated the city's woes and further enforced its backward, second-class reputation. Manufacturing employment never rebounded fully from the effects of the Great Depression and continued to decline after World War II, as industry migrated to the suburbs, the southwestern United States, and overseas. This decline occurred well in advance of and more thoroughly than in many other Northeastern cities. White flight, encouraged by government-sponsored suburbanization, and the precipitous withdrawal of federal funding for cities eroded Philadelphia's tax base, inducing multiple fiscal crises throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The white, middle-class, and planning-driven urban reform agenda of the 1950s and 1960s was largely destroyed by these developments and the regimes that cropped up to replace it made dramatic cuts in city services and employment while paradoxically trying to maintain racial and ethnic patronage arrangements. Not surprisingly, this was a rather divisive time in Philadelphia's history, replete with racial and ethnic conflict and repression.

In the 1990s, Mayor Edward G. Rendell and the city's corporate elite imposed an economic model of commercialization and privatization designed to redevelop the city as a "growth machine" (Logan and Molotch 1987; see also Ruben 2001). Exploiting its regional advantage as a center for academic research, higher education, and health care (by the 1990s, the University of Pennsylvania, with its giant hospital system, had become the city's largest private employer), the municipal elite consciously sought to transform the city from a decaying post-industrial backwater into a globally integrated regional economic hub, "knowledge center," and world-class conference and hospitality destination. This strategy for postindustrial economic growth was self-consciously framed in terms of the "challenges of globalization" (Peirce and Johnson 1995: 12) for a city such as Philadelphia that was not a haven (and still is not) for international investment.

Central to this strategy has been an effort to celebrate—and market—the inner city as a new and exciting investment space. Philadelphia has been trying to sell itself as the "city of neighborhoods" and its inner city areas as "hometowns of the twenty-first century" whose residents are "good people with good values" (OHCD 1998: 24). In this new formulation, neighborhood groups are now encouraged to work alongside, as opposed to under, the government help the city to achieve economic recovery. This shift in perspective on the inner city can be seen, for example, in the *Peirce Report*, a widely circulated

planning document commissioned and published in 1995 with great fanfare by the region's newspaper of record, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The report, which represents the perspective of then-mayor Rendell and his political allies and supporters, advocates what it calls the "Neighborhood First" approach, which calls on neighborhoods to "draft [their own] blueprints of recovery" (Peirce and Johnson 1995: H12). The report contains a vision of neighborhood redevelopment that eschews "top-down, one size fits all" approaches. Rejecting the scalar hierarchy on which conventional welfare state governance (federal, state, local, neighborhood) has been based, the report calls for a form of governance based on the state at all levels working "in partnership" with civic groups, which will be invested with "real authority" and charged accordingly with the task of "democratic self-governance" (Peirce and Johnson 1995: H2). This is but one example of a new reformist agenda that has proliferated in Philadelphia in recent years. I say reformist because by treating neighborhoods as generative sites in the production of democracy and economic recovery, this agenda must be understood as a central part of growth machine politics designed to replace, or at least subordinate, the entrenched encumbrances of corrupt machine politics and the clientism upon which they are based, which are often viewed by contemporary urban planners as an interference with the economic "reforms" favored by the dominant policy elites. In 2001, newly elected mayor John Street developed a plan called the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI) to extend the economic development model of the Rendell administration to the city's residential areas. Through NTI, the city made \$250 million worth of bond-funded public money available for the acquisition and clearing of abandoned property.

Importantly, this vision of neighborhood governance relies on a multiculturalist approach to the promotion and management of racial difference and inequality. Although cities like Philadelphia remain racially segregated, the "new hometowns" model celebrates "residential diversity." Much recent work has emphasized the demobilization of the mass civil rights and anti-poverty politics of the 1960s and 1970s and the rise of a less militant post-civil rights era multiculturalism, which has now become the dominant framework for explaining racial and ethnic differences and for managing racial inequalities in cities across the United States (see Davis 1986; di Leonardo 1998; Kelley 1997; Reed 1999; Steinberg 1996; Taylor and Gutman 1994). Among the many important themes discussed in this literature is a rightward shift in political thought and policy based on the selective appropriation of civil rights era political discourses about enfranchisement and equality. These discourses, once linked in social democratic tradition

to Keynesian welfare statism and a vision of equal proprietorship of public institutions, are now harnessed to the market-based notions of consumerism, responsibility, initiative, and voluntarism that are the cornerstones of New Right political ideologies. Leith Mullings (2005) describes this appropriation of the rhetoric of civil rights as a new form of racial exclusion and inequality or “unmarked racism” that delegitimizes anti-racist activities (Mullings 2005: 16–17; see also Davis 2004). This is precisely what is happening with respect to the “new hometowns” rhetoric of neighborhood recovery in Philadelphia. In policy statements by municipal officials and elsewhere, “residential diversity” is now described as a positive attribute that can contribute to neighborhood recovery and to the city’s image as a whole. At the same time, the specter of “racial conflict” is viewed as a threat to a city’s economic recovery. The Peirce Report, for example, cautions that too much talk of racial conflict may disrupt important economic reforms that are necessary to make the city globally competitive. In a passage that replicates U.S. Nationalist Cold War triumphalism, the report asserts:

The political “realist” will say: All these reforms are much too difficult. There will be ferocious opposition, from bureaucrats, homeowners, the unions, or folks with a racial agenda. The same class of cynics told us the Soviet Empire was permanent and the Berlin Wall would never fall (Peirce and Johnson 1995: H3).

This description defines race-based struggles over resources as unimaginative, non-visionary impediments to progress. The Peirce Report makes clear that Philadelphia’s leap to world-class status is predicated on the multiculturalization of neighborhood participation.

The valorization of neighborhoods as diverse “hometowns” provides an important opportunity for neighborhood groups to link themselves to governmental reform efforts and growth politics. However, the dynamics of neighborhood participation in Philadelphia’s inner city neighborhoods does not correspond in a simple, unitary manner to that which is advocated by the urban policy elite. Indeed, neighborhood planning around issues of redevelopment is a complex and contradictory terrain in which different assumptions about race and class play out simultaneously in the same political field. The example of Southwest Center City suggests that neighborhood participation in the contemporary inner city cannot be fully understood without reference to civil rights era forms of political participation and the transformation of these politics in the post-civil rights era.

## **Neighborhood participation, past and present**

Southwest Center City is a gentrifying neighborhood that is a mere twenty-minute walk to the city's downtown commercial and business center. For more than half a century, it was a mixed-income, majority-black residential area. In the late 1950s and 1960s, city planners announced a city-wide planning proposal to build a cross-town free-way down the center of the neighborhood. In a noteworthy example of neighborhood action against urban renewal (c.f., Fainstein and Fainstein 1974; Solnit and Schwartzberg 2000), residents fought bitterly—and successfully—against this proposal. The specter of the expressway loomed over the neighborhood for decades, however.<sup>9</sup> It was not until the late 1970s when the city finally abandoned the project for good. In the intervening years, many residents who could afford to buy houses elsewhere moved and retailers closed their shops. The neighborhood endured decades of housing abandonment, declining property values, and commercial disinvestment. Gentrification began in the mid-1980s, then stalled in the late 1980s as the real estate market plummeted across the city and the nation. In recent years, gentrification has once again resumed, spurred in part by the NTI.

Gentrification has dramatically altered the residential makeup of the neighborhood. I began research in—and moved into—Southwest Center City in the mid-1990s. I lived on a street of fifty row houses. When I first moved in, I surveyed the block and found that African Americans resided in thirty-eight of those fifty houses, whites lived in five, one was mixed, and six were abandoned. Eight years later, when I surveyed the block for a second time, the situation had changed dramatically: in 2004, only twenty-nine houses were owned by African Americans; fourteen were owned by whites; one remained mixed; one was owned by a South Asian; one by an Iranian couple; and three others were owned by a bank, a real estate firm, and a church, respectively. Only one house on the street was abandoned. Similar changes have occurred on nearby blocks. In the neighborhood at large, the African American population remains diverse along class lines. Teachers, actors, electricians, city workers, musicians, security guards, and Wal-Mart associates pass by my block on their way downtown. Most of the African American residents are homeowners. Nearly all of the residents in the two subsidized housing complexes in the neighborhood are black. Now, these residents are joined by a notable number of whites. Like the African American residents, the white residents are diverse in terms of employment and income, with students and artists living in newly converted rental properties and doctors and lawyers living in recently rehabilitated row houses.<sup>10</sup>

This demographic shift has dramatically altered the dynamics of neighborhood participation, and civic life and neighborhood alliances have been reconfigured within and across lines of race and class. The movement against the cross-town expressway was linked in many ways to the civil rights movement, and from the beginning focused on issues of racial justice.<sup>11</sup> In fact, residents explicitly referred to the cross-town expressway as a “Mason-Dixon line” that would segregate black residents from the downtown commercial district of the city (Binzen 1969: 26). As a form of neighborhood participation, it was a model of black political activism explicitly opposed to the growth coalition associated with urban renewal. In the 1980s, a similar neighborhood dynamic unfolded in a black residential fight against the first wave of gentrification. Black residential opposition to the gentrification of an abandoned nursing home for retired naval officers exemplified this dynamic. The Navy closed down the home, located on the perimeter of Southwest Center City, in the late 1970s, and promptly sold the property to the development firm Toll Brothers, which announced plans to build an upscale, gated community there. Delores Ondongo, an African American woman in her late fifties who worked as a public middle school teacher, joined with other residents to form the Southwest Center City Civic Council (SWCCCC). In an interview I conducted with Ondongo in 2001, she described the fight against Toll Brothers in the following terms:

We had hoped to get a Job Corps or a senior citizen place there. And we were under the impression that the government was willing to negotiate with us and turn it over to us. And next thing we know it was sold to Toll Brothers, without us even being...without even letting us put in the bid. We wanted some low-income housing and then we wanted to keep the impact from what they were doing, uh, from affecting our real estate taxes. And so we organized, okay. We organized under SWCCC and blocked it when they went for a zoning change. They didn't expect opposition, but they were forced to negotiate with us... At that time [former mayor of Philadelphia] Wilson Goode was the managing director and the city wanted the property developed. Toll Brothers said, “Oh yeah we just had a zoning change and we're going to build these houses,” and stuff like that, “and we're going to utilize what's there and everything you know, and we're going to build townhouses. But we got to keep this fence up there because we don't want the locals in there. And we're going to have within there complexes, stores and stuff.” And we said, “hell no,” you aren't coming in our neighborhood and keeping us out. I mean, no way... You ever see any black people living in Toll Brother's developments? You know Toll Brothers... show me one Toll Brothers development that you can buy that's under \$100,000. Now you tell me.

This quote exemplifies the dynamics of the anti-gentrification politics of the period. Like many residents who were active at the time, Ondongo interpreted Toll Brother's acquisition of the naval home as the privatization of neighborhood space, space that should have been rightly used to house services for low-income residents. Importantly, the elaboration of anti-gentrification politics articulated here links a model of racial justice with the liberal welfare state model of neighborhood development. This civil rights era formulation emphasizes public works that benefit low-income residents as a cornerstone of civic activism. As such it transcends a narrow politics of property ownership. SWCCCC was successful in delaying the redevelopment of the nursing home for several years.

In the 1990s, however, the oppositional character of this neighborhood participation was undermined partly in connection with the entry into the civic arena of many of the new white residents. Residents such as David Hirschel (discussed above) moved into the neighborhood and formed their own neighborhood association called the South of South Neighborhood Association (SOSNA). The SOSNA membership's vision of neighborhood development was significantly different from that of SWCCCC, and both groups competed for a short period to become the center of civic action. Importantly, SOSNA's entry into the civic arena fragmented neighborhood participation, dividing black residents around the politics of homeownership. One of SOSNA's first mobilizations, for example, involved opposition to the construction of low-income housing units that SWCCCC had fought to have built on several blocks in the center of the neighborhood. Many black homeowners joined this struggle on the side of SOSNA. Lois Robinson is one of them. A poised, middle-class professional African American woman born and raised in Southwest Center City, she owns her own home and has worked as a schoolteacher in the neighborhood for decades. In the early 1990s, she became part of SOSNA's leadership, eventually assuming the elected position as President of the SOSNA community board. In an interview I conducted with Robinson in 2000, she recalled how she became involved:

I went to my first SOSNA meeting because I heard that they were going to build those apartments on Christian Street. That's not what this neighborhood needs. We need more owners not renters. I have lived here all my life and I don't need to see kids running everywhere and trash all over the place. That's not good for the neighborhood.

The politics of property ownership expressed here is by no means new to black residential neighborhoods; it is based on a longstanding class- and

gender-inflected moral valuation of motherhood and proper childrearing. It was through SOSNA that this politics gained momentum and prominence in Southwest Center City.

Steven Gregory (1994, 1998) has shown how the politics of middle-class homeownership in Corona, Queens, has ascended in prominence in the post-civil rights era, in large measure as a result of state reforms and concessions that have disarticulated civic activism from the struggle against racial inequality. This same dynamic is apparent in Southwest Center City, Philadelphia. SOSNA has gained official recognition and funding from city government in support of its agenda, which supports moderate-income housing development but opposes low-income housing. Importantly, SOSNA's collaboration with the city has brought valuable public resources to the neighborhood, resulting in the redevelopment of several neighborhood blocks. For example, SOSNA gained a city contract to work with a developer to rebuild a block-long moderate-income housing development. SOSNA called the new development "Doctor's Row," in honor of the prominent African American physicians who lived there in decades past, before the cross-town expressway plan threatened the neighborhood.

In the context of gentrification, the form of cross-racial participation that SOSNA represents brings about an important compromise between white and black homeowners in establishing the priorities of community planning. From the perspective of many African American homeowners, the proper goal for SOSNA is the creation of a moderate-income housing market. For Lois Robinson and others, this is decidedly not a politics of gentrification. As Robinson explained to me in an interview in 2002: "Gentrification means taking a broom and sweeping away all of us who live here." Instead, this is an attempt to deal with the problem of blight and to face the challenge of neighborhood recovery in a context in which Philadelphia's municipal government is unwilling and unable to provide funding and other resources for the redevelopment of the neighborhood. Robinson explained: "I go to meetings and everyone is asking the city for the same things, and the city can't do much for any of us. We can't rely on the city to help us here. They do what they can and we have to figure out how to do the rest." By "doing the rest," Robinson, like many other SOSNA members, is willing to assume the burdens and responsibilities of self-governance through "community" as a means to achieve tangible benefits in "quality of life." From the perspective of new white homeowners, the creation of moderate-income housing is commensurable with their efforts to redevelop the neighborhood as well, as they see the creation of such publicly subsidized housing as a means to stimulate private sector investment.

## Racial refusals

The compromise I have described above is highly unstable, however, and, as the example with which I began suggests, does not indicate a broad consensus in the politics of neighborhood belonging. The cross-race alliance forged through SOSNA is predicated on several complex and contradictory views of the nature of race relations in the city and neighborhood. From the point of view of many African American residents, this alliance instantiates a pragmatic strategy of neighborhood uplift that is notable in its depoliticized post-civil rights era conceptualization of racial justice. Frank Brown is an active SOSNA member who sees race as the primary cause of the neighborhood's immiseration. An African American in his mid-thirties, in recent years he has been employed at the cable television company Comcast as a telemarketer. He lives in a small two-story house he inherited from his parents on one of the poorer blocks in the neighborhood. During an interview in 2001, he explained to me his perspective on race and neighborhood "quality of life":

This is America. Everything is race. I know that sounds one-minded but that's the real deal, you know what I mean? You can sit back and you can see things happening in one neighborhood. I mean it is so clearly delineated. Because I can take you for a walk out here right now, and walk right up to South Street, you see as soon as you cross South Street, boom, it's like night and day. I know people will say how can you say that now. We have a black Mayor now. But no, these are . . . this is something that's going back for decades. . . . My big thing is I have a big problem when I drive through the neighborhoods on the other side of South Street or the other side of Snyder Avenue, the other side of 25<sup>th</sup> Street, you know what I mean? . . . where it's predominantly white, you know, and I look on these streets, and I see clean streets, straight sidewalks, cherry blossom trees, you know what I mean? And when I come into our neighborhoods and the first thing I see is fucking hubcap flowerpots.

For Brown, this is not a form of racial subjectivity rooted in black power, nationalism, or even the mainstream civil rights model of racial justice. Surprisingly, it translates into a politics of racial uplift through partial alignment with white residents. In 2002, just as gentrification was again accelerating in the neighborhood, I asked Brown to speculate about the future of Southwest Center City. He replied:

I think a lot of low-income people are going to probably end up getting pushed out, you know what I mean? Because you have a lot of people, I won't say a lot of people, but it started as a trickle, but now it's kind of like a stream, you know, it's a lot of people from the subs coming back

down here. And they're moving in, which I don't have a problem with that at all . . . I really welcome, I really welcome young white urban professionals moving back down into this neighborhood again, because that's the only way we're going to get city services. When this library gets built down here on 19th Street it's not going to be behind . . . it's not going to be because it's what, we, who have lived here in this neighborhood all our lives, want. It's not going to be because of what we want. It's going to be because people like you live here. When [Mayor] John Street puts it down there, he's not going to put it down there for us. That's just the way Philadelphia is. You know when you guys start moving back in here, that's when the streets department is going to come through and sweep the streets. [Licenses and Inspections] is going to come through and take care of these abandoned homes, these abandoned lots, you know what I mean? You're not going to get Cabbage Patches anymore; they're going to put parks up like Fidler's Square. That's what's going to happen down here. That will be a good thing, but that's a bad thing too because look at the message that it's sending, you know what I mean? And that's one thing that I really and truly resent.

Brown's example goes far in explaining the widely reported preference among blacks to live in desegregated neighborhoods, though it explains this preference not as the abstract desire for multicultural belonging, as many urban planners might hope. Rather, Brown's views are ambiguous, even contradictory. He sees gentrification in somewhat more conciliatory terms than do some African American homeowners, such as Lois Robinson. However, the sense of white residential power and its implications for quality of life are fairly widespread among many African American residents in Southwest Center City. As such, they index a far less thorough accommodation to elite views of neighborhood life and direct our attention to the racial fault lines in the neoliberal consensus.

### **Dilemmas of diversity and development**

The possibility that this coalition might break up, or that its politics might someday spin out of control, is evident in an analysis of a community conflict that occurred in Southwest Center City in the summer of 2003. The conflict involved two community groups, both of which have played a decisive role in the past decade in neighborhood governance and redevelopment. The first group is SOSNA. The second is Universal Company Homes, a non-profit community-development corporation founded by Kenny Gamble, one half of the R&B songwriting duo that produced the famous "Sound of Philadelphia" in the 1960s. After decades of living in the suburbs where he pursued his musical

career, Gamble made a triumphant return to Southwest Center City in the 1980s. He has since invested considerable capital as a real estate developer in the neighborhood where he grew up. Under Gamble's leadership, Universal has achieved an impressive track record of low-income and affordable housing development in partnership with private developers and the city; it has also established a charter school, business-development center, workforce-development center, and drug- and alcohol-counseling center, all designed to "rebuild the ghetto" to help the people of Southwest Center City to "move further along on the road to economic self-sufficiency and social and cultural inclusion in the mainstream of Philadelphia life," as Gamble puts it on his organization's web site (Universal Companies 2005). As a black-led community-development corporation with a good bit of political clout and technocratic know-how, Universal is widely considered to be exemplary of the kind of civic entity required in this post-welfare era to tackle the problems plaguing inner city neighborhoods.

A clash between SOSNA and Universal occurred in July of 2003 when Universal announced plans to build eighty-five units of market-rate housing at the estimated price of \$320,000 per unit on a four-block area of Southwest Center City. Funding for this project, called Bainbridge West, would come from the city as part of its NTI; the city would lend Universal the money it needed to purchase and rehabilitate the eighty-five properties it sought to redevelop. Universal would then repay the city with revenue generated from housing sales. As part of this deal, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority promised to condemn thirty-five of the eighty-five Bainbridge West properties, acquire them through eminent domain, and then to sell them to Universal for redevelopment and eventual resale at market rates. Universal's leadership explained that it would then use the profits to build affordable housing in other areas of South Philadelphia.

From the point of view of SOSNA members, however, the Universal redevelopment plan threatened the neighborhood in a number of ways. First, members worried that the Universal plan would stall the real estate boom in the neighborhood. Private real estate firms, SOSNA's leadership argued, would be able to develop these properties more quickly than Universal. Second, SOSNA worried that Universal would "discriminate" on racial and religious grounds in the marketing of the housing units. Gamble and much of the Universal leadership are devout Muslims who have made numerous public assertions of black self-determination. Some SOSNA members wondered if Universal would partner with any non-black, non-Muslim real estate agents.

In the week following Universal's announcement of its plan, an anonymous letter—later attributed to Hirschel—was circulated

through the neighborhood. The letter detailed twelve points of contention with Universal's plan, which it characterized as a threat to neighborhood property values. The letter questioned Universal's ability to redevelop the properties and its ability to "sell them fairly and openly to any qualified buyer." Days later, another anonymous letter circulated through the neighborhood identifying SOSNA as a "real enemy" that has, in the pursuit of the private real estate interests of its founding members, worked to "undermine the structure of the Black community" for over twenty years. "[SOSNA's leadership] is the worst enemy that our community can have," the letter explained. "[It] has started a White propaganda war against a person who is trying to save our community, Mr. Kenny Gamble. . . . We cannot allow this 'Hitler Propaganda' mentality to control the destiny of Black people in our community." It appeared that a full-fledged race war might be brewing.

The conflict came to a head at a community meeting held in a large and dingy room of the neighborhood recreation center on a warm July evening. Through a variety of backroom maneuvers, City Council President Anna Verna, who represents the district of which Southwest Center City is a part, forced SOSNA to isolate and then banish Hirschel because he had authored the letter against Universal. (With Hirschel gone, SOSNA abandoned the library project, despite its popularity with residents and its support from Verna's office.) She then put heavy political pressure on both groups to co-sponsor a community meeting where Universal would announce publicly its intentions to adhere to "fair housing laws" and non-discriminatory marketing techniques. SOSNA, for its part, would reaffirm its support of Universal's Bainbridge West development project. To ensure civility at the meeting, Verna took the unusual step in sending a letter two weeks beforehand to all Southwest center city residents encouraging an end to racial conflict. Signed by herself, Kenny Gamble, and Lois Robinson (then-President of SOSNA), the letter stated:

At the end of the day we may still have some conflicting interests, but we can agree to disagree amicably. We also have the responsibility at the end of the day to treat each other with respect and dignity and to teach our children to respect people of all races and backgrounds. We ask for your support in that effort. Nothing is more important.

Verna's mediation was effective in stabilizing the relationship of the leadership of one group to the other. It did not effectively manage the racial conflict in the neighborhood, however.

The meeting began with the room filled to capacity with neighborhood residents, the vast majority of whom were African American.

Robinson chaired the meeting, starting it off by welcoming everyone and then announcing, with a bit of an iron hand, her intention to maintain order in the room. To head off unruly or indecorous behavior, she told everyone that no one was allowed to shout from their seats—they could only ask questions if they used the microphones placed in center aisle—and that they would be removed if they did not abide by these rules. Abdur-Rahim Islam, President and CEO of Universal Companies, addressed the audience shortly thereafter. He provided an overview of the plan for Bainbridge West and assured the audience that “all people would be welcome” to buy the homes once they were completed. His comments were followed by a brief presentation by a senior manager of the city’s Redevelopment Authority. Following these presentations, the audience was encouraged to ask questions. To the utter astonishment of most of the people present there that night, Universal’s representatives were blindsided by a wave of angry protest against the Bainbridge West development project by a small minority of white residents and developers. Among the questions they posed to Abdur-Rahim Islam were: “What efforts are being made to reach all communities?” and “Can one organization with a specific vision, or should many individual developers, best preserve the character of diversity of a neighborhood?” One resident went so far as to question Universal’s fiscal solvency because, she claimed, Gamble owed back taxes on several abandoned investment properties in the neighborhood. It is quite unusual to see white newcomers take such an aggressive, publicly adversarial stance against a prominent African American. Many of these residents who spoke out were small-scale real estate developers who had already bought a fair number of investment properties in the neighborhood. They saw Universal’s new project as a development that would stop them from buying more properties. By invoking the discourse of diversity, they sought to mark their exclusion from what they saw as a corrupt, insider deal between Gamble and the city. The public denouncement of the activities of a black Muslim CDC operating in an historically black neighborhood illuminates the perspective of some white residents on the issue of racial inequality, for this invocation of diversity occurred without reference to the long-term history of racial disenfranchisement and segregation and its long-term effects on housing markets and residential patterns in Philadelphia.

Unsurprisingly, many of Southwest Center City’s African American residents saw these assertions as a confirmation of the continued persistence of racism in explaining the political practices of the new gentrifying class that was moving into the neighborhood. Although they were careful to avoid comments that could be construed as “racist

against whites” (“this neighborhood is for everyone,” was a common refrain), there was much behind-the-scenes discussion—and a good bit of sarcasm—directed at the appropriation by white real estate brokers and their allies of the discourse of racial inclusion as a basis for their expanded presence in a historically black neighborhood.

This example is also instructive in what it reveals about how the politics of class plays out within an African American community as well. During the meeting, I sat in the back of the room next to an African American woman in her fifties. Her house is located next door to one of the properties slated to be sold to Universal as part of Bainbridge West. At the height of the assault on Universal’s plan, she turned to me and said, “I don’t trust Kenny Gamble. He’s taking our houses from us.” From the perspective of low-income residents in Southwest Center City, this perspective is understandable. Universal’s plan to build \$300,000 homes in a neighborhood where the average income was less than \$50,000 per year and where there is a thirty percent poverty rate would surely displace many low-income residents. I encouraged this woman, whom I had not met before, to make a public statement, but she left the meeting without saying a word. That too was quite reasonable in the context of the racially charged atmosphere in the room. The point here is that the racial conflict so overdetermined the field of public deliberation that no one was able to voice any questions about the effects of Universal’s housing project on low-income residents.

This conflict tells us more than just how “actually existing” politics of diversity play out in a gentrifying neighborhood. It illuminates the limitations of community planning, revealing its failure to manage a vital constituency—white gentrifiers—whose neighborhood participation did not in this case conform with expectations of city planners at least with regard for their role in creating a sense of neighborhood belonging across the color line. This failure occurred despite considerable effort on the part of city officials and SOSNA’s leadership. Moreover, this example also shows how community planning can produce a sense of frustration, suspicion, and distrust among African American residents (cf., Goode 2001b). Finally, it reveals that one of the consequences of this form of neighborhood participation is the disarticulation of issues around affordable housing and class differences from African American community politics at the neighborhood level. The case of Southwest Center City explains in part how the discourses and practices circulating in the new community-centered deliberative domains of contemporary urban governance render African American poverty invisible (c.f., Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Mullings 2005). Community planning does mobilize residents to become active participants in government, but it

does not produce the sense of neighborhood belonging imagined by planners.

### **Conclusion: The failures of neoliberalism**

A closer examination of the dynamics of neighborhood participation in Southwest Center City reveals a number of limits in conventional assumptions about neighborhood participation and neoliberal governance. At the level of politics, the case of Southwest Center City demonstrates that the protagonists of neighborhood participation are not merely lackeys (witting or unwitting) of the dominant neoliberal order. Civic participation has an important disruptive effect on contemporary urban governance and the urban growth politics that shape it. In particular, many African American residents are extremely uncomfortable with the disarticulation of race-based politics from place-based politics under conditions of gentrification, and they view this rupture as a failure of contemporary urban governance. The failure of neighborhood participation lies, therefore, not in its successes or failures of particular redevelopment plans such as the library project. Rather, its significance lies in the fact that it is remarkably ineffective in actually representing disenfranchised urban residents and in achieving real social equality on their behalf. This failure, I argue, is endemic to neighborhood participation under neoliberalism. It sometimes leads to overt resistance and other times to refusals to accept the dominant assumptions about diversity and civic responsibility in the new inner city. Importantly, resistance and refusals are born not from the exclusion of inner city residents from city politics and policy making. Nor are they merely the vestiges of a bygone era of racial segregation. Rather, they are produced in the new dynamics of neighborhood participation itself. It thus is the very *inclusion* of African American residents in the new devolved institutions of urban governance—and, notably, the insistence that they participate in a diverse, not a black, community—that produces a new sense of racial inequality and new forms of class division in the new inner city. In this regard, it is the very social construct of community—the sublime ideal and enabling condition of neoliberal governance—that disrupts the relation of significant segments of the urban population to governmental authority and creates new patterns of inequality.

At the theoretical level, this article directs attention to the limits of the governmentalist approach to the analysis of neoliberalism. Although this approach has opened up an interesting line of inquiry into the governing practices of community, it has paid insufficient attention to racial inequality and class divisions and their effects “on

the ground” in the creation of new relations of governmental authority. Notably, this article shows that attempts to recast the inner city as a new diverse hometown—with the expectation that residents will govern themselves through community—cannot escape the ideological and material realities of racial inequalities and class divisions, which work their way into the politics of neighborhood redevelopment even as city officials, residents, developers, and others do their best to keep them at bay. By showing how neoliberal governance fails to produce the kinds of political subjects envisioned by its most enthusiastic proponents, I emphasize ethnography’s role in revealing the limits and failures of neoliberal governmental rationality itself.

## Notes

Address correspondence to Jeff Maskovsky, Department of Urban Studies, Queens College, Flushing, NY 11367, USA. E-mail: Jeff\_Maskovsky@qc.edu.

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1. To protect informant identities, all names, with the exception of those of politicians and public figures, are fictitious.
2. I conducted five years of ethnographic research focusing on the civic activities of residents in Southwest Center City (1997–2002). Funded by the National Science Foundation, it was part of a large, comparative ethnographic research project. In addition to myself, the research team included Judith Goode, Professor of Anthropology, Temple University, Philadelphia; Susan Hyatt, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis; and several graduate student assistants from the Department of Anthropology, Temple University. The research relied principally on three ethnographic methods: participant observation, open-ended interviews, and an in-depth life-history collection. I studied a wide array of activities involving neighborhood residents as they volunteered in non-profit and church-based soup kitchens, recovery programs, and job-training programs and as they organized around “quality of life” issues such as trash removal, the maintenance and upkeep of abandoned lots, and the construction of affordable housing. I collected data on the strategies and tactics residents used to distribute resources, access services, and attract investment and paid close attention to how residents negotiate with each other, with city officials, and with representatives from the corporate sector. My interview data provided insights into the contested terrain of community life, as residents revealed varied, often contradictory, visions of

community development, resource mobilization, and neighborhood belonging. I also interviewed public officials, developers, policy makers, consultants, professional staff from non-profit organizations, and civic leaders from outside of the neighborhood. My life histories provided insights into activist trajectories, showing how personal histories of political involvement became a resource for contemporary civic practice. In my field research, I paid close attention to the ways in which race, class, and gender shaped civic action and was careful to collect data across these axes of difference.

3. The ethnographic research on urban poverty in anthropology that has rejected both sides of the “underclass” formulation is extensive (see, for example, di Leonardo 1998; Susser 1996; Goode 2001a; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Kingfisher 1996, 2002; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003; Gregory 1994, 1998; and Williams 1992). Work focusing on kinship and gendered networks of reciprocity direct attention to the informal mechanisms of rule in the inner city (Aschenbrenner 1975; di Leonardo 1984; Stack 1974).
4. Rose draws on Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism as they are interpreted and discussed by Gordon (1991) to address the question of what it means to be governed in what he calls “an advanced liberal way” (Rose 1996a: 295). Rose uses “neoliberalism” as a term to gloss the political rhetoric of the Reagan–Thatcher era. In contrast, he uses the term “advanced liberalism” to gloss the broad programmatic aspects of the new governmental rationality (Rose 1996b: 61). In my discussion, I use the term “neoliberal governance” in much the same way that Rose uses the term “advanced liberalism.”
5. Important examples of this include Davis (2004), Hyatt (1997), Kingfisher (2002), Lyon-Callo (2004), and Maskovsky (2001).
6. For similar critiques of the governmental approach to the study of advanced liberalism, see Maskovsky and Kingfisher (2001) and Raco (2003).
7. See, for example, Sassen (1991), Castells and Hall (1994), Portes and Stepik (1993), Soja (1996), and Mollenkopf and Castells (1991).
8. Philadelphia has a long history of cronyism and corruption. At the onset of the twentieth century, investigative reporter Lincoln Steffens called the city “the worst governed city in the country” (quoted in Abernethy 1982: 539). This reputation persisted well beyond the early decades of the twentieth century. The wave of progressive municipal reform that spread across the United States at the turn of the century arrived late to Philadelphia and did not break the hold of private monopoly control of the city’s economy or government. Although Philadelphia experienced a significant industrial boom in the early decades of the twentieth century, political cronyism persisted to such a degree that the city government allowed Philadelphia’s docks to decay and its downtown area to be abandoned even as manufacturing flourished and the economy grew. Sam Bass Warner (1968) calls Philadelphia a “privatist” city. He traces historical pattern of economic growth for Philadelphia that is based on the triumph of private interests over nearly all forms of public accommodation (see also Adams et al. [1991], Abernethy [1982], Goode and Schneider [1994], and Hodos [2002]).
9. Newspaper reporting from the era attributes the notable decline in commercial investment in the neighborhood to the “phantom” of the Crosstown Expressway. The possibility of its construction loomed over the neighborhood for decades, discouraging small business investment on South Street, the neighborhood’s main commercial corridor. One article refers to the expressway project as “a new scourge [that] has eroded [South Street] and almost extinguished its flickering hopes” Binzen 1969: 26). Data collected by historian H. Viscount Nelson (Nelson 1979) suggests that the exodus of black middle-class residents began in the mid-1940s;

Nelson attributes this exodus to the expansion of housing opportunities for blacks in other areas of the city.

10. The University of Pennsylvania Neighborhood Information System provides the following demographic overview of the neighborhood, based on official 2000 U.S. census data: in 2000, Southwest Center City was sixty-nine percent black and twenty-three percent white; sixty-one percent of housing was renter occupied and thirty-eight percent owner occupied (in contrast with forty percent and fifty-eight percent, respectively, for the city as a whole). With respect to poverty indicators, twenty-six percent of residents reported incomes below the official poverty line; seventeen percent of home owners were paying greater than thirty percent of their monthly income for their mortgages; and nearly forty percent of renters were paying more than thirty percent of their monthly incomes in rent. These statistics include a small white working class area called Devil's point that is adjacent to Southwest Center City. This is a small historically working-class Irish neighborhood comprised of several dozen houses. Most people consider Devil's Point to be geographically co-extensive with a neighborhood located to the immediate north of Southwest Center City (Philadelphia NIS Neighborhood Base 2005).
11. A brief history of urban renewal, the redevelopment process, and the neighborhoods movement in Philadelphia can be found in Adams et al. (1991: 100–125); for historical perspective on questions of race and class in the city, see the articles collected in Katz and Segrue (1998); see also Ruben (2000). See Ley (1996) for an interesting discussion of the neighborhoods movements as an aspect of the New Urbanism in Canada.

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