

## The Role of Social Capital in Combating Poverty

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As the third in a series of books about building assets in poor communities, this volume examines the contributions that social capital can make to combating poverty and fostering the development of poor communities. Social capital refers to the set of resources that inhere in relationships of trust and cooperation between people.<sup>1</sup> These kinds of social assets do not alleviate poverty directly; rather, they leverage investments in human capital and household financial resources. Poor people rely on the support of extended family relationships and of more formal organizations like churches to survive. Scholars have long recognized the importance of these community support structures, and in that sense, social capital is not an entirely new notion for understanding the dynamics of poor communities. But recent scholarly work on social capital has served to renew interest in how social organization and norms of cooperation, both within a community and in its relationships to outside institutions, affect its development. In particular, this work has stimulated new thinking about the role that social capital can play not just in helping families survive but in advancing public policy that seeks to combat poverty.

Making use of social capital as an analytical construct requires a shift from the individual to the community as the unit of analysis for strategies to combat poverty. Social capital is a collective asset, a feature of communities, rather than the property of an individual. As such, individuals both contribute to it and use it, but they cannot own it.<sup>2</sup> Because it is a “common good,” social capital plays a particularly important role in ensuring those aspects of personal welfare that the individual alone can rarely provide (for example, security from crime and public health). In the last ten years, evidence has been mounting that social relationships and community action matter for family well-being, even where communities lack many financial resources.<sup>3</sup>

The chapters in this volume provide a fairly comprehensive assessment of the contributions that social capital can make to combating poverty. They marshal impressive evidence that a community’s social assets can improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being, political participation, and quality of life of residents in poor communities. Yet these chapters also demonstrate that strengthening the social capital of poor communities and, just as important, making effective use of those

assets to foster community well-being are no easy tasks. Important obstacles exist, and social capital rarely works on its own. Nevertheless, social capital matters, and it may be the most promising starting point for new directions in combating poverty.

This volume was assembled to foster better understanding of the contributions that social capital can make to combating poverty and of the important obstacles to building and using social capital. With these considerations in mind, the contributors were asked to identify strategies that show promise for developing and using social assets to improve the lives of families in poor communities. Our premise is that, within the constraints of social organization, economics, politics, culture, and history, people can act collectively to change their circumstances. We seek to direct our attention to how this can be done.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL IN CONTEXT

Social capital is not an alternative to providing greater financial resources and public services to poor communities. Rather, it constitutes an essential means to increase such resources and to make more effective use of them. This perspective differs from one that counterposes community self-help to government action.

In the self-help view, the problems of poor communities lie in their weak internal organization and social norms. A decline in social capital here represents a collapse in a community's ability to solve its own problems.<sup>4</sup> Public support can be seen as a contributor to undermining community responsibility. The answer, then, is to decrease government assistance and instead foster community self-help and private, charitable support. Such thinking, in part, has served as a foundation for the charitable choice provision in recent welfare reform. This provision liberalized the rules allowing religious institutions to provide publicly funded services to local communities so that they could replace direct government provision.

Recent social welfare reforms have been premised on the moral deficit argument that poor people lack a proper work ethic and sense of responsibility for their children. Many scholars have criticized this "blaming the victim" approach (for example, Kelley 1997). In this light, we must be careful not to replace the moral deficit argument with a social deficit argument: that is, if poor communities just got their social capital "act together" so that they could be like middle-class communities, then the problems of poverty could be solved.

The essays in this volume reflect an understanding that the causes of poverty do not lie primarily within the weak social fabric of poor communities, no matter how problematic that is. Instead, the causes of poverty lie in the broader economic, political, and racial structures of American society. Although some social capital enthusiasts ignore this reality, these processes are well known. Our urban communities have experienced the decline of good-paying jobs for low-skilled workers and an exodus of more middle-class residents, processes that have concentrated poverty in the inner city (Wilson 1996). Practices of systematic racism and segregation trap African Americans in these neighborhoods and block avenues for socioeconomic advancement (Massey and Denton 1993). Numerous studies show how government

policies, like the siting of public housing in already poor neighborhoods, have concentrated the most disadvantaged in our inner cities (Judd and Swanstrom 1994; Goering, Kamely, and Richardson 1997). Our reliance on the property tax system leads to great disparities in the financing of schools and contributes fundamentally to the inadequate provision of education to youth in poor communities (Kozol 1991).

What is perhaps less appreciated is the impact of external processes on the social organization of poor communities. According to William Julius Wilson (1996), the flight of jobs destroys businesses, social institutions, and youth socialization processes, leading to a condition that he characterizes as social isolation. Youth lose ties to job networks as well as to a stable community where good work habits are instilled as the norm. Other studies have also documented the decline of the rich social fabric and mutual support networks that used to characterize poor, black communities (Drake and Cayton 1945; Ehrenhalt 1995). Elijah Anderson (1992) shows how “old heads”—older African American men with stable jobs—used to help young black males grow to adulthood, accept social responsibility, and get jobs. With the rise of crime and drug abuse, these old heads are now too afraid to intervene with youth. Their role has also lost legitimacy because they often lack the necessary job connections to back up their advice with practical help.

Government policy has also contributed to social disorganization. Although the idea of “maximum feasible participation” by the poor was an explicit part of some 1960s social policy, for the most part, since then, the poor have been seen as the passive objects of policy. Moreover, the social capital of the poor was never considered an important asset to sustain, let alone expand. Consequently, many public policies were adopted that undermined community social capital. For example, public housing policies produced concentrations of very poor tenants in buildings that promoted anonymity. At the same time, tenant selection procedures made it difficult or impossible for tenants to choose housing near friends and relatives (Goering, Kamely, and Richardson 1997).

Although these considerations suggest that social capital has declined in the inner city, there is little systematic evidence that the decline is greater than in more affluent communities. To the extent that these connections may have been declining in recent decades, evidence from the chapters in this book as well as from a recent review of national data sources (Wuthnow 2001) suggests that exclusionary processes and behaviors by mainstream institutions and organizations may be more to blame than social processes within marginalized populations.

More affluent communities do have greater financial and human capital resources, and their public institutions, like schools, are stronger. Their social capital can be more effective because it is reinforced by these other resources. For example, residents of poor communities may be friends with their neighbors, but those neighbors cannot provide them with connections and references to high-paying jobs. PTA members in an affluent community can discuss the latest curriculum innovations with schoolteachers. PTA members in an inner-city school can work together too. But instead of using their social capital to advance pedagogy at the school, they must discuss how to get an unresponsive central bureaucracy to fix the ceiling that has been falling down in the school auditorium for the last ten years.

In other words, the main problem for poor communities may not be a relative deficit in social capital, but that their social assets have greater obstacles to overcome, and are constantly under assault.

Poor communities cannot solve their problems on their own, no matter how strong and well organized their internal social capital becomes. They require greater financial resources and better public services. Their residents need better education and human capital development.

Nevertheless, social capital can play an essential role in strategies to combat poverty in several ways. First, it can help make investment strategies work. The chapters in part 2 of this volume examine the contributions of social capital in a range of policy areas: public health, safety, housing, economic development, and education. These chapters explore the ways in which strong community organization can enhance the effectiveness of public institutions and revitalization strategies. Second, to the extent that the poor can act collectively and forge alliances with outside actors, they stand a better chance of commanding the greater resources that are necessary for combating poverty. A number of the volume's chapters focus on the conditions under which social capital can provide a foundation for political power for the poor. More broadly, social capital strategies suggest a shift toward seeing the poor as active agents in the betterment of their communities. Through strengthening and expanding social connections, poor people can become partners in community development programs while building the political power needed to increase America's commitment to combating poverty.

The broad set of community building, community organizing, and community development efforts that have arisen across the United States have shown an ability to build affordable housing, foster micro-enterprise development, promote neighborhood safety, improve schools, and, more generally, take steps to reweave the social fabric of torn communities.<sup>5</sup> While working to strengthen local institutions and collective efficacy, these community-based initiatives bring new resources into poor neighborhoods and draw upon local knowledge to advance fresh ideas. In the context of the limitations of market and state action, such civil society initiatives promise some significant new directions in combating poverty.

The authors in this volume examine the role of social capital in policy domains and institutional settings critical to community revitalization. They seek to identify the ways in which social capital matters to the well-being of families and communities. And they highlight the processes central to the development and use of social capital for combating poverty. This task involves the identification of important obstacles to building social assets in poor communities. The rest of this chapter summarizes a number of the lessons learned from these explorations.

## POWER AND CONFLICT

Policymakers have sometimes narrowed the implications of social capital for antipoverty strategies to the relatively apolitical and unthreatening idea of community self-help. This reflects a broader weakness in the understanding of social capital. Some theorists of social capital have stressed the benefits of cooperation and

have little to say about how to deal with the conflicts of interest that are part of any society. Michael Foley and Bob Edwards (1996) have characterized this approach as representing a wish for consensus, an “escape from politics.” But as students of social movements understand, power and conflict are central elements of any process of social change that involves collective action.

The chapters in this volume document the many ways in which more affluent Americans and dominant institutions have worked to undercut the social capital of poor communities when their real or perceived interests are threatened. The realities of power conflicts are revealed perhaps most clearly in the chapters by Cynthia Duncan and by Lisette Lopez and Carol Stack. Both chapters illustrate how political elites in the South used public offices and agencies to prevent benefits from reaching their intended recipients and to stop the efforts of poor, minority communities to organize to improve their own lives.

Duncan takes a close look at poor white communities in Appalachia and poor black communities in the Mississippi Delta, examining the effects of racism and class inequality on the social capital of rural communities. She forces us to confront the legacy of institutional oppression and the contemporary reality of localities polarized between affluence and poverty, a division that often follows racial lines in the Delta. Duncan argues that poverty is fundamentally a political issue in both places. In other words, the affluent use their power to keep people poor for the benefit of the privileged. The poor become trapped, and their incipient organizing efforts are defused by lack of internal trust and repressive efforts by the affluent elite.

Lopez and Stack begin their chapter by discussing how processes of economic decline, racial exclusion, and welfare retrenchment have worked to undermine the social capital of poor communities. The authors show how several African American women who returned home to a small southern town with skills and knowledge developed during their sojourn in the North recognized that the grinding poverty and absence of social support and integration into the larger community placed a heavy burden on the largely poor African American community. In response, they formed Helping Hands, a volunteer organization to help neighbors reach out to each other and offer assistance. Yet the local power structure moved quickly to try to block initiatives by the new group; for example, it refused to award federal funds for a day care center sponsored by Mothers and Children, Inc. The effort succeeded only when the group’s leaders were able to circumvent local elites and appeal to state-level agencies for the necessary funds.

In addition to the more overt efforts of elites to block the social capital of the poor, Lopez and Stack document institutionalized racial and cultural practices that often result in the same thing. For example, many low-income families in rural areas of the South qualify for federally financed Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) loans. Many African Americans would benefit from housing designs suited to extended family living and shared financing arrangements. But the FmHA refuses to allow such arrangements, preferring a single-family, suburban look and individual household mortgages. Unable to share the liability collectively, many new homeowners default. The FmHA then resells the foreclosed houses to not-so-low-income families at bargain prices.

Recognizing the realities of conflict and power rooted in structures of inequality and institutional arrangements does not mean that differences are irreconcilable. It is useful to consider power in the context of social capital not just as the “power over” others but as the “power to” act together (Warren 1998). This kind of power can be transformative, creating new forms of cooperation and new solutions to the problems related to poverty. Power, in this view, is connected to responsibility and therefore to the fundamental idea of social capital as the resources that contribute to cooperative action. From this standpoint, we can conceive of building social assets as a way to empower, that is, to expand the capacities of poor communities to act to combat poverty and to win over new allies.

The political will to seek broader institutional transformation is likely to come, at least in part, from poor communities themselves. A social asset-building approach, in fact, may be the most promising strategy for generating the power necessary to demand such change. Social capital provides an important foundation to such strategies because it is through social relationships that individuals are constituted in their capacity to act in public life. Mediating institutions like families, schools, and congregations develop in each individual the understanding, skills, and knowledge for personal autonomy, a sense of moral justice, and efficacy. That is, people develop many of the democratic traits assumed by liberal theory only through their embeddedness in a vibrant civil society.

The congregation-based organizing groups discussed in the chapter by Michael Foley, John McCarthy, and Mark Chaves seek to use the social capital embedded in churches as a basis to build more overtly political interfaith organizations (see also Warren 2001). These groups pay attention to rebuilding the social fabric and institutional life of poor communities, while also engaging in political, albeit non-partisan, activity. They explicitly seek to build the power necessary to command resources for affordable housing and job training programs and to stimulate change in public institutions like schools. The more successful initiatives seem able to manage conflict and consensus building both within poor communities and in their relationships to external institutions.

New forms of mediating institutions, like these congregation-based groups, play a particularly important role in connecting social organizations to political purposes. The chapter by Cathy Cohen highlights how social capital-based initiatives that originally sought to improve community life, like community policing bodies, can evolve into an organized power base for poor communities through what she calls intervening institutions. In New Haven, community management teams created to implement community policing developed into a mechanism to increase the influence of community residents in the city’s enterprise community on economic development issues. Several community leaders used this emerging base as a platform to run successfully for local office.

The chapters by Cohen and by Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves suggest that social organization is a necessary, but not sufficient, basis for empowering poor communities. Instead, social capital can serve as an important foundation for more explicitly political institutions. Ester Fuchs, Robert Shapiro, and Lorraine Minnite take up this theme directly. They argue in their chapter that social capital cannot be a sub-

stitute for political organization in low-income communities. Political institutions are necessary to generate the power the poor need to command resources and favorable governmental policies. The authors examine data from a survey of New York City residents that includes information on their group memberships. The results show a social capital effect on political participation: that is, individuals who are members of purely social organizations are more likely to be politically active than those without such memberships. But the results also show that membership in a politically active organization has a far greater effect on an individual's level of political participation. The authors conclude that we must be concerned not just with building social capital but with rebuilding the kinds of institutions, like political parties, interest groups, and unions, that used to provide representation and political power for low-income communities. Congregation-based organizing groups and community management teams perhaps represent new forms of such institutions.

### THREE LEVELS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: AN INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH

As a structural feature of communities, social capital is fundamentally rooted in the cultural traditions and institutional forms of those communities, as well as in the physical spaces that they occupy. In other words, the concept of social capital loses its meaning and effectiveness the further removed it becomes from specific kinds of institutions, like churches, schools, and tenant associations. People who trust each other and cooperate within a group for a specific purpose may have a general resource available for some other cooperative endeavor. But social capital, unlike money, is not a universal resource, anonymous and fungible. It is tied to specific organizational forms and to specific purposes.<sup>6</sup> The transfer from one purpose to another is by no means automatic. In a classic study, Aldon Morris (1984) shows how activists worked to transfer the trust, cultural traditions, and networks of followers and leaders embedded in southern black churches to support the emerging civil rights movement. But not all churches made that transition; some refused to join the movement. And even for those churches that did participate, it took effort on the part of activists to transfer social capital from church to movement. It was not automatic.

Moreover, the purposes to which social capital is put, or for which it was formed, affect whether and how easily it is used for individual and community economic advancement. Some forms of social capital are highly exclusionary, narrow in group orientation, or in other ways contrary to community well-being and the public good (Portes 1998). Robert Putnam (2000, 350–63) has also recognized this problem, calling it the “dark side” of social capital. The Mafia contains social capital but directs it illegally and toward narrow group gain at the expense of others. Members of racially exclusive resident associations trust each other and work together, but against the common good more broadly conceived. Gangs may offer important benefits to their members, but hardly represent a net gain for communities.

Most forms of social capital within poor communities represent at least potential contributors to economic advancement and community revitalization strategies. But

the potential of different forms of social capital can vary, or they might contribute in different ways. For example, the personal-familial ties of some immigrant groups contribute to family survival and advancement but have been largely disconnected from action in the public realm. Certain forms of social capital, like some churches, may make critical contributions to community development because they engage trusted leaders motivated by religious commitment to act to support their communities. Yet such forms of social capital may not be available to address certain critical needs, like birth control or the health issues of gay residents.

An institutional and process-oriented approach allows us to move from a discussion of the potential of various forms of social capital to an examination of their actual practice. We need to look at norms of cooperation and trust not as a general resource, but as they affect what people actually do—for our concerns, the processes of community building and collective action. Consequently, the authors in this volume attempt to specify the key elements to building and using social capital, that is, to processes like leadership development, will formation, and relationship building. Whether they are examining religious institutions, labor unions, or voluntary community improvement associations, these authors work to deepen our understanding of the organizational forms and key actors critical to social capital building.

The social capital of poor communities is not limited to their internal relationships. The concept of social isolation (Wilson 1987) has unfortunately been interpreted to mean that the poor are entirely cut off from the outside world. Yet residents of poor communities are also members of other collectives and communities. African Americans, for example, share a history, a tradition, and an identity that cut across local territorial units. In addition, through their activities in churches, unions, social clubs, and political organizations, residents of poor communities are sometimes connected across poor communities and to the more affluent. Furthermore, poor people have numerous connections to the public institutions, like schools, hospitals, and the police, that operate within their communities.

Thus, there are three analytically distinct levels at which social capital operates: within communities, across communities, and through ties with financial and public institutions. The following three sections explore what we can learn from this volume about how to build and use social capital at each of these levels to combat poverty. The first section considers the foundational role of what we and others have called bonding social capital. The second looks at the challenges to the formation of “bridging” social capital across communities.<sup>7</sup> And the third articulates the possibilities for poor communities to create synergy, that is, cooperative relationships with private and public institutions to foster community building and development.

### **Within Communities: Bonding Social Capital**

Strong social bonds and effective organizations within communities provide the foundation on which poor people can develop the capacity to address the problems of poverty, to rebuild their communities, and to achieve a measure of control over their lives. Strong community institutions, like churches, schools and PTAs, fraternal



orders, and small-business associations, are essential to integrating individuals into society. And people, especially those lacking other resources, can rely on the social support and solidarity of immediate communities to develop their capacities as public leaders. Local communities can also provide the primary arena for the kind of face-to-face interactions critical to building trust and common understandings. For many reasons, then, poor communities require strong local institutions if they are to develop the leadership of their members in external institutions in the broader society. In that sense, strengthening “bonding” social capital within communities helps provide a foundation for developing social capital at the other two levels.

Ethnographic studies of poor communities have shown that poor people have historically relied on their social capital to aid in survival when other forms of capital have been lacking (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997). More than the affluent, poor people often rely on social relationships for assistance and have networks of relationships in which access to aid is relatively prevalent (Boisjoly, Duncan, and Hofferth 1995; Stack 1974). Although the social fabric of poor communities has been under assault, as discussed earlier, numerous studies confirm that survival-oriented social capital persists in poor communities, the kind of social capital that helps people “get by,” as Xavier de Souza Briggs (1998a) so aptly puts it.<sup>8</sup>

If we want to make headway in combating poverty, if we want people to “get ahead,” survival is not enough. The chapters in this volume demonstrate the need for communities to make the transition from survival to broader collective action. In his chapter on public safety, for example, Robert Sampson shows that low-income communities of similar race and socioeconomic characteristics exhibit different levels of the kinds of social organization necessary to achieve social order. According to Sampson, “local communities high in social capital are better able to realize common values and maintain the social controls that foster public safety.” All other things being equal, communities with greater social capital experience less crime. But some kinds of social capital appear critical. Sampson notes that many communities exhibit intense private ties yet still lack the capacity to achieve social control because of an institutional deficit. Informal ties—such as support networks in health and informal social control in public safety—matter. But more formal institutions appear to be critical to the ability of community residents to act collectively, particularly in the broader public sphere. Consequently, Sampson is led to emphasize the importance of neighborhood organizations within poor communities as sites for the regulation of public space.

In his chapter on school reform, Pedro Noguera shows that internal organization can serve as a source of power for those made powerless in their interactions with public agencies as isolated individuals. Alone, poor, minority parents have little input into the ways in which public schools educate, or fail to educate, their children. They can be easily marginalized by administrators. Working together, they can develop the confidence and capacities to work as partners with educators. Moreover, Noguera argues, urban schools offer a critical site for building social capital because they are increasingly the most reliable source of stability and social support for children, and one of the very few stable institutions through which parents can connect with each other.

Building local institutions capable of public action for community advancement is no easy task. Several chapters in this volume analyze efforts by the poor to build and sustain local institutions in the face of a sometimes hostile society. At times the grinding nature of poverty, combined with the efforts of some elites, as described earlier, to keep the poor “in their place,” can lock people into a survival mode. It may prove critical for poor residents who find themselves trapped in this way to have experiences outside of their community. Lopez and Stack show how African American women who returned home to a small southern town with skills and knowledge developed during their sojourn in the North sparked Helping Hands, a volunteer support-oriented organization, and then transformed the group into a broader public force for change. Duncan shows how poor people in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta remained trapped when their incipient organizing efforts were undermined by lack of internal trust and the repressive actions of local elites. Duncan emphasizes the critical role that education can play in broadening the outlook of indigenous leaders. In fact, new leaders are beginning to emerge in these communities, and many of them are younger, college-educated residents who have had some experience living and working outside of their home communities.

Religious institutions represent the most pervasive kind of civil society institution in low-income communities. They have historically helped sustain family and community life, that is, they have helped people survive under very adverse conditions. Many have sometimes played a broader public role in providing services and advocating for the needs and interests of their communities. The chapter by Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves demonstrates that, in fact, poor communities are heavily populated by religious institutions, and that a high proportion of them play a broader social role beyond fostering the spiritual life of their members. The authors describe the variety of ways in which churches work to improve community life, foster civic engagement, and increase political participation. As noted earlier, para-church organizations, like the congregational-based community organizing networks of the Industrial Areas Foundation in Texas (Warren 2001), have been particularly effective in bringing congregations and their social networks into a more active public role to revitalize low-income communities. But the authors document a wide range of other activities as well. These kinds of community mobilizations, as well as those discussed by Lopez and Stack, Duncan, and Noguera, increase the participation of indigenous residents and develop leaders among them.

At the same time, there are important obstacles and limitations to the role of the church. As Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves show, churches in poor communities suffer from limited finances. Moreover, churches can exclude nonbelievers, have historically limited the leadership roles of women, and find it difficult to address community needs when they conflict with traditional church teaching.

Other authors in this volume also warn that social networks and institutions can be exclusionary and sometimes corrupt. Langley Keyes develops this theme as it applies to the provision of housing. A genuinely open and representative organization of tenants at the grassroots level was one of the factors that Keyes found to be critical for successful cooperation with mainstream institutions in improving low-income housing. But participation in some tenant groups can become too nar-

row, causing them to lose their accountability to the community. Keyes labels as “amoral familism” the absence of accountability that came to characterize an otherwise powerful tenants’ association in Boston. Eventually, the association alienated both the residents of the housing project and the public authorities on whom their housing development relied.

The chapters in this volume indicate that the creation of bonding social capital is critical to any effort to engage poor people to improve their communities. But they offer no magic bullets to use in building this form of social capital. Taken together, however, they offer important lessons about such processes. First, stable institutions, like churches and schools, as well as more fluid support groups like Helping Hands, provide an essential foundation for bonding processes. Second, those who emerge as key leaders in these groups are likely to have had the opportunity to gain education and experience that go beyond daily survival in a poor community. And finally, any long-term effort to combat poverty must pay particular attention to cultivating broad participation from the community and fostering accountability.

## **Bridging Social Capital Across Communities**

Poor communities cannot address the problems of poverty simply by building internal social capital, as important as such bonding capital is. At their best, strong local institutions provide a foundation for binding individuals together and directing them toward the pursuit of collective needs and aspirations. To the extent that poor communities lack broader connections, however, they remain isolated and weak. “Bridging” ties can help bring greater resources and opportunities into poor communities. And in the long run, building trust and cooperation across communities can help provide the basis for strengthening the social fabric of the whole society and creating a national consensus for combating poverty.

Strongly bonded communities can be closed-minded, hostile to others, and possibly even corrupt (Portes 1998). White ethnic Americans, for example, have sometimes relied on the strong social capital of their urban communities centered in the Catholic parish to block attempts by African Americans to integrate their neighborhoods (McGreevy 1996). By sharing limited resources and pooling labor, some immigrant groups have used their strong internal social capital as a basis for economic development. But when some of the more successful businesspeople want to expand beyond the immigrant community to do business with and hire non-immigrants, the normative demands of the community often hold them back (Zhou 1992). To be effective, then, community revitalization efforts must balance the “bonding” social organizations they build with “bridging” ties to other communities.

Although the issue of bridging social capital has been discussed primarily in relation to the connection between poor and affluent communities, there are four types of bridging ties, each important in its own right. First of all, within a poor community itself, we need to consider bridging across different forms of social capital. Even a small geographically defined community has many different institutions

and networks within it. We cannot assume that one form—for example, a church community—can speak for the whole. Moreover, different community institutions often do not cooperate with each other and can sometimes be in open conflict. To expand the basis of support for community initiatives and broaden the distribution of their benefits, we need to consider ways to build new and cooperative connections across local institutions—for example, across churches, between churches and PTAs, or between churches, tenant associations, and local community development corporations.

The second type of bridging connection occurs between different low-income communities or neighborhoods. Poor communities do not always, or evenly normally, cooperate with each other in the development and pursuit of initiatives that would be of mutual benefit. In fact, neighborhoods are often divided against each other, for complex historical reasons related to different interests and identities. These divisions are particularly acute when they fall along racial or ethnic lines, and they often lead to competition between neighborhoods and racially defined communities for limited public resources or economic opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

The third type of bridging is the one most commonly discussed, although seldom practiced: forging connections between the poor and more affluent communities. Scholars have explored the importance of bridging ties for the socioeconomic advancement of individuals and families (see, for example, Briggs 1998a). At the community level, bridging social capital can help build allies for strategies to combat poverty. Moreover, cooperative relationships across communities cultivate a sense of common identity that can sustain a national commitment to alleviate poverty.

Connecting people and communities nationally is the fourth type of bridging social capital. Building social capital at the local level is a necessary part of any strategy for combating poverty, since local roots provide intimate knowledge, trust, and a respect for the diverse needs of communities. Cooperation finds an important foundation in the face-to-face interactions, and in the socializing institutions, that operate best at the local level. But effective strategies at the national level will also be necessary to generate power and change. Community is not limited to the local level, nor should it be. Yet most community-building efforts with strong local roots lack much national coherence (Stoecker 1997; Dreier 1996). Strategies to combat poverty, then, need to build social capital locally yet connect it regionally and nationally.

A number of the chapters in this volume demonstrate that there is a significant institutional basis for creating the several types of bridging social capital just discussed, particularly in such fields as religion, education, labor, and economic activity. Although there are many obstacles to the building of bridging social capital, successfully doing so, the volume's authors suggest, can bring important gains.

While religious institutions help strengthen the bonding social capital of poor communities, they also offer an important institutional bridge to outside networks and organizations that can help overcome the limitations of isolated congregations. As Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves show, congregations located in even the poorest neighborhoods provide opportunities for the development of social capital between

neighborhood residents and the majority of congregants who are not themselves poor. The national denominational structures of most religious institutions can offer outside resources and political advocacy for the poor. Foley, McCarthy, and Chaves review a number of promising faith-based initiatives—including para-church organizations and interfaith coalitions like Habitat for Humanity—that combine congregations within and across denominational lines. These coalitions play important roles in providing services and working as collective advocates for poor communities. Additionally, congregation-based community organizing networks knit congregations within and across low-income communities, and often link them to more affluent congregations within a metropolitan area. They consciously work to build leadership to advocate for greater public services, more financial resources, and new policy initiatives.

Pedro Noguera's chapter on public schools shows their potential to connect parents across neighborhoods, especially if a locality's school administration will support such an effort. A yearly parent empowerment conference organized in the San Francisco Unified School District brings together eight hundred parents from neighborhoods across the city. Parental organizing efforts developed by the Industrial Areas Foundation show the benefits of coordinating school-based projects across city and state levels: they can bring extra resources, new ideas, and outside political support to each school effort and together help to rebuild a political constituency for the support of public schools (Shirley 1997).

Despite the opportunities afforded by churches and schools, obstacles persist. The poorest or most marginalized people may not be part of the extended networks and activities sponsored by these institutions. And although they are growing, so far these efforts and the power they have generated have remained fairly small in relation to the scale of economic disinvestment and public neglect that plague poor communities.

In her chapter, Margaret Levi examines the potential for labor unions to work collaboratively with community-based organizations in poor communities. According to Levi, in earlier years labor unions represented members of poor communities. But as they were successful in raising their members' incomes, they lost accountability to those left behind, that is, low-wage workers in poor communities. Organized labor has a lot to offer these communities. Their pension funds could be used to finance affordable housing, as has been piloted in some cities. Their political clout could support public policies to help the poor, like increases in the minimum wage. Labor also has something to gain from such cooperation: it might help the newer efforts by labor to build its membership among an increasingly female and nonwhite labor force.

Levi argues that collaborative efforts will have to address the divisions that have arisen between unions and the poor. White male union leaders, particularly in the building trades unions, have developed a reputation for insensitivity, or even hostility, to the needs of people of color and women. Open hostility has broken out over hiring practices on construction projects, for example. Levi identifies the inclusion of women and members of racial minorities as one of the biggest challenges

facing labor unions. When labor-organizing campaigns are successful, they increasingly require the development of multiracial and multiclass alliances, as has occurred, for example, in several “living wage” campaigns and in the Justice for Janitors campaigns.

More generally, in order to build trust across lines of division, labor must make credible commitments to institutional allies in poor communities. These commitments, which must ensure that the benefits of cooperation accrue to both sides, will require unions to use their resources in money, people, and reputation to support specific projects and campaigns. Usually these projects, like the living wage and affordable housing efforts, fall outside of labor’s traditional focus on member services. Levi notes that the survival of the labor movement may well rest on balancing the trade-off between traditional service to members and winning jobs and living wages for those previously excluded from union membership. Union leaders who partner with community institutions do seem to advance a broader understanding of labor’s identity and interests.

Cathy Cohen’s chapter is particularly instructive in showing how real or perceived conflicts of interest can block cooperation between organizations that ostensibly represent low-income communities, people of color, and workers. In New Haven, the enterprise community management teams that originally emerged out of community policing efforts came to clash with civil rights and union organizations over hiring policies at a newly built hotel. The community groups wanted jobs for residents of their neighborhoods, while labor was most concerned with its right to organize newly hired workers, and the NAACP focused on opportunities for people of color to get high-end jobs. Each group construed its interests narrowly and failed to establish a process in which trust and cooperation could be built.

The chapter by Ross Gittel and J. Phillip Thompson shows the potential power of bridging ties for economic development. They argue that, while individual families in poor communities typically have low incomes, the purchasing power of the whole community can often be quite significant. Social capital can therefore provide an avenue for demanding market response when individuals lack the financial clout to do so alone. Moreover, Gittel and Thompson point out, market failure in poor communities is often not the result of a lack of profit potential. Instead, entrepreneurs from outside fail to see market potential because of lack of knowledge or racial stereotypes. To the extent that the poor can organize themselves and build relationships with entrepreneurs, they can help address these failures and create new investment in their communities.

In addition, Gittel and Thompson highlight the ability of social capital to serve as a basis for the political power necessary to affect market operations through public policy. In the late 1970s, community development corporations and other local community groups across the country joined forces to help get the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) passed by Congress. The CRA required financial institutions to reinvest in poor communities. A wide variety of local community groups across the country made use of its provisions to pressure their local banks. Yet it has proved difficult to sustain national-level connections between local groups, and the CRA remains one of the very few fruits of bridging social capital at the national level.

## Creating Synergy with Financial and Public Institutions

The social assets of poor communities may be ineffective because they are isolated from, or undermined by, mainstream economic and political institutions. Scholars studying the role of social capital in developing countries have used the term “synergy” to characterize the opposite situation in which local organizations, economic actors, and state institutions work together for positive developmental outcomes (Evans 1997; Woolcock 1998). These scholars show that development is most successful when governments cooperate with, rather than repress or ignore, initiatives and participation by local community networks. Such cooperation can flow from social connections. According to Peter Evans (1997), embeddedness occurs when public officials share social ties and trust with community residents across the public-private divide. As Evans (1997, 1122) argues, “Social capital inheres, not just in civil society, but in an enduring set of relationships that span the public-private divide. . . . [I]t is social capital built in the interstices between state and society that keeps [economic] growth on track.” When public officials work to establish cooperative ties and efforts, they are able to “coproduce” the desired outcome, whether it is economic development, improved public health, or the education of children (Evans 1997; Tandler 1997).

In the American context, we can think of coproduction as occurring when synergy is created between community-based activities, economic organizations, and public institutions. Synergy demands the creation of constructive connections, a form of social capital, between organized residents of poor communities and the officials and staff of public and private institutions.

This perspective differs from that of those who see social capital, or the civil society sphere, existing independently of, even a priori to, economic and political institutions. The voluntary sector appears in that view as the “core” of society, and voluntary action is to be preferred to government provision. Yet there is considerable evidence that the civil sector is closely tied to government, as well as to economic action. To counter the claims of some conservatives that there is a zero-sum relationship between government and voluntary civic action, Theda Skocpol (1996) has shown the reciprocal relationship between many important federal government programs and civic associations, like the American Legion. Government policy, in fact, can help build social capital by encouraging the formation of associations like PTAs.

But public institutions do not always work to build social capital when it comes to poor communities. Efforts to establish coproduction often run up against widespread indifference or even opposition to cooperation with the poor by dominant institutions. Historically, the power of the state has been used for surveillance and supervision of the poor. To receive basic benefits, welfare recipients have to reveal the most intimate details of their personal lives. The police treat many residents of poor communities, particularly (but not only) young men of color, as suspects rather than citizens deserving of respect. Public institutions often contribute to the grinding quality of life in many poor communities that makes the task of personal

survival difficult enough, let alone the building of social capital and the construction of a rich public life.

Public institutions have sometimes gone further, working to crush autonomy and the collective action of individuals and groups in poor communities when they perceive them as too threatening. During the last period of widespread community action in America's inner cities, the 1960s, many initiatives met with opposition and repression. As Noguera discusses in his chapter, the effort to establish community control of schools in New York City faced strong opposition from the largely white teachers' union and ultimately failed (see also Berube and Gittell 1969; Ture and Hamilton 1992 [1967]). Meanwhile, local police and the FBI worked to disrupt and repress more militant organizations in the black community. The distrust and fear spawned by the activities of the police, the FBI, and militant groups obscured the progress some of these groups made in building social capital and providing services for poor families.

Even when dominant institutions do not directly oppose the residents of poor communities, they may fail to serve them well because their staff are so disconnected from residents of the local community.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of ways in which detached public institutions undermine the social capital of poor communities or render it ineffective. First, they can make rules or institute practices, particularly nonresponsiveness, that create community instability or disrupt social ties. Nonresponsiveness works to undermine collective efficacy because it renders collective activity useless. One of the elemental lessons of efforts to organize in any community is that victories are needed to sustain and build collective action. If institutions refuse to respond, or delay ad infinitum, activists become discouraged and support withers. Social capital may continue to be latent in the community, but it will be even more difficult to use that capital to attempt to improve conditions in the future. Public institutions can also adopt practices that prevent communication or make it one-sided. They can provide information that demeans, demoralizes, or makes invisible the recipient poor community. Or they can fail to provide information that would be substantively useful to understanding community conditions. Geographic, bureaucratic, and technological buffers can prevent direct contact with poor communities. Even when government or nonprofit agencies attempt to bring poor neighborhood residents into planning and decisionmaking processes, different norms for communication and the formal structure of meetings can silence residents or lead professionals in charge to disregard their input (Briggs 1998b).

The chapters in this volume discuss a number of promising initiatives that have worked to overcome these obstacles to synergy. Pedro Noguera begins his chapter with a frank discussion of the resistance that public institutions can offer to working collaboratively with poor people. To the extent that school personnel lack any meaningful knowledge of and connection to the communities in which their students live, they will not understand local culture or serve their students well. To the extent that school personnel assume an air of superiority over parents, along racial and class lines, those parents will not be heard and they will be excluded from meaningful participation in the school community. Noguera argues that parent organizing can work to overcome these obstacles and play a decisive role in reform-



ing failed schools. Organization serves as a source of power for those made powerless in their interactions with public agencies as isolated individuals. It turns out that many school administrators, facing the widespread failure of inner-city schools, welcome parental involvement. Synergy, then, seems to work best when there is support and action from the “bottom up” and from the “top down.” Drawing on case studies, Noguera shows how organizing for parental and community control of schools, in conjunction with a broader effort to expand the resources available both to failing schools and to poor communities, can result in real improvement in the education of poor children.

Other chapters in the volume document the possibilities for synergy across a range of policy areas. Robert Sampson discusses a number of initiatives, like community policing, through which local residents, indigenous associations, and police can create synergistic partnerships to reduce crime and social disorder. Sampson shows that these initiatives can improve the accountability of the police, a public agency that has historically been one of the most repressive to poor communities.

Sherman James, Amy Schulz, and Juliana van Olphen identify new collaborative arrangements in the area of public health. Using a case study of the successful Village Health Worker Partnership in East Detroit, this chapter illustrates the kind of policy initiative that can build community capacity and synergistic relationships with public health agencies. The authors first articulate the multiple pathways through which social capital operates to affect the health status of communities. They show how such strong bonding forms of social capital as support networks are associated with better health outcomes. But they also show that factors associated with bridging forms, like mutual respect and low inequality across American states, are also powerfully associated with better health outcomes for *all* residents. The authors argue that differentials in social power between communities are related to the distribution of health problems within communities. Efforts to build social capital, they point out, must succeed in commanding real access to political power since the health problems of poor communities derive from institutional arrangements that lie beyond their immediate geographical boundaries. The chapter then illustrates how the Village Health Worker Partnership in East Detroit builds community capacity, brings needed resources into the inner city, and forges partnerships between residents and public health agencies that begin to change the institutional arrangements that undermine the health status of the poor. Its success is due in part to the organizers’ conscious effort to deal with power differentials between community residents and health professionals.

In economic development, Gittel and Thompson discuss a number of initiatives that seek to create collaborations between private and public institutions and poor communities. Here again, initiatives can originate from either the bottom up or the top down, or from some complicated relationship between the two. New York City’s Neighborhood Entrepreneur Program (NEP), for example, was initiated when neighborhood residents demanded a role in the privatization of city-owned housing. Through a collaboration between a range of city agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups, NEP was established to give resident, mostly nonwhite, entrepreneurs a chance to own and manage this housing. Tenant

organizations in the buildings originally clashed with the entrepreneurs over some policies, but Gittell and Thompson point out that most entrepreneurs eventually came to see tenant groups as assets for their business, and they even funded resident organizing in some cases.

Drawing from a framework developed by Michael Woolcock (1998), Langley Keyes's chapter on public housing compares a range of cases that represent different arrangements of social capital both within communities and in their relationships to public authorities. He shows that lack of trust in public agencies or direct conflict with them makes housing initiatives fail, even when communities are well organized internally. The optimum arrangement is strong internal social relationships combined with cooperative ties to public agencies. As a good example of synergy, Keyes offers the community development system in Cleveland, where city agencies, community development corporations, and financial institutions work together to build affordable housing. But Keyes also shows that both community groups and public agencies need to be accountable to their constituencies and maintain standards of professionalism if positive outcomes are to be sustained.

Keyes alerts us to the danger presented by embeddedness, that is, to close ties between public officials and local communities. These ties can become corrupt, serve the interests of a narrow group, or lead to nepotism. Keyes offers the example of an apparently well-run housing project in Boston with a strong tenant leader. It turns out that she shielded her nephew who ran a drug-dealing operation out of the project.<sup>11</sup>

Synergy, then, needs to be balanced with a degree of autonomy and integrity on the part of public institutions (Woolcock 1998). In addition to being accountable to the local community, public institutions must be accountable to higher public authorities as well as to the standards of their professional communities. Evans (1995) refers to this balance as "embedded autonomy"; he argues that successful industrial development occurs when state authorities develop independent and efficient bureaucracies while working cooperatively with private economic actors. Ideally, there are coherent and relatively autonomous organizations in each sector (social, political, and economic) with connections between them that foster cooperation and mutual accountability.

Cooperative initiatives among these sectors can, as noted earlier, come both from the bottom up and from the top down. From the bottom up, communities need to develop effective strategies to encourage or compel public or private institutions to cooperate with their initiatives. From the top down, public institutions themselves can initiate reforms to encourage and collaborate with community-based efforts. Cathy Cohen shows how community management teams created by government action "at the top" have opened up opportunities for organizing "at the bottom"; the result has been greater political power and representation for poor communities. As we see in her chapter, synergistic partnerships between public, private, and community organizations require new forms for the institutionalization of political power. To be successful, however, cooperative relationships must incorporate both strong community organizations and professional public agencies with real accountability to local communities.

## BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL AT THREE LEVELS: TOWARD SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Those designing strategies that seek to build and use social capital to combat poverty need to consider all three levels of social capital. Acting at one level alone will be insufficient. This process can be seen as a cycling through, from the micro level to the macro, then back to the micro. Action at one level can stimulate and sustain progress at another level.

Nevertheless, bonding social capital in poor communities appears to be foundational for effective action at other levels. Activities at higher levels assume and rely on a certain degree of coherence and support at the within-community, foundational level. Incoherence at the first level almost always leads to misrepresentation and resentment at other levels. As Margaret Levi discusses in her chapter, some trade unions would like to work with poor communities but often cannot find an organization that represents community residents. When banks, under pressure to comply with Community Reinvestment Act provisions, decide to lend to low-income neighborhoods, they search for knowledgeable and legitimate community organizations with which to partner.

Public institutions and more affluent communities are not always so ready to collaborate with the organizations of the poor. Another reason that bonding social capital is foundational, then, lies in the structural sources of poverty. To the extent that poor communities use their social capital to address their problems, they may be led to confront economic and political structures in which others have a vested interest. Bonding social capital provides a foundation for the political power needed in these conflicts.

Efforts to build and use social capital in poor communities, especially efforts that seek to stimulate political action, can contribute to a broader transformation of American civic and political life as well. Community revitalization initiatives have been one of the primary ways in which the social fabric of American communities has been repaired and democratic participation has been rejuvenated. Historically, the social movements of the poor and excluded have been some of the most important forces for democratic change in America. The contemporary period is ripe for equally broad transformation, one that begins to address the root causes of poverty.

Taken together, the chapters in this book bring into focus the cultural aspects of the structural divisions that must be confronted to create social change broad enough to reduce the burden of poverty on individuals and communities and revitalize democratic participation. The first division is blindness to the uneven division of labor along gender lines in the development of social capital in poor communities and elsewhere. The reality is that women play the central role in social capital processes, yet their leadership often lacks visibility and legitimacy. The second division is prominently discussed in many of the chapters in this volume: the persistence of a racial hierarchy, which resists social capital strategies because it draws such firm lines around groups and yokes them to historically cumulative differences in wealth and power. A concern with the third division, the prevalence of a punitive cultural

image of the poor, which is often confounded with racial and gender stereotypes, also pervades the volume's chapters.

These divisions provide a rationale for economic inequality and reinforce patterns of social relationships that ensure that the social capital of those who are more privileged will have higher value. Nevertheless, even though they represent strategic resources for those who benefit from the status quo, they also point to arenas of potential transformation. The next three sections discuss each of the arenas.

### Recognizing the Leadership of Women

The chapters in this volume demonstrate the leading role that women play in building and using social capital in low-income communities. Lopez and Stack discuss the African American women who run Holding Hands in the rural South. Cathy Cohen documents the leading role of women in the community management teams of New Haven. These women are all challenging the historical dominance of men as political leaders and community spokespersons. But in another sense they are continuing what has long been women's work: bringing together neighbors and relatives to support each other and to provide for the needs of daily life that are not met through the economic or political system. Lopez and Stack recount women's efforts to organize to assist families in making ends meet, to provide child care, and to support teenagers in their development into productive adults and citizens, and the resulting struggles with the dominant powers.<sup>12</sup> Cohen remarks on both the strong neighborhood roots of the women who go on to attain political office and their confinement to the "women's slots" on the ballot.

Some of the chapters in this volume do not identify the gender of the actors they discuss who are building social capital. To the extent that these omissions keep women's leadership invisible, it is harder to understand the organic connections between the different kinds of social capital needed to combat poverty. It turns out that approaches to generating and using social capital in poor communities are often gendered. Marilyn Gittell, Isolda Ortega-Bustamante, and Tracy Steffy (2000) have documented the distinctive characteristics of community-based organizations led by women that seem essential to using social capital to leverage investments in poor communities. According to these authors, such characteristics include "the comprehensive approach to community development, the concern with the process of community development, the focus on community participation, the human-centered and needs-centered programs, [and] the open style of leadership" (130). In contrast, community development organizations that lack significant numbers of women in leadership positions tend to focus solely on jobs, economic development, and housing construction. The processes related to these priorities are more often concerned with developing contacts and power positions vis-à-vis mainstream institutions rather than nurturing broad-based ties within the community and investing in human development at all levels. The gender gaps in priorities were especially pronounced when there were also few men of color involved in the male-led organizations.

If poor communities are going to develop effective power in the public realm, the roles of women as community leaders must be fully developed and appreciated. Yet the chapters in this volume demonstrate that this remains problematic. When community organization remains small or informal, women have freer rein. But in more formal settings where greater power and resources are at stake, men still seem to predominate. The pastors of the congregations that structure so much of life in poor communities are almost entirely men. And men still control many of the party organizations that nominate candidates for political office from poor communities.

There is cause for optimism that the emergence of leadership by women in more public-oriented social capital initiatives could translate into formal power. But such a change will require that we appreciate the strengths of women's leadership. In other words, our public life can be transformed in a positive direction by learning from women in the community-building movement. The strategies and approaches women have developed are diverse. In general, however, they emphasize relationship building, holistic approaches that integrate public and private spheres, and efforts to strengthen families and communities (Naples 1998; Stoecker and Stall 1998). Such approaches can help us find a greater sense of common purpose with which to temper the clash of interests that dominates in the political realm.

## Confronting the Racial Order

A second arena of transformation concerns racism and racial inequality. Discussions about poverty and social capital take place in an America structured by what Michael Dawson (1994) has called a racial order. Developing effective strategies to combat poverty requires confronting the structures of racial inequality because they constitute a fundamental aspect of the generation of concentrated poverty in communities of color (Massey and Denton 1993; Sampson 1999). This point is amply demonstrated in the chapters by Duncan, Lopez and Stack, and Sampson. Moreover, narrowly racialized perceptions of the interests and identities of communities complicate efforts to develop the kind of bridging social capital and sense of common purpose necessary to combat poverty. The chapters by Noguera and Levi, among others, make this point clearly.

The concept of a racial order highlights the fact that many racial injustices are institutionalized, that is, the normal operations of dominant institutions create and reinforce racial inequality. Among other things, this means that no one needs to be intentionally racist to cause or sustain racial inequality, although some may be. The institutionalized nature of racism places a tremendous additional burden on social capital-based initiatives. At the same time, social capital formation can lead to group consciousness, solidarity, and political agendas that can begin to confront institutionalized racism.

How capable social capital-based initiatives are in addressing institutionalized structures of racism remains to be seen. Certainly, most of the initiatives discussed in this volume work to reduce inequality and improve the lives of people of color in housing, education, health, public safety, and economic development. At the same

time, these initiatives remain localized and, in that sense, incapable of generating the political power that will be necessary to address broader structures of inequality.

Research on social capital could benefit from an effort to learn from the community-building traditions in communities of color. Although public attention is usually drawn to the problems of poor black communities, African Americans, despite facing adverse conditions, maintain some of the strongest forms of social capital in the country. For example, African Americans have the highest rates of church membership and participation. Rather than being inwardly focused, black churches are some of the most involved local institutions in providing services and support to the broader community and in initiating economic development and political participation (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). African Americans also demonstrate a broad commitment to the whole community, demonstrated by their consistent support for the public provision of a broad range of social services (Bobo and Gilliam 1990).

Other ethnic minorities also offer lessons in the development and use of social capital to combat poverty. To name but two examples, theories of social capital as an aid to economic development have drawn from the experiences of Chinese, Cuban, and Korean communities (Portes 1995). And the remarkably healthy babies of Mexican immigrants in the United States have led to interest in the social supports for childbearing and healthy behavioral practices in which these women are embedded (Williams and Collins 1995).

## Challenging the Cultural Consensus on Poverty

A fully developed social capital-building strategy requires challenging the nation's cultural consensus on poverty. Blaming the poor for their poverty has become the foundation for welfare retrenchment in the 1990s. Moreover, poor and marginalized people have been literally vilified by the media and public officials. For example, public housing tenants have been systematically represented in the media and in more scholarly publications as humanly as well as financially destitute, destined for lives of unemployment, dysfunction, and crime (Kotlowitz 1991; Rainwater 1970; Reingold 1997). People who have been arrested for committing crimes (including nonviolent "victimless" crimes) have been portrayed as morally and socially deficient and incapable of rehabilitation. In a number of states this moral censure has gone so far as to legitimize the permanent denial of the right to vote to convicted felons. Thirteen percent of all African American men are disenfranchised in this way; in Florida almost one-third of black men have permanently lost the right to vote (Sentencing Project 1998).

Many of the chapters in this volume show how social capital processes are infused with cultural meanings. Cultural understandings and biases affect social capital-building processes because they play such an important role in group identity. Lopez and Stack develop this theme perhaps to its fullest, but Noguera and Gittell and Thompson speak to the issue in a central way too. Lopez and Stack end their chapter with a call for transforming our notions of cultural citizenship to make them more inclusive of the poor and marginalized.

Such a transformation is important because civil society, far from exemplifying the communitarian ideal of harmony, is often the site where social groups vie for hegemony culturally as well as politically. A social capital–building strategy involves developing the capacity of poor people to engage in public discourse and contest popular cultural stereotypes. For example, if women of color are to emerge as leaders not just of poor communities but of the broader society, mainstream representations of them as dysfunctional (Kelley 1997) must be challenged. The terms of participation in civil society must be altered to better address informal inequality, and that requires contesting popular attitudes toward the poor and people of color.

In the short run, as this volume shows, social capital–based strategies can offer immediate improvements to the quality of lives of people living in some of our poorest communities. In the long run, however, for social capital to be sustained and enhanced in poor communities it needs to become “hardened” into explicit sets of policy mechanisms and legal codes whose value can be measured, evaluated, contested, and thereby justified to a skeptical public. Herein lies a great challenge to research, policy, and practice. Social transformation capable of addressing the root causes of poverty requires a paradigm shift in public policy discourse from a view of poor people as the passive object of social policy to a view of them as equal participants and leaders in policy-making and implementation. A social capital building strategy therefore requires that public discourse about poverty be infused with new mechanisms that enable poor people to participate more fully in shaping their own destinies and the future of American society.

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## NOTES

1. According to James Coleman (1990, 302), “unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons. It is neither lodged in individuals nor in physical implements of production.” Robert Putnam (1995, 67) defines social capital as “the features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”
2. In one of the earliest studies to use the concept of social capital, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) argued that Catholic schools do a better job than public schools of educating inner-city children because of the tight connections and shared norms that exist among and between parents, teachers, and students in the Catholic school community. Any child in such a school-community benefits from the collective’s social capital, even if his or her own parent is not particularly involved. Moreover, a child who leaves that school cannot take the school’s social capital to a new one. Ties back to the old school may continue to play some role in the child’s life. But, fundamentally, the benefit of the original school’s social capital to the child comes from its nature as a public good in that school, not as an

individual asset of the child. Social capital is inherently the property of a group or a network, even in cases where it is measured at the individual level and used to predict individual-level outcomes (for example, Boisjoly, Duncan, and Hofferth 1995). The measurement of social capital at the individual level has led to some conceptual confusion. If an individual's perceptions of trust and cooperation, or expectations that the other will respond helpfully to a request for assistance, are not anchored in actual relationships, they do not constitute social capital. Decisions to measure social capital at the individual level usually result from the limitations of existing databases rather than from an alternative conception of social capital. Data are usually available about individuals and not about the relevant collectivities. The proper unit of measurement in studies of social capital should be the collective involved in bringing about the outcome. Multi-level statistical models can discriminate between the level of social capital within the group and the differences among individuals that derive from their different levels of involvement, power, and centrality. Indeed, what we need are multi-level studies that measure social capital at the level of the collective, while taking into account individual characteristics (Saegert and Winkel 1996; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).

3. For example, among similar neighborhoods, those with high levels of collective efficacy, that is, social cohesion among neighbors combined with a willingness to intervene for the common good, demonstrate lower homicide rates than ones with lower levels of such social capital (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). And as Robert Sampson has argued elsewhere (1999), crime can destabilize neighborhoods; the resulting turnover and fear of neighbors also inhibit the development of social capital. On the benefits of social capital for the revitalization of inner city housing, see Saegert and Winkel (1998).
4. The Committee for Economic Development (1995, 10), for example, argues that distressed inner-city communities suffer from a social capital deficit: "Inner-city distress is about more than poverty or individual problems; it is about the collapse of a community's ability to cope with problems." To be fair, however, the authors of this report argue that external causes have created that deficit and that social capital must work hand in hand with government and other financial institutions.
5. No systematic study of community revitalization efforts has been made. For a history of neighborhood-based initiatives to combat poverty, see Halpern (1995). For an overview of community development corporations, see Vidal (1992). Peter Dreier (1996) discusses community organizing and empowerment initiatives. Examples of the work of religious institutions in community-based development can be found in Scheie et al. (1991) and Thomas and Blake (1996). Lizbeth Schorr (1997) discusses a range of comprehensive neighborhood-based initiatives involving partnerships between government, service providers, foundations, and community institutions.
6. Some studies, such as Robert Putnam's (1993) examination of Italy, have treated social capital as a universal cultural resource that transcends the concrete social institutions and relationships in which it is embedded. Putnam's study broke new ground by demonstrating the role that social capital can play in economic and political development. But these kinds of macro-level studies of social capital as a general cultural resource lack the specificity of studies that show how social capital actually operates. Moreover, they may mask important differences in the roles of various forms of social organization (Foley and Edwards 1999; on aggregate measures, see also Paxton 1999). Putnam's (2000) most comprehensive treatment of the decline of social capital in the United States does pay close attention to specific forms of social organization.



7. The terms “bonding” and “bridging” social capital have been used by Robert Putnam (2000) and others. See, for example, Gittel and Vidal (1998) and Warren (2001).
8. Briggs (1998a) distinguishes between “getting by” and “getting ahead” a little differently than we do here. He is referring to the kinds of personal connections an individual needs to survive versus those needed to improve his or her socioeconomic status.
9. Roger Waldinger (1997) discusses competition between African Americans and Latinos for jobs in Los Angeles. Barbara Ferman (1996) shows how the cooperation between African Americans and Latinos that proved crucial to the election of Harold Washington as mayor of Chicago in 1983 later collapsed when Latinos charged that they were not getting their fair share of municipal jobs.
10. By contrast, public institutions in the United States are more likely to be embedded in affluent communities. Teachers and police officers, for example, live in the more affluent areas they serve. Or even if they do not, they are more likely to be part of similar communities that share the commonalities of race, education, and class. These shared identities, interests, and perspectives allow public officials and community residents to work in tandem with each other. Public institutions do not simply deliver efficient public services according to professional standards. In fact, if we look below the surface, we can see the myriad ways in which effective public institutions are embedded in the communities they serve.
11. The dangers of embeddedness are not limited to housing. Public schools, for example, can hire less qualified but well connected teachers, give out contracts for building work to the members of the ethnic civic association that helped elect fellow ethnics as school board members, and direct public funds disproportionately to the schools in the neighborhoods where administrators have close ties. See, for example, Jean Anyon’s (1997) discussion of the corruption of the Newark school system.
12. The role of women’s leadership in helping groups move from informal social support to organizational development, and to political and economic legitimation of claims on public resources, has also been documented by Leavitt and Saegert (1990) in their description of how poor African American and Latino households in Harlem organized to save their housing during the crises of landlord abandonment.

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