



Social Impact of  
the Arts Project

---

University of Pennsylvania  
School of Social Work

**Work Paper #4**  
**Social Citizenship and Urban Poverty**

**Mark J. Stern**

**February 1997**

**DRAFT--DO NOT CITE OR QUOTE WITHOUT PERMISSION**



The increased visibility of concentrated urban poverty has posed a variety of intellectual and policy challenges in the past decade. The spread of joblessness and economic disinvestment has left many urban neighborhoods in ruins. Fears about the culture and family life of the poor have motivated a variety of responses, including the recent “welfare reform” effort that ended the federal government’s guarantee of financial assistance to dependent children.

In several previous papers, I have argued that the underclass thesis has served an ideological role with respect to social changes in two spheres: work and family. The underclass thesis--by drawing a sharp distinction between the underclass and the *mainstream*--has displaced a set of widespread concerns and dilemmas concerning work and family from society generally to a particular stratum. Thus, by identifying the underclass with problems of work and family--the decline in the regulating role of work and the *work ethic*, the increased destabilization of family life, the decline of social consensus concerning the valorization of these institutions--we have taken problems that are quite general in Western societies--and which are central to the social transformations of the late 20th century--and attempted to define them as *particular* to one stratum and *marginal* to society generally.

In this paper, I want to extend this argument to another sphere of social life: the public sphere. The underclass thesis is quite explicit in its predictions of what we should expect to find with respect to public participation. If the thesis were true, underclass neighborhoods should be characterized by low levels of public participation, few social institutions, and profound neglect of public places. In addition, not only should these phenomenon exist, but there should be a discontinuity between levels in areas of concentrated poverty and the rest of the city. In other words, if the underclass-mainstream dichotomy is correct we would expect not only to find a relationship between participation and levels of poverty (a result that can be explained using a variety of theoretical perspectives), but a discontinuous relationship between participation and concentrated poverty.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of public participation has taken on increased importance in recent years in the political dialogue on both sides of the Atlantic. In the US, the persistence of public budget deficits and the continuing popularity of anti-tax messages has imposed severe constraints on the ameliorative capacity of the state. As a result, groups and individuals with widely divergent political ideologies has reached a social consensus that

---

<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan Crane, “Effects of Neighborhoods on Dropping Out of School” in Jencks and Peterson, *The Urban Underclass* for an argument that teenage child bearing and early school leaving conform to this discontinuous pattern in US cities in 1970.



*nongovernmental community based institutions provide the most effective means of addressing contemporary social problems.* Much of the support of this position in the past decade has been rhetorical (see Salomon on this point), but the recent “welfare reform” law passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton gave an unprecedented public sanction to the privatization of social welfare in the United States. The expansion of interest in idea of “social capital” (associated with the work of Robert Putnam) for example demonstrates the extent to which we now look toward the nonprofit sector to provide amelioration and social solidarity.

In this paper, I examine the issue of public participation and the underclass from an empirical perspective. I shall use three data sources my research project has developed for its examination of the role of arts and cultural institutions in the social life of Philadelphia. The first is a “survey of public participation” which examines the relationship of participation in neighborhood institutions, cultural participation, and evaluations of quality-of-life. This survey was conducted in five neighborhoods in the city of Philadelphia during the past summer and fall. The second datasource is a assessment of physical traces of attention and neglect these five neighborhoods and one additional community. The third data source is a compilation of social and community institutions for the entire Philadelphia metropolitan region. These data sources provide three distinct perspectives on the concept of participation .

- The survey allows us to examine the *individual* structure of participation. To what extent are particular types of participation correlated with particular attitudes toward one’s environment.
- The analysis of physical traces allows us to examine the physical residue of public engagement and disengagement. To what extent, can we find physical evidence of
- The community institution database allows us to examine the institutional structure of participation. To what extent has public engagement resulted in the development of institutions and organizations?

### **The Underclass, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere**

Through most of this century, the idea of expanding the rights of citizens as been lodged in the expansion of government’s responsibility for protecting and enhancing the formal rights of the individual. Following T.H. Marshall’s famous division between civil, political, and economic rights, most American social welfare advocates had seen the expansion of public welfare programs and the formal civil rights of disenfranchised groups as at the core of its reform agenda.

However, beginning in the 1960s, the identification of rights expansion with state action began to be undermined. Although the Civil Rights movement of that era could be interpreted as a continuation the traditional liberal agenda, the movement more often than not found itself in conflict with state authorities, not allied with them. The merging of the Civil Rights movement, the “community action” projects of the War on Poverty, and



the anti-war movement permanently increased progressives' belief in the benevolent role of government.

Reformers after the 1960s were more likely to be skeptical of government. In its place, they placed increased reliance on the role of community and individual organization and mobilization as the key force for reform. In perhaps the most influential formulation of this position, Piven and Cloward argued that changes in government policy--to expand social welfare or guarantee rights--was simply one aspect of the attempts of social elites to contain and undercut the mobilization of the poor. The expansion of citizenship rights took place--in the parlance of the times-- "in the streets."

The shift away from state-centered approaches to citizenship picked up steam during the 1980s and 1990s. The skepticism over the motives of the state were complemented by concerns over its administrative and fiscal capacity. O'Connor, for example, argued that even if popular forces were successful at getting government to assume new responsibilities, the limits on the state's capacity to tax the well-off inevitably led to a fiscal crisis. Furthermore, in the years after the urban fiscal emergencies of the late 1970s and the ballooning Federal deficits after 1981, set about a process of steady erosion in the capacity of government's at all levels to address existing, much less, new needs.

Into the void left by public sector erosion and private-sector disinvestment, stepped the voluntary sector. By offering an alternative that bridged conservatives' distaste for government action (and taxation) and "New Left" beliefs in mobilization and "empowerment," the voluntary sector appeared to represent an option for hope that defied existing political categories. Furthermore, the resuscitation of communitarian thought after the 1970s merged with increased interest in the "public sphere," that was neither the government nor the market, increased the emphasis on community institutions and participation as the locus for the expansion of citizenship.

Although there were general concerns with the decline in civic engagement across society, the increased visibility of concentrated urban poverty posed a particular challenge. The market was obviously a major contributor to the decline of urban neighborhoods, and the fiscal constraints and bureaucratic distance of many public institutions did not make them a likely site of urban renewal. It was therefore particularly worrisome that the voluntary sector, too, seemed to be ineffective in poor neighborhoods.

There has been a widespread assertion in the literature on urban poverty that social institutions have abandoned urban neighborhoods. In addition to public institutions like schools and social service agencies, this institutional decline is assumed to have affected voluntary associations and other nonprofit organizations as well. Some commentators have questioned, as well, the accessibility of those that have remained. William J. Wilson, for example, has argued that many inner-city churches have memberships that have largely abandoned the neighborhoods in which the churches are located.



Although the impact of institutional failure on the urban poor has usually taken a back seat to concerns about work and family, the fact of decline and its implication for the quality of life have often been taken for granted. Michael Katz, for example, concludes that: "Many institutions have deserted inner cities; the ones that remain are failing ; along with city government, their legitimacy has collapsed." Although Katz exempts churches from this generalization, he does not question that implications of insitutional withdrawal for the quality of life and civic engagement in poor neighborhoods:

Institutional withdrawal and collapse not only rob inner cities of the services they need, they knock out the propos that sustain a viable public life and the possibility of community. They destroy the basis of "civil society." Denuded of institutions, cities move inelctuably toward privitization and away from a public life, toward anomic individualism and away from community. As community becomes more elusive in inner cities, its restraints and satisfctions disappear, eroing the buffer between individuals and a consumer culture to which they lack access through legitimate means. (Katz 1993: 447)

Katz goes on however to raise a caveat included in more sweeping accounts of poor urban neighborhoods. The breakdown of the public sphere and civic engagement are not unique to the urban poor:

Institutional failure, a degraded public life, and the collapse of community do not stop at the borders of inner cities. They diminish the lives of everyone. That is nanother reason why the problmes of the underclass represent in intensified form transfromations that are reshaping the rest of America. The renewal of public life and the rebuilding of community require the reviatalization of urban institutions. Without a renewed public sphere, no policies directed toward family, work, or wlefare will turn around the crisis within America's inner cities.

The literature on citizenship, social participation, and the underclass, however, has been marked by a failure to clearly delineate the forms of civic disengagement that plague urban neighborhoods. The evidence on civic engagement has often been anecdotal in nature or imprecise in locating its geographic impact.

In order gain a more precise understanding of the impact of voluntary organizations on urban neighborhoods--with particular attention to arts and cultural institutions--the Social Impact of the Arts Project, undertook an examination of civic participation in a set of neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The goal of the research was to investigate a variety of measures of civic participation and of attention and neglect within neighborhoods. This paper uses these data to examine levels of participation in urban neighborhoods. The central question we ask is: "Are very poor neighborhoods characterized by distinctive patterns with respect to civic engagement?" In order to



pursue this question, we examine three different methods for examining participation and engagement: self-reported data on participation, physical evidence of attention and neglect, and data on the location of social institutions.

## **Data and Methods**

The evidence in this paper derives from the study of metropolitan Philadelphia by the University of Pennsylvania's Social Impact of the Arts Project. It includes data on the location of social institutions across the metropolitan area and data on participation and engagement for a set of case study neighborhoods within the city of Philadelphia. First, I describe the city and case study neighborhoods and then I turn to the methods we used to collect data.

### **Philadelphia and Its Neighborhoods.**

[For German paper I should have a paragraph that lays out some census data on Philadelphia]

The six case studies used in this paper represent three neighborhoods that would be classified as "underclass" by most observers and three that do not have the same concentration of poverty. [Note: I think I need to break Powelton into P and west powelton].

**Powelton.** Powelton is located in West Philadelphia adjacent to Center City and the a number of universities. Powelton includes a variety of different groups, including a large professional and managerial population (42 percent of 1990 civilian labor force) and students from surrounding universities (60 percent of the area's population is under 25 years of age). Powelton is racially mixed; 65 percent of the population is white and 26 percent is African-American. The combination of a stable population and a student stratum results in an economic profile that includes a median family income of over forty-two thousand dollars and a poverty rate of 27 percent, both figures significantly above the average for the city.

**Mantua/West Powelton** Mantua/West Powelton is a poor predominantly African-American neighborhood located directly to the North and West of Powelton. In addition, to a poverty rate of 45 percent, Mantua is characterized by a high-level of housing abandonment (in 1990, 20 percent of the structures in Mantua were vacant), high unemployment (the 1990 rate was 20 percent), and a high proportion of female-headed families (66 percent).

**Point Breeze.** Point Breeze is a predominantly African-American neighborhood located in South Philadelphia. In 1990, the population included 78 percent African-Americans with significant minorities of Asians (7 percent) and white (13



percent). Although characterized by high unemployment, Point Breeze has a high rate of property ownership which provides a level of community stability.

**East Mount Airy.** East Mount Airy is a predominantly black (80 percent) located in Northwest Philadelphia. The population includes a significant minority of whites (20 percent). The poverty rate of the neighborhood was only 10 percent in 1990 and the unemployment rate only 8 percent. Sixty-four percent of the occupied units in the neighborhood were owner-occupied in 1990. Thirty-seven percent were in professional and managerial occupations.

**West Mount Airy.** West Mount Airy is a racially mixed neighborhood (53 percent white, 45 percent black) located adjacent to East Mount Airy in Northwest Philadelphia. It is the most well-off of our case study communities with a poverty rate of 8 percent and an unemployment rate of 4 percent in 1990. Fifty-six percent of the neighborhood's civilian labor force had professional or managerial occupations in 1990.

**Hartranft/Fairhill.** Hartranft/Fairhill is located in one of the poorest sections of the city, in North Philadelphia. The residents of the area are predominantly Latino (53 percent), although the western section of the area is primarily African-American. The neighborhood's poverty rate was 59 percent in 1990. Although there has been a significantly exodus of businesses from the area over the past several decades, the neighborhood's vacancy rate (16 percent) is comparable to that of Powelton and Point Breeze and lower than that of Mantua. The population is extraordinarily young. In 1990, 42 percent of the residents were under the age of 20.

## **Data Sources**

The data for this paper derive from four different sources: the U.S. Census enumeration of 1990, a survey of community participation conducted in five of the six neighborhoods in 1996, a mapping of traces of community attention and neglect that was completed in 1996, and an inventory of community and social organizations.

**US Census enumeration.** This paper uses data collected by the US Census Bureau in 1990. The information in this paper is aggregated to the *block group* level (an area of between 6 and 8 city blocks) and relates to the poverty rate, housing characteristics, labor force, and education of the population.

**Survey of Community Participation.** During 1996, the Social Impact of the Arts Project developed a survey instrument to examine community involvement and assessment of quality of life in our case study neighborhoods. The survey included: 1) a check list of 16 types of community involvement, 2) a check list of 17 types of cultural



participation (at both the local and regional level); 3) more detailed information (level of involvement, length of participation) for the respondents three most frequent types of community participation and cultural participation; 4) a 18-feature assessment of the quality of life in the respondent's neighborhood and in the metropolitan region; and 5) personal demographic information.

Samples were drawn from a listing of houses with listed phone numbers. The survey was administered using two methods. In East Mount Airy, West Mount Airy, and Powelton, the survey was mailed to sampled individuals. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a second mailing was sent to those households that had not responded. Finally, two weeks later, a letter was sent to nonrespondents requesting they return their surveys.

After consultation with the project's advisory board and community leaders, the project staff decided to use a set of trained community members to administer the survey in Point Breeze and Mantua. The project staff developed the sample using the same sampling frame and trained the canvassers in administering the survey. Then the questionnaire was administered in-person.

Our respondents represent a cross-section of the community case study neighborhoods. Our respondents tended to have slightly lower incomes in Powelton and somewhat higher incomes in East Mt Airy than the population as a whole. The proportion of respondents that was African-American was higher in Point Breeze and Powelton and somewhat lower in Mount Airy than the population. The educational attainment of our sample reflected population figures in Point Breeze, Powelton, and Mantua, but the highly educated were somewhat overrepresented in our Mount Airy samples. Finally, owners were over-represented in all of our sample areas, ranging from a gap of 13 percent in Point Breeze to 22 percent in East Mount Airy.

**Community Mapping.** The Project staff mapped all six neighborhoods between February and November 1996. The mapping was based on the method for recording "physical traces" developed by John Zeisel in *Inquiry by Design: Tools for Environment-Behavior Research*. For Zeisel, a physical traces are "reflections of previous activity not produced in order to be measured by researchers." He notes that:

Traces may have been unconsciously left behind (for example, paths across a field), or they may be conscious changes people have made in their surroundings (for example, a curtain hung over an open doorway or a new wall built). From such traces environment-behavior researchers begin to infer how an environment got to be the way it is, what decisions its designers and builders made about the place, how people actually use it, how they feel toward their surroundings, and generally how that particular environment meets the needs of its users. (Zeisel 1980:89).



Our goal in mapping our community case studies was to identify physical traces of community engagement and disengagement. As our mapping proceeded we refined our method to focus on traces of *attention* and *neglect* of the communities physical environment. Initially, our canvassers used open-ended instruments in which they recorded evidence of attention and neglect. Based on this work, we developed a set of 32 indicators of attention and neglect (Table 3). We grouped a subset of these into three categories:

- Positive housing features, which demonstrated positive attention to a resident's immediate surroundings
- Negative housing features, which demonstrate neglect and negative attention to immediate surroundings
- Positive community features, which demonstrate positive attention to the broader community

Data on the address of the feature and its nature were entered into the computer. A geographic-information system program (Atlas GIS) was then used to *geocode* each feature, assigning it a specific point location (latitude and longitude). Features were then aggregated to the block group level. In other words, for each block group in our community case studies, we counted the number of each of the 32 different features. We then used population figures from the 1990 census to calculate the number of features per 100 persons. We also estimated the proportion of each feature among all of the features in a particular area.

## **Social Organizations**

The final data for this paper are a set of listings of social organizations in the metropolitan Philadelphia region. These consist of an arts and cultural data base and an inventory of other types of social organizations:

### **Arts and culture data base**

The arts and culture data base consists of a compilation of all known arts organizations in the five-county region (Southeastern Pennsylvania). The core of the data base are registered nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. The inventory has been augmented by data on unchartered community arts groups and on commercial arts and cultural venues outside of Center City (for example, coffee houses and bars that regularly put on performances).

Data on arts and cultural organizations were drawn from a variety of sources, including city and state cultural agencies' grant applications, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and state cultural directories, the IRS nonprofit master file, and listings in newspapers and magazines. The data base includes variables on the location, size, and type of each organization and, wherever possible, its mission, activities and constituency. Approximately 1,200 organizations are included in the data base.

### **Social organization data base**



In order to compare arts and cultural organizations with other types of community and social institutions, we have developed an inventory of social organizations throughout the region. These data were drawn from a variety of sources, including the IRS nonprofit master file, city agencies' grant applications and organizational lists, and computerized phone directories. The five-county inventory contains approximately 14,000 organizations.

For the present analysis, organizations in the regional data bases were classified into seven major categories and ten subcategories:

- Arts and cultural organizations
- Culturally-related associations and groups (such as, historical reenactment, mummers clubs, "friends of" cultural institutions or historic sites)
- Neighborhood improvement groups (such as resident and civic associations, town watch, community councils)
- Houses of worship (churches, synagogues, mosques)
- Youth and social service organizations
  - ◆ Youth organizations
  - ◆ Social service organizations
  - ◆ Volunteer fire and ambulance associations
- Social and fraternal organizations
  - ◆ Social clubs
  - ◆ Fraternal organizations
  - ◆ Religious clubs and orders
  - ◆ Veterans' organizations
- Special interest, professional, business, and labor organizations
  - ◆ Business and professional associations
  - ◆ Labor unions and organizations
  - ◆ Special interest organizations and groups

Although the size of block groups provides a high degree of precision in assessing the socio-economic profile of the metropolitan area, it poses a difficulty in assessing organizational location. Because of issues of zoning and the availability of office space, the presence of particular kinds of groups *within* a block group is not an accurate measure of the accessibility of organizations to a block group. For example, one block group (because it includes a commercial strip) may be home to a number of organizations while an adjacent block group (composed solely of residential properties) has none. An



analysis that treated the former as having a high number of groups and the later as having no groups would be misleading from the standpoint of access.

In order to remedy this problem, I used a geographical information system to aggregate the number of groups of particular types that are within 1/2 mile of a particular block group. Thus, each group was counted in every block group within one-half mile. This multiple counting means the data base is not suitable for describing the groups themselves, but provides a measure of the access of residents of the block group to groups in their immediate neighborhood. Thus, the two measures of organizational presence used in this paper are:

- **Frequency.** The number of groups within one-half mile of the block group
- **Dominance.** The proportion of all groups within one-half mile that are of a particular type.

This distinction proved to be important because one of the findings of the paper is that groups--whatever their type--tend to cluster in particular sections of the metropolitan area. Therefore, we must distinguish neighborhoods with many groups of a particular kind (frequency) from those in which a particular type of groups composes a majority of all groups (dominance).

## Findings

### Community Participation

Our survey identified high levels of participation in all of the communities we examined. West Mount Airy, the most prosperous neighborhood in our study, had the highest level of participation (87 percent). However, all of the communities had rates between 70 and 87 percent. A slightly different ranking occurs if we examine the *variety* of participation, i.e. the number of different types of community participation. Here, Mantua had the highest ranking; the average respondent from Mantua was involved in over 4.5 different types of participation. West Mount Airy and Point Breeze ranked some what behind with an average of approximately four types of activity per respondent. Finally, East Mount Airy and Powelton lagged behind with just over 2.6 types of involvement per respondent. (Fig1, 2)

The neighborhoods did vary considerably, however, in the types of activity that residents were likely to engage in. In Mantua and Point Breeze, neighborhood improvement groups, including town watches, block associations, neighborhood associations, or community development corporations, were the most common forms of participation. In Point Breeze, fully 70 percent of respondents reported that they had been involved with a group of this sort in the past year. In Mantua, 63 percent of respondents reported that they had been involved in a neighborhood improvement organization.



In the two most racially balanced neighborhoods in our sample--high-poverty Powelton and low-poverty Mount Airy--arts and cultural organizations--including libraries, historic societies, or arts and cultural groups proved to be the most popular. Over 60 percent of West Mount Airy respondents had engaged in an arts and cultural group over the previous year; in Powelton the figure was 51 percent.

Finally, in East Mount Airy--the most prosperous African-American neighborhood in the survey--there was a close balance of religious, cultural, and neighborhood engagement. Between 40 and 50 percent of the respondents reported involvement in these types of groups.

Similar trends are evident in the data on different types of community participation. The average respondent in Mantua, for example, was engaged in one and one-half types of neighborhood action, one type of cultural group, and a smaller number of social organizations.

In summary, data on the levels of community participation do not support the proposition that the level of civic engagement in poor urban neighborhoods distinguishes them from other sections of the city. The two neighborhoods in our study that would most qualify as "urban underclass"--Point Breeze and Mantua--levels of participation that are not noticeably lower than those for the more prosperous sections of the city. Indeed, among those groups that conform most closely to a notion of "civic engagement"--block groups, neighborhood improvement groups, community development corporations--these neighborhoods are the most engaged.

### **Physical Traces of Attention and Neglect**

The purpose of our mapping of traces of attention and neglect was to identify how the physical remnants of individual and community actions affected our case study neighborhoods. These traces were then aggregated at the block group level; in this paper we examine the number of features of a particular type per capita and the proportion of each category of trace among all of the features in a particular block group.

As Figure 5 makes clear, the relationship of poverty to physical traces of attention and neglect was complex. Certainly, the three poor neighborhoods in our study had many more negative housing features (like vacant buildings and graffiti) than positive features (like well-kept facades). At the other extreme, Mount Airy had many more positive housing features per capita than negative housing features.

Yet, there were variations from the general pattern. First, Powelton--a relatively well-off neighborhood--displayed fewer positive housing features per capita than did the poorer neighborhoods. In addition, the poorest neighborhood in our study--Hartranft/Fairhill--actually had fewer negative housing features per capita than either Mantua/West Powelton or Point Breeze.

Most notable, however, is the distribution of positive community features across the neighborhoods. The two neighborhoods with the most physical traces of attention to the community were Point Breeze and Mantua/West Powelton. Indeed, the number of



positive community features in prosperous Mount Airy (approximately 50 per 100 residents) was less than a quarter of the rate in Point Breeze.

These trends are confirmed by data on the *percent* of each type of feature in the community case study neighborhoods. (Figure 6) About 40 percent of the features in Mount Airy were positive housing features --particularly evidence of maintenance and presentation--compared to only 20 percent of the features in Hartranft/Fairhill and less than 15 percent of the features in Mantua/West Powelton and Point Breeze. Point Breeze and Mantua/West Powelton were particularly dominated by negative housing features; around half of all features in those neighborhoods communicated evidence of neglect.

By contrast, the number of traces of positive community attention did not coincide with economic status. These features--which include evidence of community projects, murals, community greenspace, and other expressions of community pride--made up a larger proportion of all features in the “underclass” neighborhoods in the study than in more prosperous Mount Airy.. Indeed, the relationship of positive community features to poverty was just the opposite of what the “underclass” these would lead us to expect.

Inspecting the maps of the six areas underlines that even *within* each case study neighborhood, there was considerable variation. Thus, for example, although in a majority of the block groups in Mount Airy, negative housing features composed less than 11 percent of all features, there were a number of sections in which negative housing features composed a higher percentage.

In conclusion, the analysis of housing feature underlines that while economic structural features like good maintenance and housing abandonment were correlated with poverty, positive community traces did not correlate closely with poverty. To the extent, that the “public sphere” and “civic engagement” took a physical form, there was little difference between our well-off and our poor neighborhoods.

## **Social Organizations**

Social institutions, generally, are more often located in the less privileged sections of the city. Neighborhoods with higher than average poverty, more high-school dropouts, higher unemployment, fewer homeowners, and few family households are more likely to have access to more social institutions. Neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African-Americans have more institutions than those that are predominantly white. Finally, neighborhoods with a higher proportion of young adults (age 20-39) have more institutions.

These conclusions are summarized by a multiple regression analysis (Table y)(log transformation). When these variables are examined simultaneously, they remain statistically significant, with the exception of percent in service occupations and the



percent of high school dropouts. When other factors are held constant, the proportion of non-family households, African-Americans, and families living in poverty are most related to the total number of social institutions

A similar set of conclusion hold for arts and cultural institutions. Overall, poverty, unemployment, property ownership, young adults, and non-family households are related to the number of arts and cultural institutions near a block group. However, three differences are noteworthy: 1) block groups with more college graduates are more likely to house arts and cultural institutions; 2) block groups with more professional and managerial workers have more cultural institutions; and 3) the relationship of number of cultural institutions to the racial character of the neighborhood (measured by percent white and percent black) is weaker than for all institutions. Regression analyses of number of arts and cultural institutions (log-transformation) and of the dominance of arts institutions confirm the strength of their relationships to poverty, non-family households, professional and managerial workers, and high educational attainment.<sup>2</sup>

The striking feature of the pattern is the fact that it breaks with our standard sense of the relationship of these variables. Typically, a strong correlation with poverty in Philadelphia implies a strong relationship with race. At the same time, there are few social phenomenon that simultaneously have a strong relationship to high educational and occupational attainment *and* to a high poverty rate. Furthermore, arts and cultural groups are most often located near block groups that are racially diverse, rather than in those that are overwhelmingly white or black. These patterns suggest that the relationship with ethnic and occupational diversity merit further attention.

### Diversity and Social Institutions

The analysis of the presence of social institutions, and arts and cultural institutions in particular, suggest some surprising patterns. Whereas much of the concern with civic engagement has flowed from a concern about civic *disengagement* in poor minority neighborhoods, the more social organizations of all types are present in poor and African-American neighborhoods. Furthermore, arts and cultural institutions are more likely to be housed close to sections of the city that are both poor and have a high proportion of managerial and professional workers and a mixed racial composition: types of neighborhoods that are generally invisible in the dominant representation of the city.

---

<sup>2</sup> One reason for the weaker relationship of race and number of arts and cultural institutions is product of the nature of the relationship. Whereas the relationship between percent African-American and the number of social institutions is *linear* (i.e. the number of institutions tends to rise as the percent African-American increases), the relationship between arts and cultural institutions and race is *curvilinear*. The largest number of arts and cultural institutions are located near block groups that are between 40 and 80 percent African-American; as the percent drops or rises, the number of institutions declines.



We pursue this question through the measure of three dimensions of diversity: economic diversity and ethnic diversity (see methods section for definitions). One notable finding of this paper is that these neighborhoods exist at all. (Fig, Tables).

### Economic diversity

We defined economic diversity as a block group with a poverty rate and a percent of managerial and profession workers above the averages for the city of Philadelphia. Approximately, 11 percent of block groups (including 8 percent of the region's population) meet this definition. However, because 90 percent of the economically diverse block groups are in the city of Philadelphia, they represent 19 percent of the city's block groups and include 17 percent of the city's population. If poverty and professional occupations were randomly distributed across the city of Philadelphia (something we would hardly likely), statistically we would expect a quarter of the block groups to have both above average poverty and professional/managerial occupations. The fact that 19 percent actually do have both characteristics suggests that there is more economic diversity in Philadelphia's neighborhoods than we imagine.

Economically diverse block groups are differentiated by race, family structure, and property ownership. Black economically diverse block groups have higher homeownership rates, a smaller proportion of population between the ages of 18 and 34, and fewer residents living in nonfamily households than other economically diverse block groups. In other words, two types of neighborhoods compose the economically diverse sections of the city: predominantly black neighborhoods which are likely to have higher rates of family households and home owners and racially mixed neighborhoods with higher than average numbers of young adults, nonfamily households, and renters.

Identifying economically diverse areas has implications as well for our visualization of concentrated poverty in the metropolitan area. Large sections of North and West Philadelphia, as well as smaller pockets in South Philadelphia, have poverty rates in excess of 40 percent. However, when we differentiate economically diverse neighborhoods, the picture changes noticeably. First, a third of all block groups in the metropolitan area with poverty rates over 40 percent are economically diverse. These areas--in spite of their high poverty rates--do not conform to the image of social isolation that is part of the urban underclass thesis. . Second, by viewing economic diversity and concentrated poverty simultaneously, the uniformity of poverty declines. For example, North Philadelphia is not the homogeneous stretch of economic desolation that attention to poverty suggests. Rather, it is honeycombed with block groups with a higher than average number of professionals.

Rather than seeing the poorest sections of the city as undifferentiated expanses without resources and socially isolated, economic diversity demonstrates that the social



heterogeneity and the resources in poor neighborhoods are greatly underestimated by sole attention to their poverty rates.

### Ethnic diversity

Across the entire metropolitan area, 80 percent of block groups (including 85 percent of the region's population) live in racially homogeneous black and white block groups. Thus, Massey and Dentine's contention of racial isolation is confirmed by this categorization. However, within the city of Philadelphia, ethnic homogeneity is significantly less powerful. Whereas 92 percent of Philadelphia suburbanites live in a racially homogeneous block group (of which 91 percent are homogeneous white), within the city, the proportion is 77 percent. Thus, one quarter of Philadelphia city residents live in an ethnically diverse block group.

Within the city, about forty percent of those who live in a diverse block group live in one that is mixed black and white. Over four percent of the population lives in block groups in which Latinos compose 40 percent of the population, and smaller percentages live in other mixed sections of the city

### Multiple diversity

If we examine economic and ethnic diversity simultaneously, we find that about one-quarter of all block groups in the region (including 19 percent of the population) are diverse on at least one of these dimension; about 4 percent of the population lives in a block group that is diverse on both dimensions. Within the city, a third of the population lives in block groups that or diverse at least one dimension, and 7 percent live in a block group that is diverse on both dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

Taken together, these patterns suggest that our view of the city has rendered these "zones of diversity" invisible. Although it is important to note that these zones are home to only a small proportion of the region's population, precisely because they go against the

---

<sup>3</sup> Another dimension of diversity that deserves exploration is diversity in family forms. Certainly one of the major social transformations of our time is the decline of the nuclear family as a normative domestic arrangement. As part of the research for this paper, I tested a variable that examined *family diversity* (defined by the proportion of nonfamily household and the proportion of young adults in the population). This analysis demonstrated that about a third of the region's population and nearly half of the city's population lives in a block group that is diverse by this standard. Given the correlations that we have already discussed between arts and cultural groups and these variables, it is clear that *family diverse* sections of the city were highly related to the presence of arts and cultural groups. However, because this definition is quite preliminary (for example, it does not take into consideration female-headed families), I have not included this analysis in the paper.



dominant, and presumably undesirable, pattern of economic and ethnic homogeneity, they deserve more attention than they have heretofore received.

### Social organizations and Diversity

Diverse neighborhoods are more likely to have many social institutions within one-half mile than more homogeneous neighborhoods. The average economically diverse block group has 175 groups of all kinds within one-half mile, compared to only 57 groups in neighborhoods with below average poverty rates. Although neighborhoods with concentrated and above average poverty have fewer social organizations than diverse neighborhoods, they have more groups than those with below average poverty.

The same is true of ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Predominantly black neighborhoods have many more groups than predominantly white neighborhoods, but integrated black/white neighborhoods and those with an Asian presence have even more groups. Taken together, neighborhoods that are ethnically and economically diverse have, on average, 221 social organizations within one-half mile; ethnically and economically homogeneous neighborhoods have only 65.<sup>4</sup>

### Discussion

Understanding the dynamics of civic participation has taken on a profound urgency in recent years. In the United States, in particular, the retreat of the welfare state and the decline in political participation have shifted the weight of citizenship from the state to the “public sphere.” Whether in its conservative variant--in which this shift is

---

<sup>4</sup> A similar pattern is present among arts and cultural groups, although somewhat stronger. Whereas the average block group with below average poverty has only 5 arts groups within one-half mile, the economically diverse sections of the region have nearly 20 groups. Block groups that are ethnically diverse generally have more groups in walking distance than homogeneous neighborhoods. Finally, neighborhoods that are diverse economically and ethnically have 27 groups within one-half mile, compared to a figure of only 5 groups for homogeneous sections of the city.

Furthermore, arts and cultural organizations tend to be more dominant in diverse sections of the city. Houses of worship and neighborhood groups are most prevalent in neighborhoods with high or concentrated poverty, and social and fraternal organizations and special interest, professional, and labor organizations tend to be most prevalent in neighborhoods with below average poverty. Thus, of the seven major categories of social institutions, only arts and cultural groups were dominant in economically diverse neighborhoods. In ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods, too, arts and cultural groups made up nearly twice the percentage of all groups than they did in homogeneous neighborhoods.



seen as wholly positive--or its progressive form--in which the resuscitation of “civil society” sets the stage for a renewal of the expansion of social citizenship within the state--this belief in the importance of the civic participation is now at the center of political discourse.

This concern is particularly acute in the case of poor urban neighborhoods. After several decades in which the residents of poor areas were promised imminent public action, the urban poor now find themselves thrown back upon their own resources in many ways. The implementation of “welfare reform” assures that the poor will be fortunate if public income support programs do not disappear altogether. At the same time, the “devolution” of other social services from the federal government to the states, and from the states to localities, suggests that large-scale revitalization projects will become more rare in the future. If the poor neighborhoods are to regenerate, they will have to do so on their own.

The “underclass” thesis would lead us to be pessimistic about the chances for renewal. If it were right, we would expect the same forces--economic decay, institutional breakdown, and declining morality--that have undercut family and work in poor urban neighborhoods to erode the public sphere in these communities as well. Indeed, a number of influential authors have--more or less--assumed that this state of affairs has already been demonstrated.

The data reported in this paper suggests that, in this respect, the “underclass” thesis is incorrect. In our comparison of six neighborhoods in the city of Philadelphia, we found no sharp differences in indicators of civic engagement from three perspectives:

- Levels of public participation were no lower in poor neighborhoods than those that are better off. Indeed, the one form of participation that is most linked to civic engagement--involvement in neighborhood improvement associations--poor neighborhoods actually exhibit more activity than other sections of the city
- Physical traces of attention and neglect were not clearly segregated by the concentration of poverty in the neighborhoods. Certainly, in general, well-off neighborhoods have fewer negative housing features and more positive housing features than poor neighborhoods. Yet, signs of community engagement were more frequent in poor neighborhoods than in other sections. Furthermore, there was considerable variations in physical traces *within* each neighborhood.
- Social organizations were more likely to be located in poor sections of the city than well-off sections. Although economically and ethnically diverse sections



of the Philadelphia had the most groups, areas with concentrated poverty had considerably more groups than those areas with lower than average poverty.

On one level, then, this paper is good news. The yawning gap between civic engagement in rich and poor neighborhoods that many social observers have *assumed*, does not seem to exist. Using this set of measurements, poor sections of the city appear to be as engaged as those that are well-off.

Looked at another way, however, the findings of this paper are less upbeat. If poor neighborhoods did, in fact, have an “engagement deficit,” we could hope that initiatives to encourage civic participation might mobilize community resolve in a way that could spur neighborhood revitalization. However, the data reported in this paper suggests that the residents of Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods are already mobilized. If poor neighborhoods remain poor, it is not the result of the apathy and disengagement of their residents.

The analysis of physical traces, however, provides a fresh insight into the stagnation of many poor urban neighborhoods. Many years ago, John Berger pointed out that we tend to see *underdevelopment* as the absence of development:

The term ‘underdevelopment’ has caused diplomatic embarrassment. The word ‘developing’ has been substituted. ‘Developing’ as distinct from ‘developed.’ The only serious contribution to this semantic discussion has been made by the Cubans, who have pointed out there should be a transitive verb: to underdevelop. An economy is underdeveloped because of what is being done around it, within it and to it. There are agencies which underdevelop. (Berger and Mohr 1975:21)

Our research team experienced a similar insight in the course of our field work. During the Spring and Summer of 1996, we spent dozens of hours walking and driving the streets of some of Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods. Day after day we recorded the vacant buildings, abandoned lots, and trash piles that we encountered. Particularly notable were the piles of tires and abandoned mattresses that could be found on literally dozens of street corners in Mantua/West Powelton and Hartranft/Fairhill.

For weeks, we numbly recorded these tires and mattresses along with the graffiti and vacancies, gardens and banners. More than once, the research team looked at one another as if to say: why don’t “these people” pick up after themselves? Over time, however, it began to sink in that no neighborhood could produce so many tires and mattresses on its own. The quantity of tires and mattresses was not a product of *inaction* by the residents of these neighborhoods, but by the *actions* of those who lived in other parts of the city. People were coming from across the region to dump their trash in West and North Philadelphia. The trash we recorded in our data base was the difference



between the quantity that people were dumping and the quantity that local residents were picking up.

This is not an isolated example. The vacant and abandoned housing and commercial structures that dominate many of these neighborhoods are not solely the result of inaction. These structures were once occupied and used. Someone took away the machinery, boarded the windows, denied the financing for, and evicted the tenants of these structures. Once again, the negative features we recorded were not simply the absence of something; they were the result of people's actions.

The test of whether civic engagement can rescue poor neighborhoods from their current problems lies in the future. However, we will be unable to judge its relative success or failure unless we begin with a realistic portrait of its contemporary. This paper offers a modest attempt to do so. It suggests that the language--of engagement and disengagement, of action and inaction, of agency and structure--that we have used to describe the problems of our "inner cities" is too simple. Our poorest neighborhoods need more than the renewed efforts of their residents. They need the rest of society--whether in its public or private guise--to stop doing things *to* them and to provide the tangible help without which the best intentions will go for naught.



	Powelton Village	Mantua/W. Powelton	Hartranft/Fairhill	E. Mt Airy	Point Breeze	W. Mt Airy
MEDFAMIN	42058	14127	11981	40600	20175	53038
AVGFAMIN	44087	19706	15666	44437	26957	63978
PCI	11914	6861	4374	15469	8296	20769
PCTPOOR	27	45	59	10	35	8
PCTNHSGR	17	49	66	21	49	15
PCTNOCOL	28	80	90	47	80	32
PCTNODEG	38	90	97	64	92	45
PCTNOBAC	44	92	99	68	95	49
PCTUNEMP	10	20	25	8	15	4
PCTMGPR	42	19	9	37	18	56
PCTTECHS	33	33	28	33	31	25
PCTSERV	10	26	25	16	24	8
TOTUNITS	2714	6631	7641	7582	11300	6329
OCCUNITS	2273	5302	6433	6847	9609	5614
VACANT	441	1329	1208	735	1691	715
PCTVACNT	16	20	16	10	15	11
PCTOWNER	15	29	42	64	57	53
PCTRENT	69	53	43	27	28	37
SPOWNUNT	295	1652	3039	4453	5785	2908
AVGHVAL	68003	36088	15767	81460	25804	128338
MEDHVAL	59596	34872	15270	76662	21275	114837
MEDRENT	522	278	358	469	421	517
FAMILIES	692	2883	4910	4427	6125	3108
TOTPOP	6357	13726	22384	17009	26266	13858
PCTWHITE	65	5	7	20	13	53
PCTBLACK	26	94	47	79	79	45
PCTASIAN	8	1	0	1	7	1
PCTAMIND	0	1	10	4	9	8
PCTHISP	3	2	53	1	1	1
PCT0_19	23	31	42	24	28	22
PCT65_UP	5	18	7	15	16	17
TOTHHS	2377	5150	6460	6738	9460	5541
AVGHHSZ	2	3	4	3	3	2
PCTFAMHH	29	56	76	66	65	56
PCTMCFAM	69	25	33	65	40	72
PCTMCWCH	25	10	19	28	14	33
PCTFEMHE	21	66	57	30	47	23
POVRAT80	0.2743	0.4932	0.5283	0.1269	0.3156	0.1221
PCTBLK80	0.3569	0.9439	0.5199	0.7530	0.7847	0.4597
PCTHIS80	0.02	0.01	0.42	0.01	0.01	0.01
PCTWHI80	0.59	0.05	0.15	0.23	0.20	0.51
PCTAS80	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
CLF	3456	4742	6009	8859	10826	7533
AGE25UP	2574	8357	11148	11790	16930	10043
pct<25	59.51	39.12	50.20	30.68	35.54	27.53
TOTPOP80	5490	15996	24960	18474	27503	14864



TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF SAMPLE STATISTICS WITH 1990 CENSUS DATA,  
CASE STUDY NEIGHBORHOODS

AVERAGE FAMILY INCOME

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Error	95 Pct Conf Int for Mean	Population
Point Brz	99	22565.6566	1490.2391	19608.3256 TO 25522.9876	26,957
Powelton	53	34528.3019	4219.1726	26061.9125 TO 42994.6913	44,087
W Mt Airy	80	63956.2500	4988.8261	54026.2400 TO 73886.2600	63,976
E Mt Airy	63	55460.3175	5028.8377	45407.8140 TO 65512.8210	44,437
Mantua/WP	27	18518.5185	1961.4304	14486.7407 TO 22550.2964	19,706

PERCENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Error	95 Pct Conf Int for Mean	Population
Point Brz	113	.8938	.0291	.8361 TO .9515	.79
Powelton	52	.3846	.0681	.2479 TO .5214	.26
W Mt Airy	83	.2530	.0480	.1575 TO .3485	.45
E Mt Airy	64	.5156	.0630	.3898 TO .6414	.79
Mantua/WP	30	.9000	.0557	.7861 TO 1.0139	.94

PERCENT WITH NO COLLEGE

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Error	95 Pct Conf Int for Mean	Population
Point Brz	114	.9825	.0124	.9580 TO 1.0069	.80
Powelton	56	.5714	.0667	.4377 TO .7052	.28
W Mt Airy	84	.2262	.0459	.1349 TO .3175	.32
E Mt Airy	66	.3939	.0606	.2729 TO .5150	.47
Mantua/WP	30	.9667	.0333	.8985 TO 1.0348	.80

PERCENT OWNERS

Group	Count	Mean	Standard Error	95 Pct Conf Int for Mean	Population
Point Brz	115	.7304	.0416	.6481 TO .8128	.57
Powelton	55	.3091	.0629	.1830 TO .4352	.15
W Mt Airy	84	.7500	.0475	.6555 TO .8445	.53
E Mt Airy	66	.8636	.0426	.7786 TO .9486	.64
Mantua/WP	29	.5172	.0944	.3238 TO .7107	.29



Figure 2. Percent of respondents participating in any comi  
in previous year, by neighborhood

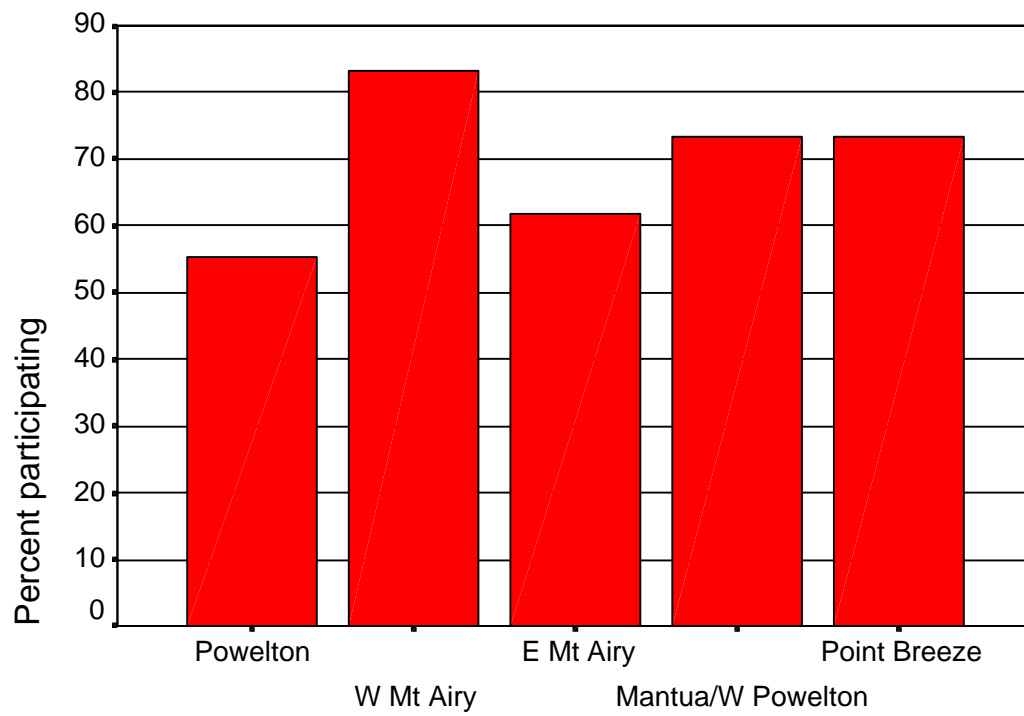




Figure 3. Number of types of community participation  
in past year, by neighborhood

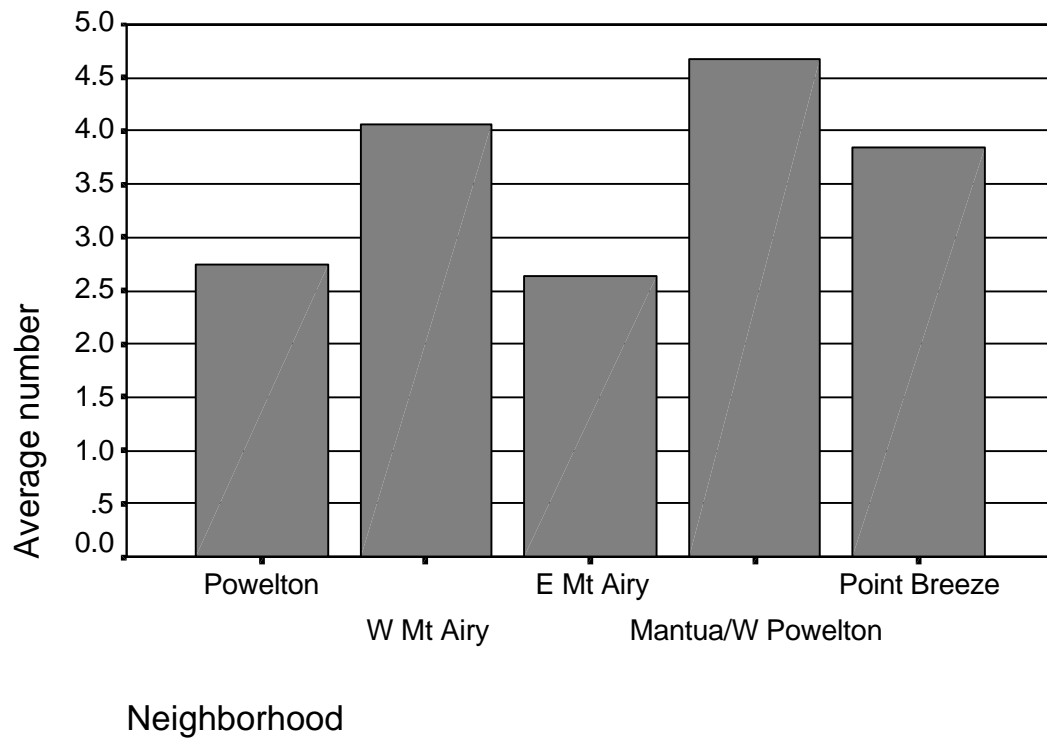




Figure 4. Types of community participation,  
by neighborhood

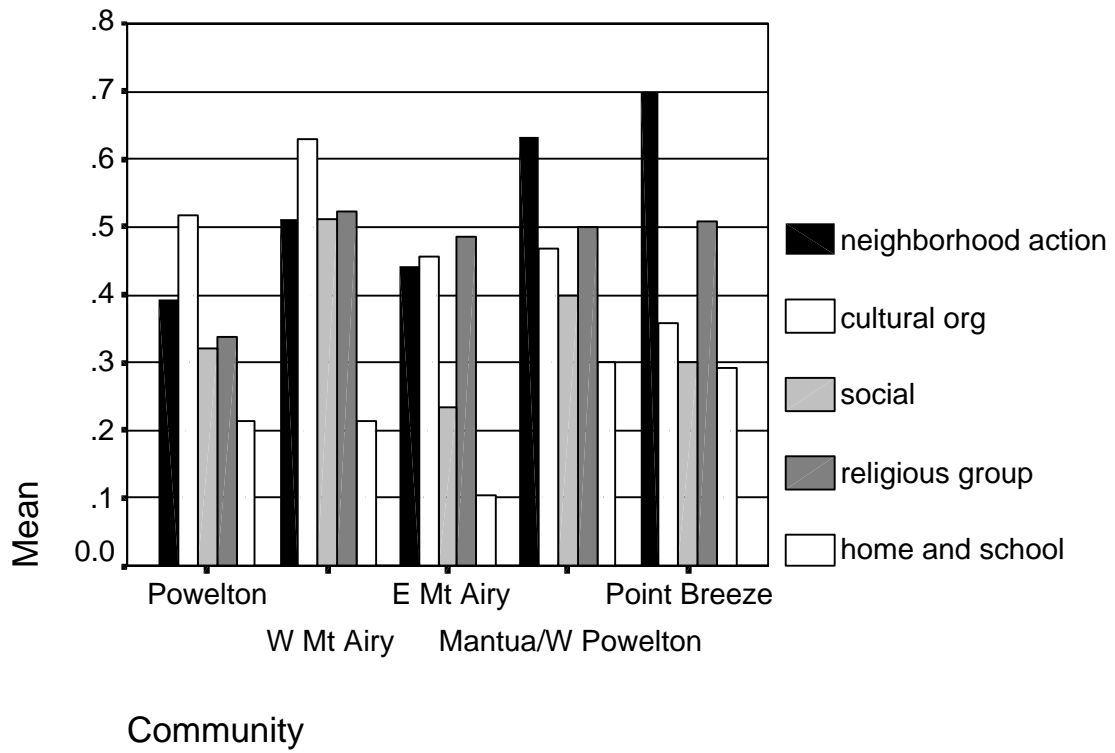




Figure 5. Features per 100 persons, by type

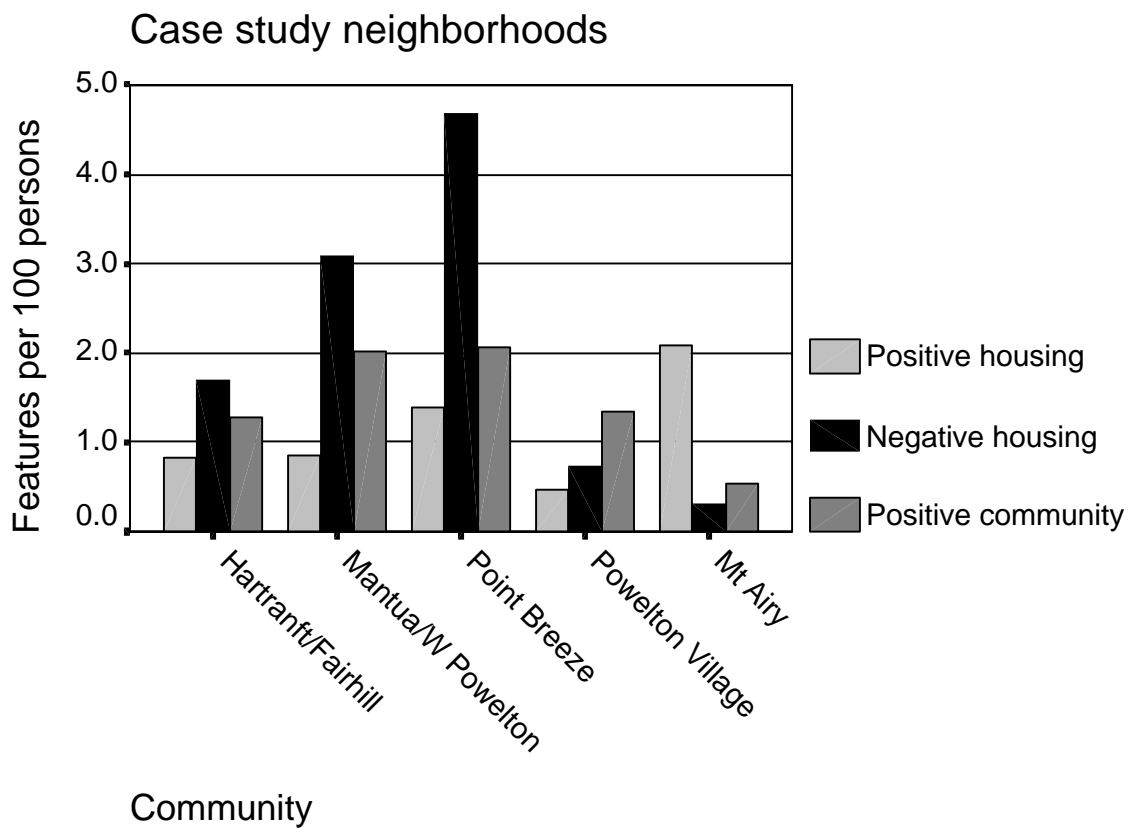




Figure 6. Types of Features, As Percent of All Features

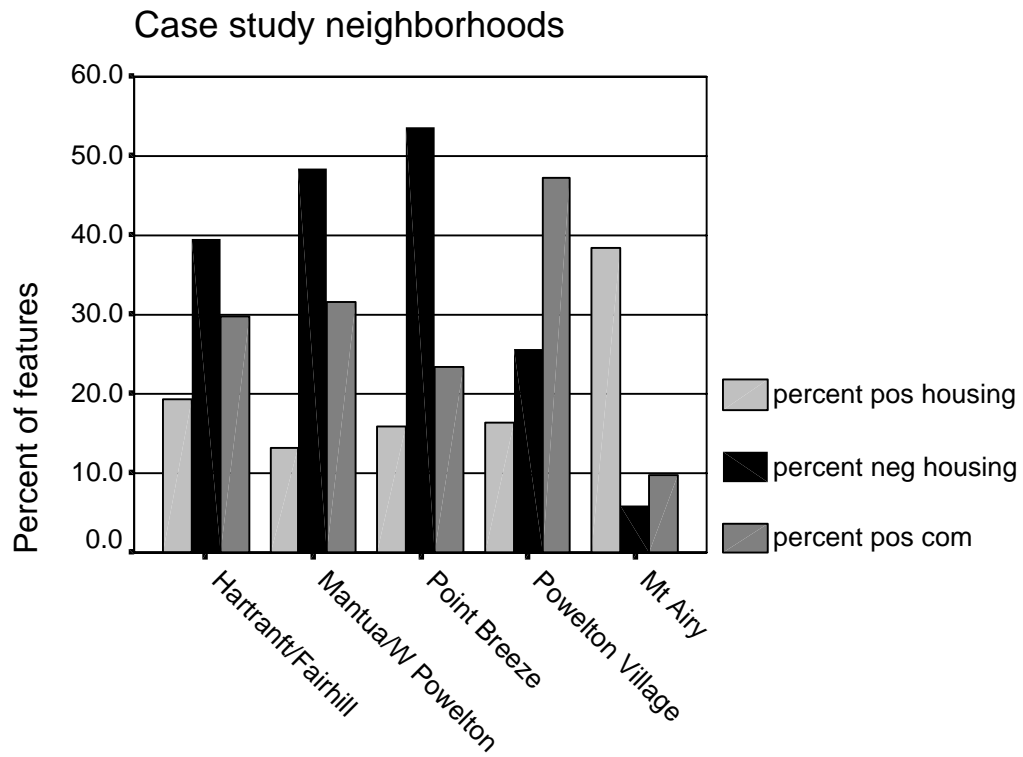




Figure 1--Community Case Study Neighborhoods

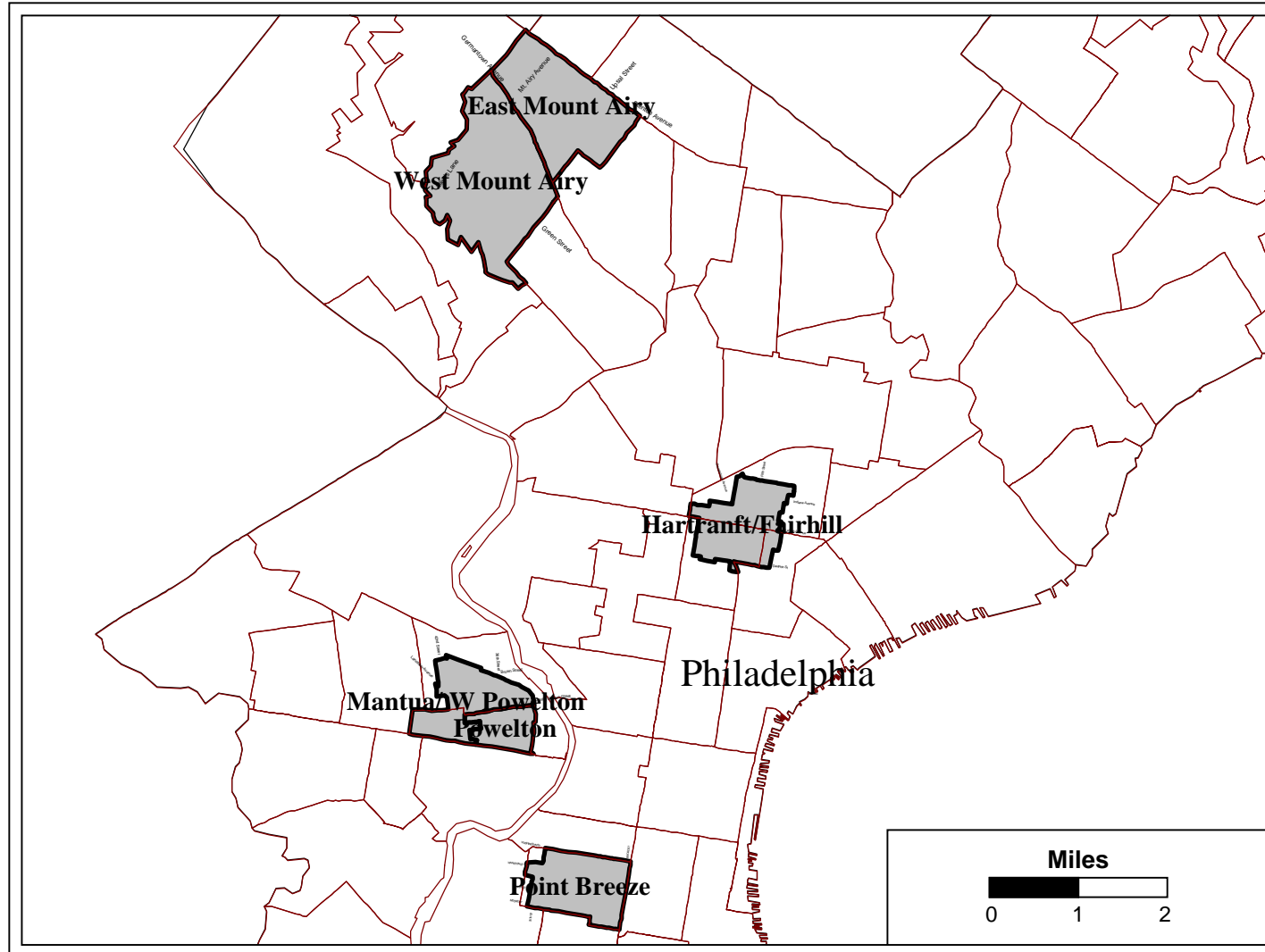




Figure 7--Negative Housing Features as a Percent of All Physical Traces, Mount Airy

