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# The Dynamics of Urban Poverty and Social Mobility: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in 4 Hartford Neighborhoods

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**THE DYNAMICS OF URBAN POVERTY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY:  
LIFE HISTORIES AND COMMUNITY TRAJECTORIES IN 4  
HARTFORD NEIGHBORHOODS**

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December 2002

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*Andrew Cohen*: Interviews, Narrative Reports, Data Entry, Final PowerPoint Presentation—The North East

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PowerPoint Presentation –April 2002

End of Project

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## ***I. Background of the Study***

As part of an initiative to enhance Trinity's connections to its urban location as well as broaden its contribution to social science research in Hartford, Professor Janice Perlman and a group of Trinity graduate and undergraduate students embarked on a research project entitled ***The Dynamics of Urban Poverty and Social Mobility Hartford, Connecticut***. The project began in the Spring 2000 with funding from the Kellogg Innovative Grant and later continued with a grant from the Metro Hartford Social Science Research Fund.

Under Prof. Perlman's guidance the students engaged in the exploration of persistent poverty in the city of Hartford. Four of the city's poorest neighborhoods --Clay Arsenal, Frog Hollow, The North East and Upper Albany were the designated areas for our research. The 4 neighborhoods were chosen based on a preliminary report done by historians Beth Rose and Frank Mitchell, during summer 2000

Armed with a few names as potential resources for further enquiry, and cognizant of the "excessive" examination of Hartford neighborhoods, we set out cautiously to discover and possibly uncover insights into the persistence of poverty in the selected areas. First, we spoke to social change agents throughout the city in an effort to get an overview of the issues and problems that they dealt with on a regular basis. These agents were associated with organizations that have been functional in Hartford for many years, including: The Housing Education Resource Center (HERC), Hartford Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), South Arsenal Neighborhood Development (SAND), Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART), and several others.

The next step of the research took us to the neighborhood organization level. Students interviewed community leaders who were actively involved in neighborhood collaboratives, block clubs and other community organizing efforts. These interviews provided substantial contextual information on each of the neighborhoods. Accordingly, we were able to view the neighborhoods through the perspectives of the people who were trying to improve the quality of life in their communities.

The third tier of the project was the most significant and the most challenging aspect of the research. It involved interviewing and mapping the life histories of people who lived or had lived in the neighborhoods for at least 20 years. Generating the sample was itself a difficult task as there was no previous research in this field. We contacted several agencies, housing authorities and even churches. They all denied our requests for potential interviewees. One agency indicated that it was not at liberty to disclose names of past recipients on official welfare rolls for the purposes of the research. The transience of the neighborhoods was also another factor that further contributed to difficulties we encountered while building our sample. Through much persistence and with the help of Elly Jacobson, director of Trinity's Community Learning Initiative and Alta Lash, director of Trinity Center for Neighborhoods, we were able to develop a small snowball sample of 20 in depth interviewees for the research.

Challenges aside, we wanted to explore notions of both inter-generational and intra-generational poverty and mobility. What were the interviewees' perceptions of poverty and mobility; did they consider themselves poor, upwardly or downwardly mobile. How did the transformations of the their city over the past thirty years affect their lives? These are some of the issues addressed in this final report.

## ***II. Literature Review***

The city of Hartford is one the top ten poorest in the United States of America. What exactly has been the underlying reason for this trend of poverty in the capital city of one of the nation's richest states in America? In the first place, how do we define the condition that has plagued Connecticut's capital with its grip on this small city? It is clear that any study that addresses issues of poverty whether in Hartford or any other city, needs to define what is meant by poverty and devise measurable variables that may be used to evaluate it.

Measuring poverty is a challenge in itself because there is little agreement between scholars and policy makers on the best method to employ. Despite the many books and articles that have been published on the subject, the various schools of thought that exist are being constantly debated, which makes the process of embarking on such a study challenging yet exciting.

The differing viewpoints on the issue of poverty make the discourse multi-layered and rich with complexity. However, it is this lack of consensus on any comprehensive definition and measurement of poverty that makes for interesting and possibly innovative introduction to issues that may impact policy changes. Indeed, we are exploring what Henry George referred to in 1879 as "the great enigma of our time."<sup>1</sup> And, what Karl Polanyi views as "the most perplexing of all the recurrent phenomena in social life."<sup>2</sup>

### **Poverty: Conceptual and theoretical frameworks**

The historical framework of ideas that speaks to the nature and cause of poverty has been written about extensively by researchers. It is from this historical background that we formulate contemporary ideas on poverty. The debates abound, as theories are re-worked or simply tossed, due to new results yielding different insights and conclusions. Several concepts of poverty are to be derived from the various theoretical bodies of knowledge that exist on the issue.

There are those who view poverty as a behavioral problem. Among the concepts of poverty put forth by Goldsmith and Blakely, they conceptualize this body of thought as "poverty as pathology".<sup>3</sup> Despite the impact of globalization and other forces contributing to poverty, many politicians and even citizens subscribe to this view. Recent surveys suggest that Americans believe that lack of effort, ability and low levels of motivation are the primary reasons why poverty remains pervasive in the country.

Individualism and self-drive have become part of the norm in the society. A person who is poor is often stigmatized and considered a failure because of his or her lack of self-motivation. Thus, what William Ryan refers to as "blaming the victim" becomes the normal way of assessing a poor person. Significant arguments have refuted this

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in: James Jennings & Louis Kushnick *A New Introduction to Poverty* (New York University Press, 1999) 13.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformations: The Political and Economic Origin of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon press, 1944) 91

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in James Jennings & Louis Kushnick. *A new Introduction to Poverty* (New York University Press, 1999) 14

‘individual lacking’ theory. David Hamilton uses the great depression to illustrate the shortcomings of this theory, he notes:

Not until the 1930’s was there any seriousness about treating poverty through some substantial changes in the social order. With one-third of a nation “ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-clothed,” a contention that their plight was attributable to moral turpitude was rather unconvincing. How could anyone convincingly argue that between 1929-1933 some 11 million individuals, formerly employed, developed serious character flaws? The problem of poverty was never so clearly seen to be a social rather than an individual one.<sup>4</sup>

Despite such lucid refutation the ‘flawed character’ argument, remains common even today, not only among the general American public, but also among the politicians whose policy actions have far-reaching implications for all affected. Although this theory may be employed for Hartford’s urban poor, intrinsic references can be used to discount this position. After all, Hartford was once a boom industrial city and most of the people who came here either sought employment in the factories or on farms. The resulting condition of the city’s urban poor is therefore a consequence of the flight of jobs (industries from the city among other things), which resulted in drastic levels of unemployment.

Other perspectives suggest that elaborate theories on poverty can be broken down simplistically in two groups. Michael Sherraden notes that two distinct groupings can be derived, theories that focus on individual behavior and the other on social structures.<sup>5</sup>

The racialization and feminization of poverty are also common themes among contemporary discourse. Scholars such as Du Bois and Mandel sought to present their perspectives on black poverty through historical analysis of the legacy of slavery. Black poverty Mandel claims, is a continuation of the effects of the plantation society that formed the bedrock of the slave society of the South. He observes that as products of the plantation economy, blacks have not been able to develop the political and economic wherewithal to transform their political and economic situation.<sup>6</sup> These historical arguments cannot be discounted and many believe that current poverty assistance programs perpetuate discrimination against the poor, especially those in minority communities. Consequently, many scholars share the perspective that some public assistance programs create a dependency and perhaps contribute to the cycle of poverty.

Political scientist Anthony Downs gives several examples of how the system excludes the poor and some minorities. He argues that the poor and blacks pay higher prices for goods and services, are often excluded from social insurance schemes and are denied loans, mortgages and other credit services. Also to add to the list, minority students have little

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<sup>4</sup> David Hamilton. *Poverty is Still with us-and Worse* Chapt. 3. *Quiet Riots Race & Poverty in the United States* edited by Fred Harris and Roger Wilkins

<sup>5</sup> Michael Sherraden, *Assets and the Poor* Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1991. 35

<sup>6</sup> James Jennings & Louis Kushnick *A New Introduction to Poverty* (New York University Press, 1999) 15



choice but to attend poorly maintained low quality public schools.<sup>7</sup> Added to the lack of choice in education for poor and minority children is the deficiency of the tax base in several low income communities, a factor that has plagued the city of Hartford.

Racism, though not entirely the primary cause of poverty in minority communities clearly contribute to the concentration of this group of people in certain urban areas. Consequently, these low wage individuals lack the financial means to improve institutions such as schools that exist in their communities. Recent discourse on the racialization of poverty indicates that discrimination is a significant element that helps to propagate poverty. Sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton note, “racial residential segregation is the principal structural feature of American society responsible for the perpetuation of urban poverty and represents a primary cause of racial inequality in the United States.”<sup>8</sup> The Greater Hartford Process, a failed plan to move Hartford residents, mainly Puerto Ricans, to a new community in eastern Connecticut, is perhaps one of the most blatant examples of the kind programs that promote institutional racist policies.

The ‘feminization of poverty’ has progressively developed since the advent of the ‘single mother’ condition as a consequence of family transformations and what many claim to be dysfunctional family structures. There are extensive debates about this theory, however some scholars argue that single-family households headed by women are more often susceptible to poverty than those headed by men. This position may be extended due to the disproportionate amount of women who have dependent children, take welfare benefits and, in other cases those who work are only able to access low paying jobs.

A major component of the single mother’s predisposition to poverty is the lack of decent job opportunities. Rather than linking poverty directly to single-mother lead households another argument seem to take precedence, that of the jobs available to women of the lower class. In her discussion on women and exploitation in America, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that jobs do not necessarily prevent women from falling into poverty and in fact, maybe in part the cause of the problem. Another study conducted by Linda R. Martin and Demetrios Giannaros points to the relationship between poor women and low wages. They conclude, “minimum wage plays a major role in explaining the feminization of poverty.”<sup>9</sup>

If there were any conclusion to be reached from these arguments it is that poor job opportunities and low wages are the fundamental problems that affect women in poverty rather than the fact that these women are single head of their households. In any case single motherhood cannot be taken to be synonymous with poverty/dependency on the welfare state, for many single women adequately provide for their households. In fact, in similar studies in other countries such as Sweden, single motherhood and poverty have little if any correlation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Downs. *Who Are the Urban Poor* New York. Committee for Economic Development. 1970

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in James Jennings. *Persistent Poverty in the United States*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in James Jennings. *Persistent Poverty in the United States*

<sup>10</sup> James Jennings & Louis Kushnick. *A New Introduction to Poverty* (New York University Press, 1999) 28.

As is the case in any discussion on poverty there are many disagreement, and the feminization theory is no exception. There are no clear-cut correlation between single mother headed household and poverty. And, although there might be an indirect relationship, such evidence remains inconsistent.

### **Relative & Absolute Poverty**

Relative poverty is defined as the deprivation of economic resources necessary for adequate participation in the society.<sup>11</sup> You are poor if: your means is much smaller than those in your society, or your level of deprivation which prevents full participation in society, is determined in relation to the norms of that society. According to absolute terms, poverty is conceptualized as deprivation or the lack of adequate economic resources to buy the basic goods and services deemed essential/necessary for proper physical well being. Both approaches have fundamental flaws.

In the relative case of relative poverty, what is the marker for inadequate economic resources, and what portion of the society falls above and below the average level of income? For the absolute approach, how is the minimum income level for purchasing the essential needs calculated? In fact, what may constitute an essential good or service for the proper physical well being of an individual is relative and will vary based on the particular society. One consensus that can be arrived at however is that a satisfactory definition/conception of poverty can neither be relative or absolute. A workable definition of poverty must be; relevant at a particular period in time, and relative to a society's existing level of cultural, social and economic development.

Were we to take a relative approach in assessing the city of Hartford to its surrounding region, the results would be alarming. The poor tax base and the city's inability to expand its boundaries make it significantly poorer than its neighboring suburbs. David Rusk proposes perhaps the only way to fix this problem—incorporating the outer regions of the city so that a mutually beneficial relationship may be developed. Such a proposition can only be adapted, with consensual regional consideration.

Despite the many difficulties that are often associated with defining poverty, it is important to go beyond describing and explaining the condition. Seeking to understand poverty is one of the primary steps in trying to influence policy. It is imperative to recognize that poverty does not exist in and of itself, but are inter-linked to other issues such as inequality, poor housing, community and institutional facilities, racism and discrimination, lack of political empowerment and other requisite factors. These all contribute in helping to understand the dynamics that drives poverty. Thus, in order to deconstruct the problem of poverty, a comprehensive approach must be undertaken which must also include examination of the composite issues that are connected with poverty itself.

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<sup>11</sup> Deanna Williamson & Linda Ruetter Defining and Measuring Poverty

In spite of the obvious complexities associated with poverty we know that poverty exist because of a number of reasons. People are poor because there is insufficient income. They are poor because they lack access to or are denied: affordable housing, health and medical services, and reasonable education. They are poor when violence and crime is rampant in their communities which limits their freedom; they are poor when they are oppressed or exploited by public or private sector; they are poor because they are discriminated against: they are poor because of inadequate participation in the political process.

### **Urbanization and Poverty**

As we enter the next century 50% of the world's population will live in urban areas and by 2005 more people will live in and around the cities than in rural areas.<sup>12</sup> According to the World Bank it is estimated that over 300 million people in urban areas of the Third World live in absolute poverty. A UNICEF report claims that since 1975 the number of household in poverty have increased 200+ %. In Latin America alone approximately 90% of the population will live in urban areas, 40 % in Africa and 45 % in Asia.<sup>13</sup> This is but a fraction of the numbers on poverty, and varying though they might be, the statistical face of poverty is staggering. One of the most significant points to be extracted from the numbers is the urban factor. The pull factors associated with urban areas account for the drastic increases in the figures. In short the problem of poverty has become the problem of Urbania.

A natural by-product of the number of people that gravitate toward urban areas is the geographic concentration of these masses. Historical patterns of migration, whether intra-national or international, suggest that people tend to gravitate toward certain areas of the city. There are several factors that account for these tendencies: having relatives and friends in the area, affordability of housing, and proximity to work locations. The internal dynamics of the city is perhaps the catalyst that drives people to areas where there is affordable, though not necessarily adequate housing.

An element of the 'pull factor' that is so often referred to in the literature is the need for the new or prospective migrant to seek out better opportunities in the city, work being one of the primary factors. In consideration of the previously outlined factors, although one may take precedence over the other, the newcomers therefore often seek a place where they can have access to available jobs.

Of course, the characteristics of the migration patterns of people vary depending on the place and country, but few would disagree with these basic tenets of the new migrant to a city. The final factor previously outlined as one of the reasons people are concentrated in a certain area of the city, clearly dispels the myth and stereotype associated with the poor—that they choose to be so, or lack the motivation to work. The general migratory patterns gradually replicate, resulting in the high concentration of people in what is often

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<sup>12</sup> Ron Shiffman. *Urban Poverty -The Global Phenomenon of Poverty and Social Marginalization in our Cities: Facts and Strategies*. 1997

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

considered low income or poorer areas of the city. In *The Greatest of Evils* Joel A. Devine and James D. Wright write that most studies that dealt with the concentration of poverty show that between 1970 and 1980 “the poor was increasingly ‘ghettoized’ in urban poverty areas.”<sup>14</sup>

Many scholars argue that it is this isolation that is the primary feature of urban poverty. This may well be the case in Hartford, particularly in neighborhoods such as Clay Arsenal and the North East and where people seemed pigeonholed with little opportunity to improve their neighborhood or exercise the option to leave. Coupled with the social isolation argument, is the fact that the people in many poor urban areas belong to minority groups. What is most disturbing however is the seemingly desperate state of urban poverty and its apparent perpetuation.

What makes the problem of poverty in certain urban areas seem endlessly pervasive? Many social scientists argue that the lack of adequate wage is one of the major factors that contribute to poverty in these depressed urban areas. Income is most often used among many studies and policy implementation as the main marker of poverty, however it does not give the full picture of the condition nor does it explain the persistency problem. Other variables such as education shed much more light on the problem of persistency than does income. Researchers Sewall and Hauser note that there is a strong correlation between family poverty and education. As family poverty increases children have less opportunity for schooling and successful careers.<sup>15</sup>

### **Measuring Persistent Poverty**

Poverty is measured within the framework that is used to define it. Income is the most commonly used indicator for measuring poverty, the practical marker used by the government to determine the requirement for state or federal assistance. The United Nations and other similar agencies contend that poverty cannot be measured using one indicator and has taken other factors into consideration. We know that absolute measures for poverty seeks to determine whether a family is able to meet their basic needs. Relative measures are based on comparison within a particular society. These measures however, do not present an overall assessment of the issue of persistent poverty.

The literature presents a number of angles from which persistent poverty can be examined: concentrated, episodic and chronic poverty, the first of which was discussed previously. More recent studies that focus on the concentration of poverty however, have explored another component of this angle. More specifically, the discussion is generating another question- what are the factors that disproportionately perpetuate poverty among people who live in poor neighborhoods. And, is the problem compounded by their geographic location?

A number of studies have found episodic poverty to be common among those who experience poverty. These experiences reflect brief fluctuation in the income perhaps as a

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<sup>14</sup> Joel A. Devine and James D. Wright. *The Greatest of Evils Urban Poverty and the American Underclass*. pp95

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Quiet Riots. Adams, Duncan & Rodgers. *The Persistence of Urban Poverty*

result of internal or external circumstances. The literature refers to these as short spells that often end within three years. Devine and Wright note, “Chronic poverty is poverty that persist across time or over generations and is to be distinguished from episodic poverty.”<sup>16</sup> With this definition come the requisite ambiguities and questions about how to operationalize chronic poverty. How many years must a family be in poverty for the condition to be considered chronic? Several studies on chronic poverty have used the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to determine the scale and increase of chronic poverty. Conclusions from the examination of this data indicate that poverty persists and disproportionately affect female-headed households, and blacks. Adams, Duncan and Rodgers point out that “persistent poverty in urban areas is considerably more concentrated among blacks and among people living in households whose head was a woman or someone who did not complete high school.”<sup>17</sup> Devine & Wright make similar conclusions concerning women:

Attesting to the validity of the ‘feminization of poverty’ thesis, female-headed households are more than five times likely to have experienced five or more years of poverty and better than seven times as likely to have experienced ten or more years of poverty than male-headed households.<sup>18</sup>

These findings confirm trends in the location and concentration of poverty and the characteristics such as race and gender that contribute to them.

### **Addressing poverty**

The United States is an interesting place to study poverty. It is affluent, with enviable economic success and achievement, yet the existence of poverty in the country is staggering. The rates of crime, violence, homelessness, hunger, characteristics that are almost exclusively concentrated in poor urban areas, are some of the highest in the world. America is the representation of the contradictions and paradoxes of the free market economy: an increase in wealth is concurrent with an increase in want.

How do we present the problems of persistent poverty to a society whose main objective seems to center entirely on economic growth and consumption of goods? Perhaps changing the way we approach development and consumption is a necessary part of the process towards addressing poverty. The process has to begin with political power-brokers and policy makers and a requires transformation in tendencies towards the professional-distant approach. If we are to ‘uproot’ the problem of poverty we must begin with the fundamental issues that form the basic root from which poverty grows.

David Rusk highlights two of these fundamental factors, “what is missing from the current debate over urban [poverty] and policy is any willingness to attack the urban

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<sup>16</sup> Devine & Wright. *The Greatest of Evils*.

<sup>17</sup> Adams, Duncan & Rodgers. *The Persistence of Urban Poverty*

<sup>18</sup> Devine & Wright. *The Greatest of Evils*

problem as a matter of racial and economic segregation.”<sup>19</sup> Policy makers therefore cannot continue to ignore the root causes thus resisting efforts to make informed decisions that would assuage the problem. Furthermore, to effect any significant changes the game of wealth and power versus poverty and powerlessness has to end. A Report from the Ford Foundation’s Project on Social Welfare lends some perspective to the issue:

A healthy economy, while essential, will not of itself generate the human investment and mutual caring that are necessary for a strong and just society. And while America has grown properly skeptical of programs that foster dependency, it has also learned that it is futile to ask people to take greater personal responsibility for their lives unless they have a real chance to escape from the material conditions that foster insecurity and despair. The deeper issue is the need to create a fairer system in which all will share both obligations and benefits.<sup>20</sup>

Consistent with several other scholars David Rusk cites empowerment of the people as a major step in efforts to address the poverty problem. People must be the agents and actors for change. Ron Shiffman calls for an extensive neighborhood participatory processes that emphasize people centered development strategies. He outlines the encouragement of self-reliance and self-determination with strong reinforcement from communities as important elements in attacking the problem.<sup>21</sup> On the macro-level political organization and participation is the base from which poor people must lobby to change the economic, and social problems that are rampant in their neighborhoods.

The city of Hartford employs many of the community based organizing that theorists suggest is necessary for empowerment of the poor. Neighborhood and community organizations such as ONE/ CHANE, HART, West Indian and Caribbean Associations, various Community Renewal Teams and Block clubs are all operational in the city. Why then has Hartford not been adequately able to address problems of poverty that exists in the city? Louise Simmons sheds light on some of the challenges of community organizing:

Neighborhood organizations build participation upon the self-interest that manifests itself in community problems and issues...lack of involvement may be a problem. A small group of people may raise an issue initially but a wider audience generally has to developed and activated in order to sustain an issue campaign.<sup>22</sup>

How then can Hartford deal with poverty that seem to continually stifle its neighborhoods? As one resident notes, the answer to this question is to create

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<sup>19</sup> David Rusk. *Cities Without Suburbs*. 121

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Ron Shiffman’s *Urban Poverty –The Global Phenomenon of Poverty and Social Marginalization in our cities: Facts and Strategies*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Louise B. Simmons. *Organizing in Hard Times Labor and Neighborhood in Hartford*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994)

employment opportunities for the people in the neighborhoods. This is one of the fundamental first steps to alleviate problems of persistent poverty and it is one which the city has to address in order truly consider itself *New England's Rising Star*.

### ***III –Hartford CT: Economic & Social Transformations and Implications for Poverty 1960-present***

#### **Economic Shifts**

Historically, agriculture and industry were the main source of income for the city of Hartford. In its most glorious years, Hartford was one of the premier industrial cities in the nation. The manufacturing sector was the most dominant of Hartford's industries and was the city's top economic earner during the 1900s. Despite being home to pioneering industries such as the Colt firearms factory, the sector began a downturn in the 1960s. As this decline began, the growth of financial services and insurance brokerages took the place of manufacturing. Between 1963 and 1972 the city lost 36% of manufacturing jobs.<sup>23</sup> Most of these job losses came as a result of the closure, relocation and restructuring of the industries. Underwood Typewriter closed in 1968; Royal Typewriter moved to England in 1972; and Colt Industries and Pratt and Whitney restructured in 1992, cutting five thousand jobs.<sup>24</sup> The resulting impact dealt a severe blow to the people who were dependent on factory labor for earning their living. According to Louise Simmons a leading social/ labor union advocate and professor at the University of Connecticut, between 1960-1985 Hartford was losing a significant share of the total employment in the labor market.<sup>25</sup>

Although job growth occurred in the insurance and financial sectors as manufacturing declined, the people who lived in the city remained adversely affected as they were marginalized by demands for skilled and educated employees. The exclusion of an entire population of workers led to declining standards of living and eventually impoverished conditions in the city. The flight of industries was also accompanied by the flight of people. "White Flight" became commonplace in the 1960's and became even more so after the social disturbances and riots of 67-69.

#### **Social Upheavals**

Demonstrations were common in Hartford in the 1960's and "Hartford experienced more riots and disturbances than any city in the nation proportionate to population."<sup>26</sup> Social policies that preceded this period contributed to the problems. The migration of Southern Blacks to the city to work in the industries between 1950-1960 resulted in a 76% increase in the black population of the city.<sup>27</sup> The downside to this demographic change in Hartford was that this population was segregated in the North End of the city.

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<sup>23</sup> Ruth Glasser, *Aqui MeQuedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut* (Connecticut Humanities Council, 1997): 145

<sup>24</sup> Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell *Preliminary Report: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in Hartford 2000*

<sup>25</sup> Louise Simmons *Organizing in Hard Times Labor and Neighborhood in Hartford*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 3-8

<sup>26</sup> Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell *Preliminary Report: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in Hartford 2000*

<sup>27</sup> Stanley Battle, ed., *The State of Black Hartford*, p. 1,14

Additionally, they were barred from housing projects with the exception of Dutch Point and Bellevue Square.<sup>28</sup>

The city sought to provide social service outreach to the poorer neighborhoods through initiatives, such as Community Renewal Teams (CRTs). The Hartford Chamber of Commerce was most responsive to the social unrest in the city during the sixties and supported community initiatives through the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development organization (SAND)<sup>29</sup>. These initiatives did not deal sufficiently with the growing concerns of Hartford's minority population who continuously voiced their dissatisfaction with the lack of job opportunities and poor living conditions in city.

By the late 1960s poor living conditions in the North End apparently grew worse and the pent-up frustration by the racial minority meant more trouble for Hartford. The years 1967-69, ushered in the worse riots in the history of the city. In 1967 marches organized in protest of poor housing by black residents in the North End spread to the South End which resulted in "scattered vandalism" and the arrest of several of the protesters.<sup>30</sup> The disturbances did not last for long as city police subverted the growth of the demonstrations. However, in 1968 Hartford counted among the cities across America that experienced uprisings as a result of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. Outbreaks of demonstrations and minor destruction of property occurred. Yet, the worst was still to come.

The 1969 riots were the biggest of the three that plagued the city within these three successive years. Approximately 500 arrests were made during the course of the riots, which lasted for 3 days. Looting and fires were rampant across most of the city. The hotbed of the riots was to be found in the North End/ Clay Hill area and city leaders responded by enforcing curfews. According to the Hartford Courant, the destruction to the city businesses and damages suffered by property owners amounted to millions of dollars.

One of the defining consequences of the riots was mass out-migration of whites from the city. Residents and business owners alike sold properties and moved to neighboring suburbs. This was the advent of a major population shift that would change the social dynamics of the city.

### **Demographic Changes**

The riots ushered in a new era in Hartford demographics. Areas that were predominantly occupied by whites saw an increase in minority (mostly Blacks and Latinos) occupancy in the years following the 69 riots. With the gradual erosion of redlining and the exodus of a majority of whites, blacks were now able to purchase/rent homes in previously off-limit areas. The Upper Albany neighborhood is a good example of the population shifts which occurred in Hartford between the 60s and the 70s. The white population declined

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<sup>28</sup> Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell *Preliminary Report: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in Hartford 2000* pp 5

<sup>29</sup> Ibid pp 4

<sup>30</sup> *Negro March Ends in Vandalism, Jail* Hartford Courant Sept 19, 1967 pp. 1 & 27



from 94% in the 1960s to 25% in the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> The demographic change occurred in 2 stages beginning at first with African Americans followed by an influx of West-Indian Americans. Although this pattern in population change is unique to Upper Albany, similar transitions were underway throughout much of the neighborhoods. Today mostly mostly Hispanics--42% and Blacks --39.5%, inhabit the neighborhoods in Hartford; the white population of the city is 18.5%.<sup>32</sup> As the communities experienced significant population shifts and major middle class exodus, the city sought ways to renew its image through various development projects that were primarily focused downtown Hartford.

### **Urban Renewal and Development**

One of the major 'renewal' projects of the city during the 70s was the highway construction which proved to be detrimental for some neighborhoods, particularly those with the least political power; Housing and businesses were destroyed and neighborhoods divided as result of highway construction. Approximately 10,000 public housing units were destroyed during as a result of I-84.<sup>33</sup> Instead of creating more access and opportunity for people in the neighborhood, the highway provided an exit and entry to and from the surrounding suburbs.

While the federally funded highway project added to long-term economic decline of the neighborhoods, corporate leaders planned their own contribution to urban renewal efforts. Sponsored by a group of powerful corporate entities, The "Greater Hartford Process" was intended to contribute to the rejuvenation of Hartford; instead, it resulted in gentrification. The removal of city residents to a rural community in eastern Connecticut, and the restriction on Puerto Rican immigrations were part of the larger goals of the 'Greater Hartford Process.' This proposed city 'cleansing' measure was met with much opposition from Puerto Ricans, other ethnic groups and the residents of the proposed rural community. In a sign of solidarity and resistance to the plan, the Puerto Ricans formed a human chain around the newly built civic center.<sup>34</sup> They convinced the city leaders to abandon the plan.

Despite numerous plans and initiatives, the city has suffered from decrease in revenues due to the lack of businesses especially at the community level. In fact, during much of the 1980s city officials seemed much more preoccupied with development of downtown Hartford where office space, shopping and entertainment complexes were built. Today insurance companies and other financial firms provide the main tax base city's revenue. And although Hartford has managed to maintain some major corporate entities, the city continues to lose money as its dependence on federal funds grows. Furthermore, the stigma of *place* continues to plague the city as the strong corporate profile of downtown businesses has been continuously overshadowed by the dereliction of the surrounding neighborhoods. Author and Hartford resident Jose Cruz, summed up the situation accordingly: "during the 1980s the city was a study in contrasts. While downtown

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<sup>31</sup> Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell *Preliminary Report: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in Hartford 2000*

<sup>32</sup> The 2000 US census

<sup>33</sup> Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell *Preliminary Report: Life Histories and Community Trajectories in Hartford 2000* p 5

<sup>34</sup> Louise Simmons *Organizing in Hard Times Labor and Neighborhood in Hartford*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 9

Hartford offered a gleaming skyline, residential areas were a locus of poverty and decay. The urban environment consisted of a array of classic juxtapositions: wealth and poverty, downtown corporate growth and neighborhood economic deprivation, political equality and economic inequality.”<sup>35</sup> Today, Hartford is trying to position itself as New England’s rising star however, the same problems persists while proposals to inject new life into the city seem to follow similar patterns as in the past. Plans are afoot for the development of Adrian’s Landing to further boost the city’s profile and create jobs. Backed by the Governor, some City and State officials, the Adrian’s Landing project seems destined to isolate the neighborhoods and residents of the city. Once again, measures intended to make a positive impact on the city seem to represent an exclusionary posture towards the neighborhoods and residents of Hartford.

#### ***IV The 4 Neighborhoods***

Hartford is made up of 15 residential neighborhoods. The four poorest neighborhoods were chosen for our study: Clay Arsenal, Frog Hollow, Northeast & Upper Albany

##### **Clay Arsenal**

Clay Arsenal is one of the city’s poorest and has been in decline over the past four decades. Perhaps not as segregated as other communities in the city, it became an first entry post for many blacks and Hispanics. Clay Arsenal also hosted most of the tobacco workers from the Caribbean during the 1960s and 70s.<sup>36</sup> Given its profile as a transit point for incoming immigrants who later sought greener pastures, Clay Arsenal has suffered from population turnover and loss. Ally Aparicio, a former resident of the neighborhood who currently works at the Community Health Services in Clay Arsenal notes that as soon as someone can afford to leave the neighborhood they do so. The lack of a stable population with strong ties to the community exacerbates the deficiencies in social, economic and political capital in the neighborhood.

The highway construction of the 1970s and 80s had a negative impact on Clay Arsenal. The alternate route also drained the neighborhood of potential economic gains from passengers who before had to pass through the neighborhoods. Clay Arsenal’s physical isolation from Downtown is a marked reflection of its social and economic alienation from the city. The lack of industries also does not bode well for the area. Former residents did not have the incentives to remain since there was little opportunity for work. The population that stayed, barely did so and this is a partial explanation of the impoverished state of the neighborhood.

According to the Census, the population of Clay Arsenal in 1980 consisted of 53% blacks and 45 % Hispanic; in 1990 45.8% and 48.3% respectively. The total population that comprises 7890 persons is 55.1% women and 44.9% men. The Institute for Community Research in its Rapid Sociodemographic Assessment Project noted that in 1980 and 1989 Clay Arsenal had the highest rates of poverty in the Hartford. Over a ten-year period from

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<sup>35</sup> Jose Cruz. *Identity and Power: Puerto Rican Politics and the Challenge of Ethnicity* Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1998. pp 34

<sup>36</sup> Rose/Mitchell pp 18

1980 to 1989-90 the families in poverty increased from 52.8% to a high of 64.3%.<sup>37</sup> Also in 1989, over 50 percent of the families living in Clay Arsenal received public assistance.<sup>38</sup> The 1990 Census reports that 28.8% of the neighborhood's household earned less than \$5000 per year.<sup>39</sup> In her book *Organizing in Hard Times*, Louise Simmons noted "[Clay Arsenal] was an area with severe poverty, ...massive welfare dependency and every poverty associated problem found in modern America."<sup>40</sup>

The disinvestments in the real estate market in the 1960s and 70s further induced conditions of poverty in Clay Arsenal. Almost 4,000 residents left the neighborhood, which led to an upsurge in abandoned units in the community. The old Victorian houses are now derelict and represent an era of past prosperity. Aside from the abandoned buildings, public housing projects are the main source of housing for most of the current residents of the neighborhood. The North Main Street area for example has several units in unsatisfactory conditions.

Yet there are several community action organizations active in the neighborhood, among them are the Organized Northeasterners/Clay Hill and North End (ONE CHANE) whose mission is "to help residents of the North East and Clay Arsenal Neighborhoods rebuild north Hartford through community organizing, housing development and employment training."<sup>41</sup> The South Arsenal Neighborhood Development (SAND) agency is also active in this neighborhood. Its focus is human services, youth education and recreation.

### **Frog Hollow**

Frog Hollow is located in the center of Hartford bordered to the northeast by Downtown and the south by Charter Oak-Zion and Barry Square. It is a neighborhood dominated by Puerto Ricans. This was not the case during the 50s and 60s. The neighborhood then consisted of white families who were mostly factory workers. After the social upheavals that sprung up throughout the city in the 60s and the subsequent relocation of industries and white workers to nearby suburban areas, Puerto Ricans and other people of Hispanic origin began to move into the neighborhood. From then on Frog Hollow has been home to one of the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in The United States.

There were approximately 11,000 people living in Frog Hollow in 1990.<sup>42</sup> The Institute for Community Research indicated that poverty rates were 35.9% for families and 36.8% for individuals in Frog Hollow (1980). Almost ten years later those numbers increased to 43% and 51.3% respectively.

Despite the reported increase in poverty levels in this neighborhood it remains one of Hartford's most vibrant and promising neighborhoods. Park Street has been the central area for small businesses owned and operated by Puerto Ricans. A number of non-profit

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<sup>37</sup> Hartford Sociodemographic Profile (1989)

<sup>38</sup> Ivan Kuzyk. *Hartford Primer and Field Guide* Chart 1 pp. 50

<sup>39</sup> Citizens' Research Education Network: Neighborhood Profile—Clay Arsenal

<sup>40</sup> Louise Simmons Louise Simmons *Organizing in Hard Times Labor and Neighborhood in Hartford*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): pp 21

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Beth Rose & Frank Mitchell pp 10

<sup>42</sup> Citizens' Research Education Network Frog Hollow Neighborhood Profile

agencies as well as community development committees are active in the area. Broad Park Development Inc is one of the agencies focusing on neighborhood renewal by refurbishing old buildings. The location of the community also augurs well for its improvement. It has benefited from various projects whether through structural enhancement such as the Learning Corridor or neighborhood training facilities. The Trinfo Café holds computer classes for people who live and work in Frog Hollow.

The Southside Institute Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) is the most active change agent operating in this neighborhood. The coalition whose aim is to foster cooperative partnership with the community, through improvement and development of the economy and physical structures, includes Trinity College, Connecticut Public Television and Radio, The Hartford Hospital and The Institute for Living.

### **North East**

Described as a “sleeping giant” by the Hartford Courant, The Northeast is the largest and poorest neighborhood in the city.<sup>43</sup> It is located at the Northernmost end of the city above two other poor neighborhoods Upper Albany and Clay Arsenal. A drive through the neighborhood readily demonstrates the lackluster nature of the surroundings and highlights the poverty that exists there. Some of the interviewees of the study described the neighborhood as a wonderful place to work and live in the forties.

The North East experienced a change in population loss of -7.5% between 1980 and 1990. The population figure now hovers around 14,000. The 50-59 year old age group makes up the largest segment of the population. There was also a negative change in the income levels in this community between 1979 and 1989. The Median household income fell from \$15,296 in 1979 to \$12,349 in 1989—a change of -19.3%<sup>44</sup>. The poverty Status of families and individuals as determined by the state, rose to 40.5% and 43.1% in 1989 respectively.<sup>45</sup> Approximately 80% of the housing units in the neighborhood are renter occupied. This figure is close to the rate of occupancy in the city at large.

There is no industry in the North East and with nothing to sustain the neighborhood, unemployment and lack opportunity abound. The current situation in this community appears bleak, however neighborhood residents are making significant efforts to effect some change by uniting in their cause to get help from the city. Rehabilitation groups including Habitat for Humanity and ONE/CHANE is helping to rebuild the neighborhood by refurbishing and building new homes.

### **Upper Albany**

Upper Albany is a predominantly African American community. It is situated in the north of Hartford between The North East, Clay Arsenal and Asylum Hill. This neighborhood like most others in the city has had its fair share of transformations. During the 60s a large Jewish population lived in the region. They owned and operated many of the businesses in the area. The riots of the latter part of the 1960s had a tremendous impact on Upper

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<sup>43</sup> Hartford Courant *Keys to the city—What is or Should be Happening in Hartford's Neighborhood* February 28, 1999

<sup>44</sup> Citizen's Research Education Network The North East neighborhood Profile

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

Albany. White flight followed as businesses were burned out along the main thoroughfare—Albany Ave. Consequently, there was a sharp decline in the white population from 95% in the 1960s to 25% in the 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

The racial shifts in the neighborhood came in two stages. African Americans began to filter into the community shortly after the white exodus. In the mid-late 70s West Indian Americans became the dominant ethnic group in the area. The new immigrants, like their white counterparts before them, set up local cooperatives, established businesses and purchased properties in the neighborhood. West Indian bakeries, restaurants, beauty shops and other specialty stores sprung up along what the neighborhood folk call ‘The Avenue.’

Upper Albany was not designated as one of the first “poverty area” of the city and as a consequence has not received a lot of help from the government. In an interview with Ron Simpson the head of the Upper Albany Neighborhood Organization he notes “\$193 million dollars were allocated in 2000 for city project yet there were non planned for Upper Albany.” Despite not being considered a primary poverty area, the Census data over the last thirty years indicate that the percentage of persons living below the poverty level in Upper Albany has increased. Though income levels have increased incrementally, according to the government ‘s measure, Upper Albany’s poverty levels have also increased. The percentage of persons below the poverty level in 1970 stood at 22% and increased by 13% in 1990. Households receiving income from public assistance have also increased by 10% in the past thirty years.

Occupancy rates in this neighborhood also mirror that of the city with 79.6% renters and 20.5% owners. Based on the 1990 census information, the largest portion of the 9,665-person Upper Albany population is between the ages of 5-19 (28%) and, young adults between the ages of 20-34 make up the second largest group (26%). Many residents and business owners have expressed concerns about the youth related problems in this community and fear that there are not enough facilities or youth oriented programs to engage this portion of the population.

The situation in Upper Albany is slightly different from the communities previously discussed and although former residents made up part of the labor force of Hartford’s industry, there is a business base in the area. Nevertheless, Upper Albany has not gone unscathed by economic decline in the city. It remains a vibrant community with several civic action groups, business associations, block clubs and a number of immigrant associations including the Urban League of Greater Hartford, West Indian Social Club and the Upper Albany Business Association. The neighborhood is also home to the newly built Artist Collective that serves the young through cultural programs. A strong effort is also being made by the business association to enhance the physical structures on the main avenue.

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<sup>46</sup> Beth Rose Frank Mitchell Report pp 19

## ***V Research Methods***

This study was inspired by the research of Dr. Janice Perlman in the favelas of Brazil 32 years ago. The results were published in her award winning book the *Myth of Marginality*. She is currently conducting a restudy of the same people who participated in the research in 1968-69. The research instrument in both the Hartford and Rio de Janeiro studies are based on the earlier study, with questions specific to each place where applicable.

### **Observation and interviews**

1. Anthropological observation methods were used to conduct the first phase of the research. Each student was assigned to one of the four selected neighborhoods. As part of Dr. Perlman's *Studio in Comparative and Urban Development* course each student had to explore several components of the neighborhoods. As a first step, an informed guided tour by Alta Lash of the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods gave the necessary overview of the entire city and proved useful for further exploration into the four communities. Lash's extensive network throughout the city also enabled us to meet with community activists, which provided useful information on projects they were successfully conducting in the neighborhoods. Students visited their designated neighborhoods as well as 'destination' neighborhoods in the Hartford Region throughout the Spring semesters of 2001 and 2002 and conducted interviews on three levels: with social change agents; community leaders/contextual informants and individuals.

2. Semi-structured interviews (following a check list of key items were conducted with Larry Charles, director, ONE/ CHANE; Karen Lewis executive director of SAND; Susan Harkett-Turley, director of HERC; Lorenzo Jones of UCAN; Jack Kadjik and Andrea Pereira of LISC and Marilyn Miranda of HART among others.<sup>47</sup> These interviews allowed us to gain insight into the projects that were being implemented in the city and more specifically in the poor neighborhoods, which were our primary focus. The information gathered from these interviews also gave us a sense of the conditions under which these agents worked and most strikingly, the situations of the poor whom they served. We got a sense of the every-day challenges they faced whether it was regarding funding from supporting agencies or the frustration in getting people to participate in programs or initiatives. Interviews were conducted with

3. The contextual interviews were designed to help us put the neighborhoods in perspective as well as to map the changes that occurred as seen through the eyes of the people who were living in or from the communities. Leaders within these neighborhoods provided informed answers to the questions we posed about their surroundings. Keith Carr of Upper Albany, Yolanda Rivera of Frog Hollow, Ed French of Clay Arsenal and Lenzy Wallace formerly of the North East were excellent sources for the interviews and continued to provide support throughout the course research.

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<sup>47</sup> ONE/CHANE-- Organized Northeasterners/Clay Hill and North End, , SAND—South Arsenal Neighborhood Development, HERC—Housing Education Research Center, UCAN—United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods, LISC (Hartford) Local Initiative Support Corporation, HART Hartford Areas Rally Together.

The core data of the research came from the individual interviews with residents or former residents of the communities. A questionnaire and life history matrix were the instruments used to map the changes in life trajectories of each individual interviewed. The data gathered was coded using SPSS and subsequent frequencies and cross-tabulations were run to compare major themes emerging from the study. Part IV of the report gives further detail of the data analysis.

### **The Sample—Challenges Encountered**

There is hardly a research project that flows smoothly. None one escapes the inevitable hitches and unforeseen obstacles that may be encountered on such a journey. At the beginning, hopes and expectations are high and what we often set out to accomplish based on these high goals are sometimes humbled by reality. Our research was subject to some of the many problems faced by other studies. The biggest obstacle for us was finding a sample that would provide the data we wished to analyze.

The various socio-economic shifts that occurred in Hartford over the past forty years made our task as researchers even more challenging. Finding residents of the selected neighborhoods to cover the period of time in which we were interested was difficult. The mass exodus of people from the city to the suburbs was also a handicap. The neighborhoods, especially the North East, are transient places, which made identifying potential interviewees particularly difficult. Additionally, there were no previous research done in the neighborhoods thus we had no references from which we could source interviewees.

Despite these challenges, our quest to find suitable candidates for the survey continued unabated. We devoted almost an entire summer (2001) to following leads and searching for ways to generate the sample. Joel Zea, a community member and interviewer from the Frog Hollow neighborhood was hired to help identify and locate interviewees. His efforts were fruitless. The study fatigue factor—the over analysis of Hartford neighborhoods--was also another Achilles heel for the study. Many residents, who were perhaps able to give us names or even participate, were simply not interested and in fact were cynical about *another* research. Suggestions for generating the sample by contacting local welfare agencies also did not yield any favorable results. Due to confidentiality clauses, disclosure of welfare recipient names for the purposes of this research was prohibited.

Our final hope for generating a sample was through the snowball method. We were able to get contacts through members of the Trinity community. Alta Lash and Elly Jacobson were most helpful in this regard. Lenzy Wallace was also instrumental in this process. Based on these contacts and the subsequent names and phone numbers we received from some of the interviewees, we generated a small sample for the research.

### **Sample Composition**

The sample comprised 60% men and 40% women; 60% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 15% White. For the interviewees to be eligible for the study, they had to be at least 30 years old, thus the age range of the sample is between 30- 88 years. There is variance between

the twenty persons interviewed for the study and current Census data information based on sex and race. However, the sample was not meant to be representative of the city. Furthermore, the snowball method of generating interviewees would not have allowed for a representative sample. The composition of the respondents based on neighborhoods were: 35% --Upper Albany, and 20% for Clay Arsenal, Frog Hollow and the North East respectively.

Forty two percent of the interviewees live in 2-3 family homes, while 37% and 21% live in single-family houses and apartments respectively. Of these numbers 58% owned their homes. Since we are looking at poverty and mobility, the mixed results suggest some form of upward mobility.

## *V Findings*

### **Social Mobility**

Several inferences can be made from the analysis of data we collected. One of the most significant themes emerging from the study was the recognition and importance of education as a means of upward mobility. This is not a ground-breaking finding. However, for people who are considered poor, the thought that education rates as highly on the list of priorities for them underscores something noteworthy. One may consider that employment and other economic concerns, particularly in a city like Hartford, would be the main concern for the individuals who participated in the study. But not so, each individual considered education to be the key factor of mobility and their narratives strongly reinforces this position.

The intergenerational comparisons on education and occupation surprisingly did not present as gloomy a picture that may be the case in the neighborhood we observed. Most of the respondents have higher levels of education than their parents and their children share similar or more advanced levels of education compared to them. The results were not as significant for the comparison between the respondents and their children as a significant portion of the sample had children still completing their education. However, based on the data the assumption was made that most of the children would achieve higher levels of education than the respondents since most were enrolled in higher level than their parents. The expressions of pride in their children were evident from personal reports of the students who met with the respondents. Many of them conveyed the emphasis their parents placed on ensuring that they received 'a good education'. In most instances too the parents whose stress on education was unquestionable were the ones who were not themselves educated. One respondent recalls being told repeatedly that education was the key aspect for a successful future.<sup>48</sup> Another interviewee expressed pride in the fact that her daughter was accepted to Trinity despite her background of being a poor Puerto Rican. Others go further to say that they were determined to "scrape together all their savings" to make sure their children went to college. In some instances respondents' children obtained multiple degrees.

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<sup>48</sup> Interview Narratives form North East respondents



### **Parent's Education**

Higher levels of education were reported for most of the respondents' mothers than fathers. The women attained at least a high school education while the results for the men, were on average, completion of elementary school. These results were somewhat unconventional because thirty years ago there were generally less opportunity for women but conversely, one could also assume that women did not readily have access to the jobs that were available which were perhaps highly gender specific. The nature of the economy looking back 30-40 years ago may also have suggested why the men stayed in school for shorter periods than the women. An industrial based economy that depended on skills training rather than high levels of education may very have been the key factor.

### **Community Cohesion**

The perception of community cohesion in the neighborhoods was a surprising finding. Poor neighborhoods are often stereotyped as being places of crime and drugs. There is little thought as to whether a strong sense of community exists in these areas. The results from the survey proved differently. Of the respondents, 73% declared that there was unity among community residents. Moreover, approximately 60% declared that they liked living in their neighborhoods. In response to another question addressing interrelations in the communities, 94% of the participants said they could count on their neighbors.

What then do we make of these results? Unlike the commonly held beliefs, these areas do not lack social cohesion. Despite conditions of poverty that are pervasive in these neighborhoods, there are active social networks operating in the communities. Whether they are able to mobilize their efforts to effect change is another issue.

### **Inequality**

We looked at four subcategories for the exploration of inequality: consumption of goods, actual income versus income necessary for a good life, social exclusion and discrimination and the impact of globalization. The finding for the first subcategory is that ownership of consumer goods does not reflect a reduction of inequality between the haves and the have-nots. The vast majority of the respondents owned most of the consumer goods necessary for life today—over 95% owned cars computers, washing machines, VCRs etc. In our society, these items are a part of almost all households and though there may be a marked difference between rich and poor in developing countries, perhaps ownership of most household items in the United States is not an indicator of wealth or poverty. Indeed, people may own these goods but their income may well fall below standard government measured poverty levels.

There was much discord in the comparison of the data based on the question of *actual income versus income necessary for a decent life*. Naturally, the respondents quoted high figures when asked about the income necessary for a decent life. Twenty percent believe that \$35,000 a year is necessary for a decent life; 40% cite a range of \$40,000-\$50,000 and 40% say more than \$50,000 is needed for a good life. The actual income levels, when compared to the projections of the respondents are quite different. Though the numbers are not representative of Hartford an interesting observation can be made. Of the sample 27% earn less than 24,000 a year and 20% earn between \$24,000-\$50,000. Two

inferences may be applicable here, 1) that the standard of living among the interviewees based on their real income is far below their expectations or 2) that they simply make a strong effort to make good with what they earn.

Another interesting dynamic of the inequality issue is that 33% of the interviewees believe social exclusion has decreased over the past thirty years, while only 22% think that there has been an increase. The explanation for the division among the sample with the higher percent having a more positive outlook on social exclusion directly relates to the near homogenous nature of city residents in different enclaves--the Frog Hollow neighborhood being mostly Puerto Rican/Hispanic and Upper Albany and the North East being primarily black. Due to the absence of diversity in the neighborhoods, we cannot make any assumptions about social exclusion within communities. Other extraneous factors however, clearly point to social exclusion on the basis of place. For within the city the North End neighborhoods have borne the tag of stigmatized places of poverty

Our question addressing discrimination is much more conclusive in relation to inequality. A vast majority of the respondents have themselves or their children experienced some form of discrimination. Over 70% believe there is discrimination based on place of origin; 80% thought people were discriminated against if they came from stigmatized neighborhoods; approximately 90% believe that discrimination occurred because of skin color and over 85% claimed dress attire were causes for discrimination. These percentages demonstrate the pervasiveness of discrimination and its implications.

People do not choose to be poor. In fact, the average person simply wants a good job so they can provide for their family. Our respondents are not representative of the city but these results are telling. If little job opportunities exist for individuals to improve their lives the difficulty of dealing with discrimination exacerbates any potential quest for advancement out of poverty. The anecdotes told to interviewers were numerous and what was even more alarming to note were the agents of such discrimination. Teachers told respondents children that they were incapable of performing in school because of their skin color and their parents' lack of education. Still others were told they completely lacked the capacity to succeed because they were black. The constant negative assumptions about people based not only on skin color but also on their neighborhood and dress attire, creates direct obstacles for people who strive to escape poverty.

The stigmatized neighborhood label as an obstacle for breaking intergenerational poverty is further reinforced when we asked the respondents if they believe a person from their community would have similar opportunities as a person from a richer neighborhood. The overwhelming answer was that the former would have a lesser chance. Thus, not only are circumstances of poverty difficult to overcome but the person trying to haul himself out of this state is also burdened, whether internally or externally, by the geography of his habitat.

Of the respondents, a little over a half of them thought globalization has had a positive impact on their lives. One would expect dissimilar results for the parallel study being conducted by Dr. Perlman in Rio de Janeiro since Hartford is in a developed country

versus Rio de Janeiro's third world status. What is interesting though is the flexibility that globalization has given the developed country and the impact of such consequences on the Third World nations. For although the respondents in our survey perceive globalization as having a positive impact on their lives, the movement of industries from America in search for cheaper labor has no doubt negatively affected cities.

A substantial amount of job opportunities have been lost in cities like Hartford. Meanwhile the job access may improve for poorer persons in the Third World countries such as Brazil but there is also the issue of poor labor conditions as firms try to get the most out of workers for the least cost. Ed French, a long time resident of the Clay Arsenal neighborhood agrees that globalization has been negative for the city. He notes that the phenomenon is not advantageous to Hartford residents because there has not been any significant increase in job creation here. He sees the condition of his neighborhood as a poverty area continuing because people simply do not have the employment opportunity that is necessary to allow for home ownership and therefore a vested interest in maintaining a strong neighborhood image.

### **Political participation: The myth of the ballot**

Hartford is well known for its political organizing at the grass root level. The respondents' reaction to questions about political participation in the survey is testament to this fact. They all agreed that it is the duty of all citizens to vote in elections. Why then has there been little response to the residents of the poor communities in the city? The high levels of participation among the respondents do not translate into real policy changes for the neighborhoods because their voices have been ignored by city officials. There seem to be an unwillingness to address the needs of the communities and most redevelopment efforts have been geared toward the Downtown area. The Rio study has had similar results with regard to political participation. Many favelados felt that the end of the dictatorship and their subsequent participation in the political process would result into positive action for themselves and their neighborhoods instead these hopes were not realized.

Further analysis of this portion of the data revealed some interesting results. Most of those interviewed felt that their vote made a difference at the city and State levels yet they believe the city is becoming worse. Similarly, they expressed much optimism about their ability to effect change through the voting process but they think the government is unfair. Another contradiction that is common among social science research is the perception that their neighborhoods and city are deteriorating while their individual lives are improving. Perhaps the responses underscore the continual efforts by the respondents to improve the quality of their lives.

### **Expectation and Optimism**

The respondents expressed strong optimism not only for their lives but more so for their children. They fully expect their lives to improve in the next five years. They strongly believe that they have experienced some mobility since they rate their parents' life as a 5 or better on a scale of 1-10 while they see theirs as being a 7 or higher. Their aspiration for their children far exceed the current levels at which they see their lives. There is a

generally high expectation for the mobility of their children as a result of their improved educational attainment. The trend in intergenerational social mobility and thus the break in the poverty cycle seem to be positive.

## *VI Conclusions*

Poverty does not exist on its own and is not disconnected from conditions of poor housing, community and institutional facilities; lack of political empowerment; racism; discrimination and inequality. The neighborhoods of Hartford are riddled with all of the above and most of the participants expressed concern about these issues.

From as far back as the 50s Hartford neighborhood residents sought better housing conditions. The 1960s brought a new era of activism where people actually went to the streets to make their voice demands. The upheavals in Hartford were in large part a means of getting the necessary attention to address these needs. Although the problem may not be as acute as it was back then, people of the poorer class in the city still face similar problems.

The racism and discrimination scenarios are as applicable in the Hartford situation as its is in any other city which encounter the similar issues. Minority groups are considerably hindered by recurring acts of discrimination and racism, which makes it doubly hard for them to break the cycle of poverty. What the literature refers to as the racialization of poverty creates a handicap for those to which it is directed. Certain skills that would be required to attain social mobility is often off-limits to people who are affected by discrimination and racism because of their socio-economic status. The experiences of racism as reported by the respondents highlight the concept of the racialization of poverty. In the case where the child of one of our interviewees is told at school that he cannot accomplish anything because he is black and comes from a poor background, demonstrates that the seeds of such false consciousness are planted by the establishment quite early.

The living space is another way that prevents access to opportunities that are potentially helpful for people in poverty. On the surface, it may seem as a clear choice for poorer individuals to live in certain areas but the literature provide evidence that this may be refuted. Hartford, not unlike other cities in America, has been a place where residential segregation was common, this created concentrations of people of lower economic status in areas with poorer facilities in the city. Furthermore, the subsequent deterioration of these areas is a consequence of job flight, which spiked high unemployment levels. The literature notes that this is one of the primary structural issues that contribute to persistent poverty. Yet, a majority of the participants felt relatively comfortable and safe in their respective neighborhoods and a strong sense of unity is thought to be common in the communities.

Despite the grim state of poverty on the larger scale, and the general belief among most of the respondents that Hartford is deteriorating, there is a marked difference in the perception of their personal situations.

The literature approaches the evaluation of the dynamics of poverty in many ways. One of them is looking at differences between and among groups and individuals to determine if there are intrinsic factors that enable them to break out of poverty. Two questions readily came to mind-- what sets these people apart despite their impoverished backgrounds? What we found among the participants of our study is a special drive to realize even small steps out of poverty. They did not question whether or not they had the ability to realize some level of social mobility. They seemed to have been simply motivated to make it happen.

The interview narratives from the individuals in all the neighborhoods emphasize the strong belief among the respondents that education was/is the way out of persistent poverty. This was the experience of some of the interviewees. Behind the striving and tremendous effort on the part of their parents or relatives who raised them is the fact that there existed some opportunity for the parents to create the conditions that enabled them to get at least high school education. This drive and sacrifice by the parents may well have been passed on to the interviewees for they themselves are doing all they can to allow their children the opportunities they did not have. Essentially our results have debunked the “blaming the victim” assessment of the poor. What our respondents showed in their life histories is a strong determination to make it despite the odds.

Our findings on the consumer goods indicate that specific measures of poverty must be applied in different circumstances. (There was no correlation to socio economic status and consumer items owned by the participants.) In fact, reference in the literature review warned that studies on poverty must be culturally specific, relevant for the time in which the study takes place and relative to the social and economic conditions of that society.

The strong sense of duty with regard to participation in the political process resonates among our respondents. Despite contradictions among the responses referred to in the *Data Analysis* section of the paper, there is an unwavering belief that exercising the franchise to vote is the only way to voice their concerns and defend their positions on certain issues. Our results demonstrate the political activism among the individuals in our sample, over 83% voted in the last presidential election which is significantly higher than the national average at 50%. Whether or not their votes translate in improving their communities is another issue.

Another noteworthy observation is the fact that Hartford has been the springboard for most of the interviewees who managed to make it out of poverty. Many may view the city in a negative light but it is interesting to recognize that although the city's neighborhoods are poor they are starting points for people coming in. The turnover and movement of residents out of these communities indicate that there may be some positives among all that is negative about the Hartford.

### **Next Steps**

The findings of this small study give a brief insight into issues of poverty and mobility as they relate to some of Hartford's residents and communities. There are many

recommendations to be made regarding this study, as well as to the researchers who wish to take this small contribution to research on Hartford further. Firstly, a more random method of selecting the sample would yield more comprehensive results. Jury duty records or an incentive based approach may be useful here. This would provide a larger and more representative picture of how people break the poverty cycle in Hartford. Secondly, a look at inter-generational poverty requires a longitudinal study and working backward was particularly challenging especially in transient communities similar to those used for this research. Perhaps an approach of looking at younger residents and their current experiences with poverty would be a good starting point for research of this kind. Taking this approach could produce more powerful results and could be comprehensively compared to similar studies in other cities. For even though the research instruments and methods were similar to those in the Rio de Janeiro study, and there are indeed similarities with the preliminary findings there to our results here, the size of the Brazilian research far overshadows what we attempted in Hartford.