

GREAT AMERICAN CITY



CHICAGO AND
THE ENDURING
NEIGHBORHOOD
EFFECT

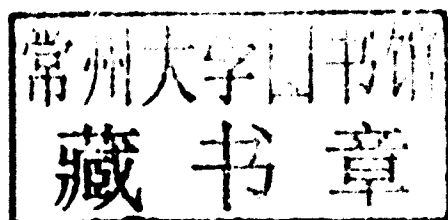
ROBERT J. SAMPSON

WITH A FOREWORD BY WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON

GREAT AMERICAN CITY

Chicago and the Enduring
Neighborhood Effect

ROBERT J. SAMPSON



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS CHICAGO AND LONDON

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
© 2012 by The University of Chicago
All rights reserved. Published 2012.
Paperback edition 2013
Printed in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 7 8 9 10 11

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-73456-9 (cloth)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-05568-8 (paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-73388-3 (e-book)
10.7208.9780226733883

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sampson, Robert J.

Great American city : Chicago and the enduring
neighborhood effect / Robert J. Sampson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-73456-9 (cloth : alkaline paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-73456-0 (cloth : alkaline paper)

1. Chicago (Ill.)—Social conditions.
2. Neighborhoods—Illinois—Chicago. I. Title
F548.3.S26 2011
977.3'11—dc23

2011029350

Ⓒ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO
Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

FOREWORD

WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON

Robert Sampson's *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* will not only change the way we think about neighborhood effects, it also sets a new standard for social scientific inquiry. Indeed, in my judgment, *Great American City* is one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated empirical studies ever conducted by a social scientist. The scope of this very readable and precisely worded book boggles the mind. As Sampson points out, "this book is at once an intellectual history of an idea, the story of a major research project, the tale of an iconic city, a systematic theory of neighborhood effects, an empirical account of community-level variations in a range of social processes, an analysis of competing schools of social inquiry, and a sustained empirical analysis that was designed to uncover new facts while adjudicating and integrating existing hypotheses."

Great American City examines two fundamentally different ways of looking at the world—one sees life in terms of independent self-maximizing individuals, the other focuses on the important collective processes in contextual settings rooted in shared understanding. The first image is powerfully reflected in contemporary America, not only in popular belief systems but also in recent developments in social science disciplines (for example, rational choice models of human behavior). This book's theoretical thrust brilliantly elevates the second idea by revealing how the mechanisms of social causality are profoundly shaped by the spatial logic of urban life. In the process the book does not inherently begin at the top (social structure) or bottom (individual

behavior) but rather creatively integrates individual, neighborhood, and structural dynamics.

Sampson is a quantitative social scientist who understands the logic of scientific inquiry and therefore the importance of integrating the structure of explanation, the meaning and significance of concepts, and the nature of evidence. Sampson's research, empirical measures of concepts, and analysis of data are theoretically motivated. And he fully exploits his very rich data sets by taking a "pluralistic stance on the nature of evidence to assess causation." His pathbreaking findings flow mainly from a comprehensive research endeavor called the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN). Using the iconic city of Chicago as a laboratory, the PHDCN collected longitudinal data on children, families, and neighborhoods. It is one of the most ambitious and creative research projects in the history of social science inquiry. A typical question will be raised about how representative Chicago is of other American cities. That is the wrong question to ask. This is a theoretically driven study, and Chicago happens to be an excellent laboratory for testing theoretically derived hypotheses.

Based on his incredibly rich and diverse data sources, Sampson argues that neighborhood contexts are, in themselves, important determinants of the quality and quantity of human behavior. In so doing, he not only clearly specifies the structural and cultural dimensions of neighborhood effects, he also gives attention to the choices and perceptions of individual residents, as well as the impact of larger structural forces. With the skillful use of econometrics, the method of empirically assessing ecological settings, Sampson provides a comprehensive roadmap for the study of context and convincingly demonstrates that collective phenomena like neighborhoods demand their own measurement logic and are not reducible to individual-level traits.

Since Sampson's empirical measures of various aspects of neighborhoods are theoretically derived, his approach stands in sharp contrast to the typical studies that highlight or search for the "correct" operational definition of neighborhoods, a measurement that is often arbitrarily selected independent of any theoretical considerations. Indeed, Sampson's multiple measures of neighborhood effects reflect his broad and flexible theoretical framing of the variable interactions, perceptions, and institutional forces manifested in large and small ecologically specified areas. And his comprehensive longitudinal data set allows him to

“examine a family of neighborhood effects across a wide range of social phenomena.”

Great American City demonstrates the powerful effects of ecologically concentrated disadvantage on individual outcomes as well as rates of behavior across neighborhoods. These effects—including joblessness, poverty, and single-parent families with children, verbal ability, violence, incarceration, and collective efficacy—are magnified by racial segregation. Sampson reveals that poverty and its correlates are especially persistent in poor black neighborhoods. Indeed, his systematic presentation of evidence on the durability of neighborhood stratification—despite urban social transformations and macro economic and political changes in the late twentieth century and gentrification in the early twenty-first century—is one of the major contributions of this book.

Sampson carefully points out that historical, macroeconomic, and global forces have indeed impacted urban neighborhoods; however, they do not negate the potent “lower order” mechanisms of neighborhoods that help to account for variations in concentrated inequality. These include social psychological mechanisms that interact with broad cultural processes (e.g., stereotypes and shared expectations and perceptions of disorder) and have played a role in shaping the long-term identities and trajectories of neighborhoods. And this research leads me to strongly concur with his contention that the role of collectively shaped perceptions of disorder and moral and legal cynicism “may be underappreciated causes of community wellbeing and of continued racial and economic segregation in the United States, and perhaps cities elsewhere.”

Another important and original contribution of *Great American City* is Sampson’s powerful critique of studies that place special emphasis on self-selection bias, a term used in research to describe the effect of people grouping themselves together on common characteristics. Proponents of self-selection bias argue that the effects we attribute to poor neighborhoods may instead be caused by the characteristics of families and individuals who end up living there. In other words, they believe that disadvantaged neighborhoods might not be the cause of poor outcomes; rather families with the weakest job-related skills, with the lowest awareness of and concern for the effects of the environment on their children’s social development, with attitudes that hinder social mobility, and with the most burdensome personal problems are simply more

likely to live in these types of neighborhoods. Some even go so far as to deny the importance of neighborhood effects.

Sampson does not dismiss the role of individual selection effects. Rather he points out that neither higher-order structures nor neighborhood mechanisms are subservient to individual selection. Indeed, argues Sampson, “individual selection is embedded in social contexts” and is itself a neighborhood effect. Neighborhoods, he contends, affect individual decisions (selection) and perceptions, which in turn influence mobility and ultimately neighborhood composition and social dynamics. Selection and mobility also have an effect on extraneighborhood (e.g., spatial proximity) processes as well as higher-order (nonspatial) links. Accordingly, “in a fundamental sense,” Sampson proclaims, “individual selection is both a neighborhood effect and embedded in a process of ‘structural sorting,’ bringing full circle the findings of the book that integrate individual, neighborhood, and ultimately structure.”

I found Sampson’s special emphasis on social structure in the study of neighborhood effects particularly appealing. Of the roughly 3,500 empirical studies that have cited or addressed arguments in my book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, the focus has been overwhelmingly on individual outcomes, despite the book’s structuralist orientation. Many of the more rigorous studies of neighborhood effects highlight experimental causation. Sampson’s book, in sharp contrast, brings structure back in. Indeed, Sampson contends that theoretical arguments incorporating social structure by their very nature challenge the assumptions of experimental causation for two essential reasons. First, a nonsocial world is created by randomization, at least momentarily; and, second, causal inferences reside at theoretical levels and do not directly emanate from data or particular methods (however elegant or rigorous). Accordingly, locating or displaying causal mechanisms using statistical or experimental results provide clues, he argues, not answers to theoretical questions. “Sometimes qualitative empirical data can even be more informative than what at first glance appear to be more rigorous quantitative data.”

In the various chapters of this book, Sampson demonstrates how his flexible conception of causality stands in sharp contrast to the “crucial individual experiment.” Rather than a single effect, *Great American City* features a holistic “contextual causality” that captures neighborhood social processes. A family of neighborhood effects is theoretically inter-

preted, described, observed, and analyzed using a variety of methodologies, including the creative use of econometrics.

Great American City also provides a framework for raising crucial questions about the “cultural turn” in the social sciences in the last few decades, particularly in the discipline of sociology, that highlight the importance of concepts such as “tool kits” and “scripts.” Although recognizing the positive contributions of this development, Sampson points out that the applications of these dominant concepts seem to be individualistic and are therefore not very suitable for understanding persistent macrohistorical continuity, cultural mechanisms, and deeply embedded structures. Given the findings of *Great American City*, Sampson raises the following question: “If individuals have so many tool kits to choose from, why is there so much consistency (structure) and intersubjective agreement on basic mediators of neighborhood social reproduction?” What is clearly demonstrated in this book is that unlike tool kits and scripts that are interchangeable and can be readily accessed or discarded by individuals, norms and shared understandings are persistent (or reproduced) across a variety of social settings, including neighborhoods.

The incredible scope of *Great American City* is also seen in Sampson’s analysis of data from the Chicago Collective Civic Action Project in chapter 8. With use of these data Sampson carefully examines the impact of nonprofit organizations under a variety of conditions including racial segregation, concentrated poverty, residential stability, population density, as well as a number of other varying social processes ranging from friend/kinship ties to voluntary associations. Sampson finds that the density of nonprofit organizations has a notably positive effect on neighborhoods regardless of racial segregation, poverty, or other social conditions that make life in these settings so difficult. What should be emphasized in this connection is that Sampson’s robust findings on the impact of nonprofit organizations relate to his earlier theoretical and empirical discussion concerning the importance of neighborhood collective efficacy. Basically, Sampson argues, neighborhoods that possess a rich organizational life enhance informal social control and embedded shared expectations that reinforce and promote trust. These findings have important implications for social policy dealing with neighborhood interventions, such as President Obama’s Promise Neighborhoods—a point that is elaborated further in Sampson’s discussion of the policy

implications of his overall findings, as I will soon illustrate in my closing comments.

In the penultimate chapter 16, Sampson revisits the city of Chicago after the economic crisis of 2008 and provides a fascinating discussion of his analytic strategy and entire set of analyses applied to present-day Chicago. In this chapter he returns to the narrative structure and methods discussed in chapter 1 of the book. He zooms in on these neighborhoods with a bird's-eye view—starting with a walking tour of the same neighborhoods in 2010, armed with observations, photos, and field notes, as well as recent quantitative data on foreclosures, crime, and a new letter-drop study. Thus the original data in this remarkable book covers the period from 1995–2010, with census data analysis going back to 1960. His findings in chapter 16 not only confirm but also extend the thesis of the book under new and significantly different macroeconomic conditions.

In the concluding chapter 17 he revisits Zorbaugh's 1929 classic study *Gold Coast and Slum* and specifically "Death Corner," the area that now sits in the center of the space occupied by the former Cabrini-Green housing project. He went back multiple times in the summer of 2010 and again as late as October 2010, with the goal to narrate the thesis of the book from the perspective of this one place. And he uses the Cabrini-Green demolition, surrounding Death Corner, to segue into the chapter's final section on policy implications.

Based on the theoretical arguments and empirical findings of this book, Sampson advocates a different approach to policy interventions for distressed areas of the city. Instead of moving people out of troubled neighborhoods, he makes the case for community-level interventions, as well as holistic policy interventions that recognize the important interconnected social fabric of neighborhoods in American cities. And, consistent with the theory and research of *Great American City*, this policy initiative would include a focus on strategies to integrate public safety intervention—such as regular meetings of local police and residents to co-identify problems—with broader noncrime policies that address the mediating social processes of social organization—such as opportunities to enhance citizen participation and mobilization. This initiative would also include other theoretically relevant projects that are inextricably linked to neighborhood-level dynamics, such as community economic development and citywide or metropolitan programs of mixed-income

housing that are connected with the dynamics of neighborhood migration. All of these policy proposals are consistent with Sampson's focus on how government action—ranging from zoning decisions to interconnected housing and school policies—affect concentrated poverty, residential segregation, neighborhood stability and, most recently, home foreclosures.

Sampson argues that given the historical evidence that community structures are highly patterned, policies focusing on community-level interventions, and based on research knowledge about the mechanisms of urban change, are more feasible and indeed more cost effective over the long term than targeting individuals. For all these reasons he sees the need to broaden our perspective of policy evaluation, which tends to focus almost exclusively on individual actions. Since meaningful change depends on understanding the impact of ongoing neighborhood dynamics and social structures, these social processes should be an essential part of any program of evaluation. Sampson contends that there is no intrinsic reason why social policy cannot address the realities of individual choice while intervening at the scale of the community and citywide social connections.

I began this foreword by arguing that *Great American City* will change the way we think about neighborhood effects and that it sets a new standard for social scientific inquiry. I say this without exaggeration. This book will be debated and discussed for years and will become a standard reference for social science disciplines. However, despite the incredible documentation and precise scientific arguments, it is also accessible and will attract the attention of general educated readers as well. Indeed, Sampson's study and engagement with the streets of Chicago will lead readers to appreciate, in his words, "the logic and power of neighborhood effects."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people and institutions that made this book possible. I begin with a special thanks to the core Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) team. Felton (Tony) Earls, Steve Raudenbush, and Albert J. Reiss Jr. stand out as my closest colleagues in the early years. Tony's leadership was essential in keeping the PHDCN from imploding in perilous times, and Steve has been a collaborator from the very beginning of my involvement with the project. I am especially grateful that I have been able to count on Tony and Steve for their friendship and intellectual wisdom over the years. Although Al is no longer with us, I will not soon forget his iron will and headstrong opinions no matter what the prevailing mood. The memories of many meetings and too many hotels have blurred, but not the rewarding intensity with which the idea of PHDCN was collectively pursued.

A number of other scholars were part of the PHDCN team of scientific leaders or external advisors. In addition to those noted in chapter 4, I would like to acknowledge Temi Moffitt, Steve Buka, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Michael Tonry, Al Blumstein, and David Farrington for their central roles in helping shape the PHDCN, and Doug McAdam for his efforts in helping launch the civic participation project described in chapter 8. I have also had the pleasure of working with a number of smart graduate students on various analyses, papers, and ideas stemming from the PHDCN and its spinoffs, including Jeff Morenoff, Dave Kirk, Heather MacIndoe, Simon Weffer, Chris Browning, Corina Graif, Patrick Sharkey, Charles Loeffler, and Ann Owens.

From this stellar cast I am pleased to acknowledge the following colleagues for their contributions to chapters where I build on prior collaborative efforts: Steve Raudenbush (chapter 6); Tony Earls and Steve Raudenbush (chapter 7); Doug McAdam, Heather MacIndoe, Simon Weffer, and Kaisa Snellman (chapter 8); Jeff Morenoff and Corina Graif (chapter 10); Pat Sharkey (chapter 11); Corina Graif (chapter 13); and Corina Graif and Dave Kirk (chapter 14). Ann Owens and Carly Knight provided superb GIS research assistance in the last year, and Genevieve Butler kept the organization of multiple components of the research effort under control.

Institutions figured greatly in the making of PHDCN. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the National Institute of Justice provided the major funding at the outset and stuck with the project despite a rough early going and series of challenges. I know that Tony and Steve share my wish to acknowledge publicly their indispensable roles in sustaining the project. The NIMH provided later funding for data collection, as did the American Bar Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust. Grants that supported analysis and writing were received from the NIH (Po1 AG031093), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Grant #052746), and the Russell Sage Foundation. I also thank the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and the Russell Sage Foundation for providing pleasant and supportive sabbatical settings for getting work done. Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge my intellectual home bases. For a total of twenty years I have been fortunate enough to claim two wonderfully idiosyncratic universities—the University of Chicago and Harvard University. I thank them both for their uniquely different and intense cultures, administrative support, and intellectual collegueship. Without a committed set of institutional lifelines, the PHDCN and this book never would have been accomplished.

Large projects like the one mounted by PHDCN take an enormous effort and extract a personal toll that goes well beyond published scholarship. But dedication and long hours do not tell the full story—a strong dose of expertise was essential to mounting the Chicago field effort. In particular I want to acknowledge John Holton (site director), Alisú Schoua-Glusberg (survey director), the project managers—James “Chip” Coldren, Cynthia Coleman, Jan Dunham, Pat Lau, Kelly Martin, Nancy Sampson, and Lorrie Stone—and the rest of the incredible PHDCN team

in Chicago, at one point numbering more than 150 people. Collectively, the PHDCN unit at 651 West Washington Street pulled off a heroic feat of data collection. NORC at the University of Chicago also carried out the difficult Systematic Social Observation and Key Informant studies with expertise and innovation. Despite considerable hardship in the field, ABT Associates together with PHDCN staff managed to pull off the first Community Survey. The University of Michigan's ISR completed the second.

Toting up one's intellectual debts is an impossible task, especially when they involve friends, colleagues, institutions, and family. I shall thus be brief and apologize for those I leave out. For comments on various chapters, related papers, presentations, or the penultimate draft, and for grounding my various obsessions, I would especially like to thank Tony Earls, John Laub, Doug McAdam, Steve Raudenbush, Nancy Sampson, Gerry Suttles, Per-Olof Wikström, Chris Winship, and Bill Wilson. Not only has Bill been the touchstone toward whom all urban scholars aspire, he has been an inspiring colleague ever since the exhilarating first days of my time on the faculty at the University of Chicago. His work has been an exemplar, and I am honored that he graciously agreed to write the foreword to this book. I can only hope that I have done justice to his efforts.

For early comments on my work, I thank James F. Short Jr., a true intellectual and standard bearer of the Chicago School. He read the manuscript in rough form but has been an enthusiastic supporter from day one of my community-level project. The readers for the Press also gave me more insights than they probably realized on the initial proposal and ideas. Claude Fischer and Andrew Abbott correctly warned that my incomplete vision would take time to refine, but I am grateful for their confidence and sage advice in tackling the early phases of the book's evolution. Discussions with Rob Mare on selection and neighborhood change have been helpful as well and have led me to new ways to think about future work.

Doug Mitchell has steered many University of Chicago Press books to publication, and this one is no exception. His enthusiasm for the idea of the project was evident in the early stages, and it sustained my efforts to craft a final product. In addition to Doug, I would like to thank Tim McGovern, Kate Frentzel, Rob Hunt, and the rest of the staff at the Press for their efforts in helping to bring the book to its final form.

This book is dedicated to the efforts of all those who helped carry out the PHDCN and the thousands of Chicagoans who took part in the study as participants over the years, from the smallest infants and their caretakers to the most powerful movers and shakers in the city. Their contributions are everywhere in the pages that follow.

CONTENTS

Foreword vii

Acknowledgments xv

PART I SETTING AND THESIS

1. Placed 3
2. Neighborhood Effects: The Evolution of an Idea 31

PART II PRINCIPLES AND METHOD

3. Analytic Approach 53
4. The Making of the Chicago Project 71

PART III COMMUNITY-LEVEL PROCESSES

5. Legacies of Inequality 97
6. "Broken Windows" and the Meanings of Disorder 121
7. The Theory of Collective Efficacy 149
8. Civic Society and the Organizational Imperative 179
9. Social Altruism, Cynicism, and the "Good Community" 210

PART IV INTERLOCKING STRUCTURES

- 10. Spatial Logic; or, Why Neighbors of Neighborhoods Matter 237
- 11. Trading Places: Experiments and Neighborhood Effects
in a Social World 261
- 12. Individual Selection as a Social Process 287
- 13. Network Mechanisms of Interneighborhood Migration 309
- 14. Leadership and the Higher-Order Structure of Elite
Connections 329

PART V SYNTHESIS AND REVISIT

- 15. Neighborhood Effects and a Theory of Context 355
- 16. Aftermath—Chicago 2010 386
- 17. The Twenty-First-Century Gold Coast and Slum 414

Notes 427

References 493

Index 525

PART I SETTING AND THESIS