

ORDER WITHOUT LEGIBILITY:

ORDER PLURALISM AND CHANGE IN POOR AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS

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ABSTRACT

Urban sociologists have long used concepts of order and organization to explain change in poor American neighborhoods. Early Chicago-school theories of disorganization and assimilation have been widely criticized. Alternative perspectives have either demonstrated how neighborhood orders promote retrenchment, or how exogenous factors cause neighborhood improvement and decline. How and when do neighborhood residents support change from the inside? I use insights from cultural sociology's institutional theories to help answer this question, using the concept of order without repeating past oversights. As I use the term, any order -- a neighborhood order, a city order, and orders at other scales -- sanction particular rankings of worth and appeals to authority. Like cultures, multiple orders exist in any place or time. They are not embodied by people and organizations but are available for them to use. Attempts at change motivate transitions between orders, and these transitions expose conflicts between different orders of worth and authority. Whether an attempted change becomes a more permanent transition or causes retrenchment of earlier ways depends on how legible alternative orders are to the people and organizations involved. This paper develops and tests this theory with a case of resident and government involvement in the use of eminent domain for economic redevelopment of a Philadelphia neighborhood. Resident retrenchment -- resistance to government intervention -- was the most public result of this policy intervention. The preceding decades demonstrate, however, that plural orders coexist and that failures in order legibility led to resistance to change. The paper concludes with suggestions for how attention to order legibility can lead to reinterpretations of other kinds of neighborhood change.

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INTRODUCTION

Sociologists can use the term order to account for resident involvement in neighborhood change. To do so, we need to clarify the term's theoretical purchase. Sociologists have used variations on the concept of order to explain why and how residents of poor communities reject or ignore mainstream orders. If expected to explain neighborhood change, however, the concept should also help us understand when and how poor communities accept or advocate mainstream orders. As sociologists rejected early Chicago school conceptions of "disorder" and "assimilation," they may have thrown out the baby with the bathwater.²

Martin Sanchez-Janowski's (2008) recent ethnographic study of neighborhood change attacks sociologists' historical use of disorder for its ignorance of and condescension toward local organization. As a corrective, he draws on cultural theorists and argues that change happens as neighborhood and state institutions conflict with each other. I also build on cultural and institutional theory and agree that we can start by characterizing neighborhoods as ordered at two different scales. I attempt preserve the term order because of its long legacy in urban sociology. I use insights from institutional theory to recover meanings urban sociologists have ascribed to order while avoiding earlier assumptions about disorder and progress.

The concept of order can help us understand whether and how actors come to support poor neighborhoods' greater incorporation with the city at large. Change will require that a situation or phenomenon be understood through a new ranking of worth and authority. Efforts at incorporation usually involve translation to an order at a larger scale than formerly dominated. Change entails entrepreneurial efforts to bridge orders, in both directions. Specifically, entrepreneurs must translate effectively, from one ranking of worth to another and one kind of authority to another. (Studies of legal change have used the word translation to describe similar processes in state transitions in legal authority.) I introduce the phrase order legibility to highlight the possible degrees success or failure in such a translation. The more illegible the order, the more likely at least one party will interpret the change as detrimental.

Ethnographers have written about poor residents who support both local and mainstream orders, and who change their attitudes over time. They have uncovered individual behaviors and collective organizing both for and against mainstream and alternative economic institutions

² Early 20th century Chicago-School ethnographies focused on how immigrants to the U.S. from European villages turned into American urban citizens, or failed to, through neighborhood processes (Park, Burgess, Wirth, Thomas and Znaniecki). They faced strident criticism for their portrayal of poor neighborhoods suffering from disorganization during the transition. Other sociologists interpreted the same neighborhoods as having alternative forms of organization, rather than disorganization (Suttles, Whyte).

(Duneier and Carter 1999; Sánchez-Jankowski 2008; Venkatesh 2006). They have presented similar findings in studies of individual orientations and collective organizing around neighborhoods' political control and development (Freeman 2006; Marwell 2007; Small 2004).

Yet explicit theories of neighborhood change usually explain what looks like retrenchment or preservation of attitudes, behaviors and norms that diverge from those prominent in middle-class communities. Urban sociologists' theories of change, however, continue to debate whether poor urban residents' seeming indifference or opposition to the law should be characterized as disorganized or alternatively organized (Wilson, Sanchez-Janowski) and whether these conditions have cultural or material roots (Lewis, Wilson, Massey and Denton).

I use a concept of order similar to the way Bourdieu () understands fields as spaces of status achievement, as Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) introduce worlds as rankings of worth, and as Friedland and Alford (1991) and Ann Orloff () differentiate among institutions of the state, market and family. Unlike fields, worlds, or institutions defined by cultural theorists, orders are marked by scale. I discuss two orders, a neighborhood and a citywide order. Additional scales beyond neighborhood and city are possible and likely, but I use just two for parsimony's sake. Like fields, worlds, and institutions, order refers both to authorities who evaluate worth and the evaluations those authorities provide.

I consider worth and authority to be key components of order. Neighborhood and citywide orders match rankings of value to kinds of authority that interpret them. Evaluation and judgment – ideas about what should be or what is better – are crucial elements of institutions, formal rules and rule-like conventions (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In this paper I concentrate on two dimensions of authority in making evaluations: source (individuals, organizations, and networks) and formality. The relative amount of authority any source and any degree of formality depends on the order within which it is invoked.

I elaborate this theoretical framework through a case that, when looked at as a *fait accompli*, seems only to reinforce current ideas about resident resistance to government. A grassroots movement emerges against government taking of property for economic development. Poor residents fight for their homes against a government policy designed to serve the middle class. When observed as a decades-long process, however, this same case requires a different interpretation. Community and government approaches to land management (and neighborhood governance more generally) passed through three broad stages: (1) a mostly informal, neighborhood-based control; (2) cautious coveting of increased involvement of formal government and markets; and, finally (3) opposition to government and outside market actors.

Most contemporary theorizing about order in poor neighborhoods would anticipate only the last stage. Ethnographies of neighborhood economies would predict the first stage. Urban sociologists would be unlikely to predict either the second stage or the transitions among the time periods. If we understand neighborhoods as having plural orders, and we understand orders to be as multi-faceted as I have described, we begin to see the less visible side of more settled periods (for example, the formal activity in the informally dominated economies and the support for government action where resistance is most outspoken) and to explain the transitions.

I begin the body of this paper by reviewing older literature concerned with similar questions but whose intricacies have been forgotten. By traveling carefully into and after pre-WWII sociology, I expose both continuity of concerns with neighborhood change and order and lost theoretical precision. I combine this historical wisdom with recent conceptual development on plural institutions in cultural sociology of the economy, organizations, and the law. Empirically, I follow the not-so-obvious origins of a seemingly obvious conflict over eminent domain to provide the evidence for both theory construction and testing (Wilson and Chaddha 2009). The discussion and conclusion use the case to explore and extend the theoretical claims.

ORDER, INSTITUTIONS, AND CHANGE

Since the early 1930s, waves of urban sociologists argued that disorganization dooms poor neighborhoods. Disorder in poor communities contrasts order, a facet of middle-class communities. For early Chicago-School sociologists, order, and the closely associated word organization, represented a certain level of formality, the authority of certain people or groups, and ordering of what people considered more or less valuable (Thomas and Znaniecki, Park, Burgess, Wirth). Sociologists continue to interpret disorder as the most immediate and visible, influence on residents' own opinions and actions though the most prominent sociological research in this tradition has rigorously detailed the exogenous political, demographic, economic, and psychological conditions that cause that disorder (Frazier 1939; Massey and Denton 1993, Moynihan, Park and Burgess; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927; Wilson 1987).³ In the earliest work, disorganization resulted from clashes between immigrants' small village organization with the organization of the industrial city. There were three possible states of being or kinds of activity: traditional order, mainstream American order, and disorder when neither of the other two was present. The most desirable and

³ A recent flurry of research on neighborhood crime has continued the tradition of concern with disorder, without giving attention to external causes. Social scientists and law-enforcement professionals proclaim that small signs of disorder like "broken windows" betray a lack of social control that begets more serious neighborhood crime. Empirical researchers in this critical tradition have rigorously deconstructed the broken windows theory as based on subjective impressions of order (Samson) and as misunderstanding the causes of neighborhood crime (Davis, Duneier).

beneficial process, according to these researchers, was the assimilation of the traditional into the contemporary forms of organization.

Critics have responded that poor neighborhoods have overlooked local orders. Local orders serve poor communities as alternatives to, but are no less organized than, mainstream orders (Logan and Molotch 1987; Sánchez-Jankowski 2008; Stack 1974; Suttles 1968; Whyte 1943). Race, ethnic, or class identity lay their foundation. Local orders are rooted in international places of origin (Gans 1982; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927), histories of slavery (Frazier 1939), ethnic identity (Gans 1982; Whyte 1943) and contemporary conditions of poverty (Liebow 1967; Sánchez-Jankowski 2008; Stack 1974; Venkatesh 2006). These researchers interpret local orders as persistent and coexistent with more mainstream orders. Change may result from the conflictual encounters between the local and the more universal orders.

A political-economy perspective has emphasized the ordering of worth, though it has abandoned the words order and organization as well as concern with authority. Urban political economists theorize that change in neighborhood-government relations results from conflicts between working-class interests in the property's use values, the subsistence and emotional worth, and middle-class interests in property's exchange value (Fainstein 1995; Fainstein and Fainstein 1985; Harvey 2005; Logan and Molotch 1987). Ethnographies of urban neighborhoods and economies have focused on authority, including degrees of formality (Duneier and Carter 1999; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974; Venkatesh 2006) and sometimes on local morality or values (Duneier and Carter 1999; Newman 1999) but have rarely theorized the two together. (Eli Anderson [1999] has done both but does not explicitly theorize change.)

Cultural sociologists offer some insights for urban sociologists about neighborhood change. Urban sociologists have yet to take advantage of cultural sociologists' institutional theorizing about the economy and organizations that would move us beyond dichotomizing kinds of value. Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) reproduced the division between use- and exchange- values in how he described the competing neighborhood and economic institutions (See also Sewell 1992).

Today's cultural sociologists of the economy and organizations use the term institutions to refer to phenomena similar to those meant when early Chicago School ethnographers wrote about order (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Friedland and Alford 1991; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Sewell 1992). Sociology's early institutionalists' emphasized patterns of evaluations and social roles internalized by people and groups (Selznick 1949, see DiMaggio and Powell [1991]). The so-called "new" institutionalists look for rule-like conventions within formal organizations (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In the latter formulation, informal rules are not internalized. Instead, they are

available and associated with particular contexts, fields, or worlds of classification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu 1984). It is the interpretive context of an institution that makes particular rankings of worth and sources of authority more likely than others. Advanced capitalism, for instance, is commonly understood as supporting three large, primary institutions: the state, the family, and the economy (Friedland and Alford 1991; Hochschild 1981; Orloff 1992). Change is possible when contradictions between institutions are exposed or confronted (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Bourdieu 1984; Friedland and Alford 1991). Once there is a moment of contradiction, when does change actually happen, and what direction does it move?

I believe that legibility is a key component of the direction change will take. Legibility is a crucial problem between local, often poor communities, and larger or higher-status communities (Bernstein 1971; Scott 1998). James Scott (1998) brilliantly demonstrated how government attempts at community improvement fail when those at the top do not understand local ways. Bottom-up attempts at change can and do fail for similar reasons. Successful transition of orders promises to facilitate transitions between them. A lack thereof promises to facilitate retrenchment. This is where a clear definition of order becomes so important. The crucial element that needs to be translated is what is valuable or worthy. Legibility makes it possible for change to receive support precisely because it makes the conversion of worth between orders possible. This conversion of worth is inherently challenging, requires negotiation, and may result in agreement or conflict or both.⁴

American poor neighborhoods often have strong informal institutionalized orders. Order legibility is a particularly important challenge of state involvement in neighborhood change. We ought to think about poor neighborhoods as spaces and communities composed of plural orders, which match rankings of worth with authorities that offer evaluations. Attempts to change neighborhood conditions create conflicts between orders. If during such a conflict, the orders of worth and authority are made legible to one another, the attempted change is likely to succeed. If the orders remain illegible to one another, parties will likely retreat and may even take a more entrenched position. These dynamics of order pluralism and legibility become clear through empirical study.

⁴ One branch of scholarship on legal pluralism suggests that we focus on a mechanism called translation to understand change. Legal pluralism can mean the coexistence of and encounters between informal and formal rules. The success of translation determines the direction of change after a conflictual encounter between institutions.

METHODS

EMINENT DOMAIN FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I develop and test this perspective on order and neighborhood change through the empirical study of a case of government efforts towards a neighborhood's transformation. I track the plans for and implementation of eminent domain for a neighborhood's economic development. In postindustrial cities like Philadelphia, eminent domain is one policy tool available to governments grappling with population and job loss, and residential and investment desertion. Many municipal government authorities can use eminent domain – the power to take private property for public use, in return for just compensation – to spark private development of “blighted” neighborhoods. Often, these are the same neighborhoods that urban sociologists study to understand the dynamics of poverty, whether or not studies specifically address this policy intervention as Herb Gans (1982) did, for example. In this research, I am specifically interested in how on-the-ground attitudes towards government's actions develop. I introduce my understandings of order pluralism and order legibility to explain variation (over time and across individuals) in support for government policy.

I study eminent domain because it is a power government uses to induce economic improvement -- a commonly desired kind of change in poor. We can understand eminent domain as one example of many government solutions to neighborhood poverty. No matter what the real motivations driving policy makers, public justifications for eminent domain are largely physical and economic, rather than behavioral. That is, policy is directed, at least publicly, at addressing economic conditions directly, avoiding the moral quagmire that many studies enter when they focus on the behavior of drug dealing, gangs, employment, and welfare. By asking about resident attitudes toward this government policy, it is possible to research resident orientation toward government involvement in change while avoiding some of the well-worn issues on which many researchers, pundits, and members of the American public have already staked their ground – with respect to poor neighborhoods. It only indirectly addresses the morally contentious ground of individual behavior so delicately addressed by urban ethnography, but eminent domain directly addresses issues surrounding the value of real estate which urban political economists – the group of urban scholars who have avoided using the concept of order all together – have deemed most pivotal to urban change.

Eminent domain is also a particularly strategic sight because it is so unusual, or at least anomalous to how most Americans think government's relationship to private property should

work. When eminent domain asks if governments should use a strong hand to support change for economic development, it also asks how individual and community interests will be balanced. By considering the use of eminent domain, a government creates a high drama about urban economic development. For these reasons, teachers often put eminent domain in curricula for courses in law, political theory, and urban planning. Without strong empirical research, students tend to read only philosophy and case law drawn from the highly unusual conflicts that make it through the appeals courts. Eminent domain creates an almost natural experiment that begs for empirical study. Government's urban development plans usually only rouse the most politically involved constituents. A property taking is so dramatic, however, any living property owners, tenants, business-owners, and neighbors have interests in the land are likely to take notice, and at the very least form an opinion. Eminent domain does not happen anywhere, so we should be careful not to generalize findings to neighborhoods that do not have similar conditions. But we will be able to generalize from explanations of the variation in support within a particular development plan.

THE CASE

This paper examines how government plans for and resident opposition to takings along American Street emerged. As I interviewed informants about eminent domain in Philadelphia, government workers, developers, and community respondents all mentioned the American Street (the real street name!). An effort at large-scale land assembly (1.5 - 3 acres) began passing through formal channels in late 2000. Along or near a one-mile strip of American Street, Philadelphia condemned 68 privately-owned parcels and began relocating thirteen homeowners between 2001 and 2003. Community meetings drew hundreds of angry and fearful residents in the fall of 2002. The takings involved almost no litigation, but Philadelphia media, City Council members, and protestors strongly critiqued them. As the condemnations proceeded, nearby residents formed a citywide anti-eminent-domain coalition. Variation in opinions about government action, over time and across individuals, makes this a strategic place to ask about support, and lack thereof.

Eminent domain was one of many tools used by government and others to try to improve a troubled area. By 1990s, conditions along American Street were considerably worse than in the city at large, which itself had been losing population, jobs, and investment for decades. In 1990, the American Street area's poverty level was about forty-five percent, almost three times the city average, and six times the national average. The 1990 median value of an owner-occupied housing unit was just \$17,300 one third of the city's median (\$49,400). The 1990s did not show improvement in the poverty rate, but real estate prices rose. In 2000 dollars, the median price of an

owner-occupied home climbed by a third (in 2000 dollars) between 1990 and 2000. Still, the 2000 price of \$29,900 was half of the city's median.

What some locals call "the strip" just a mile north of the city center and a few blocks from the I-95 interstate had once been the heart of Philadelphia's textile industry, hosting mostly factories with some housing squeezed between and behind. By the 1970s, once the gems of industry had left, so did most other businesses and residents. Through the 1980s and 90s, the area's reputation for crime and abandonment had earned it the nickname with outsiders of the "Badlands."⁵ Lots laid bare by building collapses and demolitions had become dumping sites and urban weed farms.

But some residents and businesses stayed, and others even arrived anew. They inhabited blocks of both scattered and densely packed buildings in varying conditions.⁶ Neighborhood residents were predominantly Puerto Rican. Almost ten times more individuals identified as Puerto Rican than in the whole city (55 percent/ 6 percent); and about half as many American Street area residents identified as White compared to the entirety of the city (26 percent/ 45 percent), Black (19 percent/ 43 percent), or Asian (2 percent/ 4 percent).

DATA AND ANALYSIS

I collected multiple sources of archival data. I accessed the personal files kept by this project's managers in the Mayor's Office of the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, the Philadelphia Commerce Department, and the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia. These files included inter-office memos, e-mails, and other correspondence; budgeting, appraisals, timelines, and other project planning documents; contracts, planned testimonies, and other legally-relevant forms; and policy reports. I also reviewed all official meeting agendas and minutes of the American Street Empowerment Zone Community Trust Board, a governing body comprised of residents, business owners, and government workers. I reviewed relevant mass media coverage and publicly available activist materials related to the use of eminent domain along American Street. From these documents, I created a timeline of events and a spreadsheet of property

⁵ Also reference F. Wherry. In 1995, Ted Koppel did a special on North Philadelphia that he called "the Badlands," [reference] and a Philadelphia Inquirer reporter published a novel about the "Badlands," set in a neighborhood just north of the one investigated here (Lopez 1994).

⁶ Surviving businesses are primarily warehouse operations, light construction-related businesses, and automotive repair shops. They are mostly small. In 2001, just ten percent of the 450 firms had more than twenty employees. About a third of the businesses in the EZ were services (31 percent); a third were retail (28 percent); and the final third was split between manufacturing (14 percent), wholesale trade (12 percent), and construction (8 percent). Urban Partners. 2001. "American Street Empowerment Zone: Economic Development Strategy." Prepared for City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Empowerment Zone, Philadelphia, PA.

addresses targeted, with relevant data about communications among property owners, government workers, community leaders, and others.

Interviews were planned to cover three groups with different interests: government, condemnees and neighbors, and community-based organizations. I identified the first few interviewees for this case from referrals given to me during the informant interviews mentioned above. I also solicited an interview from anyone I could contact who, based on my archival research, seemed to have been important to how the project unfolded as a whole, and I attempted to contact all property owners.

I believe that my interviewees represented people who were heavily involved and/or most significantly affected by the American Street takings. I reached most professionals and community organization leaders by telephone, and they usually agreed to be interviewed. I personally visited the initial relocation addresses of all residents dislocated from privately-owned property in the case-study projects. These personal visits also yielded a high response rate. I suspect that I missed those people who felt the use of eminent domain was a less significant event in their lives, either positive or negative. I also missed a few people heavily involved in the American Street case who chose not to give me interviews though they had fairly significant negative experiences. They told me that they had already told their story enough times, when the newspapers and Temple University students were interested, and they did not feel like doing it again. And, most notably, Rosemary Cubas, a key person in this story, died in 2006, before I began my interviews. I interviewed close associates of hers.

I conducted interviews with 40 subjects. (#) were government employees, (#) were condemnees or their neighbors with no formal leadership positions, (#) represented community-based organizations. (#) of (#) interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. (#) were conducted in English; (#) were conducted in Spanish and English with an interpreter's assistance. The sound of most interviews (#) was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. I took notes during and immediately after all interviews. Interviews averaged just over an hour (#).

Interviews were loosely structured with sets of open-ended questions about the subject's general background with the neighborhood (or professional background), experiences with eminent domain generally and with this project in particular, communications and relationships with others during the planning and implementation of the takings, and interpretations of the events experienced. I attempted to allow the interview to follow whatever threads my questions stirred before moving on. I guided interviewees to tell me a chronological narrative if they were recounting events in the case study's history; I would simply ask what happened next. I followed up

statements, such as “such-and-such is how we usually do things,” with requests for examples and evidence about how they knew whatever claim they were making. If I could anticipate a counterargument or skeptical response to an interviewee’s statement, I probed by asking, “Other people would say such-and-such, which would conflict with what you are telling me. How would you respond?” I returned to the interview schedule when I felt I had exhausted a line of questioning.

I collected documents and organized them chronologically to construct a preliminary timeline on which to locate all evidence I had about the project. I used the timeline to develop questions for interviews. I used interviewees’ responses to refine the timeline, and I used documents to verify interviewees’ responses whenever possible. I read interview transcripts and notes twice, and coded them for analysis of themes and narrative elements. I also created spreadsheets to spatially organize data about properties, especially what transpired between owners and tenants and government authorities.

FINDINGS

The Periods

The public opposition eventually organized against the American Street Takings would seem, at first, to support existing explanations of neighborhood change based on neighborhood support for particular values and institutions. From either a political-economy or a cultural perspective, residents would be expected to resist government’s effort to use eminent domain, and they did. From an urban political-economy perspective, we would expect government to pursue just this kind of policy, in support of growth and exchange values, and endangering residents’ use-values in their property. This theory would have expected residents to catch government in the act of abusing poor people’s rights, at the behest of outside businesses and a middle-class constituency dependent on growth. Urban theories that privilege culture would also anticipate resident resistance to government intervention of this kind, because of its threat to a local culture born both of Puerto Rican ethnicity and poverty.

A deeper examination of the history exposes a more complicated picture. In 1970s and 1980s, the first period I describe, is best characterized by the coexistence of plural orders. A local, informal kind of land management met the challenges caused by abandoned land and buildings, but formal mechanisms buttressed this system. Local and city forms of value and authority supported each other, though in ways one might not expect in a middle-class neighborhood. Neighbors surveilled the area around their own and each others’ homes. They also cleaned, used, and fenced

lots they did not legally own, but usually only if they could claim legal rights to land next door or to that same land in the past.

The next period in the area's history demonstrates how precarious was the balance of the coexisting neighborhood and city orders. In the 1980s and 1990s, residents participated heavily in attempts to make that change. They slowly organized more formally and increased demands for government involvement. In the late 1990s, resident leaders even sanctioned the very limited use of eminent domain in areas with occupied housing. To explain this on-the-ground support of government involvement, existing political-economy and cultural perspectives would need to treat the residents as dupes, but the people involved displayed savvy and skepticism about government that could hardly be characterized in this way. Residents knew increased government involvement would be hard. They qualified their support for outside investment with caveats about the results. They wanted to ensure that community residents would benefit, and at least with respect to the use of eminent domain they were clear about what that would mean.

The last stage in the issue's history demonstrates how important order legibility is to the outcome of an attempt at such a transition. Order legibility problems largely led to the eventual failure to accomplish anticipated goals. The people and organizations involved largely failed to make the two orders legible to one another and facilitate the change. Government failed to meet the demands for community support of the eminent domain plans, as they were implemented. Those implementation problems were partly caused by, and if not caused by could have been corrected by but were not – order legibility issues. In the 2000s, problems with government's implementation of the eminent domain plans cemented resistance that might not have otherwise arisen. When the value held in the neighborhood order was successfully translated to the city order, condemnees were satisfied with the exchange, though often aggrieved over the loss. Translation failure, possible even when individuals tried to avoid it, led to dissatisfaction and resistance.

The People

The findings refer to several residents, business-owners, community leaders, and government employees. Only three – the individuals mentioned most often -- are identified by name or pseudonym. They are introduced briefly before a chronological narrative begins.

Benito Romero would lose his home to eminent domain. Benito had moved into that house even though his daughter remembered the area at the time with these words, “many years ago there used to be a lot of drugs in every corner.”⁷ Benito had sought out a three-story row-house on one of the street's most desolate blocks. Over a few years he periodically dropped notes in the

⁷ (I choose)

mailbox to let the owner know he was interested. In the 1990s, the owner sold the house to Benito, who subsequently moved his family in. Benito had to leave American Street in 2008.

Rosemary Cubas was a long-time activist. A distant relation of Benito's, she was one of the people he talked to when he learned that his house was targeted for eminent domain. Rosemary had bought her house in the 1970s, only a few blocks away from Benito's but on a much more densely packed residential street. Rosemary would advocate for Benito and many other property owners. She even organized a coalition to fight eminent domain in Philadelphia. Her efforts would slow but not stop the takings.

Vince Dougherty was starting a long career in city government in the 1970s. He took a job for the city of Philadelphia that led him to focus on American Street's revival. [Look in interviews for details of his beginnings]. Vince and other city workers set to work planning to salvage the area after watching so many people and businesses abandon it. Eventually, they paved the road, tore down dangerous buildings, and cleaned up environmental contamination. They hoped to see American Street reemerge as a vibrant, modern industrial corridor.

PERIOD 1: INFORMALLY DOMINATED LAND MANAGEMENT

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, American Street neighborhoods supported plural orders with respect to land management. Local, informal use, care, and protection of land were common, perhaps even the dominant form of activity. But formal, state resources mattered. Residents often appropriated land they did not own, but they tended only to do that on land adjacent to property they did have a more official claim to. Residents largely provided their own security, by managing the appearance of their property and by remaining outwardly vigilant. But law enforcement agents were generally scarce, but residents did call on them and see them respond, on rare occasions. Though a neighborhood order dominated the area, residents and businesses, government workers, and others could access either the neighborhood or the city order.

Some government staff focused on the area saw its problems first, but then recognized that residents had created something valuable from the opportunities those problems provided. Vince Dougherty noted the difference between outsiders' and some residents' perceptions,

In the '80s, it was referred to as the Badlands, American street...I mean the residents didn't like using that name. I put a qualifier on that 'coz they found it very offensive. But the press and others referred to it as the badlands. I mean the highest crime, highest drugs, least educated, biggest blight. I mean really just not a good place to be. (Dougherty 2007)

For many residents, abandonment created opportunities. Benito and other residents who were eventually relocated told me they had intentionally chosen sparsely populated blocks. Vacant space actually made some of them feel safe, for it served as a barrier that anyone attempting to harm them would have to cross (Interviews, 2008). Residents, such as the following one, often explained how the fact that there were only a few houses actually made one block quiet and calm, and thus more desirable for them:

Because there was only like six or seven houses on the block, and no neighbors so it was a pretty peaceful place. Because hardly no cars passed, nobody tried to break in or nothing, so it was a nice neighborhood. Not a nice neighborhood, but a nice block. (Interview, 2008)

One government employee said she learned that the isolation that looked scary from the outside made some people feel safe:

Yes, they felt unsafe...but they also felt like they weren't living on the 1800 block of Palethorpe Street, which was really dense and occupied and lots of drug activity, and not the same. So yes, they were isolated. But in the sense in a neighborhood with lots of crime, *they felt like this isolation was a positive thing.* (Interview, 2006)

Residents also attribute much of the safety they enjoyed either to their own watchfulness and clean-up efforts. (Interviews, 2008) A woman who lived a few blocks east of Benito told me, "when I first moved in this area, that park was full of needles and glass and everything was dirty around this area. And neighbors start chipping in and cleaning up, you know cleaning up the neighborhood" (Interview, 2007). The resident quoted in the paragraph above explained, "At the end of the block, people come and dump and dump...They come at night and just dump it. So this is a never-ending fight." (Interview, 2008)

They learned that using or fencing property signaled someone was watching, which would prevent dumping and other nuisances. It was common for residents to begin using vacant lots they did not own for yards, gardens, and storage. Benito constructed a garage and stored his trucks on vacant lots to the south of his house. A group of lots width of about five row homes was commandeered by a large family living to the south of them. In 2008, when I walked by, the dirt lot was fenced in, had a large vegetable garden, a chicken coup, and several yard chairs. You would have to either look up the titles or ask the people using the lot to find out that they did not own it. The garden was even featured in a local paper. They laughed as they told me about the time when someone in a city car drove up, parked, and told them they had to tear it all down. Apparently, the rogue city official produced no supporting documents, and the residents never heard from him again. (Interview, 2008)

Benito erected several hundred feet of chain-link fencing to prevent dumping beyond where he stored his things. Another woman told me how she put up a fence to claim control,

Little by little people moved away and the houses were left unoccupied and they got old and...houses got demolished...behind my house is almost a whole block with no houses. Trucks then come at night and unload whatever they didn't want...Cars come in at night, prostitution and everything. So, my neighbors and I, we got together and fenced that space...*I figured if I just put a fence up it would stop them. I had to take control because no one else was going to do it for me. I couldn't be afraid to say, this is my house, and you don't do that around here.* (Interview, 2008)

Formal rules and informal rules might conflict in principle, but in practice they could complement one another. Many of the residents on the first block that would be condemned first moved in as legal tenants of the same owner. When he died, and no one else bothered to collect the rent, they continued living there for years even though they had no lease or title to the property. In the 1990s, they eventually made their claims to the properties official. They paid a dollar plus back taxes and utilities in return for property titles from the city. One resident described her history there,

My ex-husband and his parents used to live there. I was 17. They were not paying rent. The owner had died. He had passed away, and the house was not in good condition anyway, so they were not paying rent...And they were there for a long, long time...When [my husband's family] left for Puerto Rico...we took over the house...We started seeing like some lawyer that came around saying that he was going to help us get the deeds. People came by. They took our money. They never did anything. We lost our money. We had a lot of problems to get those houses.... [My husband] left to Puerto Rico. I stayed with my kids, and I started going places to apply for the house...I finally got the deed for a dollar,... [plus]taxes and water...We got the houses from the city. (Interview, 2008)

The use and care for the land established by residents was no panacea. Some homeowners agreed with the professionals, that abandonment had made the area too dangerous for them to live in. Benito's next-door neighbor, for example, had raised her family in her house on American Street, had watched her neighbors slowly depart. After a divorce, she was living by herself.

I liked my house, but I did not like the neighborhood, because there were no houses around. It was empty and everybody was throwing trash, and the rats are coming around there and it was very bad...and I said I have to move from here; even if the house inside looks good, the surrounding was not good. (Interview, 2008)

INCREASING FORMALITY AND SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

Resident Organizations and Government Invitations

Some residents became more formally organized and made more direct demands on government. A woman who helped form the group United Neighbors Against Drugs (UNAD) explained to me,

Resident: I was always active, and when I came here I saw all the things that needed to be done, and I saw the effort of the few people that was involved at that time. I just had to be part of it. I wanted to make some changes.

Me: And so what did you do at first?

Resident: Started organizing ... We organized in the corners that were heavily infested with drugs, and we stopped drug activities at night time. And we established a relationship with the police district, and as we saw the need growing. We had to get involved in many things. Not only in the aspect of violence and drugs, but also trying to find a way to support the folks already here. We tried to organize our own housing, education. (Interview, 2008)

Another of the UNAD founders remembered that she slowly became willing to express herself to city government, “we were afraid to open our mouth even in small meetings, and we used to go to these huge meetings with people from the city and hide behind each other so that they won't ask us any questions...Now I have to speak out, the things I like and the things I don't like.” (Interview, 2008) The District City Councilman's former Chief of Staff confirmed that these residents became important spokespeople to city government. He told me, “Any time [these women] came to us and complained about any issue, we would follow up on it.... we would respond. I mean they were good ladies. They were really good people. And they would get our attention.” (Interview, 2007)

Several other groups formally organized in the 1970s and 1980s either to pursue lawsuits against government and banks for neighborhood neglect or with other community-empowerment and development goals. After filing a successful law suit in 1970 to force state government to provide group care to Latinos with mental retardation in a state hospital, one group formed a nonprofit to provide services related to mental health and mental retardation.⁸ A group of young mothers “...dedicated to the revitalization of the neighborhood and the empowerment of its residents...through the development and improvement of the physical, economic, social, cultural, and educational aspects of the neighborhood” founded the Norris Square Civic Association in 1982.⁹ In 1986, a neighborhood coalition won a \$50 million dollar settlement from a challenge to a bank's lending practices and formed the Women's Community Revitalization Project, which now performs community advocacy and development. By the 1990s these organizations and several like them had created or become community development corporations, contributing significantly to housing and business construction with government financing.

In the early 1990s, resident and business leaders together convinced Mayor Ed Rendell (1992-2000) to include the neighborhoods surrounding American Street in a national application

⁸ Retrieved from the Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha Web Site, March 18, 2007, “About Us: A Brief History of APM,” <http://www.apmphila.org/about.html>

⁹ Retrieved from “Norris Square Civic Association,” on National Council of La Raza Web Site, March 18, 2007, <http://www.nclr.org/content/affiliates/detail/1232/>.

for federal Empowerment Zone (EZ) funds. (Interviews, 2007) (The EZ program was President Clinton's major community development initiative.) In 1994, Philadelphia became one of the six cities nationwide to win an EZ designation, and \$24 million was dedicated to what the application called "The American Street Industrial Corridor," an area with approximately 20,000 residents.

Rosemary Cubas had a long history of community activism and was involved with the Empowerment Zone program from the beginning. She invited government involvement in the neighborhood's development, but she was wary of how it would wield its power. To help the community build political power, she and other residents founded the Community Leadership Institute (CLI) the same year the EZ application was filed. At their request, the EZ application included funds to support of this group's development. CLI was to be a grassroots group that, through political education and skill-building, would help residents guide the Leviathan's hand. The remainder of this paper follows how well Cubas and others were able to do this as government moved forward with eminent domain plans.

Government's Property Acquisition

By the 1990s, local government agencies had been paying attention to what seemed to them like problems with land use in the American Street area for decades. Any area large enough for a new warehouse or light manufacturing operation was checkered with land owned by various private individuals, many who had long disappeared, and by federal and local public agencies. Through the 1990s, Vince Dougherty led a multi-agency group from the Commerce Department to acquire several small vacant parcels of land to assemble into parcels large enough for new warehouse or industrial development (three acres). They first pursued properties privately and put others that were in arrears on taxes up for public auction and bought them there (Dougherty 2007). Sometimes, however, the owner could not be located, and unpaid taxes were not high enough to force an auction, so they would use the city's power of condemnation. By the late 1990s, they had not been able to assemble any parcels larger than one acre without taking any occupied properties. There were still several lots that could be consolidated and made available as large, three-acre parcels for industry if they took a more "aggressive" approach, condemning occupied housing and businesses scattered among the more prevalent vacant parcels (Dougherty 1997).

In late 2000, three major government programs (the American Street Site Assembly Project, the American Street Empowerment Zone [EZ], and the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative

[NTI], the Mayor's anti-blight program¹⁰) coalesced around a plan to acquire the first block for the brake company. They planned to follow condemnations on the other two blocks shortly thereafter.

During the 1990s, other agencies had strongly resisted forcing any residential displacements, especially if the City of Philadelphia Department of Commerce could not promise a specific development project. By 1998, Vince and the Commerce Department had a new, pressing incentive to assemble a large swath of vacant land: a brake company began talking to them about moving operations a half mile north into the neighborhood, and building a larger facility to house more jobs. Commerce began asking other departments to consider "pilot" condemnations that would assemble three acres of land but only dislocate seven or eight families on each of two blocks, and assemble one and a half acres on another block, by dislocating three families (Dougherty 1998).

The city would first pursue the area that the brake company was interested in, as a demonstration project for how eminent domain could be used responsibly where properties were occupied. The city would seek to condemn all private property, strike the narrow street through the middle of what would become a larger block, and transfer all publicly-owned properties to a single entity. Half of the seventy-two parcels were publicly owned, and half were privately owned. Most were vacant lots. The existing structures were eight occupied row homes, two commercial properties, and a multi-story building in disrepair.¹¹ The owner-occupied homes were mostly tightly packed in a single row in the middle of the larger area. They were in fairly good condition though they were worth little on the real estate market. (The city's first estimate of compensation for the real estate was \$20,000 for each three-story row home.)

Resident leaders had expressed serious reservations about the taking of occupied homes, as had high-level government bureaucrats and politicians. The issue of eminent domain had come before the Empowerment Zone (EZ) program's governing body, dominated by community representatives before. One EZ staff member recalls that in general,

The Board was, as a group, very reluctant to get behind any effort that would end up with people having to move from their house...[the Board] always said it was against the idea of acquiring land in a way that dispossessed people *unless it was absolutely necessary*. (Interview, 2008)

Discussions about earlier takings made clear that Board members thought that the sacrifice of scattered residences could be justified if the new development was worthwhile and if relocations were limited in number and handled well. One Board member explained to me that she did support

10 At that time it was called the Blight Elimination and Neighborhood Transformation program, but it would later become the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative or NTI.

11 There was also a handful of both vacant and occupied row-homes owned by the Philadelphia Housing Authority. (Burgos, Santiago. 2001. "Status Report of First Year of the A.S.E.Z. - N.T.I. Pilot Early Action Planning Project." Philadelphia Empowerment Zone, Philadelphia.)

the acquisition of the block for the brake company “only because I saw the importance of bringing jobs because the neighborhood is dying. And it needs to be revived, and if we don’t bring jobs we are going to die” (Interview, 2008). Though the Board did not formally review the American Street takings discussed in this paper, it did consider and cautiously support eminent domain that would cause displacement a few years earlier. The planned development of a ball field would require a handful of relocations. Rosemary Cubas and other community representatives guardedly sanctioned the unfortunate sacrifice though that plan never materialized for other reasons.

ORDER LEGIBILITY IN IMPLEMENTATION

As the eminent domain plans emerged, nearby residents expressed concern about what would be developed and how condemnees (people who lost their property) would be treated. Given assurances about these two factors, many cautiously decided eminent domain was justified. The city’s failure to deliver on promises of respectful relocation of the people and redevelopment of the land -- not pre-facto objections to government’s strong hand -- drew protest. For the relocation process to function as residents expected, the worth people held in their properties would need to be successfully converted from one order to another. Problems with order legibility caused failure in relocations, and drew resident resistance.

Early Implementation

Implementation of the plan to take properties to be redeveloped by the brake company quickly proved problematic. They were embroiled by delays that lasted beyond the brake company’s ability to wait. Those delays also exacerbated challenges already posed by the overly formal and obtuse communications initiated by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia (RDA), the government agency that handles the eminent domain process, including relocation.

The RDA sent the first direct notification to owners who would lose property on the first block in late December 2001, but it was not a clear notification of the plans for condemnation. In very legalistic and non-committal terms, the letter said the city was “considering” condemnation and announced that an appraiser would be visiting the property to estimate its value. The appraisers did make their estimates, but probably only from the outside of the buildings and had no additional contact with the homeowners. The RDA staff members planned to follow up quickly with visits from specialists, who would work with residents individually on how and where they would find a place to go and pay for it.

Not having understood the December 2001 letters as indicating that their properties would be condemned, the owners were shocked when they received more pointed letters in July 2002 stating a condemnation was proceeding and providing an estimate for their properties' real estate value. The RDA staff had meant for these two sets of letters to arrive soon after one another, but the whole project had stalled, for about six months. The RDA legal team was fighting with another public agency on the content of the contract about the second agency's responsibility to pay for the acquisition. The takings on the first block, for the brake company, burst into the public conscience when the "offer letters" arrived. Benito Romero and his next-door neighbor lived on the second large area targeted, and they received similar letters just a few months later.

Important resident leaders who had either abided or sanctioned condemnations such as these turned against government as they learned of these letters. The legalistic letters government sent to homeowners became powerful symbols of government insensitivity. One community-organization leader described his perception of what happened, which matched that of several other interviewees. He had been an early supporter of the plan, but he told City Council,

Well, the concept [of acquisitions of a few occupied homes for a large industrial parcel] is good. But you just don't come to those families and give them a \$20,000 check and say go away...And so the result of that was the community got riled up. There were meetings. There were demonstrations...You just don't tell people pack up and go. Go where? So you get \$20,000. What in the world can you afford today with \$20,000? (Interview, 2007)

Resident and former EZ Board member Rosemary Cubas said she changed her position about what the EZ was doing with land acquisition after a seventy-year-old widow who had been living in her row home for decades, approached her, waved a letter in front of her, and asked, in Spanish, for help. Rosemary recalled,

I thought she was crazy...She told us that she had to move, that the City was taking her house. She kept repeating over and over again that she'd gotten a letter that she couldn't understand, but that the government was coming to take away her home." (Webb 2003)

Cubas responded by organizing people against the city's efforts. She recruited about 200 nearby residents to come to an "urgent community meeting" on October 10, 2002 by knocking on doors and passing out flyers saying, "Your home may be in danger of expropriation by city agencies, the American Street Empowerment Zone and some community groups for business expansion...We Must Unite And Fight This, Just in Case They are Heading in Our Direction." The anti-eminent domain organizing did not manage to stop the takings along American Street, but the conflict birthed a small network of committed activists who worked to prevent more eminent domain around the city (Webb 2003).

Individual Successes

The letters provided signs that residents, mostly homeowners, were being displaced without the necessary consideration, compensation, and assistance. And those signs motivated activism against the project. Though those letters came to symbolize the whole relocation and compensation process, professionals involved expect the process to be very involved and individualized. Though the infamous \$20,000 offered for the houses on the first block was pretty close (if not exactly) to what those families received as compensation for the houses' market value, but the average family also got more than that amount earmarked as relocation costs. (In all, at settlement the homeowner-occupants on the first block to be condemned would receive a median amount of \$41,149. On the second two blocks, homeowner-occupants would get \$58,319 in a combination of real estate and relocation expenses.) As a result, not all families were as dissatisfied with how they were relocated in the end, as they feared in the beginning.

Relocation specialists personally visited the residents on the first condemned block in late July and early August 2002, three to four weeks after the offer letters were mailed. They talked through their individual situations to determine possible "relocation benefits", in addition to the money offered for the real estate. An RDA relocation worker who had helped residents fight these cases of eminent domain, before she was hired, described her own learning about the process. She said that it is, of course, always difficult for people but can be much more helpful for them in the end than they initially realize,

I go to your house. (*Knocking on the desk*). "The city wants your house." And it's really bad. And it's really bad because the people have been there for 50 years, their memories, their kids grew up there. And I know it's really bad. But I've seen the outcome and I know those people will never have the chance to have a new house. Or tenants, they're never going to have the chance to maybe - for anybody to pay the rent you know. And I know it's going to be hard. But I've seen the outcome in so many cases that I handle here in relocation. And the outcome is good. Because even though the city is taking your house, the city has some program or some assistance that you know - this doesn't look that bad at the end. (Interview, 2007)

Most residents did not want to move, but some ended up with what those involved agreed were much better deals than others. The people who became most satisfied chose new housing situations whose condition government could easily approve, with a health and safety inspection. They also could easily document their claim to a relocation benefit.

Benito's next-door neighbor was pleased with her relocation arrangements. She was ready to leave the neighborhood anyway, but she had refused to sell the house in the years prior to the condemnation. She figured that when the city took the properties, it would pay more she would

have gotten earlier, and she thinks that is exactly what happened. She accessed her full relocation benefits and bought a house several miles to the north, in a neighborhood near her daughter's family. Sitting in the home she moved to, she described to me how she negotiated with the city. She spoke in English, though Spanish was her primary language.

I told them in the beginning, that if they do not give me enough to buy a house that I feel comfortable, I do not want sell it. I was not going to agree [just] because I wanted to move from there to down here. I was going to need more money to do that...I was determined. I was determined not to sell it even if I wanted to move from there...I wanted to pick my own house. They said all right."
(Interview, 2008)

Residents in many different situations managed to find relocation situations that suited them, even though they would have preferred not to have moved at all. One of the most publicly vocal opponents of the condemnations eventually managed to find an acceptable relocation scheme. His RDA relocation worker remembers that he had resisted moving until they showed him a brand new house a few blocks from his old one. They explained that he would have no mortgage, and that he would only have to pay utility and home-insurance bills. When they offered this, she said, "His whole vision changed."

A woman who had been renting from her uncle for years received enough money to make a significant down payment on her own house in a nearby neighborhood. She says she never would have been able to buy a house on her income along. Another condemnee looked at what happened to this renter this way,

They gave her a check, and she got a down payment...for a house. Now she owns her own house. And I said, 'Well good.' At least that was good of them because everybody thought they were going to just buy the houses from the people that owned them. And they were going to leave her hanging because that was not her house, but she got a house. She got a nice house. I mean she got a better house than I do. (Interview, 2008)

The situation of another family was much more difficult, but professionals and some of the family members say they managed to resolve it as well as could be expected. The family received two new houses next door to each other in a nearby neighborhood, in return for the two they had owned. The family had recently invested heavily to make one of the older houses manageable for the mother, who was disabled. One EZ staff member told me, proudly, that they managed to move them into "brand new houses...The parents were able to move into actually a better situation...It was fully handicapped accessible from the front door...and the sisters are in units right next door to each other" (Califano 2006).

Government workers say that the theory behind relocation benefits is that government is supposed to leave the condemnee in at least as good or better situation than before the taking. The written rules that guide the process support this perspective. There are many reasons that

government may succeed or fail to achieve this goal for certain individuals. But government's performance is persistently affected by how well its agents can understand, or read, how good a living situation is. Residents, community leaders, and government workers agreed that not all of the relocation stories worked out as well as the ones just described for the condemnees, considerations about whether they wanted to move set aside. The rest of the findings section explains how these cases ended up so differently from the ones just described. Two dimensions of either past or present living situations proved crucial to government's ability to recognize worth: whether a house seems like healthy, safe, and even desirable place to live and whether someone can actually document an official property right, or claim to compensation.

Learning from Individual Failures: Misreading a Desirable Place to Live

Condemnees mentioned to me how important all of the vacant lots had been for people's psyche. One woman sat in her new house and described the old one, "The house was small, but the thing is, I felt free. I could go outside and do all other things with plants and all that, but in here, I cannot. I get bored."

Individual government workers often did not understand why residents would cherish these houses that were run down or surrounded by abandoned land, until they became personally involved. One of them told me how most of the people who worked in government but did not live there saw the houses, "When you drive by, you would...ask yourself, 'Why would people want to live here?'"

Working directly with the residents sometimes taught them that people had really created comfortable spaces in a neighborhood rife with problems, and sometimes turned those problems into assets. The staff member just quoted continued,

When you came into one of these houses, you were struck by - I mean these were places where you really would have wanted to live in. I mean I can tell you, beautiful, impeccably kept, neatly painted, with gorgeous plants, TV screens, and all the amenities. They're working families who have been overtime investing in their property. And this is a place that they rightly call home. I mean it could be home for any of us. Once you went inside, you'll forget what you saw outside. (Interview, 2007)

Even when residents successfully communicated, that is convinced individuals in government, what an acceptable and desirable property was, written rules and institutional norms requiring the relocation house to be "safe and sanitary" could prevent government workers from exercising the discretion they needed to meet residents' desires. Federal guidelines provide for "relocation benefits" beyond the "fair market value" of a property, but those benefits are not given in cash. They must be used to secure a "safe and sanitary" relocation property.

Government workers satisfied some relocatees by securing houses newly constructed by nearby nonprofit organizations. But many residents were not interested in that housing. One told me, "I did not want any house from the projects or from programs." Others complained of those houses' cheap materials. Benito Romero, in particular, could not see himself in what he considered shoddy construction in a densely packed area.

One condemnee found several houses she wanted to buy that failed inspection. She became frustrated, moved into a house her husband bought in his name without government help, and signed away her right to claim the relocation benefit.

Resident: I looked for a few houses but all that I looked at never passed inspection. Because when the city inspectors would come they told me the house didn't pass inspection. And I looked for another and they told me it didn't pass inspection. Because they wanted a house that was practically new, because of the kids. They [the houses] were new, those that I got were good, they were not new, but they always told me they didn't pass inspection.

Me: For serious reasons?

Resident: No, silly things. They always said that this his wasn't good for the kids, so that the kids live in it, because it has something in the paint, or something on the walls or something on the floor. And I said oh well....they told me that we couldn't buy the house because it didn't pass inspection. So after my husband grabbed and bought this house with a mortgage. And I told them my husband bought this house because we can't get left in the street he entered in a mortgage, and we can't get left in the street, and I grabbed my money in cash. They gave me the money in cash...

Me: So when did you decide that you weren't going to look for any more houses?

Resident: After I looked at a bunch of houses and they always told me that they didn't pass inspection and I got like a little down and I said I'm not going to look for anything else. (Interview, 2008)

She forfeited up to \$22,500, about equal to what many of the owners received as market value for their houses.

Benito located several houses he liked, that he thought he could afford, but house after house failed health and safety inspection inspections. His empathic relocation worker described what happened with one of the houses he found, nine blocks north of his existing one.

He's stuck. He wanted the house. But we went to see the house. The porch is like this (*holding her hands up slanted*.) And actually we always send an inspector because we need to make sure the house is decent, safe, and sanitary. It's not decent. It's not safe...He can do the relocation. He can buy the house on his own. But he will not have the relocation money because the house is not decent, safe, and sanitary. He wants to do the repairs on his own. And there's nothing that I can do...I said I understand, but there is nothing that I can do...And he just wants the house. He wants the house, and he wants the house. And I said...we cannot help you because the house is not decent, safe, and sanitary. (Interview, 2007)

Five years after his house was condemned, Benito bought another that passed inspection. He was extremely unhappy with the place. He pointed out to me how crowded the neighborhood was and how many problems there were with the house's construction. He thought this house only passed inspection because the government finally really needed him to leave his old house.

Learning from Individual Failures: Misreading Ownership

Compensation packages were also problematic when residents had trouble documenting their ownership status, and this was a fairly common problem. As with the desirability of a particular house, individual government workers might be persuaded to view ownership differently from what they saw on paper. But the written and unwritten rules would often tie their hands.

Most government workers, neighbors and family agreed that Benito was the true owner of his house. But he had put official title in his brother's name years earlier. Benito's brother was willing to pass along any compensation from the government, but this did not solve the problem. Government would give the brother the real estate value for the house, but would treat Benito as a renter rather than an owner. As a tenant, Benito was only eligible for a little more than half of the \$22,500 that most of his neighbors could receive as an extra payment for "replacement housing." After Benito moved into a replacement house, his daughter lamented,

They treated my father as a tenant, so he lost a lot of money. He would have got more. A couple thousand more, but they treated him as a tenant only because on record, my uncle's name was the one that was on the deed. They didn't want to hear it because, you know, they have a budget, and they want to give you the least possible. And so before, he never owed a mortgage. Now he owes a mortgage. So that wasn't fair. But you know, because the city, you know, why would my uncle, if it was really his house, why would he say it's my brother's house? But they didn't want to hear it. (Interview, 2008)

Benito told me that he had put the house in his brother's name years earlier because he was convinced that owning an asset would threaten his own Social Security benefits. He didn't understand why he couldn't be treated like the rest of the owner-occupants.

Benito's next-door neighbor, who was generally pleased with the compensation, had only one complaint. She thought she should have been paid for the lot next door, which she had used but had no title to document ownership. She asked me if I remembered the time when "you were allowed to take" an empty lot that was next to your house. She said, to do that,

Resident: I said to the City, "Do you think that you can pay me for this lot?" And, they said, "If you do not have the papers you cannot get paid for that...We were using the lot for plants and different vegetables and all that, but always we said we were going to go to put the papers in our name and we never did, that was the reason. I think it was \$2,000 that they paid for each lot... so we never did.
Me: So, you thought they should have done, they should have paid you for the lot?
Resident: Exactly... I did not complain, but I think so. (Interview, 2008)

Like his neighbor, Benito had used the lots next door to his house, but neither he nor his brother had titles to them. He had built a shed and stored trucks in the two lots right next door, years before the condemnation proceedings came along. He had erected a few hundred feet of

chain-link fence, covering about half the length of a long block, to prevent dumping. RDA Relocation Worker Reyes said,

He doesn't want any house. He wants a house with a yard to be able to park his trucks and other cars that he has that don't work. But he wants them because they're his...You know it's hard. But I was telling him, "No," [when he said,] "That's my truck and that's my lot." And I said, "Benito, you know that is not yours. And I'm really, really sorry that you're going through this." (Interview, 2007)

DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

The failures, thus far, of the city to deliver on the development promises have only exacerbated negative feelings about this use of eminent domain. Though a real company's interest motivated the first large-scale acquisition, inter-agency disagreements slowed them down enough that the company lost interest and moved to the suburbs. Government moved the occupants out and demolished buildings by 2004, two years after anticipated. The area sat vacant for until 2008, when it was re-developed for a warehouse operation. A processed meat warehousing company relocated from an older building two blocks away to a new 50,000 square foot facility and reported adding sixteen new jobs before the year was out. The block it previously occupied was made vacant.

The other two areas were officially condemned in 2003, but residents were not all relocated and the buildings demolished until 2007 (Dougherty 2009). There was no immediate developer interested, so there was no real rush. In 2009, Vince Dougherty was expecting a developer to soon begin building a facility for his heating and cooling company in the second three-acre site, but there was no physical manifestation of the plans yet. Companies interested in the one-and-a-half acre site have since come and gone, and Vince responded thus to my questions about it in 2009, "We are discussing how to move forward with this site especially given the economy."

DISCUSSION

One significant way residents, businesses, and government workers sought neighborhood change was to invite increased involvement of formal state power in the area's physical development. Though this would not lead to a total replacement of other orders and might not even shift the balance of which order was dominant; orders would remain plural. But attempts to bring about this kind of change – as witnessed so dramatically here through the use of eminent domain – would require the conversion of some worth from being held and interpreted in one institutional order to another. Though some individuals would successfully make this conversion, others would not.

I am interested in the mechanisms that made the difference, and I use the label “order legibility” to signal this broad group of mechanisms. In the very particular situation studied here, two aspects of the institutionalized orders made them more or less legible to from the standpoint of one another, that is, eased or thwarted the conversion in individual circumstances. During the time when informal organization of land management reigned, many individuals treated abandonment and deteriorating construction as an opportunity for them to reap significant rewards from sweat equity. Many also turned the nuisance of dumping and crime on abandoned property into a benefit when they demonstrated care for the land to keep the others out. They then drew the benefits of extra space to store cars, have parties, and let the kids play. Making a transition to having at least some land managed more directly by a more formal organization involved the formal evaluation of property worth, previously controlled and interpreted informally. The transition was much smoother, the more legible that worth was from one order to another.

CONCLUSION

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