

The Value and Loss of Community - Video transcript with Timestamps

00:00

The inspiration behind this project came from a conversation I had with my aunt this past weekend. The day she and my other aunt came to visit me in the city we sat at a cafe downtown and we started talking about family.

I don't really remember how we began talking about this in particular but she began to tell me about the point in her life where she was confronted with the major decision of whether or not to move her family out of a certain part of the city she was living in.

My aunts as well as most of my father's side of the family all come from Chicago Illinois.

While my dad and some of his other siblings moved away, my Aunt Mary has stayed in the city all her life.

During the conversation she made a short remark about how the neighborhood she was living in originally started turning bad.

My Auntie Jen added that it started being filled with drugs and gangs.

My Aunt Mary said that she was conflicted about leaving. She said she didn't know if she was abandoning the area and making a mistake by not integrating her children or if she should get out and give herself and her family better opportunities.

01:00

After she said that I knew that I wanted this to be at the core of the message that I share with the class. The value and loss of community.

This theme has repeatedly captured my attention in the literature and media analyzed in this course.

Every time a place is confronted with the effects of social, environmental or other injustices there is something to be said about what changes for those that leave and those that are left behind.

Community dynamics that are crafted so carefully experience dramatic shifts when forced to confront injustices.

In particular for POC communities that find home in one another, what burdens are put on the people who have the chance to shed these hardships?

***Layered Audio bites for dramatic effect*

The neighbors got broken into.

Are you turning your back on your home?

Will you find friends?

Schools are underfunded.

I won't have a support system.

What if my kids get bullied?

I won't be as respected.

It's too expensive to live here

If I stay something could happen.

Could I get a better job?

Will a shot at a better life be worth potentially being ousted by a community that is not your own?

There is no one that looks like me here.

Kids will be mean.

This neighborhood needs me.

I am abandoning home.

02:00

I believe that if I asked my auntie, she would say that she is happy that her choice to move gave her the life she has today.

I find though, that the choice she had to make deserves its own analysis, especially because it is the experience of other black Americans all over the US.

When Googling how to tell if you live in a bad neighborhood, one of the first websites to pop up is Reolink.com with a 26 Point long list on dead giveaways if you live in a bad neighborhood.

Number five notes that many houses in a bad neighborhood will have fences with fake beware of dogs or no trespassing signs to deter burglars.

An example of these relatively specific to us is actually much of the surrounding neighborhoods near the RoseHill campus in the Bronx.

Number 14 on the list says that another Telltale sign is an “irregular police presence”, and the last point mentions bad neighborhoods mainly having “off-brand stores.”

2:56

On top of the biases that people hold from prejudice word of mouth, marketing conglomerates feed into this cycle of projecting negative images of less affluent communities.

If companies can provide the criteria on what makes a bad neighborhood, it makes it so much easier to sell products that can supposedly protect you in these environments.

Going down the list makes it pretty clear that most of these are just coded to identify if you live in a low-income High minority populated place.

While these points are a cumulative list of what traits people consider a bad area to have, many individuals already have the subconscious belief they are in a bad neighborhood as soon as the physical manifestations of poverty become more obvious to them.

These are communities where people still have complex social dynamics, friends, families, and places where the young kids go just to hang out.

While many would classify these communities as the antithesis of “up-and-coming”, some of America's most strong social networks exist here.

When members of the community have the chance to leave for better opportunities, there is an irregularly discussed burden placed upon those individuals.

4:03

For people like my aunt, it is not so easy to pick up and leave a place where your children are friends with the kids of the people you went to high school with.

These intercommunal relationships developed through decades are a part of what keeps the structure of POC neighborhoods like this.

In a 2021 article by the Scientific American, author Nancy Averett outlines how social capital in Black communities in the United States is majorly overlooked.

One of her interviewees in the article, Mattis, mentions how “in college she struggled when her professors described depravity and Chaos in poor neighborhoods but never mentioned the grandmother's who used what little food they had to cook a meal for someone down the street who had even less.”

This same experience was shared between my aunt as well as so many other Black Americans in the United States.

Relationships like these are not only beneficial but necessary in creating a space where identity and trust intersect.

For Black Americans, as well as many other minority groups in the United States, the formation of these groups has been an almost Century-long process, which residents relied on for safety in an otherwise discriminatory world.

5:08

As much as social dynamics in Black communities play such an important role, it does not alter the pressing fact that low-income minority neighborhoods are statistically the lowest in federal funding for things like education and infrastructure.

As a result, people living in these areas are provided with less opportunity, as well as employment positions that would give them more economic privilege.

This creates its own feedback loop where individuals in these neighborhoods fall victim to crime or homelessness.

While strong Social Capital can catch a few from falling into these cracks or at least provide forms of support;

The effects of low funding, environmental racism, minority targeted marketing - examples like these include menthol cigarette advertisements in predominantly black neighborhoods -, and poor infrastructure are felt across the board.

These factors then create an intensely complicated situation. If one is afforded the option of leaving, what will be the mental tax of breaking off from this web of Social Links?

6:08

Running the risk of staying could very well mean less opportunity, and/or direct harm from over policing or gun violence.

Making the choice to leave also includes the strain on those who are left behind. Depending on the forms of relationships, a move out could mean the loss of a friend in the community, a place to stay if needed, an educator, an advisor, a business owner, and the list stretches further and further out.

Key stitches being taken out of the fabric of communities creates different sized holes in the social capital.

Understanding what it means to reintegrate yourself into a community where you do not have the same social ties is also incredibly valuable to this kind of analysis.

Most predictably there is the loneliness, othering, or often the very same lack of opportunity that was in a previous less affluent community.

7:05

While more opportunity exists in so-called better neighborhoods; racism, prejudice, and discrimination can still put an obstacle between obtaining the same opportunities.

Especially today, with COVID-19 and a general growing decline in communal relationships, moving into new communities and out of ones where you have built intense bonds within, is harder than ever.

Circumstances like relocation and the battle with loss of community are shared by migrants from regions, most notably those fleeing from prosecution, war, or natural disasters.

Migrants have a similar experience where they go through isolation after coming to the United states and leaving a community dynamic they are used to behind.

In the same Scientific American article on black Social Capital by Averett, she recounts social epidemiologist, Ichiro Kawachi, finding that “older survivors of a Japanese earthquake who had to move

to Temporary housing and therefore lost their long-standing social connections suffered greater cognitive decline than those who were able to remain in their homes.”

8:05

Individualism in the United States in comparison to the emphasis on the group in other countries globally provides an extremely different environment that many are not used to.

The Partners Healthcare Organization expresses that this American pull from group dependence “can affect the boundaries placed on personal relationships.”

There is also the association between individualism and wealth within the U.S. The same article discussing the identifiers of a “bad neighborhood” , reolink.com, lists “people talking loudly in the street about their daily personal life” as a sign of living in a bad neighborhood.

The importance of individualism in America accompanied with the difficulty of language barriers and prejudices create a whirlwind of isolation for many immigrants coming to the United States

9:08.

This loss of community is a shared experience by many of those who need to relocate after the result of some sort of Injustice or disaster.

Evidently, the communities who are confronted with the need for relocation most often are those with less societal privilege or wealth to be able to remain where they are safely and comfortably.

An overwhelming majority of people who will experience this isolation and loss of group identity are individuals who are not white, wealthy, able-bodied, and heterosexual.

A CDC report health effects of loneliness highlights “loneliness among vulnerable adults including immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender LGBT population; minorities; victims of Elder abuse.”

In closing i’d like to highlight that the difficult decision of whether or not leaving your community in search of a potentially better future is complex and multifaceted.

10:02

While it is the dream of so many African Americans and other POC to experience the more privileged life that hasn't been accessible previously, communities that have developed in spite of hardship are held up by a web of closely connected and sometimes multi-generational relationships.

A choice like this is so far from a simple desire to move for the basis of change.

Here we are talking about safety, privilege, and potentially being ousted by a new community.

There is also the question about what it means for a so-called “bad neighborhood” to lose members of the community who are an important part of the support system.

But then again,

If you have the chance to have a better job, education, or more financial stability, why not take the chance that so many are never afforded?

10:48

Thank you for watching and like my auntie says, “have a blessed day”.