



## Section II: Social Disorganization Theory

## Social Disorganization Lecture Outline

### 1. Pre-history of Social Disorganization

Cartographic School of Criminology

### 2. Early Social Disorganization theorists

Thomas and Znaniecki

Park and Burgess

### 3. The Chicago School

Shaw and McKay

### 4. Modern Social Disorganization Theory

Bursik

Sampson and Groves

Bursik and Grasmik

Sampson and Wilson

### 5. Derivatives of Social Disorganization

Stark

### 6. Summary of Major Findings and Implications

# Pre-History of Social Disorganization

## Cartographic School of Criminology

First true sociological research into crime patterns using REAL research methods and statistics

Most closely associated with two researchers

L.A. J. Adolphe **Quetelet**: Belgian mathematician

Andre-Michel **Guerry**: French mathematician

# **CARTOGRAPHIC SCHOOL**

Developed social statistics for the use in studying crime and other social patterns.

Studies were conducted only in France

## **Main Research:**

Investigated the influence of social factors on the propensity to commit crime.

Social factors: population density, religious affiliation, gender, and wealth.

# **Major Findings of Cartographic School**

**Overall Crime is highest in the southern region of France.**

**Personal Crime Higher in South**

**Property Crime Higher in North**

**Personal Crime is Highest in Summer.**

**Property Crime is Highest in Winter.**

**Crime is highest amongst heterogeneous populations.**

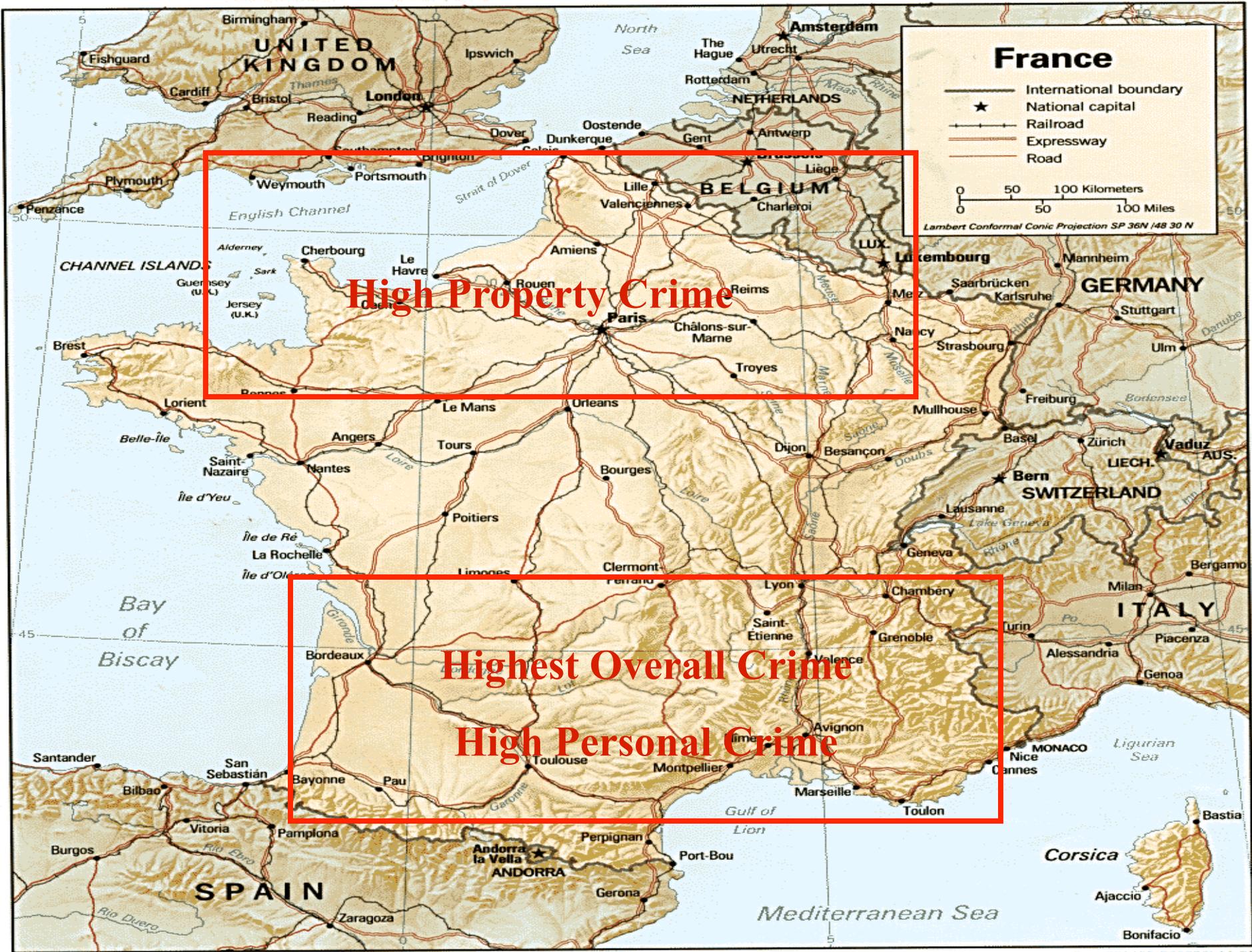
**Populations with large mix of ethnic and racial groups.**

**Crime is highest in areas with high population density.**

**Crime is highest in areas of high poverty.**

**Crime is high in areas with high amounts of uneducated individuals.**

**Crime is related to alcohol and places where drinking habits are high.**



High Property Crime

Highest Overall Crime

High Personal Crime

### France

- International boundary
- National capital
- Railroad
- Expressway
- Road

0 50 100 Kilometers  
0 50 100 Miles

Lambert Conformal Conic Projection SP 36N 148 30 N

# EARLY SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY

After the work by Quetelet and Guerry the next most important work was done by researchers at the University of Chicago.

Most of the research took place here because of two things:

1. Top school at the time.
2. Incredible change in Chicago

## Chicago in early 1900's

Growing in population at a phenomenal rate.

Growth was due largely to immigration from Europe and the South

From 1860-1910 the population doubled every 10 years

# EARLY SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY

Importantly, as with the Cartographic school, these researchers helped set the stage for the development of Social Disorganization theory through their research and theories.

## *Early Social Disorganization Theorists*

### **Thomas and Znaniecki**

The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1920)

### **Park and Burgess: **More important of the two****

The City (1925)

# Thomas and Znaniecki

“Polish Peasant in Europe and America”

## Main Concepts

Research and theories dealt with the impact of immigration on social control and deviance.

Older immigrants that moved to America were not criminal when they moved to America even when they lived in crime ridden slums.

They maintained old world traditions, customs and norms.

Second generation immigrants that were born in America had none of the old world traditions, customs or norms and had not been assimilated into new world traditions, customs and norms.

Effectively these individuals were normless and thus more likely to be criminal.

# **Importance of Thomas and Znaniecki**

**Established the idea of cultural conflicts and their importance to creating crime at the neighborhood level.**

**Crime was high because of the lack of norms in the neighborhood that act to control the activities of juveniles.**

**Those areas that had a high amount of second generation immigrants had the highest level of crime in Chicago.**

# Park and Burgess

## “The City”

### Main Concepts:

Research focused more on spatial aspects of urban settlement and patterns in which people lived within cities.

Their theories were greatly influenced by plant ecology and how natural systems developed.

Their theory was called **Human Ecology**.

Their work was grounded in the assumption that competition was the fundamental form of social interaction that determined the territorial distribution of populations in a community.

**Concentric Zones**

**Invasion, Domination, and Succession**

## Concentric Zones

There is a natural competition to occupy and control certain scarce, but highly desirable, areas within a community.

This is similar to plants and animals competing over desirable areas in nature. The strongest get the best areas.

According to **Concentric Zone Theory**, the most desirable (and expensive) land was usually in the center of a city where commercial activities were centered.

In an attempt to make a profit, others would buy up the land around this central business district in hopes of selling it for a huge profit.

In order to maximize profits, owners of the land did little to improve it, creating slums and low income housing areas.

These were areas where the newest immigrants moved owing to the low rent of the area.

## Concentric Zones Continued

Importantly, these low rent areas were characterized by high residential mobility, poverty, and low education as people moved out as soon as economically feasible.

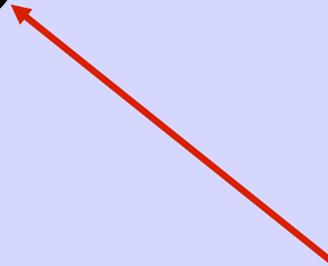
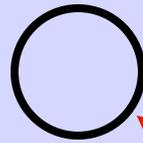
You lived in these “transition” areas only because you could not afford to live anywhere else.

In general these areas were occupied by the lowest group on the social and economic ladder.

The further away from the central business district the nicer the neighborhoods and more expensive the land.

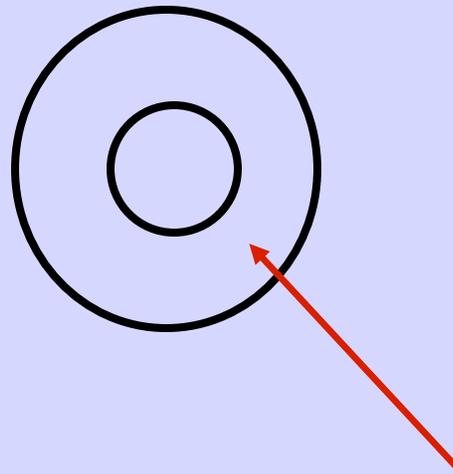
Obviously the “transition” areas had the highest **THEORIZED** crime rates, with crime decreasing the further from the city center you moved.

# Concentric Zones



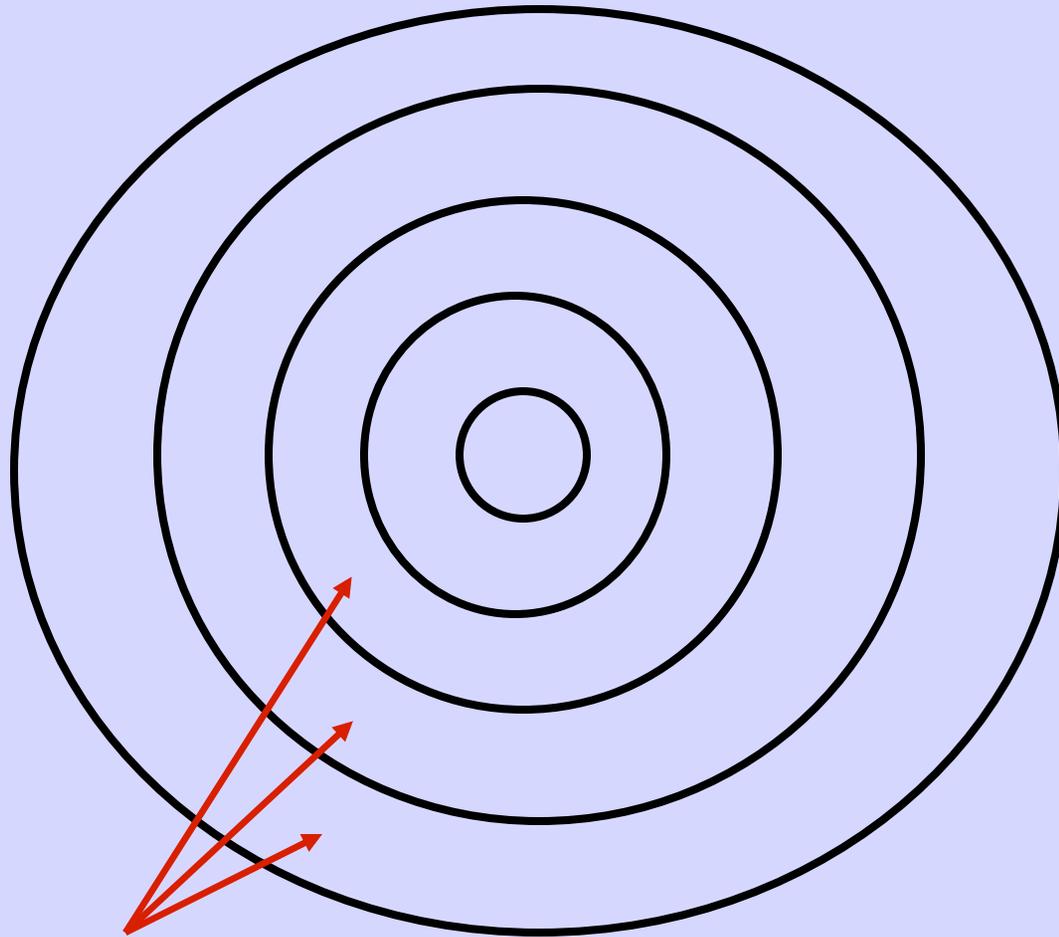
**Central Business District:** Best land in the city and most expensive.

# Concentric Zones



**Transition Area:** Slums, high residential mobility, poverty and low education.

## Concentric Zones



The further out you move from the central business district the better the neighborhoods.

# **Invasion, Domination, and Succession**

Concept borrowed also borrowed from Plant Ecology that dealt with how areas changed over time.

New plant species invade an area, dominate the original plant inhabitants and then through succession flourish.

## ***Change in Urban Areas***

**Invasion:** Immigrants move into an already established community.

**Domination:** New groups begin to “dominate” original neighborhood residents.

**Succession:** New residents become established within the neighborhood, completely supplanting original residents.

Can be for the good or harm of a neighborhoods health.

# **Influence of Early Social Disorganization Theorists**

## **Thomas and Znaniecki:**

Impact of inability to assimilate to new culture and norms on neighborhood crime levels.

Neighborhoods with high levels of second generation immigrants will have low neighborhood social controls and high crime.

## **Park and Burgess:**

Human Ecology and the competition for the best land in a community impacts settlement patterns.

Those areas closest to the central business district will be the worst areas in a city, with areas improving the further out you move.

# Classic Social Disorganization Theory

Classic Social Disorganization theory was developed by two researchers.

Clifford **Shaw** and Henry **McKay**, who began their research while working for a state social service agency.

Main research was a book named “**Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas**” published in 1942.

They were interested in how crime developed within a changing urban environment and how ecological factors impacted crime rates at the neighborhood level.

## **MAIN IDEA OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY**

**Social Disorganization links crime rates to neighborhood characteristics and the impact that these neighborhood characteristics have on a neighborhoods ability to institute social control for the prevention of criminal victimization.**

# Important Neighborhood Characteristics

## **RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY:**

High levels of people moving in and out of a neighborhood.

Residential mobility lowers a neighborhood's ability to regulate itself.

Because of the high rate of population turnover neighbors do not get a chance to know each other or build bonds with each other.

In many of these neighborhoods, residents do not care to know each other or make friends because they know they will not be in the neighborhood very long.

*Those who can move do, leaving only those who cannot afford to move to become criminals and victims.*

# Important Neighborhood Characteristics

## **MIXED LAND USE:**

Areas that have a combination of both residential and commercial land use.

Apartments and multi-family homes mixed in with commercial establishments such as fast food, liquor stores, discount stores, etc..

This mixed land use makes it difficult to regulate the neighborhood because of the large number of non-residents that come into the area.

# Important Neighborhood Characteristics

## **HETEROGENEITY:**

Neighborhoods that have a high mix of residents of different races and ethnic backgrounds..

Generally, people of these neighborhoods are less trusting of others who are of different race or ethnic groups.

In some cases there are also major cultural and language barriers.

Heterogeneity inhibits the ability of residents to work together for the common good of the neighborhood, particularly for crime reduction.

## Important Neighborhood Characteristics

### **LOW INCOME/HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT:**

Neighborhoods that have high levels of unemployed men and overall income levels that are low.

These characteristics further inhibit peoples ability to help others and encourages them to be deviant.

Income and unemployment problems help encourage crime.

## Impact of Neighborhood Characteristics

Because of these neighborhood characteristics there is poor social control, residents are uninterested in community matters and social institutions such as schools are weak and disorganized.

This allows crime to flourish and for gangs to develop in the neighborhood, residents all turn the other way, move away or in general care very little.

Crime and its norms and beliefs are then transmitted from one generation to the next through social interaction of young juveniles with older criminals.

With the general absence of supervision and community social control in the neighborhood this happens fairly easily.

Crime is merely a normal response to the disorganized social conditions of the areas.

## Location of Socially Disorganized Neighborhoods

One of the main elements of Shaw and McKays work is the idea of concentric zones and how settlement patterns impact neighborhood characteristics and thus crime levels.

Heavily influenced by Park and Burgess

Effectively Shaw and McKay were looking for some sort of pattern to the crime rates of neighborhoods and they developed this categorization scheme for the neighborhoods based on neighborhood characteristics and crime rates

## Shaw and McKays Concentric Zones

**Central Business District:** Area where main business of the city is done, almost no residential areas at all, almost completely commercial.

High crime area.

**Zone of Transition:** Most disorganized of all neighborhoods; mixed use, high residential mobility, heterogeneity, low income.

This is where immigrants would move b/c they could only afford to live here. No social control, no sense of community.

Highest crime rates in the city, regardless of who lived there race or ethnicity wise.

Consistently high crime rates over time.

## Shaw and McKays Concentric Zones

**Zone of Workingmans Homes:** More stable and residential than zone of transition.

Limited commercial land use, less heterogeneity, mobility, etc.

Lower crime rates than zone of transition.

**Zone of White Collar Workers:** Much more stable, lower residential mobility, etc..

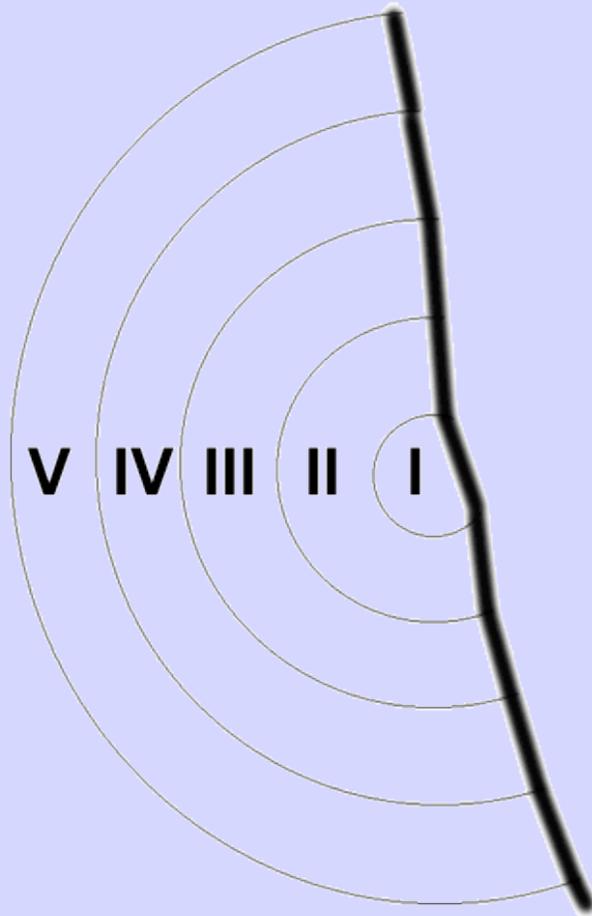
Much more social control and much less crime.

**Suburbia:** High dollar area, no residential mobility, homogeneous population, high employment, etc..

Good social control to regulate residents and keep out crime

Least crime of all zones

# Chicago's Concentric Zones



I -- The Loop (Central Business District)

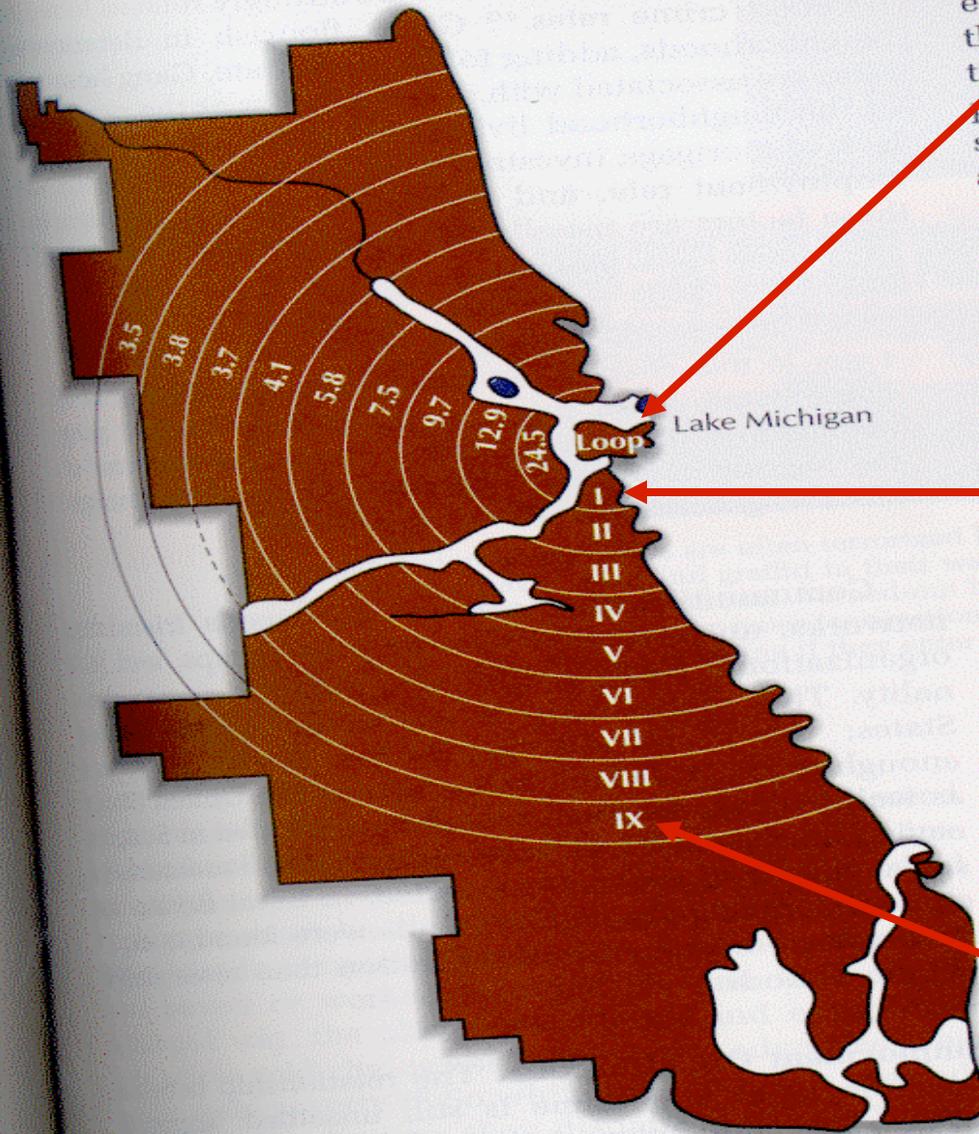
II -- Zone in Transition

III -- Zone of Working Mans' Homes

IV -- Residential Zone

V -- Commuters' Zone

Figure 7.3 Shaw and McKay's Concentric Zones Map of Chicago



Central Business District

Zone of Transition: 24.5

Suburbia: 3.5

## Social Disorganization Theory in a Nutshell

1. Neighborhood Characteristics: Residential Mobility, Mixed land use, heterogeneity, low income/unemployment.
2. These characteristics are more common in areas closer to the central business district and lessen the further out from the city you go.
3. Characteristics prevent effective social control and/or social control breaks down in these neighborhoods.
4. Crime moves in and gangs develop.
5. Criminal norms and values are transmitted from generation to generation.

Juveniles learn from older juveniles in the neighborhood

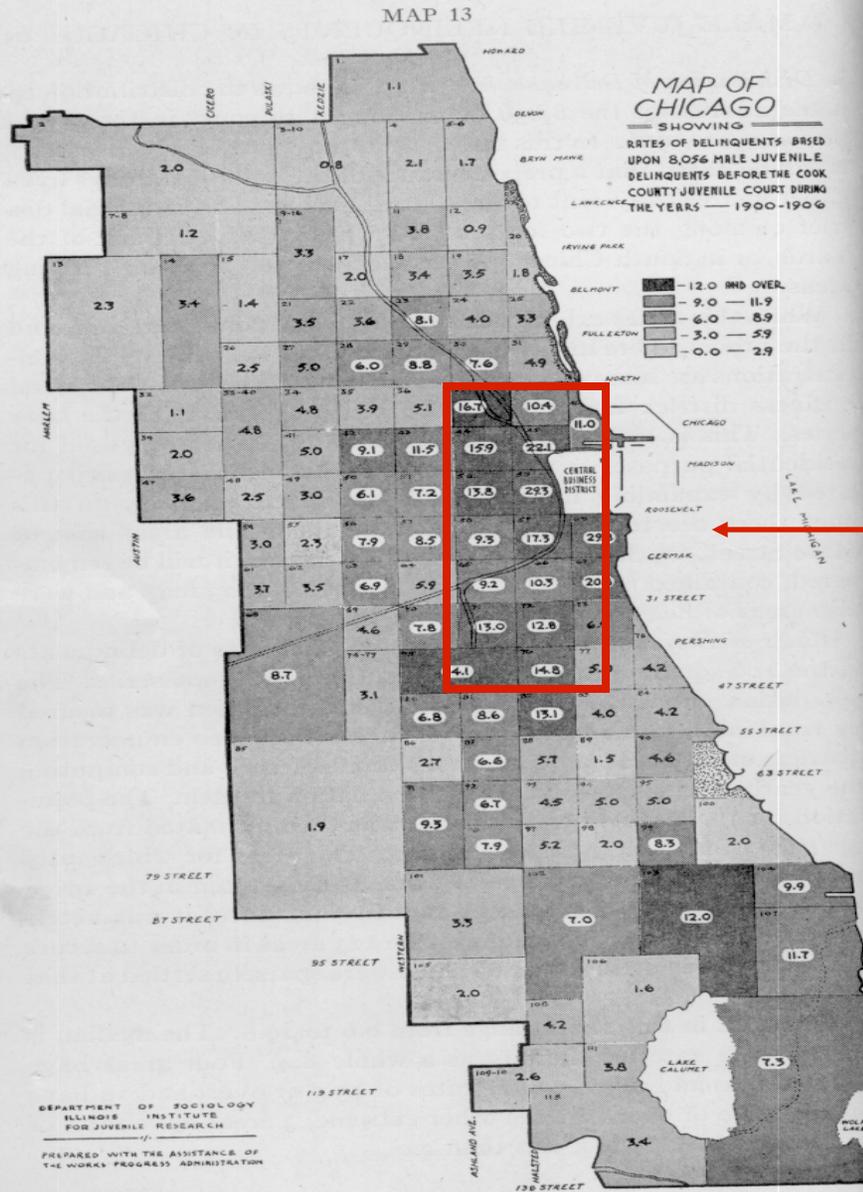
## Important Findings from Shaw and McKay Research

Research used juvenile crime rates for a 65 year time period.

High crime neighborhoods were consistent over a period of 65 years within Chicago.

Racial make-up of these different zones changed a great deal over the 65 years, however the highest crime rates were always found in the first two zones regardless of what types of groups were living there.

**\*\*Crime was seen as a normal response to the disorganized social conditions of the areas as evidenced by the stable rates of crime over time regardless of who occupied the neighborhood.**



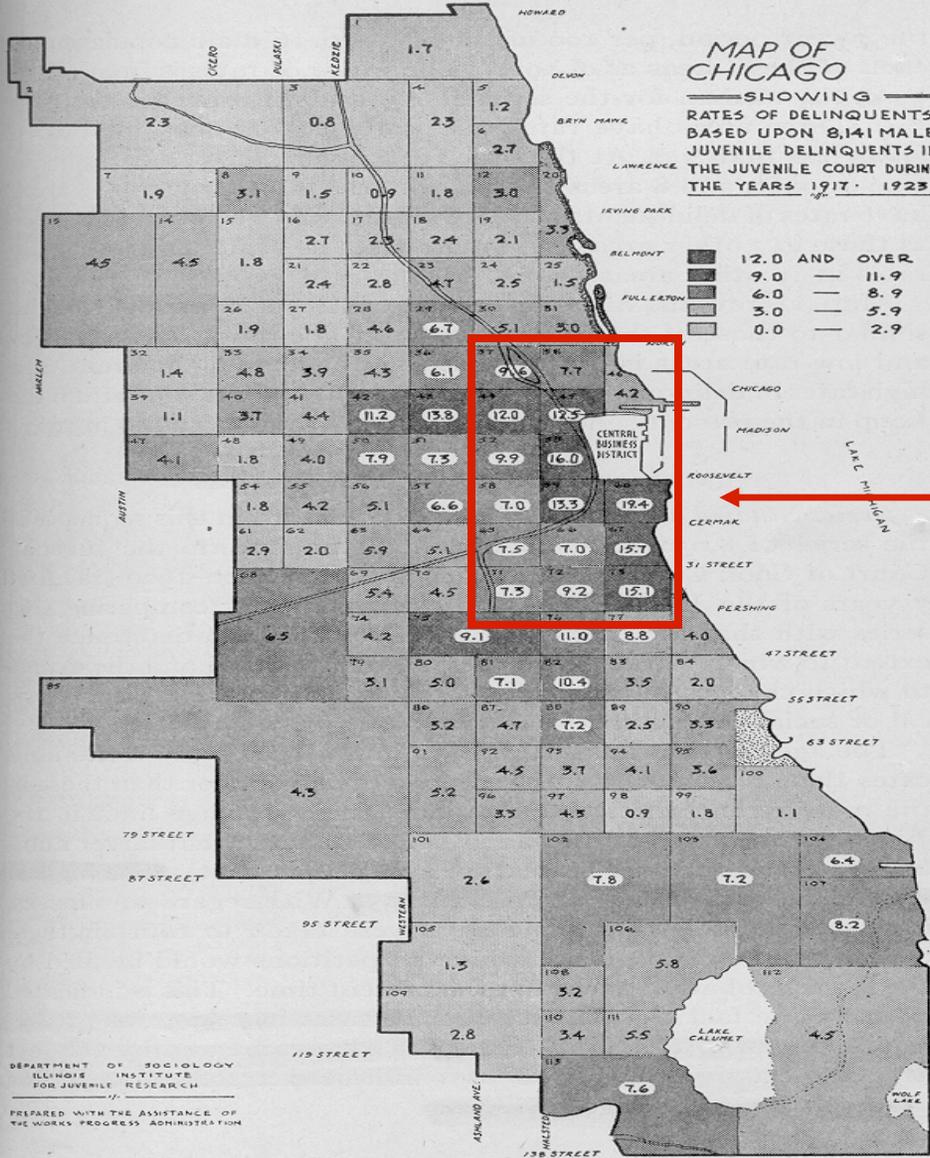
Area of Highest  
Concentration of  
Juvenile Crime

RATES OF MALE JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, CHICAGO, 1900-1906  
Juvenile Crime Rates for 1900-1906

MAP 11

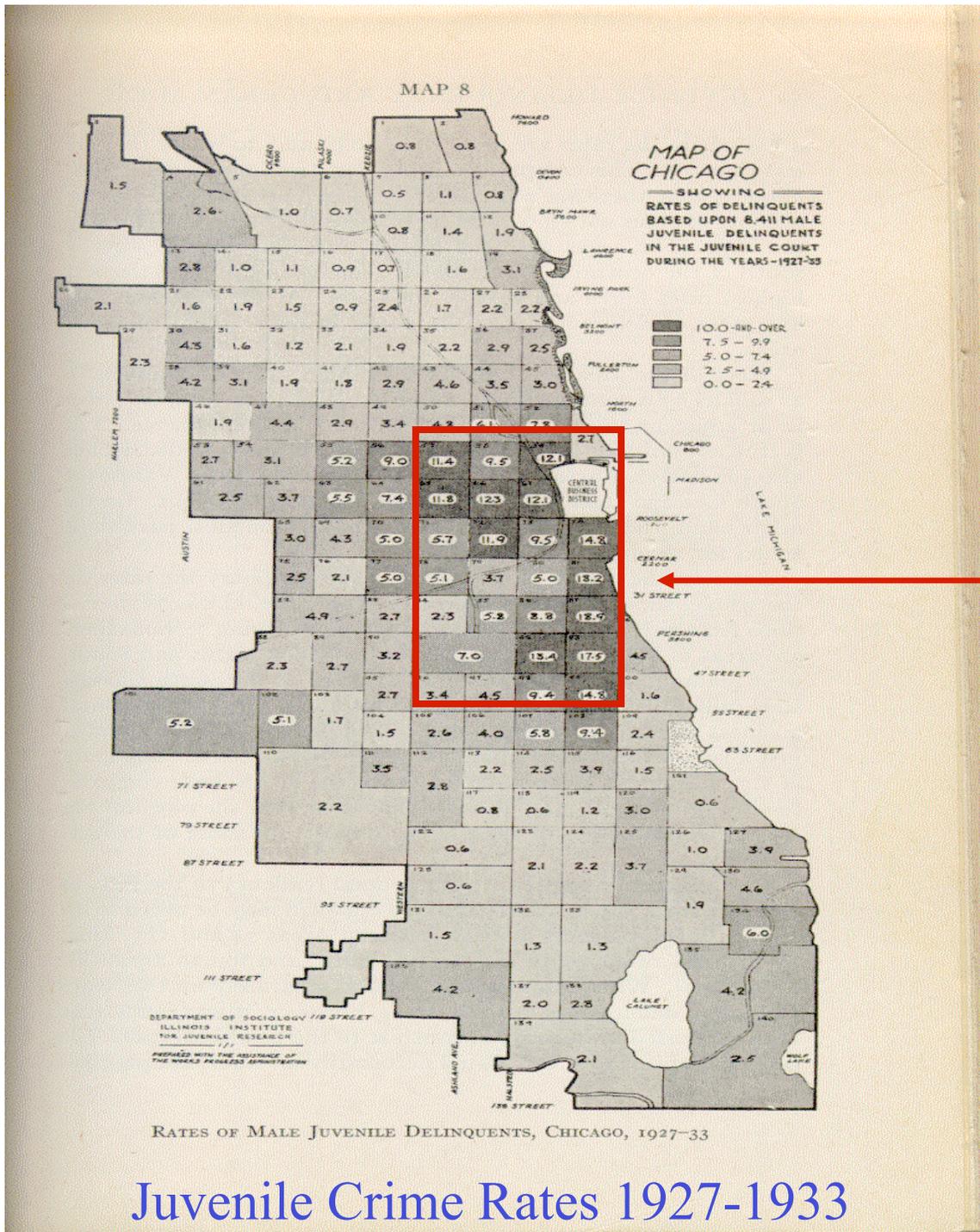
### MAP OF CHICAGO

SHOWING  
RATES OF DELINQUENTS  
BASED UPON 8,141 MALE  
JUVENILE DELINQUENTS IN  
THE JUVENILE COURT DURING  
THE YEARS 1917-1923



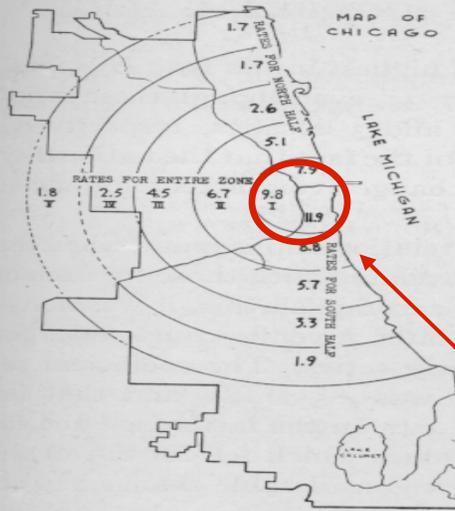
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RATES OF MALE JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, CHICAGO, 1917-23  
**Juvenile Crime Rates for 1917-1923**

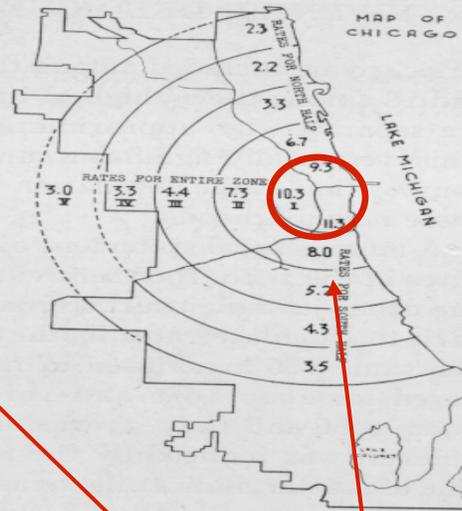


Area of Highest  
Concentration of  
Juvenile Crime

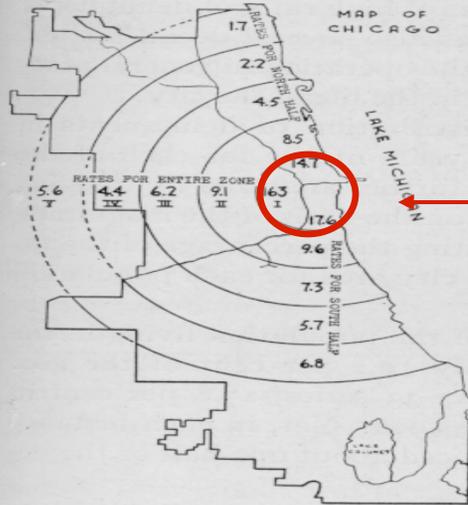
Juvenile Crime Rates 1927-1933



A. Zone rates of male juvenile delinquents, 1927-33 series



B. Zone rates of male juvenile delinquents, 1917-23 series



C. Zone rates of male juvenile delinquents, 1900-1906 series

CRITICAL RATIOS OF SELECTED ZONE RATES  
Juvenile Court Series (Individuals)

Zones	Difference	Standard Error of the Difference	Critical Ratio
A. 1927-33			
1 and 4	7.3	.301	24.3
1 and 5	8.0	.302	26.5
2 and 4	4.2	.142	29.6
2 and 5	4.9	.142	34.5
B. 1917-23			
1 and 4	7.0	.293	23.9
1 and 5	7.3	.314	23.2
2 and 4	4.0	.162	24.7
2 and 5	4.3	.196	21.9
C. 1900-1906			
1 and 4	11.9	.371	32.1
1 and 5	10.7	.467	22.9
2 and 4	4.7	.241	19.5
2 and 5	3.5	.371	9.4

FIG. 1.—Zone maps for three juvenile court series

Highest zone of juvenile crime throughout the entire three time periods

## Criticism of Shaw and McKay Findings

**Stability Amidst Change:** Some researchers have a hard time believing that there can be such stability in crime despite the constant change in the neighborhood.

**Tautology:** Many researchers have used crime rate in a neighborhood as an example of a socially disorganized neighborhood.

Presence of crime in a neighborhood was likely to lead to crime in a neighborhood.

**Police Records:** Use of official police records may show these neighborhoods are watched more by the police, not that they are more criminal than other areas.

**Replications:** Other researchers who have done similar studies elsewhere have found mixed results.

**Neighborhood:** How do you define “neighborhood” and how do you get data at the neighborhood level.

Most research uses census data not neighborhood data.

# Rise and Fall of Social Disorganization Theory

Social Disorganization was a dominant theory in Criminology until the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Criticisms mounted in the 1960's as other individual level theories of crime gained in popularity.

Replications of the Chicago study showed mixed results, some providing support for Shaw and McKay and others not.

***HOWEVER,***

This all started to change in the early to mid 1980's, when Social Disorganization began to make a comeback theoretically.

# Modern Social Disorganization Theory

The reinvigoration of Social Disorganization can be directly attributed to the works of a few researchers in the 1980's and 1990's:

**Bursik:** “Social Disorganization and theories of Crime and Delinquency: Problems and Prospects” *Criminology*, (1988).

**Sampson and Groves:** “Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory” *American Journal of Sociology* (1989).

**Bursik and Grasmik:** *Neighborhoods and Crime* (1993).

**Stark:** “Deviant Place: A Theory of the Ecology of Crime” *Criminology*, (1987).

Derivative of Social Disorganization Theory

# Bursik

“Social Disorganization and theories of Crime and Delinquency: Problems and Prospects”

## *Importance to Modern Social Disorganization:*

This article was the article that really helped to reinvigorate Social Disorganization as a viable theory of crime.

Addressed some of the major criticisms of Social Disorganization that were leveled in the 1960's.

*Tautological:* Not if correct neighborhood measures were used.

*Consensus in Neighborhoods:* Consensus not on all issues but at least on security and crime issues.

*Stability amidst Change:* Showed it is possible and likely.

*Police Records:* Valuable for measurement of serious street crimes.

# Sampson and Groves

“Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory”

## *Importance to Modern Social Disorganization:*

First to **empirically** test the *social control* aspect of Social Disorganization theory.

They linked structural aspects of neighborhoods (Poverty, Residential mobility, heterogeneity, and broken homes.) to a neighborhoods ability to institute social control (Interpersonal friendship networks, ability to monitor teens, and public organization) and found it a good predictor of criminal victimization.

Answered one of the main criticisms of Social Disorganization theory concerning structural factors impact on social control within a neighborhood.

# **Bursik and Grasmik**

“Neighborhoods and Crime”

## **Importance to Modern Social Disorganization:**

Latest and best reformulation of Social Disorganization.

Addressed major criticisms

Reformulated theory slightly

Biggest contribution was in reformulating social control aspect of neighborhoods into three different types of social control that are affected by structural factors.

# **Bursik and Grasmik: Forms of Social Control**

## **Personal Social Control:**

No real personal relationships between neighbors.

No friendship networks and the social control they bring

*Ex.:* Telling parents about actions of a child.

## **Parochial Social Control:**

Surveillance of neighborhood by residents, observing strangers in your neighborhood and doing something about it.

*Ex.:* Stopping criminal vandalism of community members home.

## **Public Social Control:**

Working together as community organizations to demand better services within a community.

*Ex.:* Working together to establish good schools, good community services and good police protection.

# Bursik and Grasmik Reformulation

## Structural Factors

Poverty

Residential Mobility

Heterogeneity

Broken Homes

## Social Control

Personal

Parochial

Public

**Criminal  
Victimization**

High scores on  
structural factors



Inhibit a neighborhoods ability  
to institute different types of  
social control



# Stark

“Deviant Places”

## *Importance to Modern Social Disorganization:*

Derivative of Social Disorganization theory that is very similar to other modern versions.

Impacted reformulations of Social Disorganization

Placed an emphasis on how disorganization reduced social control **AND** impacted other neighborhood aspects that also enhanced the amount of crime that occurred.

## *Three main aspects of Theory:*

Structural Factors

Social Control

Feedback Factors

## **Structural Factors**

**Density:** The amount of population density in a community.

Higher density impacted crime more.

**Dilapidation:** The degree to which buildings and community were run-down or in disrepair.

High amount of dilapidation impacted crime more.

**Poverty:** High amount of poverty increased crime.

**Mixed Land Use:** Areas that have a combination of both residential and commercial land use. Higher mixed land-use increased crime.

**Residential Mobility:** High levels of people moving in and out of a neighborhood.

*All of these factors combined to impact social control factors.*

## **Social Control Factors**

**Moral Cynicism:** People become more cynical concerning the law and abiding by the law.

**Increased Opportunity:** Increased opportunity to commit crimes within a neighborhood.

**Increased Motivation:** Increased motivation to commit crime amongst residents of the neighborhood.

**Decreased Social Control:** Overall decreased social control amongst the residents of the neighborhood.

## Feedback Factors

These are factors that are caused by the social control breakdown and they further increase crime and further impact the worsening of the structural factors.

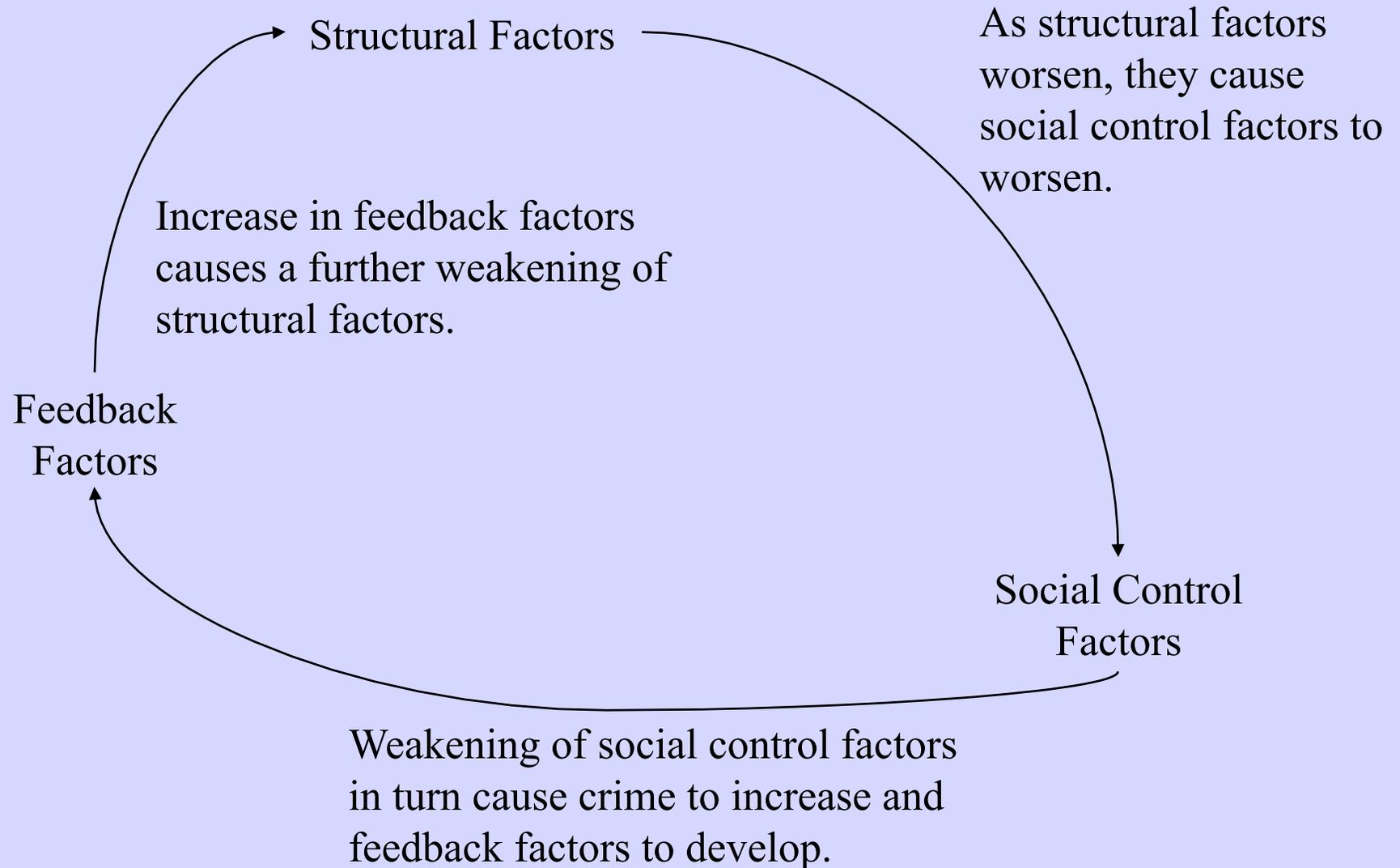
**Attraction of Criminals:** Criminals are attracted to these neighborhoods as ripe areas to commit crime without fear of being caught.

Live in these areas as well as “work” them.

**Fleeing of Non-Criminals:** Non-criminal residents will leave the neighborhood in greater numbers.

Non-criminal residents will not want to live in these areas.

# Deviant Places Theory



# Major Research Findings of Social Disorganization

1. Structural factors within a neighborhood impact a community's ability to implement social control.
2. Communities with high scores on Social Disorganization indicators have higher amounts of *overall crime*.
3. Communities with high scores on Social Disorganization indicators have higher amounts of *juvenile crime*.
4. Communities with high scores on Social Disorganization indicators have higher amounts of *violent crime*.
5. Communities with high scores on Social Disorganization indicators have higher amounts of *Homicide*.
6. Communities with high scores on Social Disorganization indicators have higher amounts of *fear of crime*.

# Continued Problems with Social Disorganization Research

1. **Neighborhood Definition:** There is still no good definition of what a neighborhood is.

Impacts implications of research findings.

2. **Data for Structural Factors:** Census data is only data we have.

Only compiled ever 10 years, while population changes happen more often than that.

Neighborhoods are smaller and less exact than census tracts.

3. **Lack of Social Control Research:** Few researchers have ever tested the social control aspects of Social Disorganization.

Most research assumes rather than tests this link.

# Social Disorganization Implications for Crime Mapping

1. Understanding the social/structural aspects of an area is very important to understanding the causes of crime patterns in that area.

Understanding causes of crime requires more than looking at crime incident locations and crime attractors.

2. Understanding demographic changes over time is beneficial to understanding changes in crime patterns over time.

Crime changes most in areas that undergo the most changes socially.

3. Seek alternative measures of community problems, not always official measures.

# **Social Disorganization Practical Implications for Crime Mapping Practitioners**

1. Use census data to create measures of neighborhood disorganization.
2. Track changes in neighborhood demographics and their associated impacts on crime and criminal victimization.
3. Create alternative measures of neighborhood stability using combinations of social, political and criminal factors.
4. Use surveys to measure neighborhood discord and social control.
5. Think outside the box when it comes to determining causes of criminal patterns and their spatial and temporal changes.

