

The Other War At Home: The Geopolitics of U.S. Poverty

Jeff Maskovsky

Department of Anthropology
Montclair State University

ABSTRACT: This paper examines how neoliberal projects of subjectification have reshaped the politicization of the U.S. urban poor. Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of civic activism and community conflict in impoverished areas of Philadelphia, the paper illustrates how neoliberal hegemony is constituted at the level of the grassroots, as market-based assumptions about social value, productivity and investment come to dominate civic life and the elaboration of political identities in poor neighborhoods. It also shows how the state manages political deliberation and dissent by pitting civic activists against one another around neoliberal distinctions between the “productive” and “unproductive” poor. These distinctions incite forms of geopolitical identification that are the local expression of post-Cold War nation-building ideologies. In the absence of a Soviet enemy outside U.S. borders, patriotic citizenship is now posited in contradistinction to a new “unproductive” enemy within.

I begin with a brief sketch of a political conflict that I am studying in the city of Philadelphia. The conflict involves two activist groups: the first is the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP), a vibrant and successful community organization of churches, schools and civic groups from the poor

and working-class neighborhoods of North Philadelphia. For several years, EPOP has organized against a range of "quality of life" threats affecting residents in immiserated inner-city neighborhoods, and it has spearheaded an anti-bligh campaign to jumpstart neighborhood revitalization in these areas. A non-partisan group that operates outside of formal city patronage routes and across the boundaries of race and faith, EPOP is an example of the kind of Alinsky-style place-based community organizing that has flourished in formerly industrialized cities like Philadelphia. The second group is Prevention Point Philadelphia (PPP). Formed as an offshoot of the radical AIDS activist group, ACT UP, PPP fought a successful battle to legalize and gain city funding for syringe exchange, a strategy designed to diminish the spread of AIDS by reducing the number of dirty needles in circulation among injection drug users. Since then, it has operated a city-funded drop-in center and a half-dozen needle exchange sites. Needles are exchanged out of a van that travels on a regular schedule to different street corners in impoverished areas, several of which are located in the neighborhoods where EPOP is active. Prevention Point is the local embodiment of the harm reduction movement. This movement opposes the criminalization and stigmatization of drug users and sex workers and endeavors instead to encourage active drug users to take steps to reduce their own risk for HIV and other potentially dangerous health and social risks without necessarily being encouraged to quit drugs altogether.

A clash between these two groups occurred in March of 1998, when EPOP held a "public action" at a neighborhood church in the Kensington section of the city. In front of a packed crowd of supporters, EPOP's leadership unveiled a plan for residents to "take back" their neighborhood. The plan included a number of demands for assistance from city officials who were in attendance at EPOP's request. Chief among these demands was a call for the health department to remove Prevention Point's drop-in center from Kensington. From the point of

view of many neighborhood residents, services for active drug users were yet one more example of the kinds of ill-managed city services that have contributed to the onset of the infrastructural decay, crime and violence that now plague the neighborhood.

From the point of view of the activists involved with Prevention Point, however, removing services for active drug users would be a serious setback in their fight against AIDS. PPP cites epidemiological data to show that Kensington is an epicenter of Philadelphia's AIDS and substance abuse epidemics, which disproportionately affect poor African Americans and Latinos, including many in Kensington. Prevention Point's withdrawal would abandon an important segment of the neighborhood population that is often blocked (due to the stigma and stiff criminal penalties associated with illicit drug use) from accessing mainstream public health and disease prevention services. This group was already in imminent life-threatening danger of contracting AIDS and other diseases. Prevention Point staff and volunteers feared that EPOP's actions would further marginalize the people they were trying to help. They fought against the removal of their programs, arguing that residents who use illicit drugs still have the right to public health services.

I begin this paper by describing this situation because it exemplifies the kind of community conflicts North American urban ethnographers often encounter in the course of fieldwork. At first glance, this battle seems rather straightforward, with an activist-based organization working on issues of health care access, and community residents mobilizing against them in the name of "quality of life" neighborhood safety. Yet this commonsense understanding of the situation is distinctly *not* the understanding a responsible anthropological practice should embrace. The real story here lies not in the quality of the opposition between the two groups, but in the larger ideological currents that array such groups against each other in

the first place. In this paper, I contend that the state manages political deliberation and dissent by pitting civic activists against one another around the age-old distinction between, as Michael Katz has famously written, “deserving” and “undeserving” poor (Katz 1989). In the current conjuncture, this distinction has been transformed by neoliberalism, as market-based assumptions about social value, productivity and investment come to dominate civic life and the elaboration of political identities. I argue that these distinctions provide the ideological cornerstone for the elaboration of citizenship among civic activists in poor neighborhoods. As we shall see, by following the process through which grassroots political constituencies appropriate privatist ideological assumptions as an aspect of their civic agency, it is possible to chart how neoliberal hegemony is constituted at the level of the grassroots. This paper, then, shows how neoliberal governance is consolidated in the dialectic between civic activists and the state.

Ethnographic Views of Poverty and Grassroots Activism

The findings presented here are based on fieldwork I conducted in Philadelphia beginning in 1998. The focus of this fieldwork was the dynamics of civic participation and community mobilization in three of the city’s most impoverished neighborhoods. It was conducted as part of a collaborative project with my colleagues Judith Goode and Susan Hyatt, with the support of a team of research assistants. I attended numerous community, ward and neighborhood action committee meetings, interviewed dozens of residents, city officials, developers, volunteers, activists and service workers, and conducted participant-observation research in schools, recreation centers, churches, housing projects, and at social service agencies. Through this fieldwork, I compiled accounts of resident mobilizations and community conflicts and charted the com-

plexity of political identifications and shifting elaborations of place that emerged in the course of residents' political action.

In focusing on poor residents' grassroots activism and civic participation, my approach is somewhat at odds with a long history of ethnographic research on the inner city poor. Typically, ethnography emphasizes the "emic" cultural categories through which inner-city residents make sense of and cope with their own impoverishment while it ignores politics and collective agency as an aspect of poor people's everyday lives.¹ In contrast to what could be called the social typology school of U.S. urban ethnography, my approach builds on an alternative ethnographic tradition in anthropology and in other disciplines that places poor people's political *agency* at the center of analysis (Hyatt 1995; Kingfisher 1996; Maxwell 1988; Susser 1996; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Williams 1992). This approach defines political participation broadly to include the wide variety of formal and informal activities designed not only to cope with the conditions of poverty but to resist and change them (Anglin 1988; Bookman and Morgen 1988; Susser 1982; Zavella 1987; see also Singerman 1995). Moreover, it does not romanticize the poor as political actors. Rather, it situates different groups' experiences of poverty, and their political responses to it, in dialectical relation to political and economic developments occurring across multiple scales (from global to local) and to the interconnected ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation. In this article, I highlight the extent to which poor people's politicization is, through its intersection with the politics of place, implicated in the consolidation of neoliberal hegemony.

Neoliberalism and the New Urban Poverty

As is by now well known, neoliberalism is the post-Keynesian model of the social order that champions unin-

dered market forces as the most effective means toward achieving economic growth and guaranteeing social welfare (Sanchez-Otero 1993; Bourdieu 1999). As such, it has involved a retreat from and privatization of the welfare state, and the invocation by the post-welfare state of matching consumers and producers in the private marketplace for goods and service provision. This has involved the concomitant conversion of all subjects into either consumers or producers/providers. With respect to the poor, this must be seen for what it is: an ideological power play. For, although one of the consequences of the rise of neoliberalism has been economic polarization at an unprecedented level, the neoliberal valorization of the market claims that everyone, including the poor, is assumed to be possessed of empowerment thanks to the liberating structure of the market itself. Once government gets out of the way of "opportunity," the logic goes, progress will take care of itself. Accordingly, no specific measures need be taken to address the problems of poverty and inequality, since these will eventually be solved by the natural working of the "free" market. Theoretically speaking, this is a project of subjectification, of creating "subjects of value," as Paul Smith (1997: 222) has written, well-suited to the demands and needs of late capitalism.

This process of subjectification is crucial to understanding the EPOP-PPP conflict in the context of neoliberalism. Decades of disinvestment, deindustrialization and decay have made cities frantic for capital investment. At the same time, a quarter-century of rising corporate profits coupled with economic polarization has produced huge stockpiles of capital in search of investment. As a result, cities, whose declining fortunes have been greatly exacerbated by this same process of economic polarization, have become somewhat attractive because of their large swaths of devalued land and the willingness of municipal authorities to provide massive subsidies to investors. The downtown business, entertainment and tourist districts that have sprung up as a result of new investment have been cel-

ebrated as models for how entire cities can be redeveloped (see Harvey 1985, Smith 1996, Zukin 1991). In reality, the downtown development model runs on public subsidies, and therefore takes precious public resources away from poor and working class neighborhoods in which redlining, industrial withdrawal and job loss already have produced downward mobility, decay of housing stock, population turnover and the weakening of local civic and community organizations. Ideologically, however, the downtown development model has become hegemonic, serving as a trickle-down model not only for downtown, but for the neighborhoods as well.

The neoliberal ideology of urban development therefore provides a powerful rationale for poor communities to adopt the privatist, market-oriented priorities of capital. The “stick” of privatizing the welfare state is balanced by the “carrot” of market-based policies designed to promote entrepreneurship, self-help and personal responsibility among the poor. Accordingly, the “ghetto,” a pathological, isolated and unproductive *place*, is now being recast as a potentially productive *space*, an investment frontier that can be integrated into the technological flow of information and investment that is now circulating at a global scale.

The recent history of neighborhood redevelopment in Philadelphia is a case study in the dynamics that ensue when city government attempts to transform poor neighborhoods from dependent places to investment spaces. Philadelphia has famously been called the “city of neighborhoods” owing to its exceptionally low number of tenement apartments and its correspondingly high proportion of homeownership via small, cheap rowhouses. This pattern of housing and its attendant social relations have been both a cause and a symptom of the city’s relatively entrenched neighborhood-based identity. Unlike the image of the global city, in which ethnic neighborhoods are overwhelmed ideologically and culturally by the image of the stranger, the transient, and the pulsing excitement of ur-

banity itself, Philadelphia represents a kind of overgrown rust-belt town, in many ways akin to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City and St. Louis. Like most U.S. cities, it is not a haven for international investment, and the deindustrialization it has undergone is not adequately represented or analyzed by the concept of globalization as the term is commonly used (c.f., Sassen 1991; Castells and Hall 1994).

Moreover, Philadelphia's economic devastation is particularly severe because its industry has always been disproportionately weighted toward manufacturing and, within manufacturing, toward non-durables. Non-durable manufacturing like textiles is much easier to relocate than durable manufacturing, and in the 20th century became relatively independent of natural resources and topography (unlike, say, mining). In the transition from manufacturing to a service economy, the city has not fared particularly well, in part because its neighborhood-based identity, with its attendant assumptions about the industrial working class that resides there, is viewed as extraneous, or worse, as an impediment, to the creation of a high-end, technological workforce, a prerequisite, it is assumed, for making a U.S. city competitive in the New Economy.²

With mediocre prospects as a competitive hub in the New Economy, poor and working class neighborhoods in Philadelphia have nonetheless been forced to endure the mostly disastrous consequences of market-based models of urban planning. As early as the 1950s, redevelopment and neighborhood "revitalization" has meant "slum clearance" and "blight removal" for every neighborhood outside of the city center. Indeed, while the city has oriented considerable public investment to the resurrection of the downtown commercial district and to the gentrification of several neighborhoods that surround it (Smith 1996: 119-139; Cybriwsky et al. 1986), the poor and working class neighborhoods outside the city center have become zones of disinvestment. Slum clearance has been coupled with the sporadic creation of enterprise zones (1980s) and empower-

ment zones (1990s), redevelopment policies designed to attract private capital through limited public subsidies and tax breaks. It is no surprise, given Philadelphia's dismal prospects at attracting private capital and its chronically low levels of available locally-based venture capital, that these redevelopment strategies have proven generally ineffective as an economic remedy for poor neighborhoods. For instance, both EPOP and Prevention Point are active in the area designated by the Clinton administration as part of the Philadelphia Empowerment Zone. In this area, \$79 million in investment over 5 years managed to create only 1,790 jobs (Philadelphia Empowerment Zone 2001). Moreover, it was unable to stave off a massive population loss, reported by the Philadelphia Inquirer to be a staggering 17% of the neighborhood's total population (Gorenstein 2001). Despite its dismal performance, city officials nonetheless defend the empowerment zone (EZ) as a success. For instance, the EZ communication director told me during an interview: "Well, look at it this way, imagine what would have happened here if we hadn't had the Zone." This comment reveals the *realpolitik* of Philadelphia's urban renewal policies – that what these strategies represent is actually blight containment, not blight elimination.³

Blight containment is, of course, hardly a phenomenon unique to Philadelphia. In fact, despite the specific histories of different metropolitan areas and the discrepancy of micro-level events in particular neighborhoods, the pattern of immiseration described above is fairly common across U.S. cities. However, the redevelopment policies that have failed so miserably in Philadelphia and elsewhere have nonetheless been promoted at the national level by policy experts such as Harvard economist Michael Porter and those associated with his Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (Porter 1995, 1997; Boston Consulting Group 1998, 2001). The strategies promoted by Porter were the cornerstone of the Clinton administration's "new markets initiative," which received widespread bipartisan sup-

port and which are likely to continue, though with a parallel emphasis on expanding the role of faith-based organizations, under the Bush administration. Proponents of these policies point to revitalization in poor areas of Boston and Oakland, California as proof that capital investment can save poor communities, but these are, of course, the exceptions that prove the rule. Curiously, many of the revitalization strategies embraced by Porter mirror those imposed in developing nations under structural adjustment. They are, in fact, its domestic equivalent, and they are likely to produce the same unimpressive results.⁴

What they have accomplished, however, is the narrowing of the political arena for the poor. In fact, in Philadelphia, as in many other cities, policies designed to transform inner city neighborhoods from dependent places to investment spaces have done more to reshape the institutional and ideological basis for poor people's demands upon the state than they have to attract investment. In particular, residents in poor and immiserated neighborhoods are increasingly encouraged to purge their ranks of the "undeserving" poor in order to make their neighborhoods more attractive to private investors. This agenda is now sold to neighborhood groups by well-meaning state functionaries as the only option for neighborhood revitalization, with the consequence that tensions and antagonisms *within* and *between* poor communities are intensified.

Poverty Out of Place

This is exactly what has happened in EPOP's mobilization against PPP. By harnessing civic values to productivity, capital investment and safety, EPOP has forged a politics in which the removal of injection drug users is equivalent to the removal of abandoned cars, dilapidated housing and other symptoms of "blight." No longer viewed or vilified as immoral or patho-

logical *per se*, injection drug users are instead seen simply as impediments to growth. They are an expression of the decadent, unproductive built environment and, as such, must be cleared. To return to the public action, Monsignor Edward Eliman, an EPOP member, avoids the overt vilification of drug users as the basis for his call for PPP's removal. Instead, he calls for the elimination of the moniker "the Badlands," which is often used interchangeably with Kensington to index the neighborhood's immiserated condition and reputation as a site of rampant drug use, crime and violence. He addresses the crowd: "There is no 'Badlands' in Philadelphia, but rather good people – fueled with hope and tempered with a long conflict with the forces of evil." This quote demonstrates that what is involved here for EPOP is not the vilification of drug users as a pathological and deviant category of individuals. Rather, it is the sanitization of the landscape of its bad qualities. Note in particular the extremely delicate and murky place of PPP's clientele in this formulation. They may be among the "good people" who are struggling with "the forces of evil," or they may themselves be the embodiment of those forces. The important thing to see is that the left-right argument about the structural versus cultural roots of poverty is effectively rendered irrelevant by Eliman's ambiguous formulation. The issue, instead, is growth as an economic and moral imperative.

What we see unfolding here is a form of neighborhood revanchism⁵ that favors some residents at the expense of others. In the current neoliberal conjuncture, this is organized around categories of productivity and drug users are, as with welfare mothers, undocumented workers and others who are typically coded as a racialized underclass, defined as non-citizens who are in the neighborhood but not of it. As Stephen Gregory has argued:

Discourses about the underclass and their enabling practices constitute, in part, an effort to reconstruct "free

labor" which in the hyper-stratified, postindustrial city has become immobilized, or locked-up in the underground economy and in the putative cycle of welfare dependency. It is this fixity of the inner-city poor, their apparent refusal to mobilize in response to the post-Fordist demands of capital, that drives calls for "taking back the street," breaking the cycle of welfare dependency and restoring the "self-reliance" of the patriarchal family (Gregory 1995: 20-21).

Here we see plainly the set of associations that get us from economic exigency to political expediency. The neoliberal promotion of economic growth at the expense of social equality produces a new kind of civic politics in which segments of the poor are vilified based on their inability or unwillingness to participate in the formal labor market.

In response to these dynamics, Prevention Point activists offer a more complex vision of drug users than the new neoliberal underclass mythology will allow. Whereas the EPOP narrative seeks to expel PPP from the neighborhood, on the grounds that drug users are not *of* the community, PPP advocates assert that PPP serves a portion of the very community that EPOP claims to represent. In fact, without PPP, we will see in the following quotes, the neighborhood would be even less attractive to investment capital, because PPP organizes and houses the otherwise disorderly fixtures of the community. Annet David Vogel, a longtime Prevention Point board member, explains:

That specific neighborhood is where the majority of exchangers resided; thus it made it geographically convenient for them to obtain services. [EPOP] argued that we were importing people but the majority of people actually lived in the Kensington neighborhood and they lived there most of their lives....And [our drop-in center] was a place for them to go during the day. It gave people an opportunity to have an affiliation, for them to have a respite from the difficult living situations they faced. It gave them an opportunity to prioritize their lives, to engage in other ac-

tivities, to build community in the way that a community recreation center does. We had an art group, an exercise group. I think that exchangers are everybody's mother's, father's, sister's children and they have a right to health care. And they would not receive any sort of access to health care if not for Prevention Point. We have to stop looking at these people as criminals and deviants because they just don't cop to joining the traditional methods of accessing health care. They have really been marginalized and disrespected when they go to regular health care facilities and they haven't received adequate health care because regular providers can't see beyond their drug use. They don't receive sufficient treatment so it is hard for them to trust the very system that tells them that they are not a human being and "we don't care about you." So they seek places where people respect them. Until we can say that this is a medical problem, then we can stop seeing them as criminals.

To the question of the appropriateness of Prevention Point needle exchange sites on street corners in Kensington, she responds:

[EPOP's] argument about the sites is legitimate. I agree that having lines of people waiting to exchange their syringes is difficult for communities. If we had our druthers, we would have our sites indoors. The problem is that no one is saying, "Okay, open up an indoor site next to me." In that respect it is difficult to see a bunch of people snaking through a corner exchanging syringes. The drop in center could have been seen as an adult center, a recreational program and an educational program because that was what was happening inside. I understand community concerns about the outdoor exchanges. But then someone has got to say, "Here is an indoor site where you can do it." When we opened up the drop-in center, there were dirty syringes all over the place and we did a lot to clean that up. We educate exchangers to dispose of needles properly and safely and we sponsored activities to clean up the corner of Huntington and Kensington and near the church.

It is interesting that the model of social service provision that is elaborated here is in some respects a throwback to the welfare state era and as such it disrupts the EPOP narrative of the neighborhood as an emergent investment space. By framing PPP's legitimacy in terms of publicly funded services such as health care and adult recreation that are typically valued in communities but that might also be construed to perpetuate the neighborhood's backwardness as a repository of welfare state services, this argument fails to signal the advent of neighborhood revitalization. As such, it is not able to compel EPOP to embrace the services that Prevention Point offers. Indeed, although EPOP supporters rather easily acknowledge that some of the people who use PPP services are, in fact, from the neighborhood, and although many EPOP supporters actually support the idea of needle exchange, at least in principle, these points did not divert them from their goal of demanding that PPP programs be removed from *their* neighborhood.

The role of public officials in adjudicating between these two groups is important to consider, since it served only to exacerbate the tensions between them. Siding with the civic activists associated with EPOP, the health commissioner and other city officials promised immediately, without consultation with Prevention Point supporters, to remove the needle exchange sites from the neighborhood. Importantly, they did not take this action because they were ideologically opposed to needle exchange, or because needle exchange is unpopular. In fact, the city of Philadelphia is PPP's main funding source. Rather, they took it because it reinforces the ideology of capital investment in a declining neighborhood in which the state cannot and will not subsidize investment as it does downtown.

Neoliberalism thus pervades the entire field of conflict. Its dynamics are not just reflected in conflicts between civic groups and "others." They are produced at the level of the grassroots, as different civic groups mobilize in pursuit of concessions from the state. These are pursuits that are locked into neoliberal

paradigms not only of community development, but of the process of political deliberation itself.

Here is an alternative example that shows how, when confronted with civic activism promoting the interests of property owners in a gentrifying neighborhood, a homeless shelter adopts neoliberal notions of civic belonging to legitimate the neighborhood presence of the homeless men it houses. Across town, in a southwest center city, a mixed race, mixed income neighborhood just outside of the city's gentrified, commercialized downtown, Bethesda Project has established a drop-in center and assisted living apartments for homeless men with serious mental illness. In recent years, these programs have been targeted by the South of South Neighborhood Association (SOSNA), a civic group comprised primarily of neighborhood property owners. SOSNA is recognized by city government as the official neighborhood association in the area. Its members have accused homeless shelter residents of public drinking, leaving trash on the streets, and urinating on public buildings. As with EPOP members, SOSNA members are careful to avoid the overt vilification of the homeless housed in the shelter. One SOSNA member, for instance, goes out of her way to distinguish her objections to the shelter's location from NIMBY ("not in my backyard") politics. She explains:

My feeling is that there are neighborhoods where everybody says, you know, NIMBY, not in my back yard. However, that's not really true here. Some communities get overloaded and it doesn't help, it makes it worse. It's not a good idea to have large numbers of people with lots of problems all together in one place....it's the same in society at large. And I think that what is acceptable in one community, and if a community is fifteen people, certain behavior is acceptable. But if you take each of those fifteen people and put them in another community [where] that behavior is not acceptable, woosh it goes away.

We can see in this statement an argument against the neighborhood assuming a “disproportionate share” of the homeless problem that is now plaguing the city (c.f. Gregory 1994). However, we can also see in this statement a reactionary paternalism that is in many respects just as pernicious as the “intolerance” typically associated with NIMBY politics. Indeed, in this resident’s formulation, the bad behaviors of homeless people are reinforced when homeless men are allowed to spend too much time together. The neighborhood should, according to this logic, do a service for the homeless by demanding that they do not congregate or form community exclusively among themselves. I point this out to demonstrate that even those who eschew NIMBY-style arguments nonetheless legitimate their opposition to homeless services in their neighborhoods through equally reactionary rhetorical devices.⁶

For their part, Bethesda Project staff and its residents tend to view SOSNA as a NIMBY group. Significantly, they have responded to SOSNA’s NIMBY activism by appropriating residential notions of citizenship and, through the elaboration of their rights and responsibilities as property owners, have tried to overcome some of SOSNA’s opposition. One Bethesda Project staff member explains:

I think SOSNA is concerned about the neighborhood. It is a real NIMBY situation. They don’t want their neighborhood to decline because of a homeless shelter in the middle of the neighborhood. There are a lot of angry people – angry because of the poverty in their neighborhood, angry at the city because it’s not taking care of the neighborhood like it is taking care of other neighborhoods. They have this feeling that they won’t get neighborhood development the way that other neighborhoods will....It’s not like we want to ignore SOSNA. We want our services to be clean and acceptable to the neighborhood. We will do our part – make sure that individuals are not causing problems. We are a responsible business owner. Our business is in human lives and we try to deal with the problems

and we don't want to antagonize anyone. That's not our intent. But we are not going anywhere. We just want to be a responsible neighbor. We are concerned about neighborhood perceptions. We make sure our facilities are well lit, grounds are clean, and residents are not encouraged to hang out outside. Our facilities have courtyards where residents are encouraged to hang out, not on the street. We try to educate our residents about the perceptions of homeless men – not our perceptions but others. We encourage our residents to do community clean up and stuff. And everyone is responsible for community relations and when residents participate, it's great. We have some residents who work in the community gardens.

Ironically, here we can see how the homeless shelter *disciplines* homeless men to act in accordance with definitions of citizenship that are based on property ownership, without, of course, actually giving them property. As with PPP, the shelter counters its opponents by showing how without it, the neoliberal project of attracting investment capital might fail. Bethesda House, its staff asserts, is making sure that all residents of the city embrace neoliberal subjectivity. Under Bethesda House supervision, residents are encouraged to become responsible community members. Bethesda Project, even in its response to the cold calculation of the market that has driven so many Philadelphians into homelessness, has nonetheless submitted to the neoliberal hegemony of marketization.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that the prime casualty of the neoliberal development model is the poor. Not only are the economic prospects for poor neighborhoods not improved by the new development model, but the *political* prospects for poor communities are damaged as well. By channeling dwindling public resources into programs that encourage poor residents to

become acculturated to the rules of the market but which, in fact, have little chance of actually encouraging private investment, the marketization of the ghetto incites particular forms of political action and resistance that pit different groups of poor people against each other without providing sufficient resources to overcome the economic and social crises against which they have mobilized in the first place. One important point of this article, then, is to demonstrate that the marketization of the ghetto is less an economic remedy for the problems plaguing inner city residents than it is an ideological claim about the relationship among capital, the state, and the poor under neoliberalism.

This ideological claim performs an additional function as well: it also reinforces U.S. geopolitical imperatives in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, there remain crucial continuities between the Cold War liberalism of the welfare state and the post-Cold War neoliberalism under whose banner the welfare state is being dismantled. It is not hard to trace the neoliberal passion for privatization and marketization to the equation of democracy and capitalism that characterized official U.S. ideology and foreign policy during the Cold War. Cold War liberalism defined freedom and democracy solely in terms of creating market-based societies; in the neoliberal era, this logic rules out alternative visions of collective prosperity and social justice. One of the most serious (and often overlooked) consequences of this narrowing of the political spectrum is its effect on the agency of the poor. Ideologies of individualism, productivity, efficiency and personal responsibility play a determinant role in structuring the lives and activities of the poor. The coherency of the body politic and the American Way, formerly consolidated through constant comparison with the faults and deficiencies of the communist bloc, is now maintained in large measure through the constant invocation of an internal "other." This other is not necessarily a raced, gendered or sexual "other" (though it is often so), but an "other" of the

market. And like the Soviet Union, this internal villain, this “other” of the market, is to be either converted to a subject of value or destroyed. The ideology of private investment and economic growth seeks to accomplish the former. The law-and-order state, with its prison system, brutality, and invocations of safety and community hygiene, seeks to do the latter.

As anthropologists studying North American urban settings, we must be attuned to both the goals and dynamics of neoliberal policy and ideology in American cities, and to the consequences neoliberalism holds for poor people’s collective agency. Moreover, a progressive response at the current moment requires us to resist the temptation to wax nostalgic for the bygone days of the U.S. welfare state. It certainly is true that the ravages of neoliberalism are most clearly illuminated in terms of privatization and devolution in reference to the Keynesian welfare state. It does not follow politically or analytically, however, that we should be arguing for a return to that state. Some of the worst aspects of the current neoliberal climate were present (albeit in altered form or different contexts) in the old welfare state, which had racial and gender inequalities structured into it. Most importantly, neoliberal policies were born in reaction to the failure of Keynesianism to overcome the decline in corporate profits that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The re-instantiation of welfare state liberalism, while preferable to neoliberalism, represents a relatively narrow political response to current patterns of inequality and impoverishment. Rather than working toward the replacement of a top-down privatist welfare system with a top-down government welfare system, we might focus our scholarly efforts on the true political empowerment of the poor. Central to that endeavor must be the obliteration of the categorical distinction between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor, for so long as this distinction remains, nation-building ideologies that exclude one group of poor people in the name of another will continue to pit groups like EPOP and

PPP or SOSNA and Bethesda Project against each other, to the detriment of both.

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NOTES

- 1 The 1960s ethnographic encounter with the inner-city poor all but ignored poor people's political action despite mass involvement in the civil rights and welfare rights movements that were occurring during that time period (Hyatt 1995; Williams 1992). The tendency to ignore poor people's politicization continues in more recent ethnographic studies as well (see, e.g., Anderson 1991, 1999). For a more thorough discussion of ethnographic approaches to political agency, see Goode and Maskovsky 2001: 10-24; see also di Leonardo 1998).
- 2 See Adams et al. 1991 and Goode and Schneider 1994 for a gloss on these political economic developments.
- 3 For a brief history of redevelopment policy in Philadelphia during the post-war period, see Teaford 1990: 111-112.
- 4 It is important to note that gentrification remains the main means through which blight is successfully "eliminated" in inner city neighborhoods across the United States. It is well known that anti-blight and other redevelopment policies often work to the advantage of big developers and other agents of gentrification. The implications of gentrification for poor residents is, of course, displacement. For ethnographic accounts of neighborhood decline and impoverishment in other cities besides Philadelphia, see, e.g.,

- Susser 1981; Williams 1988; Sharff 1998; on the politics and policies around gentrification and displacement, see Smith 1996; see also Ley 1996; Brash 2000; Prince 2001.
- 5 The type of grassroots activism I am describing here must be distinguished from the militant particularism described by David Harvey (1996: 19-45), in which residents must, in order to reach working-class consciousness, work through the political and economic contradictions implicit in their defense of "place." It is more in line with the ambivalent politics of place described by Steven Gregory (1994; 1999) in which residents fight against the neighborhood assuming "a disproportionate share" of city services for the poor, the homeless and the drug addicted. Even more than this, what I am describing here is a specifically proactive politics designed first and foremost to jumpstart neighborhood revitalization by demanding state intervention in support of "respectable" neighborhood residents' efforts to stabilize property values. This requires the sanitization of the landscape in preparation for private sector investment. Less a defensive struggle than a reactionary one, this peculiar combination of a proactive, development-oriented agenda combined with overtly reactionary political content is a quintessentially neoliberal phenomenon.
- 6 This point resonates with Desjarlais' (1997) discussion of popular and political views on homelessness.

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