

## Introduction

### *Managed Violence*

At lunchtime, two male youths, one African American and the other Latino, each around 17 years old, swung at one another in a fist fight. Someone had thrown a milk carton, which had hit a Latino boy in the head. Like the other boys, he wore Dockers khaki pants and a white polo shirt, which was the dress code at the charter school. The Latino boy confronted the African American boy and asked why he had hit him. The confrontation escalated into an angry verbal exchange. In a flash, they circled around one another, swinging at each other, as a mob of mostly Latino and African American youths cheered them on. The eating area was outdoors in the back of the school. It consisted of a set of benches placed next to each other, set on black asphalt and covered with a light aluminum roof for shade. A chain-link fence surrounded the back of the school and lunch area, and it was common here for youths from rival gangs to hang out, blaring music and staring at other students to intimidate them.

The heat from the day heightened the smell of the asphalt outdoors. The crowd got louder and louder, and one could hear yells from the mob of students, such as “fuck him up,” “kick that punk’s ass,” “get that fucking puto.” The fight was eventually broken up, but had nearly escalated into an all-group conflict as Latino and African American youths began to divide along racial lines in the lunch area. They yelled back and forth, and it seemed like the situation might turn into a riot, not uncommon since there had been numerous school riots in South Los Angeles (South LA) between Latinos and African Americans in 2003, the year I conducted my fieldwork.

It was my first day on the job as a teaching assistant, and I had been in the middle of the fight, trying to separate the two boys. I kept trying to grab them but they kept moving into the crowd, and the other students got in my way. Finally, a female schoolteacher on yard duty

dove in and caught one of the boys by the leg. I was then able to hold off the other boy.

Once the boys were separated, they were whisked away to the principal's office. The racial division, however, continued in the classrooms after the fight. In my classroom, it was noticeable that black and Latino students avoided one another—they did not sit near each other, nor did they speak; occasionally, they looked at one another with blank stares. Then, during class, two boys, one African American and the other Latino, each considered leaders by many, sat together in the corner and began talking as if they were having a business meeting. There was little emotion and very little superfluous conversation. I learned later that the Latino youth, named Skeloe, was considered a leader of one of the Latino gangs on campus. The African American youth was considered the leader of a black gang. Their meeting in the classroom seemed to be a form of negotiation. Later, one of the Latino youths, Damosque, considered to be second in charge of the gang and who later became a close friend of mine, told me what had happened. “They worked it out, Cid. The school couldn't do shit. We just told them what they wanted to hear, but we were going to handle it ourselves.” “Is that what Skeloe was doing?” I asked. “Yeah, he handled it with the black dude.”

Although the school had tried to mediate the conflict by bringing in counselors to talk with the students, nobody would say anything. As one of the teachers asked the class that I was in, “What is wrong with you guys? We are trying to help you guys, but nobody says anything.” Both black and Latino youths understood that there were informal rules for handling disputes that operated outside the control of the school administration and kept violence from escalating.

Just as the youths described in this vignette must cope with violence, other residents find a variety of ways for responding to violence in South LA. An examination of the other common institutional settings reveals a more holistic picture of the dangers and violence that residents face on a daily basis.

One institution at the heart of the South LA area is the Catholic Church. Located in the center of South Los Angeles for nearly 100 years, St. Joseph Parish<sup>1</sup> (known as “St. Joseph's”) plays an important role in helping residents cope with violence. Many residents who attend the church live within blocks of the parish, which is located in the poorest

part of Los Angeles. To the south of the church is a shopping center that was built to replace an area burned down during the Watts Riots of 1965. To the west are a library and a closed fire station, and caddy-corner is a small public housing project. The church grounds take up more physical space than any surrounding commercial or residential areas, and include the sanctuary for worship and an adjacent residential facility where the priests reside. Behind the grounds are a church-run elementary school and a large open space of black asphalt, nearly a quarter of an acre in size. Finally, the church grounds are enclosed by large, black iron gates that remain open during the day and are closed during the evening. The grounds resemble a self-contained world, nestled within a poor urban landscape. According to some, the intersection in front of the church is the largest marijuana bazaar in South LA, and drug deals occur there on and off throughout the day.

Comments by Father John, the church's lead priest, illustrate the relationship between the parish and the surrounding community:

Beyond this world [the church], there is no other. The kids don't go to the beach, or travel anywhere. Their world is here. I talked to a woman, a parishioner, who works in a factory; she makes \$200, or sometimes, \$120 a week. She does piecework and is undocumented. She has no defense. The undocumented don't complain. A lot of people here don't eat meat, food that we take for granted. There is a lot of poverty here. I don't notice depression, though. There is the poverty. But I think they are strong in faith. There are gangs and killings. Recently, a woman of the church lost her son [who was shot to death]. She came to the mass the day her son died because maybe it's their only refuge.

The priest's comments highlight the way parishioners view the church as a refuge from potentially threatening forces immediately outside its walls, such as neighborhood violence and exploitation in the workplace. This social space also acts as a form of refuge from other potentially threatening forces, such as the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Being deported by the INS is a constant fear for many members of the church. In several interviews and interactions, this fear was emphasized, and many parishioners had been told that the INS would not be allowed into the church to detain individuals. Thus, the church takes on

the role of an informal institution that provides Latino residents with a safe environment.

The area that I focused on for this book not only has the largest concentration of poor people in Los Angeles, it also has the largest number of public housing facilities in the city. The South LA area has a total of four separate housing projects, two of which are among the largest in Los Angeles, less than one mile from each other. Each public housing unit is a world within a world. I spent many months getting to know people in public housing, initially through my involvement in the City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils. I learned from talking to residents in public housing how neighborhood life is shaped by informal rules that run counter to those of mainstream society, as in the following comments by an African American male in his early 20s from the Downing Housing Project:

CID: It seems like there is street justice and legal justice. One is the law and one is unstated, and one just knows. Are there two types of law that operate here?

LBM: Yeah, there are definitely two types of laws. The street law: more of a “just us,” it’s street just us in comparison to the judicial system.

Such comments illustrate the existence of an alternative form of justice that operates outside the scope of formal law, real and widely understood by residents of public housing and the wider community of South LA. How is it that both formal and informal laws emerge in modern urban America? How do the informal rules shape daily life for both African Americans and Latinos?

The anecdotes included here sketch out a social structure in which Latinos and African Americans increasingly go underground to alternative worlds where religious institutions and street life provide competing forms of social order. Understanding these alternative worlds is key for answering the central question addressed in this book: how do poor, urban institutions respond to violence?

## Doing Ethnography in South Los Angeles

To answer my question about the relationship between alternative worlds and violence, I moved to South Los Angeles in August 2003 to conduct an ethnography of the area. I felt that living in the community, and going beyond the shotgun interviews that are a common practice among sociologists, was critical for understanding residents and their experiences. In addition to becoming a resident of South LA, I volunteered and attended meetings of the Neighborhood Councils, worked as a teaching assistant at a local charter school for youths kicked out of school for gang-related behavior, and volunteered and taught religious classes at a Catholic church.

Gaining entry into the church and gang settings started with my affiliation with the Neighborhood Councils. After conducting preliminary fieldwork in the area, I decided that the Neighborhood Councils would be a good place to get connected with the community. More importantly, the Neighborhood Councils would allow me to see how residents used formal political institutions to address local issues, such as violence and crime. I was quickly accepted by many members of the South LA community; while some viewed me with deep suspicion, most were welcoming. The suspicion was understandable. Dating back before the 1965 Watts Riots, residents felt betrayed by the police, city officials, and journalists. Although most people embraced me, the distrust I encountered made me realize I needed to blend in more. I became good friends with a Neighborhood Council managing coordinator, a Latino male in his mid-30s, who was responsible for overseeing most of the Neighborhood Councils in South Los Angeles. He was surprised to find me attending meeting after meeting in some of the roughest parts of South LA. Most people from outside the area would not dare to traverse some of the rough neighborhoods where the meetings were held. This man's friendship was invaluable. He helped me get connected to key local community members. Shortly thereafter, I became a volunteer with the City of Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE). I became well acquainted with others from the staff at this department, and I visited the office as if I worked there. I started to attend meetings now as a DONE volunteer. My role as a volunteer was important be-

cause it gave me an identity. It provided me with a legitimate reason for attending meetings and being involved in the community.

After attending the meetings regularly, I became more familiar with key institutions and organizations in the community. One day while working in a DONE satellite office, located in one of the roughest and poorest parts of South LA, I decided to pay a visit to the Catholic church conveniently located right across the street. I met with the priest of this church and explained my research to him, which at the time was about black and Latino relations. He looked at me and said, “That sounds fantastic! This is the kind of thing that, as a pastor, I am trying to figure out. The church used to be predominantly African American and now it’s mostly Latino. We have gone through many changes and your work sounds very useful for me. I will help however I can.”

Later, he would use me to help with the church in various ways. I was surprised when one day he said, “Oh Cid, I forgot to tell you, you are going to teach confirmation class for the youth, the teacher is pregnant and now she is ill. So you will have to take over. You start next week.” At this parish, I sometimes attended church three to four times on weekends.

Eventually, I realized I needed to get closer to the residents to see what life was like for parishioners outside of the church in their own neighborhoods. I informed the priest that I needed a place to live. He told me that he would ask around for me. Later, I learned that I would be living with a parishioner who resided about four blocks from the parish. This setting allowed me to see what life was like for parishioners inside church and outside in their day-to-day lives. After this arrangement had continued for a few months, I was then assigned to live with another parishioner who also lived near the church.

I considered living with the parishioners in their residences as my third field site—as a resident, I gained firsthand insight into what neighborhood life was like. Furthermore, I got to see life on a daily basis during the week and on the weekends. Doing this informed me about neighborhood dynamics, such as violence, and about the roles that were played interracially between residents. More importantly, living in the neighborhood of South LA allowed me to see the interplay of street life, such as gang life, and its relationship with the church.

Finally, I was able to observe youths who were involved in gang activity by volunteering and eventually working at two charter high schools in South LA. The schools' student bodies consisted primarily of Latino and African American youths between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. These charter schools were founded by a Catholic-affiliated foundation for youths who had been kicked out of Los Angeles Unified School District for a variety of reasons, many for their gang affiliations. At the schools, kids were screened before admission to determine their gang affiliation so that conflict and violence could be minimized. Many of the youths had nowhere else to go; their behavioral history had put them in a position where they could not attend school anywhere else. For many of these youths, dropping out was their next option if they could not cut it at the charter school.

I started as a volunteer teaching assistant at a campus located in the heart of South LA. The campus was originally a Catholic school that had been purchased to now serve high-risk youths, who were evenly composed of Latinos and African Americans. I worked individually with students who needed one-on-one help, assisted teachers with various assignments, and ate lunch with the students.

As the staff began to trust me, I was considered for employment at another satellite campus that served the same at-risk population in the western part of South LA, an area more predominantly African American that had not undergone the same the demographic changes. I was finally hired as a teaching assistant and worked 30 to 40 hours a week at the school. My role as an official employee gave me access to more of an insider perspective than I had had as a volunteer. More importantly, I could better observe the violence the youths were at risk of experiencing before, after, and even during school.

## Recruitment and Method

These four field sites became the central lens through which I saw the community. Working and volunteering at the charter school, the church, and the Neighborhood Councils and residing in the neighborhood allowed me to connect with residents and view their daily routines and experiences as they related to issues of violence. Once I became familiar

with individuals connected with these institutions, I would follow them out to the broader community in South LA. Unlike most studies, the goal of this one was to view the interrelationships between these various institutional settings, rather than view them as separate, isolated social worlds. In this sense, this book follows in the footsteps of other traditional sociological community studies that attempt to view community in its totality. Each field site from this perspective reflects an important dimension of community life. While there are many aspects of the community I could have focused upon, the classic community studies all recognize that politics, religion, and street life are key elements of community life in general.

I therefore used these sites as the starting points of a snowball sample. The individuals I met would refer me to other individuals of interest. More importantly, as a volunteer and employee, I was viewed with less suspicion, and, over time, residents began to trust me. Most of the data collected were thus field observations based on my interactions with residents.

When the fieldwork was coming to its close in August 2004, however, there were many questions I still had about how residents manage violence. Most of the data collected for this study came from direct observation. During this time, I got to know many of the individuals who are in the study well, so that they were not just subjects, but people that I had established relationships with. While direct observation was my preferred method, there were questions that I felt needed direct answers. Therefore, I conducted exit interviews with the individuals examined in this study. I also felt it was important to gain the perspective of other individuals not directly involved in the institutions that I anchored my observations to. I conducted over 100 interviews with youths from the charter school and with residents who lived in public housing and other residential areas surrounding the institutions of my study.

## Violence, Informal Social Control, and Alternative Governance

In many urban poor areas of the United States, such as South LA, local government and formal channels to address crime lack legitimacy and are disconnected from the needs of residents. In their place, I argue that an alternative form of governance has arisen to fill the vacuum.

More importantly, there are multiple and competing types of *alternative* governance that regulate violence. The notion of multiple forms of competing alternative governance, however, has received little attention from scholars.

There are a variety of ways in which neighborhood residents respond to violence according to the sociological literature. The concept of informal social control or some variety of this is often used to explain the way in which neighborhoods respond to violent crime. Informal social control can be defined as the ability of residents to self-regulate activity that is viewed as inappropriate. Neighborhood-watch programs, in which residents organize to address problems such as graffiti and blighted property, are a good example of informal social control.

Conceptually, informal social control can be divided into two categories. The traditional notion of this concept can be traced back to Albert Hunter (1985). According to Hunter, there are three dimensions of social control—the public, the parochial, and the private. The public refers to local government and the community writ large, including law enforcement; the parochial domain consists of the local community, such as stores and churches; and the private domain consists of friendship and kin relations. For Hunter, disorder and crime increase when there is a lack of integration between these dimensions of social control. The clearest example of this would be poor relationships between the police and a given community. In Los Angeles, for example, poor relations between the police and community residents of South LA no doubt undermined the ability to reduce crime. Recent preliminary reports suggest that improved police relations with residents have helped to significantly reduce crime.

Recent work by Patrick Carr (2005), however, suggests that residents can effectively address crime and disorder by a strengthened relationship between the parochial and public orders, with minimal input from the private order. He argues that local government and law enforcement, via the public order, can embolden communities to become more effectively organized and provide badly needed resources to confront neighborhood crime. Thus, Carr emphasizes the importance of the state and local government partnering with communities to effectively solve crime.

While Carr's work advances the concept of informal social control, there are limitations to this approach whereby local government plays a

critical role in regulating disorder and crime. First, he assumes that local governments have the resources to aid communities in need to address crime. Local governments, however, struggle now, more than ever, to meet the basic needs of city residents. The anti-tax sentiment pervasive in the United States combined with a struggling national economy poses many obstacles to the generation of badly needed tax revenue. Second, Carr assumes that most communities have positive relations with city government. In many cities, however, poor neighborhoods have long histories of strained relations with local government; Los Angeles is certainly one of these cities. Indeed, two of the largest riots in the 20th-century United States took place in South Los Angeles, rooted in a long history of abuse and neglect by law enforcement and city government.

What emerges from a consideration of the limitations of Carr's analysis is a variable relationship between the state and urban poor communities. More importantly, relations in most US cities between the urban poor and city government have been strained, to say the least. For many urban poor blacks and Latinos, the face of government often becomes associated with the local police.

Recent work by Venkatesh (2006) advances Carr's work in two key ways. First, he demonstrates a type of informal social control that operates with minimal connections to the state. His work focuses on how urban poor Chicagoans attempt to maintain social order and regulate behavior outside the purview of the state, which is necessary due to the ubiquitous underground economic activity of residents who must hustle to make a living. In Venkatesh's model of social control, there is a heightened relationship between the parochial—including community institutions such as gangs—and the private sector, friendship and kin ties in neighborhood settings—concerning the self-regulation of behavior. For example, gangs and residents of Marquis Park hash out the rules about where, when, and how exchange takes place in daily neighborhood life. When rules are violated, violence is used to enforce conformity. In a major contrast with Carr's framework, Venkatesh demonstrates that informal social control in urban poor areas operates with minimal relations with the state and plays a significant role in shaping neighborhood life through the use of violence.

Second, his work demonstrates that there are multiple forms of informal social control that regulate violence, which are not exclusively

limited to the street or gangs. Instead, his work focuses on the role of multiple sources of informal social control, namely, gangs and the church.

Venkatesh's findings demonstrate how the church, gangs, and residents negotiate social order by the negotiation and renegotiation of rules in poor neighborhoods through the use of violence. More importantly, however, Venkatesh shows how the church plays the intermediary role of renegotiating the informal rules of the neighborhood when relations break down with a local gang. This work opens the door for further exploration regarding the relationship between competing forms of social order.

Building on this tradition, I introduce the signature concept of this book: alternative governance. This concept starts with the assumption, like Venkatesh's, that there are multiple dimensions of social order in urban poor areas. There are three differences that distinguish this from other works, however. First, this work focuses on the role of interracial relationships in shaping alternative governance. While Venkatesh's work accurately captures how social order is regulated via violence and gangs, he does not explore what this process looks like in more contemporary ghettos, such as South Los Angeles, where urban dwellers are both black and Latino. This is a significant point, since the Latinoization of America's urban areas has greatly accelerated (Small, 2007). As Small argues, we must view modern urban ghettos as heterogeneous rather than homogenous in their makeup.

Second, the institutions outlined in Venkatesh's work are able to structure the lives of urban poor residents via rules and their enforcement through gangs and the church. However, what is the basis of these institutions? Alternative governance answers this question by illustrating the importance of social ties, trust, and a form of reciprocity of giving and taking.

In Venkatesh's observation, church pastors are revered, respected, and provide leadership to urban poor residents. However, why should residents defer to and turn to them for guidance in the first place? Research by Winship and Berrien (1999) provides a clue into the process by which legitimacy operates. They refer to an "umbrella of legitimacy" that pastors acquire through their relationship with residents. In the course of building relationships with residents, pastors develop credibility and legitimacy that can be passed on to local police to address crime. For

example, pastors can vouch for police officers as being honest and effective, thereby enhancing their reputation and legitimacy. Building on the concept of an umbrella of legitimacy, I show how legitimacy is acquired. In essence, alternative governance must be established before pastors and churches can wield the role of informal social control agent.

Finally, this work illustrates a dimension not explored by others, namely, how immigrants who reside in urban poor, multiracial communities respond to violence. The concept of alternative governance provides a key insight into this process. Many scholars, such as Robert Sampson (2008) have noted the link between falling crime rates and the increasing presence of Latinos, especially recent immigrants, in inner-city spaces. Yet no work has laid out the processes by which such peace unfolds. Indeed, what has been referred to as the “Latino Paradox,” the “protective effect,” or “immigrant revitalization” is largely a black box, consisting of many indicators of positive change (Martinez and Valenzuela, 2006) without providing insight into the lived processes by which such protection and revitalization are forged. The concept of “managed violence” compellingly provides insight into such processes, filling a gap in our understanding of urban space, poverty, and violence, and providing the groundwork for a new generation of studies. I suggest that understanding the concept of alternative governance is central to understanding the concept of the protective effect.

To be clear, this book is about the way in which core institutions respond to violence. This work makes a distinct conceptual move by highlighting the processes and strategies used by institutions to respond to violence. Although the institutions examined in this study may not deliberately regulate violence, they nevertheless cope and manage violence. This is a subtle but important difference from the conceptual approach of informal social control, which is too rigid to capture the nuanced response of urban residents to violence, and, instead, focuses on deliberate attempts to regulate human behavior. Thus, alternative governance captures a wider set of practices that includes informal social control types of operation, which regulates behavior, and also daily institutional strategies utilized by residents. Following in the footsteps of Elias (1978) I argue that social organization of violence is at the core of society. In urban poor areas, the varieties of social order are rooted in the notion of alternative governance.

## The Book in Context

Two dominant paradigms have shaped the way in which sociologists have examined the causes of violence and disorder in urban poor areas. I refer to these frameworks as the social disorganization and social organization perspectives. The social disorganization perspective assumes that there is a *decline in community* as a result of ecological changes, such as population change, heterogeneity, etc. In contrast, the social organization perspective focuses on the persistence of communities despite ecological changes. The findings from this work make an important contribution to these debates and provide insight into the implications for understanding how residents respond to violence.

Classical social disorganization theorists argue that external factors, such as poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and population mobility undermine community life, causing neighborhood institutions, such as the family, to break down, leading to disorder, crime, and violence. More contemporary disorganization theorists have argued that deindustrialization, segregation, and the outmigration of the black middle class has led to the further impoverishment of urban blacks, leading to the emergence of the underclass (Wilson, 1987). Thus, the rule of law is undermined in communities that suffer from social disorganization.

One major shortcoming of this perspective is that it assumes that urban poor communities suffer from social pathologies such as high crime, poor health, and low educational attainments. Furthermore, social disorganization is believed to be the root cause of the social pathologies. Wacquant (1997) compellingly notes that the assumption that the urban poor are socially disorganized truncates and distorts our understanding of the urban metropolis. Analyzing the urban poor in terms of deficiencies obscures and overlooks what is central: identifying the principles that underlie its internal order.

In contrast, social organization scholars focus on the institutional form of the ghetto, rather than viewing it as an accumulation of social pathology. There is a long tradition of this perspective dating back to the pioneering work of William Foote Whyte (1943). The perspective was reinvigorated with the work of many scholars (Suttles, 1968) who celebrated the social order and organization of urban poor communities in the 1960s.

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists embarked on several studies that demonstrated the ways in which urban settings are socially organized. Social organization theorists have pursued research in a variety of areas, most prominently focusing on street and religious life.

Continuing in this tradition, Anderson (1999) argues that in economically depressed and high-drug-crime areas of the city, the rules of civil law have been severely weakened and in their place a “code of the street has taken sway.” The code consists of a set of prescriptions or informal rules of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect, which governs public social relations, especially violence. These regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those who are too aggressive to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way. The rules have been established and are enforced by the street oriented. Knowledge of the code is largely defensive and it is necessary for operating in the public sphere. The terms “decent” and “street” are used to define the status of individuals who live in the ghetto (Anderson, 1999). Street-oriented individuals are those who make up the criminal element and pride themselves on defying the law. In contrast, decent families tend to encourage and respect authority and walk a straight moral line. This strain of thought within the social organization literature focuses on the role of social organization and street life.

While these studies are useful, they offer only a limited perspective by focusing on how social organization shapes the relationship between street life and urban areas. Recent work by Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) has compellingly illustrated how social order is not strictly shaped by the street, but rather by a larger set of community institutions. Sanchez-Jankowski found that barbershops, stores, gangs, and schools create stability and social order. His work is one of the few contemporary studies that examines the role of multiple institutions in creating social order.

Sanchez-Jankowski’s work makes an important contribution to the field, but he did not look specifically at the relationship between the church and the street as competing forms of social order; nor did he examine their roles in the regulation of violence. To my knowledge, Venkatesh’s *Off the Books* (2006) is the only contemporary ethnography that sheds light on the relationship between the church, the street, and the state. Many urban scholars argue that the church and the street are two of the most important institutions in urban poor areas, yet few stud-

ies have examined the relationship between the two. Venkatesh's work documents the role of the street and religion in shaping economic and social relationships in urban poor areas, largely outside the web of economic, political, legal, and law-enforcement structures that dominate mainstream American life. These informal economic relationships encourage extra-legal mechanisms to mediate disputes, thus minimizing the role of the state in effectively controlling the streets.

My study, which revisits the relationship between the church and the street, uses South Los Angeles, rather than Chicago, as the social laboratory for several key reasons. First, South Los Angeles is arguably the largest ghetto west of the Mississippi. Previous studies of the ghetto have focused mostly on Chicago (Venkatesh, 2009). However, sociologists, as noted by Mario Small (2007), should exercise caution in generalizing from the Chicago case to other large urban poor areas.

Following Small's line of thinking, I believe it is important to examine cases that work against this reductive and generalizing tendency. Through the examination of different types of cases, social scientists are able to create new ways of thinking. As Claire Colebrook (2002) notes, concepts should not be amenable to dictionary-style definitions, rather they should be expansive to illuminate the connections that scholars use them to make.

In many ways, South Los Angeles reflects the modern, emerging American urban ghetto, where the increasing presence of the Latino population can no longer be ignored. Thus, this study focuses on a dimension of community life not addressed by the classic and contemporary urban social-organization scholars: how African American and Latino residents respond to precarious situations where both are at constant risk of violence.

This study builds on the work of Venkatesh by outlining the competing, alternative social worlds in which extra-legal mechanisms are embedded. Extra-legal mechanisms are often culturally bound. How do these mechanisms operate in diverse settings? While Venkatesh outlines the process by which the mechanisms operate, he does not provide a framework for examining how extra-legal mechanisms are shaped by interracial relations.

Critics may respond that the issue of interracial relations in urban poor areas has already adequately been addressed. For example, Sally

Engle Merry (1981) has focused on how conceptions of dangerousness are functions of cultural group membership. Merry argues that the lack of social ties between cultural groups enhances crime, as the residents of a community where such ties are absent are less likely to identify criminals and work together to solve crime.

An analytical approach based on the managed violence paradigm goes deeper into the social mechanisms that mediate relations of urban poor residents by sketching a portrait of the alternative social worlds that are utilized as a response to danger and violence. While residents of South LA may be distrustful and suspicious of one another, they do not simply remain anonymous, as Merry points out, but rather they carve out distinct social spaces where they are free to interact without the fear of violence, spaces where they can form intimate social ties with one another. These spaces also contain the potential for the formation of cross-cultural social ties, which are central for managing crime, a theme not thoroughly developed by Merry.

While Merry's work is important, it was conducted in the 1980s, and, therefore, does not reflect the urban changes that have occurred as Latino immigration accelerated in the 1990s. What is needed is a more recent empirical ethnography that informs scholars about the changes in one of America's largest ghettos.

To date, this book is the only intensive, participant-observation study of South LA. Given that it is the first such study of the community, it provides an important understanding of how crime is managed among the urban poor in Los Angeles, and in other cities that are also undergoing an African American to Latino demographic transformation, such as New York and Chicago.

## Book Overview

What follows is a portrait of the different dimensions of community in South LA, a portrait that explains how some of the community's key institutions structure how residents respond to violence. I argue that alternative governance has emerged to fill a vacuum, as the state lacks legitimacy and is disconnected from the daily needs of poor black and Latino residents. The key to understanding how residents respond to violence is grounded in the concept of alternative governance.

Governance can be defined as the process by which decisions are made by the authority that underlies it. Implicitly, relationships between groups play an important role in the governing process. Therefore, this book focuses on the role of interracial relationships, relationships that shape the process of alternative governance. Second, I show that alternative governance builds on the concept of patrimonial rule by demonstrating that multiple forms of alternative governance operate simultaneously, and, at times, are in competition to establish order as a response to violence.

In chapter 2, I demonstrate the limited ability of formal legal community institutions in managing violence. I collected data for one year by volunteering and attending City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Council meetings in South LA. In order to gauge the efficacy of formal legal community institutions in combating violence and conflict, the City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils were selected as a field site. The second chapter first highlights the institutional strategies used by the Neighborhood Councils. Next, it demonstrates the factors identified for the Councils' inability to manage violence and conflict. These include: (1) low levels of participation, (2) poor outreach, (3) the inability of the City of Los Angeles to mitigate interracial differences, (4) a lack of legitimacy among residents, and (5) the inability of formal legal systems to incorporate noncitizens. Due to these factors, residents did not approach formal political institutions to address community problems, and, instead, resorted to other options.

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the alternative social spaces that have taken on a new centrality in urban poor areas such as South LA, given the limitations of the state. Furthermore, the church's role as an informal source of social control has become more salient with the influx of Catholic Latino immigrants, many of whom are noncitizens. They, therefore, resort to nongovernmental institutions for refuge and protection—primarily as a result of fear of the state. The findings for this chapter are situated in a well-established body of literature, which establishes that members of religious groups, Catholics, in particular, generate a parallel set of institutions to protect immigrants from hostile forces.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 3 suggests that the Catholic Church continues to maintain this long-standing tradition of protecting immigrants from hostile forces in the United States.

I argue that, instead of protecting immigrants from hostile Protestants as it did in the mid-19th century, the Catholic Church now protects immigrants from the ever-present state and the street gangs. Its social role has been transformed and expanded so that it now acts as a neutral safety zone for both African Americans and Latinos. Furthermore, the Church has been transformed so that it is able to reduce conflict along interracial lines. By managing these risks and conflicts, the Catholic Church shapes the social organization of poor modern urban neighborhoods.

In chapter 4, I demonstrate how the Church acts as an informal social control that manages violence in two key ways. The chapter fleshes out the various strategies used to manage violence. First, the Church proffers its own version of street wisdom that challenges the code of the street. Second, its institutional strategies help parishioners and community members at large deal with violence so that it is manageable for residents. One of the Church's key contributions is in showing how street wisdom is anchored in institutions. The second half of the chapter highlights the ways in which interracial conflict is minimized through deliberate strategies rooted in a narrative of Catholicism.

In chapter 5, I discuss interracial relations between Latino and African American street gangs in South LA. To understand these relations, I conducted the following fieldwork. First, I volunteered and worked in two separate charter schools for high-risk youths who had strong gang ties and histories. Second, I interviewed youths from two of the largest housing projects in South LA. I examined the factors that lead to conflict, cooperation, and avoidance. I argue that informal street norms play a central role in mitigating violence between both groups. Interracial relations are predicated on four key factors: (1) territorial affiliation, (2) control of the illicit underground economy and the neighborhood, (3) gang affiliation, and (4) race. Often it is the presence of a combination of these factors that leads to interracial cooperation, avoidance, or conflict. The dominant outcome, however, is avoidance—the primary way in which interracial conflict is minimized.

In chapter 6, I suggest that a set of informal public norms, rooted in the illicit economy, act as a shared framework for mediating conflict and violence for both gang and non-gang residents in South LA. I term this informal set of public norms “street justice.” The negotiation

process in the illicit economy between gang and non-gang members is what unites the community under the shared informal public norms—namely, street justice.

The book concludes with a consideration of violence and interracial conflict in multiracial urban poor areas. Researchers who do not consider the new multiracial makeup of urban poor areas and the contemporary forms of informal social control that have arisen with these changes run the risk of advocating inadequate policies. Framing urban violence within a black-and-white paradigm is no longer adequate for understanding how to address urban violence in diverse settings where Latinos and African Americans now share the same neighborhoods.