“That Place They’re Rebuilding”: Investment and Hope in Chicago’s Englewood Neighborhood

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Abstract

Englewood is a Chicago neighborhood known widely for its violence, but significantly less so for its rich culture of community organizing. In order to better understand Englewood, identify its struggles and successes, and formulate thoughtful policy solutions, this paper uses qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and document analysis to provide an account of Englewood today through residents' eyes. This develops a cyclical understanding of how disinvestment contributes to poverty and violence, and how investment helps re-establish Englewood as a thriving community. Interviewees believed negative "place tropes" adversely impact the neighborhood, but also shared stories of hope and growth. Developing this complex understanding of Englewood helps to combat harmful stereotypes and guide analyses of how policies to improve areas like Englewood can succeed through community insight and support. These policy recommendations are gathered together through a shared theme: combating disinvestment and hopelessness by investing in Englewood, recognizing community successes, and addressing continuing inequities.

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Introduction

"If you don't live here, you go home after your work is done...I still live here."

-Englewood Resident

For decades, community members and policymakers alike have tried to understand and improve urban areas struggling with high rates of violence and poverty. Such areas are generally characterized by crumbling infrastructure, widespread economic hardship, and reputations as "bad" or "rough" neighborhoods. These conditions can exact a hard-hitting and long-lasting toll on their residents' wellbeing, raise serious concerns about citywide public safety that discourage tourism and inflate law enforcement costs, and deprive cities like Chicago of billions of dollars in lost wages and educational potential (Butler et. al 2015; McCarthy 2017; Metropolitan Planning Council 2018). Additionally, the fact that many of Chicago's "worst" neighborhoods are primarily home to low-income Black communities reflects dismayingly persistent levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation maintained by the city's long history of discriminatory practices in both the public and private sectors (Metropolitan Planning Council 2018).

Policy approaches to the problems faced by these neighborhoods have included everything from improving policing methods to investing in community colleges, but despite many successes, public concern over the violence remains high. After a series of years in which the Chicago gun murder rate climbed and remained well past the national average, a frenzy of media articles centered on these areas perpetuated violence-centric monikers like "Chi-Raq": a portmanteau of "Chicago" and "Iraq" that likens the city to a literal war zone (Daily Beast 2014).

By focusing so acutely on their violence, these portrayals often ignore the myriad, ongoing attempts to improve these areas and help to publicly establish "place tropes" of these neighborhoods as overwhelmingly dangerous and begging for a silver bullet, 21st-century policy fix (Chicago Tribune 2015).

Although Englewood has seen an impressive influx of community organizing and resident activism since the early 2000s, when it was targeted by the Local Initiatives Support Commission (LISC)[1] for improvement, it remains notorious for its continued struggle with high levels of violence and poverty (RoadSnacks 2018; Chicago Tribune 2017; LISC Chicago 2019). This is evidenced by media portrayals like *Chi-Raq,* a controversial 2015 movie about gang violence that was set and filmed in Englewood, which represent the "rough hood" trope of Chicago's entire South Side to which many Americans still subscribe. Meanwhile, the positive impact of hyper-local improvement efforts, such as LISC's Englewood Quality of Life Plans (EQLPs) and projects advanced by the Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.), has remained well-known only to a subsection of its residents, and virtually unknown to those who live and work beyond the neighborhood's boundaries. Since identifying problems and proposing solutions are crucial steps in policy formation, the public perception of an area necessarily influences how policymakers respond to its needs. Fittingly, common unawareness of Englewood's ongoing attempts to address its issues, in conjunction with its national infamy as a violent place, may contribute to public and policymaker frustration with the area, encouraging unhelpful or simplistic suggestions that do not take into account the reality of the current situation.

[1]LISC describes itself as "one of the largest organizations supporting projects to revitalize communities and bring greater economic opportunity to residents." (LISC website, February 2019)

One example is a widely circulated tweet from President Donald Trump in January of 2017, in which he cited Chicago's murder rate and threatened to "send in the Feds" in order to fix the "carnage" (Twitter.com 2017; Washington Post 2017). Despite pushback from criminal justice policy experts and local aldermen, many of whom condemned this unsophisticated "tough on crime" approach to a complex issue, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel responded to the tweet by suggesting in interviews that the city would indeed benefit from federal law enforcement involvement (NBC Chicago 2017; Vox 2017). In this case as in others, a lack of community awareness and familiarity with resident perspectives can contribute to an incomplete or incorrect understanding of the problem, which in turn may invite ineffective or even harmful policy attempts to address it (NPR 2018).

This paper attempts to expose and address this gap between bottom-up community efforts and misguided top-down policies by providing a snapshot account of community organizing and neighborhood improvement in present-day Englewood. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and fifteen in-depth resident interviews, which focused on residents' perspectives of neighborhood issues and efforts such as the aforementioned LISC EQLPs and their implementation through partner organizations. The EQLPs represent a collection of efforts by residents, businesspeople, politicians, and other stakeholders to raise Englewood residents' quality of life by targeting the following areas for improvement: education and youth, health and wellness, public safety, jobs and economic development, and housing. The first plan was developed between 2003-2005 and implemented from 2005-2015; the second plan was developed in 2016 and is currently in the midst of its own realization (LISC Chicago website 2019). The second plan in particular has relied heavily on R.A.G.E, which was formed in 2011, to organize Englewood residents and

harness their collective will towards community improvement. In the last fifteen years, both of these resident-influenced and partially resident-funded EQLPs have aimed to engage actors from across the board in the Englewood community, often through the establishment of new resident-based organizations and community spaces (LISC Chicago 2019).

Exploring the efforts and views of residents, particularly those involved in community organizing in Englewood, enriches our understanding of how community-based activism and neighborhood improvement plans impact not only Chicago violence and crime, but potentially many other complex policy issues today, such as how best to address the racism and classism that persist in *de facto* segregated cities like Chicago. As those working in academia and policy theorize about how to make inner-city neighborhoods better places to live and work, we have not heard nearly enough from urban area residents themselves about what they believe to be the major problems plaguing their communities, what residents themselves are doing to address them, and what, if any, other kinds of outside resources are necessary for community-based efforts to succeed. Englewood residents are those most impacted by policy changes to their neighborhood, and they are also experts on their own community and its needs. As community activist and Englewood pastor Jonathan Brooks writes in his recent book, *Church Forsaken,* "the people with the problems are the people with the solutions." (Brooks 2018).

While there are important limitations to qualitative interviews that may limit the ability to draw policy conclusions based solely on respondents' personal experiences, speaking with neighborhood residents and organizers adds a crucial richness to the debate about local struggles. In addition to highlighting and understanding community-based efforts at neighborhood improvement, this research also identifies other, outside methods that community members

believe will be effective at reducing violence and poverty within their communities. This analysis of Englewood residents' opinions on their own neighborhood aims to enrich the body of scholarly research that addresses the problems within these urban environments, and may prove valuable when applied to areas besides Englewood that are struggling with similar problems, such as many of the United States' poorest urban areas. Drawing on the literature on community organizing, attempting to understand residents' own perceptions of how neighborhood issues may be socially constructed through involvement in and presence of community groups is an important first step to unpacking the ways that community organizing begins to transform neighborhoods into cohesive and effective communities (Brady 2012; Lavoie 2012).

Over nine months attending community meetings, spending time in public spaces, and listening to residents' opinions about their neighborhood, I have attempted to build a qualitative basis for beginning to explore the following empirical questions:

- How do Englewood residents perceive of their neighborhood, particularly its struggles and assets?
- How do local, resident-run community groups impact the Englewood community?
- How do Englewood residents believe neighborhood issues, especially those which require outside resources or policy measures to address, are best approached?

This paper constructs a broad context to the perceived impact of long-term disinvestment by understanding how social phenomena are initially constructed as policy "problems" within a particular environment, and how they may be countered by investment and community

empowerment. Englewood is by all accounts a scarred neighborhood struggling with serious issues of poverty, joblessness, urban decay, and often horrific violence, but it is also a thriving community whose residents are held together by ironclad bonds of kinship and faith in addition to shared physical space and neighborhood interests. Importantly for my project, Englewood is a welcoming and vibrant space whose people are often willing to share bits of their lives with a stranger. In the words of one resident: "Get away from the stigma of Englewood as a bad place. Instead, call it 'Englewood, that place they're rebuilding.'"

Background: Demographics and Community Organizing

Located on the South Side of Chicago, about a 15-minute drive from the Loop, the neighborhood of Englewood as defined by this paper includes the area bounded by Garfield Avenue to the North, 75th Street to the South, Western Avenue to the West, and the Dan Ryan Expressway to the East.[2] It contains approximately 60,000-70,000 residents, 95%-98% of whom are Black[3] (Statistical Atlas 2019; AreaVibes 2019). With a median household income of ~$28,000 (about half of the median household income of Chicago as a whole), Englewood struggles with a high poverty rate, with some estimates placing 40-60% of the neighborhood's households below the poverty line (Marketplace 2013; CBS Chicago 2014). Its high rates of

[2] For the purposes of this paper, this definition of Englewood contains two adjacent neighborhoods, West Englewood and Englewood, which have similar demographics and populations and share much of their socioeconomic and political history. See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation of the relationship between these two areas.

[3] Throughout this paper, I use both of the terms "Black" and "African-American." This is a conscious choice that reflects the varied terminology used by Englewood residents themselves to describe their communities.

unemployment and violent crime as compared to the rest of the city play a significant role in its frequently negative media portrayals; Englewood is regularly referred to as one of Chicago's "worst," "most dangerous," or "most violent" neighborhoods, and was ranked Chicago's 3rd most violent neighborhood in 2018 by local blog ChicagoNow.[4] (CityLab 2019; WGN 2013; ChicagoNow 2018).

Englewood is also a tight-knit community with strong familial ties; from one block to the next, it is not uncommon to find cousins, grown siblings, or other relatives all living within the neighborhood. Even when individuals are not related by blood, some may share enough else with others in the area that they refer to them as "family" nonetheless, such as one woman who refers to another woman with the same last name but no blood relation as her cousin, and a man who speaks fondly of the unrelated older woman who helped raise him as his "adopted grandmother." Additionally, many residents have roots in the neighborhood that span multiple generations; many of the older residents remember fondly the bustling Englewood of the mid-20th century.

Today, this close community is struggling—often successfully—against many acutely localized ills, including high levels of gun violence and crime, fraught community-police relationships, fractured political representation, and the absence of crucial resources like community grocery stores, mental health facilities, and green spaces. Over the last two decades of the EQLP, many of what would become some of the neighborhood's central community organizations were founded, including, notably, the Resident Association of Greater Englewood, or R.A.G.E., and Teamwork Englewood. After celebrating the first plan's 10-year anniversary in

[4] Out of 77 total neighborhoods.

2015, Teamwork Englewood reassessed the neighborhood's situation, and a second, revised EQLP was launched in early 2016 (LISC Chicago).

Founded in 2010, R.A.G.E is a grassroots organization whose membership and leadership is composed primarily of Englewood residents determined to create positive change in their neighborhood. Aside from their substantial involvement in the LISC Englewood Quality of Life Plan (explained further below), R.A.G.E. and its 300-plus members attempt primarily to create safe, welcoming spaces by hosting events at which community members can come together to share and receive information. Two such events include "So Fresh Saturdays," biweekly summer events that take place in community parks, and "Village Meetings," bimonthly year-round gatherings which invite anyone interested to come and learn about, contribute to, and get involved in the community.

Teamwork Englewood is another crucial local organization that deals primarily in identifying and financing promising community improvement projects. A product of the first Quality of Life Plan, this group was founded in 2003 and has grown to become one of the most influential nonprofit organizations in Englewood, providing fiscal support for many of the neighborhood's local groups, including R.A.G.E., and maintaining an ongoing network of community projects that helps track the Quality of Life Plan's progress. Many of the organizations described in this paper rely on fiscal support or coordination efforts from Teamwork Englewood, although their generally behind-the-scenes operation can be subtle.

The second EQLP enlisted R.A.G.E. to engage residents on task forces for its different issue areas, while continuing to rely on the strong community network and fiscal support provided by Teamwork Englewood. The plan remains underway, so its full efficacy is yet to be

seen. Although these two groups' origins may appear dissimilar on the surface, a crucial likeness is their common reliance on resident-driven engagement—a similarity that several residents claimed makes their EQLP implementation and other community activity successful.

Englewood's Rich History: A Timeline of the 20th Century

In order to better understand Englewood in present-day, this paper lays out a brief timeline tracking the neighborhood's historical transformation. Many of the issues plaguing Englewood today can be directly traced back to a highly racialized, far-reaching record of disinvestment and structural violence against Englewood's Black community, which is explored in depth below.

Pre-1950s: White Immigrants

Originally a working and middle-class immigrant neighborhood, Englewood remained overwhelmingly white until the 1950s. Because many of the neighborhood's first White immigrant residents were Irish, German, and Polish, Catholic and Protestant churches appeared throughout Englewood; many remain features in the neighborhood's physical and religious landscape today. The intersection at 63rd and Halsted became especially famous as a bustling shopping center, attracting customers from all over and reportedly serving as the second-busiest commercial district in Chicago. As business in Englewood flourished, real estate values rose and the neighborhood prospered. However, racially restrictive housing covenants prevented many

Black families from moving into the neighborhood until they were struck down by courts in the late 1940s. (Encyclopedia of Chicago 2019).

1950s-1980s: White Flight and Decline

As more African-Americans moved into the Englewood area in the following decades, over 50,000 White residents left, drastically changing the neighborhood's racial makeup. Between 1930 and 1980, Englewood's population changed from 98% White to less than 5% (NBC Chicago 2013). As White Englewood residents fled to the suburbs, taking resources and business with them, bankers sold properties to incoming Black residents at inflated prices, and despite the end of racial housing covenants, redlining and other discriminatory policies prevented Black home ownership from fully taking root in the area (Home Ownership Matters 2018; The Atlantic 2018). Many church congregants moved away and only returned to worship on Sundays, leaving their sanctuaries silent and empty for most of the week. The shopping center at 63rd and Halsted, once bustling, grew shabby and crumbling after many of its key businesses closed their doors and moved to other parts of the city.

1980s-Present: Black Flight, Injustice, and Mistrust

Throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Englewood residents have been plagued by continuing disinvestment and abuse, leading to an influx of crime and violence that has encouraged thousands to leave the neighborhood and the City of Chicago as a whole (Curbed 2018). In this "Black Flight," Englewood's population plummeted by almost half between 1980

and 2010. (Zangs 2014). As commercial districts in the area struggled and failed to stay afloat after White Flight, jobs grew scarce and poverty spread among many residents unable to find work.

Violent crime surged, accompanied by brutal and racially unjust Chicago Police crackdowns that often did little to improve public safety but instead terrorized Englewood residents, who learned to fear CPD officers. In 1994, a group of four Englewood teenagers now known as the "Englewood Four" were tortured by police and coerced into confessing to a murder of which they were later proven innocent. In 2017 and with DNA exoneration and supporting testimony from a former prosecutor on the case, the city finally approved a $31 million settlement for the men, who had each been wrongfully imprisoned for decades (Chicago Sun Times 2017). Although it was one of the most widely publicized and drew attention for its eventual, enormous settlement, the case of the "Englewood Four" was only one of many documented police brutality cases in Englewood and other South Side communities during this period, including a reign of torture by infamous CPD Commander Jon Burge (New York Times 2018). Today, the Chicago Torture Justice Center stands in the heart of Englewood on 63rd Street, working to support the community as it struggles to heal from this abuse. But in the summer of 2018, as I began my fieldwork, the Chicago Police was criticized again for its Englewood "Bait Truck" scandal[5], which community members and activists complained constituted entrapment and further weakened the "fragile trust" between police and the community.

[5] Police filled vehicles with expensive basketball shoes and then left them parked near basketball courts in the neighborhood as part of a sting operation, explained further here: https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/09/us/chicago-bait-trucks-trnd/index.html

Methodology

To address the research questions posed, this paper uses data from author-conducted qualitative interviews and ethnographic observation, supplemented by document analysis. I conducted fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with past and current Englewood residents. In addition to traveling to Englewood to conduct eleven of these interviews within its geographic boundaries, I also spent approximately 30 hours otherwise engaged in the Englewood community for ethnographic field work, particularly through attending organization meetings, attending church services, and participating in community events. I supplemented my qualitative data with background analyses of relevant news articles, websites, government documents, and scholarly literature about Englewood and other Chicago neighborhoods.

Qualitative Interviews with Englewood Residents

I relied on personal interviews with Englewood residents for the bulk of my primary data because of my interest in centering resident perspectives throughout my analysis. Speaking directly with members of the Englewood community provided a rich source of firsthand data about their subjective experiences with and relations to their neighborhood—a perspective which has often been ignored in policy discussions about low-income and structurally disadvantaged areas. The subjectivity of individuals' responses to open-ended questions provides important context for understanding many of the complexities of Englewood's assets and challenges. The data from these interviews helped to build a foundational narrative for my background research

and analysis, and can be used to identify potential future areas of inquiry into neighborhood issues and policy.

As an outsider to the local community, I employed a variety of tactics to first identify and recruit potential interviewees, including reaching out to well-known residents via social media, vocally announcing my study at community meetings and gathering interested parties' contact information, and making small talk in public neighborhood spaces. Often, the physical proximity of my fieldwork in Englewood helped connect me with residents who were interested in speaking with me; I found that those who were very involved in the community organizing scene were likely to attend neighborhood events and use neighborhood spaces, and were often eager to speak about their community. However, my primary recruitment method was snowball sampling, which I utilized by asking interview participants to identify and connect me with others in their networks who might be interested in speaking with me.

My interview respondents were a diverse group of adults who either lived in Englewood at the time of interview, and/or those who had previously lived there for a significant length of time. Twelve of fifteen interview participants provided detailed demographic information. Their average age was fifty years old**.** 94% identified their race as Black or African-American, and 13% as other races. 26% of respondents were male and 74% were female. 60% said they owned a home within the neighborhood boundaries at the time of interview, while 40% said they did not. Most were involved with community organizing of some sort.[6] Interviewee demographics and their community organizing involvement may have significantly influenced the findings of

[6] It is difficult to strictly delineate between those who were or were not involved in community organizing, as interviewees' involvement covered a huge range: from hearing about local community groups, to attending meetings, to volunteering for events, to even co-founding or founding their own community organizations. There was only one interviewee who had never been directly involved with community organizing projects of any sort in the neighborhood.

this paper, which should be understood as representing mostly community organizer perspectives, and cannot be considered representative of the average Englewood resident. See Appendix B for more information about population demographics and their potential significance.

Most interviews were audio recorded[7] and ranged in length from approximately 30 to 90 minutes each. I obtained IRB approval for this process and provided each interview participant with a waiver of consent/project information sheet immediately prior to the interview. Responses were kept confidential and de-identified before being quoted in this paper. I conducted the majority of my interviews within Englewood[8], and although I used the same interview guide to add structure to all interviews, many interviews ended up diverging greatly from the guide as I adjusted my questions to better suit individuals' knowledge and responses.[9] I transcribed all recorded interviews, and worked off of notes from the non-recorded interviews. For my final qualitative analysis, I gathered all transcriptions and notes and identified patterns of similar responses for each topic, then coded them by question and response type to create an aggregated data set that I believe represents the observations made by my interviewees. At times, responses were used to indicate necessary areas of background research to contextualize my findings; for example, participants' interest in home ownership led me to investigate the history of redlining.

Ethnographic Observation

[7] Three of the fifteen total interviews were not audio-recorded due to participant comfort levels or the impromptu nature of the talk. For these three interviews and all others, I took extensive notes, which were used in lieu of transcripts to quote participants.
[8] Eleven interviews were conducted in Englewood, three elsewhere in Chicago outside the Englewood boundaries, and one over the phone.
[9] See Appendix C for a copy of the interview guide and the questions it contained.

Between July 2018 and March 2019, I logged approximately 30 hours of ethnographic observation in Englewood public spaces and at Englewood-focused public forums. I found that this time was necessary to help contextualize my understanding of the neighborhood's geography, resources, and community areas; in addition, it was often through my physical presence in the neighborhood that I was able to recruit interview participants. As noted above, much of my observational time in Englewood was spent as follows: sitting and working in local coffee shops, attending community organization meetings held in churches and public schools, volunteering at a weekday community event focused on restorative justice, observing aldermanic candidate forums for the 2019 aldermanic races in wards that contain parts of Englewood, visiting the 7th district police station, and sitting in on religious services in and around the community.

Additionally, I made strong efforts to conduct my interviews within the Englewood boundaries, in order to help put interviewees at ease and signal that I valued the physical community spaces about which I was writing. Many interviewees met with me in their homes or workplaces, which included several Englewood-based community organizations. My takeaways from this data collection method are woven throughout this paper in the form of anecdotes and snippets, and have greatly enriched my understanding of the issues and potential solutions presented here. Regardless, this paper represents a subjective analysis which necessarily reflects my own biases and position as a researcher from outside the community. See Appendix D for further discussion of my position as a researcher and its implications.

Document Analysis

To support my understanding of Englewood, I analyzed related media articles, documentation of community initiatives, community organization websites, and scholarly literature. Particularly noteworthy documents were the LISC Englewood Quality of Life Plans (EQLPs), which helped contextualize and frame my understanding of how community-driven efforts have aimed to improve the neighborhood over the past several decades. Understanding these efforts added recent historical context about the neighborhood's development and progress, and informed my understanding of how residents and community organizers portray and view their neighborhood.

I referenced social science literature relevant to my project material and incorporated it into my final analysis. Analyzing literature on collective efficacy and community organizing helped inform my understanding of how researchers and universities have traditionally portrayed Englewood and other demographically similar neighborhoods, and of how academics have traditionally positioned themselves in relation to these communities. This self-aware approach was of special interest, as policymakers and other stakeholders have often relied heavily on academic literature as a reference point when attempting to enact policies meant to "improve" Englewood and other low-income communities of color. In addition, the University of Chicago in particular has a long and dismal history of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the residents of South Side communities neighboring its own[10] (Chicago Maroon 2017). This paper challenges the existing body of literature and academic community to critically examine its role in

[10] And something with which I am also intimately familiar after four years as a University of Chicago student.

neighborhood-level policy issues, and to encourage the incorporation of neighborhood residents' views in the research process.

Findings: Investment and Disinvestment in Englewood

My interviews spanned a wide variety of topics according to respondents' knowledge and interests, but I was able to identify one central theme threaded throughout each individual's conception of Englewood: a cycle of investment and disinvestment in the community. Residents generally believed that many of Englewood's most serious problems could be explained by the neighborhood's abuse and neglect at the hands of policymakers, residents, local government, the media, and the police. The areas for these patterns most often described by residents, explored in depth below, include: redlining and anti-homeownership policies, abusive policing, political disenfranchisement, lack of meaningful investment by local faith communities, removal of or lack of access to neighborhood resources, and overly negative media portrayals. All residents expressed a belief that Englewood needs better responsiveness and transparency from political entities in charge of allocating resources for public projects such as infrastructure, schools, and medical facilities. For ease of reading, these findings have been organized into seven thematic sections below.

Similarly, although the specifics of their ideas about how to improve the neighborhood varied, many residents voiced a conviction that encouraging investment—particularly resident-centered investment—in the community was the surest way to challenge the cycle of negativity and violence. As one resident said: "To me, and to most everybody here in

Englewood, the gun violence is just the absolute deadly symptom of the disinvestment. And we cannot create programs or solutions to only address gun violence, we have to invest in what created it."

However, these findings are sometimes complicated by individual incentives, particularly the tension between an individual's desire to support her community, and a competing desire to escape its many struggles and seek out a better place to live. A classic example of this are the parents who live in an area with poor public schools and choose to homeschool their children or send them to private school rather than contend with subpar public education; when faced with frustrating choices such as these, it is often difficult to balance individual interests with those of the broader community. This paper acknowledges the potential stickiness, or hypocrisy, of encouraging members of communities who have been repeatedly failed by those in power to continue investing in their communities and hoping for a better future. There is no easy answer to this dilemma, but it should be borne in mind, particularly in the final data section regarding "hopelessness" and Englewood's population loss. See Appendix E for a discussion of other issues and areas for further research.

Challenging the Redlining Legacy: Home Ownership and Housing

"When you get housing, that leads you to deal with education, safety, food access, poverty, jobs, transportation...everything centers around housing."

-Englewood Resident

Redlining served to prevent African-American families in Chicago from investing in their neighborhoods by purchasing property and building wealth; its effects can be seen even decades later in today's dismally low rates of home ownership in Englewood (Home Ownership Matters 2018). Just 30% of Englewood residents own their homes—much lower than the national average of about 65%, and considerably lower than the percentage of Chicago's white households who own their homes: 74% (R.A.G.E. website 2019; Crain's Chicago Business 2018). As one interviewee explained, this problem is deeply intergenerational because children not only lack the potential to inherit their parents' property—they also lack passed-down knowledge of how to be a homeowner: "You don't just wake up and know how to purchase a home...if you rented all your life and your parents rented and whatever, nobody teaches you that." For those facing these barriers to buying a home, renting affordable and high-quality housing in Englewood can be challenging, as several residents testified to rising rent prices and lack of available units. Interviewees referenced these challenges as one of the key neighborhood issues upon which many others rest. As one resident put it:

"I think housing is crucial. We have to figure out what to do with all these abandoned buildings and vacant lots. Because even if people begin to see the neighborhood as a place to invest, if there's no place to live, it doesn't really matter."

Many residents believed that the lack of home ownership not only perpetuates barriers to wealth-building in the form of property as inter-generational wealth, but also removes the powerful incentives for neighborhood improvement that go along with being a homeowner in a local community. Property owners have a vested interest in improving their neighborhood to raise property values; renters may not share those incentives. Residents were keenly aware of this, as one explained in reference to home ownership: "when you own something, you treat it differently...the level of stewardship changes when ownership is involved." This idea of "stewardship" is essential: long-term home owners who work and raise their families in the area are more likely to care deeply about neighborhood resources like schools, grocery stores, and transportation than landlords who have no personal stake in the community. As another resident explained, "Communities are stable when people own property, feel responsible for it, and therefore take care of not only their property but all that is around it."

Interviewees worried about the impact of outside businesses and investors, "people with money that don't care," who continue to buy property in Englewood. Some may allow buildings to fall into disrepair and then opt for demolition rather than remodeling, leading to more vacant lots and thus reducing the quantity of affordable housing (Rodkin 2017). One resident stated that many of Englewood's landlords, even those who own multiple properties in the neighborhood, live outside its boundaries and often belong to different racial and socioeconomic groups than the average Englewood resident. She believed that, unlike a local landlord who might be neighbors with her tenants and thus more likely to forge a personal connection, "if you're an absentee landlord, your primary interest is money and not anything else." If these landlords have little interest in preserving the community's current population, then it is possible that some of their

lower-income tenants would not be able to afford a potential rent increase, and could subsequently face a higher risk of being priced out of the area if land values rise significantly. Another resident remarked that her mortgage payment was lower than what some of her neighbors paid each month in rent, referencing a friend who had had to move several times because of inflated rents.

Residents' views were split on whether Englewood faces imminent gentrification; one dismissed concerns by pointing to research that shows majority-Black neighborhoods tend not to gentrify in Chicago, but another adamantly maintained that "it's only a matter of when, not if, Black people are going to be pushed out of Englewood" (Demby 2014). The particulars of Englewood's potential for gentrification are beyond the scope of this project; however, it is important to note that some residents feared losing their homes as a result of unsustainable neighborhood improvement attempts, and hoped that investing in property could help prevent this.

While many community organizers dreamed of greatly increasing Englewood's rates of home ownership in the long term, the broader goal of addressing the neighborhood's housing problems encompassed a variety of approaches. Although some interviewees explicitly viewed home ownership as a way to inspire residents' investment in the neighborhood, many also acknowledged this potential in long-term renters as well, who may face similar incentives to care about their surroundings. Several of the residents interviewed for this paper were in the process of buying homes or other property in Englewood, and many had already become homeowners. At two R.A.G.E. meetings I attended, I observed local bank representatives who advertised access to credit for residents interested in pursuing a mortgage. Several community members

with backgrounds in real estate and finance shared their plans to remodel existing apartment buildings or build new ones, which will offer affordable, Englewood-resident-owned rental units for those who cannot afford to or are not interested in buying a home. Alongside neighborhood beautification efforts (explored in a following section), those fighting for high-quality housing and increased home ownership in Englewood hope to change the area's urban landscape and simultaneously make it a better place to live.

Healing the Hurt: Police and the Community[11]

"I still fear the police, and I shouldn't...We should see them as they're intended to be, you know, an entity to serve and protect."

-Englewood Resident

As touched on earlier in this paper, the relationship between the Chicago Police Department and members of low-income Black communities like Englewood has been strained for years due to the CPD's long history of abuse and corruption (broadly exemplified by the 2017 Department of Justice Report condemning many of their practices); accordingly, today the CPD and its officers are deeply mistrusted by many residents. As Englewood struggled with high rates of violent crime throughout the end of the 20th century, the city regularly responded by increasing the area's police presence and encouraging a "tough on crime" attitude; however,

[11] See Appendix B for discussion of potential age/generational differences.

these strategies did little to ensure that the police officers who were assigned to work in Englewood or similar neighborhoods were well-trained, conscientious, or personally invested in the safety of individual residents. Especially bad or apathetic police officers were often cited by interviewees as contributing to the cycle of police harm, including one resident who expressed his belief that although 95% of police officers might be average or great at their jobs, the remaining 5% that are "rotten" easily spoil the overall police-community relationship. He explained this using the following metaphor:

"So if you have a gallon of milk, and you pour a cup out and put the gallon back in the fridge, but you leave that cup out for three hot days, it'll spoil...If you pour that cup back into that gallon, it's all spoiled. So...now the community, every time they see blue, they see the spoil. They don't know if you're a good cop or a bad cop."

While some interviewees reported having no personal negative experiences with the police in Englewood, several others recounted times that they had personally seen or experienced police brutality and corruption. One young man who grew up in Englewood called the police "crooked," and explained that they illegally broke into his grandfather's home to steal valuables on the pretense of searching for illegal contraband. A mother said that she had grown disillusioned and frustrated with the police after coming home one afternoon to hear from her fifteen-year-old son that two CPD officers had choked him on their porch—apparently because the boy had said something rude to one of them. When she and her son went to the police station to file a complaint against the officer, she described how her case "fell through the cracks"

because, although several neighbors claimed to have seen the event, police intimidation had scared them off from making a formal statement supporting her son's accusation about the encounter. She discussed her fear of and frustration with the police in the following terms:

"I fear my kids becoming a victim of a police officer who had a bad day, or a police officer who feels like they are above the law...I fear that just as much as I fear them becoming a victim of somebody trying to rob them and it turning bad, or somebody trying to carjack them. I fear the police just as much as I fear somebody else out there doing something they shouldn't be doing. And it shouldn't be like that...if I had a problem in my home, I wouldn't be so quick to call the police, because I worry that I might lose one of my kids instead of getting help. And I shouldn't feel like that as a parent of young Black men."

Even residents who had not experienced this extreme sort of brutality from particular officers expressed dissatisfaction with the Englewood police as a whole for other reasons, such as that they often took a long time to respond to calls or were rude during traffic stops. One resident voiced her frustration that "officers feel like they can tear down your sense of self" by cursing and yelling, while yet another described her annoyance at once watching an officer text and drive while patrolling her block—a minor violation that irritated her nonetheless because she "[felt] that everyone should be held to the same standard" under the law. These bad behaviors reflect the Chicago Police Department's longstanding failure to invest time and energy into understanding and building positive relationships with the communities it polices. Understandably, many of the interviewed residents who had had negative experiences with the

police hoped for improved police accountability procedures to stop bad behaviors or weed out "spoiled" officers before they became an issue.

On a broader scale, though, several residents also hoped that strengthened police-community relations could in and of themselves help decrease incidents of police brutality that were more reflective of widespread, unconscious racial bias and less of individual bad officers. This is supported by social psychological research that investigates the impact of implicit racial bias on policing (Spencer, Charbonneau, & Glaser 2016). One resident explained her belief that "[police] are so quick to pull their guns out because they're scared," and hoped that more interactions with community members would help teach officers, particularly White officers or others from cultural backgrounds different than most Englewood residents, not to fear the community. Two lifelong Englewood residents expressed a desire for more Black police officers, particularly those "raised in Black neighborhoods," to address this cultural disconnect. Finally, one interviewee emphasized how internalized anxiety and trauma from police work may influence police violence:

"[Police officers] see so much: murder, abandoned houses, all this blood…and that can mess with your mind a lot…So it's not like you go out and think 'Oh, today I'm going to kill somebody,' but in your mind, you're thinking all these things, thinking about what you've seen…so there's no telling what you're gonna do."

Other residents hoped that a stronger community-police relationship could not only help decrease brutality, but also increase the department's efficacy at fighting crime. With better knowledge of the community and its leaders, police could more effectively identify and address

neighborhood tensions before they rise to violence or require criminal justice responses. As one resident explained, "we wanted to have a relationship where [a police officer is] not just somebody coming on the block to arrest people." This was seen as particularly necessary to address the especially strained relationship between police and young people in Englewood; one respondent also expressed her hope that if police were more familiar with and personally invested in their community, they might be more willing to work out personalized, "community" solutions that do not involve arresting youth for minor offenses and funneling them into the justice system. These opinions are supported by many in the law enforcement and policy communities, who have found that stronger police-community relationships, including a focus on police flexibility, can help improve police efficacy and decrease crime (Lawrence & McCarthy 2013). Although several respondents voiced an opinion that Englewood needed more police officers or stronger police involvement to help address the neighborhood's high crime pockets, most also acknowledged the issues of police violence or apathy, and added the caveat that the department needs to first drastically improve its relationship with the community in order to be effective.

Some interviewees who worked directly with police through their community organizations also expressed a belief that the community-police relationship has shown promising improvement in recent years after deliberate work by the police and local organizers. One local organization, founded by a resident who lost both a daughter and a grandson to gun violence, teaches Englewood children to play chess and hosts tournaments where they play against police officers; its mission is to strengthen local kids' critical thinking skills while simultaneously building positive relationships between youth and police. There's also the

Englewood Police Youth Baseball League, which organizes teams of neighborhood children to play against each other, while police officers serve as coaches and mentors (DNAInfo Chicago 2017).

Throughout my time in the neighborhood, I noted several uniformed police officers attending R.A.G.E. meetings and chatting with residents, who seemed to welcome their presence; in addition, a quick visit to the 7th District's official website revealed that as of March 2019, they have been retweeting R.A.G.E. Tweets and publishing schedules of upcoming beat meeting alongside invitations for community members to attend. And several respondents mentioned that the police district commander in particular has done a good job at building positive police-community relations over the past few years. Given these encouraging steps forward, it is possible that the Chicago Police Department is on its way towards healing the hurt done to the Englewood community; however, judging by residents' all-too-common stories of mistrust and abuse, there is still a very long way to go. This paper was written in the midst of the 2018 CPD Consent Decree, so additional top-down changes to Chicago policing, including an entire section about "community policing," will likely impact this issue at the neighborhood level as well. As one community organizer and longtime resident put it, the police are "just another organization [in Englewood] that we have to deal with...We have to hold them accountable, support them when they need it, and work with them as well, but at the same time challenge the system that's corrupt."

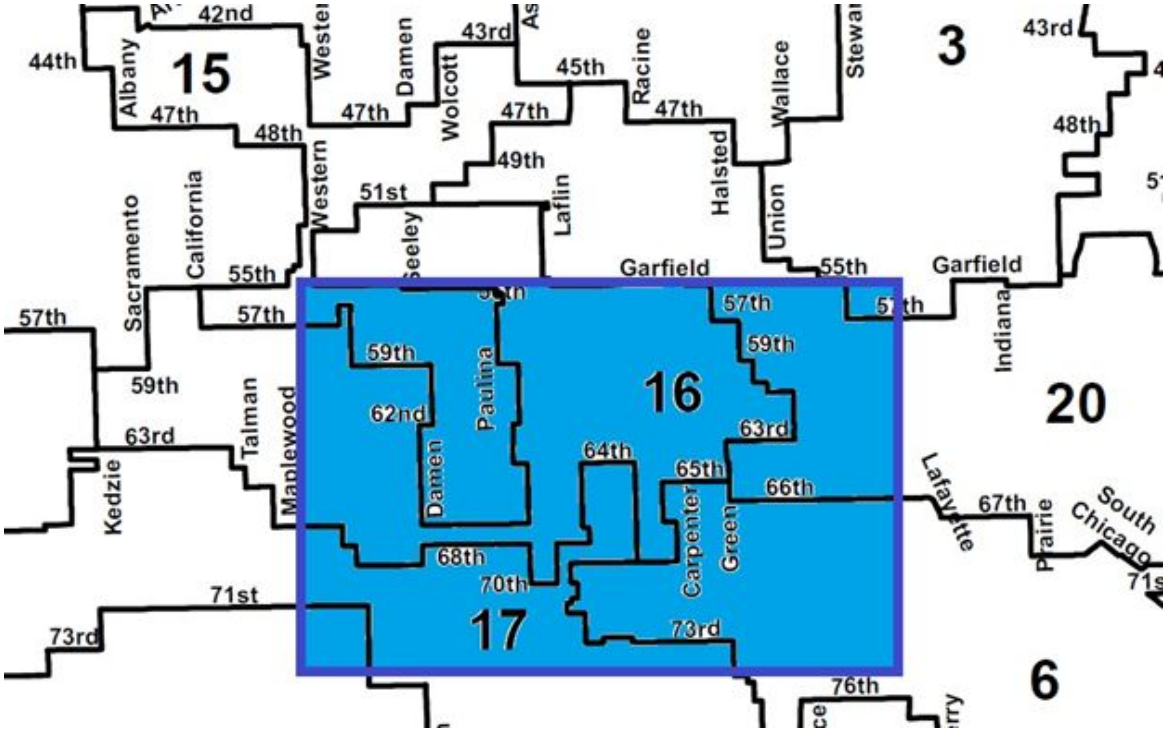
Political Representation: Fractured Wards and Frustration

"If we have five to six aldermen, how do we collectively get some unified information? It is a mess. It's difficult to become an informed resident."

-Englewood Resident

Several interviewees, particularly those who were heavily involved in community organizing, voiced concerns about Englewood residents' ability to organize, civically engage, and access city resources and public information. One explanation for this may be that although Englewood has one of the largest neighborhood populations in Chicago, it does not have one aldermanic ward to politically unify its residents (Statistical Atlas 2019). In fact, Englewood has been split into at least five wards for decades; currently, although it does contain most of the 16th Ward within its boundaries, significant portions of the neighborhood are also claimed by the 6th, 15th, 17th, 18th, and 20th Wards, with another small piece belonging to the 3rd (Chicago Election Board 2012). Over time, Englewood's politically stronger neighbors have grown their own power bases by carving district lines to include chunks of Englewood's population, in turn leaving the bulk of the area systematically neglected, represented by different aldermen from one block to the next (James Lewis, as quoted in South Side Weekly 2019). Only one of the six current aldermen is from Englewood, and most of the wards do not have offices in Englewood, forcing residents who live in a part of the neighborhood claimed by another area's ward to travel outside their neighborhood in order to access their local representatives (South Side Weekly 2019). One community organizer complained that, because there are so many wards and because

their distributions are so convoluted throughout the neighborhood, even politically savvy residents who try to contact their local representatives, perhaps to obtain voting information or request city services, often run into the immediate barrier of not knowing *which* of the six Englewood alderman to call. This confusion is represented in the diagram below, which maps Englewood's neighborhood boundaries (in blue) onto the following Chicago Board of Elections Ward Map from 2012:



However, even when residents are able to navigate ward confusion and identify their aldermen, or organize through shared interests, several interviewees explained that this "chopped-up" districting dilutes Englewood's political power by spreading its residents out to form minorities in different wards, thereby making it difficult for them to leverage their voting power and demand resources. As one resident put it, "We could not get anything solved if

residents in one ward wanted to solve something, because that alderman only has so much of Englewood, and no alderman has a large enough piece of Englewood for us to all rally behind." This concern has been validated and explored in recent research by University of Chicago sociologist Robert Vargas, who connected divided aldermanic wards in a different Chicago neighborhood with decreased local political power and subsequently, decreased access to social services and higher violent crime (Vargas 2016). Recent media articles have also attempted to address this problem of fractured aldermanic wards, using it as an example of hyperlocal gerrymandering that disadvantages Englewood residents in comparison to those of other Chicago neighborhoods (South Side Weekly 2019). Several residents also connected their struggle to secure city funding for development projects in Englewood, particularly TIF (tax-increment-fund) money, with their lack of high quality, unified political representation.

This political disenfranchisement sometimes leads to far-reaching and tangible decreases in residents' quality of life, particularly because of the massive influence wielded by individual Chicago aldermen within their wards. One Englewood transplant related two major instances in which she felt failed by her local government: once, when a sewer underneath her basement ruptured, flooding her house and alleyway after city inspectors failed to maintain it properly, and a second when she was charged $500 a year for water (much more than she had paid in her previous neighborhood) because the city had not informed her that her house did not have a water meter, or that she would have pay the higher flat rate because she had not called to request one be put in. A recent WBEZ/American Public Media story from February 2019 revealed that Englewood has the second-highest number of water shutoffs in Chicago in the last ten years—often for nonpayment of exorbitant water bills—indicating that this problem likely

impacts Englewood residents beyond the few interviewed for this paper (Zamudio 2019). The same resident expressed her disappointment in the city government in the following quote:

"It's like we are a forgotten people over here, in that sense that we don't exist, and we are not worthy of certain things...There's not enough being done to represent us, or represent the neighborhoods in that way."[12]

Within this frustrating political landscape, R.A.G.E and other community organizations have attempted to supplement the shortcomings of local government by, as one R.A.G.E. leader interviewed explained, "providing the service of information, and also giving residents an opportunity to discuss, plan and implement how they want to respond to that information they receive." After its founding in 2010, R.A.G.E. began hosting candidate forums and partnering with citywide get-out-the-vote programs in an attempt to help Englewood residents be more informed voters in aldermanic and other elections. Today, R.A.G.E. boasts a base membership of over 300 residents and continues to connect them with opportunities to make a difference in their community, notably by directing them to Task Forces for the second Englewood Quality of Life Plan. Most of the residents interviewed for this paper were aware of R.A.G.E., and those who had attended or volunteered for their events often spoke highly of the organization's impact on the community as well as their personal involvement in it. One particularly involved R.A.G.E.

[12] Others described this connection between governmental neglect and self-worth in racial terms; one longtime resident complained that a friend who lived near a city-owned vacant lot had to "change her voice to sound like a white woman" in order to get a timely response when she called the local government to request they maintain the trees and cut the grass. This relationship will be explored further in the following sections.

member spoke passionately about how she believes R.A.G.E. helps organize and thus politically empower Englewood residents:

"R.A.G.E. is a group of people in a community that are tired of sitting back and watching our neighborhood be neglected for years and years. We finally said, look...we want what's owed to us, and we're gonna let you know that we're here. You can't continue to ignore us...We have a voice and we're using our voice to get people to pay attention to what's going on in our community...We just need the politicians to do what they know they're supposed to be doing for [the community.]"

Another noteworthy group working in this arena is the Englewood Political Task Force (EPTF), which has been running voters' education campaigns and disseminating election information since its founding in 2003, as well as providing social services and coordinating anti-violence programs to further empower residents. One interviewee who works with the EPTF described his work as "anything we can do to empower our community...We're dedicated to being heard...and we need good elected officials." He also credited the group and its co-founder, Hal Baskin, with helping him realize his own political ambition, saying, "I never thought I would see my face on posters saying 'Vote for me for state representative.'"

But regardless of how well these organizations may manage to increase civic engagement, as long as Englewood remains a victim of fractured aldermanic wards, they will be unable to completely fill the gap between residents and their elected officials. Interviewees expressed near-universal agreement that in order for Englewood to continue to grow, residents

need better access to elected officials who will represent their interests; and as aforementioned, a crucial part of this is reconsidering aldermanic ward lines that currently keep the neighborhood "chopped up" and disenfranchised. One politically active interviewee explained Englewood's struggle for representation in the following terms:

"I believe it is the responsibility of the community residents to lead the way in seeing development happen in their communities, but not to the neglect of the local government and local politicians. We're not supposed to be doing their jobs for them, we're not supposed to be letting them off the hook...They need to spend more time listening to the local residents who have the problems, because we will have the solutions...we're on the ground, we're the ones living here, we're the ones who experience what's happening here on a daily basis, so we are the experts."

Reimagining Faith: Relationships Beyond Charity

"Our places guide us. They guide us in how we should live, how we should think, how we should respond to our neighbors, and how we should represent our God to people of faith. But if you don't have a real connection to your place, then I'm not sure you're truly living out your faith to its full potential."

-Englewood Resident

In part due to its history as a Protestant and Catholic immigrant community, churches of all kinds are ubiquitous in Englewood. Short an official count, estimates place the number of churches in the neighborhood in the two or three hundreds (R.A.G.E. website 2019). Although many interviewees described themselves as religious and regularly attended services, they simultaneously expressed discontent with the way Englewood's faith communities engage with their surroundings, describing many of these churches as isolationist and exclusionary. Interviewees were frustrated by the fact that often, congregants and pastors who attend church in the neighborhood do not live in the area or spend time in Englewood beyond attending services, which they believe prevents them from being wholly invested in the local community. One interviewee explained her feelings in the following terms:

"I think that everyone who's in Englewood should have a stake in Englewood, and it shouldn't just be a place you come to worship on Sundays…the neighborhood should know the pastors of the churches, the churches should be doing something for the neighborhood that they're in."

Other residents expressed frustration at seeing many sanctuaries closed during the week and surrounded by "intimidating" locked gates. As one resident explained, "kids are walking to school seeing chains and gates on doors," rather than welcoming community spaces. Interviewees saw this abundance of isolated churches as a problem for the neighborhood not only because they desired stronger community engagement from churches and their congregations, but also because faith-based organizations are exempt from many taxes and therefore do not

generate the same financial benefits for the community as commercial endeavors (Brooks 2018). This dilemma is particularly salient in the case of Englewood's many "storefront churches," which occupy buildings that were designed for and originally housed businesses. Residents were frustrated with churches that they believed benefited from their spaces in Englewood but did not do enough to give back to the community; one remarked skeptically, "There's no need to have a church on every block, which leads me to believe that it's more a business than a worship place."

When churches did attempt to give back through various forms of charity, some residents perceived their efforts as shallow at best, or self-serving at worst. One interviewee summed up her own exasperation with local churches who are absent from the community most of the time and only arrange food drives during the holiday season by asking, "But then what about the rest of the year?" Another expressed deep-seated pessimism towards groups who ostensibly wanted to "do good" in the neighborhood, explaining her view that pastors and churches had "used" Englewood in the past to raise their own charitable profiles without investing meaningfully in the community.

Englewood-based pastor and community activist Jonathan Brooks underscores this tension between churches and communities like Englewood in the following excerpt from his book, *Church Forsaken: Practicing Presence in Neglected Neighborhoods:*

"There is a shortage of community ownership and genuine church partnership resulting in community transformation. The church often exists in these communities either as fortresses built to keep the struggles of the community on the outside or as patronizing social-service entities prescribing answers for a community without ever listening." (*Church Forsaken, p 15*)

Brooks continues on to discuss how churches can become more engaged with their surroundings by opening their spaces to local residents, fostering relationships with community leaders, and approaching social service provision in a way that is less prescriptive and more responsive to the demonstrated needs of the community. In other words, working *with* communities rather than *for* them. Within his own church, Brooks has realized these goals by allowing residents to use the space for parties and events, coordinating a neighborhood healthy food co-op, working closely with R.A.G.E. leadership, and connecting congregants and church staff with local volunteering opportunities, such as tutoring with a nearby elementary school's after-school program. In fact, one of the community organizing meetings I attended was held in the church. Interviewees largely endorsed these strategies and others that endeavor to help Englewood's churches connect with and invest in the community.

Coming Back Alive: Street-Level Decay, Development, and Lack of Public Resources

"I should have a right to live in a community that has grocery stores, that has mental health facilities, that has other stores that we can shop in, restaurants—so many other things that others take for granted…we have not been given our fair share of resources. We have not."

-Englewood Resident

When driving or walking through Englewood, one might be struck by the sudden and stark diversity of its spaces: dilapidated buildings line many blocks, then give way to bustling commercial areas and vibrant murals. On several blocks in the Eastern section of the neighborhood near the modern St. Bernard Hospital, beautiful old houses form what locals call the Englewood "suburbs." But elsewhere in the area, streets are lined with rows of one-or two-family greystones interspersed with abandoned buildings and countless vacant lots—some kept tidy and converted into beautiful outdoor picnic areas and gardens, others overgrown and strewn with trash.

Many of Englewood's physical spaces convey incredible beauty, warmth, and resilience, but many others betray its history of neglect and structural violence. The area has seen several impressive developments in the past several years, including the recently-revamped Englewood Square at 63rd and Halsted, whose development was subsidized by TIF money and which sports a brand-new Whole Foods, Starbucks, and Chipotle alongside several other popular businesses (Crain's Chicago Business 2014). But prior to this development, Englewood was commonly classified as a food desert, and still has very few places where residents can buy healthy foods and fresh produce without leaving their neighborhood (Chicago Reporter 2018). Other streets are characterized by an abundance of liquor and corner stores, selling largely "junk" foods through barred windows and buzz-in doors that make them less than welcoming to any potential visitors. On 63rd Street one will find the beautiful new community college, Kennedy King, which represents a $192 million investment from 2005 and draws thousands of students with its acclaimed culinary arts program (Public Building Commission of Chicago 2005). Conversely,

due in part to constant funding crises and recent school closures, local K-12 students must often travel outside their own neighborhood to access a quality public education, particularly after a rash of Englewood school closings in recent years (Chalkbeat 2019).

Residents were in near-universal agreement that Englewood still bears these scars of long-term physical disinvestment, which is compounded by previously explored factors like lack of home ownership and inadequate political representation that has been unwilling or unable to fight for city resources. Some residents believed that strict city and local regulations discourage new investment in the area, referring to cumbersome "red tape" that, in combination with Englewood's struggles with real estate and its violent reputation, may scare off private developers. One resident complained that the city has often "only made it harder to create" in Englewood, while another stated that "they do a lot of tearing down, but they don't do any building up." Several interviewees described their feelings of disillusionment with Chicago's history of resource allocation, which has often focused on developing successful, largely White business districts at the expense of Black communities like Englewood (Chicago Reader 2017). In the words of one resident, "When African-American communities need something, we have to march, we have to fight…and if downtown wants something, they just get it." Not only does "living in lack," as one interviewee put it, harm the community itself, but it also discourages tourism and does little to challenge the negative stereotypes about the area.

Many interviewees expressed wishes for public spaces and amenities that are lacking in Englewood but commonplace in many more well-resourced neighborhoods, such as sit-down restaurants, mental health facilities, green spaces, strong public schools, yoga studios, fitness clubs, movie theaters, and a community center. More grocery stores were particularly coveted by

interviewees, who in general had positive feelings about the new Whole Foods[13] and its ability to finally provide people with high-quality and organic groceries, but who also desired a more reasonably priced option, like Jewel-Osco or Food 4 Less, for the many residents with tighter budgets. One interviewee articulated a problematic racial element of Englewood's commercial scene, which is dominated by non-Black developers and business owners, and hoped for the future creation of more African-American and locally-owned businesses:

"If you have a 95% African-American community, but no African-American businesses, there's something wrong there…I think we, in Englewood as a whole, need to start investing in our own community."

Finally, a resident of eight years explained that although she loved the new Englewood Square and was optimistic about further development, she retained a sense of overall disappointment with what she referred to as Englewood's lack of "options" for leisure and a high quality of life. However, the same interviewee also described upcoming plans to use her creative background in sewing and "upcycled" fashion to open a resale boutique in Englewood, which she hopes will also eventually offer classes on fashion or entrepreneurship. Another resident and organizer dreamed of someday realizing her vision for a neighborhood gallery space, which residents could use as a multipurpose art center for community gatherings and local exhibitions. "You make these efforts to change where you live, contrary to what people may think or say,"

[13] Jokingly referred to by its colloquial nickname, "Whole Paycheck," by several interviewees.

one interviewee said, recognizing the constant energy residents and community groups put towards improving their neighborhood.

To list just a few ways that Englewood community organizations and individuals are working to address physical blight and lack of public resources: community groups and their volunteers organize neighborhood cleanup projects to tackle areas with lots of litter (many), build benches for picnic areas (Chicago Cares), offer free after-school programming to teach kids how to volunteer (LaTanya and the Youth of Englewood) or how to play chess (Not Before My Parents), and convert empty land into urban farms that serve as a source of both local jobs and local produce (Growing Home). Local students from Lindblom High School designed and partnered with organizations like Canaan Community Church to implement ingenious "take what you need, give what you can" food pantries that take the form of small boxes placed near community centers and kept well stocked with produce and other healthy foods. Together, groups collaborate to organize year-round events like job fairs, family fitness nights, game nights, an Englewood 5K, and a midnight bike ride.

Several residents spoke particularly highly of R.A.G.E.'s So Fresh Saturdays, the free summer events held in local parks that offer music, food, and entertainment, as well as providing a venue for residents to learn about local resources through tabling by other organizations. One interviewee explained that she learned to appreciate local parks more after visiting several near her home for the first time through So Fresh Saturdays; another said that she felt as though R.A.G.E. was "really helping Englewood come back alive" through events like these. A R.A.G.E. co-founder also connected So Fresh Saturdays and other community events with a larger push toward improved public safety, stating, "We create spaces for peace, we create

spaces for community, because that's ultimately what is lacking in the locations where gun violence occurs."

Along a similar vein of reducing blighted spaces that may provide opportunities for crime and violence, one particularly well-received city program called Large Lots has made waves since it began in Englewood in 2014. This program attempts to address the abundance of vacant lots on the South and West Sides, which are widely frowned upon by residents and city officials alike for their ugliness and tendency to attract crime and pests, by allowing people who own property on the same block as many city-owned vacant lots to purchase them for one dollar, with stipulations that each new owner will maintain and pay taxes on their property (Klinenberg 2018). A Large Lots website, maintained in part by LISC, allows users to easily see which lots are available during each sale period and offers suggestions for ways buyers can turn their lots into positive community spaces (Large Lots website 2019). Several interviewees were proud of the lots they acquired through this program, including one who turned hers into an "artist garden" with flowers and painted benches, and another whose once-empty plot now features beautiful landscaping and a roofed stage with a colorful mural backdrop. Says the latter resident of her now-revamped lot (shown below), "I just wanted it to be a beautiful space."

Before *After*

(photographs courtesy of Alvin and Tina Hammond, used with permission)

The Large Lot program is not without its challenges; most notably, its administrative guidelines do not strictly limit potential buyers to those who actually live in the neighborhood, which has led to outside developers sometimes acquiring cheap land and disrupting unofficial community gardens, or sitting on the properties for their potential future value without bothering to maintain or develop them (Chicago Magazine 2018). However, I found that Englewood residents' enthusiastic approval of this program as an opportunity to invest in their community and beautify their blocks was supported by a recently published study by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who found that the program helped foster "increased social interaction that led to a desirable sense of place and community," affirming an overall positive impact on its target areas (Stewart et al, 2019; Phys.org 2019).

In addition to these pockets of beauty among its streets, Englewood features another attraction thanks to community efforts: Kusanya Cafe, nestled across from a "you are beautiful" road art display on 69th Street. This nonprofit coffeehouse not only brews fair trade coffee

served in cardboard sleeves that proudly proclaim "Brewed in Englewood", but also lives up to its name (*kusanya* means "gathering place" in Swahili) as a catch-all community space for residents looking for somewhere to host free yoga sessions, open mics, and discussion groups. Despite struggling for five years with the neighborhood's aforementioned barriers to credit and commercial development, a board of local residents opened Kusanya in 2013; it now boasts windows without bars, walls hung with local artists' work, and a friendly, hip vibe that challenges the conception many people have of Englewood as a violent or harsh place. The café has garnered substantial positive media attention from outside the neighborhood, and boasts 4.5+ star averages for its reviews on Google and Yelp; one appreciative visitor to the Englewood hidden gem wrote the following about Kusanya in July 2018:

"Such a great atmosphere. I work construction in the seemingly hopeless neighborhood and I went in for a cup of coffee and learned so much I didn't know. The quality and the atmosphere are something you just can't find in the suburbs. I've been here 4 times since I found the place..."

-Meraj Mahmood, Google reviewer

Several interviewees also spoke of Kusanya in positive terms, including one community organizer who says he loves scheduling meetings there, as well as a local financial adviser who likes using the space to offer free money advising sessions to fellow community members.

However, although residents spoke highly of Englewood's growing number of beautiful spaces and community-provided resources, they are no substitute for the structural resources and sustainable economic development the community needs if it is to continue to thrive. In the

words of one interviewee, "We can physically clean up [the neighborhood], but we have to have some people to bring jobs over here, and that makes the difference."

Fighting Stereotypes: Anti-Blackness, "Place Tropes," and the Sensationalization of Violence

"A lot of people go off the media, and the portrayal that they have for us is just one of the worst communities in Chicago. But I tell people all the time, don't go off the media, because the media tells you one thing, and when I invite you over here, it says another…In order for you to really know Englewood, you have to be in Englewood."

-Englewood Resident

To the intense dismay of most interviewees, perhaps the most common impression of Englewood today is that it is a stereotypical 'hood consumed by violence and crime. Media coverage of Chicago's South Side neighborhoods, particularly during the turbulence of the mid-2010s, may have helped maintain this perception by focusing intently on shootings to the neglect of other neighborhood stories, but Englewood's particular reputation as an overwhelmingly violent place still widely prevails among many in Chicago and elsewhere. A quick 2019 Google search on the term "Englewood, Chicago" will likely bring up a plethora of news articles referencing gun violence and vandalism in the area, but few mentions of other things happening in the community. In *Church Forsaken*, Jonathan Brooks writes about seeing a

newspaper headline that bore the sarcastic headline "A Good Day in Englewood," accompanied by a picture of a woman with a bloody face who had been involved in a domestic dispute (Brooks 2018). One interviewee also recalled an incident where she heard three women outside a children's center in Englewood begin to laugh after one of them said "Let's get out of here before we get shot." And in late 2018, an Uber driver native to Chicago heard that I was writing about Englewood and, seemingly not joking, advised me to "wear a bulletproof vest" while I was there. Viewed altogether, these overwhelmingly negative, incomplete perceptions of the neighborhood and its residents constitute what this paper refers to as "place tropes." Place tropes act like stronger, all-consuming conglomerations of simple stereotypes (such as that Englewood is low-class, poor, violent, dirty, etc), and are so alarming because they mask the area's real struggles and perpetuate a domineering rhetoric of pure, unrelatable *otherness.*

Almost all interviewees expressed deep concerns about these tropes; for those who live in Englewood, the violence that does occur is not a joke, but it is also far from ubiquitous. As one resident explained, while the neighborhood does have high rates of murder and gun violence as compared to the rest of Chicago, "you can exist here and not have a lot of interaction with crime." Another long-term resident said, "People think we're dodging and ducking bullets all the time, but we're not…We have our issues, but there is good in Englewood." Unlike what one resident called the "stigma" of being called Chi-Raq and likened to the chaos of a war zone, gun violence in Englewood is concentrated in geographic pockets and directly affects only a small percentage of the population (CityLab 2019).

Many residents believed that by sensationalizing Englewood's struggle with gangs and guns, the media often overlooks good things that happen in the community, leading the negative

press to outweigh the positive and construct the place trope that violence is all that happens in Englewood. One resident claimed that she had never seen any positive news stories about Englewood, while another expressed his disappointed opinion that "people's worst mistakes or poorest decisions are the ones that get publicized in our neighborhood, versus all the amazing things that are happening here." Several interviewees cited their love for Englewood's "family-oriented" community, where neighbors often help each other by watching each other's children, shoveling each other's snow, and loaning needed items in a pinch. For community organizers and dedicated residents who work tirelessly to bring about positive change, this perceived lack of interest in their achievements can be frustrating, as related by one interviewee who helped organize a large, successful job fair that was never covered by local news:

"We supplied a resource in the neighborhood that was needed, and do you think the news came? Nope. You know why? Because nobody got shot. No media. Anything we do that's positive, no media."

Given the history of structural anti-Blackness that has long plagued Chicago and its treatment of neighborhoods like Englewood, it is unsurprising that some residents believed that these media portrayals contain an insidious element of racism, associating negativity with Blackness and worsening the harmful impact of stereotypes for entire low-income Black communities like Englewood. In the words of one resident:

"You just look at the news and believe that that's who we are, that we're just one definition that defines us... It's really disheartening, but that's the reality that we face every day. When you see the Black people in Englewood, there's this perception that they are all crackheads, they are all drunks, they're all this and all that. You don't know that there are families, people that got married and purchased homes. And they want the same things that you want for your children, to grow up, go to college, live where they wanna live…It's just that simple."

Another interviewee who grew up in Englewood but later moved away expressed his belief that "Black people are the most feared race"—and that this narrative of fear is only worsened when the public sees countless images of Black victims and perpetrators of violence. That media representation, especially media representation around crime, can reinforce negative racial attitudes and stereotypes without using explicitly racist language is a common concern among those working in social justice (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Benson 2017). There is also evidence indicating that negative media portrayals can have undesirable consequences for minority racial groups beyond implicit bias, an idea Mastro explores in a recent study titled "Why the Media's Role in Issues of Race and Ethnicity Should be in the Spotlight" (Mastro 2015).

Residents speculated about the local consequences of these violent stereotypes, and although several interviewees voiced different understandings about how the bad rep is bad for Englewood, they were all in agreement that negative perceptions hurt the community. In *Church Forsaken*, Brooks argues that a subtle attitude shift moves people who constantly hear about incidents of violence and despair to associate Englewood with *only* violence and despair, and eventually to believe that "something is wrong with Englewood, something is missing" (Brooks

2018). Some interviewees reported being made to feel embarrassed by where they lived, such as one resident who said the following:

"People are afraid to come here…when they find out you live in Englewood, they look at you strangely. They act like you have some kind of plague or something, just because you live in Englewood…They'll say "isn't it bad over there?" and that's the first thing they ask you."

Several residents believed that the negative stereotypes hampered the neighborhood's ability to sustain its population and attract developers or visitors; one interviewee remarked that some of her friends refused to visit her, even in the daytime, because they believed Englewood was unsafe, while another remarked that negative press "makes people not want to move here." A resident who worked for an organization that coordinates local charitable involvement for corporations stated that she originally had trouble convincing businesses to come to her neighborhood "because Englewood has such bad publicity," but that once they began coming to volunteer, "they found out that it wasn't as bad as they thought it was," and increased their involvement. Yet another interviewee expressed suspicion about the negativity surrounding South Side portrayals like Englewood's, saying:

"It's political—why does the media want to say that Chicago is a hellhole, especially the South and West sides? I think there's an agenda by this machine that wants to paint Chicago in a certain light."

Finally, one interviewee and community organizer expressed feeling as though residents who fought for change were fighting an uphill battle, because the stereotypes associated with Englewood and those who live there could imply that they are too "'hood" to be taken seriously, making it more difficult for those outside the neighborhood to empathize with and understand them:

"We always have to remember, people are watching us, and we don't wanna give them 'oh you know, they hoooood over there, fighting'…We don't want them to have that perception…we know how to sit down and have a conversation about the issues and concerns in our community without getting angry and agitated."

Along these lines, many individuals and community groups attempt to combat negative perceptions about their neighborhood, often by highlighting the "good in Englewood" or by redirecting the conversation about its issues to frame them in terms of systemic injustice rather than inhabitants' personal failings. One resident expressed optimism about the neighborhood's ongoing fight against stereotypes (speaker's emphasis noted in bold):

"It's not to dismiss the difficult parts of our community. Yes, there are issues, but there are issues in every neighborhood. The difference is that we don't get to control the narrative—or we ***used*** *to not be able to control the narrative that was perpetuated about our community. But I think we've done a great job, with R.A.G.E., and the Englewood Rising campaign, other ways, of grabbing hold of that narrative and controlling it for ourselves."*

R.A.G.E. in particular places substantial importance on this goal of "constantly shifting the narrative of Englewood," largely by advocating for more positive media stories, managing its own active social media channels meant to keep residents encouraged and informed, and elevating the voices of Englewood residents who are doing good work in the community. Some interviewees also participated in the aforementioned Englewood Rising campaign, which created public billboards and banners that show the smiling faces of Englewood residents alongside inspiring quotations that describe their visions of neighborhood positivity. Some of these banners are displayed prominently at R.A.G.E. meetings. There's also the #GoodinEnglewood campaign, which represents an effort by Englewood journalist Rashanah Baldwin to use social media and weekly radio shows broadcast by local stations at Kennedy King Community College to draw attention to the positive, "untold stories" that showcase the "inherent value" of the neighborhood and its residents (Good in Englewood website 2019).

Finally, the 2018 "Folded Map" photography project by local artist and activist Tonika Johnson—who is also a R.A.G.E. co-founder—aimed to disrupt accepted attitudes about Chicago's North-South Side opposition by connecting residents who live at opposite ends of the city (ex: 6300 S Peoria versus 6300 N Peoria). Johnson's project encouraged residents to visit each other's homes and engage in dialogue about resource disparities in their neighborhoods, then documented their experiences and conversations through photographs, videos, and maps, displaying them in an exhibit that showed Chicagoans across the city a complex narrative of how Englewood relates to Chicago as a whole. One of the interviewees who participated in the Folded Map project described her feelings about the results (speaker's emphasis noted in bold):

*"It was pretty cool. It gets people talking about the inequities that go on in the neighborhoods. You **see** it. I think people have blinders on, and they don't really look…they think that if it doesn't affect them, or their immediate surroundings, it's okay…they don't have to do anything, because that's really not their world."*

Altogether, these reflections by residents showcase their deep concern at their neighborhood being portrayed as something it is not—a war zone, a hellhole—as well as their widespread determination to empower the community by reflecting the positivity and richness that Englewood residents believe characterize the neighborhood and its community as a whole.

Defying Hopelessness: Internalization of Negativity, Escapism, and Community Resilience

"Some people have seen so many people take, that they don't believe in anyone anymore. People have an expiration date where they get tired of stuff."

-Englewood Resident

All the factors explored above can have one final, acutely personal consequence for Englewood residents as they struggle with the impact of systemic disinvestment: an

internalization of the community's trauma and history of disinvestment that invites hopelessness, escapism, and consequently population loss. As the aforementioned systems continue to cause poor conditions within Englewood, residents articulated that this contributes to an increasingly damaging effect: slowly but surely, those living within Englewood begin to internalize the place tropes, and to see Englewood as not only a *structurally deprived* place, but a *bad* place. Through these systems of disinvestment, residents see their parents denied home ownership, their sons abused by police, their population divided up to form minorities in six aldermanic wards, their churches gated and chained up to keep them out, their schools and shopping centers closed, their streets plagued by vacant lots and crumbling buildings, and their neighborhood as a whole portrayed by the media as an overwhelmingly violent ghetto.

As a result of this decades-long cycle of violence, several interviewees described the formation of harmful internalized beliefs: that they should be afraid, that they should attempt to escape, and that their community does not matter. By extension, as products of a community that does not matter, they and their neighbors do not matter either. One resident explained this feeling in the following terms:

"I live in a neighborhood that people see as a ghetto, or as nothing. They see me as nothing because I live in Englewood."

According to one R.A.G.E. co-founder, since Englewood may not provide enough opportunities for residents to receive unified, accurate information or organize towards positive goals, the negativity can take over, leading residents to become discouraged, leave the

neighborhood, or act out in frustration. Brooks writes in *Church Forsaken* that "the consequence of a stigmatized narrative is that the inhabitants of the place begin to internalize the lies about themselves and the places they live" (Brooks p 119). This idea of internalized negativity is uncommon but present in literature on internalized trauma and racial oppression; one example is Pyke's attempt to understand how members of historically oppressed groups, such as many people living in low-income Black neighborhoods like Englewood, develop a sense of personal identity amidst social pressures (Pyke 2010). In constructing and relating to a shared history of racism and classism, Englewood residents internalize and may be hindered by the violence perpetrated against them; Aymer also explores how some Black men struggle with race-related trauma in the wake of police brutality that they experience themselves and see happen to others who look like them (Aymer 2016). Finally, this can be related to the more abstract idea of "stereotype threat," a psychological phenomenon in which members of negativity stereotyped groups are often found to be adversely affected after being confronted with these negative stereotypes, and whose harmful effect has been well documented on a small scale (Appel & Weber 2017).

As this cycle of disinvestment continues, interviewees exposed a dismal reality in which multiple generations of Englewood residents grow disillusioned with their bleak surroundings, seeing consistent neglect from government, apathy from neighbors, and demonization from the media, and sometimes begin to despair. Several residents believed that this in turn contributes to negative place-based behavior, particularly in children, which they explained in the following terms:

"Hopelessness comes from this neglect: when it feels as if no one cares about your place, then it also feels as if they don't care about you. Which in turn means that if you're from this place, just like me, then no one cares about you either. I can take your life, who cares?…I don't have to worry about picking up my trash off the ground, because if I hit the lottery right now, I'm moving away from Englewood. This is not a place to invest, it's a place to escape."

"The media portrayal has a lot to do with how the residents think about themselves. Kids internalize those comments they hear, and they only use their identity as an Englewood resident to prove their street cred or get in a fight."

Although many adults may not "act out" in the same ways as children or teenagers, this internalization of Englewood as a bad and dangerous place can be incredibly taxing in other ways. The interviewee quoted at the beginning of this section volunteered with R.A.G.E. and believed that the negativity sometimes made it difficult to recruit others to community organizing, as people grew weary of fighting against the tide of disinvestment. Other residents described the frustration of "living in fear" and constantly being discouraged, such as one woman who complained that there "always seemed to be some level of hopelessness and desperation" on the streets near her home. Another R.A.G.E. member described her own internal struggle to stay positive when surrounded by so much negativity, along with her hope that community organizing will make a key difference in combating the hopelessness:

"When crime hits, or vandals, it's just like 'Why? Why stay and fight?' When you fall victim to so many other negative things in this environment…The negative stuff really takes a bite out of you, but then you feel like this is my home, I don't want to be run out. I should be able to live comfortably in my home, and I should be able to sit on the porch, I should be able to go to the park, I should be able to have my kids play in the neighborhood. Hopefully, with all these community groups, it will empower others to love their community as well, and not destroy it."

A final and powerful impact that residents linked to the cycle of disinvestment and despair is Englewood's substantial population loss, which can be viewed as an especially acute subsection of Chicago's overall population loss in recent years (the Atlantic 2018; Curbed 2018). For residents who have "given up," moving away to escape some of the dismal conditions in Englewood might seem like the only good solution, as several residents explained:

"If they're not getting resources, eventually somebody's gonna get tired and go, you know, 'I give up. I'm going back to…Arkansas, Mississippi, whatever, because we don't have anything.' It's frustrating."

Two interviewees who had moved away from Englewood after living there for extended periods of time said they wanted to "sleep better at night"—largely as a reference to the violence they experienced, but also to the hopelessness. But as one community organizer explained, as residents leave, the population loses families, which then leads to school closures, continued loss of resources, and loss of further investment. This exacerbates the cycle of negativity and may

worsen conditions for those who remain. For many of those involved in organizing work, staying to fight and defying the hopelessness is in itself an act of resistance:

"So if everyone moves away, to the suburbs or to another state, and runs from the problems that exist, then who's here to fight it?"

In a sense, the above assertions that external "hopelessness" breeds negative behavior are supported by tenets of social disorganization theory and the original, controversial "broken windows theory" of crime: that disorder begets more disorder, and that a person's surrounding environment, rather than primarily individual circumstances or personality traits, has predictive power in determining future antisocial or illegal behavior (Wilson & Kelling 1982; Higgins & Hunt 2016; Battin 2015). Social disorganization theory lost ground in mid-20th century criminology after several ineffective policy attempts to improve communities and therefore prevent crime; however, the introduction of the "collective efficacy" theory of social control as an aspect of social disorganization and as a force for change has inspired renewed interest from social science researchers and academics (Kornhauser 1979; Hipp & Wickes 2017; Carbone & McMillin 2018). It seems very reasonable, in light of supporting theories such as these, that troubled environments can inspire trouble, and that encouraging communities to self-regulate may help combat disorder and crime.

However, data gathered for this paper finds that many past applications of social disorganization theory, particularly "broken windows," have driven incomplete understandings of complex social questions that can actually further harm vulnerable communities such as

Englewood. In addition to their controversial implications about policing, place-based social disorganization theories can suffer from internalized racial bias that badly skews their implementation; for example, police officers are more likely to perceive disorder in racial minority communities, regardless of other factors (Sampson & Raudenbush 2004). Accordingly, after regarding a trash-filled vacant lot, this paper was still interested in understanding why it had become that way and how to fix it, but the answer at which this argument gradually arrived is more nuanced than one that looks to a community to identify some shared flaw that encourages littering, *a la* "broken windows" (Wilson & Kelling 1982).

Exploring the harmful social and policy factors that first help to create this kind of negative environment in places like Englewood, as detailed in the above sections, may help develop a richer understanding of how neighborhood improvement efforts can succeed. Given that abusive policing is one of the factors that residents believe contributes to a sense of hopelessness and despair, the original "broken windows" application of more rigorous policing makes little sense as a prescription in this case. If this paper contains a finding related to broken windows or social disorganization, it is that negativity begets negativity, especially in the form of internalized hopelessness, and so one prescription is hope. This inspired my shift to focus on positive factors in neighborhood revitalization, which have been less often featured in studies about hyper-local issues such as crime and poverty (Aiyers et al 2014).

Many interviewees described revived hopes, healing, and excitement for the future of Englewood as both a goal to inspire in the rest of the community as well as something they had gained from their own involvement in organizing. In other words, community organizers want to

empower others with hope as they have been empowered. One resident described her positive experiences with R.A.G.E. as follows:

"Since I've been involved with RAGE, and out doing a lot of things in the community, I think it has revived my love for the community…I make a conscious effort to go to community events, to shop in the community…anything I can do in the community, I do. That comes from being a member of RAGE, and knowing the importance of investing in our community."

Hope means different things for different residents, but all of them agreed about the growing power that residents hold, that "residents are the assets, the resources," and that hope for the future starts with them. For some, like the interviewees quoted below, this means encouraging those who are from Englewood but "succeed" outside of it to return to their roots and give back:

"I bring everything I can back here, because we need it…It's a help to bring whatever you have to offer back to your neighborhood…We've got to help one another. We have to bring whatever we've got, and we are loaded with all kinds of great things."

"Being back here has helped me to realize the resiliency, the beauty, the amount of effort that people put into making this a wonderful place to live, every single day…And that has become like my mantra now, to do everything that I positively can to help others see the neighborhood that I get to see every day."

For those with complex personal histories in the neighborhood, "giving back" might look a bit different, as this community organizer with a gang background explained:

"I was a product of the gangs, I was in a gang when I was younger. And when you look back on what you did to your community, then [you realize] it's your duty to reverse that and try to give back, try to teach the young guys not to do the things you did when you were young. You just have to give back and rebuild your community."

Others, including the R.A.G.E. member quoted below, focused on directly combating the negativity by showcasing that residents do care about each other:

"When people see the news and they see all the negative stuff, they don't think there are people in Englewood who really care. So I think that R.A.G.E. shows that we are Englewood residents, we care about Englewood, and we don't want the disparities that are going on to continue. We want positive things to happen, we want to bring positive resources to the people of Englewood. That's how I think it's empowerment."

As the following quote emphasizes, some residents believed it was particularly important for frustrated young people to see adults doing positive things in the community, like organizing community events and creating beauty from the vacant lots:

"The young people, if they don't see us doing anything then they just feel like nobody cares…We keep [hosting community events] because we know, kids are smiling out there, they're happy, they see us and they remember us from last year...so you do it for the kids, you do it for the families. You want them to know that there are good people that live in Englewood, that work in Englewood, that want Englewood to rise up and be the community that it once was….When I thought about the vacant lot [that I renovated], I thought about the kids that go to school every day, and when they pass by, what do I want them to see? Other than maybe just a beer bottle, or some cans, some garbage on the ground, I want them to look at the lot and think 'Oh my god, look at that. That is so pretty.' So a lot of times when the kids get out of school, I'll look out the window and I'll see them stopping and just looking. They're looking like 'where'd this come from? Who did this?' Because they're not expecting to see that, they're so used to just walking past vacant lots, throwing garbage down…"

Through these and all of the other positive efforts and successes described above, community organizing is undoubtedly making a difference in the Englewood community. Bolstered by Englewood's tight-knit community, residents are speaking up about injustice and combating hopelessness as it attempts to consume their neighborhood. By maintaining their essential worth and choosing to fight back, Englewood residents are proving to the outside world, and to each other, that although there is still a long way to go, they will not go down without a fight. As one resident put it, "we are the people that can change this situation, and it has to start somewhere."

Policy Recommendations

"What people have to realize is that it takes decades of neglect for a community to become hopeless, and it will take decades of reinvestment for a community to see its true potential."

-Englewood Resident

Investing in Englewood and its residents is the surest way to combat this long history of disinvestment. This analysis offers two "first-step" policy recommendations: first, the Chicago Police Department must take immediate steps to end police brutality, and the city government should critically examine its use of public funds and consider redirecting funds away from policing and towards community-based initiatives to reduce violence and poverty. Second, the City of Chicago should reassess its aldermanic wards and change the districts so that Englewood residents can politically unify.

While the findings section above explores several additional policy problems that harm Englewood and its residents, such as lack of high-quality housing and difficulty attracting economic development, these may be viewed as comprehensive symptoms of a larger problem, which this paper argues is widespread systemic disinvestment and high-reaching institutional failures to listen to or meaningfully engage with the community. First and foremost, these institutions that continue to oppress Englewood even today by perpetuating physical and political violence against the community must stop the cycle and invest in the neighborhood. For the CPD, as mentioned above, this involves working hard to end the police terrorism of Englewood

and instead support equitable systems that prioritize community input and public safety; for the City of Chicago, this involves finally providing residents with quality political representation.

For decades, the Chicago Police Department has perpetuated oppression, with its officers perpetrating systematic racism and brutality against the residents of low-income Black communities like Englewood. The necessity for Chicago Police reform, at a minimum, has been confirmed by the recent Department of Justice investigation and subsequent 2018 CPD Consent Decree, which provides a more thorough set of recommendations specific to police reform and which are somewhat in accordance with this paper's findings. In Englewood specifically, the police should begin by more rigorously enforcing departmental policies regarding accountability for officer misconduct, racial profiling, and uses of force. However, considering many residents' deep distrust of the CPD and enthusiasm for comprehensive responses to violence instead, there is also good reason to further investigate the possibility of critically reducing police presence in Englewood and subsequently directing more funding towards urgent community needs like mental health care, housing, community-based law alternatives to law enforcement, and education.

Additionally, if Englewood residents are finally empowered and able to unify under a single political entity, they may be better able to draw much-needed structural resources from the city in order to address the neighborhood's struggles with housing and work on constructing a more positive, hopeful narrative for Englewood. As community organizers stressed time and again, there is a limit to how far even a well-organized and vocal community can progress without access to its fair share of structural resources. The City of Chicago should attempt to consolidate the number of aldermanic districts that encompass parts of Englewood, so that

community members living in the area can more easily access their political representatives. This will also increase the likelihood that Englewood voters will see someone from their own neighborhood in office.

Conclusion

Englewood is a community that has been long ravaged by disinvestment and structural violence, which some interviewees connected to a sense of internalized despair that residents experience when they see their community repeatedly treated as though it does not matter. In response, residents demand structural resources, an end to institutional abuse, and a stronger political voice as first steps towards beginning the healing process. Though there is a long way to go, this process is already underway, as many successful outside investments—like the construction of Kennedy King's new campus and the private development in Englewood Square—have been generally well received by the community and appear promising.

Despite the discouragement and trauma that can weigh on those living in a disadvantaged community, residents have also defied hopelessness in countless ways by involving themselves in countless efforts to take back their neighborhood. From local housing development efforts, to political organizing and get-out-the-vote campaigns, to street-level beautification and media projects focused on sharing the good in Englewood, residents and community organizations are already working in every sphere towards revitalizing their home. Recognizing the successes of these efforts is a crucial part of combating the potential for internalized negativity and dismay about neighborhood conditions that many residents believed pushed some of their former

neighbors to seek an escape and leave the area. Each bit of meaningful investment, whether by the government, outside charities, private businesses, local community groups, or determined individual residents, moves toward changing the overall perception of Englewood and strengthening the sense of community that drives its residents to continue to fight for a better future.

"People forsook [Englewood], politically, faith-based, architecturally, as far as housing was concerned, just saying 'well, good luck.' And yet, people thrive. Neighborhoods thrive. You can't take us down. Even if you leave us to die, we'll keep popping up. And I think that's just beautiful about this neighborhood. It's a beautiful example of the human spirit."

-Englewood Resident

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APPENDIX A: Englewood and West Englewood

Working within the system of Chicago neighborhoods can invite confusion, since neighborhood boundaries are often developed colloquially and can change over time. Although "Englewood" and "West Englewood" are considered distinct community areas according to the widely used University of Chicago neighborhood designations, I chose to combine them in my analysis. Throughout this paper, the term "Englewood" includes the West Englewood section under its umbrella. West Englewood is immediately adjacent to Englewood, and the two have roughly the same Northern and Southern street boundaries.

I defined "Englewood" this way for several reasons: not only does West Englewood have population demographics similar to those of Englewood, but the two areas also share much of their histories. Social service providers and community groups often target both areas together for community engagement and service provision, and the LISC Englewood Quality of Life Plans include West Englewood within the greater Englewood area designated for analysis and improvement. Several interview respondents considered themselves "Englewood" residents regardless of whether they technically lived in West Englewood or Englewood, and one respondent stated, "Those us in Englewood don't consider [West Englewood and Englewood] two separate neighborhoods--we call it all Englewood."

When calculating neighborhood statistics that differed slightly for West Englewood and Englewood, I averaged them to approximate statistics for their combined area and population.

APPENDIX B: Population Limitations and Scope of Study

As stated, the racial breakdown of my respondents was similar to neighborhood demographics. However, other demographics differed significantly between my group of interview respondents and the neighborhood as a whole. The most potentially impactful of these differences were age and gender, which signify another possible limitation of my conclusions, as the viewpoints represented in this paper may not be representative of the Englewood population as a whole.

Age

Within my group of interview respondents who provided detailed demographic information, their median age of fifty was much higher than the median age of Englewood residents (35), indicating likely overrepresentation of older residents, and/or underrepresentation of younger residents (AreaVibes 2019). This was likely exacerbated by my choice to use snowball sampling, as residents often put me in contact with their peers of similar age. Since my study focused on community organizers in particular, this overrepresentation could also be partially explained if older adults are more likely to be involved with community organizing groups like R.A.G.E.

This age disparity is of particular interest because several respondents indicated that there is a generational disagreement between older and younger residents on several issues, particularly those surrounding policing and criminal justice. This could be in part due to the wide variety of personal experiences that individuals have had with police, potentially influenced by

each respondent's gender and age. During the course of my ethnographic observations, I also witnessed several instances of young Englewood residents expressing at community meetings that they did not feel represented, or disagreeing with common older-adult sentiments about needing more police in the neighborhood. Keeping these limitations in mind, I still believe that the findings presented in this paper are valid and useful to understanding the Englewood resident community; however, I would recommend additional research be conducted within the youth community organizing scene in order to confirm and/or supplement these questions about potential generational differences.

Gender

Women were also overrepresented amongst my interview respondents. Approximately 74% of my respondents were female, which is considerably higher than the percentage of female Englewood residents (around 54%). This could be significant, for the same reasons outlined above, if female Englewood residents have significantly different opinions about their neighborhood than male residents. It is also possible, from what I observed during my time in Englewood, that women are more likely than men to be involved in community organizing, so the fact that many of the residents I interviewed were community organizers could account for some of this imbalance.

APPENDIX C: Detailed Interview Guide

- What is "Englewood" to you? Describe your neighborhood.
- How long have you lived in Englewood? Did you grow up here?
  - (if they grew up in Englewood) What was it like growing up in Englewood? Is it different for kids growing up in Englewood today, and if so, how?
  - (if they didn't grow up in Englewood) Where did you grow up? How did you come to live in Englewood?
- What sorts of things do you like to do in your community? Where do your friends live?
- How much time would you say you spend per week in your community? This can include time spent in public parks, at block parties, at community centers, meetings, church groups, or other community spaces.
  - Do you think you spend more time in the community now than you did 2-3 years ago? *(this is when MASK was founded)*
- Are you friendly with your neighbors? How about other people in your community?
  - How did you get to know your community members? What do they have in common with you?
  - What do you and your community members not have in common?
  - Do you feel like you and your neighbors have similar worldviews/lifestyles? Why/not?
    - Give me an example of something you and your neighbors disagree about?

- ➢ Do you trust your neighbors? Why/not? What does "trust" mean to you?

- ❖ Are you part of any community organizing groups or projects? Have you ever been? Why/not?
- ❖ How much do you know about community organizing groups based in your neighborhood? How do you feel about the work they do or don't do? What is your opinion of these groups?
- ❖ What do you think are the biggest issues in Englewood today?
  - ➢ What, in your opinion, should be done about these issues?
- ❖ Parent/Child Related Questions:
  - ➢ Do you have any children? Tell me about them.
  - ➢ Who would you ask if you needed a babysitter?
  - ➢ Would you feel comfortable keeping an eye on neighborhood children?
  - ➢ Do you let your kids play outside? Why/not?
  - ➢ What do you think are the biggest obstacles you face as a mom/dad/grandparent?
  - ➢ Are there people in your neighborhood that you think would be a bad influence on your kids?
    - ■ (if yes) What steps do you take to keep your children away from bad influences?
- ❖ Describe the police in Englewood.
  - ➢ What have your experiences with them been like?
- ❖ Have you ever witnessed violence in your neighborhood? How is it a part of your everyday life?

- ➢ How do gangs affect violence in your neighborhood? Do you have a lot of interactions with gang members?
- ➢ Do you see gang members as criminals?
- ➢ Have you ever thought about moving away to avoid the violence?

- ❖ What do you wish people knew about living in Englewood?
- ❖ What kind of community would you like to see in Englewood? How would you want to be part of it?
  - ➢ Is there a community group you would join if it existed in your neighborhood?

APPENDIX D: Position As a Researcher

Some of my personal characteristics may have affected the data gathered for this project. The fact that I am a White University of Chicago student could have impacted which Englewood residents chose to speak with me at all, as well as what they actually said during interviews. My respondents, like Englewood residents, were overwhelmingly Black, and several respondents referenced my race throughout their interviews, largely to inquire about my attitudes toward Englewood or explain things particular to Black culture. Given the University's complicated history with South Side communities, my status as an unofficial University representative also could have biased respondents' answers.

Appendix E: Other Issues and Areas for Further Research

The sections above are organized around the neighborhood issues that residents described most frequently and thought of as the most crucial to Englewood's further progress. However, there were several other issues about which not enough interviewees provided data, or about which interviewees did not provide enough information to form strong narratives, but which may prove good subjects for further research into this neighborhood's issues and successes. These are mentioned only in passing or not at all elsewhere in this paper:

- Unemployment: Several residents briefly named unemployment as a major cause of poverty and crime; however, this problem can be considered under the broader umbrella of lack of structural resources and businesses in the "Coming Back Alive" section of the findings.
- School Closures: Several residents named lack of access to quality education as another significant neighborhood issue, and one was particularly concerned about Englewood's recent public school closures. However, this issue is difficult to contextualize at the time of writing, because the city has already begun the substantial investment of building a new, consolidated high school to replace the four that were closed, and several residents also reported positive feelings about this change.
- Drug addiction: Several residents described the deep harm caused by drug addiction in the Englewood community; however, they were unable to provide enough firsthand information to justify an entire section about this issue. This could be a sampling issue.

- Over-incarceration: Several residents pointed to over-incarceration and lack of re-entry services for citizens returning from incarceration as deeply problematic factors for the neighborhood. However, this area also did not provide enough firsthand input from respondents to analyze, and as another criminal justice issue, could be understood as closely related to the "Healing the Hurt" section about police violence.

Additionally, further research into residents' opinions of community organizing, particularly in Englewood, may benefit from attempting to interview teenage and young adult participants, as this paper encountered evidence that this group was involved in organizing efforts but was not represented in this paper's interview sample.

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