

cease to think of it wholly in moral terms! In that case we shall have less news, but better newspapers.

The real reason that the ordinary newspaper accounts of the incidents of ordinary life are so sensational is because we know so little of human life that we are not able to interpret the events of life when we read them. It is safe to say that when anything shocks us, we do not understand it.

ROBERT E. PARK

## CHAPTER V

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

#### I. THE "NATURAL DEPRAVITY" OF MANKIND

In view of the fact that man is so manifestly—as Aristotle described him—a political animal, predestined to live in association with, and dependence upon, his fellows, it is strange and interesting to discover, as we are compelled to do, now and again, how utterly unfitted by nature man is for life in society.

It is true, no doubt, that man is the most gregarious of animals, but it is nevertheless true that the thing of which he still knows the least is the business of carrying on an associated existence. Here, as elsewhere, it is those who have given the subject the closest study—the educator, the criminologist, and the social worker—who are most aware of the incalculable elements in every social situation and feel most keenly their inability to control human behavior.

In his recent study, *The Unadjusted Girl*, Dr. W. I. Thomas, referring to this matter, calls attention to the fact that "The whole criminal procedure is based on punishment, and yet we do not even know that punishment deters from crime. Or, rather, we know that it sometimes deters, and sometimes stimulates to further crime, but we do not know the conditions under which it acts in one way or another."<sup>1</sup>

So ill-adapted is the natural, undomesticated man to the social order into which he is born, so out of harmony are all the native impulses of the ordinary healthy human with the demands which society imposes, that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that if his

<sup>1</sup> William I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl—with Cases and Standpoint for Behavior Analysis*, *Criminal Science*, Monograph No. 4, Boston, 1923.

childhood is spent mainly in learning what he must not do, his youth will be devoted mainly to rebellion. As to the remainder of his life, his recreations will very likely turn out to be some sort of vacation and escape from this same social order to which he has finally learned to accommodate, but not wholly reconcile, himself.

So far is this description true that our ancestors, living under a sterner discipline and in a moral order less flexible and accommodating than our own, were so impressed with the innate cantankerousness of ordinary mankind that they were driven to the assumption that there was something fundamentally diabolical in human nature, a view which found expression in the well-known doctrine of the "natural depravity of man."

One reason why human beings, in contrast with the lower animals, seem to be so ill-adapted to the world in which they are born is that the environment in which human beings live is so largely made up of the experience and memories and the acquired habits of the people who have preceded them.

This experience and these memories—crystallized and embodied in tradition, in custom, and in folk-ways—constitute the social, as distinguished from the biological, environment; for man is not merely an individual with certain native and inherited biological traits, but he is at the same time a person with manners, sentiments, attitudes, and ambitions.

It is the social environment to which the person, as distinguished from the individual, responds; and it is these responses of the person to his environment that eventually define his personality and give to the individual a character which can be described in moral terms.

## II. SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL MILIEU

This social environment in which mankind has acquired nearly if not all the traits that we regard as characteristically human is what we call society, society in the large; what Comte called "humanity."

When, however, we attempt to consider a little more in detail this society which ideally includes all mankind, we discover that it is composed of a number of smaller groups, little societies, each of which represents some single aspect or division of this all-enveloping social milieu in which we live and of which we are at the same time a part.

The first and most intimate portion of man's social environment, strange as the statement may at first seem, is his own body. After that, his clothing, tools, and property, which are in some sense a part of his personality, may, under certain circumstances, be regarded as a part of his environment. They become part of his social environment as soon as he becomes conscious of them; as soon as he becomes self-conscious.

Most of us have known, at some time in our lives, that "sickening sense of inferiority" that comes over one when in competition with his fellows, he realizes for the first time, perhaps, the inadequacy of his personal resources—physical, mental, and moral—to achieve his personal ambitions. But we who are presumably normal have very little understanding of the struggles of the physically or mentally handicapped to accommodate themselves to a world to which they are constitutionally not adapted.

So important to the development of personality is this interest which, with the advent of self-consciousness, the individual discovers in himself, that it has been made the basis of one of the numerous schools of psychiatry in Europe. Dr. Alfred Adler's theory of "psychic compensation" is based on the observation that an individual who is conscious of his inferiority inevitably seeks to compensate himself for this lowered self-esteem by greater concentration and effort. Eventually he may, in this way, succeed in overcoming his constitutional handicap; or he may find compensation for failure in one field by success in another and different one. Adler points out that there are numerous instances in which individuals have made striking successes in fields in which they were least fitted,

constitutionally, to succeed. The classic illustration is that of Demosthenes, who, according to the anecdote that has come down to us, was a stutterer, but, by putting pebbles in his mouth and talking to the waves on the seashore, overcame his handicap and became the greatest of Athenian orators.

When this sense of inferiority is acute because of some physical deformity, or in consequence of any other constitutional inferiority, so that the person is peculiarly sensitive about himself, the result is frequently what Adler describes as "psychic overcompensation," which manifests itself in certain definite neurotic and socially pathological tendencies, usually described as "egocentrism."

In such cases, according to Adler, "the neurotic shows a series of sharply emphasized traits of character which exceed the normal standard. The marked sensitiveness, the irritable debility, the suggestibility, the egotism, the penchant for the fantastic, the estrangement from reality, but also more special traits such as tyranny, malevolence, a self-sacrificing virtue, coquetry, anxiety, and absent-mindedness are met with in the majority of case histories."

As soon as we become conscious of ourselves, self-control—which is not fundamentally different from the control we exercise over external volume—tends to become one of our most difficult and absorbing problems. Man has many advantages over the lower animals. On the other hand, the lower animals are not subject to what Frazer describes as "the perils of the soul"; they do not have the problem of managing themselves. This was evidently what Walt Whitman meant when he wrote:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained, . . .  
 They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,  
 They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,  
 No one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,  
 Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth.

### III. THE FAMILY AS A CORPORATE PERSON

After the individual's own person, the most intimate environment to which the person responds is the family. The family is, or was, under earlier and simpler conditions of life, a sort of larger corporate person. Among the Polish peasants, for example, where the family completely dominates the individual, "husband and wife," we are told, "are not individuals more or less closely connected according to their personal sentiments, but group members, controlled by both the united families."<sup>1</sup> It is on this basis that we can understand completely the letters written by immigrant boys to their parents asking them to send them wives:

#### DEAREST PARENTS:

Please do not be angry with me for what I shall write. I write you that it is hard to live alone, so please find some girl for me, but an orderly [honest] one, for in America there is not even one single orderly [Polish] girl. . . . [December 21, 1902.] I thank you kindly for your letter, for it was happy. As to the girl, although I don't know her, my companion, who knows her, says that she is stately and pretty, and I believe him, as well as you, my parents. . . . Please inform me which one (of the sisters) is to come, the older or the younger one, whether Aledsandra or Stanislaw.<sup>2</sup>

Of such a family it may almost be said that the unrebelling and completely accommodated individuals who compose it have ceased to exist as persons. They have no independent social status and no personal responsibilities except as members of the family group.

The family, as it exists under modern conditions, has fallen from the high estimation in which it was held by an earlier generation.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, I, 87-97, quoted in Park and Miller, *Old-World Traits Transplanted*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 259, quoted in Park and Miller, *Old-World Traits Transplanted*, pp. 39-40.

I once heard a distinguished psychologist say that he had been forced to the conclusion, after much patient study, that the family was probably the worst possible place in which to bring up a child. In general, I should say the psychiatrists seem to have a very poor opinion of the modern family as an environment for children. This opinion, if it is not justified, is at least supported by studies of juvenile delinquency made some years ago, in which it appeared that 50 per cent of the delinquencies studied were from broken homes.

The "one-child family" is now generally recognized as one of the characteristic social situations in which egocentric behavior is likely to manifest itself. It is certain that parents, just because of their solicitude for the welfare of their offspring, are not always safe companions for them. However that may be today, it is certain that in the past it was within the limits of the family group that most of the traits which we may describe as human were originally developed.

Outside the circle of the family and the neighborhood, within which intimate and the so-called "primary relations" are maintained, there is the larger circle of influences we call the community; the local community, and then the larger, organized community, represented by the city and the nation. And out beyond the limits of these there are beginning to emerge the vast and vague outlines of that larger world-community which Graham Wallas has described under the title, *The Great Society*.

The community, then, is the name that we give to this larger and most inclusive social milieu, outside of ourselves, our family, and our immediate neighborhood, in which the individual maintains not merely his existence as an individual, but his life as a person.

The community, including the family, with its wider interests, its larger purposes, and its more deliberate aims, surrounds us, incloses us, and compels us to conform; not by mere pressure from without, not by the fear of censure merely, but by the sense of our interest in, and responsibility to, certain interests not our own.

The sources of our actions are, no doubt, in the organic impulses of the individual man; but actual conduct is determined more or

less by public opinion, by custom, and by a code which exists outside of us in the family, in the neighborhood, and in the community. This community, however, with its less immediate purposes and its more deliberate aims, is always more or less outside of, and alien to, us; much more so than the family, for example, or any other congenial group. This is to such an extent true that certain sociological writers have conceived society as having an existence quite independent of the individuals who compose it at any given time. Under these circumstances the natural condition of the individual in society is one of conflict; conflict with other individuals, to be sure, but particularly conflict with the conventions and regulations of the social group of which he is a member. Personal freedom—self-expression, as we have learned to call it in recent years—is, therefore, if not a fruitless, still a never ending, quest.

Only gradually, as he succeeds in accommodating himself to the life of the larger group, incorporating into the specific purposes and ambitions of his own life the larger and calmer purposes of the society in which he lives, does the individual man find himself quite at home in the community of which he is a part.

If this is true of mankind as a whole, it is still more true of the younger person. The natural impulses of the child are inevitably so far from conforming to the social situation in which he finds himself that his relations to the community seem to be almost completely defined in a series of "don'ts." Under these circumstances juvenile delinquency is, within certain age-limits at least, not merely something to be expected; it may almost be said to be normal.

It is in the community, rather than in the family, that our moral codes first get explicit and formal definition and assume the external and coercive character of municipal law.

#### IV. SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

In the family and in the neighborhood such organization as exists is based upon custom and tradition, and is fixed in what Sumner calls the folk-ways and the mores. At this stage, society is a purely natural

product; a product of the spontaneous and unreflective responses of individuals living together in intimate, personal, and face-to-face relations. Under such circumstances conscious efforts to discipline the individual and enforce the social code are directed merely by intuition and common sense.

In the larger social unit, the community, where social relations are more formal and less intimate, the situation is different. It is in the community, rather than in the family or the neighborhood, that formal organizations like the church, the school, and the courts come into existence and get their separate functions defined. With the advent of these institutions, and through their mediation, the community is able to supplement, and to some extent supplant, the family and the neighborhood as a means for the discipline and control of the individual. However, neither the orphan asylum nor any other agency has thus far succeeded in providing a wholly satisfactory substitute for the home. The evidence of this is that they have no alumni association. They create no memories and traditions that those who graduate from them are disposed to cherish and keep alive.

It is in this community with its various organizations and its rational, rather than traditional, schemes of control, and not elsewhere, that we have delinquency. Delinquency is, in fact, in some sense the measure of the failure of our community organizations to function.

Historically, the background of American life has been the village community. Until a few years ago the typical American was, and perhaps still is, an inhabitant of a middle western village; such a village, perhaps, as Sinclair Lewis describes in *Main Street*. And still, today, the most characteristic trait of Homo Americanus is an inveterate individualism which may, to be sure, have been temperamental, but in that case temperament has certainly been considerably reinforced by the conditions of life on the frontier.

But with the growth of great cities, with the vast division of

labor which has come in with machine industry, and with movement and change that have come about with the multiplication of the means of transportation and communication, the old forms of social control represented by the family, the neighborhood, and the local community have been undermined and their influence greatly diminished.

This process by which the authority and influence of an earlier culture and system of social control is undermined and eventually destroyed is described by Thomas—looking at it from the side of the individual—as a process of “individualization.” But looking at it from the point of view of society and the community it is social disorganization.

We are living in such a period of individualization and social disorganization. Everything is in a state of agitation—everything seems to be undergoing a change. Society is, apparently, not much more than a congeries and constellation of social atoms. Habits can be formed only in a relatively stable environment, even if that stability consists merely—as, in fact, it invariably does, since there is nothing in the universe that is absolutely static—in a relatively constant form of change. Any form of change that brings any measurable alteration in the routine of social life tends to break up habits; and in breaking up the habits upon which the existing social organization rests, destroys that organization itself. Every new device that affects social life and the social routine is to that extent a disorganizing influence. Every new discovery, every new invention, every new idea, is disturbing. Even news has become at times so dangerous that governments have felt it wise to suppress its publication.

It is probable that the most deadly and the most demoralizing single instrumentality of present-day civilization is the automobile. The automobile bandit, operating in our great cities, is much more successful and more dangerous than the romantic stage robber of fifty years ago. The connection of the automobile with vice is

notorious. "The automobile is connected with more seductions than happen otherwise in cities altogether."<sup>1</sup>

The newspaper and the motion picture show, while not so deadly, are almost as demoralizing. If I were to attempt to enumerate all the social forces that have contributed to the disorganization of modern society I should probably be compelled to make a catalogue of everything that has introduced any new and striking change into the otherwise dull routine of our daily life. Apparently anything that makes life interesting is dangerous to the existing order.

The mere movement of the population from one part of the country to another—the present migration of the Negroes northward, for example—is a disturbing influence. Such a movement may assume, from the point of view of the migrants themselves, the character of an emancipation, opening to them new economic and cultural opportunities, but it is none the less disorganizing to the communities they have left behind and to the communities into which they are now moving. It is at the same time demoralizing to the migrating people themselves, and particularly, I might add, to the younger generation.

The enormous amount of delinquency, juvenile and adult, that exists today in the Negro communities in northern cities is due in part, though not entirely, to the fact that migrants are not able to accommodate themselves at once to a new and relatively strange environment. The same thing may be said of the immigrants from Europe, or of the younger generation of women who are just now entering in such large numbers into the newer occupations and the freer life which the great cities offer them.

"Progress," as I once heard William James remark, "is a terrible thing." It is a terrible thing in so far as it breaks up the routine upon which an existing social order rests, and thus destroys the cultural and the economic values, i.e., the habits of thrift, of skill, of industry, as well as the personal hopes, ambitions, and life-programs which are the content of that social order.

<sup>1</sup> W. I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*, p. 71.

Our great cities, as those who have studied them have learned, are full of junk, much of it human, i.e., men and women who, for some reason or other, have fallen out of line in the march of industrial progress and have been scrapped by the industrial organization of which they were once a part.

A recent study by Nels Anderson of what he calls "Hoboemia," an area in Chicago just outside the "Loop," that is to say, the downtown business area, which is almost wholly inhabited by homeless men, is a study of such a human junk heap. In fact, the slum areas that invariably grow up just on the edge of the business areas of great cities, areas of deteriorated houses, of poverty, vice, and crime, are areas of social junk.

I might add, because of its immediate connection with the problems and interests of this association, that recent studies made in Chicago of boys' gangs seem to show that there are no playgrounds in the city in which a boy can find so much adventure, no place where he can find so much that may be called "real sport," as in these areas of general deterioration which we call the slums.

In order to meet and deal with the problems that have been created by the rapid changes of modern life, new organizations and agencies have sprung into existence. The older social agencies, the church, the school, and the courts, have not always been able to meet the problems which new conditions of life have created. The school, the church, and the courts have come down to us with their aims and methods defined under the influence of an older tradition. New agencies have been necessary to meet the new conditions. Among these new agencies are the juvenile courts, juvenile protective associations, parent-teachers' associations, Boy Scouts, Young Men's Christian Associations settlements, boys' clubs of various sorts, and I presume, playgrounds and playground associations. These agencies have taken over to some extent the work which neither the home, the neighborhood, nor the other older communal institutions were able to carry on adequately.

These new institutions, perhaps because they are not to the same

extent hampered by our earlier traditions, are frankly experimental and are trying to work out a rational technique for dealing with social problems, based not on sentiment and tradition, but on science.

Largely on the basis of the experiments which these new agencies are making, a new social science is coming into existence. Under the impetus which the social agencies have given to social investigation and social research, sociology is ceasing to be a mere philosophy and is assuming more and more the character of an empirical, if not an exact, science.

As to the present condition of our science and of the devices that we have invented for controlling conduct and social life, I can only repeat what I said at the very outset of our paper: "The thing of which we still know least is the business of carrying on an associated existence."

#### V. THE GANG AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

I have sought, in what has been said, to indicate what seems to me to be the relation of the work of the playground association and other social agencies to the more general problem of community organization and juvenile delinquency. But I have a feeling that this paper lacks a moral, and I know that every paper on a social topic should have a moral. If I were asked to state in a few words what seems to me to be suggested by our discussion so far I should say:

1. That the problem of juvenile delinquency seems to have its sources in conditions over which, with our present knowledge, we have very little control; that the whole matter needs, therefore, a more searching investigation than we have yet been able to give it.

2. That the encouraging factor in the situation is: (1) that our social agencies are definitely experimenting with the problem; (2) that there is growing up in the universities and elsewhere a body of knowledge about human nature and society which will presently enable us to interpret these experiments, redefine the problem, and

eventually gain a deeper insight into the social conditions and the social processes under which not merely juvenile delinquency but other forms of personal and social disorganization occur.

3. That what we already know about the intimate relations between the individual and the community makes it clear that delinquency is not primarily a problem of the individual, but of the group. Any effort to re-educate and reform the delinquent individual will consist very largely in finding for him an environment, a group in which he can live, and live not merely in the physical or biological sense of the word, but live in the social and in the sociological sense. That means finding a place where he can have not only free expression of his energies and native impulses, but a place where he can find a vocation and be free to formulate a plan of life which will enable him to realize in some adequate way all the fundamental wishes that, in some form or other, every individual seeks to realize, and must realize, in order to have a wholesome and reasonably happy existence.

4. This suggests to me that the playground should be something more than a place for working off steam and keeping children out of mischief. It should be a place where children form permanent associations. The play group is certainly one of the most important factors in the defining of the wishes and the forming of the character of the average individual. Under conditions of urban life, where the home tends to become little more than a sleeping-place, a dormitory, the play group is assuming an increasing importance. Mr. Frederic M. Thrasher has recently been studying the boys' gangs in Chicago. He has located one thousand gangs, and it is interesting to notice where these gangs are located. They are for the most part in the slums. The gangs he has located and studied are by no means all the gangs in Chicago. They are, rather, the gangs that have attracted attention because they have been troublesome, because they are connected directly or indirectly with juvenile delinquency and adolescent crime.

If I ventured to state my opinion in regard to the matter, I should say that these gangs have exercised a considerably greater influence in forming the character of the boys who compose them than has the church, the school, or any other communal agency outside of the families and the homes in which the members of the gangs are reared. And it is quite possible that the influence of these homes have not been always and altogether wholesome.

5. Finally, playgrounds should, as far as possible, be associated with character-forming agencies like the school, the church, and other local institutions. For however much the older generation may have been detached by migration and movement from their local associations, the younger generation, who live closer to the ground than we do, are irresistibly attached to the localities in which they live. Their associates are the persons who live next to them. In a great city, children are the real neighbors; their habitat is the local community; and when they are allowed to prowl and explore they learn to know the neighborhood as no older person who was not himself born and reared in the neighborhood is ever likely to know it.

This is one thing that makes the gang, a little later on, when perhaps it has become an athletic club, important politically. Our political system is based upon the theory that the people who live in the same locality know one another and have the same political and social interests. The gang is not infrequently a vocational school for ward politicians.

ROBERT E. PARK

## CHAPTER VI

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND THE ROMANTIC TEMPER

#### I. THE PROBLEM STATED

Recent local studies in Chicago seem to show that the number of competent persons in the community is frequently no real measure of the competency—if one may use that expression in this connection—of the community itself. A high communal intelligence quotient does not always, it seems, insure communal efficiency.

The explanation that at once suggests itself is that competent persons presumably are specialists deeply concerned in the little area of human experience in which they have chosen to operate, but profoundly indifferent to the interests of the particular geographical area in which they may happen to reside.

It is the incompetent persons, apparently, who still maintain an interest that could in any sense be called lively in the local communities of our great cities. Women, particularly women without professional training, and immigrants who are locally segregated and immured within the invisible walls of an alien language, are bound to have some sort of interest in their neighbors. Children in great cities, who necessarily live close to the ground, however, are the real neighbors. Boys' gangs are neighborhood institutions. Politicians are professional neighbors. When the boys' gangs are graduated, as they frequently are, into local politics, the local political boss assumes toward them the rôle of patron, and they assume toward him the rôle of clients.

The competent people—that is to say, the professional people—are, on the other hand, either physically or in imagination, abroad most of the time. They live in the city—in their offices and in their