

CHAPTER SIX

The Unbearable Lightness of Community

It is understandable that two leading police scholars would argue that community policing "is the most important development in policing in the past quarter century."¹ No self-respecting police department in the United States—and now much of the world—does *not* have a program that can plausibly be placed under the community policing umbrella. Today, there is little talk of the professional model, little talk of competing models for organizing police departments. Community policing is the preferred ideal.

And why not? Given the desired ends of community policing—more cohesive and politically competent urban neighborhoods, closer ties between residents and officers, more creative police problem-solving—how could one object to its hegemony as a model for police organizations? Why not a more capable and engaged citizenry, why not a more responsive and effective police force?

In preceding chapters, I have addressed these and related questions. I pursued two broad goals. One was to disinter the normative assumptions about community, and about the community-police relation, that underlie legitimations of community policing. I sought to expose and contrast the architecture of differing normative visions of community and of the state-society relation. I both stressed the force of such visions and demonstrated that no single one of them commands absolute allegiance. Such normative competition is inescapable. Any broad evaluation of

community policing must acknowledge this competition and the unavoidable political tensions it generates.

But normative theorizing is insufficient to the task of evaluating community policing fully. My second goal was empirical assessment. I engaged two groups of actors, urban citizens and urban police officers, because they are the people meant to create community policing. One can isolate and counterpose normative visions, but such an abstract exercise fails to assess the tractability of any such vision in daily experience. To determine whether the ideals of community policing can be achieved involves collecting and analyzing the qualitative data I relied upon here.

My analysis teaches many lessons. In chapter 1, for instance, I showed that the dominant ideologies of community that captivate normative theorists do not, in fact, have much relevance for urban residents. Certainly, the "thick" visions of communal togetherness that community advocates—either through the recovery of shared values or through the discovery of political possibility—do not resonate deeply for citizens. Yet people want something more than a fleeting, thin connection. Instead, they want relations of basic familiarity upon which they can build a sense of security in place; they want to live in a neighborhood of known others whose actions they can predict and on whom they can rely. The hegemony of this vision of neighborhood connection has implications for our expectations of community political action. If theorists of community politics anchor their prescriptions on the necessity or desirability of close neighborhood connections, they will encounter only frustration. Community cannot bear the weight of such expectations.

But perhaps the establishment of relations that breed security is a sufficient basis for the communal political work that community policing envisions. In chapter 2, I explored that possibility. I showed that the residents were quite pessimistic that this could transpire. They consistently cited numerous obstacles that impede their neighborhood's ability to coalesce and to advocate. Activists especially, but others as well, noted several factors that prevented the realization of communal political agency. Importantly, the significance of these obstacles varies unevenly with geography, such that economically disadvantaged communities face larger hurdles to political efficacy than do advantaged ones. Taken together, the analyses of chapters 1 and 2 suggest a need to question endorsements of community policing that presume that neighborhoods can and will enact an efficacious and representative politics.

Further, even if communities could organize effectively, they would still need to encounter a state receptive to their suggestions. Any assessment of community policing thus must determine whether the police, as one symbolically significant arm of the state, demonstrate such receptivity. In chapter 3 I explained how the democratic aspiration for a state that is responsive to its citizenry is not the only legitimate standard for the state-society relation, not the only desirable articulation of the police-community connection. Instead, states might sometimes be best understood as importantly separate from the citizenry, through adherence to either an abstract legal code or a set of professional norms. Also, the state can accurately be described as generative of society, because of its policies, its bureaucratic routines, and its moralized discourses. I used the ethnographic data to demonstrate that all three modes of state-society relation inform the police's approach to the communities they serve; in both theory and practice, these modes are in tension. This reality complicates any blithe endorsement of community policing that presumes a police force that is largely responsive to communal politicking.

Although all three modes are significant to police practice, the narrative of separation has unusual power. In chapter 4, I explained how the police reinforce a self-construction as authoritative crime fighters whose autonomy and discretionary authority deserve respect. Powerful impulses in the culture create a wariness of citizen oversight and an endorsement of officer independence. These realities should also cause us to reconsider any high expectations we might have for community policing; officers continue to resist the suggestion that they make themselves especially subservient to community input.

This helps explain much resident frustration with the police—a phenomenon I explored in depth in chapter 5. I showed that the three modes of state-society relation all possess legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry. This suggests that possible tensions between these modes irrevocably complicate the politics of police-community relations. Yet residents do appear to recognize the comparative power of the narrative of separation, and they express dissatisfaction with it. They also sometimes chafe at the routines the police use for both apprehending their input and morally constructing their neighborhoods. The frequency of these complaints suggests that much work must be done before police-community relations can improve significantly.

In short, community is unbearably light: it cannot bear the political weight of projects like community policing; its voice is not loudly heard by state agencies like the police. In this chapter I explore the implications of this conclusion, by addressing four sets of questions. The first

concerns whether the hegemony of community policing deserves to persist. To conclude that community is unbearably light is to suggest that it is time to reassess our expectations of police-community relations, to reconsider the status of community policing as a model. The second focuses on the broader role of the state in community. As agents of coercive force, the police should not be a prominent player in building community. If the state wishes to help create effective communal organizations, then it must avoid over-reliance on the police to help accomplish this.

Of course, there is no simple pathway for more legitimate state-society relations. My third set of questions revolves around the tensions that ensue from the normative competition between subservience, separation, and generativity. The intractability of these tensions means that they deserve our continuing attention, not because any easy resolution is possible, but because normative choices simply must be made. They are best made consciously, and with full awareness of the consequences that inevitably attend any such choice.

My final set of questions concerns what role, if any, community should play in urban politics. Because community as an ideal will not disappear, it is senseless to discard it as a potential vehicle through which localized politics can emerge. Yet skepticism about its utility must be ever present; its political lightness must never escape our attention.

On the Status of Community Policing

Skogan and Roth accurately describe the rapture that surrounds community policing. Its popularity allowed it to overthrow the professional model as the organizational ideal, and it infected much popular and political discourse about the proper role of police departments. Yet mine is not the first analysis to suggest that the reality of community policing does not match its rhetoric. Police officers continue to resist it with appreciable tenacity.² Many departments appear to adopt community policing programs not because of a strong internally held belief in its utility, but primarily to maintain their legitimacy, particularly in the eyes of outside funding agencies like the federal government.³ Even where community policing does exist to a noticeable extent, it is typically confined to a single, often isolated unit within a department, rather than diffused throughout the organization as a culture-changing reform.⁴ In addition, the police's community engagement is often largely confined to working with advantaged neighborhoods whose

perspectives on crime and policing are congruent with those of the officers.⁵ More marginalized groups rarely get a word in edgewise.

Indeed, we do not possess much evidence that the police-community relation has changed much as a consequence of community policing. Take, for example, the case of Chicago, whose municipal government undertook what is arguably the most ambitious effort yet to implement community policing. Chicago's city government spearheaded an impressively concerted effort at a thoroughgoing reform. This included making numerous city government agencies responsive to community concerns about a range of issues connected to crime and disorder.⁶ It also included a robust effort to advertise and convene regular police-community forums. In their analysis of these forums, Wesley Skogan and his associates found that awareness of community policing in Chicago increased measurably, and that about 28 percent of Chicagoans who were aware of police-community forums had attended at least one. Yet the number of attendees did not increase much during the late 1990s, and it consisted mostly of people who showed up regularly. More importantly, observations of these meetings noted a continuing difficulty in establishing interactions in which both sides participated actively to create strategies to solve problems and to establish means to evaluate those strategies.⁷ Skogan et al. conclude that these forums have not "become a general vehicle for the kind of systematic problem solving that the department envisions."⁸ Similarly, Roth's extensive evaluation of community policing programs in the United States leads him to argue that "True community partnerships, involving sharing power and decision making, are rare at this time."⁹

But why should we expect anything different? Why did we ever believe that communities could be more capable of articulating a political voice? Why did we ever believe that the police would be especially responsive?¹⁰ In retrospect, these assumptions seem naive.¹¹ They may even be dangerous. To hold onto the hope that these dynamics will change is politically untenable.

Such hope, however well-intentioned, can lead us astray. For instance, its perpetuation may cause us to neglect the significant challenges that face neighborhoods of economic disadvantage. As Ralph Taylor persuasively argues, broader factors—the cost of housing, the availability of jobs, the state of various social services—all deeply impact the everyday reality of urban neighborhoods far more than factors of "disorder."¹² And none of these broader factors are in any way touchable by the police. Further, as Eric Klinenberg notes,¹³ efforts to foreground policing in urban politics necessarily means that fear of crime receives

significant attention. This can mean that discussions about how to improve broader measures of social welfare get sidetracked. It can also increase levels of distrust and suspicion within the urban citizenry, as the fearful seek protection from the fear-inducing. In Klinenberg's strong words, "As a program for civic renewal, [community] policing represents democracy in its most desperate and depraved form."¹⁴

Indeed, if community regeneration is a priority, why foreground the police in any such effort? As agents of coercive force, the police do not make especially good community builders. As I explained in chapter 4, this coercive capacity deeply shapes police culture in ways that reinforce officers' sense of separation from community: they are the authoritative crime fighters.¹⁵ Further, their dominant narrative for crime causation—as the result of ill-minded bad apples—means that officers rarely pay attention to wider community dynamics and may in fact exacerbate divisions within communities.¹⁶ Police officers may be able to make urban residents feel safer, as when they patrol more visibly on foot.¹⁷ But this hardly translates into any competence in restoring the deeper fabric of community life. Indeed, given the police's standoffishness toward community politics, it seems positively counterproductive to expect neighborhood political regeneration through community policing.¹⁸

This misplaced faith in community policing may help reduce police accountability. To presume that police-community forums will work to ensure citizen oversight of the police is a mistake; the evidence suggests otherwise. A more productive strategy would be to bolster formal mechanisms of civilian oversight, such as civilian review boards. These may be a more effective means to ensure that officers are held accountable to community expectations, as expressed through formal proscriptions on police behavior. The police successfully resist the idea that community forums are places where they can be called to task. Accountability must be pursued through alternate means.

In short, it is better to constrict, not expand, the role of the police in any project aimed at community regeneration. The police's coercive role means that they are not good community builders, and thus we fool ourselves—and harm communities—by holding onto the more elaborate rhetoric of community policing. As much as citizens themselves desire a friendly relation with the cop on the beat, this should not obscure the impressive array of coercive tools that officers carry, and that so fundamentally structure their culture and job orientation. These coercive mechanisms are deeply implicated in other developments that occurred concurrently with the ascent of community policing—including

ing, most notably, the growth of paramilitary policing and the rising popularity of broken windows policing, neither of which exemplifies a friendly police force.¹⁹ Indeed, the era of community policing has seen a robust reinforcement of the "get tough" rhetoric of crime control, and the concomitant policy changes that make the United States the world leader in incarceration.²⁰ Further, these punitive practices reinforce the discrepancies between urban neighborhoods, because they impact poor and minority-dominated neighborhoods most significantly. Residents of such neighborhoods are more likely to be incarcerated, and thereby to suffer the long-term consequences of the stigma of conviction: both steady employment and family stability become more elusive with a history of incarceration.²¹ This reality merely increases the level of distress facing urban neighborhoods of disadvantage.²²

This "get tough" orientation obviously has much resonance within the culture of the police, which helps explain officers' inability to work productively in creating equitable partnerships with community groups. The professional model lives on, quietly flourishing beneath the reform rhetoric of community policing.

As coercive agents, the police do have a role to play. They remain a vital means of resolving immediate crises, of promoting a sense of safety, of responding to specific instances of criminality. They can even competently work to prevent crime, though such efforts have historically been inconsistent.²³ But to entrust them with these responsibilities hardly means that we should expect anything more, that we should hope for them to be rendered easily subservient to community oversight. As Berkley long ago recognized, "The phrase 'democratic police force' is a contradiction in terms."²⁴

In short, perhaps it is time to abandon community policing, to give up the ghost of a chance of its ever representing a project for meaningful police reform. Its promise remains unrealized, largely because it was never realizable. This does not mean that police departments should discontinue efforts to forge productive working relations with community groups. What Loader and Mulcahy note for England holds true for the United States: that the large reservoir of public support for the police provides a solid basis upon which constructive police-community relations can be built.²⁵ But such constructive relations are frustrated when the police act as if isolated programs constitute reform or as if they presently engage in meaningful power sharing with community groups. Given the limits to what the police can accomplish, they should withdraw from a prominent place in efforts to revive urban neighborhoods, a role that more properly belongs to other agencies of the state.

The State and Community

The expected role of the police highlights a paradox. They are a state agency expected to reduce crime and to rebuild community, yet these goals are rendered well nigh unattainable by other components of the state. The police are not capable of altering the social dynamics that most affect urban neighborhoods. These dynamics, however, are implicated in policies enacted by the state. Indeed, Robert Sampson and Janet Lauritsen show that federal policies from urban renewal to public housing may have done more to cause inner-city violence than to prevent it.²⁶ At other levels of government as well, policies controlling zoning, housing, economic development strategies, and education strongly shape the realities that confront urban communities.²⁷ It is hardly the police's fault that they cannot do much to stem the ill effects of the concentrated disadvantage these policies enable. Even if greater competence in police problem-solving operations is possible, it would be but a puny bulwark against the overwhelming challenges generated by broader forces. The work of the police, in effect, represents an attempt by one component of the state apparatus to minimize the negative effects generated by other components.

This reality helps underwrite a necessary skepticism about the possibilities of community policing and mandates a shift of our attention toward those state activities that more directly bear on urban neighborhoods. It is unrealistic to expect the police to undo the catastrophic consequences of state policies that help generate urban landscapes of widely variant economic and political possibility. To create and reiterate such expectations for the police leads to an unjustifiable neglect of the role of other arms of the state in rendering those expectations impossible to meet. Recall the words of Marshall, the pastor in Centralia quoted in the last chapter:

I mean hey, [the police] keep me safe at night, I appreciate them for doing that. If they want to focus on that and cleaning up the streets, I say you concentrate on that and let us, and find other agencies or whatever, or have the police come alongside churches that can help change the community. But you put the police in charge of changing the community as well as policing the community, they are going to fail in both areas.²⁸

This is a point very well taken. The police *cannot* change the underlying conditions that shape urban neighborhoods in any substantive fashion. Whatever culpability the state possesses for the health of community

largely lies outside the police's rightful charge. Let us absolve the police of unjustified responsibilities, and hold the state accountable for those of its policies most directly connected to the realities that urban neighborhoods confront daily.²⁹

Let us also hold the state accountable for its responsibility in generating the means by which citizen agency can be expressed and reinforced. The insight that the state largely generates the community with which it interacts requires us to assess just how this transpires. The state and civil society, in other words, are not strictly separate and opposing entities, but importantly connected by the opportunities the state constructs for citizen activity and involvement.³⁰ Through various means—wars, schools, political parties—states have historically created the mechanisms for citizen participation in public life. Without such state-sponsored supports, citizen action is unlikely to build. As Ehrenberg summarizes it, "You cannot explain civil society apart from the influence of state-building."³¹ Sadly, as I have demonstrated, community policing does not represent an instance of the state's nurturing of civil society. Yet this failure should not spell the end of the search for alternate means by which this can transpire. Because the police are hobbled by their coercive power from being supports for a revived civic politics, the state must find other means to accomplish this.³²

On the State-Society Relation

I have been at pains to establish that there is no simple means by which the state-society relation should be pursued. That is because different modes of that relation possess legitimacy. These modes can coexist peacefully. Certainly the protection of individual and group liberties is essential for any modicum of democratic activity; subservience and separation are therefore necessarily twinned.³³ Yet conflict between these modes is unavoidable. In the case of the police, the drive to hold officers subservient to citizen input is frequently thwarted by the police's ability to remain separate and by their generative practices. Importantly, the police maintain their separation more through their adherence to internally defined norms of professional conduct than through their loyalty to the legal code. Whatever merit attends to professional authority, its assertion can reduce the extent of citizen oversight. Similarly, the frames the police use to structure citizen input often yield citizen frustration, a commonly held belief that residents cannot make themselves heard as they desire.

There is no magical resolution to the dilemma posed by conflicting paths to legitimate state-society relations. Yet this does not mean that this dilemma should escape our continued attention. In fact, it is precisely the lack of a resolution that mandates such attention. Certainly, no single path should capture our unalloyed allegiance, because each possesses shortcomings. The single-minded pursuit of subservience falls prey to the well-grounded liberal complaint about the potential excesses of majority rule. Similarly, a state agency that takes refuge behind separation may find its legitimacy challenged. Resolute adherence to the legal code may frustrate citizen groups that expect a more flexible response; the preservation of professional authority can unjustifiably stiff-arm citizen oversight. In addition, the ways in which the state generates community also deserve perpetual examination. State policies that deeply affect urban neighborhoods need to be measured against ideals of justice, fairness, and equity, especially if we expect localized groups to assume responsibility for asserting a political voice. The practices by which state agencies apprehend those citizen voices, while unavoidable, can be overly restrictive filters. And the moral discourse that state actors invoke, also unavoidable, can similarly mute citizen input.

At the same time, we cannot do without any of these articulations of the state-society relation. The norm of democracy is so well-established that some evidence of its perpetuation is necessary for state legitimacy; citizens rightly expect a responsive state. Similarly, they rightly expect the state to be checked in its exercise of power. State actors must be accountable to legal rules and to rights-bearing citizens. And state actors will continue to construct and defend professional norms for regulating their conduct. Because such norms can improve efficiency and performance, they are not necessarily problematic. Further, the state cannot help but generate community. It will continue to construct policies that deeply impact urban neighborhoods, to use bureaucratic routines to apprehend citizen input, and to develop moral justifications for its actions.

It is therefore unproductive to suggest that any of these three modes of state-society relation deserves absolute priority over another. Our political attention should focus instead on the particular expression of these modes and the balance between them. We can sensibly query whether state agencies like the police do or do not respond to citizen suggestions, whether they are or are not constrained by legal regulations. We can assess their professional practices, both to determine their effectiveness and to assess whether their expression illegitimately

constricts public oversight. We can ask whether an overly robust moralism allows state agencies to elevate their actions beyond the pale of assessment.³⁴ Further, we can wonder whether the state's moral desire to protect its citizenry should not extend beyond the crusade-like quest to apprehend and incarcerate criminal "predators." A moral case can be easily made to suggest that the state, as well, should ensure basic levels of economic security.

Indeed, such a commitment to the less advantaged is under sustained attack in these neo-liberal times. With the economic market the increasingly hegemonic metaphor for structuring social and political relations, citizens are seen primarily as free economic agents, expected to ensure their own survival with minimal support. If they do approach the state, they are more likely to be viewed as clients than as citizens; perhaps they will receive limited services, but their political agency will likely not be recognized. The pervasiveness of market-based individualism stands as an obvious contrast to nostalgic visions of communal togetherness and political capability, and it is a glaring contradiction of neo-liberal discourse that it often trumpets both simultaneously.³⁵ My larger point is that the state's moralism is an inescapable fact, regardless of the ideal of liberalism that the state remain as neutral as possible. Yet the form of the state's moral framework remains susceptible to change, even though it is often situated on a transcendental plane ostensibly beyond critique. The state's moral framework, and the power accorded it, deserve perpetual questioning.

It would be simpler, of course, to find some Archimedean point upon which one could situate the ideal state-society connection. Yet such a quest is fruitless. There will *always* be tension between these modes of relation, *always* be a charged politics about their content and their competition. Our obligation is less to locate an ideal end state than to monitor the balance continually and strive toward some basic degree of equilibrium.

In the case of the police, the politics of the state-society connection will be especially fervent, because of the coercive power officers possess. At present, the evidence suggests that the balance is not ideal, that the police lie rather too far beyond the reach of citizen oversight. Further, community policing is a poor vehicle through which a better balance can be struck. Because police so resist informal oversight, they need to be held accountable through more formal bodies. Citizens need sufficient means by which they can raise questions about police operations. Although the police should be granted some deference, they must also confront clear limits on their authority. These limits must be imposed by

legal regulations and enforced by independent bodies. And police morality must be checked to ensure that it does not legitimate questionable actions. Indeed, the police's capacity to construct crime in highly moralized language, and thereby to cast their own actions as unassailable, deserves ongoing suspicion. Otherwise, officers can arrogate to themselves a degree of power that is unacceptable in ostensibly democratic societies.

In this ongoing political struggle over the state-society connection, it is questionable whether "community" should play a central role, to which issue I now turn.

On the Political Status of Community

It is easy to understand the persistent longing for community. That is because community promises so much—togetherness, support, cooperation, care, compassion, friendship. No social institution can provide these in quite the same way. Certainly, the state cannot do it.³⁶ In an increasingly mobile and tenuous world, the allure of a secure anchor is irresistible. In her extensive interviews with volunteer activists, Nina Eliasoph witnessed this allure: "Almost everyone I met harbored intense nostalgia for the warm, totally enveloping community. They all ambivalently recognized that without anything thicker than moral minimalism holding anyone together, life could be lonely and dangerous."³⁷ The promise of localized democracy is similarly seductive; grass-roots empowerment is easy to desire and to support. It is thus not surprising that programs like community policing galvanize such strong enthusiasm from across the political spectrum.

These hopes for community are sometimes realized. Projects done in the name of community can work to improve the life circumstances of urbanites, even those in neighborhoods of disadvantage.³⁸ Yet assessments of community politics suggest that these successes are not typical, that urban neighborhoods only rarely approximate the social and political ideals many hold out for community.³⁹ Certainly, none of the neighborhoods I studied in West Seattle do, for the reasons I delineated. Because these realities exist across American cities, my cautionary tale about the unrealized hopes for community deserves consideration when approaching projects like community policing.

In fact, the seductiveness of localized democracy should not blind us to its very real downsides. The devolution of power toward smaller units can work to increase inequality, both within and across groups. Within

groups, there exists always the possibility that the more volatile and energetic members of a small faction can dominate the discussion and push an agenda that is not widely supported.⁴⁰ Across groups, certain community organizations typically possess greater political skills than others and can thereby prosper when there is competition between groups for government resources. Because neighborhoods of higher economic standing are more likely to harbor members with political acumen, devolution of political authority can thereby increase the social and economic gaps between rich areas and poor ones.⁴¹ It can also decrease the possibilities for political alliances across social groups. If groups are perpetually in competition with one another, they may well find it difficult to forge coalitions.⁴²

The devolution of authority can also frame problems as local when they are actually the result of dynamics generated at other scales.⁴³ Because urban neighborhoods are shaped by regional, national, and international forces, perhaps it is misguided to expect much from local political organizations, regardless of their representativeness or seeming capability.⁴⁴ If this is true, citizens might rightfully focus their political energies on national-level political groups, even if that means that they are increasingly "bowling alone."⁴⁵ Certainly, neighborhood political organizations that fail to connect their agendas to larger political dynamics stand little chance of seeing meaningful long-term change.⁴⁶ One can therefore call into question the presumption that localized groups should take such extensive responsibility for ensuring their own economic and social security. Even the best organized of such groups can do little to affect broader dynamics; communities of disadvantage face nearly impossible odds.⁴⁷

This concern about increasing the degree of disadvantage is particularly regnant in these post-welfare, neo-liberal times. The extent of concentrated disadvantage in American cities remains exceedingly high, the political will to create a sense of collective interest exceedingly weak. The ideology of devolved authority can certainly sound sweet; who, after all, wants to discourage local empowerment? But if localized politics obscure larger-scale dynamics, if they render more difficult the creation of a public interest, then they deserve questioning.⁴⁸

This is not to suggest that neighborhoods cannot and should not be the focus of political organizing. Because the problems that confront neighborhoods are immediate, they can often be a visible and direct reminder to citizens of the importance of political action.⁴⁹ In the case of crime, neighborhoods can work as a locus for the development of social capital and informal social control, both of which can help reduce

crime and collective fear.⁵⁰ But, as Clarence Stone and his associates note, social capital is different from civic capacity.⁵¹ In other words, the development of social connections to provide support and reciprocal assistance is not the same as the capacity to act effectively in the wider body politic.

In short, simply to devolve authority to "the community" without cognizance of the immense obstacles many urban neighborhoods face in gaining greater economic, social, and political equality confounds justice rather than promotes it.

The Unbearable Lightness of Community

Now here, I've known of three drive-by shootings and I know all the kids that have been shot. That creates an awareness. But what can community really do to fix that, I'm not sure.

MARSHALL, CENTRALIA RESIDENT

Little that I learned in West Seattle offers much reason for optimism about the political power of community. Neighborhood groups rarely organize effectively, focus broadly, or attract much state attention. Although the pursuit of communal connections will not abate, these connections cannot typically bear much political weight. Our hopes for community as a means for generating political energy must always remain modest.

As Marshall notes, community members possess minimal capacity to alter the dynamics of violent crime. This is especially the case if such violence can be traced ultimately to matters of economic and racial disadvantage. Community can, of course, exist as a central component of many people's lives; urban citizens continue to seek connections of meaning, value, and support, both within and outside their neighborhoods. In many cases, these neighborhoods can possess a skein of relations capable of exerting informal social control sufficient to help reduce rates of crime. Certainly, as a core sociological and political concept, community is unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

Yet we invest it with significant political hopes at great potential peril. It would certainly be nice if one could conclude otherwise, if more romanticized notions of community togetherness and empowerment actually had more resonance and possibility. A more clear-eyed assessment points us in the opposite direction, toward a necessary skepticism about the promise of community policing and other efforts to increase localized self-governance. Such an assessment makes clear that community cannot be expected to be a robust force for political action.

It also reveals that community, in whatever form, cannot relate in any simple fashion to the police or any other component of the state. If the goals are to increase the political capacity of urban neighborhoods and to improve citizen oversight of state agencies like the police, community is unlikely to be an effective vehicle. For now, and for the foreseeable future, it is best to recognize that, all too often, community is unbearably light.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 15. Robert Sampson makes much the same point: "Community seems to be the modern elixir for much of what ails American society." Sampson, "What 'Community' Supplies," in *Urban Problems and Community Development*, ed. Ronald Ferguson and William Dickens (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 241–92.
2. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 183.
3. Adam Crawford overstates the case when he says that, in daily use, community policing possesses "unfathomable plasticity." Crawford, *The Local Governance of Crime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 45. Yet this is a reminder that the term is broad. On the various ways community policing has been implemented in the United States, see Edward Maguire and Stephen Mastrofski, "Patterns of Community Policing in the United States," *Police Quarterly* 3 (2000): 4–45.
4. That Weed and Seed does not work to provide opportunities for extensive citizen oversight is documented well in Lisa Miller, *The Politics of Community Crime Prevention* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Miller's analysis focuses on two Weed and Seed operations in Seattle.
5. Stephen Holmes makes this point provocatively: "When we hear [community], all our critical faculties are meant to fall asleep." Holmes, "The Permanent Structure of Antiliberal Thought," in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 230.