

THE IMPACT OF HOPE VI HOUSING POLICY ON GANG-RELATED CRIME: A CASE STUDY OF THE PICO-ALISO NEIGHBORHOOD IN LOS ANGELES

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Consigned to the public's subconscious for many years, federally-funded public housing quickly re-entered the nation's public discourse in the early 1990s as a result of two defining events. The first was the publication of *There Are No Children Here*, an account by Alex Kotlowitz of the utter dilapidation of the Henry Horner Homes, one of the largest public housing projects in Chicago. The second, also in Chicago, was the murder of Dantrell Davis, a seven-year-old resident of the Cabrini-Green public housing project, at the hands of a gang-affiliated sniper.¹

Although these two events garnered the attention of the media and the public, they were by no means isolated events. Indeed, by that time, federal public housing projects ("the projects") suffered many ills, which meant everyday life was inferior to that of the average American in almost every respect. Management of the housing projects was inefficient and often corrupt.² Violence and crime had overrun entire neighborhoods, as gangs and drug dealers used violence to control large sections of the buildings.³ Unemployment and poverty rates were sky-high, while educational opportunities were practically non-exis-

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1. See HENRY CISNEROS, *A New Moment for People and Cities*, in FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE: HOPE VI AND THE NEW PROMISE OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN AMERICA'S CITIES (Henry Cisneros & Lora Engdahl eds., The Brookings Inst. Press 2009); Joseph A. Kirby, *The Death of Dantrell Davis*, CHI. TRIB., Oct. 13, 1992, available at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/chi-chicagodays-dantrelldavis-story,0,6132262.story>.

2. See Michael Schill, *Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go From Here?*, 60 U. CHI. L. REV. 497 (1993).

3. JAMES DIEGO VIGIL, *THE PROJECTS: GANG AND NON-GANG FAMILIES IN EAST LOS ANGELES* (2007).

tent.⁴ The housing stock was rundown as well and residents had to endure poor plumbing, cockroach infestations, mold, poor lighting in many areas, and litter strewn everywhere.⁵ In general, living in the projects meant fewer opportunities for an average quality of life.

In response to the evident crisis and mounting public pressure, the federal government, acting mainly through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) and its then Secretary Henry Cisneros, implemented a brand new program that later came to be known as Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (“HOPE VI” or “HOPE”). When it was launched, HOPE VI promised to be a revolutionary program because it took a completely different approach to urban housing, generally, and public housing for low income residents, specifically. HOPE was premised on the belief that previous public housing policies had done a disservice to the low-income communities they were supposed to serve because these policies effectively sequestered low-income individuals in areas of concentrated poverty. Officials and academics in the early 1990s argued that, up to that point, housing policies had created areas of poverty that were cut-off from the rest of the city and were devoid of any capital investment and economic opportunity. To remedy the situation, HOPE called for the demolition and subsequent reconstruction of many housing projects. During reconstruction, the government would avoid the mistakes of the past and build with the goal of deconcentrating poverty.⁶

In order to bring about poverty deconcentration during reconstruction, HOPE employed three different strategies. The first strategy sought to allow for mixed-funding sources and to create mixed-income housing. Under this strategic model, the federal government partnered with private developers to build units that would be rented and managed by the government and other units that would be sold on the private market.⁷ The sec-

4. See Ngai Pindell, *Is There Hope for HOPE VI?*, 35 CONN. L. REV. 385, 385-86 (2003); ROD SOLOMON, THE BROOKINGS INST., PUBLIC HOUSING REFORM AND VOUCHER SUCCESS: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES 5 (2005), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/reports/2005/01metropolitanpolicy_solomon/20050124_solomon.pdf.

5. Accounts of the abysmal living conditions in the projects abound, but the most obvious example was Kotlowitz' book. See ALEX KOTLOWITZ, THERE ARE NO CHILDREN HERE (1991).

6. See CISNEROS, *supra* note 1, at 8; ALEXANDER POLIKOFF, *HOPE VI and the Deconcentration of Poverty*, in FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE: HOPE VI AND THE NEW PROMISE OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN AMERICA'S CITIES 65-66 (Henry Cisneros & Lora Engdahl eds., The Brookings Inst. Press 2009).

7. See POLIKOFF, *supra* note 6, at 69-70. Although these are analytically distinct strategies, they are coupled here because they go hand in hand in practice. Private developers were only attracted to the project once it was possible to build

ond strategy aimed to build lower-density housing. Prior to HOPE, most housing projects consisted of large, high-rise buildings that maximized the number of units per area of construction. HOPE abandoned this idea so that buildings of old were replaced by single-family homes or duplexes.⁸ Finally, HOPE sought to relocate some residents that had been displaced as a consequence of the transition from low-income to mixed-income and from high-density to low-density housing.⁹ This was to be done primarily, according to government officials, by making use of the already established Section 8 Housing Voucher program.¹⁰

Many years have passed since HOPE's poverty-deconcentration policies were first implemented and, by many accounts, life for public housing residents has vastly improved. In particular, scholars agree that one of the greatest upturns has been evinced in matters of crime levels.¹¹ Whereas myriad forms of criminal activity—ranging from murder through all petty offenses—once held many projects in a stranglehold, most HOPE housing projects now enjoy an environment of relative tranquility.¹² Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, those who were forced to relocate as a result of redevelopment have also enjoyed a more peaceful environment in their new neighborhoods.¹³ Generally, scholars believe that housing project residents became less afraid to engage in everyday activities and this, in turn, had a profound positive impact on their overall quality of life.¹⁴

non-public units and stray from the traditional design of public housing projects. Also note that the order in which the strategies are listed does not correspond to the chronological order in which they were implemented.

8. See Note, *When Hope Falls Short: HOPE VI, Accountability, and the Privatization of Public Housing*, 116 HARV. L. REV. 1477, 1478 (2003).

9. See SUSAN J. POPKIN ET AL., THE URB. INST., A DECADE OF HOPE VI: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND POLICY CHALLENGES (2004), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411002_HOPEVI.pdf; JENNIFER COMEY, THE URB. INST., HOPE VI'D AND ON THE MOVE (2007), <http://www.urban.org/projects/hopevi/index.cfm?>.

10. Molly Thompson, *Relocating From the Distress of Chicago Public Housing to the Difficulties of the Private Market: How the Move Threatens to Push Families Away From Opportunity*, 1 NW. J. L. & SOC. POL'Y 267, 276 (2006).

11. See *infra* Part I (discussing the issue of safety in the lives of public housing residents). See also SUSAN J. POPKIN & ELIZABETH COVE, THE URB. INST., SAFETY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING: HOW HOPE VI HELPED FAMILIES 2 (2007), <http://www.urban.org/projects/hopevi/index.cfm?>; MEGAN GALLAGHER & BEATA BAJAJ, THE URB. INST., MOVING ON: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF HOPE VI FOR CHILDREN (2007), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311488_HOPEVI_Children.pdf.

12. *Id.* See also Fred Brooks et al., *Resident Perceptions of Housing, Neighborhood, and Economic Conditions After Relocation From Public Housing Undergoing HOPE VI Redevelopment*, 15 RES. ON SOC. WORK PRAC. 481 (2005).

13. POPKIN & COVE, *supra* note 11, at 2. Considering that the majority of people who lived in pre-reconstruction projects were forced to relocate via Section 8 vouchers as a result of reconstruction, this finding provides stronger support for the proposition that, generally, implementation of HOPE VI improved the lives of people who lived in the pre-development projects.

14. *Id.*

Unfortunately, there is good reason to be skeptical of these positive results. The primary justification for the skepticism is that most of the scholars who report that HOPE VI redevelopment had a positive impact on crime rely on similar research methodologies. This raises doubts as to the reliability of the results because any method of analysis has inherent limitations.¹⁵ Thus, by employing similar research methodologies, it is possible that these studies are all limited in similar ways. Otherwise stated, many of the studies reporting favorable results all examine their object of study through the same lens, and it is possible that the resulting picture is limited because the lens used can only capture *some* facets of that picture. Using another lens, then, may give researchers access to very different, and previously invisible, facets of the same picture—i.e., of the impact HOPE VI had on crime in the projects.¹⁶

Specifically, most of the literature on HOPE VI is based on quantitative data sets that are aggregated across many individual HOPE projects all over the nation.¹⁷ A smaller portion of the literature uses quantitative data from all of the residents in one specific HOPE VI project in order to draw its conclusions.¹⁸ Both types of literature utilize the same means of data collection, namely, form questionnaires that break down information into discrete and quantifiable points of reference. For example, these studies rely on variables like annual median income, crime rates, employment rates, and educational success measures to reach their conclusions on the effectiveness of HOPE VI at transforming the lives of those in the projects for the better. By contrast, only a very minor portion of the literature focuses on anecdotal evidence when conducting an analysis of HOPE VI and criminality.¹⁹

15. This statement verges on being a truism. We need not look far beyond our everyday lives to agree that how we approach an object of inquiry dramatically limits what we learn from said inquiry.

16. It is vital to note that the methodological critique I set forth in this article in no way suggests that one research methodology is “better,” so to speak, than any other. The problem I wish to reveal is that the studies rely on only *one* methodology. Thus, it would not be helpful here to choose a different methodology if researchers were to rely on that one methodology exclusively as well. Ultimately, only the use of *multiple* research methodologies is capable of revealing a full picture of the object of study.

17. See, e.g., SOLOMON, *supra* note 4, at 40; Thomas G. Kingsley et al., *Patterns of Section 8 Relocation in the HOPE VI Program*, 25 J. URB. AFF. 427 (2003); POPKIN ET AL., *supra* note 9; COMEY, *supra* note 9.

18. See, e.g., Micere Keels et al., *Fifteen Years Later: Can Residential Mobility Programs Provide a Long-Term Escape From Neighborhood Segregation, Crime, and Poverty?*, 42 DEMOGRAPHY 51 (2005); MARY K. CUNNINGHAM ET AL., THE URB. INST., CHAC MOBILITY COUNSELING ASSESSMENT: FINAL REPORT (2002), <http://www.urban.org/publications/410588.html>.

19. It is interesting to note that in one of the few articles that rely mainly on anecdotal accounts of HOPE VI transformations, the authors cannot help but try to

Although there are very sound reasons for relying on quantitative data, the conclusions drawn in these studies exhibit two specific drawbacks.²⁰ First, the use of aggregate data and the lack of input from public housing residents themselves betray the top-down approach that characterizes the HOPE VI debate. Most expert analyses fail to give a voice to the most important people in this entire effort, namely, the former and/or current residents.²¹ Second, and more importantly, very few studies delve into the causal mechanisms underlying the results they are reporting. The literature asks whether HOPE VI produced positive results, but not how it procured them. In other words, the reports are results-oriented. It is not difficult to see that failing to examine causal mechanisms leaves vital questions unanswered, the two most important of which are: (1) Is HOPE VI the most efficient or effective program for curbing crime rates;²² and (2) Is the way in which HOPE VI increases safety consistent with public policy?

The omission of causal mechanisms while studying the relationship between HOPE redevelopment and criminality is particularly troubling in light of the rather complex forms of crime affecting the projects. For example, as the Carbini-Green tragedy

make their methods sound more quantitative. They state in their paragraph-long methodology section that they gathered data by means of "semi-structured interviews" and they inform the reader of the number of people they interviewed using quantitative nomenclature, namely, "(N=63)." See Carolina Katz Reid et al., *Building Community During HOPE VI Redevelopment: Lessons From a Seattle Case Study*, 65 HUMAN ORGANIZATION 192, 195 (2006).

20. See BERNARD SUSSEY, *APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF POLITICS* (Macmillan Publishing 2d ed. 1992) (1991) (surveying the debate, perennially unfolding in the field of political science, about the adequacy of employing only quantitative methods to describe social phenomena). One of the many interesting and germane criticisms recounted by Susser is that quantitative analysis "has no place within it for 'essences' or 'wholes,' that is, for those quasi-real entities that claim to combine the many concrete and accessible elements of sense experience into totalities that hover beyond our empirical reach . . . those mystifications . . . that insist on being more than the sum of their elements." *Id.* at 7. Thus, relying solely on quantitative analysis carries with it the risk of overlooking the fact that society entails more than the sum of its individual human parts.

21. One article, for example, attempted to take a more qualitative approach and conducted interviews with individuals affiliated with projects that had undergone a HOPE 'facelift.' However, of all the people interviewed, only a few were residents of projects. Instead, most were members of the housing authority, developers or police chiefs. See MINDY TURBOV & VALERIE PIPER, *THE BROOKINGS INST., HOPE VI AND MIXED-FINANCE REDEVELOPMENTS: A CATALYST FOR NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL 2* (2005), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/09metro_politanpolicy_piper/20050913_hopevi.pdf.

22. I am aware that HOPE was not meant to be a gang-prevention or a crime reduction strategy. This argument would seem, at first glance, like an unfair crack at HOPE. Nevertheless, I include it because HOPE was, in part, designed to reduce crime in general. I argue this in greater detail below. Furthermore, this argument forms the basis of a more generalized critique of the program, which I only tentatively explore at the end of the essay.

illustrates, gangs were some of the most prevalent sources of criminality in public housing projects during the 1990s.²³ In reporting a decrease in the general levels of criminality, the overly simplistic results reported above imply that gang-related criminality, too, has subsided. And yet, none of the studies above offer an explanation into how this was accomplished.²⁴ Indeed, it is rather baffling if one considers that gang formation and violence are incredibly complex phenomena.²⁵ How redevelopment managed to alter the specific confluence of factors that tend to give rise to gangs is anyone's guess. What is not surprising, however, is that there are no studies that address this issue. The reason for this lacuna is that quantitative analyses cannot answer these questions.

This comment attempts to answer the two questions I have posed above with respect to gang crimes and violence. Specifically, it delves deep into the literature on gangs in order to understand the dynamics of gang formation and criminality. This investigation seeks to reveal what changes are necessary to curb gang-related problems in a specific neighborhood. Then, it analyzes the HOPE VI literature, going beyond the reports that merely state that criminality has decreased, in order to assess how the effects of HOPE have altered the confluence of conditions that tend toward gang formation. In other words, armed with an understanding of gang dynamics, I examine the quantitative results reported in HOPE studies to try to tease out a plausible causal mechanism by which HOPE has reduced gang crime. As an additional effort to close the problematic gap in HOPE VI literature, I gathered non-quantitative data of my own by conducting lengthy personal interviews with several members of the

23. One need not look any further than the Cabrini-Green example, cited at the beginning of this article. Other examples of public housing projects where gang violence was one of the greatest and most intractable sources of criminality include: Pico-Aliso projects in Los Angeles; Jordan Downs and Imperial Courts also in Los Angeles; Henry Horner Homes in Chicago; and Rockwell Gardens in Chicago. See generally VIGIL, *supra* note 3; Dirk Johnson, *Gangs that Plague Housing*, N.Y. TIMES, May 20, 1989, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/20/us/target-gangs-that-plague-housing.html>.

24. In light of the fact that none of the studies referred to address the issue of gang violence in any detail, it is difficult to ascertain, with a great degree of certainty, whether gang-related criminality has, in fact, declined as a result of HOPE VI. As discussed below, this article offers some evidence that gang-criminality has decreased as a result of HOPE VI. Nevertheless, the question I wish to raise here is not whether this was accomplished or not. The issue that lies at the heart of this piece, and that I wish to raise here, is that none of the literature addresses *how* this could have been accomplished. For, as I have argued, describing *how* the reported results have been achieved is just as important as determining what the results themselves are.

25. See *infra* Part II; THE MODERN GANG READER (Arlen Egley, Jr. et al. eds., Oxford U. Press 3d ed. 2006) (1995).

HOPE VI Pico-Aliso community in Los Angeles over the course of several months.²⁶

Both the literature and the Pico-Aliso experience suggest as follows: (1) HOPE redevelopment is not an effective or efficient means of curbing gang criminality; and (2) the limited positive effects redevelopment has had on reducing gang violence are achieved only through mediocre mechanisms that are likely contrary to public policy. Specifically, this comment argues that HOPE VI does not ameliorate the underlying socio-economic conditions that tend to produce gang-related criminality. Instead, HOPE VI merely reduces gang-related crime by isolating individuals that may otherwise engage in gang behaviors. Finally, I examine the possibility that the drawbacks of using HOPE redevelopment as a policy tool for crime reduction might extend to the adequacy of using HOPE as tool to ease other social ills.

To that end, this comment is organized into five parts. Part I provides the reader with an overview of how redevelopment has impacted the overall safety of public housing residents from the projects. This includes a discussion of both the improved conditions evident in the redeveloped projects and of the similarly positive outcomes experienced by those who were forced to relocate as a result of redevelopment. Part II examines the delicate balance of environmental and personal factors that tends to result in gang formation and gang-related crimes. Part III returns to an examination of HOPE VI redevelopment and asks whether it has had the effects necessary to alter the process of gang formation and to curb gang criminality. Specifically, this part examines the effects HOPE has had on income, employment, education, the existence of informal support networks, and the acculturation process of current and former public housing residents. In Part IV, I recount the experiences of current and former Pico-Aliso residents. Finally, Part V critically dissects all of the data gathered and concludes that HOPE reduces gang crime by isolating families, not by trying to put an end to the abject poverty that is often the catalyst for gang formation.

PART I. OVERVIEW: HOPE'S EFFECTS ON CRIMINALITY IN GENERAL

There is a general consensus among HOPE scholars that redevelopment leads to lower crime rates for both current and former public housing residents. In this section, I present a more

26. None of the interviews were structured, meaning I did not plan the interview questions in advance or predetermine the order of topics discussed. The interviewee had a lot of leeway to discuss any subject s/he wished to so long as it was related to HOPE VI.

detailed picture of this downward trend with two goals in mind. I intend to (1) highlight certain trends within the overall pattern of lower criminality; and (2) give the reader an adequate perspective of the methodological pitfalls of these reports.

Findings from HOPE VI redevelopment studies almost uniformly report that redevelopment had positive and robust results on safety across a variety of measures. First, they assert that there was a downward trend in criminality for HOPE VI communities and residents across the nation. For example, Susan Popkin and Elizabeth Cove found lower crime rates in projects located in Atlantic City, NJ; Chicago, IL; Durham, NC; Richmond, CA; and Washington D.C.²⁷ In a different study, Mindy Turbov and her colleagues found a general decline in crimes in three projects located in Atlanta, GA; Louisville, KY; and Pittsburgh, PA.²⁸ Needless to say, these findings tend to support the conclusion that lower crime rates are not simply a happy coincidence.²⁹

Scholars have also found that levels of criminality generally diminished across different types of crimes. Popkin and Cove, for example, classified a variety of crimes as either drug-related offenses or violent offenses and found that, generally, there was a statistically significant decline in both types, with the greatest reduction evinced with respect to drug-related offenses.³⁰ Turbov and Piper, by contrast, examined criminality by adopting various police departments' two-tier system. The first tier is composed of Part I crimes. Although different jurisdictions define Part I differently, it generally includes the most serious types of offenses.³¹ For example, the Pittsburgh Police Department includes the following under Part I crimes: murder/manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, vehicle theft, and arson.³² Part II is the catch-all classification and it includes the less serious offenses. Turbov and Piper found that Part I crimes in Atlanta dropped 93% between 1993 and 2004.³³ In Louisville, annual rates for all crimes fell as much as 82% and, in Pittsburgh, Part I crimes also fell significantly.³⁴ As before, these results seem to support the idea that redevelopment has the capacity to change whichever factors are a common cause of different types of crimes. In other words, the ability of HOPE to

27. POPKIN & COVE, *supra* note 11, at 11.

28. TURBOV & PIPER, *supra* note 21, at 27.

29. This is true only if the results are statistically significant, and many of them are. Those that are not significant will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

30. POPKIN & COVE, *supra* note 11, at 4-5.

31. TURBOV & PIPER, *supra* note 21, at 27.

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

diminish criminality does not seem to depend on the type of crime.

In contrast, where residents moved after relocation has a significant effect on the levels of criminality they experience. According to Popkin and Cove, the sharpest decline in crime rates was exhibited by those residents who relocated outside of the projects without government assistance.³⁵ Following them, the next significant decline occurred amongst those residents who left the projects with the help of Section 8 vouchers. Those who returned to their former housing project after it had been rebuilt also experienced a decline in crime rates, albeit a smaller one than the previous two groups.³⁶ Lastly, people who relocated to other non-HOPE VI projects fared the worst. For example, according to Popkin and Cove, before HOPE redevelopments in 2001, 67% of residents reported that shootings were a “big problem.” After redevelopment, this number was down to 17% for those who relocated using Section 8 vouchers. Of those who relocated to other non-HOPE VI public housing projects, however, 35% reported that shootings were still a “big problem.”³⁷

Interestingly, poverty level and criminality are positively correlated.³⁸ Studies reveal that people who relocated without government assistance, on average, moved to neighborhoods with lower poverty rates than any other group. Similarly, studies also show that people who relocated using Section 8 certificates generally settled in neighborhoods with lower poverty rates than those who lived in public housing projects of any kind. Lastly, the studies conclude that redeveloped HOPE projects tend to exhibit lower poverty rates than other non-HOPE projects.³⁹

While these studies report a strong correlation between poverty and crime, none of them presents a plausible account of how HOPE brings about the observed reductions in crime. The studies did not, for example, engage in lengthy discussions about the nature of the drug trafficking or gang violence. In many respects, the studies are content to simply report that there have been reductions. Perhaps this is sufficient. One might suggest, for example, that HOPE was not designed as a crime-prevention strategy. As such, lower crime rates are a great by-product, but they should not play a significant role in policy considerations. Or, one might argue that what really matters is that the reported de-

35. POPKIN & COVE, *supra* note 11, at 3.

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.* at 2-4.

38. *Id.* at 3.

39. *Id.* at 2-3.

clines have had quite a significant and real impact on the everyday lives of people.⁴⁰

Still, these arguments miss their mark. First, although crime-prevention is not HOPE's central goal, it is certainly a very important one. Recall that HOPE was designed to reduce poverty concentration. The main objective of reducing the concentration of poverty in certain areas was to eliminate the all too common ills associated with concentrated poverty, including sky-high levels of crime. Thus, crime reduction was sure to be on the minds of policy makers when they created the program. Second, settling only for results, and not attempting to explain how they were achieved, makes it difficult to evaluate those results. By failing to understand how HOPE achieves its goals, policy makers and scholars are unable to assess how much it costs—in terms of money, sweat and tears, as the saying goes—to procure them.

PART II. GANGS AND GANG CRIMINALITY: HOW DO THEY WORK?

At first glance, the literature speaks highly of HOPE VI as a tool for curbing crimes and violence. By implication, it seems to suggest that HOPE VI is also effective at curbing gang-related crimes and violence. Nevertheless, gang formation and violence are complex phenomena whose root causes are difficult to grasp. Therefore, in order to understand how HOPE can and does have an effect on gang-related crime, it is necessary to dissect what lies at the heart of gang formation and crime. On the basis of the available literature, I argue that gangs are most likely to form in environments that exhibit: (1) deteriorated economic conditions; (2) disorganized families and substandard social institutions; and (3) individuals who find themselves in a process of adaptation.⁴¹ I also contend that the same factors explain the existence and nature of gang-related crime.

At the outset, it is important to bring the object of study into sharper focus by defining “gang” and the related notion of “gang-related criminality.” There is a great deal of disagreement amongst scholars, policy experts, gang members, and law en-

40. *Id.* at 4.

41. There are a number of different conceptual frameworks that seek to explain the origins of gangs. Although there are important differences between them, most of the disagreement is about how much explanatory power each factor has, not about what factors often give rise to gangs. In this essay, I highlight the features that are held in common by most theories and that I find most persuasive. Because I find Vigil's overall argument the most convincing, I have adopted a similar framework. Nevertheless, most of what is laid out in this section echoes other theories as well. For a very good summary of the different theories on gang formation, see RANDALL G. SHELDEN ET AL., *YOUTH GANGS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY* 117 (2003). For Vigil's model, see VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 5.

forcement agents, about what a gang really is. Such discussions, however, are beyond the scope of this comment and so, here, I will adhere to the definition proposed by David Curry and Scott Decker in their book *Confronting Gangs: Crime and Community*. According to the authors, a gang is a group of people that: (1) appropriates symbols and transforms their meaning so as to create a unique identity and form of communication; (2) is a permanent, or at least non-transitory, group with a stable identity; (3) often, but not always, lays claim to a specific geographic area that it calls “home” and attempts to control; and (4) engages in criminal activities.⁴² Beyond possessing these characteristics, it is also clear that gangs are fundamentally concerned with creating a distinction between themselves and the rest of the population—similar to one’s identity within a family.⁴³ Indeed, many of the activities and features that make a group into a gang are often entered into or performed for the sake of setting up or erecting a very visible barrier between the group and those around it. For example, gangs often use criminal activities to determine whether a person is a particularly valuable member of the group and whether he or she is a member of the core or the periphery. Crime is, to an important degree, something that sets a particular member apart from the rest of the society.⁴⁴ Likewise, laying claim to a territory is a very clear manner of creating boundaries between the group and the rest of the community. It is not surprising that transgressing physical boundaries is considered a dire offense between rival gang members.

The concept of “gang criminality”—alternatively referred to as “gang-related crimes”—is no easier to define. The difficulty becomes readily apparent when trying to distinguish between a crime committed by a gang member *qua* individual and a crime committed by a gang member *qua* gang member. John Hagedorn articulates the latter concept as “gang-motivated” criminality.⁴⁵ This iteration is helpful because it highlights the intentionality inherent in the concept of gang-related criminality. As such, I will use the following definition for gang criminality: all criminal

42. G. DAVID CURRY & SCOTT H. DECKER, *CONFRONTING GANGS: CRIME AND COMMUNITY* 3-6 (2002).

43. *Id.* at 9-10, 61, 67. Curry and Decker only mention the “self-identification” feature of gang membership in a casual reference late in the book. Nevertheless, the definitions of “gang” that are provided by the gang members themselves and are recounted at the beginning of the book all clearly point to this element.

44. See discussion *infra* Part II.B. See also CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 72; CELESTE FREMON, *G-DOG AND THE HOMEBOYS: FATHER GREG BOYLE AND THE GANGS OF EAST LOS ANGELES* 133 (1995) (wherein a gang member nicknamed Green Eyes says that he had to commit crimes in order to get the respect of his fellow gang members).

45. John M. Hagedorn, *Gang Violence in the Postindustrial Era*, 24 *CRIME & JUST.* 365, 378-82 (1998).

activity—including acts of violence—that is undertaken by a gang member in furtherance of his or her gang’s aims or goals.⁴⁶ More importantly, this definition includes criminal activity that is undertaken in furtherance of a gang’s aims even if intent is not explicitly formulated in the gang member’s consciousness as he conducts the activity. For example, under this definition, a gang member selling narcotics performs a gang-motivated activity even if he or she, at the time, is not thinking about furthering the gang’s aims but simply thinking about making money for him or herself.

Having clarified the meanings of “gang” and “gang-related crimes,” I now turn to an analysis of the formation of gangs. As I stated above, gangs are most likely to form in an environment characterized by: (1) deteriorated economic conditions; (2) disorganized families and substandard social institutions; and (3) individuals who find themselves in a process of adaptation. Accordingly, I will develop each of these three elements in turn.

A. *Deteriorated Economic Conditions*

Perhaps, one of the most commonly known facts about gangs is that they are fundamentally linked to poverty.⁴⁷ Yet, what accounts for the strong correlation between poverty and gang formation? After all, the existence of gangs seems to be a phenomenon unique to the underprivileged classes of only certain countries.⁴⁸ Moreover, how does one explain the fact that only 10% of those living in poverty in the U.S. join gangs?⁴⁹ Part of the answer is that poverty alone is not sufficient to foment gang formation. More importantly, however, the other part of the answer is that poverty is related to gang formation only in specific ways. More concretely, there are three reasons for the strong correlation between poverty and the gang presence.

The first explanation for the strong link between poverty and gang formation is that living in conditions of abject poverty marginalizes large sections of the population. In order to fully

46. This definition is loosely based on the one provided by Curry and Decker. See CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 31.

47. *Id.* at 80.

48. That said, there are some examples of gangs that easily take root in a variety of different countries. The most notable example, of course, is the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. This gang first started in the streets of Los Angeles, but was then exported to El Salvador via deportation and has now spread to many countries in Central America. See Freddy Funes, *Removal of Central American Gang Members: How Immigration Laws Fail to Reflect Global Reality*, 63 U. MIAMI L. REV. 301 (2008); Juan J. Fogelbach, *Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Ley Anti Mara: El Salvador’s Struggle to Reclaim Social Order*, 7 SAN DIEGO INT’L L.J. 223 (2005).

49. James Diego Vigil, *Urban Violence and Street Gangs*, 32 ANN. REV. ANTHROPOLOGY 225, 232 (2003).

grasp how and why lower-income people are marginalized, it is important to keep in mind the degree of poverty at issue here. Take for example, the Pico-Aliso community, where at one point there were upwards of eight gangs⁵⁰ and, during which time, the average annual *household* income was estimated at close to \$11,000.⁵¹ This incredibly low average household income seems to be consistent with the fact that more than 60 percent of Pico-Aliso households had no source of earned income.⁵² To make matters worse, the people who experienced this level of poverty had very few chances of improving their socio-economic status. Indeed, many of them lacked the resources to get an adequate education or the social networks that facilitate good employment opportunities.⁵³

As a result, poverty erects barriers between low-income populations and the rest of mainstream American society. Sometimes the barrier is quite visible, as with the geographical isolation of many of the nation's poorest neighborhoods,⁵⁴ many of which are located on "the other side" of railroad tracks, highways, or natural barriers like rivers.⁵⁵ At other times, the barriers are less visible, but more restrictive. For example, one of the gang members interviewed by James Diego Vigil, a former resident of Pico-Aliso and current professor of Social Ecology at the University of California, for his work on gangs in East Los Angeles describes the situation as follows: "We knew we had nothing, and other outsiders had more. There was a tightness there [amongst the outsiders]." ⁵⁶ He continued, it was "us against them."⁵⁷ These feelings likely derive, in part, from the fact that many of the people living in such conditions have abandoned all hope of achieving success, at least as it is defined by any of the traditional variables. For example, one young member of the Pico-Aliso Community stated: "If I had a, like fairy godmother who said I could have . . . wishes, then my wishes would be to have a job. Something where I could use my muscles . . . Number

50. FREMON, *supra* note 44, at 24.

51. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 33. There is very little data on income in the Pico-Aliso community. Vigil states a number of times that the income of those in Pico Gardens, specifically, is lower than those of Boyle Heights residents. The only number he uses is the one cited above. However, he does not give a specific year nor does he cite to its source. Furthermore, the average or even the median household income for Boyle Heights in 2000 seems to elude clear definition as various sources cite different numbers. Nevertheless, the main point still stands: Residents of the Pico-Aliso community live in deep poverty.

52. *Id.* at 31.

53. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 163-66.

54. POPKIN ET AL., *supra* note 9, at 7-10.

55. The Pico-Aliso community in Los Angeles and the Henry Horner Homes in Chicago are but two examples of many.

56. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 55.

57. *Id.*

two wish, would be to be a good father . . . ”⁵⁸ In short, poverty acts like a great social sifter, where some people simply get left behind. Unfortunately, as individuals are left behind, so too are the expectations that these individuals ought comply with the social mores of mainstream America.

The second explanation for the intimate relationship between poverty and gang formation is that poverty places enormous pressure on the development and maintenance of social institutions.⁵⁹ As I describe below, one of the most important factors contributing to gang formation is the breakdown of certain social institutions like schools and the family. On the one hand, poverty may often lead to insufficient resources, which stump a child’s development, emotionally unhealthy parenting and relationships, and absenteeism. On the other hand, poverty often results in children receiving substandard education and experiencing high rates of attrition.

The third link between poverty and the existence of gangs is that poverty is often closely linked to the existence of a particular form, of gang violence. As I will explain later in this part of the comment, a significant number of gang-related violent acts can be attributed to drug dealing and the quest for easy money.⁶⁰

B. *Disorganized Families and Substandard Social Institutions*

Most scholars agree that the family structure is the single most important factor in precipitating the formation of gangs.⁶¹ Families play a key role because they are “the first institution an individual interacts with . . . [and the most important] in socializing young people, teaching them the rules of behavior in society and taking the appropriate steps to keep them within those rules.”⁶² When families leave a child unprotected from the influences of other institutions or, worse yet, drive the child away, the child is once again marginalized. Be it through neglect or direct abuse, the child is made to feel either as an unimportant member of the family or as a complete outsider from the family. In either case, the child often turns to another ready source of support and socialization, his or her friends and the streets. Further, this becomes especially true if, as we will see below, other potential sources of guidance have failed as well.

58. FREMON, *supra* note 44, at 138.

59. See THE MODERN GANG READER, *supra* note 25. See generally CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42; FREMON, *supra* note 44; VIGIL, *supra* note 3.

60. Hagedorn, *supra* note 45, at 381-84.

61. See CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42; FREMON, *supra* note 44; VIGIL, *supra* note 3; THE MODERN GANG READER, *supra* note 25.

62. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 141.

Consequently, many gang members describe the gang as a family. A striking example includes the account by Cisco, a young member of The Mob Crew in Pico-Aliso (“TMC”).⁶³ After Cisco’s girlfriend, Smiley, was murdered in a gang shoot-out, Cisco and some other members of TMC went to the hospital cafeteria and ran into Smiley’s mother and aunt. Cisco recounts, “And they started telling us, ‘This happened because she was hanging around you bums.’ And I felt like saying, ‘You know what? You guys were never there for Smiley.’ We were the only family she had. The mom was into drugs and never paid any attention to her.”⁶⁴ Gangs assume many of the roles typically played by the family unit and fulfill many chief needs, including unconditional acceptance, love and support.

Why have some families failed so completely at fulfilling their most basic tasks? There are too many reasons to count and the situation for each failed family is unique. Nevertheless, there are some common causes worth noting. One prevalent factor is family structure. For example, it is all too common for people in high-poverty areas, and certainly in many of the public housing projects, to be raised by single mothers.⁶⁵ This obviously makes it very difficult for the mother to both work full-time and adequately supervise and nurture her children.⁶⁶ The causes for male absenteeism are also too many to explore here, but at least three are important. According to William Julius Wilson, high rates of incarceration and poor long-term employment prospects for minority males are partly to blame for the high rate of absenteeism.⁶⁷ A third source of absenteeism for Hispanic minorities, specifically, is deportation and other immigration-related troubles.

As noted above, another common source of disorganization is poverty. Indeed, even if there are two parents who divide the responsibilities of bread-winning and family supervision, it is quite likely that limited sources of income will cause a strain in family relations.⁶⁸ Material concerns often overwhelm people with little resources, and the “fear and lack of control that . . . [they] feel are quite serious.”⁶⁹ Often times, these feelings affect

63. FREMON, *supra* note 44, at 63.

64. *Id.*

65. For example, in a study of the Park Du Valle housing project in Louisville, Kentucky, it was revealed that 80% of the households were single-parent and were headed by African American women. See Michael Brazley & John I. Gilderbloom, *HOPE VI Housing Program: Was it Effective?*, 66 AM. J. ECON. & SOC. 433, 436 (2007).

66. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 142.

67. *Id.*

68. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 161.

69. *Id.*

the parents' ability to do their job appropriately, as when some of them take to substance abuse as way to escape their financial woes.⁷⁰ Moreover, these feelings of fear, helplessness and hopelessness are often transmitted to the children, which further marginalizes them and creates in them resentment toward the social structures that put them in these terrible situations.

Typically, when families fail, there are a host of social institutions—ranging from church, community organizations, youth groups, schools and social services—that help rescue children from being completely marginalized and that help socialize them. Regrettably, in environments where gangs are most prevalent, these social institutions are also inadequate.

Schools in areas with a strong presence of gangs generally provide a very low-quality education because they are grossly under-funded.⁷¹ As such, many schools suffer from overcrowding, which means that each student receives less attention from his or her teachers and, inevitably, some fall through the cracks. At the same time, this means that schools are incapable of tending to children with special needs of any kind, like kids with severe behavioral problems.⁷² Lack of adequate funding also means that schools are unable to provide a safe learning environment for children, leaving students at the mercy of outside forces.⁷³

But poor quality schools are not the only obstacles to obtaining a good education in a low-income community. In many cases, the problem stems from the fact that children decide not to go to school at all. Sometimes, the child is forced to quit school and work instead because his or her family does not have enough money to provide the most basic necessities. At other times, the child's failure to attend school is the result of a failure on the part of the family to inculcate the value of a good education, including advocating on behalf of the child for greater and improved school resources.

In short, the feelings of marginality created by abject poverty are oftentimes simply reinforced by broken families and failing institutions. Children find themselves with little place to turn to for guidance, support, or community. Still, there is always one place to go: the streets and the gang.

70. Needless to say, drug addiction is another major component of family dysfunction, regardless of its cause. Addressing this topic adequately, however, is far beyond the scope of this modest project.

71. See VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 203.

72. *Id.*

73. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 144.

C. *Individuals In Transition*

Finally, gang formation and participation is often highly correlated with individuals who are in a process of personal transition.⁷⁴ The relationship between the two phenomena is due to the fact that, during periods of flux and transition, individuals often struggle to define themselves. Naturally, when faced with such uncertainties and doubts, they seek sources of guidance.⁷⁵ This process of negotiating a new identity may take on many different forms. For example, for teenagers, the transition from childhood to adulthood is often accompanied by a quest to define themselves in almost every respect. They wish to better define their views of the world, to distinguish themselves from their families, to fit into a specific group and to choose a path for themselves.⁷⁶ Another group that often experiences a difficult and far-reaching transition is newly arrived immigrants.⁷⁷ As they transition from life in one socio-cultural context to another, many immigrants often seek to define themselves anew in an attempt to assimilate.

Sadly, when individuals live in poverty and many of the social institutions around them are broken, they have a very difficult time finding the guidance and support they need. On one level, these vulnerable populations often find themselves isolated from mainstream society because they are poor. Their life in poverty means they often cannot conform to the ideals espoused by mainstream society. Moreover, mainstream society shuns these vulnerable populations because they “different.”⁷⁸ On another level, teenagers find no comfort at home, where overly-punitive parents may treat them poorly or simply ignore them, thereby contributing further to their sense of isolation and rejection. In this regard, the words of Dreamer, a member of the Clarence Street Locos, prove quite revealing:

74. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 5.

75. James Diego Vigil, *Group Processes and Street Identity: Adolescent Chicano Gang Members*, 16 *ETHOS* 421, 430-438 (1988).

76. *Id.* at 430.

77. Vigil, *Urban Violence and Street Gangs*, *supra* note 49, at 232.

78. Indeed, many of these vulnerable individuals are “different” in myriad ways. The most obvious, of course, is the fact that many of those living in areas of concentrated poverty are minorities. There is no need to delve deeply into the literature on discrimination and segregation to know that racial differences still present significant barriers to assimilation into mainstream America. See every book ever written on the history/sociology/economics of race relations in America. On a serious note, see DOUGLAS S. MASSEY & NANCY A. DENTON, *AMERICAN APARTHEID* (1993); David Cutler et al., *The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto*, 107 *J. POL. ECON.* 455 (1999); CAMILLE ZUBRINSKY CHARLES, *Can We Live Together? Racial Preferences and Neighborhood Outcomes*, in *THE GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY: RACE AND HOUSING CHOICE IN METROPOLITAN AMERICA* (Xavier de Souza Briggs ed., 2005).

It is also hard to be at home with my dad. He gets to me a lot . . . If I had a son, I'd try to be a good father, not hassling my kid all the time. Not like my dad. I'd treat my son nice. I guess if I could change anything about my life, I just would want a dad that I could get along with . . . Last week I had a dream that they killed me in front of my lady. If I got killed, my mom would probably cry for a while. My dad, for him it'd probably be no big thing.⁷⁹

Individuals who find themselves in such situations find the streets instead. In the streets, the individual finds a group of people who provide unconditional support. Unlike mainstream America, the gang member's social group does not judge or reject him or her, for the other members, too, know what it feels like to have poverty dash any hopes of a "normal", mainstream life.⁸⁰ Unlike the family, the group can provide a nurturing and caring environment, including basic necessities parents often cannot afford. Unlike the family, the group can fulfill each other's emotional needs by making one another feel like they belong.⁸¹ Lastly, unlike the family, the group can provide a sense of structure and inculcate in the individual a set of mores and rules of conduct.⁸²

D. *Gang-Related Criminality*

These same three factors help explain the existence and the nature of gang-related crime. The link between deteriorated economic conditions and gang-related crime is two-fold. First, and foremost, many gang members use violence as a means of securing the bare necessities.⁸³ For example, selling drugs "for most gang members is just another low-paying job—one that might guarantee 'survival' but not much else."⁸⁴ The common belief that most gang members are getting wealthy off of "controlling" the lucrative drug business is simply false. In his study of Milwaukee gangs, John Hagedorn found that small drug-dealers, including those from gangs, earned approximately \$300 per month, while bigger dealers earned approximately \$3,700, of which \$1,300 came directly from drugs.⁸⁵ The second link between poverty and delinquency is somewhat more complicated, but equally

79. FREMON, *supra* note 44, at 87.

80. SHELDEN ET AL., *supra* note 41, at 188.

81. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 142. This accounts for many of the most popular features of gangs: tattoos in highly visible places that practically flaunt allegiance and devotion, similar styles of dressing and the choice of specific gang colors, ritualized activities, particular dialects and dictions specific to the gang, etc. Each of these are clear attempts to reinforce a sense of belonging.

82. SHELDEN ET AL., *supra* note 41, at 183.

83. *Id.* at 106.

84. *Id.* at 182, quoting JOHN M. HAGEDORN, *PEOPLE AND FOLKS: GANGS, CRIME AND THE UNDERCLASS IN A RUSTBELT CITY* (1998).

85. Hagedorn, *supra* note 45, at 378-82.

powerful. As discussed, most gang members live in abject poverty and have very little, if any, opportunity of bettering their economic lot. Furthermore, they are forced to endure poverty while the greater, "outside" society surrounding them values money and wealth to the point of fetishism. Faced with the stark contrast between their reality and the reality advertised and valued by mainstream society, many gang members view crime as the only plausible means of accessing easy money and acquiring an economic status valued by mainstream society.⁸⁶

The failure of traditional social institutions like schools, families, church and the criminal justice system also help account for the fact that gangs engage in criminal activities. The most obvious relationship between the two phenomena is the absence of control. While most people learn that crime is reprehensible from their parents, school and/or other institutions, most gang members live in environments where there are no institutions to instill in them a clear moral compass. Gang members and residents of low-income communities know that crime is wrong, but it is largely accepted as an everyday part of life.⁸⁷

Lastly, criminality and violence constitute acts that have the dual purposes of rebelling against a society that marginalizes them and reinforcing group solidarity as an outcast. Turning to the words of a gang member himself proves incredibly illuminating:

They took Green Eyes. They took Oso. Those are the ones you could talk to, and they would listen. Green Eyes was stubborn. He was hardheaded. He wanted to be out there. He said, 'My uncle's locked up. My dad's dead. My mom's all fucked up. Fuck it. I don't give a fuck.' The only thing that probably kept him from tripping big time was his baby. If he'd been locked up it woulda been better. Green Eyes' death was hard for all of us.⁸⁸

The rebellious nature of Green Eyes' statement is undeniable. If everything else in his life had gone wrong and there was no hope for a better future, then why should he care? Why should he play by the rules and learn to create fairness when all that he knows is injustice? But violence also reinforces solidarity between gang members *qua* outcasts. This is why, for example, initiation rituals often involve violence directed at the inductee or perpetrated by him.⁸⁹ This also explains why a lot of the leaders of the gang are

86. SHELDEN ET AL., *supra* note 41, at 187.

87. *Id.* at 183. See also CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 46. Curry and Decker, for example, discuss that gang members and some members of the low-income communities they researched viewed drug dealing as a legitimate job.

88. FREMON, *supra* note 44, at 161.

89. CURRY & DECKER, *supra* note 42, at 72.

those who are most willing to commit acts of violence in the gang's name. The act of transgression bonds them to each other and creates a shared history of defiance.

PART III. EFFECTS OF HOPE ON THE CONDITIONS THAT TEND TO PRECIPITATE GANG FORMATION

Having fleshed out three of the most important factors that account for the presence of gang-related criminality, I now return to the primary focus of this essay; namely, to explore how it is that HOPE redevelopment has reduced the level of gang-related crime in the lives of those affected by it.

Unfortunately, it has been impossible for me to examine the effects of HOPE on these three factors—at least exactly as they were described in the section above. One reason is that while it is easy to find studies on post-redevelopment economic conditions and educational opportunities, it is rather difficult to find any on the effects on family health. Accordingly, I have found it necessary to substitute the analysis of HOPE families for an analysis of informal support networks. I rely on informal support networks as a proxy for family health because the two often play the same roles in the development of an individual. Like a family, informal support networks help socialize individuals and often provide opportunities to fulfill similar basic necessities.

Furthermore, this section does not examine the presence or absence of individuals who are experiencing difficult periods of transition, as every single project houses teenagers. Instead, I examine the overall mental health of people. I justify this substitution on the assumption that if people have difficulty finding support during their periods of transition, then they will exhibit poorer mental health. To sum up, in this section, I examine the effects of HOPE redevelopment on: (1) socioeconomic conditions, specifically income and employment; (2) educational outcomes and presence of informal support networks; and (3) overall mental health.

A. *Deteriorated Economic Conditions*

Literature on the economic conditions faced by public housing residents post-HOPE VI redevelopment tends to be quite positive. Generally, scholars agree that, after redevelopment, residents live in wealthier neighborhoods.⁹⁰ Significantly, this is true of most residents, regardless of where they found housing after redevelopment. For example, those who were forced to relocate using Section 8 certificates, “. . . moved to neighbor-

90. See POPKIN ET AL., *supra* note 9.

hoods where the poverty rate was 16 and 15 percentage points lower on average.”⁹¹ Those who, instead, relocated to other public housing projects generally moved to projects with lower poverty rates as well.⁹² Results are also positive for the redeveloped sites. According to some scholars, the median household income for HOPE VI neighborhoods increased more than 33%.⁹³

Still, it would be misleading to read too much into these positive results. For the vital question is not whether the neighborhood as a whole is wealthier, but whether the residents’ financial outcomes improve. The positive results reported above are mainly explained by the fact that, after redevelopment, residents find themselves surrounded by wealthier neighbors. With respect to those who relocated, their new neighbors are people who already lived in these wealthier communities. For those who moved back to their redeveloped projects, their wealthier neighbors are people the program attracted in an attempt to create mixed-income communities.

Contrary to what the data on neighborhood wealth indicates, the future for individuals affected by HOPE VI is rather bleak. For example, in her article titled, *Relocating From the Distress of Chicago Public Housing to the Difficulties of the Private Market*, Molly Thompson argues that the people who relocated using Section 8 vouchers—the great majority of the people affected by HOPE VI redevelopment—are worse off in their new neighborhood. According to her study, moving to a lower-poverty neighborhood often makes it harder for residents to increase their incomes.⁹⁴ The explanation she provides for this result is simple and intuitive: moving to a wealthier neighborhood does not better prepare residents to find employment or to find better-paying jobs.⁹⁵ The move, however, does affect their ability to find employment opportunities via informal networks and personal relationships. Indeed, Thompson finds that residents often feel ostracized in their new neighborhoods because they are not as self-sufficient as their neighbors.⁹⁶

Thompson’s results are echoed in Diane Levy and Mark Woolley’s policy brief on the effects of HOPE VI relocation on employment levels. The authors find that “HOPE VI has lead to

91. COMEY, *supra* note 9, at 4.

92. *Id.*

93. MARY HOLIN ET AL., U.S. DEP’T OF HOUS. & URB. DEV., INTERIM ASSESSMENT OF THE HOPE VI PROGRAM CROSS-SITE REPORT 35 (2003), http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/20030_RETASK-XSITE_03.pdf.

94. Molly Thompson, *Relocating From the Distress of Chicago Public Housing to the Difficulties of the Private Market: How the Move Threatens to Push Families Away From Opportunity*, 1 NW. J. L. & SOC. POL’Y 267, 297 (2006).

95. *Id.*

96. *Id.*

improved life circumstances for many residents, who report living in better housing located in safer neighborhoods. But these improvements in living conditions have not affected employment.”⁹⁷ Studying the effects of redevelopment on all those affected by HOPE VI, and not just those who relocated, Levy and Woolley found that, before redevelopment, 48% of those who were eligible for full-time employment were unemployed. After redevelopment, the unemployment rate in their sample remained the same through two follow-up surveys each spaced two years apart.⁹⁸

Only Fred Brooks and his colleagues have found that HOPE redevelopment exerted a positive influence on income and employment beyond the neighborhood level, as reported in their article titled *Resident Perceptions of Housing, Neighborhood, and Economic Conditions After Relocation From Public Housing Undergoing HOPE VI Redevelopment*.⁹⁹ They find that “forty-one percent of voucher users stated that their overall financial situation had improved since they lived in Smith Homes.”¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, Brooks and his colleagues find that the specific reasons for residents’ improved financial situation were “finding employment or getting a raise.”¹⁰¹

In spite of these positive findings, the overwhelming majority of the studies contradict Brooks and his co-authors. Thus, I will treat their conclusions as atypical, and, like most scholars, adopt the view that redevelopment has had, at best, only minor positive effects on employment rates and income levels for current and former public housing residents.¹⁰²

HOPE’s failure to have any discernible effect on income levels and employment opportunities has significant implications for its ability to mitigate gang criminality. At a very basic level, redevelopment fails to alleviate many residents’ struggle to make

97. DIANE K. LEVY & MARK WOOLEY, THE URB. INST., RELOCATION IS NOT ENOUGH: EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS AMONG HOPE VI FAMILIES 1 (2007), <http://www.urban.org/projects/hopevi/index.cfm?>.

98. *Id.*

99. Few other scholars report positive findings, *see also* SEAN ZIELENBACH, HOUS. RESEARCH FOUNDATION, THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HOPE VI ON NEIGHBORHOODS (2002).

100. Fred Brooks et al., *Resident Perceptions of Housing, Neighborhood, and Economic Conditions After Relocation From Public Housing Undergoing HOPE VI Redevelopment*, 15 RES. ON SOC. WORK & PRAC. 481, 489 (2005).

101. *Id.* at 488.

102. *See* LARRY BURON ET AL., THE URB. INST., HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS: HOW HOPE VI FAMILIES FAIRED IN THE PRIVATE MARKET 8-9 (2007), <http://www.urban.org/projects/hopevi/index.cfm?>; Susan Clampet-Lundquist, *HOPE VI Relocation: Moving to New Neighborhoods and Building New Ties*, 15 HOUS. POL’Y DEBATE 415, 427 (2004); Susan Popkin et al., *Has Hope VI Transformed Residents’ Lives? New Evidence From The Hope VI Panel Study*, 24 HOUS. STUD. 477, 492 (2009).

ends meet. This, in turn, implies that many of the negative behaviors associated with high levels of stress are likely to continue. To make matters worse, the fact that employment opportunities do not improve implies that people still have no more reason to believe they will ever be a part of the American middle class. On the contrary, if Thompson is correct, those who relocate find themselves worse off because the discrepancies between them and their neighbors become more salient. People's sense of isolation, it seems, is bound to increase because they can no longer take comfort living in a community of people with equally dim socioeconomic prospects.

B. *Schools and Informal Support Networks*

Unlike the literature on socioeconomic impact, the literature on HOPE's effects on the educational outcomes shows no signs of consensus. Effects vary from one site to another and there does not seem to be a study that provides a plausible account of the large variation across sites. As I show below, one study presents positive outcomes, another reports mixed results, and a third one concludes there has been no improvement at all. This lack of consensus means that it remains unclear whether HOPE VI redevelopment has a discernible and positive impact on the quality of education that might, in turn, lead to less gang-related criminality.

Signs of hope are evident in Julie Kaufman and James Rosenbaum's comparison of educational attainment between children who relocated to the suburbs of Chicago and those who relocated to other low-income neighborhoods in the city.¹⁰³ The authors found that children who relocated to the suburbs generally exhibited a lower dropout rate, obtained better grades, and took more classes specifically oriented towards attending college.¹⁰⁴

Still, Jens Ludwig and his co-authors report somewhat less promising results in *Urban Poverty and Educational Outcomes*. On the positive side, the authors find that children who moved away from high-poverty neighborhoods generally obtained higher grades.¹⁰⁵ On the negative side, however, they also report

103. It is worth noting that this article analyzes outcomes for children who moved as part of the Gautreaux program, not as part of the HOPE VI program. Nevertheless, the results are relevant in light of the similarities between the two.

104. Julie E. Kaufman & James E. Rosenbaum, *The Education and Employment of Low-Income Black Youth in White Suburbs*, 14 *EDUC. EVALUATION & POL'Y ANALYSIS* 229, 234-5 (1992).

105. Jens Ludwig et al., *Urban Poverty & Education Outcomes*, 14 *BROOKINGS-WHARTON PAPERS ON URB. AFFAIRS* 147, 174-5 (2001), available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058785> (discussing the outcomes of children who relocated as part of

that the adolescents who moved to wealthier neighborhoods with better schools were more likely to be held back, suspended, or expelled.¹⁰⁶

Finally, Brian Jacob's study, *Public Housing, Housing Vouchers, and Student Achievement*, presents rather inauspicious results. According to Jacob, HOPE VI relocation of families led to a "small increase in the drop-out rate among children (i.e. youth aged 14 and older at the time of the closure announcement), but had no impact on the academic achievement of younger children on a wide variety of measures."¹⁰⁷ The primary reason for relocation's failure to have any significant impact on the educational outcomes of low-income students is that, generally, relocation did not translate into enrollment in better schools.¹⁰⁸ According to Jacob, HOPE VI relocation may be beneficial in other respects, but when it comes to education, relocating yields the same, if not slightly worse, results than having stayed in the under-funded, low-quality schools characteristic of dense public high-rises.¹⁰⁹

Another interesting facet of the scholarly discourse surrounding the impact of HOPE VI relocation on school outcomes pertains to the effect of the relocation itself on the outcomes of the children. Indeed, Jacob, Kaufman and Rosenbaum, and Thompson all aver that lower-income children have likely been discriminated against and ostracized in their new environments, thus drastically reducing their ability to rely on informal support networks and their capacity to focus exclusively on their academics. In short, these authors suggest that relocation creates a type of environmental shock that makes educational success an even less likely outcome.¹¹⁰

This line of reasoning is quite evident, for example, in the work by Kaufman and Rosenbaum, who expressly hypothesize that relocation will adversely impact children.¹¹¹ Interestingly, however, their conclusions directly contradict the hypothesis.¹¹² In fact, their findings indicate that when children are faced with

the MTO experiment). The results are relevant to the study of HOPE VI in light of similarities between the two programs.

106. *Id.*

107. Brian A. Jacob, *Public Housing, Housing Vouchers, and Student Achievement: Evidence from Public Housing Demolitions in Chicago*, 94 THE AM. ECON. REV. 233, 235 (2004).

108. *Id.* at 251.

109. *Id.*

110. *Id.* at 247; see also Thompson, *supra* note 94, at 282-3; Kaufman & Rosenbaum, *supra* note 104, at 229.

111. See Kaufman & Rosenbaum, *supra* note 104, at 229.

112. *Id.* at 230.

unforgiving new surroundings, they adapt and thrive—they swim, instead of sinking.¹¹³

Nevertheless, the results delineated by Kaufman and Rosenbaum do not give an account of the significant difficulties faced by the children immediately after relocation. Jacob and Thompson both find, for example, that grades dropped and attrition rates increased within the first two years of relocation.¹¹⁴ These results seem to demonstrate that although relocation itself may have no lasting effects, it does exert significant pressure on children in the short term.

What import do these studies have to the discussion on gang formation? Well, it is difficult to say. On one hand, they indicate that better schools have a positive impact on the lives of low-income children. On the other hand, they indicate that many of the children who are forced to relocate as a consequence of HOPE VI do not, in the end, attend better schools as a result of their relocation. Only the few families for whom it is possible to relocate to significantly wealthier areas see a marked improvement in their children's educational outcomes. For the rest, under-funded, low-quality schools appear to be the only option. This explains the discrepancy between the results reported by Kaufman and Rosenbaum and Jacob. Further complicating matters is the temporal dimension of the results and the fact that the studies indicate negative short-term effects.

Scholarly discussion on the existence and effectiveness of informal support networks, in many respects, mirrors the discussion on education. The main focus of the debate is still the capacity of people to build relationships after they have been uprooted from their neighborhood. Nevertheless, there is a much greater degree of consensus, as most scholars agree, that redevelopment destroys informal support networks and that, once broken, these ties are almost never rebuilt.¹¹⁵

In their study of HOPE redevelopment, *Moving Three Times Is Like Having Your House on Fire Once*, Lynne Manzo and her colleagues conclude that redevelopment does more harm than good to these networks. According to them, residents establish two types of informal bonds to their communities. The first type of bond is place attachment, meaning the “behavioural, cognitive and emotional embeddedness that individuals experi-

113. *Id.* at 237.

114. See Jacob, *supra* note 107, at 247; Thompson, *supra* note 94, at 282.

115. See generally Clampet-Lundquist, *supra* note 102, at 415; Lynne C. Manzo et al., *Moving Three Times Is Like Having Your House on Fire Once: The Experience of Place and Impending Displacement Among Public Housing Residents*, 45 URB. STUD. 1855 (2008); Thompson, *supra* note 94, at 267.

ence.”¹¹⁶ In other words, people experience emotions and relate to other people in their lives in part by reference to specific places. The location of everyday events figures prominently in the construction of common histories and social mores.¹¹⁷ Once you take the individual out of this geographical context, many of the corresponding social mores lose strength. This scenario is not unlike the child who goes to camp with his or her school peers and feels that merely being in a new place allows him or her to act in a different, usually less controlled, manner.

The second category of bond is social attachment, which refers to “an emotional connection to neighbours based on shared history, interests and/or concerns.”¹¹⁸ Colloquially, this type of bond is referred to as the existence of a sense of community. According to the authors, because life in the projects is a constant struggle for most, this kind of community is particularly well-suited for the formation of this kind of bond. Indeed, an important part of building community is creating the notion of a “common project” with those around you—that is, a common set of goals that drives people to action. Public housing residents experience the notion of a common goal very strongly because they can all bond by reference to their marginality. Most everyone in the projects is seeking to adequately cope with the difficult conditions in which they live. This struggle is a powerful bonding force.¹¹⁹ It is also interesting to note that this argument is not unlike the one expounded above regarding the formation of strong social bonds amongst gang members.¹²⁰

Once this notion of a struggle—that feeling of “us against them”—is gone, the sense of community in the projects will likely lose some of its strength.¹²¹ It is important to understand that Manzo and her colleagues do not mean to say that in order for solidarity to exist there must be some existential struggle. Instead, they argue that those who return to the new projects have more reason to focus on their private goals. Those who are forced to relocate, too, have more reason to focus on their private goals because they have little in common with their wealthier neighbors.¹²² This last point is corroborated by Susan Clampet-Lundquist’s finding that public housing residents who were forced to relocate by means of a Section 8 voucher “were less likely than their counterparts in public housing develop-

116. Manzo et al., *supra* note 115, at 1860.

117. *Id.*

118. *Id.*

119. *Id.* at 1861.

120. *See supra* Part II.D.

121. Manzo et al., *supra* note 115, at 1861.

122. *Id.* at 1858.

ments to have a friend in the neighborhood or to regularly exchange with their neighbors.”¹²³

Once again, it does not seem like HOPE VI has the power to effect any kind of significant change on those conditions that most likely account for the formation of gangs and the violence they create. As with the other aspects we have examined above, the literature points to the fact that redevelopment has, at best, no effect on the formation of strong informal support networks. At worse, redevelopment leaves residents more isolated than before.

C. Overall Mental Health Conditions

In a sharp break from the trends examined heretofore, scholars generally agree that redevelopment has a positive impact on the overall mental health conditions of public housing residents. Prior to redevelopment, mental health problems were widespread. According to Popkin, “nearly one in three residents surveyed . . . (29 percent) reported poor mental health,” which is almost fifty percent higher than the national average.¹²⁴ Further, nearly one in six adults had experienced a major depressive episode within the past twelve months. And, making matters worse, the problem was not confined to adults. Approximately two-thirds of the children from whom they gathered data also exhibited at least one significant mental health problem.¹²⁵

Following redevelopment, however, mental health concerns were appreciably less prevalent. For example, a relocation study conducted in Boston found that males who relocated reported approximately an 18 percent reduction in mental health problems and associated behaviors.¹²⁶ A different relocation study conducted in Chicago also found a dramatic, and “almost immediate,” improvement of mental health among residents.¹²⁷ Interestingly, these studies indicate that “moving out of high-poverty public housing to more affluent areas [leads to] improved neighborhood safety and possibly improved housing conditions [and, further, the] fieldwork strongly suggests such changes are likely to be associated with reductions in parental stress and anxiety.”¹²⁸ In other words, relocation may improve mental health outcomes by reducing residents’ exposure to crime and violence.

123. Clampet-Lundquist, *supra* note 102, at 415.

124. *Id.*

125. *Id.*

126. Lawrence F. Katz et al., *Moving to Opportunity in Boston: Early Results of a Randomized Mobility Experiment*, 116 THE Q. J. OF ECON. 607, 633 (2001).

127. POPKIN ET AL., *supra* note 9, at 30.

128. Katz et al., *supra* note 126, at 613.

There are two noteworthy limitations to results presented by these studies. The first one is purely methodological and not very significant. The complication arises from the fact that most of the data on mental health has been gathered for studies that focus on Section 8 housing relocation exclusively. Consequently, the scope of these conclusions is somewhat narrower. That said, it is important to bear in mind that most of public housing residents affected by HOPE redevelopment are forced to relocate using these certificates.¹²⁹ As such, these results account for the majority of people affected by HOPE VI. Additionally, the positive effects of redevelopment on mental health are quite dramatic and seem to be consistent across relocation efforts all over the nation.¹³⁰ Consequently, this methodological limitation only has minor effects on the significance of the conclusions drawn. Accordingly, the conclusions reached by these studies should be considered no less consequential to the analysis and I proceed as though they describe the effect of HOPE VI *in toto*.

The other limitation to the positive results indicated by these studies should by now be familiar: isolation. Most scholars agree that the effects of redevelopment on mental health are very positive. However, they also seem to agree that the improvement would be even more significant were it not for the fact that moving into a completely redesigned or entirely new neighborhood isolates individuals, thereby increasing anxiety and depression.¹³¹ In a study of residents' post-redevelopment health, for example, Carlos Manjarrez found that HOPE VI participants still reported very high levels of anxiety and depression, reporting twice as many cases of depression as the most vulnerable population in the U.S., black women.¹³²

Such positive findings bode well for the capacity of HOPE VI to reduce the likelihood of gang formation and curb gang-related criminality. One possible explanation between improved mental health and lower rates of criminality is that individuals who are struggling with a transition—those vulnerable individuals who are likely to join a gang—are having less trouble coping with the changes in their lives. Why they have less trouble coping is less clear, however. The fact that they are more likely to be isolated suggests that the process has not become easier as a result of effective support mechanisms. Instead, it is possible that

129. See POPKIN ET AL., *supra* note 9, at 28.

130. *Id.* at 34.

131. *Id.*

132. CARLOS A. MANJARREZ ET AL., THE URB. INST., POOR HEALTH: ADDING INSULT TO INJURY FOR HOPE VI FAMILIES 3 (2007), http://www.urban.org/UploadPDF/311489_HOPEVI_Health.pdf.

they are simply dealing better with the change on their own, since now they have less stress to manage.

PART IV: PICO-ALISO CASE STUDY AND SELECTED INTERVIEWS

Having examined what the HOPE VI literature has to say about the possible effects of redevelopment on gang formation, I now turn to a case study of HOPE VI relocation in the Pico-Aliso community of Los Angeles. In this section, I recount the anecdotes of community members who experienced redevelopment first-hand. Through their stories, I hope to present a more or less unified perspective of redevelopment—the community's perspective. As I stated at the beginning of the essay, the purpose of conducting this case study is to contribute to the literature on HOPE VI and to begin to close the huge methodological gap that currently exists.

For all of the methodological difficulties inherent in a quantitative analysis, it is clear that the qualitative approach also suffers from quite a number of drawbacks. Here, I briefly introduce some of them. First and foremost, the views of these individuals can hardly be construed to be the perspective of the entire community. Not only because there is no such thing as a unified “community perspective,” but because, even if a community perspective existed, it would be impossible to determine whether the views of the interviewees are the same as the “community perspective.”

Additionally, there are some contradictions, or at least inconsistencies, between some of the accounts. Where the inconsistency concerns factual matters, the confusion may be easily dispelled with further research. However, it becomes much more difficult to resolve inconsistencies regarding matters where no record exists or individuals' opinions are split down the middle. In these cases, using their best of judgments and a healthy dose of intuition, the reader will simply have to decide for him or herself whom to trust.

Lastly, the method for selecting interviewees, although unstructured, can hardly be said to be random. On the contrary, most of the people I interviewed were very involved in the HOPE VI redevelopment process. Undeniably, any conclusions drawn from the information presented below will be wide open to charges of selection bias.

Never forgetting these flaws, I urge the reader to bring the advantages of this method to the foreground. For one, free-form interviews allow the interviewees to determine what topics they would like to speak about and how much they want to disclose

about each topic. Therefore, this format avoids imposing a predetermined direction on the conversation. Furthermore, this type of information gathering enables the interviewees to delve deeper into their opinions by fleshing them out with stories, jokes, aphorisms, and the like. In doing so, this method avoids forcing the individual into choosing, for example, either “yes” or “no” to a question that may best be answered by “maybe.”

A. *Brief History of the Pico-Aliso Community*

The Pico-Aliso community lies just east of the Los Angeles River and is located in the northwest corner of the Boyle Heights neighborhood. The Pico-Aliso community is formed, in part, by three separate housing projects—Pico Gardens, Pico Gardens Extension, and Aliso Village—which together formed the largest group of public housing projects west of the Mississippi.¹³³ The remaining part of the community consists of privately owned housing scattered in between projects. In 1993, HUD awarded the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles a grant to demolish and rebuild Pico Gardens and Pico Gardens Extension.¹³⁴ Subsequently, in 1998, it awarded another grant to demolish and rebuild Aliso Village.¹³⁵ Unlike the redeveloped units in Pico Gardens, most of the units in Aliso Village were transferred to the private market and were developed as part of HOPE VI’s efforts to create mixed-income housing in the area.¹³⁶ Consequently, Aliso Village is now known as Pueblo del Sol.

Although Boyle Heights served as the primary arrival destination for immigrants of varied ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds, the Pico-Aliso community has always been predominantly Hispanic. Today, the community is approximately 85% Hispanic.¹³⁷ In addition to being highly segregated, the community remains incredibly poor. Recall that the average an-

133. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 22.

134. HUD News Release, HUD No. 98-402, Cuomo Announces \$23 Million Grant To Los Angeles To Transform Public Housing And Help Residents Get Jobs (Aug. 18, 1998), <http://archives.hud.gov/news/1998/pr98-402.html> (Pico Gardens Extension is now known as Las Casitas).

135. *Id.*

136. *Id.*

137. VIGIL, *supra* note 3, at 22.

nual household income is close to \$11,000¹³⁸ and more than 60 percent of households have no source of earned income.¹³⁹

From its very inception, the Pico-Aliso Community has been afflicted by a scourge of gang violence. The first gang to emerge in the 1940s was the Cuatro Flats gang, which, at the time, resembled more of a youth club than today's gangs.¹⁴⁰ However, gang development continued and violence reached its apex in the 1990s, after the gangs formed solidified command hierarchies, established systematic narcotics operations, and routinely used automatic weapons to engage in turf wars.¹⁴¹ It was amid this social turmoil and inhuman conditions that HOPE VI redevelopment and relocation took place.

B. *Case Study: Selected Interviews*

*Yolanda, Former Resident of Aliso Village*¹⁴²

Yolanda was born in Durango Mexico, but she has been living in the U.S., more specifically, in Los Angeles, for a little over 40 years now. When she first moved to Los Angeles in 1968, she took up residence in a small apartment in East Los Angeles near Whittier, where she currently lives. She resided there for five years and then moved to what was then called Aliso Village. She remained there until she was forced to relocate in the year 2000. It is clear from our conversation that, for her, life in the projects meant a life full of struggle and hardships, but one of happiness as well.

Yolanda's life in the projects was, for better or for worse, fundamentally shaped by her experience with gangs. Aliso Village, she explained, consisted of seven different buildings and was home to five rival gangs. This meant that gunfights and shootings often took place from one building to another. Oftentimes, there was no place to go or to hide. On one occasion, she recounted, she was walking home with her sister-in-law when she saw three kids walking close to a fence, trying to cover something up. When she noticed this, Yolanda expressed concern and urged

138. *Id.* at 33. There is very little data on income in the Pico-Aliso community. Vigil states a number of times that the income of those in Pico Gardens, specifically, is lower than those of Boyle Heights residents. The only number he uses is the one cited above. However, he does not give a year nor does he cite a source. Furthermore, the average or even the median household income for Boyle Heights in 2000 seems to elude clear definition as various sources cite different numbers. Nevertheless, the main point still stands: Residents of the Pico-Aliso community live in deep poverty.

139. *Id.* at 31.

140. *Id.* at 40.

141. *Id.* at 47-50.

142. Interview with Yolanda Ramirez, Former Resident of Aliso Village, in L.A., Cal. (Oct. 2009).

her sister-in-law to pick up the pace. Sure enough, a few seconds later, one of the three kids pulled out a machine gun and started firing at a building next to where Yolanda and her sister-in-law were standing. The attack prompted another group of kids in the building to fire back. Yolanda and her sister-in-law found no other option than to hide behind some trashcans and use the lids as shields. She remembers another story, but this time with a saddened expression, where Father Boyle, the Jesuit priest who leads the community's parish, had just come back from burying one young man when another was killed in a gunfight.

Beyond issues of personal safety, however, a lot of the violence affected Yolanda in other ways because she was very close to many of the gang members. She developed relationships with some of the gang members by virtue of residing in Aliso Village. Yolanda recalled, for example, that she used to live next door to a gang member and his mother. The young man would often show up to his door very late at night and knock so that his mother would open the door for him. Although Yolanda often heard the knocking, for whatever reasons the mother oftentimes did not. This always worried Yolanda because it was always possible that the young man was trying to get inside to hide from danger. As such, every minute that the young man spent waiting outside the door counted as one more minute of imminent danger. To remedy the situation, Yolanda took it upon herself to call the young man's mother whenever she heard him knocking. This created a strong bond between Yolanda and the young man, for he realized that Yolanda was always there to look out for him and help protect him from getting hurt. Yolanda also befriended many gangsters because they were friends of her sons, even though her sons were not in any of the gangs. Indeed, according to her, her relationships with some of the gang members were so good that she felt comfortable cussing them out or standing up to them whenever they were up to no good.

The close relationships she developed, though, exposed her to a great deal of pain whenever any of her "surrogate sons" was killed in a gang battle. As Yolanda stated, "We fought very hard here and we left many shoes walking [for Caminatas Pro Paz] and we left our hearts and many disappoints and much pain because we saw kids we know get shot."

At the same time, the very source of her anxiety and heartache was also an important source of her happiness. The unwavering violence led Yolanda and many other residents to form strong communal bonds. Perhaps, the best example of this is her involvement with Caminatas Pro Paz, a group whose goal was to take the streets back from the gangs. The rationale behind the

effort, she says, is that gang members were in the minority so it was possible to mitigate the violence by a simple show of force. As she put it, "We are the barrio, we make the barrio." To that end, Yolanda and a group of residents sought out the assistance of Father Boyle and Leonardo Vilches to create peace walks wherein large groups of residents gathered every Friday night to walk through the streets of the community. Importantly, through *Caminatas Pro Paz* and other peace-promoting initiatives, Yolanda met and worked with many of the Pico-Aliso residents.

During our conversation, I asked Yolanda if the gang problems had subsided after redevelopment. According to her, the situation has improved significantly, largely because the housing authority "kicked out" many of the families whose members were involved with gangs. Nowadays, a lot of people feel like they are living in "Disney World." I also asked Yolanda how she would go about solving the gang problem if she had an unlimited amount of resources, time, and cooperation. She answered that the biggest obstacles to finding a definitive solution included the lack of employment opportunities and the very poor parenting that existed in some families. She expressed bafflement at the fact that some parents see their children dressed in gang attire but fail to say anything about it. For her, not saying anything is tantamount to condoning the behavior. She always told her kids to be mindful of getting involved with any gangs because, in the end, they were affecting the whole family.

Towards the end of the interview, I inquired about her life after the projects. She expressed her sense of disbelief by saying, "I always thought I would be taken from here straight to the cemetery." After all, she said, she had built her entire life in the projects—she had raised her kids in the projects, had suffered in the projects, built a community in the projects, and attended church in the projects. At heart, she is a product of the projects.

Upon eviction, Yolanda and her family moved to the house where they currently reside. The house is a quaint two-story unit surrounded by several other units of comparable size in the same lot. The house is located a few blocks away from where Yolanda lived when she first moved to Los Angeles. She pays for the rent with the help of a Section 8 voucher. She currently lives there with two of her children. The house, said Yolanda, is very clearly nicer than her apartment in the projects. It is cleaner, safer, more comfortable, and affords more privacy.

Nevertheless, she feels like she has been uprooted from her community and, in spite of living with her children, she feels lonely and isolated. In order to remedy this, she remains very involved with the Pico-Aliso community through her work for

Dolores Mission. She goes back to her barrio, she said, as often as she can.

*Father Gregory Boyle, Director, Homeboy Industries*¹⁴³

Father Boyle is one of those people who needs no introduction. He has been closely involved with the Pico-Aliso community for close to thirty years now, having served as the priest for Dolores Mission and the head of Jobs For a Future and currently serves as Executive Director of Homeboy Industries. More importantly, Father Boyle has an intimate, first-hand knowledge of many of the trials and triumphs of the Pico-Aliso community.

I first met Father Boyle in his office at Homeboy Industries, a few blocks away from Pico-Aliso. During our short interview, I asked Father Boyle about the benefits and drawbacks of HOPE VI redevelopment. He responded that HOPE VI was a wonderful program that had adequately responded to many of the community's needs. Wishing to press him a little further, I inquired about the critics of the program who think that HOPE VI merely displaces people, leaving them worse-off. Father Boyle is skeptical of the critiques. He added that, for a long time after the demolitions, he was invited to the christening of a great many houses that had been newly leased or rented by former Pico-Aliso residents with government aid.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged that HOPE VI redevelopments had created a significant divide among the Pico-Aliso residents. Some, he said, had rejected the idea of redevelopment because they were opposed to relocation. Others welcomed the much-needed improvements to the housing stock and felt as though they were getting "a fresh start." In general, Father Boyle seemed to think that HOPE VI had not solved all, or even many, of the community's problems. For example, a small number of the gang members who left the community after relocation have, at times, come back to continue their gang activities. And yet, for most everyone—those who stayed and those who left—the new units were "nicer places to live." This, alone, had changed the environment and the outlook for many people, making "hope . . . easier to access." And this, Father Boyle says, is vital, "For after all, hopeful kids, won't join gangs."¹⁴⁴

143. Interview with Father Gregory Boyle, Director, Homeboy Industries, Inc., in L.A., Cal. (Oct. 2009).

144. Quoted portions of this section are excerpts from an email conversation between the author and Father Gregory Boyle, Director, Homeboy Industries, Inc.

*Maria, Former Resident*¹⁴⁵

Maria lived in Pico-Gardens for many years before she was forced to relocate, as a result of HOPE redevelopment, without HOPE VI assistance. She moved to Santa Barbara because she had some family in the area and has been there ever since. Nevertheless, Maria visits the Pico-Aliso community with regularity in order to attend service at Dolores Mission and to see the family members that still reside in the housing projects. I met Maria at Dolores Mission on a sunny Sunday morning as she was waiting to attend the 9:00 a.m. service.

After introducing myself, we started talking about the changes in her life and in the Pico-Aliso community after HOPE. First, she said that she was very happy living in Santa Barbara, as she found the community to be peaceful and really liked her house. Curious to know whether she owned the house, I asked and Maria responded affirmatively. Her husband worked in landscaping and construction for many years, until he retired, and had managed to save a little bit of money, which, in addition to government subsidies, had been enough to purchase the home.

I asked her why she had moved to Santa Barbara and she explained that she had done so because some of her family lived there. She expressed that it was important to have family nearby. Of course, she had family in the projects, but they had been allowed to stay and she had been forced to go. She also mentioned that being near family after relocation was all the more important because her chances of knowing someone at the new location were not very high.

Maria then went back to extolling the virtues of living in her new community, saying that the neighborhood was very safe, clean, and that her house is a good place to live in, unlike the poor condition of the “old” projects. She mentioned, for example, that moving to Santa Barbara had eased a lot of the pressure exerted on her sons by gangs. In Pico-Aliso, she said, her sons’ friends were a bad influence because they were involved with the local gangs. In Santa Barbara, however, her sons had to make new friends and these were “good kids.”

I then asked her if there was anything she didn’t like about her new location. She took her time thinking and at first had little to say. However, she then stated that she liked having a community in the old projects and that she didn’t have that now. She told me that when she lived in Pico-Aliso, she would often socialize with her neighbors, as they provided a very good system of

145. Interview with Maria Lopez, Former Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Oct. 2009).

support. In her new place, she said, it was only family. She has not really spoken to, much less socialized, with her new neighbors since the move.

I wondered if this might be the reason why she was at Dolores Mission that day, so I asked her why she was in the neighborhood. She responded that she did, in fact, return because she felt that it was still her community, especially the congregation at Dolores Mission, and she returned to see her family. Although she would never want to “go back” to the projects of old, Maria felt a special bond with the people in the neighborhood. Perhaps, she added, the bond was born out of the horrible violence the neighborhood had to endure.

*Rita, Community Member and Activist*¹⁴⁶

I first met Rita outside Dolores Mission as she was about to enter the church. Although no longer a resident of the community, Rita, like many others, visits Dolores Mission and the “barrio” quite often. On that day, she was going to attend a service being held in honor of Stephanie Raygoza, a young girl who had been killed by a gang member’s stray bullet back in 2000.

Rita is a middle-aged woman who, for many years, lived in a rental house behind Pico Gardens Extension. Rita did not receive any government subsidies and is, therefore, not a public housing resident. Nevertheless, she was a member of the Pico-Aliso community for many years before and after redevelopment and, as such, has a intimate knowledge of the changes brought about by HOPE VI.

Generally, Rita said, those who moved out of the Pico-Aliso community were doing well. She knew several people who had accepted Section 8 vouchers and now lived in much safer neighborhoods—areas where they no longer had to be continually afraid of gunfights between gang members. Safety was, in part, one of the reasons she too left the Pico Aliso area. Indeed, gang violence personally affected Rita, as three of her family members had been killed in gang-related shootouts over the course of the years. So, she said, it was time to move out of the neighborhood.

Nevertheless, Rita also chose to become an active participant in the Pico-Aliso community and remained involved with Proyecto Pastoral even after she had moved away. Rita told me that it was interesting that violence had made her leave the neighborhood, but had also prompted her to become more involved and strengthen her ties to others. She also mentioned that she thought her life experience in Pico-Aliso was common. On

146. Interview with Rita Chairez, Former Resident of Pico-Aliso, in L.A., Cal. (Nov. 2009).

the one hand, people hoped for a better life and wished they could move. On the other hand, they also felt strong ties to their community, because the community reached out to individuals in the same way it reached out to her.

*Patty, Current Resident*¹⁴⁷

Patty is an outgoing American woman in her early forties. She rents a house on the private market, so she does not have any personal experience with public housing. Nevertheless, she has lived in the Pico-Aliso community for over ten years and has an intimate knowledge of the area.

I asked Patty about the economic conditions in the area and whether they had improved during the past few years. On the contrary, she said, economic conditions in the neighborhood were quickly declining. She mentioned, for example, that many residents who had bought a house with government assistance during redevelopment had lost their homes to foreclosure. This is not surprising, according to Patty, since a lot of community members have lost their jobs and have had a difficult time finding another one. This difficulty was due, in part, to the deteriorating market conditions, namely, the closing of many of the nearby factories. To make matters worse, those that do have jobs often earn very little money working in the garment industry.

Being interested in the topic of violence, I asked Patty if the neighborhood was safer than it had been in the past. She told me that the neighborhood was generally safer, but that there were still a fair amount of problems. She pointed to numerous graffiti scrawled on the sidewalk, spelling various gang names styled in typical "street" font. The kids did this, she said, in order to mark their territory. Patty then told me the very tragic story of a young four-year-old girl who had been killed by a stray bullet only two blocks away from her house, a little over a year ago.

On a brighter note, though, Patty seemed pleased with the fact that there had been multiple infrastructure development projects in recent years. Specifically, she mentioned that four different schools had been built.

*Cecilia, Current Resident*¹⁴⁸

Cecilia has lived most of her 75 years of life here in Los Angeles, having immigrated from Guatemala when she was just a young child. When she first moved to Pico Gardens eight years

147. Interview with Patty, Current Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Apr. 2009).

148. Interview with Cecilia, Current Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Apr. 2009).

ago, she was working as a housekeeper, however, she recently had to stop working after being diagnosed with cancer and becoming too sick to work. In general, Cecilia is very pleased with the Pico-Aliso community.

I first asked Cecilia about the current economic conditions, but she didn't have much to say other than what everyone already knew—it is a difficult economic situation for everyone and finding a job is incredibly difficult. Nevertheless, she said, the impact is mitigated by the sense of community. She explained that community residents had realized they needed to protect each other if they were ever to overcome the significant socio-economic obstacles they faced everyday. This amount of support, she said, made her very happy. It was also a relief because it showed that many of her neighbors cared about the community, which is, according to her, a value that many residents share.

I also asked Cecilia about the safety of the neighborhood. According to her, the Pico-Aliso community is very safe and noted as evidence the fact that children and adolescents often use the playground or freely roam the large, empty grassy areas. Like some of the other residents, she believes safety has improved because a lot of the “troublemakers” were not allowed to return after redevelopment.

*Lidia, Current Resident*¹⁴⁹

When she came to the door, Lidia seemed very busy and on edge. She cracked the door open just a tiny bit and poked her head out just enough to answer a few questions. She is a 40-year-old employed woman who has lived in Pico Gardens since before the HOPE VI demolition and reconstruction.

Unlike most others, Lidia had mainly negative things to say about the Pico-Aliso community and, especially, about the change from high- to low-density housing. In particular, she mentioned that safety had not really improved since before the demolition and that gangs are still rampant. She also mentioned that the older buildings were better because they were sturdy, whereas the new houses seemed to her to be “flimsy,” as though the wall was going to fall apart if she hit hard. Finally, Lidia mentioned that neighbors were no longer as close as they used to be before the demolition. Nowadays, according to Lidia, people tried to stay out of each others' business.

149. Interview with Lidia, Current Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Apr. 2009).

*Stella, Current Resident*¹⁵⁰

Stella is a young woman of Hispanic descent that has lived in Pico Gardens with her mother and father since 1992. Stella is currently employed, however, when I talked to her she had taken a day off of work in order to take care of her sick father. She used to work for the Los Angeles Housing Authority and has no children.

Stella is very frustrated with her life in the projects. She believes redevelopment did not do much to change the underlying problems plaguing the projects. Instead, she said, the reconstruction was merely a “facelift”—it improved the neighborhood’s façade but little else. One of the aspects of project life that has seen very little or no improvement is safety. According to Stella, gangs still control the neighborhood, commit a lot of crimes, and create a generalized sense of fear. The fear, she added, had a chilling effect on neighborly relationships. A lot of people refuse to establish close relationships with other residents for fear of making acquaintances with “the wrong person.” She noted, however, that Pico-Aliso is a lot safer than many of the other housing projects in Los Angeles, especially Imperial Courts.

I also asked Stella about the change in resident composition after redevelopment. She told me that a lot of the people who were not allowed back into the community had simply moved to Estrada Courts, another public housing project less than three miles away. Nevertheless, not everyone ended up in another housing project. She cites, as an example, one of her childhood neighbors, a family with whom her parents were very close. When the government awarded the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (“HACLA”) money to redevelop Pico Gardens, Stella’s neighbors decided to leave. With the help of government subsidies and other private lenders, they bought a home in, what she claims, is a much nicer neighborhood.

Stella told the story, in part, as an example of what a brighter future might look like—a future outside the projects. Because of the poor quality of life, she regrets that she did not try to persuade her parents to move out of the projects when they had a chance. She also notes that it would have been nice to receive the money that HACLA gave those who opted to relocate. However, Stella’s story of a better life outside the projects seems to end poorly, as the family lost its house to foreclosure several years ago, before the recent economic downturn.

150. Interview with Stella, Current Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Apr. 2009).

*Carolina, Resident*¹⁵¹

Carolina has lived in the U.S. for approximately 20 years, including three of those years at Pico Gardens. She is an employed, single mother of five and, as one can imagine, very busy. As such, she was only able to talk with me for a short period of time.

My conversation with Carolina was dominated by her two primary concerns: safety and education. With regards to education, Carolina complained that the nearby schools failed to provide a good quality of education. She also lamented that a lot of the after school and youth programs, offered by either the schools or the community, were not free. She mentioned that she had thought about enrolling one of her children in a nearby youth program, but it costs \$50 per month. As a single parent trying to raise five children, she said, \$50 dollars was simply not feasible.

As far as safety is concerned, Carolina was also rather pessimistic. Like some of her fellow residents, she was also very concerned about the prevalence of gangs. She complained that it was easy for Pico-Aliso families to “lose” their children to the gangs. And, she added, even if one’s family does not become involved with gangs, we all continue to live in fear of gang violence.

*Cynthia, Staff Member at Proyecto Pastoral*¹⁵²

Cynthia has never resided in the Pico-Aliso community, but she has worked for Proyecto Pastoral (“Proyecto”) for the last four years. Proyecto is a Jesuit organization created in the community that provides a variety of educational and support services for Pico-Aliso residents.

More specifically, Proyecto works with a number of children from the community to provide academic support, including tutoring in all areas. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, Proyecto takes the steps necessary to ensure that children stay in school as long as possible. Thus, they keep track of and attend parent teacher conferences, develop workshops to help parents understand the educational system, and provide special assistance for children who need to improve their English-language abilities.

Cynthia believes this kind of work addresses the root of the gang problem. According to her, many kids in the neighborhood have a hard time looking beyond middle or high school. As such,

151. Interview with Carolina, Current Resident of Pico-Gardens, in L.A., Cal. (Apr. 2009).

152. Telephone Interview with Cynthia Sanchez, Director, Proyecto Pastoral (Nov. 2009).

the attrition rate for Latino males at schools in the area is close to 70%. The lack of education, she says, gets children and adolescents into trouble. Instead of going to school, they sit around at home, looking for employment opportunities they are, inevitably, unable to find. The children's families are not much help either, as parents are oftentimes simply unaware of what role they should be playing in their children's lives or how to work through challenges. This is why the "hand holding" is required.

I asked Cynthia about the level of violence that the community currently experiences. Like most people, she said things seemed to be much better than in the past, but that gang violence was still a very real concern. She cited two recent events as an example of the problem. Approximately two years ago, as families were coming back from Good Thursday mass, several shots were fired. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Additionally, approximately two months ago, some gang members who used to live in the community were released from prison and returned to cause trouble. They started harassing community members and adolescents, asking them what gang they belonged to. After a few hours, they approached a couple that lives in a house near the projects and shot both of them. Fortunately, they have both since recovered.

I thought it curious that gang members were coming back to the neighborhood to cause mischief, so I asked her for her thoughts on the matter. She answered that most of the gang members who lived in the neighborhood prior to redevelopment had been barred from moving back after the units had been rebuilt. Their expulsion had made life in Pico-Aliso a lot quieter and safer. Still, she said, "Just because you tear down dilapidated buildings and build shiny new buildings doesn't mean that the issues are gone. A lot of the kids come back."

PART V: ANALYSIS

At last we are ready to answer the two questions driving the entire analysis. First, I asked whether HOPE is an effective and efficient method for curbing gang violence. Second, I seek to determine whether the advances HOPE has made in terms of violence and crime have been achieved in a manner consistent with public policy and our ethics.

The literature clearly shows us that HOPE does not curb gang-related criminality by lowering poverty rates amongst those who were in gangs or were likely to join gangs. Indeed, the literature shows that HOPE has little or no effect on the income levels or employment opportunities for those who relocate and for those who return. This is echoed in the Pico-Aliso experience by

several interviewees. Maria's husband, for example, has had the same employment for many years. His relocation to a better neighborhood in Santa Barbara does not seem to have opened up opportunities for a better job. This lesson also comes to life with the unfortunate ending to the story of Stella's neighbors. Decidedly, many factors could have aggravated this particular family's situation, thereby making their story atypical. Thus, it would hardly seem fair to judge HOPE on the basis of this one family's story that is, perhaps, riddled with misfortunes like poor health, addictions, or any number of misfortunes unrelated to employment opportunities or income. However, many of those in public housing suffered and continue to suffer from evils such as these and the fact remains that the family was unable to afford mortgage payments on a modest house, as many other similarly situated families may likely experience.

It is further unlikely that HOPE has had any significant impact on individuals' status as relegated minorities—people distinct from mainstream America. In fact, according to some authors, HOPE actually aggravates residents' sense of isolation by surrounding them with wealthier neighbors that do not share a common past or a common future. Pico-Aliso residents corroborate the literature as well. Maria, for example, remains companionless in her new neighborhood. Yolanda returns to the projects as often as she can, as many others do. Father Boyle's perspective, however, provides a ray of hope. If he is correct, then the mere act of living in a better neighborhood, one's own continuing poverty notwithstanding, is sufficient to provide hopes for a better future. Father Boyle further suggests that this glimmer of hope—the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel—is enough to prevent the reckless abandon exhibited by Green Eyes' statement that nothing in his life mattered. Still, Father Boyle's statements seem to be uncorroborated by either the literature or the views of Pico-Aliso residents themselves. One could even go so far as to say that Father Boyle's ministry itself undermines his statement. For it is no coincidence that Father Boyle's flagship program creates jobs for marginalized youth, as opposed to providing them with low-cost home loans, for example. What public housing residents need in order to regain any hope of leaving their status as outcasts is a permanent source of wealth—i.e., a job.

We have also seen that HOPE does very little to improve the adequacy of social institutions and informal support networks to aid those facing the greatest need of guidance and socializing. The Pico-Aliso experience suggests that the most important institution—the family—remains in shatters. Indeed, Proyecto Pastoral's methodology is premised on the fact that most families in

the community still do not know how to or cannot fulfill their roles appropriately. On the other hand, the literature paints a picture of isolated individuals with few informal networks they can turn to for assistance. These individuals lack friends or neighbors to introduce them to the rules of the game in their new neighborhoods. Schools present the only real hope for low-income youths to receive the necessary socialization and support as they struggle through poverty. As we saw, the results in this area are mixed. The literature cannot seem to agree on whether children even stay in school once they arrive in their new neighborhoods. The residents of Pico-Aliso are also divided. Some, like Patty, tell us that four new schools have been built in the community in years past. Others, like Carolina, report that the quality of education is extremely poor. Finally, Cynthia tells us that neither of these variables is relevant because children are simply not going to school.

The greatest promise that HOPE redevelopment holds for curbing gang violence and criminality is reducing the emotional and mental stress experienced by residents and, in doing so, affording them the opportunity to cope with difficult situations in a healthier manner. This argument is similar to that made by Father Boyle above, namely, that the mere fact of moving to a new neighborhood or returning to an improved project alleviates concerns enough to change individuals' mindsets. This change in attitude, in turn, allows them to seek better and non-destructive ways of coping with frustrations and uncertainties. The reduction in stress, referred to in the literature, is very clearly expressed by many, but not all, of the Pico-Aliso community members. Maria, Cecilia, Patty and Yolanda all seem to rest easier now that many of the crime-related problems have subsided. Many, however, echo the concern that residents will feel more isolated after redevelopment.

So, how does HOPE lower gang-related crime? It is hard to give a definitive answer insofar as it is practically impossible to pin down a causal mechanism exactly. Nevertheless, on the basis of the analysis presented above, I would like to posit that HOPE does not achieve any of its positive results by altering the root conditions that give rise to gangs. Rather, it does so in a completely different manner. Instead of addressing the root conditions that lead to gang formation, HOPE reduces gang violence by dispersing and isolating individuals. In other words, by dispersing the majority of its projects' residents, HOPE makes it very difficult for individuals to take to the streets in search of answers. HOPE crushes gangs' *raison d'être*, including the formation of social bonds that provide support to individuals and instill in them a sense of belonging.

Most authors, as we have seen, conclude that HOPE isolates people in their new or redeveloped neighborhoods. For the most part, HOPE scholars speak about this as a drawback—a factor that prevents assimilation, acculturation, and better opportunities for employment and education, etc.—but they fail to see that the bonds that HOPE destroys are the same ones that give life to the gang. In the same way Cisco felt he had replaced his girlfriend's absent family, Yolanda similarly became a leader of *Caminatas Pro Paz* to protect her “surrogate children.” Insofar as HOPE disperses people, it destroys the social and place attachments referenced in the literature. Inevitably, this means that gangs are less likely to form and that the tight-knight community that Yolanda so fondly remembers no longer exists.

Is this the most effective and efficient method for ameliorating the scourge that is gang violence? I really cannot be sure, for this would involve comparing HOPE to other possible strategies. One thing is true, though, that HOPE has been very effective at diminishing gang-violence. These effects alone should not be underestimated. After all, other than Yolanda, none of the residents of Pico-Aliso said they would like to return to the days of old when the strong bonds of community were constantly strengthened by the seemingly endless resolve of teenagers to kill each other.

That said, it is clear that HOPE's methods for preventing gang violence are neither consistent with our public policy nor our ethics. At heart, HOPE tries to improve the lot of those who are marginalized, but only at the cost of marginalizing them further. The program gives hope to the most vulnerable populations in our society by promising a better life, but then delivers this promise by sanctioning increased isolation and social deprivation. Are the positive results HOPE has had in some areas worth this continued isolation? I leave this question for others to explore.