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Skateparks and crime: correlations and causation

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Skateparks and crime: Correlations and causation

by

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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Abstract

Skateparks are being constructed at an unprecedented rate across the United States. Though many communities are convinced that they need a skatepark, few people want it in their backyard. One of the many concerns cited by potential neighbors is that the skatepark will become a haven for crime. Local skatepark advocates strongly disagree, believing that a skatepark will reduce crime by “keeping kids off the street”. While both parties insist that their view is correct, no research has been done on the subject. The purpose of this study is to determine if any correlation exists, positive or negative, with three major skateparks. The study sites are: FDR Skatepark in Philadelphia, Denver Skatepark in Denver, and Burnside Skatepark in Portland.

To determine the quantity of crime, multiple forms of research are conducted. Objective forms of data, such as numerical crime statistics and GIS based crime maps, are used to determine recorded crime. The crime maps and statistics are examined on neighborhood and site scales to provide context for the crimes that occur at the site. The quantitative data is provided using case study methodology, including interviews and site visits. Multiple interviews and twenty hours of direct observation provide first-hand accounts of unreported crime at the study sites.

Insights into causation are provided through comparison of the sites to three different sociological theories. These theories include Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by Ray Jeffery (1977), Defensible Space by Oscar Newman (1976), and Broken
Windows by James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). Interviews with local skateboarders interested parties support and influence the presented theories of causation. The use of objective and subjective research methodologies creates a two pronged approach. Often the data from the two methodologies support each other, providing a more accurate view of total crime. This unusual approach allows for crime, both reported and unreported, to be expressed. This study not only addresses correlations between skateparks and crime, but provides a methodological framework for future studies attempting to combine objective and subjective data sources.
Introduction

It is difficult to get a city to approve building a skatepark, but it is impossible to find a place for it. As a whole, people are overwhelmingly opposed to having a skatepark in their backyard. Some are elusive about their reasons, dancing around the issue, while others speak clearly. The brave unequivocally state that the skatepark will become a focus for crime. The crimes typically mentioned are vandalism, assault, alcohol, drugs and disorderly conduct. An extreme few state that a skatepark is a potential location for more serious offences such as theft and robbery. Skateboarding advocates adamantly disagree stating that skateparks actually reduce the amount of crime in the area. The extra supervision, provided by the much maligned skaters, discourages criminal activity. In addition, local kids are provided with entertainment options other than petty crime. At this point all sides hastily produce references to individual skateparks that fit their argument to a tee. Each side proclaims their belief is in fact unshakeable truth, while neither side has done research beyond the first three pages of a Google search.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine possible correlations, positive and negative, between skateparks and crime using a systematic methodology. The conclusions will be based on a transparent and consistent structure. Multiple data sources will be examined and referenced. This document will bring creditable sources to bear on the argument and base conclusions on a foundation of data.

What is noticeably absent from the skatepark and crime argument is any mention of a field that has been studying crime. Sociology has been analyzing data and theorizing on the causes of crime with scientific rigor for over one hundred years. Due to FBI requirements, the quantitative amount of reported crime that occurs in geographic scales, such as cities and neighborhoods, is known. In addition, Geographic Information Systems has allowed measurement of crime at even smaller scales. Though this flood of data is of little interest to most, sociology has been one of the great benefactors of the information age. Vast quantities of quality data are now able to be analyzed. It would stand to reason that the vast body of
work Sociology has produced may have something to say on the issue of skateparks and crime.

Ironically, sociology has provided a definition for what they don’t know. It’s called, “The dark figure.” The dark figure represents the amount of crime that has occurred that does not make it to official crime statistics. Despite the apparent logical incongruity, there are some ways to estimate the amount of crime that is not reported. Case study methodology, including archival records, local interviews, and personal observation can provide insight of the amount of unreported crime in an area. Sociology, a field of study predicated on numerical data, has had difficulty validating case study research. Fortunately, Landscape Architecture has been using case studies as primary research for years.

This study will use all of the above methods to view crime at three skateparks in a comprehensive manner. Most studies would use exclusively objective data, such as numerical statistics and GIS maps, or exclusively subjective data such as interviews and site visits. Unfortunately neither methodology is complete, each excludes relevant information. Objective data is numerically quantifiable, but is limited by known crimes. The dark figure of crime is never addressed. Subjective data is limited by its lack of quantifiable results, but can begin to investigate the dreaded dark figure of crime. This study will incorporate the two types of data, using the strengths of each, to support the final conclusions. Though additional studies would need to be conducted to generalize the findings of this study across all skateparks, this study is a first step in the direction of more global theories.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question is, “Is there any geographic correlation, between skateparks and crime?” This leads to three possible outcomes: a positive correlation, a negative correlation, and no correlation at all.

Regardless of the outcome of the primary question, a secondary question of, “Why does this situation occur at the site?” will be examined. This question will not have a
quantitatively verifiable answer, but will be a global assessment based on the data collected. The subjective data becomes more valuable than the objective when addressing this question.

A third question is, "How does the skateboarding culture impact the results of the study?" This question will not be directly investigated in the thesis, but is such an overwhelming overtone, it deserves mention. The reader will undoubtedly form their own subjective judgment over the course of the study. The researcher's subjective judgment is littered throughout the document and will quickly become apparent.

**Organization**

This document is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the current chapter and includes the rationale for the study, the three research Questions, and the organization of the study. The second chapter is the literature review. This includes a history of skateboarding, the skatepark argument, and a review of three sociological theories. This information provides important context for the remainder of the study. The history of skateboarding shows the progression from a fad to a sport. It also gives clues to why much of the public perceives skateboarders as wanton vandals and hellions. The skatepark argument outlines the reported pros and cons of building skateparks. Considering the rate that skateparks are being built, some form of this argument is rehashed in city halls every week. Finally, the three sociological theories that were used in this study are reviewed. Though this can be occasionally dry, it is important to understand the rationales behind the theories used. None of these theories are unshakable, the all have weaknesses and each measures criminal potential in far different ways.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters are the meat of the text, the case studies of FDR, Burnside, and Denver Skatepark. All three chapters are structured the same. First, the history section is included to provide context. Then the sociological criteria section reviews the qualities of the site comparison to three sociological theories. Next is the reported crime in the Surrounding Area. This section presents numerical and GIS based crime statistics revealing the amount of known crime in the area. The unreported crime in the surrounding
Area is reported next. Relying on interviews, published reports, and personal observation, the amount of crime the police don’t know about is estimated. The scale then zooms down to the site itself. Reported crime on site uses GIS data to determine what reported crimes occurred on the site. Unreported crime on Site again relies on interviews, published reports, and personal observation. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the various data sources and the criminal potential of the site is globally assessed.

Though the organization of the studies is straight forward, there are a couple of oddities when the data is presented. First, the definitions of crime are included fresh in each new chapter. Though the FBI publishes specific definitions of crime, not everyone uses them. Specific state definitions are very similar across the nation, the way crimes are categorized can change, particularly with minor crimes. For example, most states consider “driving under the influence” to include the influence of alcohol or drugs. On the other hand, Oregon considers these two separate offenses and reported them as such. The second oddity is that the possible sources of error are included directly after the data to which they apply. Each piece of data has different possibilities for error, as the source changes so do the errors. Possible error is typically relegated to a foot note or an appendix at the end of the document. This is unfortunate because it is critical information required to understand the validity and reliability of the study. This can lead to nit picking a valid study into oblivion, simply because it was not 100% valid and reliable. All studies have error including this one. Acknowledge it, understand it, and begin to value the study for what it is, imperfect.

Finally the conclusions will be presented. The conclusions will bring together the three study sites and their results. Unfortunately, a unified and comprehensive theory that can apply to all skateparks across the nation is impossible for the scale of this study. Regardless, theoretical connections will be drawn and supported by the research. The conclusions based on the three sociological theories will be compared to the actual physical and social attributes of the site. The physical and social context of the site will be integrated with the reported and unreported crime on the site. In this section, correlations will be reported and causation will be addressed.
Literature Review

Though this study covers a five year span, it remains a snapshot of skateparks and crime. In reality the “fad” of skateboarding has been around for over forty years. During this time skateboarding culture has developed and interacted with society at large. Literary references can be used to provide a contextual backdrop to the discussion of skateparks and crime. The first section will review the development of skateboarding and how society has reacted to the fluctuating popularity of skateboarding in the United States.

In addition, literary resources can provide context to the contemporary arguments that inevitably begin once a skatepark is proposed. Though it can be difficult to convince a city and its citizens that a skatepark is a justifiable use of public funds, it can be nearly impossible to find an uncontested site to place the skatepark. Previously adamant supporters of skateparks have been known to quickly balk when they can see the proposed site from their backyard. Though the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) attitude is common in most public works projects, skateparks seem to be especially undesirable. Regardless, skateparks are being built at an unprecedented rate and in cramped cities they always end up in someone’s backyard. Though not a complete review of all possible arguments in support of and in opposition to skateparks, the more common arguments are reviewed.

Finally, literary resources will be used to provide an explanation of the sociological theories used to examine the qualities of the skateparks studied. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by C. Ray Jeffery (1977), Defensible Space by Oscar Newman (1976), and Broken Windows by James Wilson and George Kelling (1982) attempt to correlate crime with the physical and social qualities of space. None of the theories were written to apply specifically to skateparks. Instead they attempt to predict crime in all public and private spaces according to physical and social criteria. Though these theories may seem dated, all three theories are in contemporary use by designers and police across America. Using these theories will show how the skateparks’ criminal potential compares to the criminal potential of public and private spaces as a whole.
A Brief History of Skateboarding

The early 1960’s is littered with fads that never seem to disappear. Absurdly perfect Barbie dolls, candy striped hula hoops, translucent Duncan yo-yos, and crudely constructed skateboards all hail from the sixties. The modern versions of Barbie, hula hoops and yo-yos keep their original form and purpose, except for frequent updates to Barbie’s always trendy wardrobe. The skateboard, on the other hand, has undergone drastic changes in both form and purpose. Modern skateboards have urethane wheels, sealed bearings and layered decks, and are a far cry from steel wheels bolted to a 2”x4” characteristic of early skateboards. The purpose of skateboards also bears little resemblance to its origins. The skateboard was initially conceived as a novel source of transportation and off-season recreation for surfers. Modern skateboarding is now typified by a surreal combination of grace and speed, brazen contempt for the constraints of gravity.

Many of these fads have become cultural icons and have caused interest to the point of obsession, as a quick and disturbing internet search will show. Though undoubtedly the dedicated “Barbiephile” receives some strange looks from concerned family, the collector likely does not dress in replica Barbie® fashions nor is she likely to adopt the hair style of the new American Idol® Barbie®. Perhaps unfortunately, yo-yo contests have never been inundated with retailers showing yo-yo clothing, expressly designed to improve style and performance, nor is music written to provide that extra bit of adrenaline when “walking the dog”. Skateboarding as gone a step further than other sixties fads and created a distinct subculture complete with accepted music, clothes and attitudes that, despite placid beginnings, has a reputation for being firmly anti-establishment.
The first wave.

The creation of this subculture and its ideals began almost immediately after the first commercial skateboard was introduced in 1959. The initial reaction to skateboarding was lukewarm at best. Most of the country looked at skateboarding as a fad, but surfers embraced it and saw it as a way to ride the concrete when they couldn’t ride the waves (Brooke 2003).

The surfers had already established a subculture and brought the same ideals to skateboarding. The first skateboarders were a far different breed from the rebellious youth of today, but they were just as exclusive. The first surfers/skateboarders were sons of well-to-do families that had received the finest education and often monthly stipends. It is comical to think of a group of skateboarders sitting in comfortable chairs smoking cigars, sipping scotch, and arguing about contemporary literature, but this is what was occurring in early 1960 California (Weyland 2002). The majority of skateboarding was done on flat terrain and emulated moves done on the Pacific waves.

The social elitist monopoly on skateboarding did not last long as middle-class kids began to replicate the production skateboards with homemade versions. Brothers stole sister’s roller-skates and endured the wails of protest while bolting the steel wheels to sanded down 2”x4”s. Early in the 1960’s middle-class kids on homemade boards and appearing on the streets of California with a do or die attitude toward surfing and skateboarding. The old guard abandoned the skateboard to the new interlopers and returned to their easy chairs and imported cigars. The new interlopers had a more aggressive attitude and included downhill runs reaching dangerous speeds along with the existing “freestyle” surfing moves. The next generation of skateboarders also pushed social boundaries and were
“cavorting around without respect for authority, going unsupervised while engaging in an activity that most adults had never done and couldn’t relate to” (Weyland 2002).

A new fad and menace

The May 1965 issue of Life Magazine brought skateboarding to the attention of the public at large and set a social tone that would stick with skateboarding for the next 45 years. The story was featured on the cover, showing an angelic barefoot blond named Pat Mcgee performing a handstand on a skateboard. In stark contrast to the graceful almost demure image is the foreboding caption, “The craze and menace of skateboards”. The actual title of the article was even more descriptive “Skateboard Mania- a Teeter-Totter on Wheels Is a New Fad and Menace”. The article featured skateboarders in a variety of contexts including priests on skateboards, a mother learning to skate with her son and a professional downhill skateboarding contest (Weyland 2002). Perhaps the most common context in which skateboarders were featured was airborne, the photo freezing the action as they were falling off to an undoubtedly harsh landing. This type of photo continues to have widespread appeal, showing the often comical face of the rebel who scoffed at gravity and is about to be painfully corrected.

It is difficult to say if the article’s text was encouraging or discouraging the use of skateboards. Comments like “the most exhilarating and dangerous joy riding device this side of the hot rod” or “gives the effect of having stepped on a banana peel while dashing down the back stairs” seems quite encouraging to thrill seekers everywhere. A mother was even quoted describing skateboarding as giving “a very free kind of feeling”. Other passages portray skateboarding as near suicidal calling them a “menace to life and limb” and reporting on two deaths that were a result of falling off skateboards and into traffic (Weyland 2002). The article confirmed what everyone suspected, skateboarding is inherently dangerous and most likely quite fun, as dangerous things tend to be.

Other assorted articles were published confirming the dangers of skateboarding and to a large degree were correct. Steel or clay wheels gave a bumpy ride and the lack of bearings
would cause the wheels to seize when they encountered the smallest of pebbles, quickly ejecting the rider. As bones broke and skin tore the dangers of skateboarding were confirmed in the real world.

**Maybe it wasn’t that great if an idea after all.**

As the sixties continued, skateboarding fell out of favor and society proclaimed skateboarding a fad and celebrated its departure. Some still skateboarded but not enough to keep the potential menace in the public eye. Few people had time for novelties while a very controversial “police action” was occurring in Vietnam. A negative social climate coupled with the very real limitations of the skateboard made sure most skateboards were relegated to a dusty garage.

**The second wave.**

Dedicated skateboarders kept the “fad” alive in the late sixties skating freestyle over flat surfaces and enduring the fickle nature of clay wheels and the damage they cause. Fortunately the faithful were soon to be rewarded; skateboarding would soon become faster, smoother, safer and most importantly, cooler. The savior of skateboarding was, unassumingly enough, plastic.

Cadillac Wheels, composed of stylish clear urethane, were introduced in 1972 in Southern California surf shops that sold skateboards (Brooke 1999). Though twice as expensive, they were faster and smoother and the dedicated bought them up. The word was soon out, both of the superiority of urethane and that Cadillac Wheels was making money on them. The entrepreneurial spirit led to numerous other improvements on the design, including better bearings and axels made specifically for skateboards called trucks. Decks were also made of plastic in a bewildering
array of shapes and colors. The resulting design, similar to modern day skateboards, greatly improved control. Skateboarding was once again becoming popular in Southern California and the public was understandably concerned.

**Z-Boys enter stage left.**

In 1975 skateboarding exploded in California, spreading to neighboring states which can be attributed to one defining event, the 1975 Skateboard Championships at Del Mar. The championship was won by an unknown team, the Z-Boys. The majority of the competitors were uniformed and clean cut performing typical wheelies, pirouettes and handstands while staying upright on the board (Weyland 2002). These tricks formed the core of skateboarding at the time.

The Z-Boys were obviously out of place with shaggy hair and ripped jeans. The crowd and competition expected little from the skateboarding urchins. The crowd soon sat in stunned silence as the Z-Boys carved the status quo to pieces. The Z-Boys' runs contained no handstands or wheelies; they showed the crowd completely new tricks never even conceived before. The Z-Boys rode fast and hard, crouching down on the board, hands inches above the ground. They planted hands on the street to assist in 180 degree turns, coming out of the turns at amazing speeds. Skateboards spun under their feet in the middle of high speed runs, never losing momentum (Peralta 2001). The speed, the noise, the complete disregard for established form was more than some could stand. Perhaps most scandalous, the Z-Boys dripped style all over the pavement and made the entire competition seem passé. Z-Boy Nathan Pratt was later quoted as saying, “It was like Ferraris versus Model T’s” (Weyland 2002).
The birth of the skateboarding lifestyle.

The Z-Boys destroyed and rebuilt skateboarding in one afternoon. Their opinions on music and fashion were reported in Skateboarder magazine along side images of the future of skateboarding. Their anti-establishment attitudes and exploits became the stuff of legends. The boyish good looks of Z-Boys Tony Alva and Jay Adams insured that they received extra attention from the adoring masses.

The Z-Boys were located out of the Zephyr Surf Shop in a rough area of Santa Monica known as Dogtown. Skip Engblom, a co-owner of Zephyr, described Dogtown as “the last great seaside slum.... it was dirty, it was filthy, it was paradise” (Peralta 2001). The harsh urban environment fed their anti-establishment attitudes and contributed to the outrageous schemes that usually culminated in trespassing.

Seems a shame for a pool to sit empty.

In 1975, the same year the Z-Boys won the Skateboard Championships, California was experiencing a severe drought and had placed water restrictions on the public. The result was hundreds of swimming pools were lying empty in Southern California. The pools would not remain empty as skateboarders descended in mass on the empty pools. It has even been suggested that this was a coordinated effort of Dogtowners and other skating groups throughout Southern California (Welyand 2002). A few pools were abandoned but most were not, and running from the police became a frequent activity.

Dogtown elevated trespassing to an art form by employing absurd methods of locating and accessing pools. Skateboarders obtained records from city hall to find potential pools. Jay Adams rode on the roof of a car, seeing over fences for potential sites. Tony Alva
actually hired a chauffeur so he could put more hours in the search. A few brave souls even got jobs as legitimate pool men to find more pools. Once they located a pool, any standing water was drained while the homeowner slept. The next day skateboarders would carve the pool while the owners were at work. Skateboarders posed as police or potential buyers to gain access to homes that were not occupied (Welyand 2002). Inevitably the real police would show up, sometimes in minutes, other times in days. Skaters would use predetermined escape routes and simply move on to the next pool.

Z-Boys would never reveal the location of the pools, but the photographer that accompanied them preserved the moments for public review. The photos coming out of the pool sessions were amazing because skateboarders for the first time were airborne and in control. The Z-Boys vocally justified their trespassing and fraud with a skate or die attitude, and disregarded the police that tried to stop them. They were open and unrepentant about their hedonistic lifestyle. The Z-Boys told stories of prostitutes, drugs and Mexican police presenting them with a trash bag full of marijuana (Weyland 2002). The antics of the Z-Boys, especially Adams and Alba, fueled a popularity that was already on the rise due to the gravity defying photos from the pool sessions.

Skateboarding continued to grow in popularity, encouraged by the mythic figures of Dogtown, skateboarders were becoming more brazen in their use of public and private space. Police began to enforce skateboarding bans but cities made no attempt to provide alternative space for skateboarders. The conflict between skateboarders and police was mild and usually characterized by the skateboarders fleeing the scene to avoid yet another ticket.
For a small fee.

The entrepreneurial spirit helped some cities by providing a space specifically designed for skateboarding, of course for a small fee. Private skateparks began to open across the country to feed the second generation of skateboarders. The private parks paid heavy liability insurance claims to insulate them from injury lawsuits. It is unclear how many skateboarding injury cases were successfully prosecuted. It is clear that rising insurance premiums reduced most skateparks to financial ruin. Many of the skateparks were well built concrete surfaces and heavily used, but skateboarding’s tradition of appropriated space is not so easily redirected into defined areas. Many skateboarders felt constrained inside a specific spot and preferred the freedom and endless concrete terrain of a city. The behavior restrictions, placed on skaters by the skatepark owners, drove some skaters back to the streets (Weyland 2002). Despite this, the skateparks were largely accepted by many skaters, if for no other reason than to avoid conflicts with the police.

Leave it Hollywood to make skateboarding lame.

As a testament to skateboarding’s popularity, two bad movies focusing on skateboarding were created in the late seventies; almost non-existent Freewheelin’ and the fortunately rare Skateboard: The Movie. Freewheelin’ was centered around a forced love story between a marginal actress and a poor actor who happened to be professional skateboarder Stacy Peralta. The unfortunate girlfriend is abandoned when Peralta pursues his true passion, skateboarding. Reports believably state that the story and acting was bad but the skateboarding was exceptional (Weyland). Skateboard: The Movie tells of a man of questionable moral character who meets some exceptional
skateboarders and forms a skateboarding team. The newly crowned manager attempts to make as much money off them as he can to pay his gambling debts. The skaters, of course, rebel and show the manager the error of his ways. Again, professional skateboarders, including Tony Alva, are cast as the skaters in the film (Weyland 2002). Reviews confirm earlier suspicions that professional skateboarders can skate, but can not act.

**I am part of the public, but can’t use public space?**

Most cities had banned skateboarding in public places, leaving skateboarders with no legal option and constant problems with police. Though early skateparks were popular, liability concerns eventually raised insurance premiums beyond the breaking point. By 1980 almost all skateparks were out of business and demolished for public safety. Youth began to turn to other activities and skateboarding slowly faded away from the public view.

Society breathed a collective sigh of relief as skateboarding went underground. Riding a skateboard had become easier and safer, but instead of reducing injuries it only promoted more extreme tricks. Skateboarder’s complete disregard for safety was only eclipsed by their complete disregard for everything else. The Z-Boys, Tony Alva and Jay Adams in particular, gave skateboarding an identity that scorned authority, property, and the status quo. In other words, they were teenagers of the highest order and completely unrepentant. Fortunately the antics of the Z-Boys were not featured on 60 Minutes so the uninitiated rarely knew the extent that the Z-Boy attitude had saturated skateboarding. The public saw little, but what they saw they didn’t like and were more than happy to see the skateboarding fad fade away.

**The third wave.**

Through the late seventies and early eighties the faithful stayed true, building wooden ramps in back yards and once again sending skateboarding underground. The core contingent skated on ever increasing amounts of urban concrete until 1981, when things changed. Thrasher hit the newsstands and the faithful were saved.
It may seem simplistic to attribute the resurgence of skateboarding to one cause, but it appears to have happened that way. *Thrasher* was an instant success among the faithful, who poured over each new issue with a glazed look. *Thrasher* provided far more than stunning photos of amazing aerial maneuvers, of which they had plenty. *Thrasher* defined a lifestyle, detailing everything from the board under your feet to the thoughts in your head. Saying that *Thrasher*’s articles gave “advice” on skateboarding, fashion, music, and even nutrition, is perhaps generous. The articles were written in a demanding tone that was closer to proclamations of furious indignation than tips on spring’s hot new colors. *Thrasher* told people how to live, rather than suggest options. The message was simple and useful in almost all situations; the way the establishment tells you how to do anything, is wrong.

The faithful had been gnarly, and the faithful had been true, thus were rewarded with their monthly communion. *Thrasher* was the soul of skateboarding and the message was clear, “Skate and destroy”. The *Thrasher* message soon infected newsstands across the country. The anti-establishment magazine began appearing in classrooms and backpacks far outside of skateboarding’s traditional Californian stronghold. It was as if the Z-Boys had been reincarnated as a demented printing press and were going national. Needless to say, the public was not amused.

**Skate and destroy.**

From the beginning *Thrasher* intended to resurrect skateboarding. As originator Fausto Vitello put it, “It was about pure skateboarding. It was a matter of survival. We were keeping the spirit alive.” (Brooke 2003) *Thrasher* went so far as to publish an article on how
to create your own skateboarding magazine. All the essentials were covered including page layout, image theft, and mass distribution. Vitello was typically candid about *Thrasher* and its readers, “Skateboarding attracts a unique person. It influences the rest of society. *Thrasher* is not about hypocrisy or selling out. We are about skate and destroy.” (Brooke 2003)

Perhaps the biggest problem society would have had with *Thrasher*, if it cared to look, was the insistence that skateboarders hit the streets. By 1981 only a few skateparks were left, but as *Thrasher* said, “there are tons of asphalt and concrete being poured everyday so- GRAB THAT BOARD!” (Brooke 2003) Articles like “Pool Mercenaries” were written giving advice for skating in private pools and getting away with it. Most of the tips were recycled habits of the Z-Boys, but prior planning helps in most endeavors, including escaping from the police. “Scene Reports” highlighted choice concrete in specific cities (Weyland 2002). The owners would likely be pale with the thought of skateboarders descending on their property, but that is the owner’s problem. *Thrasher* was littered with photos featuring the reigning skate gods holding court in public parks or from the top of stair railings. *Thrasher* declared public space to be the proper place of worship and the faithful responded.

This is not to say that skateparks were not covered in *Thrasher*. Many California skateparks were featured, but they were also being destroyed at a rapid rate. As the last few skateparks disappeared, so did *Thrasher*’s sparse coverage of them. They became a romantic memory that fueled the fires of frustration with the powers of repression.
Skate at all costs.

*Thrasher* encouraged a “skate at all costs” attitude and tapped into the do-it-yourself nature of skateboarders. *Thrasher* published plans for building your own skate ramp and all but gave directions to local construction sites to acquire materials. As a result ramps popped up in back yards across America.

The inevitable conflicts with police rose as more skaters began to appear on public and private property. *Thrasher* was obviously resentful of the police, but *Thrasher*’s policy was always to run, preferably fast, from the cops. *Thrasher* had a light hearted approach to the police as shown in one of their multiple choice questionnaires. The question was, “Police are sometimes called A) Pigs, B) Sir, C) The Man, D) In times of emergency, E) Only when you are having fun.” *Thrasher* even poetically suggested that police help skateboarders by “forcing you into carving the right line at the right time.” (Weyland 2002) Understandably, police soon became stricter with enforcing no skateboarding ordinances, leading to the mantra “Skateboarding is not a crime”. Unfortunately, for many skateboarders, trespassing is.

**The Thrasher hymnal**

The *Thrasher* music section called “Notes from the Underground” could more accurately be called the “Punk Rock Rules and the Rest Sucks”. The early eighties punk explosion occurred in San Francisco and *Thrasher* was at ground zero. *Thrasher* ran interviews with the who’s who in punk rock. The perpetually pissed-off included Social Distortion, Sex Pistols, Circle Jerks, and the legendary Black Flag. It is not surprising that skateboarding and punk were linked, considering they share similar ideologies. Actually skateboarding was practicing the punk ideal long before many of the songs were written.

*Thrasher* not only exalted the independent music scene, but had searing contempt, that bordered on funny, of established bands. When reviewing a Rolling Stones concert *Thrasher* stated, “This form of coliseum rock would better be left alone. It was good while it lasted, but old dead things stink.” Fortunately, little restraint was expressed by the author who further pontificated, “The audience puts a group of human begins on the stage and
worships them like new messiahs. Then this group proceeds to control the emotions of the hypnotized..... The motive of all of this is not for your hearts, nor your soul, but it is for what man craves most. Slaughter of dignity for financial gain.” (Weyland 2002) It is safe to assume that fading disco and emerging 80's hair bands did not fare any better under Thrasher’s less than objective eye.

The skateboarding love-in.

Two other skateboarding magazines made an appearance, but neither was as monumental as Thrasher. The first magazine was Transworld Skateboarding and began publication in 1983, two years after Thrasher. Transworld Skateboarding was created by skateboard manufactures that were becoming frustrated with Thrasher’s anti-establishment ranting. The individual skateboarding companies could not afford to print catalogues so Thrasher became their default catalogue. It is assumed that mommy’s delicate sensibilities were offended by Thrasher and Johnny received a badminton set for Christmas, as opposed to the new skateboard pictured in Thrasher (Brooke 2003). The solution to the problem was an all inclusive skateboarding magazine that presented an accepting, and acceptable image to the public. Predictably, Transworld Skateboarding was not as popular as Thrasher. Transworld Skateboarding is still being published today and has a consistent audience, but Thrasher still reigns supreme. The obvious miscalculation is that skateboarders don’t want to be mainstream. Opie Taylor on a skateboard just isn’t cool. Prominent skateboarder Rob Schlaefi put it best, with brevity that borders on universal truth, “Skating’s not nice. You don’t grind to be nice.” (Weyland 2002)
Wish all big brothers were this cool.

The second magazine with the ominous title of *Big Brother* appeared at the very end of the third wave in 1992. Despite the Orwellian overtones, the magazine was not about control, far from it. *Big Brother* was produced by die hard skaters because they saw *Thrasher* as too conservative. Surprisingly, *Thrasher* had a limit, they had even begun to restrict some advertising and content that was considered too risky (Brooke 2003). This offense was too much for *Big Brother* to stand, so they created a magazine with no restrictions on advertising or content.

This thunderdome style of journalism has some truly disastrous results. Articles included "How to Kill Yourself" and "Field Trip to Hustler". *Big Brother* featured articles on more mundane topics such as sex, drugs, music, and purportedly midgets. Somewhere between the breasts and bongs there were a few stories about skateboarding. Skateboarding stories were spiced up by adding some controversial images like the photograph of a heel flip over a stack of burning bibles (Brooke 2003). Fortunately *Big Brother* never came to the attention of the public at large. Though unknown how the public would react, it is quite certain that someone would have been arrested.

 Ironically enough it took Larry Flint, yes that Larry Flint, to clean up *Big Brother*'s act. Upon buying the magazine, Flint imposed a modicum of censorship and began to remove content of questionable taste (Brooke 2003). *Big Brother* remains in publication today and still provides a hardcore alternative to the relatively mainstream *Thrasher*. 
A singular transmission

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of Thrasher as a cultural catalyst. Mass media exposure allowed the ideology to spread beyond California and across the nation. Many skateboarders saw Thrasher as their only link to the outside world. Unfortunately, what was transmitted across the link society had some issues with. Regardless, all over the country kids were living the Thrasher lifestyle. Skateboard biographer Jocko Weyland described Thrasher as, “More than radical and underground- it was indispensable. It was a singular transmission of style, attitude, perseverance, and rebellion.” (Weyland 2002)

The reasons for skateboarding’s decline in the early nineties is usually blamed on the economic recession and the rise of roller blades. Roller blading gave the same feel as skateboarding but was far easier to master. Undoubtedly these factors contributed to a decline skateboarding, but ten years of Thrasher’s irreverent, anti-establishment attitude did not help. As in previous eras, the posers dissipated and the faithful remained true, treating the always expanding suburbia like their personal skatepark.

The fourth wave

Skateboarding, like many things, went into a depression in the early nineties. As discretionary income dried up, money for skateboards was hard to justify. Fewer skateboarders were assaulting the streets, but attrition was not as extreme as before. The faithful had grown and were finally getting organized.

The primary skateboarding organization in the early nineties was the National Skateboard Association (NSA). The NSA was run by Frank Hawk, Tony Hawk’s father, and no one else. Frank ran the show and his son, arguably the best skater of all time, insured that
Frank Hawk could take his ball and go home if people didn’t cooperate with his autocratic methods (Weyland 2002). Frank would host contests and provide monetary prizes for the best skater. To cover costs, Frank would charge a modest admission. Fortunately for Frank, his lucrative son was undeniably the best skater on the ramp and the won many of the monetary prizes.

Though the money was likely good, Frank Hawk had a larger goal in mind, more money. To get more money, the solution was obvious, more skateboarders. The progeny of the baby boomers were becoming teenagers and their economic buying power was staggering. The only way to milk the cash cow was to get parents to allow, or even encourage, their kids to skateboard. Frank Hawk saw skateboarding as a socially appropriate activity and was determined to convince the public. The attempt to commercialize skateboarding met with marked resistance from the faithful “skate and destroy” crowd. Some “legends” of skateboarding were refused admittance to contests over concerns about their behavior (Weyland 2002). If Frank Hawk said you were in, you were in. Unfortunately, the court of appeals was Frank Hawk. Thrasher, predictably, was not a fan stating, “The crime of fun is often punished by the minions of commerce.” (Weyland 2002)

**It’s called cable television and it will revolutionize how we waste time!**

Despite Thrasher’s disdain, Frank Hawk’s plan was working and skateboarding was about to benefit from the new opiate of the masses, cable television. Cable television was in most American homes and networks were sprouting like weeds. The days of three channels were over. Americans could now endlessly search over one hundred channels before they found that nothing was on. ESPN broadcasted sports 24-hours a day, but surprisingly found
that they had not saturated the market yet. ESPN2 was launched and the scramble began to find more sports to broadcast. One of their most successful ventures was the Extreme Games in 1995.

Extreme Games featured “sports” that any reasonable person would consider insane. Some of the questionable activities included sky surfing, street luge, snowboarding and skateboarding. The show was enormously popular and presented a far different image of skateboarding than the public was previously exposed to. The skateboarders were clean cut and sober. There was no anti-establishment rhetoric or juvenile rebellion. Perhaps most importantly they were physically contained, not carving on curbs and handrails in the general public. The flawless balance and raw strength required to do the tricks astounded America. People called them crazy, people called them suicidal, but people also called them athletes. Skateboarding was becoming legitimized as a sport in the eyes of the public.

They are just like skateboarders, only reformed.

The new image of the skateboarder was closer to an acrobat than a thug. The skateboarder was now a person who could dazzle people with acts of physical dexterity as opposed to terrifying you with acts of high-speed masochism. The new vision showed skateboarders competing in a sanitized and organized event with no trace of previous anarchic behavior. Some skateboarders, who used to look upon the masses with undisguised disdain, now were eager to wait in line, to entertain the masses. The public loves nothing more than a reformed delinquent, and was overjoyed when skateboarders were finally getting into line. Of course, the faithful were profoundly disgusted in what could only be perceived as a perversion of their beloved vision.
The acceptance of skateboarding as a sport caused a rift between the old faithful and the new professional class of skateboarder. The faithful considered professional skateboarders trained monkeys that could perform incredible tricks, but had sold out the ideology for the all mighty dollar (Weyland 2002). Professionals rarely commented on the insults that were heaped upon them by the faithful. It is possible that the professionals’ ears were plugged with the money made from skateboarding, of all things. Though the topic of jealously is rarely mentioned, the overtone is unmistakable.

Skateboarding didn’t, and still hasn’t, entirely lost the anti-establishment image that sustained it for the previous thirty years, but the ideological purity had definitely been diluted. Skateboarding biographer, Jocko Weyland, put it best when he wrote, “One leitmotif in the history of skateboarding and the punk movement is the stark contrast between the real counterculture of the past and the pseudo-counterculture of the present, a present where teenage rebellion is packaged and sold in a perpetual feedback loop of co-optation and regurgitation. Punk and skating could be hidden and their appeal and authenticity lay therein. The freedom to be underground has all but disappeared today.” (Weyland 2002).

Sir, your son’s fine is $50.

Despite the cries of blasphemy from the skateboarding faithful, the clean cut professional skateboarders continued to gain popularity, and society focused all their attention on them. The pros were treated as rock stars by skateboarders and public alike, and the sales of skateboards and related clothing went through the roof.
Though the new breed of skateboarders did not profess the anti-establishment doctrine of the *Thrasher* generation, they still wanted to skate. Conflicts between police and skateboarders rose as thousands of new skateboarders hit the streets. Tickets and warnings were issued and, as expected, people were not pleased. The difference this time is the offended parties included the parents that bought their kids a skateboard. It was far easier for the police and politicians to ignore the cries of disenfranchised kids than their tax-paying-parents, complete with voter registration cards. Numerous cities had problems justifying their anti-skateboarding laws to their citizens. Fortunately someone could lead the California government to water, now just to make them drink.

**You mean that skateboarding wasn’t considered hazardous already?**

The International Association of Skateboard Companies (ISAC) wanted a future to their sport that did not involve constant conflict with civil authorities. Their solution was an old one, and one that had previously failed, skateparks. The problem with the earlier attempt at skateparks was the crippling liability insurance required to protect the private owners from litigation. The public sector understandably never went down this road to financial ruin that buried a previous generation of private skateparks. The solution was to legally declare skateboarding a hazardous activity. The legal classification declared a public facility as “use at your own risk” and insulated the city from liability if someone was injured. The classification had been used by California for years for high-risk sports like rock climbing. After months of deliberation ISAC, convinced the Californian horse to drink the water it had been led to. In October 1997, AB1296 amended the California Health and Safety Code declaring skateboarding was a hazardous activity (Skatepark.org 2004).
The skatepark explosion began and the parks that had appeared in California soon were replicated in other cities. The cities insulated themselves with the same hazardous activity law which, surprisingly, has held up in court to this day. ISAC was ecstatic and successfully promoted public skateparks across America. Steve Van Doren, owner of Vans shoes stated, “We have to market the idea that these sports can be done at the top level only in the best facilities, in specially designed skateparks and not on street corners.”(Weyland 2002) The faithful were disappearing and those remaining cried themselves to sleep clutching a faded worn out back issue of Thrasher.

It’s just a fad, it will fade again…..won’t it?

The fourth wave has never subsided and skateboarding is more popular today than it ever has been, both as an activity and as an industry. Cities still issue tickets and ban skateboarding in public places, but feel justified as long as some spot is set aside and deemed a skatepark. The quality of the parks varies from city to city, but the message is clear, “We gave you a skatepark, now stay off our streets.” A few faithful still skate on the streets and still hold to the old anti-establishment attitudes, but the rebels are disappearing and being replaced with masses of kids that have none of the rage or dissatisfaction of previous generations. The new guard is now composed of clean-cut kids hopping out of Mom’s white mini-van to ride the vertical at the local skatepark. The public is happy, the city is happy, the new generation of skateboarders is happy and no one seems to miss what was lost.

Skatepark Argument

If skateboarding was to follow its typical periodic rise and fall from popularity, then skateboarding should be declining in popularity soon, much to the pleasure of society as a whole. Unfortunately, for society, this is not the case. The silver lining of the storm cloud is that the image and practitioners have changed in the past ten years. Skateboarding still sees
its share of rebellious youth that descend upon the streets, but now middle-class kids are
given skateboards from willing parents. Skateboarders have diversified to include all types
of people with a wide range of ideologies. Far different from the unified anti-establishment
front skateboarding presented in years past.

Skateboard? Sure, everybody’s doing it.

In 1999 approximately 7.8 million people were skateboarding. By the year 2000 that
number grew a stunning 49 percent, to 11.6 million people, and boasted more participants
that baseball (Sporting Goods Manufactures Association 2001). It is estimated that in the
year 2005 active skateboarders will grow to 15
million (Williams 2002). The Skatepark
Association of United States of America
claims that skateboarding has become a three
billion dollar industry (SPAUSA 2004a)

The reason for the rapid growth of
skateboarding is an intrinsically interesting
topic worthy of hours of serious discussion in
smoke-filled rooms. In between assertions of
mainstream acceptance, economic feasibility,
and the non-competitive nature of skateboarding, espresso could be sipped while providing
insights of skateboarding’s meteoric rise in popularity. Unfortunately, this topic will not be
given its just due. Likely, the aforementioned factors combine with a host of factors not yet
mentioned, encouraging people to hop on a skateboard. The interest here is contemporary
society’s reaction to the current wave of skateboarding that is crashing on their shores.

The explosive growth of skateboarding has spawned cities, towns, and even modern-
day villages to consider building skateparks. The skateparks are often implemented as a
solution to public property damage and to justify anti-skateboarding ordinances. According
to the Atlanta Journal Constitution, in the 18 months between January 2001 and July 2002,
1,000 skateparks were built in the United States (Williams 2002). Numerous design firms
specialize in skatepark design including Dreamland, Site Design Group, Purkiss Rose, Wormhoudt and the evocatively named, Team Pain. Specialty contractors travel through America performing the perfect concrete work required for a top notch skatepark surface. Though designers, contractors, and city planners seem to be on board, the communities themselves remain skeptical.

**Anti-Skatepark Position**

Though skateparks have not been universally villanized, many communities have reasonable arguments for not wanting to invest the resources in a skatepark. Skatepark advocates routinely scorn these arguments, but that is easy to do when skateboarding is considered an inherent good. Unfortunately for advocates, these arguments presented by communities are reasonable and should be addressed before large sums of public money are spent for a structure that is specific to a singular activity and user group.

**How much? Hey wait! Not over here... I don’t care somewhere else.**

Perhaps the greatest concern is for the cost of the skatepark. When a city starts talking about spending $100,000 for a skatepark, many people begin to wonder if this is a good use of their hard earned tax dollars. Skateboarding is perceived by many to be a fad and will fall into decline as it has before. By the time the park is built skateboarding could be out of fashion, and the city would be a day late and many dollars short. The skatepark will likely soon be covered in graffiti and become an eye sore, if it wasn’t the minute it was pored. Then the city will want to spend another $20,000 just to remove it. That is precisely what happened to many cities in the late-seventies to early-eighties. Skateparks were deemed a public hazard and had to be removed. In that context, building a skatepark sounds like a typical governmental money sink.
While many people praise the efforts of cities to accommodate a quickly growing sport, not all people believe they should support an activity that has shunned them for thirty years. A third group of people will sing the virtues of skateboarding, but if a skatepark is proposed in their immediate neighborhood their tune will change dramatically. Unfortunately, when perfectly normal people embrace the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) doctrine they become emphatic, tenacious and a little dense. The resulting argument plays out in design meetings and city council chambers across the country. The ensuing verbal battle often contains ridiculous assertions and prognostications of both apocalyptic and heroic proportions.

What was that? Speak up, man.

Noise is a common and understandable concern for potential neighbors of a skatepark. Often the most vocal opponents of established skateparks are neighbors that claim the noise never seems to end. The two sources of the noise are the definite clack of a skateboard hitting the concrete and the definitive chirping of teenage conversation. The noise became so extreme at Haverhill Skatepark in St Edmundsbury, England neighbors successfully closed the skatepark, which will be relocated for half of its original cost (Haverhill News Online 2004). The sound of skateboarding can be constant in a successful skatepark. The noise problem can continue well into the night when the teens congregate and socialize. Unfortunately, telling teenagers to quiet down is like telling the sun not to shine, it’s not going to happen.

I am an attorney, here is my card.

Injuries are matter of course in skateboarding and seen by skaters as badges of honor. Every skateboarder can tell of their bleeding, ten inch, seven color bruise that was shaped
like Africa. The vast majority of these injuries are hidden from parents and doctors alike, but they undoubtedly occur. In a society where many people would call a lawyer before a doctor in the case of an injury, it is understandable that the community would be concerned about possible law suits. Wavers and other disclaimers are notoriously unreliable and legislation is made from the bench as often as Congress. A good lawyer could drag the community into bankruptcy even if they won. Then all it takes is one sympathetic judge to hit the city for a cool three million in liability. Though this scenario may be overstated, the city would indeed be opening itself up to possible liability that it was never in danger of before.

What did you just call me?

It is not surprising that some disagreement exists when politicians, planners, skateboarders and potential neighbors meet at City Hall. The previously mentioned issues are hotly contested events, which often degrade to something less than civil. Yet there remains one topic that can offend every skateboarder in the room if presented poorly, crime.

Inevitably, the topic of crime in and around the proposed skatepark is broached and often the assumption is that crime will occur more often. The implication is so loud that the actual words said are irrelevant. Skateboarders are criminals. In all fairness, the concerned homeowners never actually say skateboarders are criminals. The concerned residents could actually be suggesting that people who visit skateparks, aka teenagers, are criminals. Despite the lack of clarity, the message goes over like a lead balloon. The ensuing hysteria may be dramatic amusement for the disinterested observer, but few in the room are disinterested.

If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, well.....

Despite the skateboarders' screams of righteous indignation, the connection of skateboarding and crime is too obvious to ignore. The fact is that skateboarding was criminal in ideology and act for 30 years before being christened a sport. Despite the number of skateparks being built, many skateboarders still take to the streets and grind on public and private property, to the frustration of cities everywhere. In fact, it is easily argued that the original and contemporary appeal of skateboarding is in its outlaw status.
The very act of skateboarding from the mid-sixties to the mid-nineties often required two laws be broken, trespassing and vandalism. Skateboarding's sister sport "running from the cops" could also provide the skateboarder with an additional ticket if the officer was in an especially foul mood.

Now a generation is skating that theoretically could have only skateboarded in approved venues, but the remote likelihood borders on laughable. If a criminal is defined as, one who commits a crime, then most skateboarders are indeed criminals. Skateboarders will often claim that they have only broken laws to do what they love, skateboarding. This may indeed be true, considering no study has shown that skateboarders are likely to commit crimes other than trespassing and vandalism.

You call that art?

Another crime that is closely associated with skateboarding is graffiti. Skateparks are notorious for attracting graffiti. While some see graffiti as an annoyance and eyesore, others consider it a far more serious problem. The public at large does not differentiate between tagging, gang related graffiti and work of real artistic merit. As a result, all graffiti must go, otherwise the skatepark will look like a slum. Sandblasting the skatepark regularly will cost the city more and more every year because once it is clean it will be spray painted again.

Perhaps the most damming condemnation of graffiti comes from Tracy Warner, the editor of the Wenatchee World, about graffiti at the local skatepark. Warner eloquently cautions, "Don't underestimate the power of graffiti. It is more than an exercise in bad taste or a sign of misdirected youthful exuberance. It is not innocent; it is not art for self-
expression. It is more than a nuisance, more than simple vandalism. It is a message and a symbol. It is a threat and a reminder that the lawless can rule. That is not overly dramatic. Graffiti is a symptom, and the disease cannot be cured with a sandblaster.” (Warner 1999)

What is this world coming to? Did you hear about the skatepark in…?

Some people suggest that skateparks become a nexus of criminal activity and predispose an area to crime. If the skateboarders are not committing the crimes then other local teens and out-of-towners are. Regardless, it’s not a desirable situation for any neighborhood. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the argument is that many examples of skateparks with serious crime problems can be found. These crimes are typically violent offenses such as assault. Theft seems to be very popular along with the obligatory drug offenses. Though it is impossible to prove if the crimes would have occurred if the skatepark wasn’t there, it is believed to be more than a coincidence for many potential neighbors.

A select few skateparks have become notorious for crime problems such as Mullay Skatepark in crime ridden Bronx, New York. Reports of theft and robbery are commonplace and violence is the order of the day. In May of 2000, a teenager was beaten to within inches of his life and left with a crushed skull (Cracked Fork.com 2004). Unfortunately these activities can be expected in the Bronx.

According to the The Star Phoenix in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Lions Skatepark was, “A magnet for thefts and scuffles”. Apparently BMX bikes have been stolen at knife point and someone was severely beaten with a chain. The local city councilman stated that these were growing pains and the skatepark was the best thing to happen to his district in a long time. Apparently the city had a low tolerance for pain, of any kind, and decided to take
action. A troop of security guards were hired to observe the park during the summer months. Though the city is having trouble finding the $15,000 to pay the security guard, it appears the situation is improving (French 2005).

In Fort Wayne, Indiana the police were called 64 times to Lawton Skatepark during its first two months. Most of the offenses were violent and some included weapons. A local skater definitively summed up Lawton skatepark with “It would be a lot cooler if there weren’t so many fights, a lot of people just come here and sit around.” The city remains committed to the park stating that, “Anytime you open a new facility you are going to have to work out a few bugs. It has surpassed our expectations of use.” (Cortez 2004)

Not all skateparks that experience crime problems are located in large cities. Pioneer Park in Wenatchee, Washington, a town of 25,000 has been experiencing problems also. Violence and gang graffiti is the order of the day, with the occasional instance of intimidating the locals. The skateboarders say that the problems are caused by the gangs that hang out there, not the skateboarders. The city makes no distinction between different groups and questions their mutual exclusivity. The city is exploring the typical options: more lights, security guards, and video surveillance, but the neighborhood is skeptical of their impact. They want the skatepark closed and the gang graffiti removed. Unfortunately, the consequence is global one, but as one resident puts it, "I know it isn't all of you. But it's enough that you're all involved, just by association." (Maher 1999).

Even the tropical paradise of Maui is not free from problems in Kalama Skatepark. Perhaps the worst of the examples, the skatepark is located in a larger park that is swamped with crime. Beatings are a regular occurrence, and the beaten are robbed while they try to
recover. Though it is difficult to tell what the worst part of the park is, the skatepark can make a bid. The skatepark seems to be a focus of drugs, evidenced by the needles littering the ground. The skatepark is managed and supervised by the local YMCA. Routinely employees observe drug deals, violent crime, and theft, but rarely report it. Unfortunately the crime is so thick, it is like picking an individual zebra from the herd. The absurd prevalence of crime and threats of vengeance from criminals, keep the wise YMCA employees safe and quiet (Wilson 2004).

Uh... No thanks, I think we are doing fine

The above arguments and examples lead many to believe that skateparks are an invitation for crime. Some will make the distinction between the skateboarders who use the skateparks and the people who gather around it, but others find the distinction unnecessary. It doesn’t really matter if skateboarders are the bad apples spoiling the barrel or not, no one wants to have rotten apples next to their backyard.

Pro-Skatepark Position

As might be suspected, skateboarders do not agree with the general public about skateboarding, skateboarders, or skateparks. As a matter of fact, many skateboarders take great offense to their character being questioned. They insist that the neighborhoods’ complaints are unfounded stereotyping. To the contrary, skateboarding is the solution to many of the problems attributed to it. Fortunately city planners and designers often agree with skateboarders and help add credibility to their arguments.

Advocates argue that in an increasingly overweight youth population that spends more time in virtual worlds than real ones, skateboarding is a good way to get outdoors. Perhaps skateboarding’s greatest strength is that it is non-competitive, unlike declining traditional sports. Skateboarding focuses on individual achievement, allowing people to progress at their own rate. Skateboarding teaches success through self-imposed discipline and commitment. Finally skateboarding allows youth to express themselves through sport,
much like ice skating. Skateboarders can develop a style unique to themselves while getting much needed exercise.

Skateboarding's public image has vastly improved over the past ten years, but thirty years of anti-establishment rhetoric is not quickly forgotten. If confronted with the ghost of *Thrasher*, skateboarders insist that they are not the same skateboarders of the past. Indeed the skateboarder in the city council meeting is different from the past. No *Thrasher* faithful would stand before the city council, a member of a collective known as “The Man”, and ask for a skatepark. They would simply assault the streets and take it from the world that discarded them. The skateboarder standing in front of the city council is far more concerned with having a place to skate without being hassled by the police or their parents. There is none of the rhetoric or hostility of yesteryear, the skateboarders are just average people willing to work with the city for what they want. It goes without saying that you catch more flies with honey, than with vinegar.

**Uh...To skate on, I guess?**

An inevitable question asked is, “why should we build a skatepark in the first place?” The obvious answer is to skateboard on, but this question attempts to suggest that skateboarding is not an activity that deserves public support. The question of “Why build a soccer field or baseball diamond?” is never asked because these activities have already been deemed worthy of public funds. The traditional sports of tennis, baseball and football are in decline and skateboarding is on the rise. The same justification of why to build, applies to skateparks the same as basketball courts.
Though more respectful, skateboarding is still not perceived as a legitimate sport due to its outlaw beginnings. Perhaps the situation was best addressed by an anonymous reviewer who was reviewing a funding proposal for this project. The disturbingly honest reviewer stated, “Everyday I encounter problems with property damage and attempts to outsmart skaters so that improvements are not ruined by their activity. I respect this sport, but until a vast majority of skaters begin to respect public and private property and not threaten public safety, this group will never achieve a wide enough support base in average communities to invest public funds to build skateparks.” (pers. comm.). It is assumed that respecting public and private property means not skating on it. Unfortunately, excluding skateboarding from public property means that there is nowhere to skate. The solution, would be that once no one is skateboarding, the city will consider building the non-existent skateboarders a skatepark.

**Pays for itself in ten easy installments!**

When faced with the financial realities of building a skatepark, skateboarding supporters can quickly name reasons to spend the money on skateparks. One of the primary reasons to build a skatepark is to mitigate damage to public structures. The average bench or ornate granite ledge is not capable of withstanding the impact of 100+ pounds of skateboarder all day. Edges quickly become rounded and chipped, letting in the destroyer of all that man builds, water. Though specific figures of money spent repairing the damage varies, the term “thousands of dollars” seems quite popular. Considering that a small concrete skatepark can be built for $100,000, the park should pay for itself over ten years assuming $10,000 dollars a year. Fortunately concrete skateparks with steel coping on edges can take the abuse, for well over ten years.
Though the skateboarders with enough initiative to be at the city council meeting will may use the skatepark exclusively, other skateboarders will not. Hopefully cities are aware that street skateboarding is alive and well in many places that have skateparks. Some skateboarders shun the artificial skatepark terrain and prefer to appropriate their space from the vast sea of concrete on which the city rests. Despite the holdouts, the popularity of skateparks is obvious. Equally obvious is the certainty that many skating at the skatepark would be skating somewhere else if the skatepark was not there. No inventory of skateboarding related damage before and after a skatepark introduction has ever been done, so the impact can not be quantified. It is reasonable to assume that fewer skateboarders on the streets would mean less damage to society's beloved concrete.

**We are just hanging out. Yea sure, we will keep it down**

When confronted with concerns about large groups of teenagers gathering, the argument remains surprisingly civil. Skateboarders first respond that they can not be held responsible for the all of the teenagers at the skatepark. Refraining from providing skateboarders a legal place to skate based on the questionable judgment of all teenagers, is a group consequence of the highest order. Besides skateboarders insist, teens need a place to gather, they have no where else to go. Teenagers are welcomed in very few places. Though generalizations are often dangerous, there is an undeniable tendency for large groups of teenagers to become rather loud. This quality causes different reactions from different people including annoyance, hostility and fear. No matter how much Sandy loves Brandon, or how much she hates his girlfriend, that tramp, Emma, people on the other side of the park don't care, nor do they want to hear about it. The end result is that public open space is one of the few places that can contain a large teenage group both physically and sonically.
The amount of noise the skatepark itself will generate is often sited as a reason not to have a skatepark next door. Fortunately noise can be measured. According to Skaters for Portland Skateparks the loudest instance 100 feet away from a skatepark is 65 decibels, comparable to a normal conversation (Aperio Consulting 2005). Despite the seemingly quiet nature of the skateboarding, there have been numerous reports of noise problems at skateparks. Unfortunately the noise problems occur at high traffic parks that attract many non-skaters. Apparently a hundred teenagers having a conversation exceeds 65 decibels.

Ouch! That’s going to leave a mark.

Another commonly sited reason not to have a skatepark is the fear of injuries, and the inevitable litigation attempting to hold the city financially responsible. For a lawsuit to occur, a skateboarder must first sustain an injury. Despite the well publicized, and often spectacular, wipeouts that do occur, skateboarding causes fewer injuries than many other popular sports. According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission, 1998 injuries from skateboarding (8.9 per 1000 participants) were dwarfed by both basketball (21.2 per 1000) and football (20.7 per 1000). It would appear that the benign sport of bicycling (11.2 per 1000) is a risky proposition when compared to the suddenly safe sport of skateboarding (Consumer Products Safety Commission 2003). The American Academy of Pediatrics states that of the skateboarding injuries that do occur, only five percent are serious (concussions or internal injuries) and a full quarter of those occur in traffic, which is not an issue at the skatepark (American Academy of Pediatrics 2005).
Your Honor, the plaintiff was doing a McTwist seven feet in the air!

Cities have taken numerous routes to mitigate the persistent fear of possible lawsuits. Common strategies include requiring signed disclaimers, requiring protective equipment be worn, or by providing park supervision. Some cities are still purchasing insurance from third parties to insulate them from liability. SPAUSA currently offers one million dollars of skatepark insurance through Lloyd’s of London and AIG. The prices are far more reasonable than the rates that buried skateparks in the seventies (SPAUSA 2004b). The most common method of insulation is legally declaring skateboarding a "hazardous activity" as California has done. The hazardous activity law is rarely challenged and no libel lawsuit against a city skatepark has ever been successfully prosecuted in the United States. Unfortunately, the fear remains firmly embedded in the slippery slope mentality. It is feared that if one lawsuit is successful, then others will soon bury cities across the nation in an avalanche of lawyers. It currently appears that this fear, like others, is unfounded.

Criminal is such a harsh word. I prefer to call it civil disobedience.

When the assumptions about crime come up, skateboarders can get understandably upset. Being called a criminal repeatedly can anger anyone, regardless of the questionable validity of the claims. When trespassing and vandalism are brought up skateboarders tend to dismiss crimes committed while skateboarding. If they had a legal place to skate it would be a non-issue. They state that they just want to do what they love without being hassled. Undoubtedly the skateboarder is telling the truth and a large segment of the participants would use the skatepark exclusively. Unfortunately, at the same time there is a kid grinding the city hall steps.
Yes, I call that art.

Skateboarders seem to see graffiti as a minor infraction at best. Graffiti is able to be ignored at its worst and absolutely stunning at its best. Graffiti as a form of rebel expression has similar ideological roots as skateboarding. Stubbornly, mainstream culture has obsessed on graffiti’s illicit nature and refused to recognize the distinct style and dazzling craft of talented graffiti artists. Skateboarders have taken ownership of graffiti as the art of skateboarding. Graffiti style decks have been appearing on skateboards since the eighties and are still well represented today.

Some idealistic skateboarders have actually managed to convince the city to allow murals and graffiti at the skateparks (Lemmon 2003). This impressive feat of salesmanship is only accomplished by the mind-numbingly tenacious and most who try this tactic get nowhere. Many skateboarders don’t seem to mind losing graffiti and will eventually agree to whatever demands the city makes on them. Some cities will shut the skatepark down at the first sign of graffiti until they get around to cleaning it up. Others will wait until they feel that it is unsightly then sandblast it. As a result most public skateparks are kept relatively free of graffiti. Though some feel it is an unfortunate loss to the aesthetic of a skatepark, some compromises must be made.

We aren't the problem, we are the solution.

When the conversation turns to the “real” crimes, assault, murder, theft etc, skatepark proponents say that skateparks actually reduce crime. The first way skateparks reduce crime is by giving youth a place to go and something to do. This is simply the repackaged theory of “keeping kids off the streets” will reduce crime. The theory consists of getting kids involved in an activity, preferably a physical one, believing this keeps kids from spending their time committing crimes. This concept has been around for a long time and has seen
some empirical review. Activity in sports has been correlated to numerous things, including self-esteem (American Psychological Association 2005), which tends to negatively correlate with criminal behavior (National Association for Self Esteem 2005). Though far from definitely proven, the theory has some merit.

The second method that skateparks reduce crime is by self-policing. The theory holds that the skateboarders themselves will become possessive of the space and challenge criminal activity with it. This theory largely derives from two skateparks, Burnside in Portland and FDR in Philadelphia. At both sites, skateboarders began building concrete skateparks without the sanction of the city. Both sites were underpasses of highways and essentially wasted space. At both sites the “undesirable elements” were forcibly ejected and kept away through the threat of violence. Despite questionable methods, skateboarders had indeed revitalized a piece of the city. The cities have never demolished either skatepark so both sites exist today and are icons of the skateboarding world. This story is repeated over and over again by skateboarders trying to convince the public they are upstanding members of society, but it remains a tough sell.

In conclusion.

These arguments, or portions of them, are presented by both sides in city counsels across America, and the discussion can turn ugly fast. Though residents have some reasonable concerns, skateparks are built every day. A recent survey by Landscape Structures Inc. claims that over the next 24 months 40% of the park directors believe they will be building a skatepark (Nessen 2004). Skateboarders are no longer alone in their cries for skateparks. Designers, city planners and many politicians have joined the cause. The skatepark cause has a lot of appeal, it helps an overlooked population, is progressive, and most of all, it is cool.

Sociological Theories

Skateboarding is rapidly becoming one of the most popular sports of the new millennium. A city’s concern over liability and damage to public structures from
skateboarding is understandably growing at an equally rapid rate. The city’s solution is to outlaw skateboarding in public places, despite the cries of outrage from the local youth. As a result, cities are more responsive to the idea of building skateparks than ever before. Unfortunately the residents themselves are not as supportive. One of the primary concerns is the skatepark will cause the crime rate to rise at the location and possibly the neighborhood. Skatepark advocates disagree stating that skateparks reduce crime by getting “the kids off the street”. The city is caught in the middle and soon begins wondering why it considered building a skatepark in the first place.

As the controversy stumbles on between the pro- and anti- skatepark camps, a field of study dedicated to crime is largely ignored. Sociology has been studying crime for almost 200 years. Sociological references are noticeably absent from the argument of skateparks and crime. Numerous theories in sociology provide theoretical interest but the focus of this review will be location oriented theories. The following theories all attempt to correlate crime with the physical qualities of a space. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by C. Ray Jeffery, Defensible Space by Oscar Newman, and Broken Windows by James Wilson and George Kelling will be examined in the context of skateparks and crime. The theories will be summarized and supporting arguments will be presented. Next, conflicting arguments will be briefly examined and finally the theories will be discussed in the context of the study.

**Crime Prevention Thorough Environmental Design**

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is drawn from the book of the same name, written by sociologist C. Ray Jeffery in 1977. CPTED is one of two design guides intended to assist architects, landscape architects, and urban planners in creating spaces that will not provide the opportunity for criminal activity. The second guide, *Creating Defensible Space* by architect Oscar Newman will be discussed later in the literature review.

Jeffery suggests that he is making the leap into physical design, but Jeffery remains a sociologist. As a result, Jeffery spends a significant amount of effort building his theoretical
base using traditional sociological methods. A brief sociological history is recounted showing the theoretical context of Jeffery’s arguments. The role of the police, the courts and prisons are examined in context of sociological models (Jeffery 1977).

It could be your neighbor

Where Jeffery attempts to blaze a new trail in sociology is when he begins to look at the physical environment and its impact on crime. Unfortunately the title Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is slightly misleading in that Jeffery makes very few statements of what design interventions will actually affect crime. Jeffery instead points out qualities of high crime areas. Being a sociologist instead of a designer, Jeffery supports his position with a series of studies that have found physical differences between high crime and low crime areas. Jeffery is compiling relevant studies, more than producing a theory of crime prevention. The first point Jeffery emphasizes is that crime is not distributed evenly across a neighborhood; crime is concentrated in specific locations.

Jeffery begins by citing the work of Sarah Boggs who found a difference between where the criminal act is committed and where the criminal lives. She found that there was little association between where the criminal lives and where robbery, non-residential burglary, rape and larceny occur (Boggs 1977). Henry Bullock found that the majority of homicides in Houston, Texas occurred within four blocks of each other (Bullock 1955). G.F. Pyle found that homicide was concentrated in one neighborhood in Akron, Ohio and that 57 percent of the time the victim lived on the same block as the perpetrator (Pyle 1976).

Jeffery also presents evidence of the spatial distribution of crimes against property. Pyle found in Akron that armed robbery occurred in the city core and residential burglary was usually committed in low income areas (Pyle 1976). Wayne Crow and James Bull found that 72 percent of convenience store crimes occurred in 27 percent of convenience stores (Crow 1975). A study in Oakland California by Floyd Feeney showed that one third of the blocks had no robberies and 25 percent of robberies were in 4 percent of the geographical area (Feeney 1974).
Crime is not a spectator sport

Jeffery often mentions the importance of surveillance. The most illustrative study was done by Patricia Mayhew for the English Home Office. Their study showed that busses that only had the driver on board were 20 times more likely to be vandalized then a bus with a supervisor accompanying the driver. The vandalism on the seats of the driver-only bus became more prevalent the further away the seat was located from the driver (Mayhew 1976).

A paper written by Shlomo Angel (1968) provides interesting insights about what sites are prone to crime. Angel believed that community and police surveillance were deterrents to crime. Angel also believed that vacant areas would have low crime rates due to the lack of targets, while areas of moderate use approached a critical point where there were enough people to commit the criminal act, but not enough to provide sufficient surveillance. Angel also found that crime is most prevalent 6:00 pm to 2:00 am. As a result, businesses open late tend to have a greater risk of crime. Access to major transportation corridors also predisposed an area to criminal acts (Angel 1968).

Jeffery reinforces the impact of surveillance by providing a story from his own experience. Jeffery compares two districts, both open late, but one is a busy entertainment district and the other an industrial park that was abandoned after 5:00 pm. The abandoned area had a greater crime rate, with the suggestion being, the few people present were unable to provide adequate surveillance of the area (Jeffery 1977). Jeffery notes that public parks are particularly dangerous places because few people frequent them at night. The trees and shrubs make surveillance even more difficult by blocking sound and line of sight giving the criminal seclusion for the act, and an easy escape after (Jeffery 1977).
**Got to love cul-de-sac’s**

A quick review of contemporary sources reveals that restricting access to a site is considered a primary component in CPTED theory. What is strange is that Jeffery never dedicates significant verbiage to the subject in the original work. Never does Jeffrey exclusively devote a section, or even paragraph, to the topic. Instead Jeffrey tangentially mentions restricting access infrequently in the text. The typical contemporary interpretation of restricting access pertains to building entrances and exits. In the original text Jeffery does not limit restricting access to a structural scale. When Jeffrey refers to restricting access, he is discussing restricting traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian (Jeffery 1977).

The same principle applies for both scales, the fewer access points the better. While fire codes require at least two points of access to a building, civil engineers have no such requirement resulting in the CPTED ideal, a dead end or cul-de-sac. The rational is that the fewer access points restrict the arrival and escape of potential criminals. By definition, dead ends receive no pass-through traffic, drastically reducing the quantity of people, including criminals “just passing by”. In addition, when a crime is committed, few possible escape routes increase the chance that the police will catch the perpetrator. The dead end is ideal because a criminal must leave by a known route, the same way they came in (Jeffery 1977).

At the time of the original book very little evidence was available supporting the benefits of restricting access to an area. A singular study notes that convenience stores with multiple getaway routes were more attractive targets for crime. The University of Louisville implemented a program specifically to test if restricting access was beneficial. Jeffery claims not to know the outcome of study, a statement the skeptic finds hard to swallow. Considering the massive amount of research he references, not knowing the outcome of the only study directly applying his theories, is a glaring omission (Jeffery 1977).
Everyone needs a little support

Jeffery's initial work is difficult to support due to the lack of consistent theory presented. Jeffery cites an incredible amount of studies and raises a call for reform, but never really states how the studies contribute to a coherent theory. The only maxims that can be drawn from his text are first, that crime is not evenly distributed. Second increased surveillance reduces the likelihood of a crime being committed. Third, the fewer access points the better. These three statements have been justified by the studies Jeffery cites and have been verified through replication. Beyond these maxims Jeffery provides very little to support or deny, leaving the reader to read between the lines and construct their own theory. Jeffery's primary contribution is the presentation of a series of studies that future researchers could use to formulate their own theories, which is exactly what happened.

The theories initially presented by Jeffery have spawned a slew of studies. In the 80's and 90's almost every aspect of CPTED was tested and replicated with some degree of success. Many studies found correlations supporting CPTED predictions, unfortunately these results have been far from definitive. The theories are still argued today and have some staunch supporters. State and local police departments are particularly enamored with CPTED for obvious reasons. Improved surveillance and restricting access will only help the police in doing their job. Predictably there is The International CPTED Association complete with a newsletter, website, and logo enriched coffee mug. The organization publishes a newsletter and presents classes throughout the year.

Everyone is a critic

The greatest weakness of Jeffery's work is that no coherent theory was produced and design interventions are few and far between. Jeffery seems to believe that the reader will take his related statements and connect the dots, then attribute Jeffery with the theory he failed to produce. It should be noted that geographical analysis of crime and criminals was in its infancy, and perhaps even created by Jeffery. It is understandable that when laying the foundations of a new method of study, definitive statements are difficult to come by.
In addition, some later studies supported OPTED theories, but many studies did not. To call OPTED empirically proven is a stretch indeed. Sporadic correlations suggest that OPTED may be on the right track, but there are undoubtedly other factors that are affecting crime in an area. Unfortunately OPTED has not been implemented on a large geographic scale, thus studies can only correlate the physical qualities of site with existing crime. The OPTED interventions themselves have never been incorporated into a design then subject to a post intervention analysis. Though theoretically feasible, OPTED remains unproven in the real world.

Perhaps the reason that OPTED has not been incorporated into design is due to the esthetic limitations of OPTED. Clear lines of sight and restricted access are demanding mistresses. Any structure over three feet tall will interrupt a line of sight on level ground. The idea OPTED space is a well lit, empty parking lot with one entrance. The consequences of strict line of sight demands make designers shiver. Jeffery repeatedly states that plants, particularly large shrubs, are a bad idea because they restrict line of sight. Needless to say, Jeffery’s feels parks are criminogenic (Jeffery 1977).

Another compliant is that OPTED does nothing to address the root causes of crime. Environmental changes will not affect social dynamic that lead to a person becoming a potential criminal. In addition OPTED does little to reduce crime as a whole, it only affects the immediate area. The result is that OPTED does not lower crime but simply displaces crime to less “well designed” areas. Though these complaints are relevant and deserve to be mentioned, they do not directly impact this particular study.
Why are people always watching me?

One thing Jeffrey’s had correct is that crime is not evenly distributed over a geographic area. The advent of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has proven this to be true. GIS crime maps have shown with disturbing clarity that crimes often focus on a limited set of geographic locations. The question is do skateparks have a tendency to become one of these focuses for crime? Also, is it possible that skateparks have a negative impact on crimes at the site and surrounding areas? An additional question is do surveillance and restricting access have any impact crime at skateparks.

Different skateparks tend to be supervised differently but all see some level of supervision. The most heavily supervised skateparks have a park supervisor who supervises the area during operating hours. Many parks are supervised to some extent by the community that they are located in. Quantifying community supervision is difficult and well beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is safe to say that skateparks receive as much community supervision as any public space and perhaps more. The reputation of skateboarding, has promoted many parents to go with their children to skateparks to insure the child’s safety.

All parks at a minimum are supervised by police patrols. There is some debate if skateparks receive more or less police attention than typical public spaces, but the reputation of skateboarders and adolescent males would suggest that additional attention by the local police is a possibility.

Finally there is the supervision of the skateboarders present. Once again the extent and effectiveness of the supervision is in question, but many documented cases, including Burnside Skatepark, and FDR Skatepark, have shown skateboarders to be vigilant defenders of etiquette on their “home turf”. Justice is dispensed in a prompt and harsh manner by resident skateboarders and can lead to a ban being issued to the offender. The application of violence is a known possibility for not showing the proper respect. Despite the questionable
methods and difficulty in quantifying the extent of supervision, skateparks likely are under more supervision than most public areas.

**What about a dead end outside of town?**

In terms of restricted access, skateparks are a mixed bag. Some are isolated while others are adjacent to major thoroughfares. When a city cites a skatepark there are two polices. The first is, to place the skatepark in the middle of nowhere so that few neighbors complain. Out of sight and out of mind. The second theory is to place it adjacent to major transportation corridors so that the skatepark is accessible by public transportation for skateboarders too young to drive. Both methods have been tried numerous times by cities across America. Skateparks connected to public transportation tend to be more successful as a skatepark for the aforementioned reason.

Skateparks not built or sanctioned by the city tend to be in obscure locales. It makes sense, if one is to engage in renegade construction on city owned land it would be wise to keep it on the down low. The more forgotten the space is, the less likely police are going to drop by asking for construction permits. Skateboarders have had to avoid police for years and instinctually know where the police are rare.

As a general rule CPTED has received a lukewarm reception form sociologists and dismissed by many designers. Jeffery comments on CPTED's marginal reception, in comparison to the favorable reaction to Defensible Space theories, with a touch of bitterness. This response could be derived from the specific design guidelines presented by Newman in *Defensible Space*. Though Newman’s theories lacked sociological studies to support them,
Defensible Space made definitive statements that allowed action, something very important to designers responsible for making decisions every day.

Defensible Space

The term defensible space comes from the work of Oscar Newman, done in the early 1970's. According to Newman, “Defensible space is a term used to describe a residential environment whose physical characteristics, building layout and site plan function to allow inhabitants themselves to become the key agents in insuring their own security.” (Newman 1976) Newman’s work differs from other theories presented here in significant ways. First, Newman is not a sociologist, but an architect, which drives him to create concrete guidelines and practical solutions. Second, Newman’s theories are supported by specific case studies as opposed to citing previous sociological work. Case studies are the typical method used in the design fields to justify design interventions. As a result, Newman has one foot in the sociology field and the other remains in design.

Newman’s central theory is simple: if a space is perceived as privately owned then it is less likely to have crimes committed within it. If the residents feel ownership of the space, then the resident will become more protective of the space and challenge a stranger’s right to occupy the space. If the space is perceived as public, the resident will have no grounds to challenge the presence of strangers. Potential criminals will feel that there is an increased risk of being observed and challenged in a privately owned space, thus commit their crimes in spaces perceived to be public. The actual legal ownership is not relevant; the perceptions of ownership by the resident and potential criminal are the important factors. Newman categorizes ownership along a continuum including private, semi-private, semi-public, and public (Newman 1976). Newman supports his distinctions with case studies of each type of space and the associated crime rates.

Get out of my private space

Newman states that space is inherently public or private. The single family residence obviously is categorized as private, the walk-up building is semi-private, the medium-rise
building is semi-public, and the high-rise building is public space. Newman states that the more people that share the space the less likely any individual will take ownership and become protective of the space. Two factors primarily determine ownership of a space, the first being shared access points including entrances and internal corridors. The second factor is the degree of personalization of the space that distinguishes it from adjacent properties. Put in the context of building types, a private home has no shared entrances. All interior space is private, so all strangers will be confronted with the question, "What are you doing in my house?" In the high rise, population densities inhibit a resident's ability to recognize neighbor from stranger and make confronting a stranger difficult until they are actually in the resident's apartment. Potential criminals have no responsibility to justify their presence until they are actually in private space, and are also free from confrontation as soon as they enter the shared public space of the hallways and corridors (Newman 1976). The notorious Pruitt Igoe is an example of problems resulting from high rise living.

The presented case studies are high density residential areas that are plagued by chronic crime. In each example, Newman promoted ownership of the space by residents which led to a reduction of crime rates in the area. The inherent selectivity of case studies is a methodological weakness and, as expected, all case studies support Newman's theories. Newman's theory lacks the statistical evidence typical in sociological studies but regardless makes a strong argument due to the logical consistency of the theory and the profound success of case studies. Newman simply did not spend time articulating a complete theory his emphasis was more pragmatic. The strength of Newman's work is that he provides guidelines that can actually be applied to various sights.
Newman's guidelines constantly promote ownership of a space by empowering residents to personalize and control their space. The number of interventions Newman proposes is impressive and all factors will not be reviewed here, but some of the more major interventions will be examined.

The building type itself is examined, as one would expect, from an architect. The central argument is the less population density the better. Single family detached homes are the ideal, with high-rise apartment buildings being the least desirable. Newman recommends no more than six units to the acre for detached housing, and a limit of 16 units per acre for row housing. Walkup housing is limited to 30 units per acre for two story walkups, 40 units per acre for three story walkups. High rise density recommendations are not provided, nor are high-rises encouraged by Newman. He states that it is effectively impossible to privatize high-rises and their use for housing should be eliminated (Newman 1976).

The typology of the building is reviewed with the intent of maximizing private space. Courtyard architecture is an ideal method of maximizing public space. Access to the internal courtyard is allowed only through individual housing units. As a result courtyard becomes private space allowing access only to residents or their guests. The least desirable form is, not surprisingly, the typical high rise that allows free public access. The space in-between the high-rises are open to all and can be roamed by potential criminals at their leisure (Newman 1976).

**A place to call my own**

Individualization of units is encouraged as the primary means of gaining ownership of the property. Individualization occurs when the structure is designed, constructed, and after the resident moves in. During design and construction, individual units should be constructed using different materials for each unit. Simple treatments such as different colors of paint will allow a resident to identify their residence as the “blue unit on the corner.” This has the positive effect of indicating to neighbors who is responsible for signs of degradation on the specific units. The neighbors can address the offending resident and implement
controls encouraging the resident to maintain social standards regarding the maintenance of the property. The personalization extends to any yard that may be associated with the unit. A common method of personalization is through landscaping materials such as shrubs and flowers. A well-trimmed lawn and lush flower beds are an indication of a concerned owner, and may act as a deterrent to thieves who will feel that the owner is serious about their property and will not tolerate infringement upon it (Newman 1976).

Newman notes some small scale interventions focusing primarily on doors, windows, trash cans, and mailboxes. These interventions include private access and physical security measures such as locks and doors. This process is typically referred to as "hardening the architecture." (Newman 1976) These methods are interesting, but not applicable to a public space, such as a skatepark.

I swear it works, let me show you

The lack of theoretical support for Newman’s work is understandable considering the simplicity of the theoretical statement he makes. The only definitive statement that he makes is that the further a resident identifies their home as private space, the more they will control access to the residence and adjacent grounds. By using a simple theory Newman avoids contradictions that seem to develop the more complex a theoretical framework becomes. Few sociological studies have been conducted supporting Newman’s theory, with methodological difficulty likely playing a role. It is very difficult to quantify the extent of investment that is required for an average citizen to control space adjacent to their home. As a result, Newman’s prime theory may never be directly measured.

Newman’s contribution is not theoretical, his contribution lies in application of his theory in the real word. Newman’s design interventions are logically consistent with their
theoretical origins, but the true test does not lie in theory. The true test lies in practice. The case studies presented by Newman do support his underlying thesis and show that Newman’s design interventions can work under certain circumstances.

A case study of a project in Carlson Point, New York attempts to show the positive effect of modifying existing government owned row houses. A common space, in the center of the row houses, was taken over by drug dealers, promoting people to retreat inside their homes and surrender their front yards. Newman suggested interventions to increase ownership of the area. The facades of individual houses were painted different colors, the color being chosen by the resident. Street lights were placed in the area to aid in surveillance. Curbs were used to physically divide properties, Grass seed was given to residents, allowing them to grow turf in barren front yards. The interventions took some time to impact the area, but gradually people began to care for their front yards and demand to know who was standing on them. As residents began to take ownership of the spaces, drug dealers found somewhere else to peddle their wares.

When the interventions were installed, the maintenance crew took offense and said that the interventions would make maintenance more difficult. This eventually led the maintenance crew to refuse to perform any maintenance on the site. Surprisingly, the residents quickly began to take responsibility for maintenance and proved to be better caretakers than the city workers. Within three years the area had been transformed, with all the homes having a lawn and many heavily landscaped. The resulting decrease in overall crime rate was 54 percent and the serious crime rate dropped by 61.5 percent. The row houses, which had a 30 percent vacancy rate, were soon full and had a waiting list with hundreds of names. The residents’ investment was evidenced by the number of people who felt they had a right to confront someone on the property, which rose from 27 percent to 50 percent (Newman 1976).

Case studies like these propelled Newman’s theories to near universal acceptance in the design field and were also noticed by sociology. Newman’s theories are largely accepted
by governmental organizations including Department of Housing and Urban Development, who published Newman’s second book. Numerous cities have attempted to mitigate crime in neighborhoods using Newman’s theories.

**There is one in every crowd**

The strength of Newman’s case studies makes his work difficult to dismiss. The success of Newman’s projects silences many of his would-be-critics. One of the few sociologists to make any negative comments regarding the validity of Newman’s work is, not surprisingly, Jeffery, his theoretical competitor. After citing Newman and his work to support Jeffery’s own theories, Jeffery attempts to devalue the work of Newman (Jeffery 1977). Jeffery states that the majority of Newman’s interventions are cosmetic, and questions if the people undergo any cognitive change. Newman and others conducted surveys of residents to see if they believed the neighborhood had changed. The apparent evidence is that yes, people do believe their neighborhood has improved. Considering that Jeffery’s work often theoretically supports the practical applications of Newman, it would seem more beneficial for Jeffery to work with Newman, strengthening both of their positions. Instead, Jeffery calls Newman’s work “unimaginative” and lets the smell of sour grapes infect the discussion (Jeffery 1977).

Newman’s theories have never been tested on a large scale and lack empirical sociological evidence. A large obstacle is how resource intensive Newman’s recommendations are. The changes require significant time and money to complete limiting their application. Despite this weakness the few case studies cited by Newman have not been challenge by sociologists.

**Is a public skatepark truly public?**

The application of Newman’s work to the research question is as simple as the theory Newman proposes. If the residents and users of the skatepark feel ownership then they will not allow a criminal climate to develop. In the case of skateparks, community ownership is recognized as one of the greatest factors that contribute to skatepark success.
The attempt to gain ownership begins before the skatepark is even designed. Often city governments have required the skateboarder’s to contribute funds to the building of a skatepark. The city does this to help mitigate cost of construction, but a benefit of this process is that skateboarders fund raising efforts show the city that they are willing to work with the community to achieve their goals. The act of fund raising can create a sense of ownership in the skateboarders and the local community.

Investment in the park is further created during the design process. Despite different philosophies of skatepark designers, there seems to be one thing that they can all agree on, the skateboarders must be involved for the project to be successful. The extensive user involvement allows designers to get the curves of the built work accepted, but also to get all opinions represented on a perpetually confrontational issue.

Not all skateparks are built by professionals, some are renegade projects built on unused public land without the sanction of the city, such as Burnside and FDR. These skateparks use donated materials and all labor is done by the skaters themselves. Purportedly the level of ownership the skateboarders feel for the park they built is well beyond that of the more common city sanctioned method. Major infractions, such as riding a BMX bike in a park reserved for skateboarders, are taken very seriously and can end with the offender literally running for their life.

In conclusion, Newman’s maxim of “get the residents to take ownership of the space” is strongly expressed at skateparks with little need for encouragement. Anyone not on a skateboard or inline skates has little reason to be at a skatepark and will invoke suspicion from the skateboarders.
Broken Windows

Broken Windows theory, authored by James Wilson and George Kelling first appeared as an article in the Atlantic Monthly in 1982. Broken Windows is a slippery slope argument that suggests once signs of neglect appear, termed incivilities, others will follow. A message is sent that no one cares about or supervisees, the property. This small infraction on order will lead to larger infractions and can eventually lead to crime because the area is obviously unsupervised. This simple theory has a common sense correlational appeal because crime ridden areas certainly do have numerous signs of neglect (Wilson and Kelling 1982).

Conveniently, Wilson and Kelling provide the theory, but also the solution to the problem. It is simple, more police on the streets prosecuting minor crimes such as vagrancy and graffiti. Without the minor crimes to lead to bigger crimes, serious crime will never develop. This theory has grassroots appeal because it confirms an assumption society holds dear to its heart. The assumption being, more police will correlate with less crime. This belief has been empirically challenged and found to be accurate only in very specific situations on certain crimes. As a general rule more police do not correlate with less crime (Sherman 1997). Despite the beating Broken Windows has taken in sociological circles, the theory is beloved by many cities and citizens in America.

Crime? Forget about it

Few studies are cited in support of the theory, but Philip Zimbardo did conduct a study in 1969 that strongly supports the theory. Zimbardo placed two cars, one in Palo Alto, California and the other in the Bronx, New York. The car in the Bronx was stripped in a day but the car in Palo Alto was unmolested after a week. At this point Zimbardo broke a window on the car in Palo Alto to see if the broken window would have an effect. Soon after breaking the window, the car in Palo Alto had also been stripped. The suggestion is that no one would make the first move, instead waiting until the car showed signs of neglect (Zimbardo 1969).
Perhaps the most powerful support comes from the real world. The Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, implemented the theory on a wide scale. Police were encouraged to adopt a “zero tolerance” policy with regard to crime. Minor offenses such as jaywalking and vagrancy were ticketed, more serious crimes were prosecuted with zeal. The belief is small infractions lead to larger infractions. By prosecuting the small infractions with vigor, the rate of serious infractions will be reduced. The crime rate has plummeted in New York and their methods have been well publicized. It remains unclear if the decline was a result of the zero tolerance policy (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice 2005).

Its all relative

The broken windows theory has received extensive attention from the sociology field. Despite this attention the broken windows theory has not been supported other than in the above cases. The data being produced from studies is inconsistent and often shows small correlations with incivilities and crime (Taylor 2001). At the current time a longitudinal study of 10 years is being conducted by Felton Earls in Chicago. Early reports suggest that the broken windows thesis will not be supported (Ambiguous.org 2004).

The likely reason for this is the difficulty of isolating the physical incivilities from the larger socioeconomic background. Combating “incivilities” requires money something in short supply in economically deficient neighborhoods. Identical predictions to Broken Windows could be achieved by correlating poverty and crime.

In addition, defining what exactly an incivility is had provided complications. While some may feel that a stray paper flyer is an incivility, others need to see a vagrant vomiting in a corner before they notice. An incivility to a hardened New Yorker is quite different from a South Dakota farmer.

I thought art was civilized?

Broken Windows theory was briefly presented because it applies to the graffiti that can appear in the skatepark. In general public skateparks are maintained by the city and kept
in good repair. The durability of a steel and concrete skatepark assists the city in keeping an orderly site. Few skateparks have significant landscaping requirements and infrequent, if any, power washing to keep clean. The chances that signs of neglect, such as trash or vagrants, are unlikely to appear in a typical public skatepark patrolled by the police and cared for by the city. The Graffiti “problem” can be easily resolved by banning the practice and shutting down the park until the graffiti is cleaned. This is exactly the method some cities are successfully using.

Of course there are exceptions and some public parks are neglected by city maintenance crews. Graffiti, trash and vagrants have been known to appear at these sites, much like other places neglected by city maintenance crews. Unsurprisingly the city will often maintain a skatepark in the same manner they maintain the area around it. In expensive “nice” neighborhoods the resident skatepark will be kept clean and graffiti free. In lower income areas “on the bad side of town” the skateparks will be neglected and quickly become a reflection of its surroundings.

The third possibility is renegade skateparks. The city never does maintenance on renegade skateparks because they did not build them in the first place. Fortunately the skateboarders who built the structure often maintain it. The location of renegade skateparks is often in secluded locales that have already have multiple incivilities. Often these incivilities are dealt with by the locals resulting in a fairly clean skatepark. Unfortunately, the area around the skatepark rarely changes, but the skatepark itself is clean.

**In a nutshell**

The situational crime literature would suggest in general that skateparks are not predisposed to higher crime rates. The site specific qualities described of high crime areas
are not present in typical skateparks. The theories above give little support to the idea that skateparks and rising crime rates are correlated. Skateparks possess none of the qualities that would encourage crime, except for graffiti. The literature seems to suggest that crime is less likely in these places, especially skateparks without graffiti.

This study will investigate the crime rates of specific sites. The sites will be visited and the physical qualities of the site will be inventoried in the context of the reviewed theories. The inventory will then be compared to crime rates of the area to investigate the impact of the suggested interventions.
FDR Skatepark

A walk through Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Park in Philadelphia is an old-school picturesque fantasy. Curvilinear paths meander through the park cunningly revealing still ponds and stone gazebos nestled in fields of manicured turf. Mature oaks and maples provide the cooling effect of dappled shade for those on their afternoon walk. If not for cars doing 20 mph on a perimeter road, it would be easy to forget that it is the new millennium. The design speaks of a time when men wore dark suits more than blue jeans and women carried a lacy parasol as opposed to pepper spray. People still picnic on the grassy slopes of FDR Park, but KFC and Budweiser have replaced bread and wine. The noise of a motor and the occasional 1600 watt subwoofer has replaced the clop and whinny of the horse. The dominance of the car is revisited on the southern edge of the park which is bordered by an elevated eight lane highway. The highway casts a huge shadow plunging the area beneath it deep in shade for many hours of the day.

The area beneath the bridge exhibits all the characteristics of ignored urban space. The land exists only to support the massive bridge above, what it looks like matters little. The surface is a hodgepodge of mixed rock, broken glass and beer cans. Trash of every description can be found under the bridge, from the expected fast food bags to the broken washing machine that a former owner would rather illegally dump than pay to have legally removed. Understandably, few picnic in the dark recesses under the bridge, but the shadows are perhaps the most popular place in the park. Though prostitutes and drug dealers have
been known to use the area to conduct business, they are not the main attraction. Flowing in
the shadows under the bridge is a concrete icon of infinite value, FDR Skatepark.

FDR Skatepark initially appears to be an amorphous blob of spray painted concrete. Perhaps illegally dumped like its eastern neighbor, the rusting washing machine. On closer examination, eyes adjust to the shade and views of the hollow interior are reviled. The concrete on the swooping forms of the interior are smooth as glass, in contrast to the haphazard exterior. Skateboarders race across the concrete surface, flowing from each impossible curve to the next. Performing amazing tricks, as if gravity is momentarily suspended for their convenience. Even without the rumble of the wheels and the silence of powerless flight, it is clear that FDR is unique.

The locals wait patiently, lined-up on its edges waiting for their turn to tangle with the infamous FDR Skatepark. The brutal curves reward the bold and punish the meek. The flow is continuous and a run here could last 30 minutes if the skateboarder had the endurance. The design is dazzling in both form and construction; any designer would love to say they are responsible. Interestingly none can, nor can any concrete company take credit for the exceptional concrete. The designers and builders can easily be found. They are skating at FDR, lovingly grinding the lips they created.

Skater designed and skater built, FDR is arguably the best skatepark on the East Coast. It’s open to all, free of charge and with no rules or supervision. There is no phone for the injured to call their mother in tears, there is just the graffiti covered concrete. FDR Skatepark is much like the city it occupies; it is raw, gritty, occasionally dirty, but always
beautifully urban. Come to FDR, it is open to anyone with the guts to try, but please give proper respect. Respect for the concrete, respect for the builders, and respect for each other.

**History**

Nothing happens in a vacuum, despite what physicists insist. FDR Skatepark is the result of actions taken long before any concrete was poured at the site. Before discussing how Philadelphia skateboarders took it upon themselves to build a skatepark, it is important to understand the often adversarial relationship between skateboarding and the city of Philadelphia.

**Can’t we come to some agreement?**

Philadelphia was possibly the first city to feel the economic impacts of skateboarding damage. In the mid-1980’s, during the height of the *Thrasher* “skate or die” mentality, street skating took Philadelphia by storm. Skateboarders began to explore the limitless possibilities produced by 200 years of granite and concrete. Philadelphia was ground zero for the “new” wave of street skating. As expected, damage to polished benches and painted hand rails began to appear. Private property owners began to insist that the police protect them from this new form of vandalism which technically, skateboarders did cause. Police, understandably, did not want to hassle kids being kids, but the monetary consequences were becoming hard to ignore.

In the 1990’s, while the city floundered with how to deal with the “fad” of skateboarding, private property owners began to install architectural anti-skateboarding measures and post “no skateboarding” signs. Though these interventions were only marginally effective, it was fine as far as the skateboarders were concerned. The skateboarders had discovered a rarely used public plaza in downtown, with wide open spaces
and long granite ledges. JFK Plaza, or more commonly known as LOVE Park, was perfect street skating terrain. Some of the best street skaters in the country came out in mass to give it a run. The amazing moves the “new guard” performed off the granite benches were immortalized in national skateboarding magazines and underground videos. People began to travel to Philadelphia just to skate LOVE Park, the faithful saw it as a pilgrimage to a street skating Mecca. Unfortunately, skateboarders on a pilgrimage to LOVE Park will likely end up with a $300 ticket and a confiscated skateboard.

Officially skateboarding has been banned at LOVE Park ever since 1995. In 2000, Philadelphia passed law 10-610 prohibiting skateboarding on “all public property” (ushistroy.org 2003). To be sure that the message was clear, Philadelphia specifically banned skateboarding, not inline rollerblades, not BMX bikes, just skateboards. Unfortunately for the city, Philadelphia skateboarders tenaciously held on to their beloved Love Park. In 2001 the city increased fines for skateboarding at LOVE Park in attempt to punitively convince skateboarders to go some place else. This policy was equally ineffective, so in 2002 the city again increased fines, physically blocked preferred ledges, and posted a near 24 hour guard (ushistroy.org 2003). These measures have proved more effective, but at times seem slightly draconian. It has been reported that walking through LOVE Park while carrying a skateboard is enough to indicate intent to skate, thus will result in a confiscated skateboard (Lathrop 2005). Though few people skate LOVE Park anymore, the local skateboarders have not conceded defeat. The local skateboarders have become unusually organized and are letting the case of LOVE Park be tried in the court of public opinion. At first glance it would seem that the public is largely on the side of the skateboarders, but never underestimate the tenacity of a bureaucracy.
Banning skateboarding at LOVE Park has been a public relations nightmare. A recent poll by Philly.com states that 92% of respondents wanted skateboarding returned to LOVE Park (Philly.com. 2006). Countless articles have been written by the local media, almost universally calling for a removal of the ban of LOVE Park. Over the years multiple organized demonstrations at LOVE Park have occurred, including one where the 92-year-old designer of LOVE Park rode a few tenuous feet on a skateboard (Altman 2002). Adhering to the “money talks and bullshit walks” mentality, in 2004 DC Shoes offered the city a million dollars to assist in upkeep of LOVE Park if the city would reopen the area to skateboarders (ushistory.org. 2003). Despite these attempts by the skateboarding community and the public at large, Mayor Street refuses to “go soft on the skateboarding issue” (ushistory.org 2003).

Though many would concede that the City of Philadelphia is being unfortunately stubborn regarding the ban, the city has also rubbed some salt in the wound. In 2001 when the popular ESPN X-Games wanted to bring their event and the forty million in associated revenue for the city, the city of Philadelphia jumped at the opportunity. For the event, LOVE Park was once again open. The resulting street sessions were nationally televised. Philadelphia was so pleased with the results, and the money acquired, the X-games returned in 2002. It goes without saying that while the X-Games were not in session, skateboarding in Philadelphia was once again demoted to illegal (ushistory.org. 2003). The message the city sent to local skateboarders is painfully clear: skateboarding is allowed if there is enough money, but the locals can’t come up with the required cash.
When given lemons, make lemonade.

In 1994 the city set aside about 16,000 square feet underneath the Interstate 95 Bridge at the southern edge of FDR Park. The intended purpose was a skatepark for the diehard local skateboarders. The southern edge of FDR Park was currently occupied by prostitutes and drug dealers, but most importantly it was out-of-sight, thus out of mind. The hope was that the site would draw skateboarders away from LOVE Park. Like many stop-gap measures the meager “skatepark” was a miserable failure. A slab of concrete was poured, a couple of pyramids and a grind box were placed, and then it was called good (Lathrop 2001). The reasons for its failure as a replacement for LOVE Park are too numerous to name, but the geographic isolation and lack of structures were critical. For a year the “skatepark” was deservedly vacant, but some of the skateboarders had bigger plans for their sorry little patch of asphalt. In the political climate it is easy to understand why Philadelphia skateboarders took it upon themselves, as opposed to petitioning the city government, to improve the skatepark.

Skateboarders began to build on to the existing skatepark without the sanction of the city. These constructions were not cheap plywood ramps, but solid concrete left over from local construction jobs. Reinforcement was provided by short dumped construction debris, such as broken concrete and fencing that was piled around the site. It seemed that the discarded construction materials were alive and coalescing, mixing with concrete to make a post-modern work of industrial art. At times, the city was concerned about the growing concrete form that was swallowing the support piers of the bridge above, but never did the city destroy or restrict the expansion of FDR skatepark. By 1997 FDR Skatepark was beginning to take shape and its reputation was growing. The size of the terrain was beginning to come into scale for blistering runs. The “bunker wall” was 60 feet long and 11 feet high. The “dome” was 14 feet high with an overhang curving far past 90 degrees (Lathrop 2000).

By 1999 the city had begun to realize that due to the skateboarders, FDR Skatepark was becoming what the city had hoped it would create in the first place. The ever-persistent
LOVE Park debate was still raging, so the city decided to throw the skateboarders a bone, a small bone, but a bone none the less. The city contributed $25,000 to expand FDR Skatepark. It is not surprising that a space that prospered without the government, hit tough times once the government was involved. Every aspect from, design to construction, was debated among FDR locals and the city. The argument eventually degraded to physically smashed concrete and broken coping (Lathrop 2005). Fortunately, skateboarding prevailed over egos and by late 2000 the last of the concrete was poured. In 2005, in preparation for the annual Fourth of July birthday party and the 2005 Gravity Games, many of the transitions were redone and additional moguls were added (Lathrop 2005). Though some may resent their favorite line being cut short by a mogul, they will soon find new lines, new grinds, and new experiences.

Perhaps the most endearing thing about FDR Skatepark is that it is constantly changing and being refined. Unlike most projects that are built, static until their demise from a jack hammer, FDR is constantly being reinvented. FDR is alive and growing, becoming closer to the builder’s dream with each new pour. FDR feeds on vision and anticipation of what a skatepark could be. The heavy labor required to remove and re-pour concrete is simply the price that must be paid for the next great run. Designers go through great effort and expense to instill a fraction of the public investment that flows off of FDR Skatepark. FDR is truly owned by the people who designed it and build it. The skateboarders deserve all the credit. FDR is civil disobedience of the highest order. For once the product of rebellion is truly beautiful stuff. As local skateboarder Bryan Lathrop states “It ain’t perfect, but it’s the real deal, and you won’t find anyplace like it” (Lathrop 2000).
Real estate is all about location.

FDR Skatepark is located in, coincidently enough, FDR Park in far southern Philadelphia. South Philadelphia has a history that someone from Chicago could appreciate. South Philadelphia was historically run by the Mafia, as was much of Philadelphia. The mostly Italian area was supposedly a safe place to raise a happy family (Gelman 2004). It comes as no surprise that the Marconi Plaza neighborhood, which contains FDR Park, is named for an Italian Nobel Prize winner Guglielmo Marconi. Though FDR Park is located in the center of the Marconi Plaza neighborhood, it remains fairly isolated. To the north, a
residential district is only a quarter mile away, but that is the extent of the populated area. To the west is a golf course equal in size to FDR Park itself. To the south resides the massive Philadelphia Naval Shipyard where the infamous Rainbow Project was supposedly conducted by the Navy. Finally to the west is the massive sports complex. The sports complex contains the stadiums for the Phillies, Eagles, and the 76ers, not to mention the endless accompanying parking. The view could be called interesting. The endless planes of grey asphalt are sharp contrast the gleaming white stadiums that dominate the skyline. As a whole, the area is not densely populated.

As previously mentioned, FDR Park, locally referred to as “the lakes”, is a picturesque dream. The small amount of trash does little to take away from the sweeping green fields, the calm ponds, or the quaint stone bridges. The mature trees create striking silhouettes that the most callus man must pronounce beautiful. Though South Philadelphia has a reputation for being occasionally rough, FDR is a refined landscape worthy of a picnic or two. One road makes a loop around the park and has only one entrance from the street. The park provides room to stretch and is never crowded, even during a local favorite holiday, the Fourth of July. Unfortunately, Broad Street to the west shakes the pastoral illusion. The illusion is then destroyed by the massive I-95 bridge to the south. Traffic hums across the bridge as a constant reminder of the death of the pastoral landscape. All is not lost, for with all change comes opportunity. The massive I-95 bridge pilings were used by frustrated skateboarders to create FDR Skatepark, arguably the best skatepark on the east coast.
The site is quite the sight

Approaching FDR Skatepark is quite an experience. Passing into the perpetual shade cast by the I-95 bridge, a rough concrete blob coalesces out of the shadows. The rough exterior gives the impression that the earth herself burped up the concrete that forms the structure of FDR Skatepark. Coming closer to the mass, undulations in the form provide glimpses of the interior. The teased viewer pushes onward trying to figure out how to get to the top of the amorphous mass. No stairs are available, but fittingly there is a pale dirt ramp leading to the top. Climbing to the top is rewarded with a completely different point of view. From there the skatepark is laid out in full, with sweeping concrete curves and a colorful riot of extensive graffiti, and that’s just the stuff that is not moving. When combined with skateboarders ripping lightning runs culminating with a peeks above the edge close enough to touch, it is a little overwhelming. Scrambling for a seat may provide a long broken piece of concrete to sit on, if fortunate. This place was designed for skating not sitting. People line the edge, taking a break between runs, some talking, some just watching the show. Orderly lines appear at specific drop-in points with people waiting patiently for their turn. All the while, three or four blurred skateboarders are ripping lines through the park, each one more amazing than the last.

The immediate area surrounding FDR Skatepark stands in shaded contrast to the lush fields of FDR Park that form the backdrop. The surface is dull soil thoroughly compacted as only heavy construction equipment can. Piles of construction debris litter the surrounding area, likely illegally short dumped by local construction contractors. There is a nice selection of materials including pale dirt, broken concrete, and steel fencing. Aside from the construction materials, there is little noticeable trash. Nicely framed to the north are baseball fields with clean bathrooms and a water fountain. Looking to the south reveals the source of
the constant humming. The massive I-95 and Broad Street intersection dominates the southern edge. To the east hardy weeds grow on the perimeter in the forgotten spaces under the bridge. To the west there is nothing but pale dirt, the bridge and its pilings for a quarter of a mile. Occasionally a car is seen parked there, but not for long, the cars rarely stay.

FDR Skatepark itself consists of 16,000 square feet of poured concrete and two large wooden half pipes. The half pipes are solid as a rock and a platform for impressive tricks, but the main show in this three ring circus is the concrete. The utilitarian beauty of the concrete is reviled by the comparison of the haphazard exterior to the magnificently finished concrete that graces the interior. No one skates on the rough exterior of the structure which, in part, consists of fifty-five gallon steel drums drenched in concrete. Fortunately, the interior is glass smooth, with few interruptions. The concrete itself is a patchwork of grays from different pours. The surface has graffiti up one side and down the next, some are a toy’s scrawling while others are artist’s stunning pieces. To call the FDR aesthetic interesting is an understatement, unique is closer to the truth.

It’s alive

Tucked away in a picturesque park with a pastoral image, FDR Skatepark is an icon to the urban reality of Philadelphia. It is not an idealized urban image either, there are no stairs, no benches, no lights, no amenities of any kind. What about ADA? If they are physically challenged, but determined they will to the top of the bowl. The bathrooms are a couple hundred yards away which is way too far for some, particularly guys. There is occasionally trash and some piled construction materials, so what? FDR makes no apologies, and requires none. This place is about one thing and one thing only, skateboarding.
FDR is the architectural equivalent of Frankenstein, built of the ruins of the urban fabric and clothed in graffiti. Like Frankenstein, FDR is rough around the edges, but it has life, and lots of it. The atmosphere is electric and the shady urban decay aesthetic only adds to it. The setting fits FDR perfectly, there are no neighbors to complain and nothing expensive to protect. Nobody is down there except the skateboarders, and no one else cares what happens there. The short dumped materials are trash to the rest, but opportunity to the locals. It appears that under the I-95 bridge is a perfect place to build a monster.

Sociological Criteria

The majority of criminological theories focus on the criminal or victim and have down-played the role of the physical location of the crime. Focusing on the criminal and victim has provided valuable insights as to why crime occurs. Recent research has shown that the physical site of the crime may be more important than previously theorized. GIS based crime mapping has shown with disturbing clarity that crime is not evenly distributed across a geographic area. In fact specific crime prone locations in larger areas can be responsible for the vast majority of reported crime in a district.

The realization that “hot spots” and “cold spots” of crime occur in broader geographic and recording districts have caused a resurgence of interest in theories that examine the physical qualities of a space. Of particular interest are areas where crime disproportionally does or does not occur. FDR Skatepark will be examined against three place-based theories of crime to determine if the physical qualities of the skatepark contribute or reduce the possibility of crime occurring at FDR Skatepark. The first theory is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by sociologist Ray Jeffery (1977). The second theory will be
Defensible Space by architect Oscar Newman (1976). The third theory will be Broken Windows by sociologists James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). The three theories were reviewed in a more detailed manner in the Literature Review section of this text.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Jeffery’s CPTED theory cites multiple studies that suggest a multi-layered approach, but it is often unclear exactly what layers he is suggesting be used. While the importance of some interventions is unclear, Jeffery does make a clear case for two primary interventions. CPTED’s primary physical interventions are restricting access to a site and facilitating surveillance of a site.

It is not a dead end, but there is nowhere to go.

Though FDR Skatepark is not located on a dead end street it is located on the next best thing. Access to FDR Skatepark is provided by a curvilinear road that meanders around picturesque FDR Park. The road does allow traffic in both directions but there is only one place to access the road at the north end of FDR Park. All vehicular traffic in or out of the park must pass through the north entrance, as far from the southern location of FDR Skatepark as possible. In theory the police could block the north entrance and prevent any car from leaving FDR Park without their approval.

Though FDR Skatepark is located under a bridge that contributes to the massive Delaware Expressway (I-95), there is no access to the expressway from the skatepark or even FDR Park. To reach I-95 vehicles must take a circuitous route that involves passing through FDR Park’s north gate then turning south to connect with I-95. In addition, the curvilinear
roads through FDR Park reduce the speed for vehicular traffic. In short, a car escape from FDR Skatepark, or FDR Park for that matter, is a sketchy proposition indeed.

The prospects for a criminal fleeing on foot are only slightly better. Though a criminal on foot can navigate steep terrain, allowing more escape routes to open up, few of them are promising. The northern escape route through FDR Park provides a lot of land but limited places to hide. Though the picturesque style does twist and turn providing blind corners, the secrecy is limited because the places to lay low are few and easily searched.

The eastern route through the golf course is blocked by a chain link fence that can be climbed. Unfortunately golf rarely requires players to climb fences and any such activity would provoke extreme suspicion from the players at the course. Their suspicions will then likely be reported to the course supervisor or police via the ubiquitous cell phone. If a perpetrator manages to make it over the fence unseen, they are confronted with similar problems with hiding that they would have experienced in FDR, only more profound. FDR Gold Course is designed similar to most golf courses, providing even more wide open spaces then the FDR Park.

The western route by foot out of FDR Park into the adjacent sport complex holds more promise but is also risky. As previously mentioned, unless the Eagles, Phillies, or Seventy-Sixers are playing the sports complex is a massive asphalt desert with few signs of life. In fact the only people in the complex are people monitoring the stadiums and their massive parking lots. Finding cover in the paved void is like trying to find a corner in a round room, they don’t exist. It goes without saying that any suspicious activity will be quickly reported to police or private security agency by
the monitors. After all that is their job and the only reason they are reading Maxim in the
glass booth.

Finally there is the southern, and near suicidal, route from FDR Skatepark. This route
allows the perpetrator to bypass FDR Park but presents the fleeing criminal with far greater
concerns than being arrested. FDR Skatepark is actually located under the bridged lanes of
the massive I-95. It is possible to access and cross I-95 on foot but only the most tweaked-
out criminal would ever attempt this eight-lane, 70 mph game of Frogger.

**All surveillance is not equal.**

There are two groups of people that contribute to the surveillance of FDR Skatepark.
The first is the Philadelphia Police Department and the second is the general public, which are
mostly skateboarders. There appears to be the occasional parent or spectator but most people
at FDR are there to skate.

The police regularly patrol FDR Skatepark by driving on a slow road north of the
skatepark. Police patrols do not seem to be excessive and are usually confined to a drive-by.
According to Sergeant McGuckin of the First District Philadelphia Police, FDR is “just
another location” on his beat and the site experiences “no problems” (pers. comm.). It is also
worth noting that the police have an inactive outpost at FDR Park. The outpost was closed in
the mid 70’s but it is still owned by the police department. It is unclear what the buildings
are used for, but it is likely they are occasionally visited by the police.

The view from the road is limiting due to the large northern concrete wall that hides
most of the skatepark itself. Though the skate surface itself is hidden, the only reason anyone
is on the skating surface is to skate, which is not a crime at FDR. The land around the
skatepark is easily seen from the northern road and the space around the skatepark is often
occupied. Because FDR was built to skate on, not to sit on, the seating options are limited.
As a result, most socializing overflows onto the gravel surface adjacent to the skatepark.
The police can see the gravel surface in its near entirety form the road. The area is not well lit due to the bridge it is located under but there is enough light for police to see what is going on. This is not to suggest that the area offers completely unobstructed views. FDR Skatepark is under a massive bridge with all the accompanying structural elements. There are numerous lost spaces tucked into the I-95 footprint. Small pockets between highway and piling provide enough privacy to do anything short of cooking meth.

What the police are supervising the area for is a fairly straightforward subject. They are looking to see if any criminal act is being committed, after all it is their primary responsibility. Understandably, some other things will cause an officer to investigate further, ranging from individual odd behavior to general mayhem.

In addition to the police, the resident skateboarders also provide surveillance to the site. Though the locals change, the surveillance is always present. From sun up to sundown there is usually someone at FDR Skatepark riding the curves. Unfortunately, FDR Skatepark does not have lights so the crowd usually evaporates at sundown, though a few bold skateboarders feel that light is a luxury not a necessity. The number of people can range from a couple to fifty depending on predictable factors, such as time of day, day of week, and climatic conditions.

From the skateboarders perspective the entire area is laid out in panoramic fashion. The ledges that surround the skate surface provide an elevated vantage point giving mostly clear quarter-mile views in all directions. The skate surface itself was designed to allow people skating to see each other and avoid collision, making surveillance easy. Realistically
though, anyone committing any act in the bowls, other than riding them, would be immediately confronted and berated for slowing down traffic.

It is also important to note that people at FDR are often actively looking around to see a trick or to spot a friend. FDR, like other skateparks in this study, is a social place. The people that skate there frequently know each other, and most people are either friends or acquaintances. Eyes are always scanning new arrivals to see if they know them. The atmosphere is similar to a small bar. Everyone may not know or like everyone else, but they all know who skates FDR on a regular basis. In short, avoiding the notice of the public, particularly for unknowns, is next to impossible.

It may be difficult to avoid the notice of the locals during clandestine transgressions, but will they care? While an assault will certainly attract attention, will smoking a joint do anything other than attract people wanting a hit? In general it seems that all illegal acts are discouraged. It goes without saying that the skateboarders at FDR, like society as a whole are strongly opposed to murder, assault and rape. What is surprising is that minor crimes such as underage drinking and drug use are actively discouraged.

The primary concern is that FDR will be closed and demolished if there are any problems in the area. The legality of FDR is open to question. Though work permits have been obtained for recent renovations, the bulk of the construction has been done without the permission of the land owner. Though in the past the city has provided ten thousand dollars towards FDR’s construction, the city government has also been harsh with skateboarders. The reasonable concern is that the city will shut the skatepark down the minute they have an excuse.
Sounds like a nice place.

According to Jeffery’s primary criteria there should be few problems at FDR skatepark. Situated an effective dead end, there is only one way in or out of the skatepark. This situation is least preferred by criminals because it limits their options for escaping the scene of the crime.

FDR Park and Skatepark are supervised by the police regularly and may receive a few extra patrols due to the police outpost in the park. The local skateboarders see all crimes as an issue and, more importantly a threat to their skatepark. The chances of a criminal act being unseen is slim. Though the criminal mind is not fully understood, it is safe to say that most people would prefer to engage in criminal acts in private.

Defensible Space

Newman’s theory of defensible space is particularly relevant to this study. In short, the more personal investment a person has in a space the more they are willing to defend it. Actual legal ownership is not required, only an emotional attachment. As Newman discovered, quantifying a population’s investment in a space is difficult. Fortunately the amount of investment can be assessed through actions and words.

We did after all, build it.

The typical method of obtaining a skatepark is a political one. Countless hours of activism and fund raising are typically required to get a city to begin considering a skatepark for the local residents. This method shows a city that the local skateboarders are invested and willing to work for their skatepark. Perhaps due to the problems skateboarders had with the Philadelphia government, petitioning the city counsel for improvements to the laughable skatepark provided was not an option. Though not politically oriented, the local skateboarders were more than willing to work for their skatepark, so they began to pour concrete.
While difficult to quantify investment, there is perhaps no greater indication of investment than the act of creation. Ask any craftsmen, the personal attachment gained through time spent and work done is impossible to replicate through any other means. Though the crew changed, every person that designed the curves, built the formwork, or floated the concrete has a right to call it their skatepark.

Local skateboarder Bryan Lathrop can tell tales of volunteer investment that any non-profit agency would be jealous of. He can talk about ten days of volunteer work required to get the park ready for the 2002 X-Games. He can tell of volunteers jack-hammering by flood light at 11:00 pm. People have been known to camp out underneath a highway just so they could start working when they woke, bypassing the unnecessary shower and coffee. Lathrop sums it up by saying, “There is a lot of love and commitment that goes into making it work and a lot of guys are protective of it.” (Lathrop 2005)

Not only did the locals work to build FDR but they also maintain it. This is not to suggest that there is no trash in the area. The area under the I-95 Bridge is notorious for illegal dumping of commercial trash. What is surprisingly absent is the trash that would accumulate in any well used public space. Fast food wrappers, soda cans, and stray papers are few and far between. According to Mike Helson, the Park District Supervisor, the skateboarders clean up after themselves and routinely paint the concrete to remove offensive graffiti (pers. comm.). As an unexpected bonus the skateboarders will often use some of the illegally dumped material as structure for the skatepark. Walls are formed with abandoned steel drums and reinforcement is provided by discarded chain link fence. In conclusion, Helson believes that the skatepark causes “no problems” and is a “major success” (pers. comm.).
The skateboarders express their investment through action and are willing to speak of it. Bryan Lathrop calls it his “home away from home”, a statement commonly repeated by skateboarders across the study areas (Lathrop 2005). Chris Hunter boils it down to primary elements stating, “The cool thing about this pace is it doesn’t matter if you are good. I can’t catch big air or grind. I just come out here and have fun.” (pers. comm.) Perhaps it was said best by a random skateboarder on the street in downtown Philadelphia, who upon finding out the purpose of this study, made the impassioned plea, “Man, please don’t say anything bad about FDR, its all we’ve got.” (pers. comm.)

I’m not telling you what you can’t do, just where you can’t do it.

With the specter of city hall’s intolerance looming over FDR Skatepark, it is understandable that some of the locals are concerned with any crime what so ever. The question is if they will actively defend their space. Will the locals self-police the site to insure FDR’s continued existence? The answer appears to be they will, at least verbally, which may be all that it necessary. After all, committing a crime, such as assault, to stop another crime would be counterproductive.

Multiple parties believe that FDR Skatepark is self-policed by the local skateboarders. According to Bryan Lathrop, if he sees any type of crime he addresses it. Not only does he address it, he encourages other locals to do the same, “I tell guys that you have to say, ‘It’s your choice to drink beer and smoke pot, but don’t do it here because you are going to ruin it for everybody’” (Lathrop 2005). Another local, Chris Hunter, agrees. When asked what he would do if he saw a crime he says, “I would confront them personally. I would tell them to get that stuff out of here. You are going to get us in trouble.” (pers. comm.) The Park District Supervisor, Mike Helson, also feels the resident skateboarders police the area and contribute to the lack of crime at the skatepark.

A slightly different view comes from Josh Nims, local skater and Executive Director of Franklin’s Paine Skatepark Fund. According to Nims, there is not much self-policing at
FDR but mostly because it is not necessary. Nims states, “FDR doesn’t work that way, that’s not to say FDR doesn’t have the potential to work that way”. “There is some in car crime that occurs under the interstate and there is short dumping.” Nims elaborates, “We are too far away from the urban fabric for traditional street corner crime. I’m sure there is a car-to-car crack deal that occurs on a regular basis, but it is between two cars and it is a hundred yards away.” (Nims 2005)

Though the aforementioned opinions do not completely coincide, there are in agreement on the key issue. First is that if crime occurs at FDR Skatepark, the crime will be addressed by the local skateboarders. It appears that the only method of intervention required is verbal redirection. None of the people interviewed seemed to think that the situation would turn physical (pers. comm.).

**Two for two.**

According to Newman’s Defensible Space theory as a resident population becomes invested in their space the will being to defend it. This is expressed by residents addressing people that they don’t know and confronting behaviors determined unacceptable. It appears that this is exactly what is happening at FDR Skatepark. Not only will the locals state that they are invested, but they have a rather large concrete icon to prove it. It also appears that as Newman predicted, the residents are willing to confront behaviors that they believe will detrimentally impact their skatepark. Newman allowed residents to choose paint and flowers to create investment in a home, while in Philadelphia they built the house.

**Broken Windows**

Broken Windows Theory, proposed by James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982, is the classic slippery slope argument. This theory states that once small “incivilities”, such as
graffiti, trash, or broken windows occur then they will act as a visual clue to criminals that
the space is not supervised. The unsupervised space will then be prone to additional, and
more serious, criminal behavior. The “common sense” nature of this approach is supported
by every slum in America. Typically high crime rates lead to lowered property values, which
in turn reduces the desire of land owners to maintain it. This cyclical process then spirals
down until the area is full of condemned buildings and rampant crime.

**Beauty is more than skin deep.**

FDR Park as a whole is a triumph of the picturesque. Neo-classical architectural
follies dot the landscape transporting the viewer back in time two hundred years to a time
when a walk through a park was a civilized and refined activity. Large trees hide the
surrounding highways and enclose the pedestrian in an idyllic time warp. This illusion is not
complete however, as a viewer travels south they will see an icon of the modern landscape,
the I-95 Bridge that dominates the southern skyline of FDR Park. The area beneath major
bridges is often forgotten and unused resulting in many of the “incivilities” described in the
Broken Windows thesis. Graffiti, evidence of drug use, illegal dumping, and litter are
common occurrences in these lost areas. Some of the expected “incivilities” at FDR
Skatepark are prevalent while others are noticeably absent.

The overall aesthetic of FDR Skatepark is unique. Constructed of a hodgepodge of
“found” materials, FDR Skatepark is the Frankenstein of skateparks. Large metal drums are
used as walls then covered with unfinished concrete to provide structure. Chain-link fence
peeks out of the edges of the concrete revealing where the fence was used as reinforcement
for the impossible curves of the concrete. Concrete was poured when materials and labor
were available, resulting in multiple small pours. The weathering darkens the concrete over
time resulting in a patchwork of grays that reveals the order in which the different sections were poured.

Initial inspection of the construction may seem shoddy or haphazard with little regard for craft. Further investigation will reveal pristine concrete on the interior, smooth as glass and fast as a gazelle. The craft of the interior concrete is brought to a level of finish unheard of in modern construction. FDR Skatepark is all go and little show. It is not there to provide a tranquil place to have a picnic, FDR is there to provide a perfect surface to make blistering runs and catch unheard of air.

To suggest that FDR Skatepark is a pristine landscape would not only be inaccurate, but it would be a disservice to the urban feel of the space. There are essentially two types of trash at FDR Skatepark, occupation related trash, like cans or cigarette butts, and short dumping, discarded construction materials such as chain link fence or cinder block.

Occupation related trash is apparent but minimal, considering the extensive use the park receives. For the amount of square footage contained, skateparks are often the most heavily used spaces in a park system, if not the entire city, and FDR skatepark is no exception. The fact is that people create trash, and more people create more trash. Regardless, little trash is obvious to the casual observer. A more detailed investigation will reveal a few of the usual suspects such as beer bottles and cigarette butts tucked into nooks and crannies.

The park system does not consider FDR Skatepark part of their responsibilities (pers. comm.), so it is clear that the locals themselves are performing maintenance on the area.
Though the local skateboarders maintain, the cleaning is sporadic and incomplete. It is far more likely for a local to spend a few minutes picking up trash before skateboarding than it is for a team of skateboarders to spend their entire Saturday picking up every last glass shard embedded in the gravel (Lathrop 2005). Fortunately the list of people who pick a few things up is long and as a result FDR Skatepark remains a fairly tidy space.

Illegal short dumping of old construction materials has long been a problem under the I-95 Bridge. Though the local skateboarders are not hauling out the materials using a flat bed truck, the locals have a positive impact on the short dumping situation. Many of the discarded materials are incorporated into FDR Skatepark. As Josh Nims puts it, “There is short dumping under the interstate, which kind of feeds our habit in some ways. Whatever we can pull we will use. We love to use wire mesh, if you want to drop some fence, feel free man. Cool.” (Nims 2005) Though not all materials dumped at the site are suitable to feed the expansion of FDR, the locals are resourceful, dedicated and will use whatever they can. Unfortunately, a site with short dumping is a telltale sign that the owner of the land does not maintain it.

The area is also noticeably free of any evidence of drug use. When surveyed, FDR contained no pipes, syringes, roaches, baggies, or any other paraphernalia that would suggest that drug use is occurring at the site. Though this does not confirm that drug use never occurs at the site, it does show that FDR does not provide a visual clue to drug users that this space is an appropriate place to get high.

Graffiti is prevalent at FDR Skatepark and undeniably adds a gritty, urban element to the space. The graffiti ranges from impressive pieces approaching mural in scale to
incoherent scrawling more commonly found on the walls of a bar bathroom. Themes range from the American Flag to artistically abstract images to naked women in compromising positions. Each image is painted over the last, providing a continually changing backdrop for skateboarding.

Apparently the skateboarders themselves are responsible for little, if any, of the graffiti that regularly appears on the concrete surface of FDR Skatepark. Regardless, many locals don’t mind its presence and feel they could stop it if they did. According to Bryan Lathrop, “FDR is a regular stop on the graffiti writer’s route. I don’t mind, some of the stuff is really cool.” According to Chris Hunter, “If someone wants to come in the middle of the night and spray up the place there isn’t anything we can do.” (pers. comm.) Graffiti is obviously present, and few park supervisors consider this a benefit to the area. Regardless, District Supervisor Mike Helson does not feel that it is a major problem. Helson believes that the skateboarders “monitor the graffiti and paint over the real offensive stuff” (pers. comm.).

**Neglected? Yea right.**

According to Broken Windows theory FDR Skatepark should be slightly more prone to crime than other urban locations. The little remaining trash, extensive short dumping and prevalent graffiti all contribute to the look of a place that is neglected. The irony of this conclusion is that FDR Skatepark has a fanatic following who care for every inch of the skatepark. In fact the only reason why FDR Skatepark exists at all is because the local skateboarders do not neglect the space, they build and maintain it with little to no help from the city.
Two out of three, is pretty good.

Of the sociological theories presented, Jeffery’s Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and Newman’s Defensible Space suggest that FDR Skatepark should not be crime prone. The third, Wilson and Kelling’s Broken Windows theory, seems to suggest that FDR Skatepark may be prone to criminal behavior.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design focuses on restricting access to the site and surveillance of the site. Though FDR Skatepark is not at a dead end, it is only practical to approach from one direction, the north. In addition FDR Skatepark is under surveillance from the local police who patrol regularly and are able to view the vast majority of the area from their patrol car. The local skateboarders themselves provide additional surveillance to the site. People entering the skatepark are noted by the locals, if for no other reason than to see if one of their friends has shown up for a few runs.

Newman’s Defensible Space theory relies on investment in the area to promote local residents to enforce their perception of appropriate behavior in the space. It is clear through their words and actions that the local skateboarders are invested in their skatepark. Also there are multiple accounts of locals confronting behavior that is possibly detrimental and may lead to the destruction of their skatepark.

Finally, Wilson and Kelling’s Broken Windows theory suggests that FDR Skatepark may be prone to criminal activity due to the signs of neglect, primarily the short dumping and graffiti that is present. The theory operates under the assumption that these “incivilities” indicate that no one cares for the space, or what happens in it. This assumption is tenuous in FDR’s case and may limit the application of this theory to the site.

Reported Crime in the Surrounding Area

Every year the FBI creates a massive tome entitled *The Uniform Crime Report* (UCR). This mandatory report compiles crime statistics from almost 17,000 law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. As a result, every police station in the
country is required to keep records of the location and type of crimes committed. Knowing that an informed public is necessary for democracy, police stations will willingly provide these statistics, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

Whenever the public views crime statistics, they are seeing the official and presumably accurate police statistics. Numbers do not lie, but unfortunately numbers are routinely misrepresented misunderstood. Selective sampling and assumed correlations have caused growing skepticism with a cynical public. Many begin to question if statistics are "proof" of anything. Throwing the baby out with the intellectual bathwater is not necessary. All that is required is an understanding of exactly what the statistics are measuring. With this knowledge statistics become measurement of something as opposed to a springboard to inaccurate associations.

A crime is a crime is a crime.

Defining what exactly a crime is an inherently debatable topic, as evidenced by the multitude of court cases currently pending at all judicial levels. Fortunately, in interest of expediency, the FBI has created a universal set of definitions of all major and most minor crime. Unlike other cities that produce their own definitions of crime, Philadelphia uses the published FBI crime definitions of crime. The official definition of crimes, according to the UCR Handbook, is listed below. (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2004)

**Robbery:** The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

**Aggravated Assault:** An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm.

**Burglary:** The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft.
Theft: The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.

Motor Vehicle Theft: The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

Other Assault: Includes all assaults which do not involve the use of a firearm, knife, cutting instrument, or other dangerous weapon and in which the victim did not sustain serious or aggravated injuries.

Liquor Laws: The violation of state or local laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, or use of alcoholic beverages, not including driving under the influence and drunkenness.

Drug Abuse Violations (Narcotics): The violation of laws prohibiting the production, distribution, and/or use of certain controlled substances and the equipment or devices utilized in their preparation and/or use. The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance. Arrests for violations of state and local laws, specifically those relating to the unlawful possession, sale, use, growing, manufacturing, and making of narcotic drugs.

Vandalism: To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law.

Despite the thoroughness of the UCR handbook the FBI does not provide definitions for graffiti or truancy. Fortunately the definition of these crimes is fairly straightforward. For simplicity the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition will be used (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2005).
Graffiti: The unauthorized writing or drawing on a public surface.

Truancy (Truant): One who stays out of school without permission.

Finally the “all others” category should be mentioned. All crimes not in the previous categories were included in this one. These are typically non-violent crimes such as criminal trespass, prostitution, gambling, etc.

Too...many.....numbers.

Traditional numeric data is extremely useful for describing large geographic areas, but is problematic at smaller scales. Data is typically compiled for an entire neighborhood or police district. The data of small areas within the neighborhood is often buried within the larger data set. Fortunately, University of Philadelphia operates CrimeBase, an interactive crime database that provides flexibility in determining geographic sample size. CrimeBase not only allows for statistics by neighborhood, but also police district and section. Though it can not state crime specifically at FDR Skatepark, the data does provide crime based context of the area that FDR Skatepark is located in. CrimeBase also allows data for minor crimes to be accessed, providing insight for crimes particularly relevant to this study including alcohol, narcotics, vandalism, graffiti and truancy.

The first data presented is numerical data showing arrests made or citations given in areas around FDR Skatepark. It is important to note, the numbers do not represent the total number of crimes committed, just those caught by the police. Though the former can be indicative of the latter, it is not a perfect correlation. The details of data are often relegated to footnotes in barely readable print. Without understanding what and how the data is measuring the results are invalidated by lack of context. In the spirit of transparency, the following is a few words on what the data is actually measuring and why it was included in the study.
Philadelphia crime statistics include all crime that occurs within the city of Philadelphia. These stats were included because they potentially can show larger trends in crime rates across the city. If the city’s total crime increases while the study area’s crime rate remains constant, then the study area has experienced a relative decrease.

City of Philadelphia

Neighborhood crime statistics include all crime in a given neighborhood as defined by the Temple University Social Science Data Library. FDR Skatepark is firmly located within Marconi Plaza and would have little effect on adjacent neighborhoods. Eastwick and Girard Estates are neighborhoods adjacent to Marconi Plaza. They are provided to give an idea of crime in the larger geographic area.

Marconi Plaza  Eastwick  Girard Estates

Police district statistics include all crime in a police district. Police districts provide a slightly larger and distinctly different set of boundaries. Again FDR Skatepark is firmly within the first district and other adjacent districts are added for comparison.
Police sections are the geographically smallest scale that Crime Base can supply. FDR Skatepark is located in section 1L. The boundaries include FDR Park and the adjacent golf course. Again adjacent districts, 4K and 11, are added for comparison.

As population grows, so do the number of crimes committed. Obviously a small town will have less total crime than a massive metropolis. To account for the population discrepancies between different neighborhoods, districts and sections, crime is expressed in crime per 1000 residents. This allows for a direct comparison of different sites regardless of population. So, without any further ado, the long awaited crime statistics:
### 2000

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#### Neighborhood

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#### Police Section

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<td>20,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>28.79</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>14.35</td>
<td>13.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Neighborhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Agg. Assault</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Auto Theft</th>
<th>Other Assault</th>
<th>Liquor Laws</th>
<th>Narcotics</th>
<th>Vandalism</th>
<th>Truancy</th>
<th>All Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marconi Plaza</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>69.66</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>21.67</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>20.45</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>204.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastwick</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>9.29</td>
<td>24.40</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>18.23</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>217.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girard Estates</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>4,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>28.08</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>19.26</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>12.94</td>
<td>170.40</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Police District

#### First District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>184</th>
<th>175</th>
<th>181</th>
<th>846</th>
<th>547</th>
<th>625</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>117</th>
<th>501</th>
<th>366</th>
<th>5,597</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>17.87</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>10.47</td>
<td>160.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fourth District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>275</th>
<th>259</th>
<th>266</th>
<th>1,802</th>
<th>696</th>
<th>990</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>265</th>
<th>929</th>
<th>482</th>
<th>8,485</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>37.10</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.38</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>19.13</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>174.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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#### Twelfth District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>494</th>
<th>651</th>
<th>803</th>
<th>2,460</th>
<th>2,01</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1,530</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>701</th>
<th>1,414</th>
<th>1,729</th>
<th>14,969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>32.83</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.30</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>18.76</td>
<td>22.94</td>
<td>198.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Police Section

#### Section 1L
| | 2 | 1 | 2 | 28 | 22 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 2 | 91 |
|----------|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|----|
| Per 1000 | 3.27| 1.64| 3.27| 45.83| 36.0| 1 | 8.18| 0.00| 0.00| 16.37| 3.27| 148.94 |

#### Section 4K
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>21</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>222</th>
<th>78</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>78</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>758</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>62.75</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.29</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>22.05</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Section 11
| | 3 | 1 | 3 | 27 | 24 | 19 | 0 | 1 | 21 | 1 | 122 |
|----------|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Per 1000 | 1.23| 0.41| 1.23| 11.07| 9.84| 7.79| 0.00| 0.41| 8.61| 0.41| 50.02 |

### 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Agg. Assault</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Auto Theft</th>
<th>Other Assault</th>
<th>Liquor Laws</th>
<th>Narcotics</th>
<th>Vandalism</th>
<th>Truancy</th>
<th>All Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>8,431</td>
<td>9,165</td>
<td>10,785</td>
<td>37,600</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>29,401</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>11,772</td>
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<td>20,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>24.80</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>19.40</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>14.24</td>
<td>13.68</td>
<td>161.92</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Neighborhood

#### Marconi Plaza
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>38</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>406</th>
<th>196</th>
<th>180</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>218</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>1,624</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
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<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>49.71</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22.04</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Eastwick
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>67</th>
<th>82</th>
<th>82</th>
<th>339</th>
<th>432</th>
<th>308</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>334</th>
<th>73</th>
<th>2,940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>23.50</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.35</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>23.16</td>
<td>5.06</td>
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</tbody>
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#### Girard Estates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>158</th>
<th>123</th>
<th>121</th>
<th>716</th>
<th>273</th>
<th>514</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>443</th>
<th>399</th>
<th>4,722</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>26.77</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19.22</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>16.57</td>
<td>14.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Police District

#### First District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>179</th>
<th>143</th>
<th>152</th>
<th>781</th>
<th>417</th>
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<th>0</th>
<th>123</th>
<th>595</th>
<th>422</th>
<th>6,023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>22.33</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>17.01</td>
<td>12.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fourth District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>240</th>
<th>223</th>
<th>1,550</th>
<th>660</th>
<th>920</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>246</th>
<th>940</th>
<th>355</th>
<th>8,050</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>31.91</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>19.54</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth District</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>1,957</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,749</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>1,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>25.96</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>18.11</td>
<td>18.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4K</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agg. Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nar. others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marconi Plaza</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eastwick</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girard Estates</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First District</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth District</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twelfth District</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4K</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Per 1000       | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |

| Per 1000       | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
The analysis please.

This would traditionally be the time and place to use sophisticated statistical analysis that makes researchers drool and mathematicians give a respectful nod. The result of the arithmetic acrobatics would reveal hidden and obscure correlations that explain why crime occurs in specific locations and who is committing it. Fortunately this level of statistical
analysis is not necessary for this investigation. A quick review of the limited data set will reveal the vast majority of relevant correlations without any mathematical mayhem.

The primary purpose of the crime statistics is to provide a comparison of the general area around FDR Skatepark with other sites in the city. Different scales are used to provide multiple ways of measuring the same thing. Ideally, a trend will develop and the results will support each other. Remember, none of these figures exclusively represent the skatepark. Police section 1L limits the geographic area to FDR Park and the adjacent golf course, but even so FDR Skatepark is a geographically small area on the southern end of FDR Park.

In relation to Philadelphia, crime in Marconi Plaza is equitable with the city as a whole. In 2000 most crime rates in Marconi Plaza were slightly higher than the city, but over the next four years the crime rates per 1000 have slowly moved lower than the city. Unfortunately for Marconi Plaza, theft, auto theft and vandalism are the exceptions. The theft rate in Marconi Plaza is high, on average 234% of the per 1000 city wide theft rate. The auto theft rate in Marconi Plaza is the highest on average at 271% of the city wide auto theft rate. Vandalism rates also tend to run a bit high, on average 157% of the per 1000 city wide vandalism rate over the five years.

When the Marconi Plaza statistics are compared to surrounding neighborhoods, the trend is less definitive. As a whole, Marconi Plaza is equitable in per 1000 crime rates to the Eastwick neighborhood. Both Marconi Plaza and Eastwick have slightly higher crime rates in comparison to the Girard Estates neighborhood. As expected there are exceptions, these concern thefts, auto thefts, vandalism and truancy. Again Marconi Plaza records more thefts than other neighborhoods. On average over the five years, Marconi Plaza recorded thefts were 271% of Eastwick and 223% of Girard Estates. Marconi Plaza's auto theft rate is, on average, only 76% of Eastwick's rate but Marconi Plaza's average auto theft rate almost doubles Girard Estates at 190%. Marconi Plaza and Eastwick have similar vandalism rates, which are above city averages. Marconi Plaza has 150% of the vandalism rate in Girard Estates. Marconi Plaza experienced a rash of truancy in 2000, but in the following years they
had a very low truancy rate in comparison to neighboring areas. From 2001 to 2004 Marconi Plaza had 42% of the truancy rate in Eastwick and a mere 16% of the truancy rate in Girard Estates.

When per 1000 crime reports of the First District are compared to per 1000 city wide crime reports, it shows that the First District typically has fewer instances per 1000 over the majority of crimes. Vandalism is slightly more common at 106%, but at 154% of the city, auto theft is likely a greater concern. Despite these exceptions, the First District typically has slightly less crime than Philadelphia at large.

Comparing the First Police District to the surrounding police districts paints a slightly different picture. The vast majority of per 1000 crime rates are lower than the adjoining districts, the Fourth and the Twelfth. Though the differences occupy a quantitative range, they are indeed lower, with a couple exceptions. In 2003 and 2004 the rate of other assaults in the First District is slightly higher than neighboring districts averaging 110%. The First District falls in the middle regarding truancy. While the First District has 203% of the cases of truancy that the Fourth District does, the First District has only 93% of the truancy reports as the Twelfth District. The numerous instances of theft at the neighborhood scale were not evident at the police district scale. The previous trend of auto theft is continued at the police district scale.

Before discussing the police sections, it is important to note that due to the small geographic size and low population, variations in per 1000 crime rates can be more extreme. A few incidents can have major impact on the result. Section 1L is a small area encompassing FDR Park and the adjacent golf course with the sparse population of 611 residents. The population of the section increases every day while people use the park, unfortunately this is not represented in per 1000 statistics.

When Section 1L is compared to city wide per 1000 crime rates, Section 1L has less for most crimes. Some major variations do occur, such as truancy in 2000 or theft in 2003,
and the per 1000 auto theft rate has remained consistently high. Averaged over five years, the auto theft rate is 267% of the city as a whole.

Compared to surrounding areas, the consistent trend of Section 1L is to have less crime than Section 4K. Section 1L typically does record more crime than Section 1I. Section 4K often doubles the per 1000 crime rates in 1L, while often 1L doubles the crime rates of 11. The regularity of this pattern suggests a strong connection to the real world. The one exception, unsurprisingly, is auto theft. Section 1L per 1000 auto theft rate is 120% of Section 4K and 315% of section 1I.

Could you put that in a couple less paragraphs?

Throughout the different scales the crime rates of the study area were typically equitable to, or slightly below, the city as a whole. The most noticeable exceptions included the slightly inflated vandalism and theft rates in Marconi Plaza. The constantly high auto theft rates appeared across all scales.

When compared to surrounding neighborhoods, districts, and sections, again the area around FDR Skatepark in general has less crime per 1000 people. Vandalism and theft were higher in Marconi Plaza at the neighborhood scale, but this was not evident at police district or section scales. The one consistency was auto theft which was, again, high across all scales.

The resulting impression is that FDR Skatepark is in an average to low crime area with the exception of auto theft. Occasional thefts may occur, but some of the expected problems such as alcohol, drugs, vandalism and truancy are not prevalent. The exception to the pattern is auto theft, which is at least twice as likely to occur in the area as a random location in the city. The take home message is that the area is fairly safe, just don’t drive a recently pimped ride down there. Ride a bike, take the subway, or better yet ride a skateboard.
The inevitable oops factor.

Typically possible sources of error in data exist in obscurity, buried deep within the bowels of the appendix and rarely read. This section not only reveals the perpetual suspects of error but also shows error specific to the individual table or study. For this study sources of error will be given directly after individual data sets to connect them to the data which they refer.

Perhaps the most common source of error is human error. This typically occurs during data entry or coding and has undoubtedly already made an appearance. From the officer filing the report to the researcher doing statistical analysis, anything touched by humans is prone to error. Miscopied numbers or incorrect math fall under the category of human error. Often unavoidable, this error is inherent of data of all types, including this data.

More specific to this data set is error associated with CrimeBase itself. CrimeBase receives its information from the police five days after the crime is committed. Any information about the classification of a crime after this time period is not reported to CrimeBase. If the classification of a crime changes, from an assault to aggravated assault, for example, then the change will not be reflected on CrimeBase. In addition, CrimeBase uses an automatic address location system that results in a 1% to 3% error rate (Philadelphia NIS CrimeBase). Though these sources of data impact the study, none are significant enough to invalidate statistics presented.

There is more data?

Though numerical statistics can provide significant insight into crime within a geographic area, they are unable to provide the location within the geographic boundary which the crime occurred. Fortunately GIS based crime maps can show exactly where the crime occurred. Equally fortunate, the Philadelphia Police department launched their Crime Analysis and Mapping Unit in 1997 to produce GIS based maps to be reviewed by the police on a weekly basis (Philadelphia Police Department 2005). Most unfortunately, the Philadelphia Police Department refuses to provide these maps at any cost. In fairness, they did provide a hefty stack of papers with the date, time, address and type of crime for
approximately 5500 offenses occurring within a mile radius of FDR Skatepark. The crime records include the years 2000-2004 (Philadelphia Police Department). A GIS style map could then be constructed showing the location of various offenses.

The strength of GIS based data is that it shows the actual location of a crime and it is graphically accessible to the point of self explanatory. Each yellow dot represents one crime, while the red dot represents five crimes. The white circle is a half-mile radius from the site of FDR Skatepark. Crimes are divided into the FBI definitions listed above. In this data, liquor, narcotics, vandalism and graffiti are included in the “all others” category. Murder, rape and arson were not included because, fortunately, they do not occur very often.
Robbery

The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear

= 1
= 5

FDR
Aggravated Assault

An attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or injury.

- = 1
- = 5

FDR
Burglary

The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft.
Theft

The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.
Motor Vehicle Theft

The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.
Simple Assault

Includes all assaults which do not involve the use of a firearm, knife, cutting instrument, or other dangerous weapon and in which the victim did not sustain serious or aggravated injuries.

- = 1
- = 5
All Other

All crimes not in other categories are included in this one.
Seeing is believing.

As previously stated, the GIS style maps are self explanatory. It is obvious that crime is not evenly distributed throughout the study area. Crime tends to congregate around specific areas, and surprisingly, many crimes follow a similar pattern. There are always exceptions, including a few areas that are almost crime free.

The general pattern is difficult to miss. Crime primarily congregates along massive Broad Street. The six lane thoroughfare is the main north /south road through Philadelphia. The six lanes give the idea that this road is teeming with cars and buses, which is clearly not the case. The road’s sizeable girth is rarely used but necessary when there is a game in town. The Eagles, Phillies, and '76ers all play just west of FDR Park. The three huge stadiums dominate the skyline within a sea of asphalt parking lots. To call the view unobstructed is a gross understatement, there is simply nothing there.

At the corner of Broad and Pattison, between FDR Park and the sports complex, more crimes are recorded than anywhere else in the study area. This trend is evident across all five years and with many crimes. Theft, auto theft, other assaults and “all other” crimes disproportionately occur at this site. Even in times when few instances occur, the majority of them occur at this site. What is also unusual is the relative isolation of the site. To the northeast and southeast are massive stadiums and barren asphalt. In addition, little glass booths protect the asphalt from those wishing to do it harm. To the northwest is the Eagles training center which is outfitted with fences and security cameras to protect the Eagles from those wishing to do them harm. Finally, to the southwest is picturesque FDR Park, sans security presumably because no one wishes to harm it.

Despite the isolation of the intersection, it does likely see traffic, particularly pedestrian. FDR Park is not another unused public park. In addition to the skatepark, there are heavily used tennis courts and ample picnicking space. The primary route for those not driving would be from the subway station a couple of hundred yards north on Broad. The trip from the subway station requires that pedestrians run the gauntlet to gain access to FDR
Park. This same move is required to get from the subway to any of the stadiums. It is likely
that on game days this corner is the busiest in Philadelphia. A correlation was not done to
determine how many of the crimes occurred on a game day, but a safe speculation would
suggest more than a few.

The second area that attracts crime is one block north on Broad where it intersects
Hartranft. This area is slightly less isolated than Broad and Pattison. The Eagle’s training
facility is now southwest and the west still consists of parking lots, but to the north is the
southern edge of the Marconi Plaza neighborhood. The neighborhood consists of cute brick
row houses with small lawns allowing the owner to personalize the space with tasteful
plantings. Though the area would likely see extra foot traffic on game days, there is little
other reason to be there unless you live in the area.

The next place that crime congregates is the Citizens Bank Park, home of the
Philadelphia Phillies. The effect is not as strong as Broad and Pattison or Broad and
Hartranft, but is still noticeable, particularly in 2003 and 2004. This does not suggest that
players or spectators of a specific sport are more likely to commit criminal acts, which
would, of course, be absurd. Likely, the masses of humanity that attend baseball games
make suitable targets for crime.

Finally, crime is frequently reported in the southern portion of Marconi Plaza. The
frequency is not as high as the previously mentioned locations, but crime is constantly
recorded there. Crime does not seem to center on a specific location in the residential area,
but consistently crime is scattered through the row houses. This area is well off main roads
and would likely see little traffic outside of the residents.

There are few crimes that do not follow this pattern including robbery, burglary and
aggravated assault. Through the five years, robbery appears to scatter across the map
following no obvious pattern. This is also true of burglary, but only in places with multiple
buildings, such as residential areas. Finally, aggravated assaults seem to hover around Broad Street but show no other pattern.

It is worth mentioning that there are places where crime is rarely, if ever, recorded. The most relevant to this study is the green space that comprises FDR Park and the adjacent gold course. In the five years, not a single incident is attributed to the interior of FDR Park. The golf course to the west is also free of crime with the exception of three thefts at an entrance in 2004. The significance of this finding to the study is obvious and would appear to deserve pages of analyzation and conjecture. Fortunately, this will not be done because little else is relevant, other than crime’s absence. To repeat, there are no instances of recorded crime inside FDR Park during 2000-2004.

The parking lots to the east are as vacant of crime as vacant of structure. This may seem odd considering the opportunity of multiple cars left while watching a game. Remember that the area is supervised and presents no cover to hide behind. It is also possible that what little crime may occur there is attributed to the nearest sports stadium. The lot itself may not have an address, so the crime may be attributed to a stadiums address.

Finally the Naval Shipyard to the south is relatively free of crime. An incident or two occurs every other year, but this area is almost completely free of crime. It appears the cliché of the seedy, fog laden docks does not apply to Philadelphia.

For those of us with short attention spans.

A definitive pattern emerges with the vast majority of crimes. Reported crime seems to center on Broad, with the intersections of Pattison and Hartranft being the most popular. Though these spaces are not continually populated, they do have some foot traffic daily and very heavy traffic on game days. Other than FDR Park, there is little else in the area. Robbery, burglary and aggravated assault do not form a definitive pattern. These crimes are typically scattered across the map.
Citizens Bank Park, where the Phillies play, has recorded multiple crimes. The number of crimes recorded at the stadium skyrocketed in 2003 and 2004. The southern residential section of Marconi Plaza consistently sees crime reports scattered through the residential area, but never concentrated at one locale.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that in five years there are no crimes attributed to the interior of FDR Park. In the same five years the adjacent golf course records only have three thefts. Oddly enough, the park is located on the corner of Broad and Pattison, where many crimes are recorded. The parking lots to the east and the Naval Shipyards to the south are typically free of recorded crime.

**The data may have some small issues.**

The definitive graphics of GIS style maps lead to understanding and confidence in their results. Unfortunately, there is always some error in any data and this data is no exception. Though there are inaccuracies, the overall trend exhibited by the above maps is too strong to ignore.

The first type of error is the ever-present human error. Considering the myriad of ways a human can error, it is difficult to suggest there is any other type of error. For example, there were 96 inaccurate addresses. Many gave no numeric address, just the street. Others were an intersection of streets that do not intersect. This was likely improperly imputed to the data base by human hands.

It should again be stated that these maps were not created with GIS based data. Though the list may have come from a GIS database, it was not in the format of a map. Each address was looked up and then a dot placed on an aerial photo. Any process done a thousand times, was undoubtedly done incorrectly a couple.

The clear dot definitively showing where a crime occurred is also slightly inaccurate. The dot may be where a crime actually occurred, but it could also be the closest address that
the police office could identify. Chances are that some of the crime attributed to the street corner actually occurred twenty yards, or more, away. The corner may have been used as the location because it was close and well known. The resulting clusters may not be as "tight" in reality as they appear on the maps. In the same vein, when 75 crimes occur on one street corner, the resulting dots become an unreadable mess. As a result the dots were spaced enough to be readable.

Finally, the complete lack of crime at FDR Park and eastern parking lots should be viewed skeptically. It is impossible to know, but the police may feel that the address of FDR Park is the intersection of Broad and Pattison and attribute all crime at the park to that street corner. A similar situation could be occurring with the crime in the parking lots being associated with the baseball stadium. The presence of three thefts on the interior of the golf course shows that not all crimes are recorded this way. Still, when the corner of the park records multiple crimes and recorded crime in the park itself is non-existent, it bears considering.

Ahem...and in conclusion.

The area around FDR Skatepark holds few people and fewer attractions, with the exception of game days when it holds many people and the biggest show in town. As a whole, the area has less reported crime then other parts of the city, but theft is often high, and the rate of auto theft borders on comical. The crime, unsurprisingly, centers on the main thoroughfare, Broad Street, particularly the intersections of Pattison and Hartranft. These intersections provide access to the only two attractions in the area, FDR Park and the sports complex, and see the vast majority of foot traffic in the area.

In addition, these areas may be overrepresented because crimes are attributed to the intersection from a larger geographic area. Crimes from FDR Park or crimes in the stadium parking lots may be attributed to the Broad and Pattison intersection for convenience. If the exact geographical location of the crime was recorded instead of the nearest address, then the pattern of incidents would likely be more spread out.
Astute readers may have noticed an apparent contradiction in the two data sets regarding crime in FDR Park and the adjacent golf course. Police section 1L is exclusively FDR Park and the golf course, which had small but noticeable crime each year. When the maps are consulted, there are only three incidents of theft in 2004 from the same geographical area. This may be indicative of error in one or both data sets, but it is possible that the sets are in agreement. The question is where exactly the boundary of section 1L is when tabulating data. If the boundary includes the sidewalk around the perimeter of the park and golf course, then the crimes recorded may have occurred on the corner of Broad and Pattison. Logic would suggest that the boundary would divide the adjacent road down the middle, thus including the sidewalk.

Though this makes the proposition of “there is never any crime is FDR Park” tenuous, it is likely that crime is not frequent. Though a few of the results may be limited by error, the shear quantity of instances insures that the bad apples won’t spoil the whole orchard. As a result, the data shows that recorded crime in the general area is slightly less than the city, and in FDR Park reported crime is infrequent to non-existent.

Unreported crime in the Surrounding Area

As previously mentioned, reported crime in a given area is not the same as the total amount of crime in a given area. The discrepancy between recorded crime and actual crime is referred to as the “dark figure”. Unfortunately, by definition, the “dark figure” is impossible to quantify. There are many reasons for this discrepancy. Known crimes can go unreported by victims and victimless crimes are often reported by no one. Many crimes simply go unnoticed by the police and everyone else. Though it is impossible to know the exact amount of crime that occurs, simple observation can provide an idea.

Obviously if a crime is witnessed during the observation period it can be considered, regardless of if the crime was officially reported or not. In the case of graffiti and vandalism, there is physical evidence that reveals the prevalence of the crimes. Fear of burglary can be
revealed by the presence of steel bars over the windows of homes. Areas under extensive supervision may reveal a concern of crime, but can also reduce the amount of crime in that area. Finally neighborhoods have a reputation, “bad neighborhoods” are often well publicized, such as Camden, New Jersey or Compton, California.

Placed seems nice enough.

The residential areas in Marconi Plaza look like what they are, straight out of the sixties. The small homes and brick row houses that make up the residential areas far north of the skatepark are cute and well maintained. The lawns are neatly trimmed and plants pruned well in bounds. The majority of the homes do not have bars on the windows. The few that do have bars are usually as ornamental as safety oriented. There is also no noticeable evidence of graffiti or vandalism. Often even power washed graffiti can leave a ghosted image, but none of these are apparent. In short, the homes are clean and tidy, likely showing an invested owner. According to South Philly Review, the area is a “family-oriented area with low crime”. The crime that is present is restricted to “nuisance teens and vandals in the parks at night.” In addition there are a few “drug houses resulting in petty crime on several blocks” in Marconi Plaza (Gelman and Pilla 2004).

Though much of the area surrounding FDR Park could accurately be described as vacant, the space is actually being supervised by someone. Directly north of FDR Park is the training center for the Philadelphia Eagles. A large section of this land is fenced off with a solid bar style fence. Periodically perched on top of the fence posts are rotating security cameras. Such impressive hardware undoubtedly has someone viewing it on the other end. It is assumed that there is no vandalism or graffiti inside. This is unconfirmed due to the fact the security measures not only keep out criminals, but researchers.
To the west is the sports complex with the three stadiums and countless parking spaces. This vast area is also supervised, this time by attendants in regularly placed glass booths. There is no evidence of anything here, including crime. It is unclear what crime would occur in this sea of nothingness. Though it is clear the attendant would indeed see it, unless engrossed in the latest Danielle Steele novel.

Even though the beginnings of the Naval Shipyard lie to the south, the I-95/Broad Street interchange effectively cuts the shipyard off from FDR Park. Access to the ship yards requires a significant northern jaunt just to access Broad Street. Regardless, the now private Naval Shipyard, is building large tankers and cruise ships. It goes without saying that the area is heavily supervised preventing most, if not all, crime.

Finally, to the west is the aptly named FDR Golf Course. City owned, it is managed by a small staff of which the General Manager is a retired South Philadelphia police officer (Woelful 2005). Though FDR is not a premier course, FDR Golf Course like all golf courses, is maintained and undoubtedly free of graffiti or vandalism. This was not confirmed because the fifty dollar greens fee was a little steep for the intrepid researcher.

It’s such a nice day for a walk.

The great irony of the picturesque is the amount of work required to make a design look “natural”. Despite the effort, when enough manicuring is done the results can be soothing and impressive at the same time. The grass at FDR Park is neatly cut, and the few buildings are well maintained. There is an occasional piece of trash, but only those staring at their feet would notice. Fortunately, the city is committed to preserving this green space in
its intended form, resulting in a relaxing environment seemingly far away from any urban area.

Crimes such as vandalism and graffiti require structure of some kind, to break or paint. FDR Park has little structure to deface which is fortunate, because what structure is in FDR Park is worth preserving. The majority of the structures, including a gazebo, boat house, and bridges, are all about ninety-years-old. The remaining structures include the I-95 Bridge, tennis courts, and FDR Skatepark. Most of FDR Park is surprisingly free of vandalism or graffiti. The historic structures show no sign of intentional damage what so ever. The corners are smoothly rounded from a hundred years of exposure and free of chips. There is no graffiti on the historic structures and there is not any inconsistency to the surface patina, indicating that sandblasting was used. The new tennis courts are in very good shape, with no sign of vandalism or graffiti.

It is also worth noting that there is not extensive skateboarding damage at FDR Park. Skateboarding damage can be difficult to identify if an object is only skated a few times. Unfortunately, repeated grinding does begin to leave a distinctive mark. Paint scraped off the deck builds up and become a glossy blue-black streak. Occasionally flecks of steel ground off the trucks will oxidize and become rust orange. The corners of the concrete can chip and begin to wear unevenly. None of these elements are prevalent or even noticeable in FDR Park. Besides, with FDR Skatepark sitting few hundred yards away, what could possibly compare to the famous graffiti clad concrete?
The exception to the sparkling image previously portrayed is the area under the hulking I-95 bridge. Though FDR Skatepark is in the bridge’s shadow, a significant stretch of area to the west is also under the bridge. Crime at FDR Skatepark will be reviewed later, currently the text refers to the area under the bridge except FDR Skatepark.

It seems that everyone agrees there is crime under the bridge. The exception being the Philadelphia Police, considering official reports show no crime in FDR Park. Locals Bryan Lathrop (Lathrop 2005), Josh Nims (Nims 2005) and Chris Hunter (pers. comm.) all state that drug deals and prostitution occasionally occur in this area. The general consensus would have been plenty to verify the statement, but gods of research decided to also provide an eyewitness account. In the twenty hours observing FDR Park, two car-to-car transactions and one incident of prostitution was observed. Granted it is possible that the two cars were trading notes or phone numbers. It is also possible that someone has a disturbing idea of a romantic location to make sweet love. Though possible, in light of previously stated reports, it is unlikely. The shaded, relatively secluded location likely accounts for the vast majority of crime in FDR Park.

There is graffiti sprinkled across the bridge supports and there is more trash here than anywhere else in the Park. The amount of graffiti and trash are not extreme, but typical of the land under a bridge, the archetype of lost space. The area does receive some maintenance as evidenced by the crew in matching uniforms picking up trash one morning. None of the area has any signs of skateboarding damage. This is not surprising considering the only skateable surface under the entire bridge, is FDR Skatepark.
I love the area, but about my neighbor.

With the exception of the residential district to the north, the area around FDR Skatepark is mostly vacant. Isolation isn’t all bad though, the neighborhood is fairly safe and for the most part heavily supervised. FDR Park itself is a relaxing oasis from the perpetual urban grind. The park is kept surprisingly well manicured and free of trash. Graffiti, vandalism and skateboarding damage are suspiciously absent from FDR Park. It would not be a stretch to call most of FDR Park idyllic. As always, there is an exception. The space under the I-95 bridge is the only place where there seems to be any crime at all, unfortunately it is right next to the skatepark.

Reported Crime On Site

The analysis of reported crime that occurs at FDR Skatepark will be blessedly short. Put simply there is no reported crime. While tempting to leave it at that for impact, a few qualifiers are likely required.

Numbers never lie, right?

This is straightforward as it gets. Not in five years from 2000 to 2004 was there a single crime attributed to FDR Skatepark according to official Philadelphia Police statistics. According to the numerical data previously presented, crimes have occurred in Section 1L, encompassing FDR Park and adjacent golf course (Philadelphia NIS CrimeBase). To tell if any of these crimes occurred at the skatepark, over 5500 crimes were cataloged and mapped according to address. None of the addresses gave any indication of FDR Skatepark, in fact only three thefts in 2004 gave any indication of being within FDR Park as a whole (Philadelphia Police Department). It is of course possible there is some error evident. For further discussion refer to the causes of error previously listed in the Crime in Surrounding Area section.
Feel free to ask around.

When the information presented is no information, the skeptic always believes that something was overlooked. To be sure undiscovered data was not lying in wait, like an academic holy grail, people “in the know” were contacted.

The obvious place to go was the Philadelphia Police. According to Sergeant McGuckin of the First District Philadelphia Police Department, the statistics used were the official version. He believes that the statistics are an accurate reflection of crime in the area. He further stated that FDR has experienced “no problems” and is “just another location” on his route (pers. comm.). The next stop was the crime reporter for the local newspaper, the South Philly Review. According to Lorraine Gennaro, who has been a crime reporter in the area for three years, she can not recall a single incident of a reported crime at FDR Skatepark (pers. comm.). Finally Mike Helson, the Park District Supervisor, was asked if he recalls any reported crime in FDR Skatepark. Helson confirms that according to his memory there has been no recorded crime at FDR Skatepark. Helson states not only that there are “no problems” in the area but calls FDR Skatepark a “major success” (pers. comm.).

“Welcome to my nightmare.”

These were the words uttered by FDR advocate Bryan Lathrop, at the 2005 Fourth of July party at FDR Skatepark, after things got ugly. Though the incident occurred in 2005, which is technically after the years being studied, the event is relevant to this study and it would be negligent to omit it.

Every year FDR Skatepark hosts a free Fourth of July party to celebrate its existence. Like FDR, the party is a grass roots effort. The locals clean and decorate, to be sure the park looks its best. Bands bring their generators and amps, playing the party for free. A couple
hundred of people bring their own food and beer and the party is on. The who’s who in skateboarding has been known to appear with board in hand and join the festivities. There is no better place in America to wait for the evening’s fireworks than FDR. For many years this amazing event has gone on without a hitch. Unfortunately, in 2004 there was a small problem, but that never made it to the official records. This was a small preview to the nastiness that occurred in 2005.

The party had been going on for a while and by 7:00 pm the party was in full swing. There were a couple hundred people, and the skating was unbelievable, the music was punk, and the beer was cold. In short, FDR was as one hell of a time. Abruptly there were problems that promised to end the party. For an unknown reason about fifty yards outside of the skatepark itself, a victim was thrown down by four aggressors. They then began to beat him as a group. Not being a subtle move, it was quickly noticed and confronted by three bystanders standing next to the group beat down. When the aggressors told them to “get lost”, the bystanders compassionately chose not to comply. Unfortunately no good deed goes unpunished and the bystanders were attacked, by two assailants who were now wielding knives. Undoubtedly feeling inadequate without a weapon, a third aggressor procured a basketball sized piece of broken concrete. Two of the bystanders were stabbed and the third attempted to run. The third bystander received the concrete to the head with accuracy any professional wrestler would appreciate. After that move the fight ended, likely because there was no one left to stab.

Fortunately the police quickly arrived and began arresting the assailants who were, surprisingly, still there. According to Josh Nims the skateboarders “had to subdue these guys
until the cops came.” A bold feat considering the aggressors had already shown a williness to stab people. The four assailants were charged with simple and aggravated assault. The ambulance arrived with equal speed and tended to the injured, which were all later released from local hospitals (Gennaro 2005). To the police’s credit, they showed a surprising amount of proportional response. They maintained a brief presence at the skatepark, leaving after no more than thirty minutes. The police did leave two plain-clothes officers behind, but the police made no attempt to break up the party. Thankfully, the party slowly built up steam and experienced no further examples of male idiocy.

If you say so.

Pushing all skepticism aside, there is no reason to believe that any time during 2000-2004 there was any recorded crime at FDR Skatepark. There is no indication in any of the official data that attributing a crime to FDR Skatepark. Even those in a position to know about recorded crime at FDR Skatepark confirm the data’s findings. A cynic may say that crime was undoubtedly recorded during other years, but if a site can go five years without recorded crime, then crime must be rare indeed.

Fortunately Fourth of July 2005 was a rarity. It was an obviously regrettable incident from which the victims will recover, but FDR may be living down for a while. Despite this, the incident is instructive for this study. The incident was obviously recorded by the police and was distributed to the public via the media. The point being, that if a known crime does occur at FDR Skatepark, then the incident is reported through standard channels. This lends validity to the official crime statistics. If an arrest was made at FDR Skatepark during the years 2000-2004, then it would likely be recorded in the official statistics.

Unreported Crime at the Site

Despite the clear absence of recorded crime at FDR Skatepark, it would be hasty to assume that no crime occurs. The “dark figure”, the quantity of crime that goes unreported, is believed to vary from crime to crime. For example, burglary clearly has a victim, who will likely report it to the police. While “victimless crimes” such as alcohol and drug violations
will likely have a higher dark figure. In the case of drug sales everyone gets precisely what they wanted out of the deal, plus everyone is incriminated, so a detailed report to the police is suicidal. These types of crimes fly under the police radar and occur thousands of times each day completely unreported. In this case official stats are next to useless, but there are two ways to get an idea of the extent of unreported crime. The first, simply ask people that spend time at FDR Skatepark, the second, go down there and hangout for a while.

From what I hear.

Just coming right out and asking people if there is any crime in the area has a few issues. First, personal bias may come into play. People that frequent and enjoy FDR Skatepark are unlikely to say anything negative about it. They may even answer the question truthfully, yet still under report crime. Second is level of exposure, some people may have seen more crime than others. Unfortunately, increasing the interviewed population to statically valid levels is well beyond the scope of this study. Finally, the interviewee may simply lie to protect FDR. The fear that this study could be used as ammunition by those wishing to see the skatepark closed. Considering Philadelphia’s ham-fisted approach to skateboarding, the concern is understandable.

Knowing the possible sources of error does not discount the information. It is simply considered when assessing the validity of the response. Perhaps the most realistic assessment came from Bryan Lathrop, long time FDR advocate and skateboarder. He states, “It would be absolutely naive and idealistic to believe that there is no criminal element at all. There are always going to be some bad eggs.” Lathrop believes that serious crime at FDR is not a problem, and the small crimes never become serious. There are occasional “scuffles” but believes that boys will be boys. Occasionally one of the older regulars my come by in the evenings and “crack a beer or smoke some” but the situation is infrequent and very low key. Lathrop also makes the point that crime at FDR is “no more than you will find on the side of any basketball court” (Lathrop 2005).
Advocate Josh Nims believes very little crime occurs at FDR Skatepark. According to Nims someone may “fire up a joint or drink a beer” but that is the extent of it. He believes that FDR Skatepark’s relative isolation from the city helps insulate it from “traditional street corner crime”. Nims believes that the police are aware of the minor infractions but have more important matters to attend to such as “making sure no one gets killed” (Nims 2005).

Local Chris Hunter believes that some minor crimes may occur, but the space is far better off with the skatepark there. As Hunter bluntly states, “before people just came here to fuck prostitutes and smoke all sorts of shit”. This is an entirely believable assertion considering that is exactly what was witnessed under the bridge a couple of hundred yards to the west of FDR (pers. comm.).

Perhaps the most interesting report comes from a local mother who has been bringing her son to the skatepark for a few years. With she states, “You occasionally see a couple of people go off into the weeds back there. They come back with a huge smile on their face. Everyone knows what they are doing.” With the warm smile that all mothers seem to possess she shrugs her shoulders and says, “I don’t care or anything, it’s just funny.” (pers. comm.).

All the responses are remarkably consistent. Also consistent was the mention of a minor incident that occurred on the Fourth of July 2004, one year prior to the previously mentioned incident in the “Recorded Crime On Site” section. The reason it was not mentioned previously is because there is no record of it in police statistics or crime reports. It is not unusual that Bryan Lathrop and Josh Nims (Lathrop and Nims 2005) both referenced an unrecorded crime. What is unusual is that Sergeant McGuckin of the Philadelphia Police and Mike Helson of the Park District referenced it also (pers. comm.). All reports are the
same, the party was fine until some people showed up looking for a fight, and found it. Fortunately, this ruckus was minor and it is even possible that no one was charged with a crime. This would explain the lack of documentation of the incident in police records. Both Sergeant McGukin and Mike Helson agree that the incident was isolated and the skateboarders at the site were not involved (pers. comm.). These comments were solicited from both gentlemen prior to the incident on the Fourth of July, 2005.

**Take a load off and stay for a while.**

It is often amazing what can be discovered if one just sits patiently and waits for it. Approximately twenty hours of observation is a very brief snapshot of FDR Skatepark. FDR is a living, growing entity of which the cast of characters is constantly changing. To simplify it to definitive statements based on twenty hours would be a grievous insult. This does not suggest that no time should have been spent at the skatepark. The time limitation exists, but certainly some things can be seen when just sitting around and looking for a short while.

It does not take long to realize that illegal short dumping occurs at site. Piles of discarded construction materials dot the skatepark. According to Nims the short dumping feeds their addiction and is certainly welcome. Though illegal, short dumping has provided a significant amount of the material that FDR is constructed of (Nims 2005). The fact that the materials are “delivered” is a nice bonus. The Philadelphia Police are aware of the short dumping problem and are trying to address it, including conducting a sting operation. Ironically, the sting caught Josh Nims and Mark Laman who were dropping off materials specifically for use in the construction of FDR. Though the cause was good and the cause was just, it is still an interesting question if they were technically short dumping. Perhaps
skateboarding advocate and lawyer, Nims, answered that particular question for police because Nims was released seventeen hours later. Unfortunately, it took Laman closer to twenty six hours to be released. The original article *Skate Crimes* by Howard Altman detailing the event is worth reading, if just for the screaming irony and brief, but humorously candid, description of a Philadelphia jail (Altman 2002).

It is also obvious that graffiti occurs at the site. It is assumed that the majority of the work occurs at night. First, in observation of the skatepark not a single person was seen doing any graffiti. In addition, no one was even seen with spray paint in their position. Second, the majority of the graffiti is on the skating surface itself, a space that provides seclusion required for complex pieces. Considering that throughout the day people are skating the surface, it is off limits to graffiti artists. Finally it is important to note that graffiti is not encouraged. Though some feel that nothing can be done to stop it, the locals have been known to paint over some graffiti (Lathrop 2005). The graffiti artists may feel that they are only safe from the FDR locals at night. Regardless, there is undoubtedly graffiti on the site, some is the work of toys while others are the work of artists.

As mentioned earlier there is a small amount of trash on the ground, included in this trash is an occasional crushed beer can or broken beer bottle. All sources agree that occasionally a cold beer is enjoyed at FDR Skatepark. It is worth noting that drinking a beer is only a crime if the person is below the age of twenty one. Undoubtedly some of, perhaps the majority, of the cold beers are consumed legally. It would be naive to believe that they all the beers are in the hands of adults. During observation a couple of people were seen drinking beer, but they appeared to be approximately legal age. Regardless, they were
quietly sipping beers and talking, it was definitely not a fraternity style scene. The safe assumption is that occasionally there is illegal drinking and occasionally there is legal drinking, but the line six deep is for skateboarding FDR, not body shots of bad tequila.

Noticeably absent from the area is any indication of drug use. There are no baggies, roaches, or tin foil pipes anywhere on the ground. Though this is not that odd, it was surprising that no one was observed doing any drugs, even marijuana. Two people were seen briefly walking into the weeds only to return five minutes later smiling between coughs. It can not be definitively stated that they were smoking pot, but there is reasonable suspicion. If that is the case, it is not surprising that they would desire to remove themselves from the area. Many of the locals feel that such behavior puts FDR at risk and some locals been known to confront them about getting high at FDR (Lathrop 2005). The locals don't seem to care if someone is smoking marijuana, they just need to do it somewhere else.

During the time of observation there were no physical altercations. In fact there was not even a voice raised in anger. If someone was cut off during their run and irritated, a cold stare was the extent of their retribution. A far more common occurrence would be a quick comment followed by a friendly laugh. If two people collided, an open hand helping each other up was more common than not. In general, the mood was positive and friendly, certainly not hostile.

No theft of any kind was observed, and by the behavior of people skateboarding, it is not a concern. People left backpacks of their personal possessions laying out on the edge, assured that when they returned from their run they would find the backpack unmolested.
Perhaps there was nothing valuable in the backpack, but just the backpack itself likely has some monetary value.

Surprisingly there were also no homeless people at the site. Not only are there no homeless people, there are no indications that homeless people were ever there. There are no makeshift camps or blackened earth from small fires. Why the homeless were not there is a mystery. The site has it all, shelter from the rain, nearby bathroom, and flow of people to panhandle from. Perhaps skateboarders do not carry spare change or even the homeless can’t stand the isolation of being in extreme south Philadelphia. Regardless FDR Skatepark does not appear to have an issue with homelessness.

While the 2005 Fourth of July party was observed, the event is so clearly unique and not representative of the daily life of FDR Skatepark that it was excluded of the assessment above. After all, the Fourth featured a few hundred more people than are usually there. During this time many people were drinking beer, some of them surely under age. The smell of marijuana was once noticed and in general people were loud and rambunctious. Unfortunately the assaults previously mentioned were also witnessed. With the exception of the assaults, the overall behavior was well within bounds. Like most Fourth of July parties in the United States, there was plenty of beer. To do otherwise is almost unpatriotic. All Americans should be drinking an ice cold, urine colored, watered down American pilsner and proclaiming it tasty. It is the American way.
If it is not true, why does everyone keep saying it.

When asked what crime occurs at FDR Skatepark everyone seems to agree. There is little to no crime at FDR Skatepark. What crime does occur is limited to infrequent underage drinking and the occasional joint being smoked. There was one mention of a “scuffle” but the word itself suggests that it was not a serious issue.

The remarkable consistency in the responses given during interviews suggests the descriptions resemble the truth. The twenty hours of observation only confirmed the repeated description. There was not one single blatant event of an illegal behavior. There were a couple of suspected incidents of alcohol or drug infractions, but these were so low key that they can not be confirmed.

Unfortunately on Fourth of July in 2004 and 2005 FDR Skatepark did have some issues. It would be exceedingly unfair to suggest that these incidents are typical behavior at FDR. The Fourth of July parties have ten times the number of people possessing twenty times the normal amount of beer. There have only been two significant criminal incidents at FDR Skatepark in eleven years and both occurred on the same holiday party. Both incidents were committed by people who don’t frequent FDR regularly and may not even skateboard. To attribute these incidents to the existence FDR Skatepark or local skateboarders is laughable.

Conclusions

All methods of analysis lead to the same conclusion. That FDR Skatepark does not contribute to crime in the area or on the site. Though there may be an occasional minor crime, there is no suggestion that the crime is disproportionately high. In fact at larger scales it is usually lower than most other parts of the city. At the site of FDR Skatepark there is
very little crime. Many accounts even suggest that the low crime rates are the result of local skateboarder surveillance and intervention.

**Two out of three researchers agree.**

Two out of three sociological theories reviewed, CPTED and Defensible Space, suggest that there should be little crime at FDR Skatepark. The third, Broken Windows, suggests the signs of neglect such as graffiti and litter are visual clues of a neglected space. The lack of investment would lead to more serious crimes being committed. The hitch in this argument is that despite these visual clues, FDR Skatepark does not lack investment, nor does it have any sign of serious crime.

The crime statistics presented gave no sign that crime was high in the general area. Crime was lower in the home area of FDR at neighborhood, police district, and police sector scales. As the scale shrunk down to the police sector, exclusively including FDR Park and the adjacent golf course, there was very little crime including graffiti and vandalism. The crime maps showed that the vast majority of crime is concentrated on the intersections of Broad/Pattison and Broad/ Hartranft. The five years of maps showed only three thefts in the adjacent golf course and zero incidents in FDR Park.

A visual assessment of the surrounding neighborhood revealed a clean, tidy area with no signs of criminal activity, except the occasional barred window. Much of the land surrounding FDR Park is under surveillance, including the Eagles training center, stadium parking lots, and adjacent golf course. FDR Park itself is a well maintained park with little trash. There appears to be no noticeable graffiti, vandalism, or skateboarding damage any
where in the park. The exception is under the I-95 bridge right next to the skatepark. Where there is some trash, a little graffiti, and an occasional unreported crime.

Despite their neighbor, FDR Skatepark has no instances of recorded crime in any official document. The skeptical are soothed by consistent assurances that there have been no crimes at FDR, spoken by the local crime reporter, park supervisor and even the Philadelphia Police Department.

While FDR Skatepark may not be as free of crime as the statistics suggest, it is a far cry from crime prone. Though an occasional person may smoke a joint or a kid drink a beer, it by no means is standard fare. It is even actively discouraged by some people at FDR. As for more serious crimes, they are non existent. If the locals actively discourage smoking a joint then more serious crimes would certainly not be tolerated. The problems with prostitution and drug dealing to the west of the skatepark do not appear at FDR.

As a whole, there is no reason to believe that FDR Skatepark contributes to crime at the site or the surrounding area. In fact, it may have actually reduced the amount of crime on the site itself. This tenuous proposition is not statically supported, but possible none the less. There is no reason to believe that the crimes occurring under rest of the I-95 Bridge were not occurring at the site of FDR, prior to its construction. Obviously FDR has not discouraged crime under the remainder of the bridge, but the cars do maintain a safe 200 yard distance. In addition, minor crimes, such as drugs and alcohol, which appear at almost any congregation of people, are actively discouraged at FDR. Bryan Lathrop may feel that crime at FDR is “no more than any basketball court” (Lathrop 2005), but it is possible there is far less crime at FDR than many basketball courts.

Besides

Reducing FDR Skatepark to a series of numbers and crime assessments has been a painful but necessary process for this study. Before closing, it is important that all readers understand a basic underling fact about FDR. It kicks ass, all sorts of it. FDR is an icon of
so much more than skateboarding. FDR Skatepark is a triumphant example of a
disenfranchised group refusing to be kept down. The Philadelphia government would not
cooperate, screw them, they did it themselves. Many political groups embrace their over
inflated sense of entitlement demanding that the government give them what they want.
Others roll up their sleeves and just build it, which is precisely why they love FDR, it is their
creation.

Many times FDR is sited by designers as a positive example of a skatepark, which it
certainly is. The hope is that the level of investment at FDR will be evident in the parks they
design. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to happen. It can not be replicated by a designer or
anyone else. FDR is a unique cultural product that arose out of specific circumstances. The
intolerance of the city, a willingness to work,
and perhaps most importantly, a fanatical
dedication to the art of skateboarding created
FDR.

At times it seems unfair that a city as
intolerant to skateboarding as Philadelphia
should be able to boast of having FDR, they
simply don’t deserve it. Fortunately, FDR is
not there for the city, it is there for the locals
who created it. They have the only relevant
claim of ownership. Hopefully the city will pull its head out of the sand long enough to
realize the value of FDR and treat it appropriately. Specifically, give some supplies to the
locals for additional expansion, and then leave it alone. Long live FDR.
Denver Skatepark

A morning bus turns off of the congested I-25, and makes its way into downtown Denver delivering its cargo of commuters to Union Station. While the suburban passengers are, unfortunately, already thinking of work, the passengers on the right side of the bus are treated to an unusual sight, an acre and a half of undulating “Santa Fe” red concrete. Like a coastal wave frozen in time, the swooping terrain flows across the land in stark contrast to the angular back drop of the Denver skyline. The precise curves scream of intention, but what intention? What would anyone do on such a surface, surely not take a leisurely walk, you could twist and ankle. Why would someone build this thing anyway? This thing is Denver Skatepark, the largest skatepark in the United States and it is not tucked away under a bridge. Denver Skatepark is prominently displayed along a major transportation route. Denver Skatepark is on prime downtown real estate it is massive, it is world class, and of course, it is bright red.

Perhaps even more unusual than the aesthetic is, at the crack of dawn, there are already people skating the concrete. The responsible members of society have not yet clocked-in for a day of work, but the skateboarders have awoken just as early for a labor of love. While commuters mentally prepare for another day of “the grind”, a select few skateboarders have been “grinding” for an hour of the morning. Skateboarders swoop across the pavement in the rising sun feeling the slick concrete, the rush of speed, and the certainty of a crash when the run ends. With no boss to direct their efforts, they continually reinterpret the structure. They can skate the same bowl for hours with free and seemingly
reckless, abandon. The smile on their face tells it all, “This is being alive, and all I have to do today is live.” For today at least, the people who “have it all figured out” are not the commuters wiping the sleep from their eyes and lint from their wool suits. It is the skateboarders, who are wiping the sweat from their eyes and blood from their mangled elbows. The early morning skateboarders are going to spend the morning with little thought for the future, the present is good enough. This must grate on poor souls who must witness this satisfied apathy knowing their destination is a cubicle with a computer. It would take a strong mind indeed, to refrain from asking difficult questions such as “What is a career really worth?”, “How much money is enough?” and “Could they still call-in-sick mere blocks from work?”

**History**

Surprising as it may be few city planners wake up one morning and suggest a skatepark for their city. Unlike soccer fields or basketball courts, which will are typically provided in parks, some one has to specifically request a skatepark. The typical progression of a large city and skateboarding goes something like this. A growing number of skateboarders begin to skate downtown structures. Expensive materials, particularly marble, are damaged so the city bans skateboarding downtown. Skateboarders continue to skate downtown regardless. The police step in. The quick escape the police, the slow get tickets. Parents of the slow kids get mad at the youth for getting a ticket, and possibly for being slow. This is where the grassroots support starts. Skateboarders and their parents start complaining to police and local government that there is no place to legally skateboard. The words “registered voter” are mentioned, and politicians begin to listen. City builds a skatepark hoping to relocate skateboarders and stop damage in the popular skateboarding areas.
This is largely the story with Denver Skatepark, and Denver is not alone. This dynamic has been played out in most major cities in America, and their resulting skateparks have been hit or miss. Fortunately for the politicians, once a skatepark is built the voters are quiet again.

A Promise Kept.

In addition to the grassroots support, a skatepark typically needs someone to spearhead the operation, this unlikely vanguard was Councilwoman Joyce Foster. One romantic story states that Councilwoman Foster once received a ticket for riding her bike on the 16th Street Mall. From her conflict with “the man” she identified with the skateboarders and began to pursue a skatepark. This story only goes to show, that some people will make things up, just to have a story to tell. The truth is, after voting for a skateboarding ban, she promised the skateboarders she would give them a place to skate (Holthouse 2001). Here is the twist in the story, where things get spooky, a politician actually did what she promised.

A couple of days later Councilwoman Foster contacted Denver Schools asking for two skateboarders from each grade to be on a coalition to pursue a skatepark. The coalition toured potential sites and settled on a space next to the Children’s Museum. It was deemed an ideal spot, it had good transportation routes and already had a youth targeted attraction. If children ran the Children’s Museum, likely there would have been no problem, unfortunately adults run the Children’s Museum, and they were admittedly opposed. Though never stated outright, it has been suggested by Foster that skateboarders were considered undesirable. "You know, adults pay a lot of lip service about doing things for kids -- remember, this is the Children's Museum we're talking about -- but it has to be the right kind of kids. The kids I was working with, they don't wear the Dockers and the polo shirts. They have the tattoos and the piercings and the spiked, colored hair and the chains and the pants down around their bottoms, so a lot of people assume they must be junior criminals or something. Well, they're not.” (Holthouse 2001) Righteous indignation aside, the proposal was squashed and a new site needed to be found.
Fortunately, Mayor Webb proposed that the skatepark become part of the South Platte River Park System, and there was much rejoicing. The skateboarders were quite fond of the site and the Mayor himself offered it, what could go wrong? Fortunately very few people had a problem with the new site. Though the dissenters were few they did provide some resistance, bordering on the comical. The residents of Flour Mill Lofts complained that the skatepark would create excessive noise. One resident actually stated that she moved downtown for “peace and tranquility” (Bernstein 2005). Fortunately the eight-lane highway, and active railroad tracks, that separate the lofts from the skatepark, drowns out most of the skatepark noise. The other voice of absurdity was Councilman Ed Thomas who contributed "Now that we have this skateboarding park, why don't we spend another million bucks on a knife-throwing park for the kids?" As if that wasn't enough, Thomas drove the extremist point home with "How about a drive-by-shooting range while we're at it?" (Holthouse 2001) Fortunately these concerns were taken for what they were worth and ignored. Denver Skatepark was going to be built.

Now we are getting somewhere.

Once a site was decided on, the process sped along. Skatepark designer Kevin Thatcher of Thrasher fame was hired as a consultant and Architerra was hired as the designers. The skaters who were involved in the fight to build a skatepark stayed on to help design the park (Pearson 2005). The designers and skaters were given an impressive budget and almost free rein. According to Commander Dilly, the Police requested clear lines of vision and no blind corners be designed. This is a standard request made of all public spaces
to assist in surveillance and officer safety (Dilly 2005). Aside from the Police’s reasonable request, there were no limitations other than the sizeable budget.

Arguments about the rules were few, considering there was only one rule. The skatepark was open at 5:00 am and closed at 11:00 pm and that’s about it. Pads are “strongly encouraged” but not required. Other than operating hours, all normal laws apply, including vandalism in the form of graffiti. Vandalism from skateboards is impossible considering in Denver Skatepark everything is skateable, the seating wall, the phone booth, the pavilion, even the port-a-potties are skateable. Many of the posted rules of Denver Skatepark sound more like advice than strict edicts. The remainder of the rules list reminds the reader that illegal acts are still illegal. Perhaps the most important rule involves the city’s right to close the park with no warning. This implied threat clearly states “Behave yourself or we will shut the park down.” Eventually the design was finalized and the rules, or lack there of, were agreed upon, and the search for a qualified contractor began. Many contractors competed for this very lucrative project, but Hallmark, Inc. walked away with the prize.

Construction began on Denver Skatepark in mid-2000 and Councilwoman Foster cut the ribbon in mid 2001. Denver Skatepark is an acre and a half of beautifully poured concrete and the largest skatepark in the United States. The skatepark has it all, bowls, ramps, ledges, rails, and most importantly, people. Denver Skatepark is a resounding success as far as the users are concerned. Soon after opening it was determined to be the most used facility in the Denver Park System (Bernstein 2005). Some claims state that the
skateboarding has dropped by 60% on the 16th Street Mall (Garza, pers. comm.). The skatepark quickly filled up with skateboarders, and soon other teens went there to socialize. Parents also began showing up to watch their kids attempt things that would make many mothers cringe. Unrelated spectators began showing up simply because it looks cool. Though some people feel Denver Skatepark may become a “victim of its own success” (Pesek 2005), all can agree that the skatepark is indeed a success.

Location, location, location.

Denver skatepark is located on the southern bank of the South Platte River. The site sits on the northern edge of downtown Denver. This area is also referred to Lower Downtown (Lodo). The skatepark is officially located in a neighborhood named Union Station after the massive railroad station that dominates the area. Union Station is not only architecturally impressive, but it remains a heavily used cargo and passenger route. The skatepark is located in the northern most boundary of this neighborhood. As a result, it is just as easy to access adjacent neighborhoods, particularly Highland. There is a bridge on 19th street that begins at the skatepark and ends at the Highland boundary.

Five Points neighborhood is slightly more difficult to get to, but 20th street provides easy access by car to Five Points. There is also an asphalt biking (or skateboarding) path that provides access to Five Points without the car.

Though these neighborhoods are worth considering, Denver Skatepark is associated the strongest with Union Station, its official district. South, into Union Station provides access to the 16th Street Mall. The 16th street mall is strongly associated with Denver Skatepark for two reasons. The first connection is based on proximity to the Denver transportation infrastructure. The 16th street mall is a transportation hub where all public
transit meets. The 16th Street Mall is also the closest place to access public transportation from Denver Skatepark. In addition the free Mall Bus shuttles countless riders north and south along the fourteen block corridor. Anyone using public transportation, including local skateboarders, will likely start and end their journey on the 16th Street Mall.

The second connection is that Denver Skatepark was built for the express reason of reducing skateboarding on the 16th Street Mall. After a skateboarding ban was instituted in the 16th Street Mall the cries of righteous indignation became more righteous. Soon after the city began to seriously consider and construct Denver Skatepark. Despite the ban, skateboarders can still be seen on the 16th Street Mall but with skateboards in their hands, instead of under their feet. Local skateboarders will go to the 16th Street Mall to buy food, look at the shops and be in a public setting. These qualities are particularly lacking at Denver Skatepark because it is currently located in a developing area. The immediate area has no commercial opportunities, few residential buildings, which results in few people on the street. The closest restaurants and convenience stores to Denver Skatepark reside on the 16th Street Mall.

The future is now.

Currently there are few people in the surrounding area immediately surrounding Denver Skatepark except the occasional user of Commons Park. Even though downtown begins two blocks south, the first block to the south of the skatepark is mostly empty lots. The abandoned warehouses of Denver’s blue collar past, which stood here, have been cleared for Denver’s white collar future. The South Platte River provides a strong barrier to the north cutting it off from the residential areas to the north. Despite being in middle of a booming city Denver Skatepark is strangely isolated from the rest of downtown.
Perhaps one of the reasons for placing Denver Skatepark at its current location is that it is not currently a densely populated area. Fewer people are likely to complain when it is in fewer people's backyard. Make no mistake this is not abandoned space, this area is the future's new hot spot. In fact land is at a premium in downtown Denver. The city has been landlocked by its own legislation. The city of Denver enacted legislation that prevents the city of annexing any adjacent townships. As a result, Denver's geographic boundaries are static, at least until the legislation is repealed. The few wasted spaces in the urban grid have become the only places to build and increase the beloved tax base. As a result, formally
unused, thus low cost, land has skyrocketed in value and has been snapped up with dreams of development (Brewer 2005). It goes without saying that the proximity to downtown of the land surrounding the skatepark makes it attractive indeed.

It should also be mentioned that the area directly east and west of Denver Skatepark is largely green space. Denver skatepark is actually part of a larger park system referred to as the South Platte Initiative. The South Platte Initiative includes Denver Skatepark, Commons Park to the east and City of Cuernavaca Park to the west. The skatepark is not only physically connected to the aforementioned parks, but is also visually connected. The pavement, seating walls, and trash cans are all identical to those used in the surrounding parks. This integration is visually appropriate but is also a financial gamble. The reason why few skateparks are heavily detailed with expensive materials is because expensive materials are typically expensive to repair or replace. It goes without saying that anything in a skatepark will be skateboarded, believing otherwise is optimistic, bordering on foolish. Despite the certainty of damage, the city still spent the money to keep the “park” in skatepark.

The upcoming development around Denver Skatepark is marked by the rumble of diesel engines and multiple cranes intruding into the air. At times, the sounds of construction even drown out the much ballyhooed noise pollution of the skatepark until actually standing on the concrete itself. The majority of the construction will be residential with some commercial, but the days of an industrial downtown are well behind Denver. Kenneth Brewer, Senior City Planner of Denver speaks of the future. He describes the entire area with a certainty that suggests that the buildings have already been constructed, not built over the next five years. Brewer is certain that in the area a “grocery store of some type” will
have opened to serve the massive residential influx. The residential high-rises currently in
the area have commercial on the first floor and residential above the commercial. This design
trend will likely continue in the area. Within five years there will be no vacancies around
Denver Skatepark, it will be solid hip residential (Brewer 2005). Fortunately the new
residents can’t complain about Denver Skatepark. As Denver Skatepark resident, Michelle
Garza says “We were here first.”

Did someone ring a bell? Then why am I salivating?

The actual skatepark is an impressive sight. The graceful curves flow seamlessly into
each other with fluid harmony. The smooth amorphous form reveals the versatility of
congrete and defies concrete's underserved reputation for harsh unyielding forms. The dull
grey tone of concrete is also challenged by a pigment that turns the entire pour a pale
pinkish-red. The whole surface looks like a surrealist's nightmare, and a skateboarders
dream.

The 65,000 square feet of skating surface is enough to make any skateboarder
drool like a Pavlovian dog, but many other unexpected amenities are provided. The site
has a shade pavilion in the center of the skating surface with a few benches. The shade is a
welcome, and well used amenity. The extensive skating surface acts like a heat sink soaking
up the heat from the Denver sun. The reddish color of the concrete only exacerbates the
problem and has been reported to raise the temperature of the skatepark by twelve degrees.
Shade will eventually be provided by trees that line the south and west edges of the park, but
currently the young trees don't cast a large enough shadow to help the heat radiating of the
concrete in seemingly liquid waves. The site also features a small turf area in the center of
the park. Unfortunately, the obscene heat and intense foot traffic has reduced the turf to
isolated patches of green against a pale dirt background. The edges of the site are also planted with grasses and the occasional shrub giving a prairie-like feel.

Perhaps the most important amenity is the lighting system. The area is very well lit at night. The lighting fixtures are hooded, which reflects all the light down in a defined cone. This was done to elevate the concerns of downtown neighbors about light pollution, but the skatepark also benefited. The area is very well lit, with no shadowed corners to hide the terrain. Though grizzled veterans have never let not seeing where they are going stop them, the neophyte should reconsider. The turning off of the lights helps enforce the closing time of 11:00.

The site also has bathrooms and a water fountain. The water fountain is a necessity for any public skatepark or active recreation area. Denver took an interesting approach to bathrooms. In response to concerns of bathroom vandalism they are using port-a-potties, admittedly very clean port-a-potties. To mitigate the undeniable lack of class inherent in port-a-potty, the city has built a powder-coated structure to enclose the restroom facilities. This may seem like putting a lipstick on a pig, but there is one difference. The pig’s appearance is not improved by lipstick, actually it is kind of spooky. The port-a-potties, on the other hand, are definitely “classed-up” by the enclosure, but they remain port-a-potties on the inside.

Oddly enough, in the days of five-year-olds with cell phones, a pay phone has been thoughtfully provided. The phone sees little use, but those who use it for emergency and non-emergency situations undoubtedly appreciate its presence.
Nice place you have here.

As a whole Denver Skatepark is a very “nice” place. The area is very clean, and is free of trash and graffiti. The seating walls and benches are a nice touch, so the port-a-potties can be overlooked. The phone is a nice safety touch and the concrete is stunning in form. The trees and grasses on the perimeter help connect Denver Skatepark to the more traditional parks on either side. Denver Skatepark is more “park” than the vast majority of skateparks in America. Many of them are ad hoc affairs hastily constructed and isolated from the city.

Denver, on the other hand placed America’s largest, and possibly cleanest, skatepark in a hip, developing area with an established park system. Though isolated from downtown, the skatepark is only a ten minute walk, or five minute skateboard ride from downtown. Considering Denver Skatepark is the first skatepark in downtown Denver, they indeed started off well.

Sociological Criteria

Though their theories are rarely mentioned in design circles, Sociology has been theorizing about crime for over a hundred years. Many of these theories focus exclusively on the criminal, some of the theories have examined the scene of the crime. These theories suggest that certain places are more prone to criminal behavior than others. Denver Skatepark will be examined against criteria of three sociological theories. The first theory is Crime Prevention through Environmental Design by Ray Jeffery (1977). The second theory will be Defensible Space by Oscar Newman (1976), and the third will be Broken Windows Theory by James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). Their theories were reviewed in a more detailed, but occasionally dry, manner in the Literature Review section of this text.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Jeffrey’s CPTED theory, focuses on the physical qualities of sites that are high crime areas. As mentioned, Jeffrey has a tendency to cite multiple studies suggesting multiple methods of dealing with crime, but the primary methods are controlling access and
facilitating surveillance of the site. Though other possible methods were suggested by Jeffrey (Jeffery 1977), the data presented by Jeffrey only supports the aforementioned factors.

**Easy access isn’t always a good thing.**

Ideally Denver Skatepark would be located at the end of a street with only one entrance and exit far from any major transportation route. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Despite the isolated location in relation to downtown Denver, the Skatepark can be accessed from multiple places. The most obvious place that the skatepark can be accessed is from the streets that surround it. To the south is moderately traveled Little Raven Street, touchingly named after the Native American Chief who was forcibly evicted from the area in 1861. To the west is the moderately traveled 19th Street, which includes a bridge crossing the South Platte River. The western border is 20th Street that provides access to massive I-25 a few hundred yards to the north. From I-25 a criminal could disappear into the massive urban grid of the sprawling city of Denver.

![Denver Skatepark map](image)

Perhaps even more disturbing to Jeffrey would be the hidden back door to Denver Skatepark. On the north side of the park there is a worn dirt path that can be accessed by stepping over a two-foot high seating/grinding wall. This path sharply descends to an asphalt trail that runs along the south bank of the South Platte River. Though this trail is primarily used by bicyclists, the homeless population uses the 19th and 20th Street bridges as an impromptu base of operations. The blind turn 30 yards to the east on the path is a bonus, allowing a criminal to access or flee the site with only being seen by the vagrants, who likely are not interested in a kid’s stolen I-Pod.
Do you ever feel like someone is watching you?

Though Denver Skatepark has multiple avenues of access, it also has a surprising amount of supervision from multiple parties. It seems that everyone is interested in what is going on at the skatepark, from the police to the Burrito lady, yes, the Burrito lady. Though all parties provide supervision, the type of supervision can change from party to party.

Of course the police regularly patrol the Denver Skatepark. Understandably police are only concerned with legal infractions, which is their job. According to Commander Deborah Dilly of the sixth district Denver Police Department, the police drive by, but will not leave their cruiser unless they have reasonable cause to believe that a crime is being committed. Commander Dilly states that the skatepark receives no more patrols than any other public place (Dilly 2005). Though this may be true, local skateboarders reported that the police patrol Denver Skatepark “slightly more often” to “all the time”, which suggests that the users feel they may receive special attention (pers. comm.).

Unusually, Denver Skatepark attracts a fair amount of adults. Some adults are skateboarders who still surf concrete, but many are parents are watching their children. The primary concern of the parents at the skatepark is the welfare of their children. The parents questioned didn’t care much about minor legal infractions, such as marijuana or graffiti, but may get involved in more serious offences such as assault or burglary were witnessed (pers. comm.). The skateboarders questioned about the presence of parents shrugged it off as little consequence, especially when it wasn’t their parent (pers. comm.). Despite this show of machismo it is likely that some behaviors were curtailed by the presence of adults.
The skateboarders themselves provide some degree of supervision, but what exactly they are supervising is open to debate. The younger skateboarders questioned seemed apathetic about the minor infractions of their peers, such as drugs or vandalism, and only slightly more concerned with serious crimes like assault or burglary (pers. comm.). The majority of skateboarders questioned were in their teens, but there is an older group of skateboarders who may provide an additional level of supervision. According to Tim Gordon the “elder statesmen” of Denver Skatepark serve more as role models of appropriate behavior than a police force confronting behavior. Unfortunately, the older skateboarders deal with the demands of the real world, so typically are at the skatepark at specific times of the day, such as weekday evenings and weekend mornings. Gordon feels that at these times, particularly weekend mornings, older skateboarders have limited contact with people involved in criminal behavior (Gordon 2005).

Finally Denver Skatepark has the Burrito Lady, Ms. Garza. Ms. Garza runs a small cart located on 19th street selling burritos, tamales, chips, candy and soda pop to skateboarders. Ms. Garza has been selling concessions every day at Denver Skatepark for the past four years, one week after the skatepark opened. Though Ms. Garza was unwilling to speak, her adult daughter, Michele Garza, was willing to comment on many subjects including the supervision that she and her mother provide. According to Michele, she and her mother are “the guardians” of Denver Skatepark (Garza, pers. comm.). As with other supervising parties, what exactly they supervise is open to debate. Though fights and drugs seem to be considered negative behaviors, graffiti is not. While Michele Garza was speaking of her intolerance for fights and drugs, her friend sitting next to her was busily scrambling to unclog the nozzle of his can of black spray paint so that he could finish the tag he was writing.
The level of supervision Ms. Garza and her daughter provide is difficult to measure, but it is likely quite strong. They are at the skatepark daily, it means that if someone offends them they will constantly be dealing with the consequences of the negative impression they gave. The acceptance of the Garza’s status as “guardians” of the skatepark is evidenced by the large congregation of skateboarders that hang around the burrito cart when ever the stainless steel door is open. If the Garza’s don’t like you, chances are that many of the resident skateboarders don’t like you much either. Finally, the Garza’s are the gatekeepers to the only place to buy soda pop and snacks for a mile in any direction. The prices are reasonable and the burritos smell tasty, it would indeed be unwise to bite the hand that, literally, feeds you.

Six of One, Four Dozen of Another

According to the two major principles put forth by Jeffery’s Crime Prevention through Environmental Planning, Denver Skatepark suffers in one but makes up for it in the other. The ease of access, and more importantly, the ease of escape at Denver Skatepark would suggest that the area would be prone to higher crime rates.

The counter point is that Denver Skatepark receives an excessive amount of supervision from a variety of interested parties. Though not all parties agree on what behaviors require intervention, between the supervising parties all the bases seem to be covered. The police provide legal supervision (Dilly 2005), the parents protect their individual kids (pers. comm.), and the skateboarders, especially the adults, provide a social education on how to act at a skatepark (Gordon 2005). As an unexpected bonus the Garza’s give some legal supervision, some social supervision and will even provide a tasty snack.

Defensible Space

Newman’s core theory of Defensible Space is especially applicable to skateparks, as was seen in FDR Skatepark in Philadelphia. The investment the local skateboarders feel for FDR is directly linked to its renegade nature and the effort by locals who constructed FDR.
Denver Skatepark, which is constructed and sanctioned by the city, is more of a public amenity than an act of concrete expression. It is easy to assume that Denver skateboarders will not be invested in their park because they were not heavily involved in its construction. Ironically, the only thing that can be easily assumed is that assumptions are notoriously unreliable.

Measuring a level of investment in space is problematic, as Newman found when his theories were introduced. Investment is not able to be directly measured, but can be assessed from both word and action. In the case of Denver Skatepark much of the "action" has largely been taken by the city, who built and maintains the space. The act of spending 2.9 million along with spending the additional resources for maintenance shows Denver's commitment to providing a free, world-class skatepark to its citizens. Despite the city's commitment, Newman's theory relies on investment of the residents or users of the space, in other words, skateboarders and the Burrito Lady.

There is no place like home.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of skateparks is the dedication they foster in the users. Though everyone has a public open space they have a special feeling for, few people relate to terrain as intimately as skateboarders. Skateboarding demands absolute concentration on the surface, every curve, every ledge, and every crack. The texture of the surface is amplified through the board revealing cracks and inconsistencies invisible to the casual observer. This connection is not just another aspect of skateboarding, it is a requirement. The consequences of ignoring the feedback from the board can be quite painful. Additionally all skateparks are different, demanding that the skateboarder develops
It does not take long for a skateboarder to speak with genuine affection for Denver Skatepark, and many call it home. One Denver skateboarder emphatically proclaims “I love this place. Here you can be yourself. Spikes, blue hair, whatever.” Though he lives in the suburbs he says “It’s like my home, in some ways better.” (pers. comm.) Michele Garza concurs. She talks of the time the city tried to restrict her mother’s vending business “They tried to kick us out, but we fought to stay. This is our home.” (Garza, pers. comm.) Though many skateboarders complain of the slick surface, the hot temperatures, or the throngs of kids, the problems do not seem to be enough to drive them away. “Some leave” says Michele Garza with a grin, “but they always come home”. Though not all call it home, many go to unusual lengths to be there. Gary Saydam works downtown in a “professional” job but spends most of his lunch hours at Denver Skatepark. It would seem Gary would rather spend his time skating the red concrete than “networking” over a power lunch (Saydam, pers. comm.).

**We would confront it if it was here....I think.**

Few could deny the user’s investment after talking with the skateboarders and seeing glazed look in their eyes when talking about Denver Skatepark. The question still remains if the users are invested enough to affect the behavior of people at Denver Skatepark. Newman’s theory suggested that when residents are invested they would confront people that were engaging in social or criminal infractions.

According to all verbal accounts, very little crime occurs at Denver Skatepark. It is worth noting that the crime that does occur at Denver Skatepark is considered by the users as minor at best, and not worth a confrontation. Far more prevalent are social infractions, which are confronted through peer pressure and verbal confrontation.
Perhaps the most subtle method of confrontation is peer pressure. It is clear that the users are a socially tight group. As one lanky teen put it “I had to skate here for a year before people stopped hassling me.” (pers. comm.) The familiar statement “People that cause trouble aren’t skaters, they aren’t one of us” was uttered by a matter-of-fact Michele Garza. It appears that the regular users of the park don’t want any trouble (Garza, pers. comm.). They just want to skate so they accept the standards of behavior of their peer group. Of course the familiar problem with peer pressure is that peer determined rules don’t always coincide with established rules. The peer group seems to have little problem with graffiti, while drug use or fights (aka assault) are discouraged at the skatepark (pers. comm.).

Verbal redirection from users appears to be a more direct form of intervention, particularly from the adults. Though Ms. Garza was unwilling to directly comment on the skatepark and crime, her willingness to verbally intervene is clear. At one point, two teenage skateboarders started to roughhouse in a mock fight. Ms. Garza stopped it with a curt “Cut it out, you two are setting a bad example for the kids.” With those words the teen’s smiles disappeared from their faces and they stared at their shoes, as if wondering how they got on their feet. According to Michele Garza, her mother will also intervene when drugs are used. In her trademark matter-of-fact tone she states “If Mom sees guys smoking pot, she will just call the cops.” (Garza, pers. comm.)

In addition the older skateboarders will likely verbally intervene if the younger crowd gets out of hand. According to Tim Gordon, though he personally has never seen it at Denver Skatepark, he says of other skateparks “I’ve seen younger kids mouthing off to people, it has been the older skaters that tell them to knock it off.” (Gordon, 2005)
The only instance of a user of the skatepark becoming physically involved to reduce crime at Denver Skatepark is from a bold and non-violent Michele Garza. She states that when fights do occur she will physically place herself between them to break it up. Purportedly she has never been caught with a stray punch and is usually successful in stopping the fight. Perhaps her status at the Skatepark and the social stigma of hitting a girl provides her the immunity necessary to quickly diffuse the situation.

I'm just here to skate.

Though the instances of confronting criminal act at Denver Skatepark are few and far between, it would be a mistake to assume that it is a result of less investment by the users. It is clear that the users are invested in Denver Skatepark, but as Tim Gordon states “There is some level of stewardship at the park, but it doesn’t have to get too far. Denver does a good job by itself.” (Gordon, 2005) After all no one shows up at a skatepark to confront someone else’s behavior, they go there to skate.

Broken Windows

It is unclear if Denver skates on the slippery slope of Wilson and Kelling’s Broken Windows Theory, but it is clear that Denver Skatepark has been brought to a level of aesthetic finish that is almost unheard of in skateparks. Their theory states that incivilities, such as graffiti, trash, and vagrancy, can lead to more serious crime. Incivilities act as visual clues of neglect to criminals suggesting that criminal behavior may be tolerated or ignored.

It’s just like a regular park, except for all the concrete.

The overall aesthetic is that of a traditional park. Denver Skatepark blends seamlessly into the South Platte River Park and uses many of the same materials and details. The flowing concrete surface is a rich red through out the pour. The sidewalls are constructed of the dry laid red stone. The shade trees around the perimeter of the skate park are healthy and trimmed. There is even an attempt at a turf island in the middle of the park. Unfortunately the heat off of one and a half acres of dark concrete presents an environment that even yuccas would find toasty. If not for the concrete, the landscape would be
indistinguishable from the thousands of picturesque parks that appear in towns across America.

Many of the signs of neglect that typically appear around skateparks are noticeably absent at Denver Skatepark. The area is completely clear of trash and debris, even the trash cans themselves sparkle. The sanitized area is void of the traditional cigarette buts, scraps, and crushed cans. The immediate conclusion that the skaters clean up the area would be unfortunately premature. According to city maintenance workers, Denver Skatepark has significantly more trash than other area parks (pers. comm.). In all fairness Denver Skatepark is the most heavily used of all Denver parks, so it is reasonable to assume that the amount of trash could be correlated to the amount of use a site receives.

Evidence of drug use is also absent from Denver Skatepark. This does not suggest that drug use does not occur here, but is evidence of the diligence of the Denver Park District. According to the maintenance crew, they regularly find pipes of different types along with discarded roaches. Other types of drug paraphernalia such as needles and spoons are rarely, if ever, encountered by the maintenance crew.

Though multiple parties report a vagrancy problem, few vagrants can be seen at the park and no evidence of their presence can be found. A short distance away on the riverside trail there is evidence of vagrancy, but not at the skatepark. The few vagrants that pass through Denver Skatepark briefly use bathrooms or water fountain and quickly return to the banks of the South Platte. The air is clean and the smell of body odor and urine is absent.
The typical piles of clothes and discarded remnants of society were nowhere to be found in the park. It would seem that panhandling from teenagers is not very profitable.

Perhaps the most surprising example of the commitment to keeping a clean environment is the complete absence of graffiti. This does not suggest that graffiti does not occur at Denver Skatepark. Sharp eyes will notice the ghosted images of graffiti that have received treatment with solvents or a power washer. According to Mark Bernstein of Denver Parks and Recreation Department, a maintenance crew removes graffiti daily (Bernstein 2005). Indeed, graffiti that still smelled of xylene one day, was a faded palimpsest twenty-four hours later. As a result, the graffiti is low quality limited to small ten-second tags.

If there are no signs of neglect, crime doesn’t happen here….Right?

According to Broken Windows theory the absence of these minor incivilities will send the message that this space is owned and cared for. In theory, people will not litter, do drugs, steal, assault, or a host of other criminal immoralities. If Wilson and Kelling would survey Denver Skatepark they would suggest that crime is virtually absent from this pristine environment. The constant maintenance keeps the incivilities to a minimum allowing a diligent parks department to keep the incivilities under control. Unfortunately this does not mean that criminal behaviors are unheard of, as will be shown later.

So far so good.

According to all the theories presented here, there is no reason why Denver Skatepark should be prone to criminal behavior. Though there are multiple routes of access and escape, this has been designed for and is unavoidable. It is important for the skatepark to be
accessible by both car and public transit so that it can fulfill its intended purpose as a public space. The theories would actually seem to suggest that Denver Skatepark should be less prone to crime. The park is under heavy surveillance from multiple interested parties. There appears to be some degree of investment by users of the space, and the space is kept sparkling clean. There is little to complain about, all three theories would suggest that crime at Denver Skatepark should be a rare event.

**Reported Crime in the Surrounding Area**

Like all major cities in the United States, Denver records numerical crime statistics and presents them to the FBI for use in the *Uniform Crime Report* (UCR). Though the minimum requirement for the FBI does not include minor crimes, most cities record this data regardless. The statistics for major (Type II) crime are typically provided by the city to the public, typically on the internet. The city of Denver offers crime statistics at city and neighborhood scales. Denver reported crime statistics begin in 2001. It seems unusual for a major metropolitan area to only release crime statistics of the past five years, while they have been accumulating them for decades. While other sites have numerical data going back to 2000, the numerical data for Denver will be presented for 2001 on.

Many cities include select minor crimes, such as vandalism or drug offenses, in their publicly released crime reports. Unfortunately Denver does not include minor crimes in the publicly released reports. Only major crimes are included. As in other case studies, the crimes of homicide, sexual assault and arson are excluded due to their rarity. The remaining crimes include aggravated assault, auto theft, burglary, theft robbery and an “all others” category. The exclusion of minor crimes is not ideal for this study, but the numbers can still give an impression of the prevalence of crime in a neighborhood.

**A crime is a crime.**

To insure consistent, results the FBI provides specific definition of crimes in their *Uniform Crime Report*. All cities must adhere to their definition when reporting crime to the FBI. Despite this, many states and cities restate the definition of crimes. The local
definitions are almost identical to the FBI definitions except for minor changes in wording. In the interest of accuracy, the definitions of crime determined by the city and county of Denver are listed below (Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis 2005).

**Aggravated Assault:** An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm.

**All Other Crimes/Offenses:** All other crimes not tracked by UCR

**Auto Theft:** The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

**Burglary:** The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft.

**Theft:** The unlawful taking, carrying, leading or riding away of property, from the possession or constructive possession of another.

**Robbery:** The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

To be taken with a grain of salt.

Though the limited years available and the omission of minor crimes limit the usefulness, this data set has far more serious problems. Despite the open land surrounding it, Denver Skatepark is technically in a downtown neighborhood. Measurement of numeric crime rates in downtown neighborhoods is problematic. The method of normalizing for population is to report crimes per 1000 people. In a downtown neighborhood this normalization method leads to numbers exaggerated to the point of useless. The problem is that the actual population of downtown far exceeds the number of residents. Commuting workers and tourists inflate the population. The number of people to commit crime or be victimized by crime is far greater than the resident population would suggest. Further obscuring the numbers is that the true population in a downtown neighborhood is in constant flux. The population can grossly shift depending on day of the week and time. As a result, it
is next to impossible to find a population number to normalize the quantity of criminal incidents.

The crimes per 1000 people in the Union Station neighborhood are so exaggerated that Denver does not even publish them in their publicly released crime statistics. Unfortunately for this study, Union Station is the resident neighborhood of Denver Skatepark and that will not change. The statistics for Union Station were acquired from the Denver Police and are presented below. The resident population for Union Station is a mere 2225 people. It is quickly apparent that the crime per 1000 is way off. The data is included here for methodological consistency, but the value of the data is questionable.

The statistics presented include the city of Denver, the Union Station neighborhood, and two adjacent neighborhoods, Highland and Five Points. The city wide statistics are included to provide a benchmark for the focus neighborhoods.

As previously mentioned, the neighborhood statistics are wrought with problems. Comparing the adjacent neighborhoods to Union Station is impossible, considering the inflated numbers of Union Station. Perhaps the best use of these numbers is to compare the adjacent neighborhoods to the city as a whole. Denver Skatepark is located in the extreme north corner of Union Station. As a result, Union Station is on the border of the Highland and Five Points neighborhoods. Denver Skatepark is only a few hundred yards away from Highland across the 20th Street Bridge, while Five Points is literally across the street. To
understand the criminal context at Denver Skatepark all three neighborhoods should be considered.

The crime statistics are presented in both raw quantity and occurrences per 1000 people. The numbers per 1000 people is an attempt to normalize for population, but in the case of Union Station there is little point. Fortunately, the occurrences per 1000 people in Highland, Five Points, and Denver as a whole remain valid. Of course, the numbers only refer to recorded crime known and prosecuted by the police. The amount of unrecorded crime will be addressed later in this chapter. Listed below are the brief, and questionable, numerical crime statistics for 2004 to 2001.

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(Denver Police Research and Development and Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis)
The limited data set and exaggerated Union Station numbers greatly limit the validity of any analysis. The primary purpose of including this data is methodological consistency. In the other case studies numerical data was directly compared to equivalent numerical data from adjacent neighborhoods. This provided a feel for how much crime is in the neighborhood as a whole. In the case of Denver Skatepark that is not possible. In this case, it is simple to invalidate data, what is difficult is to find something that matters.

There must be something.

Without an accurate population, normalizing for population is impossible. Population estimates of the entire downtown workforce do exist, but none specifically for Union Station. Tourism estimates also exist, but these numbers grossly change depending on what events are in town. As a result, the per 1000 numbers are useless, leaving the number of actual occurrences. Drawing conclusions from the raw occurrences is a sketchy proposition, but in this case all that is available.

When using raw occurrences any comparison with the city is not possible. The occurrences can be compared to the adjacent neighborhoods. It should be acknowledged that the populations of the Highland and Five Points neighborhoods are 10,353 and 8,775 respectively. Though Union Station is smaller geographically, it is more densely populated particularly during the working hours. It is safe to say that the Union Station population regularly exceeds the population of the adjacent neighborhoods.

In general, there are fewer occurrences of crime in the Union Station neighborhood than either adjacent neighborhood, despite the inflated population. The Highland neighborhood has 113% of the criminal occurrences of Union Station. Across most crimes, Union Station has fewer criminal occurrences than Highland with the exception of theft. Theft is typically more common in Union Station, recording 133% of the occurrences in Highland.
The Five Points neighborhood records a disturbing 229% of the total criminal occurrences of Union Station. The quickest way to determine the number of occurrences in Five Points is to take the occurrences in Union Station and double them. If this is not sufficient then triple them. Determining the exact numerical quantity between 200% and 300% percent is not necessary. There are many more occurrences of all crimes in Five Points than Union Station, but the real standout is burglary. Five Points records a mind-numbing 502% of the occurrences of burglary compared to Union Station.

Comparing raw numbers without accurate population data is risky business. Though the actual population is unknown, it is arguable to say that the daily population of Union Station reaches the 10,000 mark, population similar to the surrounding neighborhoods. The 10,000 mark is obtainable considering estimates of the downtown Denver workforce are around 111,000. In addition the influx of tourists boosts the population daily.

One thing that is not affected by the inflated numbers of Union Station is the comparison of the adjacent neighborhoods to the city as a whole. The geographic proximity of the adjacent neighborhoods to Denver Skatepark makes the adjacent neighborhoods particularly relevant to the criminal context of Denver Skatepark.

The Highland neighborhood to the northwest sees slightly more crime per 1000 people than the city average. The rate of total crime per 1000 in Highland is 114% of the Denver's per 1000 rate. This marginal 14% increase is remarkably consistent throughout all crimes reviewed, with the exception of robbery. Two out of four years the robbery rate in Highland has been lower than the Denver rate. The average robbery rate in Highland is only 93% of the rate of Denver per 1000 people. The crime rates in Highland are consistently, but only slightly, over the norm for the city. To say that Highland is a high-crime area is undoubtedly stretching the truth, but Five Points on the other hand is a whole different story.

Doubling the crime rates of Denver would begin to approach, but not equal crime rates in Five Points. The Five Points neighborhood to the north east consistently experiences
much more crime, per 1000 people than the city as a whole. The rate of total crime per 1000 people is a stunning 271% of Denver’s total crime per 1000 rate. While the cynical my find it humorous to examine each crime individually, the rest would find the story grim. The lowlights include Five Points’ aggravated assault rate and theft rate both averaging 350% of the Denver average per 1000 people. In fairness, the area directly adjacent to the skatepark is the “nicer” part of the neighborhood, including the Flour Mill Lofts, a posh residential building. Unfortunately, the remainder of the neighborhood is less exclusive and has significant issues with crime.

How about something shorter?

Drawing conclusions from crime statistics without an accurate population is difficult. When the raw occurrences are compared to adjacent neighborhoods with populations around 10,000, Union Station tends to record fewer crimes. Highland records 113% of occurrences than Union Station has. Five Points records 229% of the criminal occurrences than Union Station. Assuming that the daily population of Union Station grows over 10,000, then the per 1000 rates would be lower than the adjacent neighborhoods. Though the population boom is an assumption, it is certainly an arguable one.

The adjacent neighborhoods can be compared to Denver as a whole by crime rates per 1000. In this comparison, Highland has slightly higher crime rates across the board with the exception of robbery. The rate of total crimes per 1000 people in Highland is 114% that of Denver. The Five Points neighborhood experiences significantly more crime than Denver per 1000 people. Total crime per 1000 people in Five Points is 271% that of Denver. All crimes are significantly higher but the worst is aggravated assault and theft per 1000 at 350% of the city as a whole.

Error? Sure I have some right here.

The above data set has the dubious distinction of being the most problematic data in the study. All the normal errors, the vast majority revolving around people, apply here. Error could be introduced through inaccurate coding by the police or intermittently dyslexic
researchers. Though these errors are difficult to track down, be sure they exist in some form in most data sets. Regardless, these errors are minor in comparison to the errors resulting from the daily population inflation in Union Station.

For once the error is easy to spot, but there is little that can be done. Denver Skatepark is indeed in the Union Station neighborhood and accurate population for the neighborhood simply does not exist. The result is the per 1000 numbers are so loaded with error they are useless. Some attempt has been made to put crime in Union Station in perspective, but unfortunately the word "assume" was necessary. When ever the word "assume" is used in describing data the reader should beware. The better the data, the less there is to assume. The data was included primarily for methodological consistency, but there is still some useful information lodged in the numbers. Regardless, better data is right around the corner.

So close to primary data I can taste it.

Though the numerical data for Denver Skatepark is questionable, the GIS data provided by the Denver Police is very nice. The purchase price was steep, and the wait required Herculean patience, but when the data arrived it was worth it. Unlike Philadelphia, who provided page after page of addresses, Denver provides actual maps generated from the Police GIS database. These maps were created by professional GIS researchers to the specification of the buyer. The only things better would be to have access to the GIS database itself and be free of charge. Yea, free would be nice.

Becoming an educated buyer of GIS data requires quite a bit of specification regarding the researcher’s graphical conventions. Unfortunately, the police researchers typically use progressive scales when creating crime maps. This means that one dot can represent more than one crime, the number of crimes being determined by the size of the dot. The benefit of this graphical convention is dots don’t stack on top of each other and become an unreadable mess. An undesirable byproduct is that the scale constantly shifts from map to map. While a red dot may represent two crimes on one map, on another map it may
represent five crimes. The scale occasionally changes between maps of the same crime, but will change drastically between crimes. As a result, it is difficult to determine the prevalence of crime by counting dots, the quantity of crimes each dot represents must be considered. The scale used is placed in the upper right hand corner and is worthy of note on each map reviewed.

Again, the white circle represents a one half mile radius around Denver Skatepark. In addition to the crimes previously defined, the GIS maps include additional crimes. The made-to-order data includes simple assault, drug offenses, and vandalism. The Denver Police do not publish definitions for minor crimes. In their place the FBI definitions are listed below (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2004). Due to their rarity homicide, sexual assault and arson are excluded from this study.

Simple assault: Assaults and attempted assaults which are not of an aggravated nature and do not result in serious injury to the victim.

Drug abuse violations: The violation of laws prohibiting the production, distribution, and/or use of certain controlled substances. The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance.

Vandalism: To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law. Attempts are included

After the ambiguity of the numerical data, crime maps are pleasantly definitive. Without any further delay, the movement has arrived that someone may have been waiting for. Now this study proudly presents the self-explanatory, the refreshingly accurate, and the colorfully festive 2000-2004 crime maps. (Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis 2006)
Robbery
The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear

Denver Skatepark
Aggravated Assault

An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.

Denver Skatepark
Burglary

The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft.

Denver Skatepark
Theft

the unlawful taking, carrying, leading or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.
Vandalism
To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property.

Denver Skatepark
Auto Theft

Auto theft is defined as the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

Denver Skatepark
Simple Assault

Assaults and attempted assaults which are not of an aggravated nature and do not result in serious injury to the victim

Denver Skatepark
Drug violations

The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance.
All Other

All crimes not previously mapped are placed in this category

Denver Skatepark
Like I said, self explanatory.

If a researcher had his way, the data would always be consistent and repeatedly point to the same conclusion. Analysis could be done without fear of contradiction because the pattern is so obvious anyone can see it. On rare occasions when the moons on Jupiter align, the researcher gets his way and things are greatly simplified. A lunar windfall appears to have shed its beneficent light on this study, because the crime maps couldn’t be any clearer.

Across all years and all crimes, the area within the half-mile radius around Denver Skatepark experiences less crime than the remainder of the mapped area. Crimes of all types clearly occur with increased frequency in Highland, in the northwest, and downtown Denver to the southeast. When crime does occur within the radius it is typically on the edges where the radius intersects Highland or downtown Denver. This affect is particularly noticeable on the theft maps. The only time a crime’s frequency approaches the surrounding area is on the 2004 vandalism map. Even on the 2004 vandalism map the lack of crime within the radius is noticeable.

Not only is the geographic pattern clear, but so is the likely reason. The half-mile radius around Denver Skatepark is primarily low-density open space. The simple rationale is that few people are around to be victims or perpetrators of crime. The radius around Denver Skatepark encompasses space in Commons Park along the South Platte River corridor. In addition, there is a large stretch of open land to the southwest where warehouses used to stand. The vast fat plains of pale dirt give an urban wasteland vibe and effectively separate Denver Skatepark from downtown Denver. Commons Park and the open lot experience negligible crime in relation to the surrounding urban areas.

Considering that Denver Skatepark is sandwiched between two areas with significant crime, it is surprising that the 20th Street Bridge does not become a conduit for criminal behavior. Denver Skatepark could be a halfway point where people congregate and could engage in assorted debauchery. Regardless, this is clearly not the case. Denver Skatepark sits squarely in a half-mile wide swath that experiences relatively few crimes.
While more text could be wasted analyzing and restating the obvious, there is no need. As promised, the crime maps are self-explanatory and the reader can analyze and restate the obvious at their leisure. It suffices to say that crime occurs in the residential area in the northwest and crime occurs downtown to the southeast, but reported crime rarely occurs anywhere near Denver Skatepark.

**We think a little error is a good thing.**

As with all data sets, there is error in the crime maps. The perpetual human error is present, but in this case minimized. The fewer people that touch data, the fewer opportunities error has to be introduced. In this case only three people have touched the data. First the police who coded the crime, second the police researcher that created the maps, and third the intrepid researcher completing maps for this study. Though human error is always a possibility in data, this data has had relatively few opportunities to be corrupted.

The most prevalent form of error in this data set was deliberately introduced by the Denver Police Department. From the actual location of the crime, up to 40 feet of error is added in a random direction. This defined error is commonplace in GIS data with the rationale that it protects privacy of the victim (Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis, pers. comm.). It is difficult to tell how effective it is or if it is even necessary.Regardless, this is standard operating procedure with the majority of GIS data. The error is relatively insignificant at larger scales, but as scales become smaller the error becomes noticeable. At this scale the forty foot error is barely worth mentioning, but it is error and should be referenced.

A geographic study of the location of crime is one place GIS data shines. The cost and the inevitable hassle required to procure the data is well worth the effort. The strong pattern shown in this data set is a perfect example of why GIS data is popular with both the police and researchers. The data shows with remarkable clarity and full transparency what crimes occur and where. The power of this data has led some cities to keep a tight control
over their GIS data. Denver should be commended for having the integrity to allow this information to be accessible to the public.

**They have problems, but we are just fine.**

Problems with the numerical crime data for Union Station and surrounding neighborhoods make definitive statements difficult. The daily influx of workers into the Union Station neighborhood render the per 1000 statistics for the area useless. Working with raw number of occurrences, in general Union Station appears similar to Highland, which has a population of approximately 10,000. When compared with the city of Denver, Highland has slightly higher crime rates per 1000 than Denver. The Five Points neighborhood has vastly higher crime rates than Denver, Highland, and more than likely Union Station. Fortunately the “nice area” of the comically criminal Five Points is adjacent to Denver Skatepark.

The neighborhood scale would suggest that Denver Skatepark should experience average quantities of crime, the GIS maps show that is not the case. In fact, while the urban areas at the edges of the half-mile radius show significant crime, the area around Denver Skatepark is relatively free of crime. Denver Skatepark squarely sits in a low crime area a half of a mile wide. This zone includes Commons Park, vacant lots to the southeast and massive I-25 to the northwest. These sparsely populated low-crime areas combine and effectively buffer Denver Skatepark from the more crime prone urban areas. The lack of people to be perpetrators or victims in the area is a likely cause for the low crime rates. After all, it takes two people for a robbery, the robber and the person robbed.

Denver Skatepark is strangely isolated from the urban fabric despite being located downtown. The fact that the surrounding neighborhoods are average to above average in crime has little bearing on Denver Skatepark. The skatepark has a quarter-mile of wide open space in any direction. Though Denver Skatepark may be isolated, the isolation is treating them well. The skatepark may lack the commercial and residential buildings typically
associated with a major city, but they also lack the crime. Though some may disagree, it seems that Denver Skatepark is making a fair trade.

**Unreported Crime in the Surrounding Area**

Often people see a skatepark as a sign of a progressive city that has its fingers to the pulse of a youth culture. Unfortunately, Denver was likely using their thumb and reading their own pulse, as much as their youth’s. As is often the case, building Denver Skatepark was a reactionary measure meant to mitigate skateboarding in surrounding areas, particularly the 16th Street Pedestrian Mall.

Though the proposal received widespread public support, when the time came to site the skatepark, no one wanted it in their backyard. Predictably, people felt that the skatepark would impact the surrounding area, in predominately negative ways. A primary concern is that any criminal behaviors that may occur at the skatepark would “bleed” out into the surrounding areas. Few people would suggest that local murders or rapes would increase, but there was greater concern about disturbance and vandalism (Bernstein 2005). As a result, the skatepark was placed in an area of vacant warehouses and railroad tracks, in other words the backyard of the homeless.

Unfortunately the isolation from downtown and residential buildings was short lived. The area known as Lower Downtown (Lodo) soon became a hip commercial and residential district and is currently experiencing massive construction, much of it high-end. The economically frugal can buy a loft for mere $200,000 but prices can rise to well over $1,000,000 (Booth 2005). As the average property value rises, concerns over damage to said property from skateboards and spray paint also rises.
Skateboarding is down 60% at the 16th Street Mall, I swear.

When numerous parties were asked if the new skatepark has impacted the surrounding area, they rapidly state that skateboarding has been reduced at the 16th Street Mall by 60 percent. It may seem unusual that such a statistic is qualified as unreported. This is because few can provide the source of this data. Michele Garza says that she heard the figure from the Denver Motorcycle Police, but this was not able to be confirmed (Garza pers. comm.). Though it is unlikely that this figure represents an “urban myth”, the lack of identifiable source calls it into question, especially considering the comments received from The Business Improvement District (BID).

At first examination there appears to be very few people skateboarding on the 16th Street Mall. This does not suggest that all skateboarders have quietly bowed down to the authority represented in the “no skateboarding” signs liberally sprinkled across the mall. As previously mentioned, BID ambassadors are still issuing warnings to those who refuse to be a pedestrian in a pedestrian mall. Don Pesek, the Operations Manager for BID, laments “In my experience the skateboarders don’t pay attention to warnings.” As a result, Pesek strongly encourages the police to issue tickets to people found skateboarding at the mall (Pesek 2005).

When Pesek, who walks the mall daily, is asked if he believes there has been a 60 percent reduction in skateboarding on the mall, he is skeptical. Pesek candidly states “You will be able to get whatever numbers you want to support your work. I don’t have any trust
in the numbers. The more I know (about crime statistics) the more skeptical I am.” Pesek
believes that if there has been a 50 percent reduction in criminal skateboarding, is a result of
“fewer cops writing tickets”. In a classic situation of the double edged sword, the proactive
presence of BID, coupled with reduced police budgets have placed fewer police on the mall.
Consequently the remaining police focus on serious crime and are not concerned with less
serious crimes, such as skateboarding (Pesek 2005).

Adding to Pesek’s skepticism is the obvious skateboarding damage to structures in
the 16th Street Mall. If the skateboarding has been significantly reduced then the damage
would be minor, or at least weathered from four years of exposure. Unfortunately this does
not appear to be the case. Skateboarding damage is not difficult to find, particularly in an
area known as Skyline Park. Despite a redesign to the park, expressly for the purpose of
reducing crime in general, and skateboarding in particular (Pesek 2005), the marble benches
have smooth, glossy black streaks on the corners, sure signs of fresh grinds.

It is entirely possible that
skateboarding in the 16th Street Mall has been
reduced due to the introduction of Denver
Skatepark. Unfortunately the idea that the
skatepark was going to eliminate the
skateboarding “problem” at the mall was unrealistically optimistic. As local skateboarder,
Tim Gordon, puts it, “Skateboarding has attracted many different types of people.” (Gordon
2005) It would appear that though many are content with accepting where society allows,
even encourages, skateboarding, others are not. Perhaps others skate the 16th Street Mall
simply because they are told not to.
Kilroy was here.

Considering the lack of serious crime in the skatepark, the possibility of serious crime “bleeding” to adjacent areas is questionable. Much like getting blood from a turnip, there is little to start with. Serious crime, is not what area residents’ fear, or at least would not verbalize that concern at risk of being perceived at culturally intolerant. Residents are more concerned with minor “nuisance” crime, such as disturbance and vandalism (Bernstein 2005).

A brief tour of the area around Denver Skatepark will quickly reveal that not all pathways to and from the park are used equally. In fact, one particular path is used almost exclusively by those not fortunate enough to drive or be dropped off at Denver Skatepark. This path is easily identified through graffiti and skateboarding damage, like an urban Hansel and Gretel leaving a trail of breadcrumbs so that they can find their way home. The path starts at Denver Skatepark and goes southwest through the Commons Park until it meets 16th street at the Commons Plaza. The well designed plaza was privately funded by East-West Urban Management. From there skateboarders travel southeast to Union Station where the free 16th Street Mall Bus route begins. The free bus route starts at the northern end of the 16th Street Mall, where the skateboarding ban begins, and travels to the southern end. Union Station offers trains, but the Mall Bus offers a free ride to Market Street Station, the main hub for Denver’s extensive bus system, and can reach to the furthest suburbs in thirty minutes. All along this route is evidence of the skateboarder’s journey.

Common occurrences in Commons Park

Disturbance simply does not seem to be much of an issue because there is no where that the skateboarders gather other than Denver Skatepark. This is not to say there are no skateboarders in Commons Park, they just are not hanging around. If they are going to Denver Skatepark they make a straight run for it, and when leaving they make a straight run out. The skatepark draws them in and keeps them there until they go home.
Commons Park itself possesses little skateable terrain, perhaps by design, so it does not see extensive skateboarding damage. The wall around the perimeter of Commons Park is about three feet high, too tall for many skateboarders to ollie. In addition, in places the surface immediately adjacent to the wall is fine gravel, perhaps the least suitable surface for skateboarding. The walls themselves are dry laid stone resulting in an uneven cap that would hang up any potential grinder within inches. Even if a skateboarder could get to the wall, pull an impressive three foot ollie, the jagged cap would make the run painfully short. As a result, the skateboarders keep their boards on the ground and use them as transportation through the area.

Commons Park does have a significant problem with graffiti. Stickers or marker tags can be found on a full third of signs and benches. Ironically, the Parks Department’s “no-tolerance policy” towards graffiti in the skatepark does not extend to adjacent Commons Park. Graffiti in Commons Park can last for a week or more before being cleaned up, resulting in the comical situation of Commons Park having more graffiti than Denver Skatepark. The graffiti consists of small tags or stickers and is not blatantly obvious, but a quick search of signs, benches and transformer boxes will yield plenty of vandalism. Fortunately, the amount of graffiti seems to fade out the further from the skatepark you travel. By the time the path reaches the southwest corner of Commons Park, graffiti has been reduced to about one instance every two hundred yards. Across the street from the southwest exit of Commons Park is the privately-owned Commons Plaza. Commons Plaza shows no sign of vandalism but Commons Plaza has a more economically serious problem. To skateboarders passing through, the Commons Plaza is not a place to spray paint, the plaza is a place to grind.
We wouldn’t skate here if we had a skatepark.

Commons Plaza, which purportedly costs more than the Denver Skatepark, is a stunningly designed public space. The plaza has it all, a pedestrian scale, a strong sense of enclosure and beautiful granite forms that encourage and reinforce preferred foot traffic patterns. The red flagstone pavers, long granite ledges, and surprisingly good public art in the space all reek of good design and deep pockets. Surrounded by interesting architecture, and more detailed than a ‘57 Cadillac, the space is terminated by the Millennium Bridge. Unfortunately, the plaza’s inspiration is not limited to designers, it would seem that skateboarders find the space irresistible.

The long granite ledges, some with a gentle consistent curve, are about eighteen inches off the ground, a perfect height to ollie up on. The edge is sharp, the stone is smooth, it is as if someone rings a bell and skateboarders begin to salivate. As David Booth, Operations Manager of East-West Partnership puts it, “It’s the urge. You can almost see it, as they come over (the Millennium Bridge) they just start touching their board on things. Touching it on the rails, touching it on the granite, it’s like they are just itching.” (Booth 2005)

For some, it appears that the temptation is just too much, despite the clearly posted “no skateboarding” signs. David Booth believes that about fifty percent of the skateboarders that pass through willingly comply with the ban. The level of compliance goes to a hundred percent when a hired off-duty police officer, in uniform, is present. East-West Partners has been known to hire off-duty police and BID ambassadors to patrol the area (Booth 2005). This investment in supervision keeps the skateboarders moving through the plaza as opposed to stopping for a prolonged session.
Despite resources invested by East-Partnership to provide supervision, there is still damage from skateboards in the plaza. Booth is quick to point out that it is not just the skateboarders. BMX bikes are also a problem, which cause even more rapid failure of crisp polished edges. Booth states that the edges will eventually need to be ground down then re-polished and this translates into money. Booth emphatically states, “That’s real. Those are real dollars. We are not talking little dollars, we are talking about huge amounts of money. That’s our frustration.” (Booth 2005)

Despite this frustration, Booth feels this is part of “city living” and refrains from globally condemning skateboarders. “Generally we have found skateboarding participants to be courteous. We have certainly found some of them to be pretty obstinate about not skateboarding where they aren’t supposed to though.” Booth also feels that Denver Skatepark is good for the users, but tough on the neighborhood. “It’s a management nightmare, not because the skatepark is there, but because they (the skateboarders) want to get there.” (Booth 2005)

Booth states that if Commons Plaza was not on the path to the skatepark then they would have no problem with skateboarding damage. Local skateboarder Tim Gordon disagrees. “Because it is down the street from Denver Skatepark it is more evident to skaters, but would it still be skated? Yes it would. Skaters like nice feeling public spaces too. Which is probably why they choose some of the places they do. If it feels good to be in that environment, then they (the skateboarders) will find it.” (Gordon 2005)

Areas southwest of Commons Plaza also show the marks of passage of thousands of skateboarders. On the Millennium Bridge the edges of benches have been ground down and coated with a black sheen. At an office building across the street from Union Station, slanted bollards have become impromptu ramps (Pasek 2005). A piece of public art that sits at front of the office building bears a startling resemblance to a three-quarter pipe, and is too much for skateboarders to ignore. Once the path reaches Union Station, and the free Mall Bus, the
damage seems to fade out, likely because the skateboarders take the bus to Market Street Station where the spread out across Denver suburbs.

**The law of unintended consequences.**

The damage that appears on these structures is a sharp reminder that there is no sure fix to urban skateboarding damage, no matter how impressive of a skatepark the city builds. It is undoubtedly frustrating for East-West Partnership to be the recipient of an unintended consequence solely due to their location. While the skatepark is a “management nightmare” for East-West Partners, for the city of Denver, the skatepark has likely made management easier. In some cities the entire downtown is covered with skateboarding damage while in Denver it appears to relate to the park itself, the 16th Street Mall and a direct path between the two. This high traffic corridor has likely saved many locations in the city from damage by focusing skateboarding on a specific area.

**Reported Crime on Site**

Perhaps the greatest benefit of GIS based crime maps is their ability to quantify crime on small scales. Little more than a zoom tool is required to quantify crimes in specific locations. In this case, find Denver Skatepark on the crime map, zoom in, and count the dots.

**There is always something**

As previously mentioned, the Denver Police place a deliberate forty foot error in the location of a crime. The offered reason is to protect the privacy of the victims (Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis, pers. comm.). This seems odd considering the dot provides absolutely no information on the victim. Regardless, this is standard operating procedure and most cities build in some error when GIS maps are released to the public. At
larger scales this is insignificant, but at smaller scales the error becomes apparent. Odd results may appear, such as in the burglary map. Burglary requires forced entry to a structure, a structure that does not exist at the locations of the mapped crimes. Sharp eyes will notice a dark rectangular construction trailer about forty feet to the south. It is likely these crimes refer to the trailer, the only structure in the area.

Maps? Sure I have maps.

The first thing to note about these maps is that some crimes universally occur more often than others. The theft map is a good example. In this set of maps there are more thefts at Denver Skatepark than any other crime. It should be noted that this is usually the case across all sites and all scales. Apparently theft is a popular crime. Other crimes such as robbery are relatively rare. If a location has five thefts and three robberies, the site does not have a theft problem. In actuality, the site has a robbery problem. What crimes are prevalent can be assessed by a quick glance at the larger scale maps previously presented.

Next it should be acknowledged that the following maps represent a combined total of crimes recorded from 2000-2004. The few crimes recorded at smaller scales allow the locations to be readable when the entire study period is combined. The radius surrounding Denver Skatepark is forty feet, the maximum amount of error, from the edges of Denver Skatepark. Any crime within the radius will be considered to have occurred at Denver Skatepark.

A final consideration is the quantitative value of the dots. The inconsistent progressive scale used by the Denver Police is consistent in one way. A yellow dot typically means one event. Considering almost all the dots at this scale are singular events, the crimes are easily quantified. The one exception to this convention is the theft map. In this map one yellow dot represents one or two crimes. In addition, the red dot represents three to nine instances of theft. There is no way tell if a yellow dot represents one or two events, so definitive quantification is impossible. Regardless, the map does show the prevalence and location of theft. (Denver Safety Office of Police Analysis 2006)
Combined Crime 2000-2004

Denver Skatepark
Short and sweet.

Though crime does occur at Denver Skatepark, the area has relatively few crimes, thankfully simplifying analysis. In general, very few crimes can be attributed directly to Denver Skatepark. Only simple assault, theft, and oddly enough, auto theft have a recoded incident in the radius. Some crimes do not have a recorded instance on the map area at all. The majority of the crime that occurs in the general area occurs in the park across 20th Street. The vacant lots to the southwest also have a few recorded crimes.

It is not surprising that there are no recorded robberies. Robbery is a relatively rare crime and many locations in the city do not have a recorded robbery anywhere near them. What is surprising is the absence of any drug violations in the five-year study period. Not only are drug violations more common than robbery, often the skateboarding culture is accused of disproportional drug use. According to crime statistics at Denver, this stereotype is unfounded.

The majority of crimes have instances recorded on the map, but not within the forty foot radius around Denver Skatepark. Two incidents of burglary occurred over the five year period, but these can be attributed to the only structure in the area, the construction trailer. The other major crime to appear outside the radius is four instances of aggravated assault. Two instances occur just south of the radius, while the other two are in the park across 20th Street. Three incidents classified as “all others” are recorded in the mapped area. One is very close to the radius to the southwest, but the remaining two occur in the park across the street. Surprisingly vandalism is not recoded at, or near, Denver Skatepark. The four recorded incidents of vandalism are all across 20th Street, in the same park previously mentioned.

Only three recorded types of crime occurred at Denver Skatepark, simple assault, auto theft and theft. This does not imply that the perpetrators were skateboarders by default. It should be noted that the majority of the people at the site are skateboarders, so there is a strong possibility the victim or perpetrator was a skateboarder. The only two simple assaults
on the map occur on the southern edge of the Denver Skatepark radius. No other simple assaults are recorded, even in the notorious park across the street. Five auto thefts are recorded, with one located on Little Raven Street, the southeastern edge of Denver Skatepark. The auto theft map contains one anomaly. There is apparently an auto theft in the middle of the lawn to the park across the street. Though the idea of driving a car into the park lawn, only to have it stolen from there may be comical, the location of the crime is likely the result of the built in error. The car was probably stolen from the adjacent street.

The most prevalent crime by far within the radius is theft. The limitations of a progressive scale come into play with this map, making definitive quantification impossible. The best case scenario is that thirteen thefts occurred from 2000 to 2004. The worst case scenario is that thirty five thefts occurred at Denver Skatepark during the study period. In reality the actual number of thefts is somewhere between the two extremes. For the purposes of this study a middle ground of twenty four thefts will be used. Unlike the other maps, the theft map shows a concentration of incidents at Denver Skatepark. Smaller concentrations exist to the northwest and also in the park across 20th Street. This does not state that local skateboarders are perpetrators of the theft. At least as likely, is the local skateboarders are the only ones with anything to steal in the area. Averaging the hypothetical twenty four thefts over five years shows less than five events per year. Remembering that theft is the most common crime in Denver, it appears that theft is an issue, but not a severe issue. Many places in Denver would be happy with only five thefts a year.

Short and Sweet? Try shorter.

The lack of crime in the area surrounding Denver Skatepark makes for a simplified analysis. The majority of crimes do not occur within the forty foot radius extending from the edges of Denver Skatepark. As a whole, crime appears to concentrate in a park across 20th Street. Two crimes are not recorded anywhere on the mapped area. It is not surprising that the relatively rare crime of robbery is not recorded. What is surprising is that no drug violations were recorded in the mapped area. Four crimes including burglary, aggravated
assault, vandalism and “all others” were mapped, but outside of the Denver Skatepark radius. The majority of these crimes occurred in the park across the street.

Within the park two occurrences of simple assault occurred, averaging one incident every two-and-a-half years. Over the five year period one auto theft was recorded within the radius. The most prevalent crime recorded is theft at approximately twenty four incidents, averaging just fewer than five every year. Theft is the only crime that appears to concentrate around Denver Skatepark. It should be acknowledged that theft is the most common crime in Denver, and few mapped locations are far away from an incidence of theft. Crimes that occur at Denver Skatepark are not necessarily by local skateboarders. It is possible that the skateboarders were not involved in the incidents at all.

The vast majority of crimes do not appear to have any relation to Denver Skatepark. Six-out-of-nine examined crimes were not recorded in the skatepark from 2000-2004. The frequency of the few crimes that are committed at Denver Skatepark is very low, less than one a year. The notable exception is theft which appears to be a reoccurring issue. Though not an epidemic, it is certainly unwise to leave a new I-Pod on the bench while taking a final run.

Unreported Crime on Site

At first glance it may appear that crime statistics tell the whole story of crime in a specific area. After all, if the crime is not reported or no one is arrested, was crime actually committed? The answer is yes and crime goes unreported for a host of reasons.

Perhaps the victim is embarrassed to admit that they left their cell phone sitting unattended, while they were putting the “moves” on the blond cutie with the navel piercing. As embarrassing as this oversight may be, even fewer guys will admit to parents or police that they got in a fight, and were whooped. Though the victor of the confrontation may brag to his friends about the “beating of the week” they administered to that little punk, only the most foolish would brag to their parents or the police.
Additionally police are given a degree of discretion when dealing with criminal acts, resulting in observed crimes going unreported. If police "cuffed and stuffed" every kid that was caught with a joint or can of spray paint, then the city jail would soon resemble a ghetto version of Romper Room. Particularly with juvenile offenders, police will often diffuse the situation in the interest of public safety and hope they put the fear of God, or at least the police, into the boy.

The question remains how much crime occurs at Denver Skatepark that never makes it to official crime statistics? That, of course, depends on the crime. More serious crimes, such as homicide and arson, tend to be reported with more accuracy than crimes such as vandalism or minor robbery. A stinking corpse or burning building tend to be hard to miss and are also considered serious infractions. These crimes are more aggressively prosecuted and will make it into the official crime stats far sooner than "nuisance crimes" such as vandalism or drug use. The lack of a definitive victim to press charges further reduces the chance that these crimes are accurately represented in the official crime statistics.

I saw it with my own eyes...or more accurately didn’t.

A primary way to assess the amount of unreported crime is to spend time at Denver Skatepark and personally witness what crimes are committed, and confronted by police. Through the approximately twenty hours of direct observation at different times and days very little crime was observed, and what was observed was definitely minor. During this time period the only crimes observed were four individuals committing vandalism. Three of the instances were hasty tags using Sharpie pens on the concrete surface and the fourth was a less artistically inclined individual placing
stickers on signs and benches. The perpetrators doing this were certainly rushing to commit their act of civil disobedience, though they seemed to be unconcerned if other skatepark users saw this activity.

One 30-second mock fight spontaneously began and then ended just as quick. The ruckus was obviously between friends. Despite the heavy use of the skatepark and the numerous times two people’s runs crossed paths, there was no animosity between users. Even when a collision occurred, the two people picked themselves up off the pavement with smiles, laughing off the event. The collision almost seemed to add to the comradery of the space, and the helping hand up was usually extended and well received.

During twenty hours of direct observation, no drug use was seen at Denver Skatepark, though the dirt path to the north that leads down to the river saw a fair amount of traffic. People would climb over the wall and disappear down the path, only to return five minutes later with the permanent grin that suggests a rapid change in mental perspective. It is possible, but unlikely that the scenic beauty of the rushing waters of the South Platte River put the smile on their face. A far more likely reason for the perpetual smile on their face involved a lighter and the phrase “puff, puff, give.”

The word on the street is…

While twenty hours sitting on an acre and a half of concrete under a Denver summer sun may seem like forever, it most certainly is not. It is definitely not long enough to assume that all possible behaviors in Denver Skatepark will be exhibited. To provide a larger scope, numerous people were asked about crime that occurred at the site. Different parties were questioned including the police, the park district and users of the park. Though there were some small inconsistencies the reported amount of crime, the continuity among reports smells of the truth, or the most elaborate and unlikely conspiracy since the faking of the moon landing.
The consensus states that though crime occurs at Denver Skatepark, the vast majority of crime is committed by a specific minority of people. Additionally the crimes committed are "nuisance crimes" and are not considered serious. In fact many of the people questioned looked offended at the mention of crimes such as homicide and sexual assault. One parent of a skateboarder went so far as to say, "I don't know where you got your information, but it is wrong." The offended parent then quickly looked away and terminated the conversation (pers. comm.). The crimes that were considered possible at Denver Skatepark were robbery, assault, drug use, and vandalism.

Most people insisted that robbery is unheard of at Denver Skatepark, but Michele Garza stated that theft does rarely occur. The typical targets of this crime are cell phones and I-Pods which were foolishly left on benches or seating walls. The perception is the owners own ignorance and carelessness led to the crime being committed against them Garza (pers. com.). Tim Gordon provides the likely explanation of why robbery is infrequent at Denver Skatepark. He states that typically the younger skateboarders have very little to steal (Gordon 2005). The older skateboarders are the ones who usually have backpacks that may contain items worth pilfering. It can be assumed that the ability of the older skateboarders to prevent the theft, or extract retribution, provides an extra layer of protection for their valuables.

A few people questioned stated that fights have occurred, but emphasize that they are a rare occurrence. Most people state they have never seen a fight, and the few who have seen a fight laugh it off as insignificant. It is clear that large melees are not occurring at Denver Skatepark, rather more isolated scuffles that are more comical than threatening. As one skateboarder put it, "There are no real fights here, more like two eight-year-olds hitting each other." (pers. comm.) Once again the wealth of information that is Michele Garza attempted
to quantify the frequency of fights. She states that, “Fights occur about two or three times a month”. She concurs that they are nothing serious and don’t effect the safety of the skatepark as a whole (Garza pers. comm.).

Most people questioned stated that drug use does occur at the skatepark. The drug of choice at Denver Skatepark, like most of America, is marijuana. Though Michele Garza insists that if someone was smoking pot then her mother would call the cops, it would appear that as a deterrent, her mother is not completely effective. Multiple users at Denver Skatepark state that they have witnessed drug use at the park. One person was quoted as saying “I saw two people smoking a joint right there yesterday afternoon” pointing to a seating wall adjacent to 19th Street (pers. comm.). Not all people are brave enough, or foolish enough, to smoke grass in plain sight. The rapid isolation provided by the backdoor path on the northern edge of Denver Skatepark is occasionally used. It is well known to users at the skatepark that a quick exit to the South Platte River and quick return five-minutes later screams marijuana use (pers. comm.).

Despite the assumed marijuana use at the park the police department does not believe that the presence of the skatepark, or skateboarders, have anything to do with people smoking pot. When questioned about marijuana use at Denver Skatepark, Commander Dilly stated that she does not think the skatepark is any different from any other area. She states, “I don’t necessarily believe that skateboarders are responsible for more dope, or more anything. Do I think they participate in it? Sure. Do normal kids? Sure.” (Dilly 2005)
One thing everyone can agree upon is that graffiti occurs at the skatepark more often than other places. According to Mark Bernstein, Landscape Architect for Denver Parks District, initially the skatepark had little problem with graffiti, but lately has seen a sharp rise. He believes that the daily maintenance of Denver Skatepark keeps graffiti largely under control. Bernstein is quoted as saying “If you don’t remove graffiti it almost encourages more.” (Bernstein 2005) The maintenance crew at Denver Skatepark confirms this and says they remove graffiti “every day” (pers. comm.). The skateboarders questioned all said that Denver skatepark had a lot of graffiti. As a matter of fact, one of them was holding a can of spray paint at the time. They commented, “It is gone the next day” with a tone of vague disappointment (pers. comm.).

Not all the vandalism is done with spray paint. As mentioned earlier, stickers have become a problem at Denver Skatepark. The less artistically inclined will put a sticker on nearly anything that is not moving, and they are working on overcoming that particular difficulty. It is easy to assume that stickers are easier to remove than spray can graffiti. According to the maintenance crew, this is not the case. The adhesive on many stickers is particularly tenacious and the only method of removal is laborious scraping (pers. comm.). The prevalence of stickers has promoted the city to ban sticker distribution at the skatepark (Bernstein 2005).

Crime? No...Oh, pay no attention to the guy with the spray paint.

It appears that some crime exists that does not show up on official statistics, but it is minor crimes. Though some crimes occur, is does not seem to be disproportional to the rest of the area or city as a whole. The exception to this statement is graffiti, which seems to spawn like pimples before the prom. Despite the vigilance of Denver Parks and Recreation,
the concrete park still screams “blank canvas” to everyone with spray paint, sticker or Sharpie.

Conclusions

When the city of Denver says they are going to build a skatepark, they don’t kid around. The city spared no expense in the construction of the Denver Skatepark. The impressive curved vista of red concrete is stunning in size and form. The skatepark is also firmly integrated into a larger park system through common stone work and detailing. The city of Denver has literally put the “park” into skatepark. Standard park amenities such as bathrooms and water fountains are included. The benches and trash cans are identical to those used at multiple parks in Denver. Arguably, Denver has provided a skatepark with more aesthetic mass appeal than any other skatepark in the country.

Like many skateparks, the story of Denver Skatepark starts with a skateboarding ban. Once skateboarding was banned at the 16th Street Mall, registered voters began clamoring for someplace legal to skateboard. When registered voters start screaming, it is in the best interest of politicians to pacify them with something. It turns out, all that was required was a few million dollars and a political anomaly, a promise kept by a politician. After a few years and endless political arguments, the funds for a skatepark were finally secured. As always, site was an issue because no one wants a skatepark in their back yard. Eventually a site was found in few people’s backyards and America’s largest skatepark was built. Denver Skatepark quickly became the most used park in the Denver park system, and all was good forever after. In many ways the story of Denver Skatepark is similar to the story of hundreds of
other skateparks where local skateboarders had to fight to get concrete poured, just on a larger scale.

**Two out of three researchers agree, again.**

When compared to the reviewed sociological theories, generally Denver Skatepark fares well. While Defensible Space and Broken Windows suggest that Denver Skatepark should not be prone to crime, CPTED gives mixed reviews. The surveillance at Denver Skatepark is well within CPTED guidelines. The police, skateboarders, even the Burrito Lady provide surveillance to the space. Wide open views and lights are additional bonuses. The second CPTED principle regarding restricting traffic is where Denver Skatepark deviates from CPTED guidelines. Not only is Denver Skatepark easy to access from multiple routes, the skatepark is mere yards from an interchange with massive I-25. The only thing that would slow down an escape from Denver Skatepark is the multitude of choices.

Defensible Space theory would suggest crime would be rare at Denver Skatepark. The investment required by Defensible Space is clearly evident in the local skateboarders and burrito vendors. They clearly love their skatepark and feel ownership for it. Despite clear investment, the locals have no history of defending the space against crime, but they rarely have to. Unlike other study sites that had to carve space out of places with existing crime, Denver Skatepark was placed in a low crime area. The need to defend the space has never been required.

Broken Windows would also suggest there should be little crime at Denver Skatepark. The dreaded incivilities Broken Windows focuses on are not present at Denver Skatepark. The site is maintained by the city with startling rigor. Graffiti is removed within
twenty four hours and trash is nowhere to be seen. In addition, there is no problem with vagrancy or any other clue to suggest that the space is neglected. In short, Denver Skatepark is just another public park, except this one has significantly more concrete.

The numerical crime statistics rapidly approach useless, due to the fluctuating population of the Union Station neighborhood. Estimates suggest that Union Station receives roughly average crime in comparison to Denver as a whole. The numerical statistics also show that the Five Points neighborhood has problems with every crime reviewed in this study. The crime maps reveal a vacant half-mile-wide swath that is relatively low in crime. Placed square in the middle of the swath is Denver Skatepark. Much of the land adjacent to the skatepark is also contained in this low crime area. Understandably, most of the crime occurs in the urban areas to the northwest and southeast of Denver Skatepark.

There appears to be little unreported crime in the area, with the exception of vandalism and skateboarding damage. Though the vandalism may not be connected to skateboarders, the fact that the graffiti becomes less frequent further from the skatepark is incriminating. Skateboarding damage, specifically along a path from Denver Skatepark to the 16th Street Mall, is by definition connected with skateboarders.

This issue reaches the pinnacle at Commons Plaza, owned by the East-West Partnership. The plaza is so conducive to skateboarding that the designer should start designing skateparks. Despite "no skateboarding" signs, skateboarding damage is evident on all the granite ledges.

There is very little reported crime at Denver Skatepark itself. The majority of crimes were not recorded at Denver Skatepark during the entire five years. The remaining crimes had frequencies well below once a year. The exception is theft, which occurs approximately
five times a year. Though this amount is significant, theft is a common crime and five thefts is certainly not an epidemic. Considering the absence of other crimes, the theft numbers should be taken in moderation.

There is clearly some unreported crime at Denver Skatepark, but the vast majority of it is minor. No major crimes were witnessed and all questioned insisted that theft is the only major crime that occurs at Denver Skatepark. Purportedly, fights rarely occur and those that do involve eight-year-olds (pers. comm.). People have been known to smoke marijuana (pers. comm.) at the skatepark, but this was not witnessed. The most common issue at Denver Skatepark is graffiti. Every weekday the city maintenance crew comes in and removes graffiti. That is correct, five days a week. Despite this diligence, multiple people were witnessed spray painting the surface of Denver Skatepark. One person was even willing to answer questions about crime while spray painting the skatepark. While frustrating for the city, the “graffiti problem” is well under control, as evidenced by the conspicuous absence of graffiti.

A pat on the back.

The odd thing about Denver Skatepark is that, there are no other skateparks in the city, it is the first. As opposed to starting small and seeing how the park was received, they built the largest, and possibly the nicest, skatepark in America. The city did not get their "feet wet" with skateparks, they drowned. Bold moves are rare from government, but this move could be described no other way. The city should be commended for the vision and resolve required to see this project through. Of course the government needed to be convinced by numerous determined citizens, but that is nothing new. Politics always seems to work that way.

Despite the minor issues mentioned above, almost everyone asked felt that Denver Skatepark is a benefit to the city. Even those who were not advocates of the skatepark tended to feel that it was a good idea, but it has caused other issues that need to be addressed. By many measures Denver Skatepark is a success today and will be in the future. Many cities
would have thrown a few thousand dollars at a skatepark solely to justify they skateboarding ban. Fortunately, Denver decided to invest the money and do it right.

Though not a research question, the reader may be wondering if building Denver Skatepark has stopped skateboarding on the 16th street mall. The brief answer is no. As any skateboarder will confirm, skating street is completely different from skating at a skatepark. A portion of skateboarders love street and will always find new places to grind. What is important is that many skateboarders like skateparks and will gladly skate at one, as opposed to continually running from the cops. Denver Skatepark has undoubtedly taken some of the skateboarding pressure off many places in Denver, but some people will always skate street.

Denver Skatepark lacks the gritty urban feel or counter-culture mystique of the other sites in this study, but Denver Skatepark has its own distinct personality. Denver Skatepark may be a bit sanitized, but it is tough to convince a skateboarder that there is something wrong with an acre-and-half of concrete. Regardless, the sanitized appearance is all for show, so the public doesn’t get upset. It is a small price to pay for a world-class skatepark. The people skating at Denver Skatepark likely care little for the appearance of the concrete they skate on. All they care about is the feel of the concrete and the silence of powerless flight. After all, Denver Skatepark exists for a singular purpose, to be skated. Everything else is just fluff.
Burnside Skatepark needs no introduction, which is fortunate because no introduction would do it justice. Tucked under the Burnside Bridge in Portland, Oregon, is the original outlaw skatepark, built by skaters, for skaters, without the sanction of the city. Fed up with not being able to skate anywhere in Portland, a few disgruntled and industrious skateboarders took matters into their own hands and built an icon.

The story of Burnside would make a perfect B movie. It has the rambunctious youth endlessly toiling, pouring concrete ramps in an abandoned criminogenic nook of the city for the unadulterated love of skateboarding. The local skateboarders tenaciously defended their site, removing unsavory criminal elements, in general making the area a better place to live. Of course the oppressive city begins to interfere with the skateboarders' concrete expression. It goes without saying that the city “just doesn’t get” why they built a skatepark, or even why they skate. As the city, aka “the man”, begins to come down on the skateboarders, the rambunctious youth are forced to go legit. A dramatic political battle begins, and with the help of a few adults that “do get it”, the skateboarders are victorious. Burnside is saved from the jackhammer and, prospers forever after. Final closure is provided during a scene where the intrepid builders create a company called Dreamland Skateparks and then make a living building skateparks across the nation. The only thing missing is the hot blond love interest who can, of course, skate better than most of the guys. It could even be billed as a true story, with the exception of the blond. Artistic license would be required to get the rating down to PG-13, but it would be the feel good hit of the summer for the rebellious teen crowd.
Even without the dramatic story, Burnside would be the king among skateparks. To begin with, the curves themselves are legendary. Many consider Burnside the best designed skatepark in America, despite the mere 9,000 square feet it occupies. Continuous, smooth concrete slopes defy verbal description, but reveal themselves through the act of skateboarding. Tales of climbing up the punk wall and the crushing gee’s of the big bowl are testament to the curves, not the story, of Burnside. In addition, numerous professional skateboarders cut their teeth at Burnside, while many others with mad skills remain in obscurity, shredding day after day performing tricks worthy of a magazine layout.

The atmosphere is of a barely controlled chaos, people whizzing by on skateboards and occasionally coming within inches of each other. Yet all the skateboarders know exactly where they are on the concrete and instinctually avoid collisions. Some people say that the skateboarders at Burnside have an attitude, which is likely true. The local’s attitude is justified in the house their hands built, visitors on the other hand, need to check their attitudes at the door. Come to Burnside as a humble skateboarder on a pilgrimage, showing the proper respect to locals, and there will be no problems. Like any guest, wait patiently in line, ask before taking pictures, and pick up after yourself. They will let anyone handle Burnside who can, but remember it is always with the locals’ unspoken permission.

If Burnside was built solely as an inspiration for the skateboarding community, it would have been a worthy project, but Burnside was built with far purer motives. The locals fought for and built Burnside for the simple pleasure of skateboarding. It was constructed for the rumble of wheels on concrete culminating in a brief period of powerless flight, only to come down with a thud and roll away as if it was the natural state of man. Perhaps for the
locals it is their natural state, despite the looks of amazement plastered on the faces of the rest of humanity.

Welcome to Burnside, the first and best outlaw skatepark in the world. Taste the electricity in the air and witness the history being made. This palace is second to none in culture or construction. It is an example of the power of fanaticism and ingenuity. The lesson can apply to endeavors well beyond skateboarding. Fortunately the lesson was applied to skateboarding. Feeble words simply don’t do it justice, Burnside must be experienced to be believed, just be sure to mind your manners.

History

The history of Burnside Skatepark is a bit of a legend. Mere utterance of the lore surrounding Burnside should be done in reverent tones and accompanied by a small choir. Unfortunately a choir was not available so the reader’s imagination will have to provide the necessary harmonies.

So it is told.

In the beginning, in the year of 1990, there was a flat patch of concrete underneath the shelter of the Burnside Bridge. In perpetually damp Portland where it seems to routinely rain for forty days and forty nights, the area under the bridge would stay dry. There was little to recommend the site to local skateboarders. There were no ramps, nor curves, nor slopes of any kind, only one massive wall looming to the west. Regardless, local skateboarders began to congregate under the bridge and socialize between kick flips. As a bonus, the Portland Police rarely ventured to the shaded underbelly of Burnside Bridge. This same environment encouraged others besides skateboarders to settle with less benign
intentions. Aside from skateboarding, which was a crime everywhere in Portland, there were multiple vagrants, prostitute and drug dealers under the bridge. Perhaps this was a blessing because it provided a smokescreen for the persecuted skateboarders. As stated in the book of Keith David Hamm, under the bridge served as, “a somewhat safe zone from the Portland cops, who in truth were more likely to bust the illicit debauchery of the prevailing blow-jobs-for crack economy than to brandish their ticket books at bored skateboarders” (Hamm 2004). Time passed and things were fair, certainly not the Promised Land, but things were fair.

Things began to change the hollowed day that locals Bret Taylor, Osage Buffalo, and Chuck Willis arrived under the Burnside Bridge with a bucket, shovel, quickcrete, and a few beers. Shoveling the prevalent trash into the corner between the looming western wall, they created a rough concrete transition. The humble mound was distinctly ghetto, but did provide the brave with a slope up the wall. The small mound was just the beginning. Soon after, Mark “Red” Scott, caught in the righteous fervor, created another, larger transition allowing further accents up the wall. Then a core group, led by the fanatic work of Red Scott, began to erect more ramps. Before long there were multiple ramps up the wall providing multiple possibilities for the disenfranchised Portland skateboarders (Willis 2004). From there, the fabled antics that Burnside is notorious for ensued, all involving a skateboard and many involving beer. A little of a good thing was all it took to become possessive and the locals began to consider their small ramps “their space”. The other “inhabitants” were told to leave, now. If vagrants, prostitutes, and junkies did not do as asked, then the locals showed them the error of their ways. Soon all that was left were the local skateboarders and their make-shift ramps (Hamm 2004).

May I see your construction permit?

Unfortunately, the previously ignored faithful began to attract the attention of the city government and Burnside’s first trial was upon them. Ironically, drug dealing, prostitution, and vagrancy do not attract the attention of the city, but unsanctioned concrete is a completely different matter. Portland, as many cities, tends to look down on unsanctioned construction on city property. After all, what is a government there for, if not to provide its
sanction? Understandably the city wanted the construction stopped, and perhaps even destroyed. Fortunately the skateboarders had a guardian angel looking down on them from her fourth story window.

When the city demanded to know why they should let clandestine construction continue, Joanne Ferrero spoke up. The owner of a neighboring car part business, Ferrero had watched the skateboarders build ramps, paint over graffiti and run off the “undesirable elements” from their humble constructions. From her lofty heights she saw something grow from nothing, and she was impressed. Not only did Ferrero pontificate the praises of a budding Burnside to the city, but she also convinced her neighboring property owners (Dawdy 2001). Fortunately, soon other political angels joined the fight. Linda Dobson, an aide in the Parks Bureau, was converted to the cause of Burnside. In addition, there was Mayor Clarke’s son, Nick, who skated Burnside regularly and even contributed to its construction (Hamm 2004). Finally, the local skateboarders themselves petitioned the neighboring landowners for tolerance, and received it.

In the year of 1992, the city realized that no one in the area was complaining, so the city officially sanctioned Burnside. Of course this sanction would be repealed and the jackhammer applied if anyone in the area began to complain. The actual verbiage of the edict is the Burnside locals need to maintain “continued good neighbor relations with the surrounding business and community as a whole.” If they fail at this task then “their use of the site may be terminated at any time.” (Hamm 2004)
The tenuous sanction of the city carried an obvious threat, but carried with it no economic benefits. The city did not contribute any materials nor provide any amenities to Burnside. The locals were even denied any part of $41,000 that was earmarked by the parks department specifically for skatepark construction. That money was given to a private, pay-to-skate facility that fittingly failed within two years (Dhalgren 2005).

**Just dump it right here.**

Until now Burnside was a rough piecemeal affair that had undeniable “quirks” resulting from multiple small pours and questionable concrete skills. This would all change when construction of an I-84 highway interchange began a hundred yards away. A deal was struck with a major supplier, Ross Island Cement, that all extra concrete from the interchange would be dumped at Burnside. With a steady supply of concrete, Burnside expanded to the 9,000 square feet seen today (Willis, 2004).

Now Burnside was fast and smooth, possessing some of the finest curves in America. It is not just that it was built, but that it was built so well. The legend of Burnside quickly grew and drew skateboarders from the traditional bastion of skateboarding, California. Soon everyone wanted to skate Burnside, and the curves themselves insured they took away a story. Some people shredded while others were humbled, but all were reverent.

The Promised Land had arrived and those who labored to create it were rewarded. For over ten years Burnside has been the archetype renegade skatepark. Tucked in a shady part of town, the skatepark is a definite improvement over the previous use as a refuge of junkies and hookers. Apparently that was enough to maintain “good relations” because few neighbors have complained and the police have left well enough alone. In addition to
rewarding local skateboarders, Burnside served as an example for numerous other renegade skateparks. Burnside is likely responsible for the disenfranchised skaters in Philadelphia taking matters into their own hands at FDR Skatepark. Though some may argue other skateparks have better lines or more room, no one argues about the best skatepark, that title is deservedly held by Burnside.

With Burnside’s place firmly entrenched in the skateboarding canon, it is unlikely that the city would now seriously consider its destruction. Ironically the greatest threat to Burnside may be an act of construction, not destruction, in the form of the Burnside Bridgehead Project. This slick proposal from Opus Northwest LLC includes residential and commercial space in a “pedestrian friendly” environment. Fortunately the talk of a “big box” store such as Lowe’s moving in to anchor the commercial development as been abandoned.

The proposal notes the existence of the skatepark and says that it does not want interfere, but the surrounding environment will certainly change. Perhaps the most appealing aspect of the site to skateboarders was that it was so bad, that even they seemed like a positive influence. When the chipped walls and dirty corners are replaced with pristine white and glass architecture, not only will Burnside lose its urban appeal, but the skateboarders may not seem as desirable as they once were. As wise man Kent Dahlgren said, “It is one thing to know when skaters are around, but when you run into some lady and spill her four dollar latte, it is another matter.” (Dahlgren 2005) Regardless, this story is of the past and those answers lie in the future. For now, Burnside exists in all of its glory.
It is around here somewhere.

Burnside Skatepark is conveniently hidden under the east end of the Burnside Bridge in central Portland. Technically Burnside is in two neighborhoods, Buckman and Kerns. To the north of Burnside Street is Kerns while to the south is Buckman. Despite Burnside’s dual residency, the area is far more closely associated with the Buckman neighborhood. First, the only reasonable route to Burnside Skatepark is to the south through the Buckman neighborhood. Second, all of Burnside’s neighbors, with the exception of a parking lot to the north, are in the Buckman neighborhood. Finally, the commercial opportunities used by the local skateboarders, such as convenience stores and bars, are in the Buckman neighborhood.
The best way to describe the Buckman neighborhood is “a little sketchy”. Buckman is nowhere near a ghetto, but it is certainly not the “good part of town”. The neighborhood consists of industrial districts and apartment buildings. In fact, 84% of the people in Buckman rent and slightly over 50% of the people live alone. It is not surprising that 52% of Buckman residents are 22-39 years old (City of Portland 2005). This is a young, moderately populated area with few permanent residents. Perhaps because of the youthful residents, Buckman has been referred to as having a “fun and funky feel” (Portland Neighborhood.com 2005). Unfortunately, George Clinton was not able to be consulted and the funk confirmed.

As a whole the neighborhood is fairly clean, though graffiti and trash are occasionally evident. Buckman does have a well-earned reputation for having its share of crime, but again this is not a ghetto. It is a neighborhood where a pedestrian needs to pay attention, though the timid should find elsewhere to stroll. Perhaps the most consistent problem in the neighborhood is with the homeless. A reminder that no good deed goes unpunished, St Francis church provides numerous social services for area homeless. As a result, many homeless have taken up residence in a local park across the street from St. Francis. The park has become a camp of sorts and neighbors are understandably concerned with the behaviors, some criminal, which are occurring there (Neighborhood Link 2005).

The area immediately surrounding Burnside Skatepark is mostly industrial. To both the south and west there are brick warehouses complete with frequent semi traffic. To the north there is a long rectangular parking lot. Fortunately there are plenty of spare parking spots to accommodate the Burnside locals. To the east is a small, apparently inactive, loading dock. The loading dock is deep in the shadow of the bridge. The shade creates dark
corners making this area a little questionable. Fortunately, once eyes adjust to the gloom, the entire loading dock can be seen. There is an occasional homeless person sleeping the day away, but that’s the extent of activity on the dock.

In short, there is very little in the area other than the loading dock, adjacent warehouses, a few semis, and Burnside. There are almost no windows in the adjacent brick warehouses which look down onto Burnside. Those who do have access to the rare window likely have a tremendous view of locals screaming across the concrete. As previously mentioned, a low profile location for illegal construction was a necessity, and this is as low as it gets. Outside of the 9,000 square feet there is no indication a skatepark is nearby. In fact it is hard to see Burnside until right on top of it. Fortunately, the low sound of wheels on concrete can be heard from fifty yards, leading skateboarders directly to the Promised Land.

**This is the mythic Burnside?**

People expecting to hear a chorus triumphantly singing “Hallelujah” upon arrival at Burnside may be slightly disappointed. It’s not that Burnside is not impressive, it is. Secure in its superiority, Burnside does not awe people by professing its own self worth, as the archetype of outlaw skateparks. There are few murals or glorification of any kind, even the name “Burnside” is not even readily apparent. Despite its reputation, Burnside remains humble, even plain. The aesthetic is less like the Vatican and more like a small country church, low on money and big on faith.

Those bold enough to view Burnside from the inactive loading dock are rewarded with a panoramic view. The dock is elevated at least 15 feet above the Burnside surface, providing an open view of the vast majority of Burnside. The only thing hidden from view is the depths of the big bowl. The curves
themselves look like other premier skateparks, which is not surprising considering Burnside, in many ways, has set the standard. Many of Burnside builders went on to form Dreamland Skateparks, considered by many the best in the business. Even though Burnside is small, every inch is professional quality showing no sign of donated materials or amateur labor. The transitions are quick, but smooth and allow for some impressive air. During the site visit, Burnside was sporting a fresh coat of paint in an eye-numbing blue and orange color scheme. Though the paint has undeniably covered some graffiti, it is surprising how clean the surface is. There is almost no trash or graffiti evident. Many parks cared for by tax-payer-funded city maintenance crews are not half as clean.

Despite the legend, Burnside is not packed with a hundred people pushing for a spot in line. There are closer to twenty casually lining the edge taking a run when the mood strikes them. During the down time the locals talk to their friends, with laughter occasionally rising above the conversation. The mood is very causal and undeniably local. They all know each other and most are happy to see their fellow skateboarders. There is a distinct lack of hierarchy, giving Burnside a slight socialist air. It is rumored that at Burnside everyone is treated equally, even the sponsored pros leave their ego at the door (Balcom, pers. comm.). Despite their reputation, most people are willing to talk to outsiders as long as outsiders mind their manners. They are proud of their skatepark and are willing to talk about it. This is understandable considering there is so much to be proud of.

Abandoned does not mean empty

An abandoned space is rarely an empty space and few spaces were more abandoned than Burnside. Located in a marginal neighborhood and buried within a riverside warehouse district, many people couldn’t find Burnside if they tried. It is not surprising that the space
was a haven for crime. Though unfortunate that this was the only place tolerant of skateboarding, the locals worked with what they had. From these questionable beginnings Burnside grew into an icon of the skateboarding world.

The trash littering the ground was replaced with concrete and the "pervious inhabitants" were sent packing. This is more than an outlaw skatepark, this is guerrilla urban renovation. The cause was noble and the cause was just. For their efforts, locals were rewarded with the sanction of their neighbors and eventually the city. Now all Burnside needs is the continued sanction of their neighbors. For all those watching, this is an example of what can be done to a neighborhood with hard work and dedication to an ideal, in this case skateboarding. Burnside is a perfect example of it being easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.

Sociological Criteria

With the advent of GIS crime mapping, it has become clear that criminal activity tends to be clustered around specific sites. This logically leads to the conclusion that some places may have physical qualities that predispose them to crime. As previously done with FDR and Denver Skatepark, Burnside will be assessed according to three place-based criminological theories. This is done to assess if the physical qualities of the space contribute to or reduce the possibility of crime occurring at Burnside. The first theory is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by sociologist Ray Jeffery (1977). The second theory will be Defensible Space by architect Oscar Newman (1976). The third theory will be Broken Windows by sociologists James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). The three theories were reviewed in a more detailed manner in the Sociological Theories section of this text.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

As previously stated, Jeffery's theory gives multiple factors, but two primary factors influence the amount of crime on a given site. These factors are accessibility and
surveillance. The more difficult it is to arrive and leave the site the less crime it will have. In addition, the more surveillance that is present on a site the less crime it is likely to have.

**What is the quickest way out of here?**

Although Burnside Skatepark is under the bridge of a main thoroughfare, it is not simple to access. There is no direct route to the area from Burnside Street, the easiest route requires a two block detour east on Burnside Street, followed by a block south on MLK Boulevard and finally backtracking two blocks west on SE Ankeny Street. Those with a good sense of direction should have few problems, but others would certainly have some difficulty. Only one road runs along side Burnside Skatepark, NE 2nd Avenue. NE 2nd does run north and south but only the south could be used for a possible escape route. To the north the road quickly comes to a dead end in a large parking lot. The southern direction feeds into the grid of Portland but does not provide access to a major road without jogging east two blocks to MLK Boulevard. MLK Boulevard is a major north/ south street through Portland. From MLK Boulevard, a trip one block north will connect with Burnside Street, another major road through Portland.

To the east of Burnside Skatepark is the inactive loading dock which connects with SE 3rd. It is worth noting that the loading dock doubles as private parking for the adjacent building. If parked there, a criminal could escape slightly quicker because they would be one block closer to MLK. Both 2ed and 3rd Streets are purely access roads and see very little traffic. Though Burnside is slightly off the beaten path, it is in central Portland. In a car it does not take long to reconnect with the massive infrastructure of Portland and disappear.
The possibilities of escaping a crime on foot at Burnside are the same, only slower. The west one row of warehouses, then the massive I-5 Expressway effectively shuts down this avenue of escape. It is unlikely that this suicidal 70-mph game of Frogger is anymore popular with Burnside’s I-5 than it is with FDR’s I-95. Taking a northern escape route will lead to the same discovery of a dead end only quicker, at the I-5 and I-84 intersection. It is possible to make it out of the massive interchange on foot and alive, but the adventure would still require successful navigation of at least one major highway. To call this safe, or even a viable option, is stretching it.

The inactive loading dock to the east and NE 2nd to the west provide access to the city grid on foot as they did for cars. In the middle of the city there are few empty lots and there are no short cuts to be had. In addition, there are no large public buildings to enter and mix with the general public. There are just a few warehouses, a furniture store, and a car dealership. Once on MLK or Burnside, a perpetrator could conceivably catch a bus, but the exceptional timing required puts this option well beyond most criminals. Escaping Burnside on foot offers no additional possibilities but one additional problem. There is the possibility that someone may be in pursuit, likely with a skateboard in hand. In short, any escape on foot is questionable.

Ever get the feeling you are being watched?

Two parties provide surveillance of Burnside. The first party, the police, patrols the area providing surveillance mostly because it is their job. The second party observing the site is the general public, in this case, the local skateboarders. There is an occasional spectator but the vast majority of people at Burnside are part of the local skateboarding crowd.

As with all locations within the city of Portland, the police regularly patrol the area. It appears that the police patrols at Burnside are infrequent. According to Chad Balcom, “the police come by less” in relation to an average location in the city (Balcom 2005). This is understandable considering there are few attractions and fewer people in the area. In
addition, during the entire period of observation no police patrols were seen. On the rare occasion that the police do show up, according to Balcom, “They almost never stop.” As Balcom points out, “The last thing they (police) are worried about is what we are doing in the park.” (Balcom 2005)

Though there are two routes that the police can take to view the area surrounding Burnside, neither of them provides an open view. NE 3rd Avenue runs along the eastern side, but the vacant loading dock is between the skatepark and the road. Even during high noon on a sunny day the loading dock is drenched in deep shadow. Seeing into the loading dock is unlikely without military issue night vision goggles. Unfortunately, vagrants or people watching the action at Burnside often occupy this area. Regardless, seeing beyond the loading dock and into Burnside itself is impossible from the comfort of a police cruiser.

The other option is to drive by on NE 2nd Avenue on the west side of Burnside Skatepark. This route does not have anything obstructing the view, other than Burnside itself. The concrete wall that forms the western edge of the skatepark obscures the view inside the structure to the skating surface itself. The wall ranges from approximately ten feet at the corners down to approximately four feet in the center. If the officer left the police cruiser and walked up to the low part of the wall they could see in, but from the plush seating of the car nothing is visible. This view is not a complete loss however. Due to the lack of seating in the park itself, those socializing are often found along the western wall. Though any criminal activity within Burnside may be obscured, activity along the edge is easily observed.
As with previous sites, what the police are looking for is simple. They are looking for criminal activity or suspicious behavior that may indicate criminal activity. While some police are more energetic than others, typically all of them need a reason to get out of the car. Fortunately skateboarding is not a crime at Burnside and the locals seem to provide little reason for the police to put forth the effort to investigate further. Besides, as will be discussed later, the police are provided with many legitimate reasons to get out of their car other places in the neighborhood.

The local skateboarders are also part of the surveillance of Burnside. In the early morning hours Burnside is vacant, but by late morning there is usually someone skateboarding in the park. The crowd slowly grows and by mid afternoon there is as many as thirty people skating and hanging out at the park. The crowd stays until sundown when darkness signals an end to the day. Currently Burnside does not have lights, but the local skateboarders are currently attempting to find the funding to have lights installed.

Whom the crowd includes changes through out the day, but the majority of the people are Burnside locals. Few other people appear at Burnside. Occasionally a young kid shows up with their parents in tow, but it is unusual. There are infrequent spectators, referred to locally as “lurkers” (Balcom 2005). Finally, there is the rare seasoned skateboarder on a pilgrimage to Burnside, who hopefully left his attitude at home. It is a very conservative estimate to say that 90% of the people at Burnside are locals. This is not to say that they are all skateboarding at the time, but they are all Burnside skateboarders.

To a skateboarder standing on a ledge waiting for a run, all of Burnside and most of the surrounding area is easily viewed. Like most outlaw skateparks, Burnside was built up,
not dug out, meaning that all the places to stand are elevated. The elevated view combined with the fact there are few places to stand means that everyone in Burnside can see everyone else. The elevated position also allows people in Burnside a panoramic view of the exterior space immediately surrounding Burnside. The one exception is the inactive loading dock, which is hidden from view. The loading dock is approximately fifteen feet higher than Burnside, preventing a clear view.

The few places to stand at Burnside means that people not in line for a run often gather around the perimeter. The most popular places for socializing are the inactive eastern loading dock and perimeter of the west wall. The loading dock provides the best view but this spot is not as heavily used as the west wall. The primary reason people gather on the west wall is that it allows someone to socialize with people in line for runs. Occasionally someone hangs out on the north wall, but the view and social opportunities from there are lacking. The eastern wall provides no opening to see the action, and is effectively cut off from the Burnside. Few people stand at the eastern wall, but the area is still easily viewed from the elevated perches within Burnside itself.

As previously stated, Burnside is a social place, where people look for their friends. Pretty much everyone notices every person that walks in. Outsiders are immediately tagged. It may be possible for a local to “hide in plain sight” but for others it is impossible. The possibility of an outsider blending into the crowd is slim, and the chances of an outsider committing a crime unseen are non-existent. Purportedly, the locals have kicked people out of Burnside for no reason (Balcom 2005), if given a reason there is little doubt the offender would quickly be told to leave.

Not a nightmare, but not exactly a dream either.

Original local Kent Dahlgren is clearly familiar with the CPTED theory and proclaims Burnside a “CPTED nightmare” (Dahlgren 2005). Though this is perhaps overstated, there is little to recommend Burnside in CPTED theory. Though not on a main thoroughfare, the east/west Burnside Street and north/south MLK Boulevard are only two
blocks away, providing a quick escape by car. The local police have severely limited ability to observe Burnside from their car, which they apparently rarely leave. The only saving grace is that the local skateboarders have wide-open views of Burnside, particularly from the elevated perches in the corners. Though this may seem like the fox watching the hen house, it is important to remember exactly who is addressing crime at Burnside. According to the legend of Burnside, the local skateboarders have been more willing to and effective at reducing crime in the area than the police are.

Defensible Space

Burnside could be the poster child for Defensible Space theory. The story of Burnside reflects the theory so strongly, it is a wonder that modern adherents to the theory do not cite Burnside as an example. Oscar Newman’s theory of defensible space suggests that once a group becomes invested in a space then they will begin to regulate behavior in the space. The locals will challenge behaviors deemed unacceptable, the end result is the “undesirable elements” will go elsewhere. Actual legal ownership of the space is not required, only investment by the people who occupy the space. As Newman discovered, investment can be problematic to directly measure. Perhaps the only method of measuring investment is to look at what the residents, in this case the local skateboarders, both do and say about their skatepark.

We built it, is that invested enough?

Beginning with the obvious, the locals built Burnside, and few further qualifications are necessary. Work, particularly volunteer labor, is perhaps the quickest and strongest way to become invested in a site. It could be a skatepark or a formal garden, as long as their sweat went into it, the builders are invested. In addition to the actual labor that went into Burnside, a significant amount of money was invested. Many of the materials were donated, but particularly in the early years, the
concrete was purchased by financially strapped skateboarders. To see the locals’ investment is simple, just go to Burnside, its very existence is literally, and figuratively, concrete evidence of investment.

In addition, the local skateboarders maintain Burnside, keeping it in surprisingly good condition. They pick up after themselves and others with efficiency any parks supervisor would approve of. There is no formal cleaning crew, so the cleaning can be sporadic, but multiple locals were seen cleaning up messes they did not make. To Chad Balcom “It’s like picking up your room.”(Blacorn 2005) The end result of the communal cleaning crew is a tidy Burnside. As part of the maintenance, locals regularly paint Burnside to control the graffiti using their own time, labor, and, perhaps most importantly, money.

It is also important to remember that Burnside began in 1990. The work done by locals to build and maintain Burnside has been going on for a stunning fifteen years. Their investment is not a fad, this is a self-perpetuating culture that continues to instill investment to the new blood that flows into Burnside. Despite Burnside’s advanced age, there are few, if any, signs of deterioration. With a fresh coat of paint, Burnside looks like it could have been built only a couple of years prior.

Perhaps the most significant verbal indicator of investment in Burnside is how they refer to it. The terms “Burnside” and “our skatepark” are used interchangeably, and the possessive is used about as often as the actual name. The use of the possessive voice was common among many different locals (pers. comm.). Chad Balcom believes that “People will have a sense of ownership at any good quality park,” he continues, “But at Burnside we especially have a sense of ownership.” (Balcom 2005) Kent Dahlgren put it simply “If you love your park you won’t allow a bunch of deviance.” (Dahlgren 2005) It is clear that the locals do love Burnside and it is also clear that they won’t allow much deviance.
All of you need to leave. Yes now.

According to Newman’s Defensible Space theory once a group gains investment in a space, they will defend it against all who would wish it harm. This is exactly what happened at Burnside. From Burnside’s humble beginnings as a wall with a deformed lump of concrete, the local builders protected their investment. From the start the drug dealers and prostitutes were sent packing from the area. Legend has it that the criminal element was told to leave and many of them did. According to Kent Dahlgren, the criminal element, particularly the homeless, take the path of least resistance. Just the act of confronting the criminal element was enough to make the majority of them leave. If the person did not get the message then they, as a last resort, were physically removed from the park.

Dahlgren plays down these stories, not denying that they are true, but suggesting they have been romanticized well out of proportion (Dahlgren 2005). These tales have undeniably grown during repeated telling, but the accounts are likely based on real life stories.

Perhaps the locals can be a bit too defensive, as in the incident with Oregon Public Television. A camera crew from the television station showed up to film Burnside for a television program. Much to the crew’s surprise, when they showed up they were not exactly welcomed. It is unclear what exactly was said by the locals to the camera crew. What is clear is that the crew did feel threatened and was shown the metaphorical door. Despite this, the tenacious camera crew returned to Burnside with a crew of a different sort, a security crew. With the assistance of hired thugs, the camera crew took the images they desired (Dahlgren 2005). The television program has not aired so it is impossible to know if the publicity will be positive or negative, but it is likely that the locals’ initial response to the camera crew will be mentioned.
Good to meet you, I'm your local skateboarder.

Unfortunately the local vagrants, prostitutes and drug dealers, are not the only people that Burnside needed to be defended against. Perhaps the most serious threat to the skatepark was the city of Portland. While it undeniably takes some investment to kick awake a junkie and tell them to get the hell out, perhaps it took even more investment to do the unthinkable, to kiss vast quantities of political ass. According to Dahlgren, despite the exaggerated stories, the real reason that Burnside exists is that the local skateboarders made sure they were in the good graces of their neighbors (Dahlgren 2005). Dealing with the homeless and drug addicts may be physically threatening, but when the city needed a reason not to jackhammer the park, their reputation with their neighbors is what saved Burnside.

The locals would actively petition the surrounding landowners, knocking on their doors singing the praises of their patch of concrete. Locals remained landowners of the unsavory element that the skateboarders ejected. Skateboarders kept the area clean of trash and graffiti performing more maintenance than the legal owner of the space. According to Dahlgren, the fabled antics at Burnside were kept deliberately low key. Dahlgren states, “It wasn’t that chaotic, we didn’t want to blow it.” (Dahlgren 2005) Though it is unlikely that the local skateboarders were altar boys in their spare time, it is clear that their indiscretions were not publicized to their tolerant neighbors.

Today, the local skateboarders at Burnside have an easier time with their neighbors now that the groundwork of brown-nosing as been laid. With a positive relationship with their neighbors established, all the locals have to do is maintain the positive vibe, which apparently they are doing. The area is still actively defended and maintained by the locals, in turn pleasing the surrounding landowners. Some have concerns that certain events may have damaged Burnside's reputation (Dahlgren 2005). The locals’ hostile reaction to the camera crew, or a rare flying beer bottle, is certainly not helping, but they have yet to cause Burnside’s demise. Perhaps the surrounding land owners are ignorant or simply don’t care, but there are currently no complaints about Burnside from its neighbors.
Can’t make it any clearer.

It is obvious that Burnside Skatepark is defended space. The investment in the space is evidenced by the fact it physically exists and is rigorously maintained. The space was also physically defended in the past and still is defended in the present. Perhaps even more impressive is the social and political defense that has been mounted to insure Burnside's continued existence. With few exceptions, no one likes to kiss ass. Great effort and discipline is required for individualistic skateboarders to swallow their pride and ask for acceptance. To say that Burnside is defended is an understatement. More accurate is Burnside is defended against all comers, in all venues, even if they have to go “legit” to do so.

Broken Windows

As previously mentioned Broken Windows theory developed, by Wilson and Kelling (1982), is a slippery slope argument. The theory states that once small signs of neglect are seen then it will attract larger amounts of crime. The rationale is that people look for unsupervised, abandoned spaces to commit criminal acts. The signs of neglect include numerous “incivilities” such as graffiti, trash, vagrancy, and of course, broken windows. The logical appeal of this theory is further supported by the correlation of high crime areas and the presence of the aforementioned incivilities.

Sure looks nice.

Like FDR Skatepark, Burnside is located in the archetype of a lost space, underneath a bridge. These spaces are notorious for providing people with the seclusion to engage in criminal acts. The incivilities mentioned in Broken Windows theory are commonplace in the abandoned areas under bridges. In fact, prior to Burnside’s construction the space exhibited numerous of these
incivilities and the accompanying crime. As the legend states, these incivilities and accompanying crime were unceremoniously removed from the area. Apparently the myth is a reality because now few incivilities are present.

The overall appearance of Burnside, and outlaw structure, is much like city-sponsored skateparks across the country. The skatepark has none of the haphazard appearance of FDR, with chain link fence or fifty-five gallon drums peeking out of the concrete. Perhaps the first incarnation of Burnside was rough, but today the concrete work is brought to an unbelievable finish. The arrangement with Ross Island Cement to dump their excess concrete allowed nearly daily pours creating a unified skin to be laid over the earlier concrete attempts. The learning curve was swift resulting smooth surface is blisteringly fast and transitions that are near perfect. Burnside shows no sign of its outlaw origin, it unquestionably looks professionally done in every way, which is not surprising. After all, Dreamland Skateparks built Burnside, just before they declared themselves professional.

The simple correlation is that people make trash, and the more people, the more trash. Despite what is universally taught by mothers, not everyone cleans up after himself. Yet, Burnside is almost completely absent of trash. Of course the concrete is kept clean, but the surrounding areas are also surprisingly clean. There is very little trash of any kind to be found on north, south or west sides of Burnside. Trash does occasionally appear, but within twenty-four hours someone has picked it up and put it in a trashcan. Considering the city does not do maintenance on Burnside, someone else is obviously picking up trash. This undocumented maintenance crew is undoubtedly the local skateboarders. The one place that trash does occasionally appear is on the elevated loading dock to the east.

The trash on the elevated loading dock to the east is not excessive, but present. Typical trash, such as paper coffee cups and crushed beer cans do appear here. According to Chad Balcom, the loading dock receives periodic maintenance, but not as regularly as rest of the area surrounding Burnside. Typical locals gather on the western or northern edges of Burnside. As a result not everyone considers the eastern loading dock park of Burnside, so
maintenance is sporadic. Some locals do occasionally clean up the loading dock, so the trash does not get too thick (Balcom 2005).

With the exception of the aforementioned beer cans there is no evidence of drug use at Burnside or in the immediate surrounding area. When surveyed, Burnside contained no pipes, roaches, or syringes. There were no plastic baggies, large for marijuana, small for everything else, on the site. Of course this does not mean there is no drug use at the site. In fact, a story about Burnside tells of concrete being floated with a heroin spoon, but these spoons were nowhere to be found when surveyed. Regardless, there is no physical indication that Burnside is a safe place to get high.

Graffiti is almost non-existent at the site or the surrounding area. When surveyed Burnside had just received a new coat of paint in anticipation of the annual Halloween party, so it is difficult to assess how much graffiti was covered up. Burnside is regularly painted and a review of old photos also shows very little graffiti. The conclusion can be drawn that graffiti may appear, but it is temporal art at best, as it will be painted over soon. When a local who was painting Burnside was asked if he regretted covering up the graffiti, his response was emphatic. The answer was stated, Jeopardy- style in the form of a question, “Why should I care? This place is for us, not them. Right?” (pers. comm.)

The exception to the “no graffiti” attitude is the work of a man named Jay Meer. Meer is the only one allowed to spray paint at Burnside. Meer is a local skateboarder who is also a graffiti artist, and is encouraged to throw up pieces when the inspiration hits him (Willis 2004). These are not simple tags, but works of artistic talent and discretion. Despite the quality, much of the work is pained over, but Meer periodically comes back to revisit his
Locals will say that graffiti is not welcome at Burnside, but all quickly except Meer from rule (pers. comm.). The result is a few exceptional pieces highlighted by a clean concrete backdrop. Though graffiti has a limited presence at Burnside, this does not seem to act as a visual clue to other graffiti artists. The only work is Meer’s and no one else’s graffiti seems to be tolerated.

Perhaps the only incivility present at Burnside is up on the eastern loading dock. As previously mentioned, this area does not receive constant maintenance like rest of the surrounding area (Balcom 2005). Aside from the aforementioned trash there is some evidence of vagrancy. During the period surveyed there was one bum sleeping in a dark corner. Other evidence of vagrancy included occasional piles of clothes or blankets. The exact contents of the pile were understandably not confirmed. There was also the faint smell of urine and body odor. Purportedly, vagrancy was a more serious problem when a soup kitchen, Bologna Joe’s, was open in the near vicinity (Dahlgren 2005). Currently there is not a homeless problem, but the dark corners likely encourage vagrancy, if not actively prevented. Again, the loading dock is not strongly associated with Burnside by some locals so it may suffer from a small lack of “maintenance”.

**Just don’t mind the loading dock.**

The dreaded incivilities that spiral an area down the dark depths of crime and debauchery rarely make an appearance at Burnside. The area primary inhabited by the local skateboarders is clean and tidy. In fact, Burnside is cleaner than many of parks maintained by the city. Graffiti is nowhere to be seen with the exception of Jay Meer’s work. There is no sign that criminal activity is present or tolerated. The lone exception is the rarely inhabited loading dock to the east. Not considered part of Burnside by many, there is some
evidence of vagrancy and trash. Though not excessive, there is sparse evidence of these incivilities. When these infrequent incivilities are combined with the perpetually shaded architectural reality of the space, the area does seem a little sketchy. In fairness to the locals, even the loading dock is periodically maintained and there is little the locals can do about the deep shade cast by Burnside Bridge.

**OK, no place is perfect.**

When CPTED is applied to Burnside it does not fare well. Though the area is isolated there are major through fares that can provide a speedy escape, especially by car. In addition, it is nearly impossible for the police to view the interior of Burnside Skatepark from the preferred venue of an air-conditioned police cruiser. The only saving grace is that the local skateboarders themselves can see the entire area from multiple vantage points, particularly the elevated corners. This is fortunate because it seems that the locals’ themselves are more effective at deterring crime at the site than the police are.

The investment required in Newman’s Defensible space theory is clearly evident at Burnside. Not only is the investment apparent in the actual construction, but also the maintenance over Burnside’s fifteen-year life span. In addition, the locals have defended Burnside in the social and political areas. Very few people enjoy kissing butt, but the locals did what they had to do to please their neighbors and preserve their skatepark.

According to Broken Windows theory, the part of the skatepark occupied by the locals gives no indication of a neglected space, simply because it is not neglected. The locals keep it clean and free of “incivilities”. The exception is the elevated loading dock to the east that has some minor evidence of trash and vagrancy. Regardless, the occupied areas give no
indication that crime will be tolerated at Burnside, which is fortunate because potential criminals may find the space most unwelcoming.

Reported Crime in the Surrounding Area

As previously mentioned, the law requires local police to quantify crime and report the data to the FBI for use in the Uniform Crime Report. Those who are determined enough, can wade through the massive document and discover crime statistics for every major city in America. The beloved Freedom of Information Act also requires that police departments release this data on request to the public. Portland, like many cities, allows access to the data on the internet as opposed to fulfilling individual requests.

Portland presents the data at city and neighborhood scales. Typically a city will provide detail beyond the minimum FBI requirements in their crime statistics. This detail is always helpful but not consistent from city to city. The data presented here is meant to be referenced only to Portland and not to other cities, negating any reporting inconsistencies between different sites.

As in the previous studies, murder, rape and arson are excluded due to their fortunate rarity. Portland also includes statistics for molestation in their crime data, again the blessed rarity of this crime requires that it be excluded from the analysis.

A crime is still a crime.

As mentioned previously knowing exactly what the statistics represent is crucial to an accurate interpretation. As with previous chapters the specific definition of crime is required. The state of Oregon produces its own definition of crime, which is almost identical to the FBI’s definitions except for the wording. In the interest of accuracy the definitions of crime as defined by Oregon Law Enforcement Data System are listed below (Portland Police Bureau. 2005).
Robbery: The taking or attempting to take anything of value from a person or persons by force or threat of force.

Aggravated Assault: An attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or injury.

Burglary: The unlawful entry of a structure (both residential and non-residential) with intent to commit a theft.

Theft: The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Bicycle Theft and Theft from Automobile are subsections of theft.

Motor Vehicle Theft: The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle; includes motorcycles.

Vandalism: The willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of any public or private property.

A curious selection.

Unfortunately Portland does not benefit from a system like CrimeBase. Philadelphia’s CrimeBase provides excellent flexibility in both type of crime and geographic scale, but Portland’s statistics are far more limited in both respects.

First, the type of crimes that Portland chooses to publish is curious and limited with some surprising exclusions. After excluding the rare murder, rape, molestation and arson, there are only nine categories. The expected robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, auto theft and “other thefts” are included, but other assaults and drug violations are excluded. It would be assumed that these crimes are included in the “all others” category, if such a category existed. Equally odd is the inclusion of theft from auto, bike theft and vandalism. Perhaps
the police publish what the citizens have requested and in fairness most crimes are covered by the published Portland statistics. Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, the statistics' brevity limit their usefulness.

Second, the geographic scale is limited to the neighborhood or the city as a whole. Though lacking in flexibility, citing cities and neighborhoods is standard practice in crime statistics and expected. Unfortunately, it was unexpected that the physical location of Burnside straddles the boundary of two neighborhoods, Kerns and Buckman. The southern boundary of Kerns and northern boundary of Buckman is Burnside Street, which Burnside Skatepark is directly under. In theory, both neighborhoods could be potentially impacted by Burnside Skatepark. Despite the geographic location, Burnside is more strongly associated with the Buckman neighborhood. The crime statistics of Kerns are only included to provide a comparison to the Buckman neighborhood.
Despite these limitations, the Buckman crime statistics are relevant. They can show how prevalent crime is in the neighborhood in comparison to adjacent neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Buckman statistics are presented with three additional adjacent neighborhoods for comparison. These neighborhoods include Kerns, Sunnyside, and Hosford Abernathy. As with previous sections, the crimes included within the city limits of Portland are presented to provide additional context. It is important to note that the crimes represented here are crimes that are known and prosecuted by the police. As previously mentioned, this is not the number of actual crimes committed. The amount of crime that goes unreported at Burnside will be discussed in a later section.

Of course as the population of a neighborhood grows so do the number of crimes committed. To normalize the figures, as in previous sections, the raw numbers are provided along with the crimes per 1000 people. This allows for a direct comparison of neighborhoods of different numerical populations. Finally, with no further tiresome qualifiers, the following are the crime statistics for the Buckman Neighborhood for 2000-2004.

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(Portland Police Bureau, 2005)

Though the limited scope of the data restricts the conclusions drawn from it, the silver lining is that analysis is simplified. The purpose of these statistics is to provide a criminal context for Burnside Skatepark. By comparing Buckman and adjacent neighborhoods to the city as a whole it can be determined if Burnside is located in the “bad side” of town. The neighborhood statistics also give an idea how Buckman compares to adjacent neighborhoods regarding crime. The amount of crime present at Burnside Skatepark is dependent on knowing how much crime typically occurs in the larger geographic area.
Impressive. What do they mean again?

From 2000-2004 the Buckman neighborhood has more crime of all types than the city of Portland as a whole. The only exception was the "other theft" category which was often lower, but by a very small margin. Of total crimes committed per 1000 people, Buckman experienced, on average, 155% of the city rate. As suspected, some crimes were far over the city rate per 1000 people, including aggravated assault, bike theft and vandalism. The aggravated assault rate in Buckman was on average, 145% of the aggravated assault rate of the city per 1000 people. The Buckman vandalism rate was even higher at 188% of the city rate per 1000. Though a seemingly minor crime, the bike theft rate of Buckman was highest at 242% of the Portland rate.

It is clear that Buckman has an issue with crime in comparison to Portland as a whole. This issue is shared to a lesser extent by the Kerns neighborhood to the north. On average the Kerns neighborhood has 141% of total crime per 1000 people in comparison to the city at large. It is unsurprising that most of the individual crime rates in Kerns are above the city rate per 1000 people. To the east the Sunnyside and Hosford Abernathy neighborhoods are more in line with the city norms. Both neighborhoods averaged over the five years 109% of the crime per 1000 experienced by greater Portland. As expected, most crime rates hovered around the city rate with the exception of "other theft" in Sunnyside. In this area "other theft" was consistently high in comparison to the city, with an average of 128% of the city's per 1000 rate.

Considering the previous figures it is obvious that in terms of total crime Buckman does not compare favorably to its neighbors. Total crime in Buckman is 110% of Kerns, 143% of Sunnyside, and 143% of Hosford Abernathy per 1000 people. In many individual categories Buckman has the highest crime rate in comparison the surrounding neighborhoods. Occasionally Kerns takes the top spot in a specific crime, but this occurs far less frequently than Buckman. The exception is of course Sunnyside's problem with "other theft". Sunnyside has the dubious distinction of leading in this category.
As occurred when compared to the city, Buckman leads by wide margins in specific crimes when compared to its neighbors. Again, aggravated assault, vandalism and bike theft were constantly higher in Buckman than its neighbors over the five year period. The aggravated assault rate in Buckman is perhaps the most disturbing, at 139% of Kerns, 268% of Sunnyside, and 244% of Hosford Abernathy. The vandalism rates were also quite high at 122% of Kerns, 180% of Sunnyside, and 146% of Hosford Abernathy. In comparison, the minor crime of bike theft was also significantly higher in Buckman at 137% of Kerns, 123% of Sunnyside, and 147% of Hosford Abernathy.

The even shorter version.

In summery, the Buckman neighborhood has significantly more crime than the city average or the neighborhoods surrounding it. On average there is 155% of crime in Buckman per 1000 people than the city as a whole. The aggravated assault, vandalism, and bike theft rates are especially high in Buckman in comparison to the city of Portland. Buckman fares only slightly better when compared to its neighbors. Though Buckman total crime rates are only 110% of the Kerns neighborhood, Buckman records 143% of crime in comparison to Sunnyside and Hosford Abernathy. Again, as with city norms, the aggravated assault, vandalism, and bike theft rates are higher in comparison to adjacent neighborhoods.

In conclusion Buckman is not adjacent to a “bad neighborhood”, it is the “bad neighborhood”. Crime rates are significantly higher than the city norm or adjacent neighborhoods, but to assume that Buckman is a crime ridden cesspool of humanity would be hasty. Buckman is not a slum littered with homeless, where people fear to walk around after dark. According to Kent Dahlgren, “I’m not scared to walk around at night, but you need to pay attention.” (Dahlgren 2005) Buckman is not the worst neighborhood in Portland (that would seem to be Hollywood according to the stats) but it is a close contender.

No data is perfect.

This data is, of course, subject to error. With all data humans touch, they tend to screw it up. In the previous chapters this text has described a few of the endless ways that a
human error can occur. Again the most common suspect is an error in coding the information. A fertile imagination can provide endless scenarios that could cause error. Fortunately this task will be left to those with a fertile imagination. The data set itself must be assumed accurate, after all it is straight from the Portland Police Department. If the data set has error, no one knows it because these are likely the same statistics sent to the FBI. The only way to verify the numbers would be count the individual crimes all over again with the vain hope that no error occurs in the second tabulation.

Unfortunately the data set is very limited selection of crimes. This is not exactly a form of error, the numbers themselves are accurate, but can lead to errors in interpretation. Although all major Type I crimes are listed, the choice of Type II crimes has noticeable exclusions including drugs, alcohol, simple assault and, perhaps most inexplicable, the exclusion of an “all others” category. The “all others” category includes many criminal behaviors and often accounts for significant portion of the crime in an area. It is fairly safe to assume that the high-crime trend of Buckman is continued in the non-existent “all others” category. Unfortunately the statistics are not available to prove it.

Behold the glory of primary data.

Despite the questionable quality of Portland’s numerical stats, the city came through where it counted. Sure the information cost a few hundred bucks, but the results were worth the investment. While other cities have put some degree of distance between the data and researcher, Portland provided the actual digital files from the police GIS data base. Once the data was input into ArcView GIS, over 80,000 crimes were able to be catalogued in any manner the researcher desires.

In this chapter, only yellow dots are used and they represent the location of one crime. Due to the accuracy of GIS data, crime locations were not stacked on top of each other at a convenient address. As a result the red dot representing the location of five incidents was not required. The white circle represents a half mile radius around Burnside Skatepark. Crimes are defined according to Oregon Law Enforcement Data System
previously mentioned. In addition to the crimes previously mentioned in the numerical stats, the flexibility of the primary data source has allowed more specific crimes to be mapped. Their definitions are listed below. Again murder, rape, molestation and arson have been excluded, due to their fortunate rarity (Portland Police Bureau. 2005).

**Drug Laws:** Included are all violations of state and local laws, specifically those relating to the unlawful possession, sales, use, growing and manufacturing of illegal drugs. For purposes of this study driving under the influence of drugs was included in this category.

**Simple Assault:** Assaults which are limited to the use of physical force and result in little or no injury to the victim.

**Alcohol Offences:** All liquor law violations, state or local, are placed in this classification. For purposes of this study driving under the influence of alcohol was included in this category.

**All Other:** All crimes not previously mapped are placed in this category.

With out any further fanfare, roll out the red carpet, strike up the band, and keep photographs to a minimum. This study proudly offers the universally desired, but perpetually elusive, primary data (Portland Police Bureau. 2005).
Robbery

The taking or attempting to take anything of value from a person or persons by force or threat of force.

Burnside
Aggravated Assault

An attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or injury.
Burglary

The unlawful entry of a structure (both residential and non-residential) with intent to commit a theft.
Theft from Auto

The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another from a motor vehicle.
Bicycle Theft

The theft or attempted theft of a bicycle.
Theft

The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.
Motor Vehicle Theft

The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle; includes motorcycles.
Vandalism

The willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of any public or private property.

Burnside
Simple Assault

Assaults which are limited to the use of physical force and result in little or no injury to the victim.
Alcohol Offence

All liquor law violations, state or local, are placed in this classification. For purposes of this study Driving Under the Influence was included in this category.
Drug Offence

Included are all violations of state and local laws, specifically those relating to the unlawful possession, sales, use, growing and manufacturing of illegal drugs.
All Other

All crimes not previously mapped are placed in this category

Burnside
It's obvious, isn't it?

Perhaps the most appealing characteristic of GIS crime maps is that they are self-explanatory. Analysis does not consist of arcane mathematical rites inevitably involving an imaginary number and the possible sacrifice of a goat. They can be understood simply by looking at them. At times they show with disturbing clarity that crime focuses on specific areas with sniper-like precision. Other times the pattern resembles a shotgun fired after consuming a twelve-pack. The distribution of crimes in the previous maps resembles the latter, far more than the former.

The relationships at Burnside are more difficult to assess for a few reasons. The obvious reason is that the clusters are not as tight as seen in the previous sites. Crime is more scattered and the relationships are looser. The distributions begin to occupy the disturbingly subjective space where patterns can be seen, but only through unfocused eyes. Also, the quantity of crime in the immediate area around Burnside is significant. Unlike FDR and Denver Skatepark, which were in areas receiving relatively few crimes, the Buckman neighborhood sees plenty. While a half dozen criminal acts would draw attention to an area in previous sites, it takes a few more to attract attention in Buckman. It seems that very few locations have not had some sort of criminal activity in the five years mapped. It becomes less a question of, "Was there a crime?" to a more relative, How much crime was there?"

Finally the area around Burnside is fully incorporated into the urban grid. People work, live and shop in the majority of the half mile radius around Burnside Skatepark. Open green space is strongly associated with the previous sites, while the only thing seen around Burnside is the Willamette River. The likelihood of "causal" traffic on the site and surrounding area is greatly increased. The people in the area are going about their daily routine, some grocery shopping, others shooting heroin. The chances of a random crime occurring in a well populated area are far greater than a sparsely populated one. Despite the complications, some patterns are evident, but should be viewed as what they are, loose correlations.
Few statements can be applied globally to the crime maps, except one, there is always more crime across the Willamette River. It is obvious that crime is more prevalent to the west, in the Downtown and Chinatown neighborhoods. The value of this statement is unfortunately questionable. First, the river acts as a strong boundary between the Downtown and the Buckman neighborhood. Not only is there a geographic difference requiring a quarter mile cross on the Burnside Bridge, but the social context is completely unrelated. Buckman is mostly apartment buildings and accompanying commercial opportunities, including grocery stores and gas stations. The Buckman neighborhood undoubtedly receives some traffic beyond its permanent residents, but the east represents the opposite. A few people live downtown, but the majority of the daily population in Downtown is temporary. Most people downtown are working or shopping, inflating the population to massive proportions during the day and dwindling at night as people return to their suburban homes. Chinatown has more permanent residents, but the population is inflated by the numerous restaurants, bars and porn shops that line the streets. In addition, both Downtown and Chinatown attract a fair number of tourists, notoriously easy game for potential criminals. As a result, it is very difficult to compare Buckman to its neighbors across the river. The neighborhoods on the western shore provide a more comparable social context.

When the area within the half mile radius of Burnside Skatepark is compared to the surrounding area a few noticeable patterns emerge. Beginning with the positive, within the half mile radius, bike theft appears to be significantly less than the surrounding area. This result is unexpected considering the numerical data, which reports that bike theft is notoriously prevalent in Buckman. The burglary rates also appear to be less within the half mile radius than the remainder of the neighborhood being heaviest in the residential areas to the southwest. Perhaps when breaking and entering, residential targets are preferred over the commercial warehouses that occupy the majority of the half mile radius around Burnside Skatepark.
According to the minutes of the Buckman Community Association, "theft from a motor vehicle" is an understandable concern. Evenly distributed across the mapped area, there are few locations without a recorded incident. Though prevalent, there is no discernable pattern to the events. Vandalism is also evenly distributed across the city. As previously mentioned, Buckman has traditionally high rates of vandalism, but they are no more prevalent inside the half-mile radius than outside of the radius.

Other crimes appear more frequently within the half mile radius than other areas on the west side of the river. Auto theft, other theft, aggregated assault, simple assault, drug offenses, alcohol offenses and "other crimes" all appear in slightly heavier concentrations within the half mile radius. While auto theft appears to be evenly distributed, other theft, aggravated assault, simple assault, drug offenses, alcohol offenses and "all other" crimes appear to be associated with two major thoroughfares. Burnside Street, running east/west, is most strongly associated with crime in the half mile radius. A close second is MLK Boulevard, which also seems to receive a disproportionate amount of the aforementioned crimes. Unsurprisingly, at the intersection, the two roads crime doubles, like a warped double-mint commercial. This association is not nearly as strong as was seen in the Broad/ Pattison intersection in Philadelphia, but is still clearly present. It should be noted that crime being associated with major thoroughfares is nothing new, and the intersection is one of the busiest in the area. The presence of this traffic, resulting in a criminal nexus, contributes to the elevated crime rates within the radius in relation to the surrounding areas.

Finally, unlike the previous study sites, there are few places devoid of any type of criminal activity, with the exception of the Willamette River. The park green-space associated with the previous sites was almost free of crime. In contrast when all 80,000 crimes are mapped the area becomes a near solid yellow circle.
You can stop skimming, here is the condensed version.

The area surrounding Burnside Skatepark is difficult to access due to the quantity and even distribution of crime. In addition, the area is fully incorporated into the urban grid, unlike the previous study sites. Despite these difficulties patterns can be seen in the data but the correlations are not as strong as in previous sites.

First, all crimes are more prevalent across the river in the Downtown and Chinatown districts, though the difference in social context reduces the comparative value. Bike theft and burglary are noticeably lower within the half mile radius around Burnside than without. Theft from auto and vandalism are prevalent throughout out the entire mapped area and show no discernable pattern to the events. The remaining crimes including auto theft, other theft, aggregated assault, simple assault, drug offenses, alcohol offenses and “other crimes” all appear to be more prevalent within the half mile radius surrounding Burnside Skatepark. A strong contributor to this is Burnside Street and MLK Boulevard. As is often the case, the crimes are associated with these major thoroughfares, both of which are located in the half mile radius. In addition the intersection of these streets is also within the radius. At the intersection the crimes stack up, becoming more, or less depending on perspective, than the sum of its parts. Finally, there are no places in the surrounding area that are untouched by some sort of criminal activity.

To error is human, to not is digital.

As with all previous data sets there is error in the above maps. Every time humans touch something there is the possibility of error being introduced. Fortunately, by providing the primary data, as opposed to information derived from the data, Portland has cut out a few people that may introduce error. The prime possibility of human error in this data set is coding errors. These could be from the officer who made the arrest or the officer that input the data into the GIS system. The information could also be improperly coded by the researcher, though few researchers would admit it. Fortunately,
once the information is input, the computer does the rest, locating the position of the crime on the map with mindless digital perfection.

It should also be mentioned that there is inherent error deliberately built into the map. From the actual location of the crime, a random a distance from 0-100 yards is added or subtracted in a random direction from the actual coordinates. The City of Portland does this to insure the “privacy” of an undisclosed party, presumably the victim (Portland Police Bureau, pers. comm.). How this insures privacy in not quite clear but can lead to an occasional odd result. For example, in 2002 a bicycle theft was committed in the northern Willamette River. The first question is, “How did the bike get in the river?” followed quickly by, “Why did someone swim out to steal it?” Though this new brand of river piracy may be comical, it is likely that the crime was actual committed on the shore, and the built in error placed the location within the river.

Despite these possibilities, the GIS data from Portland remains some of the best data in this study. Providing the actual files provides more transparency than a wet t-shirt contest in Cancun. Nothing is hidden, and comparatively few people stand between the researcher and the data. The fewer people that touch it, the less error is introduced. The information is also complete, providing all types of crimes both major and minor. While other cities provide excuses and delays, Portland provides data. Portland should be commended for providing this service to its citizens.

Ok, so we have our problems.

All evidence supports the conclusion that the Buckman neighborhood and the immediate area surrounding Burnside are both a little sketchy. When the Buckman neighborhood is compared to the city as a whole, Buckman consistently reports more crime per 1000 people in all categories. Buckman does not fare much better when compared to surrounding neighborhoods. Though the crime rates in the Kerns neighborhood are occasionally close to those in Buckman, the Sunnyside and Hosford
Abernathy districts regularly record far less crime. It appears that legend contains some truth, Burnside is indeed in the “bad part of town”.

Within a half mile radius around the skatepark a few crimes, such as bike theft and burglary, occur less frequently then outside the radius. Other crimes such as auto theft and vandalism are randomly distributed across the study area. Many crimes including auto theft, other theft, aggregated assault, simple assault, drug offenses, alcohol offenses and “other crimes”, appear more frequently within the radius than outside of it. This does not suggest that the skatepark causes the crime, after all crime in Buckman was there long before the skatepark was.

Unfortunately, Burnside is in a questionable part of an equally questionable neighborhood. Few, if any, areas have remained completely crime free over the past five years. Buckman does not have the most crime in Portland, but it is always in the top five. At all scales, the area surrounding Burnside has more crime by comparison, the only question is how much. Despite this, the area does not resemble the archetypical slums of Chicago or Philadelphia. True the concrete buildings are cold, but they are not crumbling. The brave and ignorant have nothing to fear from the streets, and the meek are perpetually scared anyway. The neighborhood can be rough, but the steady cadence of gunfire is fortunately absent.

It is understandable why skateboarders decided to create an illegal construction in this neighborhood. There is enough other illegal behavior that a little concrete is a minor concern. Like a zebra hiding in the herd, the other crime in the area is more than enough to keep the police busy. The only bad part is that the locals have to hang out in a crappy neighborhood. Oh well, it could be worse, there could be no place to skate at all.

**Unreported Crime in the Surrounding Area**

Considering the amount of reported crime in the Buckman neighborhood, it can be disturbing to think that there is unreported crime present. The unfortunate reality is
that in many places unreported crime often exceeds reported crime. Quantifying exactly how much crime is unrecorded is impossible, but some sources can be used as a basis for estimation.

Unfortunately for residents, but fortunate for researchers, crime is so prevalent in Buckman, few people do not have an opinion on crime in the area. These opinions are openly discussed in community associations and personal conversations with residents. From these conversations a neighborhood can develop a reputation as a "bad neighborhood." In addition, if a crime is personally witnessed by the researcher then it can be considered regardless if the crime was officially reported. Some crimes such as graffiti and vandalism leave physical evidence long after the crime was actually committed.

**It doesn't look that bad.**

Throughout the chapter this document has insisted, that despite the prevalence of crime, the Buckman neighborhood is not a slum. This conclusion is largely derived from the physical appearance of the area. The towering concrete projects of Chicago's Cabrini-Green or the crumbling buildings of Philadelphia's north side are nowhere to be seen in the Buckman neighborhood. The architecture in Buckman is a mostly multi-level concrete or brick buildings in fair condition. Scattered around the area are a few historically significant buildings dating back to the turn of the century. In general, the condition of the buildings is good, but it is clear that some owners care little for the aesthetic value of the structures. Standing next to a historic building will be a dilapidated warehouse. The majority of the housing in the area is apartments, resulting in a transient population that does not own, thus will not
invest, in their residence. The lucky few who own their residence tend to invest the time and money to keep them in good condition, but these are the exceptions. Overall the aesthetic is more bland than menacing.

The residents have repeatedly expressed, in the Buckman Community Association meetings, that graffiti is a chronic problem. The pro-active community has created a graffiti task force to paint over graffiti free of charge to the property owner (Neighborhood Link, 2005). The effort has not been 100% successful, graffiti is still present, but it is not excessive. The amount of graffiti present is difficult to quantify, but in comparison to other urban neighborhoods in major cities it is average, or perhaps a little less. With the exception of graffiti, there is little evidence of other vandalism. There was one incident mentioned at an association meeting about skateboarding damage to a local park. The problem was mentioned once and never reappeared, suggesting that the isolated issue was dealt with (Neighborhood Link, 2005). It is possible that some vandalism was present on buildings, but it is difficult to determine if the damage was vandalism or neglect. The owners of apartment buildings typically live elsewhere and in addition are notorious for a policy of “minimal investment equals maximum return”.

No good deed goes unpunished.

In addition to the graffiti problem, the Buckman Community Association is also concerned with the idea that Buckman neighborhood may be attracting people who are likely to commit a crime. The fact is that the Buckman neighborhood has over forty social service facilities, more than any other neighborhood in Portland (Jones 98). While it is unnecessary to list them all, rest assured that every conceivable social service is
represented in Buckman, including a methadone clinic. While some may say that the residents are committing the politically incorrect sin of pre-judging those in need of social services, their concerns are understandable. After all, few enter a methadone clinic to take a look around and see what services they offer. With the exception of employees, anyone walking into a methadone clinic has recently fallen of the “white pony” and is willing to do most anything to get the pain to stop. Heroin users in withdrawal have been known to engage in some unusual and often criminal behavior to get another fix. The belief that methadone clinics attract heroin addicts is not a stretch, considering that attracting heroin addicts is the point of a methadone clinic.

In addition, there are chronic problems at the St. Francis homeless shelter. For twenty years the church has provided food and shelter for the homeless of Portland. While the idea is politically popular, there have been some unfortunate ramifications. The programs at St. Francis have been so popular with the local homeless that the church quickly ran out of room inside. To accommodate the needy, St. Francis opened up a park across the street to squatters. This bold gesture is well within the legal rights of the church who owns and maintains the park. Unfortunately, those with no property have trouble recognizing the property rights of others. The homeless were soon spilling out on to adjacent properties. The residents quickly became frustrated with washing away human excrement from their doorways while sipping their morning coffee. In addition, local residents say that criminal activity other than vagrancy occurs in the area. The usual crimes are mentioned, including assault, alcohol, drugs, and petty theft. The problem grew until the police were forced to declare the church a “nuisance property” on behalf of
local residents. These minor crimes, experienced by the residents add significantly to the unreported crime in the area.

They would know.

The residents of Buckman are well aware that there is a “crime problem” and are more than willing to discuss it. Not only are the residents willing to discuss it in a Buckman Association meeting, but the topic has become the idle conversation on the street. They discuss the crime rate like Chicagoans discuss the Cubs latest losing season. These candid comments are often exaggerated for comedic effect, but the core of the story is rarely funny.

The prevalence of drugs seems to be a popular topic. When asked, people will readily admit that there are a significant amount of drug deals in the Buckman area. Some people put it plainly, like a particular Buckman resident posting on a Portland internet forum. The poster states, “As a Buckman resident, I see plenty of drug addicts wandering around our streets everyday.” (Bogdanski, 2005b) Others have a bit more flair. In an unrelated discussion a former Buckman resident states that, “The folks down in Buckman spend their summers chasing drug dealers around on their own because there aren’t enough cops.” (Bogdanski, 2005a) Numerous others, including local skateboarders, just shrug their shoulders and state some variation of “There are lots of drugs in Buckman, but there is nothing I can do about it.” (pers. comm.)

The amount of crime drives some to begin to see dark humor in the criminal events. According to Chad Balcom, a girl he knew had her car stolen in Buckman. The
mar was a “beater”, but transportation none the less. The theft was reported, but the police had not been able to discover the whereabouts of her car. A few days later, while walking somewhere the girl saw her car parked on the side of a road. Fortunately she still had her keys on her keychain. With what could be assumed to be quick, she jumped in her car and surprisingly found the ignition still intact. With a quick turn of the key she fired up the car and drove home. This story was delivered in a matter-of-fact tone, suggesting situations like this occur everyday, which they likely do not (Blacom, pers. comm.).

Perhaps most disturbing is that when a location is desired for criminal activity, Buckman is a likely candidate. According to Chad Balcom, recently a new crime has appeared in Buckman, committed by a mass of undocumented workers. Recently an area in Buckman has become a pick up point where undocumented workers gather in hopes of finding employment for the day (Blacom, pers. comm.). The traditional scene is played out when a car pulls up to the area. The potential employees gather around the car while the driver picks from the masses who will work for ridiculously low wages. If these illegal aliens commit any further crime is not known, despite what Lou Dobbs of CNN insists.

On a final note, few crimes were actually observed in the Buckman area during the study. Of course graffiti was noted in several places, and there did seem to be a large homeless population. Despite the contention that drug deals are happening on every corner, none of these were witnessed. Numerous people were seen talking on the streets and several of them looked as if they may be “conducting business”, but it was not confirmed. Though the
researcher’s instinct was to question the individuals on the corners, the self preservation
instinct wisely squashed any ideas of actually asking them what was going on.

I’ll bet you dollars to doughnuts.

Despite the impressive quantity of crime that is addressed by the police in
Buckman, it is quite likely there is far more crime that goes unreported. Unlike the
previous sites, that had crime in few specific places, the area surrounding Burnside
Skatepark experiences a cornucopia of crime in all of its sorted incarnations. Though the
appearance of the area is not as rough as rough as other high-crime areas, it is not the
Vatican Gardens either. It is clear that the often unreported crimes of graffiti,
homelessness, and drugs are even more prevalent than the crime statistics show. In
addition, it appears that the Buckman neighborhood is a likely location when a new
criminal opportunity arises. Though few crimes were observed first hand beyond graffiti
and vagrancy, it is safe to assume that the reports of local residents are accurate. In
conclusion, it appears that Buckman does have unreported crime, a bet of dollars to
doughnuts says there is plenty of unreported crime occurring in the neighborhood.

Reported Crime on Site

Thankfully, reported crime at Burnside Skatepark is fairly straight forward topic.
The GIS data provided by the Portland Police Department makes quantifying crime at the
site easy. Just find Burnside Skatepark on the GIS crime map, zoom in and count the
dots.

Just a couple of small irritants.

The first hitch in the process is the built-in error of up to 100 feet. At a city wide
scale, a 100 foot error is a minor concern. As the scale becomes smaller, the error
becomes more noticeable. The reason stated by the Portland Police Department is to
“protect confidentiality of the cases” (Portland Police Bureau, pers. comm.). Accounting
for this error only requires that crimes right next to Burnside be considered possible
crimes at the site. Though the error can be easily accounted for by researchers, it is
unfortunate that this deliberate degradation of the data is present. Considering that the only strength of GIS data is that it shows the geographic location, any deliberate attempt to obscure that location is in actuality providing deliberately deceitful data to qualified researchers. In this strange world there is the remote possibility of a “rogue researcher” that prowls GIS data bases looking for the addresses of high crime locations, but it is unlikely.

Second, there is an inherent limitation of the data due to the two dimensional aerial view. Any crime that occurs on Burnside Bridge or under it at Burnside Skatepark will be represented by a dot in the exact same location. It is impossible to determine which distinctly different space is indicated by the dot. If there was a quick path from one location to the next then the impact would be minimal. In fact the shortest route between the two locations requires a trip of six city blocks, assuming rappelling from the bridge is not an option. It is entirely likely that one or more of the dots at Burnside Skatepark are actually referring to the bridge above.

**Were you a Cartographer in a previous life?**

Despite the aforementioned issues, reported crime at Burnside Skatepark can be assessed simply by zooming in on the site and recording the number of crimes that occur there. It is important to remember the plus or minus 100 foot error built into the data. Some inconsistency in the data can be directly attributed to this error, such as a burglary occurring in the street or a theft from motor vehicle occurring in a building.

It is also important to remember that some crimes occur more often than others. Major crimes such as aggregated assault thankfully occur with far less frequency than the minor crime of vandalism. While reviewing the presented maps, be aware that a simple count of crimes can be misleading. For example, if the site has three instances of simple assault and three instances of aggravated assault, the area could accurately be characterized as having low vandalism and high aggravated assault rates. To assess how
prevalent a crime is as a whole, review the large scale maps presented in the “Crime in the surrounding area” section.

Finally, it is important to state that the following maps represent crime over the entire five year study period. One benefit of zooming in on the maps is that individual events spread out enough to be easily read. The maps previously presented become a solid mass of indistinguishable yellow dots when the multiple years are combined. Relatively few crimes are represented on the zoomed in maps, making the combination of crimes over the five years feasible. Again, the yellow dots represent one crime and the white dot in the center of the map represents the location of Burnside Skatepark. The circle surrounding Burnside Skatepark represents a 100 foot radius, the possible error built in by the Portland Police Department. The analytic convention will be any crime within the radius will be attributed to the site. While not perfect, the likelihood that the crimes within the radius occurred at, or adjacent to the skatepark is very high. The following maps are derived from Portland Police GIS database (Portland Police Bureau. 2005).
"I’m sure you have a few words on the subject."

The fortunate result of an easy to read graphical representation of crime is that the reader may quickly grasp the situation and create their individual analysis. Though it is tempting to forgo analysis entirely and let the reader do all the hard work, it would not be research, if the data was not analyzed by the author.

The analysis will start with the assessment of the crimes of robbery, bike theft and burglary. During the five years of 2000-2004 there were no events of robbery or bike theft at Burnside Skatepark. Both of these crimes are relatively rare in general, and the events that did occur in the larger mapped area are all isolated events with no visible clustering. The events are evenly distributed across the map and give no indication that any of the sites where these crimes occurred are particularly prone to criminal behavior. The one incident of burglary that did occur within the 100 foot radius can’t, by definition, be attributed to Burnside Skatepark. Burglary requires entering a building with the intent to commit theft and Burnside is simply not a building. It is very likely that the burglary was actually at the building located to the south of the skatepark, but the built in 100 foot error placed it within the confines of Burnside.

The next three crimes, auto theft, theft from auto, and drug violations each have only one recorded event within the 100 foot radius around Burnside Skatepark. Unlike the previous three crimes, there is a mix of isolated events and clusters. This suggests that certain locales do attract these crimes more than others, but randomness to the distribution is still evident. With the exception of the aforementioned singular events, additional instances of auto theft and theft from auto do not occur anywhere near Burnside Skatepark. This reinforces the conclusion that these crimes are isolated and in no way related to the skatepark. The same can’t be said for drug violations, with additional events occurring nearby, but not within the 100 foot range of the skatepark. In fairness, these drug violations are also singular with the only clusters appearing far from Burnside to the north and east. Two out of three of the clusters are associated with the major thoroughfare of MLK Boulevard.
Aggravated assault and alcohol violations follow a similar pattern. During the study period there were two occurrences of aggravated assault and five occurrences of alcohol violations within the radius. Occurrences of these events show some clustering along with a few isolated events. Unlike the previous three crimes, the 100 foot radius around Burnside is one of the clusters. It is important to note that the clusters at Burnside are smaller than the clusters appearing in other areas on the map. Significantly larger clusters for both crimes are evident to the east, associated with Burnside Street and MLK Boulevard. Apparently these crimes are committed with more frequency at Burnside Skatepark than random locations, but the skatepark is far from the most common place these crimes occur.

The occurrences of vandalism and “all other” crimes follow a similar pattern. There were three occurrences of vandalism and five occurrences of “all other” crimes within the radius during 2000 to 2004. Again these crimes exhibit significant clustering along with a few isolated areas, with clusters appearing at Burnside Skatepark. Unlike the aggravated assault and alcohol violations, the clustering that appears at Burnside is quantitatively similar to clustering that appears in other areas on the map. The association with the major thoroughfares is not present with vandalism and “all other” crimes. In general, the clusters tend to appear more to the north and east than the south and west of the mapped area. The conclusion is that multiple sites, including Burnside, may attract these crimes. A final consideration is if the sanctioned graffiti of Jay Meer is considered and reported as vandalism by people not associated with the skatepark. Unfortunately it is impossible to determine if the Meer’s sanctioned work is being counted as, or even qualifies as, vandalism.

Finally, the occurrences of the crimes “other theft” and simple assault follow similar patterns. During the study period there were three instances of “other theft” and five instances of simple assault. These crimes, particularly simple assault, exhibit strong clustering with a few isolated incidents. Again, these clusters appear at Burnside Skatepark. In contrast to vandalism and “all other” crimes, there are only three clusters on the map, each with multiple violations. The three clusters are similar in size and account for a significant
portion of the incidents mapped. The areas in between the clusters show few incidents, particularly in the case of simple assault. The conclusion is that other theft and simple assault occur in disproportionate amounts at a few specific locations and Burnside Skatepark is one of them. This effect is exaggerated with simple assault.

How about even fewer words.

Unfortunately crime at Burnside Skatepark is not as straight forward as FDR Skatepark. Some crimes are noticeably absent from the area while others seem more prevalent. The crimes of robbery and bike theft are non-existent at Burnside, while burglary, by definition, does not occur at the skatepark. Recorded crimes of auto theft, theft from auto, and drug violations are virtually absent, with only one isolated event over five years. Aggravated assault and alcohol violations do cluster around Burnside, but they tend to be quantitatively smaller clusters than appear in other mapped areas. Vandalism and “all other” crimes are also clustered at Burnside, but the clusters are similar in size to multiple other clusters appearing in the mapped area. The crimes “other theft” and simple assault cluster at few locations, including Burnside. The correlation of simple assault and Burnside is disturbingly strong, but fortunately by definition simple assault results in “no serious injury”.

It is important to remember that Burnside is located in the Buckman neighborhood and borders the Kerns neighborhood. Two neighborhoods with significantly higher crime rates than the city average across the board. In this context the few crimes that are completely absent are stunning and the quantity of other crimes is respectably low. The most prevalent crimes including alcohol violations, simple assault and “other crimes” record only five occurrences each. These crimes are the most prevalent at Burnside, but they are also typically the most prevalent crimes in all cities and neighborhoods in America. This averages out to a meager one occurrence a year at Burnside which is located within a notoriously high crime neighborhood. It is very important to remember that the five years were combined to make the data easier to read, not to suggest more crime occurs in the area than actually does. One occurrence a year of a relatively common crime in a high crime area hardly qualifies as criminogenic. Though there are some loose geographic correlations
between some recorded crimes and Burnside, the idea that the skatepark is a focus for local crime is suspect at best.

**Unreported Crime at the Site**

Despite the diligent efforts of the Portland Police, they do not catch all crimes that occur within the city. The resulting “dark figure” is impossible to quantify for any location, including Burnside Skatepark. All of the aforementioned reasons of why a crime goes unreported are applicable at Burnside. In particular, victimless crimes that lack someone “wronged” are usually unreported because no one is upset with the outcome. As a result, official crime statistics grossly underestimate these crimes, leaving only two ways to assess their presence. The first is simply to ask the people what crimes occur in the area, hoping for some hint of honesty and objectivity. The second is to go to the site and sit down, preferably with open eyes and a closed mouth.

**You don’t say.**

Walking up to people at Burnside and asking them what crimes occur at the site has numerous problems. First, they don’t know the person asking the question and the Burnside locals are notoriously rough with interlopers. The intrepid researcher should count himself lucky if he only receives the “skate it or beat it” mantra, as opposed to being shown the figurative door. If the locals answer at all, they will likely minimize the amount of crime that occurs at the site. They may do this to protect Burnside or to avoid incriminating themselves. Fortunately a few people are willing to discuss crime at Burnside during a structured interview. Both Chad Balcom and Kent Dahlgren agreed to an interview and were thorough and candid in their commentary. They were typically in agreement, suggesting a conspiracy or accuracy, with the latter being far more likely than the former. In
addition, a few questions were slipped in during conversations with other Burnside skateboarders. These conversations elicited responses similar to those given by Balcom and Dahlgren.

FDR and Denver Skatepark were isolated to some degree from the urban grid, meaning that those people at the previous study sites were typically there to skateboard. As a result, crime at the site could be directly attributed to the skateboarders. On the other hand, Burnside is firmly entrenched in the urban grid and can attract many people to the area with intentions other than wicked grinds.

Beginning with the major (Type I) crimes, few are mentioned as prevalent by the locals. The previous GIS maps show that crimes such as robbery, auto theft, and “other theft” have infrequently occurred at the site. No one interviewed reported these crimes as a reoccurring issue (pers. comm.). The maps presented support this conclusion, reporting only isolated incidents over a five year span. The exception is theft, which has three recorded incidents. Despite this, Chad Balcom feels that theft is not an issue at Burnside. When questioned about theft he reports, “There is a persona and urban legend that you have to watch out for everything, but I don’t think that it’s the case. I’ve known a lot of skaters, in a lot of places and it’s a brotherhood.” (Balcom, 2005)

Though aggravated assault is considered a major crime, simple assault is not. The difference between the two types of assault is how bad the beat down was, and if a weapon was used to facilitate said beat down. It is difficult to assess if the assaults that occur at Burnside are aggravated or simple, but reports from those interviewed seem to suggest that
most of them are of the simple, rather than the aggravated, variety. While the term assault has understandably negative connotations, it is important to remember that most males and many females have engaged in what could technically be termed assault. Every sibling tussle, bar room brawl, playground scuffle, or Jerry Springer episode is technically an assault. Fortunately, most assaults are simple, resulting in little permanent damage.

As the previous section on reported crime shows, there are indeed incidences of simple assault at Burnside, a point supported by interviews. Kent Dahlgren can’t speak for today, but makes it clear, “There used to be lots of fights down there.” (Dahlgren, 2005) According to Chad Balcom there are still infrequent simple assaults at Burnside but it is never exclusively involving local skateboarders. Balcom states that, “I have never seen two skaters fight, just a skater and a random crazy.” As Balcom puts it, in a statement worthy of a t-shirt “Some times you get random lunatics. It’s a city. Some times they are on drugs, sometimes they are just lunatics. Sometimes they get punched in the face.” (Blacom, 2005) Of course the “random lunatic” is exactly what the locals defend Burnside against, including vagrants, prostitutes, junkies and drug dealers. Balcom makes it clear that violence is a “last resort” after simple requests, intimidation, and calls to the local police have demonstratively failed. Fortunately, according to Balcom, those extreme physical measures are rarely required (Balcom, 2005).

While few could feel good about beating on a bum down on his luck, only a true pacifist wouldn’t get the slightest bit of satisfaction out of smacking a drug dealer around. When a local skateboarder was asked what he would do if he saw someone dealing drugs at Burnside, his answer was succinct. He said, “I would beat his ass so bad that he never came back.” (pers. comm.) The statement was delivered with a grin that suggested a little violence on someone who likely deserves it
would be a nice distraction from the everyday grind. The message seems to have gotten through that dealing drugs at Burnside is a definite faux paux. Kent Dahlgren remembers a time when drugs were dealt at the site but confirms, “No one is dealing down there anymore.” (Dahlgren, 2005)

Though dealing is certainly not accepted, there have been problems with drug use at the site. Initially the space was littered with heroin junkies falling off the white pony, but these were initially removed when Burnside was built. With the sanction of the city, Burnside was required to have portable toilets. Unfortunately, the heroin junkies retuned once they realized the toilets were ideal for shooting up. The toilets were covered with graffiti and reached a previously undiscovered level of nasty. The problem disappeared once new toilets were enclosed with a locked fence. A select few locals are given keys with the understanding that the toilets were for removing fluids from the body, not injecting them. Once the junkies no longer had access, the locals began to invest in their toilets. Balcom will proudly display the tile he installed in the cage, while telling of his mother from Nebraska who found the new porta-potty up to her standards (Blacom, pers. comm.). Though Balcom's obvious affection for the commode is comical, it is perhaps the cleanest porta-potty in Portland, if not the whole west coast.

Though apparently the heroin junkies are typically not skateboarders, there does seem to be a fair amount of marijuana smoked at Burnside. When Balcom was asked if someone smoking a joint would be confronted he said “No, it’s no big deal, if you even consider pot a drug.” According to Balcom, “If you discount weed as a drug, then no one is getting high down there.” He continues, “Almost everyone down there drinks beer, smokes cigarettes, smokes pot or some combination of the three at some point.” (Balcom 2005) The overall
impression is that smoking pot in public is in bad taste, but nothing to be concerned with. Kent Dahlgren appears to believe it is a more serious transgression but agrees with brevity, “Yea, guys are smoking weed down there.” (Dahlgren 2005) This issue may not seem very important to some Burnside locals, because the population of Oregon seems to agree. Oregon has some of the most liberal marijuana laws on the books, including medicinal marijuana use. Simple possession is more akin to a traffic ticket then a crime and includes no jail time. Much to the horror of the Bush administration, the people of Oregon just don’t care that much about restricting pot use.

On to a drug the majority of America can get behind, alcohol. Technically it is illegal to consume alcohol in public, with the glorious exception of New Orleans. Despite this, the law is regularly ignored by police, many of whom crack open a tasteless pilsner once off duty. To suggest that there is no drinking at Burnside would be ridiculous. According to both Balcom and Dahlgren people drinking beer at Burnside is a regular occurrence (pers. comm.). It was once suggested by Willamette Week that Burnside was actually controlled by Pabst Blue Ribbon, which the locals would likely be all for (Dawdy 2001). The low cost, and white-trash appeal of PBR make it a perennial favorite at Burnside. This is not to suggest that the keg truck rolls up at 9:00 am and starts passing out cups. The quantity is likely limited to a six pack or a couple of forties and purely for personal use, typically in the afternoon or evening. It should also be noted that the local skaters at Burnside are typically of legal drinking age. Unlike the teens at Denver Skatepark, or the mix at FDR, most people at Burnside are legally adults. Though public intoxication is illegal regardless of the age, it is unlikely that there are many instances of a “minor in possession” at Burnside. The whole scene is typically low key, with the rare exception of a few PBR induced antics which will be discussed a bit later.
The locals at Burnside are not the only ones drinking at the site. Many of the vagrants sleeping in corners have likely had a nip of the hard stuff before settling down on their concrete bed for the day. Despite the locals’ efforts to keep vagrants out of their space, the tenacious homeless routinely return. The St. Francis Homeless Shelter is located a significant distance to the east of Burnside. Another homeless shelter and soup kitchen is just a few blocks away from Burnside. In addition, the loading dock is “really conducive to being a bum” according to Chad Balcom (pers. comm.). Supposedly the locals’ intolerance of vagrancy at the site even led one homeless man to learn to skateboard just to stay in the area (Balcom, pers. comm.). In fairness, vagrancy is a significant issue for the entire neighborhood of Buckman, including Burnside.

The connection between graffiti and skateboarding may be historically established, but the locals at Burnside don’t particularly care for it. The sole exception is the stellar work of Jay Meer’s. According to Balcom, they paint the park “as needed” to cover up the graffiti that periodically appears on the concrete (Balcom 2005). While significant text could be used to elaborate on graffiti at Burnside, Kent Dahlgren sums it up in a few sentences with his trademark comical indignation. He states, “This dude would show up with a bag full of spray paint, I would say ‘what the fuck are you doing here. Better yet go ahead, I’ll just paint over it later.’ They would get pissed and talk about how it is artistic expression. I don’t give a shit if it is for your dead mom. Don’t do it here, do it on a damn train. Everybody wants to turn it (Burnside) into a god damn art project. Just drape it in a bunch of orange blankets, like god damn Central Park.” (Dahlgren 2005)
There also is the unlikely appearance of undocumented workers at Burnside. Apparently close by is a staging area for immigrant day workers. In general these day workers are not tolerated at Burnside, but not for the political reasons that Lou Dobbs repeats nightly like a mantra on CNN. According to Balcom, most of them are regular people just looking to make a little money, but there are exceptions. One particularly industrious undocumented worker bought a ball cap and skateboard and started hanging around Burnside, despite the fact that he did not ever ride the skateboard. Instead the undocumented worker was embracing capitalism by selling drugs, likely low-grade brick marijuana brought up from Mexico. Unsurprisingly, this was not tolerated by the locals out of fear of guilt by association. According to Balcom, “We know they aren’t skating, but to the untrained eye they are just skaters at the park. Then there was some sort of vigilante justice running these guys out.” (Balcom 2005) Needless to say, the mistake was not repeated by the undocumented workers around Burnside.

Finally there are a few activities that could generously be called shenanigans. Most of this goofing off is harmless, if a bit rambunctious. For example, the occasional beer bottle may be thrown at a passing truck, but never on the skate surface where it would need to be cleaned up. Another example is a time when the pigeons, which are notorious for defecating on the skate surface were “thinned out” with the help of a BB gun. The dead pigeons were then launched into the dumpster catapult-style with an available shovel. This went on until the local police stopped by and had umbrage with the “discharging of a firearm” (Balcom 2005). Despite the horror that would likely be evidenced by the local PETA chapter, no permanent damage was done and the pigeon population will undoubtedly recover. These sorts of “games” are commonplace at Burnside and may be juvenile, but few of them qualify as illegal.

The art of doing nothing.

In a life full of things to do, it is a real pleasure to do something that requires that nothing be done. One method of assessing the crime that occurs at Burnside requires little more than a numb butt, simply sitting quietly watching the world spin. After a short while,
people forget that anyone out of the ordinary is there and go about their daily life. Unfortunately, the fact that Burnside is in a crime prone neighborhood infringes slightly on the relaxing nature of the non-activity. Some small indiscretions were witnessed during the observation period, but perhaps more importantly, many things were not seen.

The drug dealers and prostitutes that had to be run off when Burnside was built have apparently gotten the picture. The “blow job for crack” economy appears to have relocated to more friendly confines, far away from irritated skateboarders. Though prudence prevents obtaining verbal conformation, drug deals are typically easy to spot. The exchange of large amounts of money for minuscule amounts of product in obscure locations screams drug deal. In addition, despite the Miami Vice stereotype, drug dealers are rarely wearing expensive suits and sporting a quarter pound of gold. Chances are if it looks like a drug deal, then it probably is. Nothing that looked vaguely like a drug deal occurred.

Prostitution is also easy to spot. Typically, prostitutes have their “wares” on display and are often quite vocal about their vocation. A thirty-three-year old male wearing a wedding ring is a prime target for a lady of ill repute, but no such offers were made by women of questionable morals. In fact, there were very few women at Burnside at all. The vast majority of people at Burnside are male, leading to a “sausage party” atmosphere reminiscent of a lame college party. The few women at Burnside were skateboarders, and though possible, unlikely prostitutes. The closest thing to a prostitute was a local who was dressed as a “prostitute who had just had a back alley abortion” (pers. comm.). In fairness, the costume was quite convincing, complete with substantial blood loss. Fortunately it was Halloween and can be assumed to be merely a costume.
Also noticeably absent was the well publicized territorality. During observation no one was told to leave, "undesirables" or otherwise. Admittedly, one of the few people at Burnside that was not skateboarding was the intrepid researcher, but never was any attitude forthcoming from the locals. The initial response to the researcher sitting at the loading dock sketching Burnside was apathy. This response was soon replaced by curiosity. When told of the research, some were interested, while others retuned to apathy. Never was there any suggestion that the researcher was unwelcome. Later after appearing at Burnside with local Chad Balcom, the skateboarders became conversational and welcoming. The acceptance was unexpected considering the harsh treatment outsiders purportedly receive.

With no one ejected from the area, it is not surprising that no indication of violence was anywhere to be found. In fact, the atmosphere was anything but hostile. It seemed that the majority of people are friends, resembling a grade school recess more than a professional wrestling cage match. Pockets of people sat on the edges of the skatepark having animated conversations and occasionally dropping in for a run. If a voice was raised, it was in laughter, not anger. It is clear that the locals have little to fear from each other, aside from being the butt of a particularly good joke. Though others, such as the "undesirable elements", may have more to fear, they wisely don't show up at Burnside anymore.

Among those that don't show up at Burnside are the junkies that used to infest the area. Junkies, particularly ones that haven't been a junkie for long, can be difficult to spot based on appearance. However, most junkies will eventually reveal themselves through their behavior. Often skittish and paranoid, they almost always show themselves by feeding the monkey strapped to their back. There was never an instance of anyone smoking crack, snorting cocaine or shooting heroin at the park. No hard drug use at all was witnessed in
Burnside. In fact, there was a surprising absence of marijuana being smoked. Not to suggest that it never occurred, but only a couple of joints met their fiery demise at Burnside during observation period. Though smoking pot was not actively discouraged by the locals, it was not particularly noticeable or common.

What was noticeably common were people drinking beer. By 5:30 pm, called beer-thirty by many hard workers across America, roughly half to a third of the locals had a beer in their hands. In general most people kept the beer out of sight, often sitting at their feet. A casual examination from a passing car would likely miss the occasional PBR being tipped. Though the amount of beer drunk at Burnside may be significant, many of the problems associated with “party spots” are not noticeable. The empty beers are discarded in the trash cans not on the ground. People were occasionally loud, but absent were the beer-can philosophers screaming a slurred universal truth only available to those who brains have been marinating in alcohol for hours. People may have caught a healthy buzz, but none were “shit-faced” and vomiting in the nearest available corner.

Again it is important to recognize that most people at Burnside are legally adults. Though no one was checking ID’s, there was no instance when someone obviously underage was drinking at Burnside. Though the posted rules state that alcohol is not allowed, a Mormon-like abstinence is perhaps a bit unrealistic. Considering that the first concrete ever poured at was done with a tasty beer or two, it could be said that beer and Burnside were connected from the start. In general, the drinking is done fairly responsibly and the effects of the party don’t seem to affect those outside of Burnside.
Also missing from the aforementioned observed scene is the antics that Burnside is so well known for. Many would think that after the beer was broken out the legendary Burnside high-jinx would begin, but this was not the case. In fact, the reality seemed rather sedate when compared to the legend. A few questionable events did occur such as a belly to skateboard, face first run down the bowl. At another point a small motorcycle was brought on to the concrete, but unfortunately the rider had little success even at moderate speeds. These events, though a bit silly, are truly minor, as most men will agree. Part of being male is doing things that are just plain dumb and counting on the immortality of adolescence to win the day, despite impending doom. Antics far more dangerous than these are hidden from mothers by sixteen year-olds everyday.

Perhaps the only thing witnessed that was well beyond reason was a fearless skateboarder riding the legendary curves of Burnside while carrying a chainsaw. Of course the engine of the saw was fired up, and the chain would periodically be set in motion. His psychopath Halloween costume, complete with hockey mask, completed the aesthetic. For obvious reasons, when someone begins skating with a running chainsaw, the remainder of the concrete is quickly vacated. Any fall would only endanger the individual brave and foolish enough to attempt the stunt. The worst possible case scenario would be gory. Regardless, the only danger to anyone else is blood on their car upholstery while taking the skater and his dismembered limbs to the emergency room.

One final observed crime on at Burnside is vagrancy. Unfortunately, watching a vagrant sleep in the corner of the elevated loading dock is far less entertaining the aforementioned events, but it did occur none the less. The previous statements in this study may seem to suggest that an impromptu homeless camp has developed at Burnside, but
this is not the case. During observation there was almost always someone curled up in the corner smelling of alcohol and body odor, but there was never more than one individual at any time. It is difficult to say if it was the same person or different people each time, but there was typically someone taking advantage of the isolation and deep shade of the bridge to catch some sleep. As previously mentioned, not everyone considers the loading dock part of Burnside. As a result, an isolated incident is understandable. If the problem got out of hand then the locals would likely run out the vagrants with a similar frequency that graffiti is painted over, which is “as needed”.

**It’s not that bad, really.**

After spending a few thousand words discussing what crime occurs at Burnside that never makes it into official statistics, it can be difficult to remember that many crimes do not occur at the site. These crimes include many of the major (Type I) crimes including robbery, auto theft, and “other theft”. Minor (Type II) crimes such as drug dealing, hard-drug use and prostitution were also not witnessed by locals or the researcher. This is especially relevant because it is well established that these crimes existed at the site prior to Burnside being built. Considering the neighborhood and obscure location of Burnside, these crimes would likely return if the local defenders left.

It is clear that some type of assault does infrequently occur at the area, though it is likely simple assault (Type I) as opposed to the more serious aggravated assault (Type II). In addition, the assaults never include exclusively local skateboarders. The assaults are typically locals defending their turf from criminal elements. This particular method of deterrence is only used as a last resort after previous, less violent methods have been tried and failed. Regardless, this is a sticky situation. Technically a crime is being infrequently committed to deter more severe criminal elements from chronically operating at Burnside. The contradiction and irony is difficult to ignore. While American society is familiar with the concept of justifiable homicide, the term justifiable assault has yet to be, well, justified. Regardless, the Burnside locals are clearly not a band of wandering thugs engaging in Clockwork Orange style ultra-violence. If the “undesirable elements” would not come
around, or simply leave when asked, then the infrequent whooping could be suspended indefinitely. A perfect example is the undocumented worker selling drugs. He did not get the memo that drug dealing was not acceptable, so he was “informed”. Once he left Burnside, he was not hunted down for retribution. Unless he comes back, the problem is considered solved.

The remainder of the crimes that were reported through interviews or directly observed are minor. The assessment that a few beers are emptied (in this case quite a few) and a few joints smoked at Burnside should be familiar to readers from the FDR chapter. A modest attempt to keep this activity on the down-low is exercised by the locals, the majority of which are of legal drinking age.

Though a vagrant was typically seen on the loading dock, one vagrant in a neighborhood full of vagrants hardly indicates a “homeless problem”. Considering how difficult it is to find a dark, dry corner in the middle of a Portland afternoon, the loading dock should be full of vagrants. Fortunately the homeless rarely require the extreme methods of deterrence mentioned earlier. They will just move on to some place else with fewer people bothering them. The lack of homeless under the bridge shows that word has gotten out that Burnside is not a comfortable place to sleep, despite its appearance.

Finally, although the antics that occur at Burnside may be juvenile, they rarely impact others, and even more rare are crimes. If the shenanigans escalate and become more frequent or more obvious to Burnside’s tolerant neighbors, then there may be a problem, but for now boys will be boys, even if they are adults.
Conclusions

In comparison to previous sites, crime at Burnside is significantly more difficult to access. FDR and Denver Skatepark have significant public green space that acts as a relatively crime-free buffer to the surrounding city. In contrast, Burnside is entrenched in a notoriously crime-prone neighborhood in the center of the urban grid. The analysis changes from a purely quantitative assessment to a relative assessment.

Crime was so regular at the site prior to the construction of Burnside Skatepark, the term criminogenic could be applied without fear of contradiction. If the skatepark itself contributed to crime then the effects would have been dramatic. Burnside would have become a nexus of the currently existing criminal element. Burnside would experience grossly disproportionate crime rates in comparison to the neighborhood as a whole. This is clearly not the case. In fact, if the crime rates remained relatively high after Burnside’s construction, then it could be argued that Burnside has had no effect on crime at the site. If crime rates at Burnside dropped to become similar to the remainder of the crime-prone Buckman neighborhood, then a small victory would have been achieved. Despite the benefits, this small victory was not the goal. The impact of Burnside Skatepark on the crime in the area is far more dramatic.

Through the occasionally draconian efforts of the local skateboarders, the crime rate at Burnside Skatepark has plummeted to well below the norm for the crime-prone Buckman neighborhood. The previous motley crew, comprised of vagrants, prostitutes, junkies, and drug dealers, has been removed from the underbelly of Burnside Bridge. They have been replaced by an equally motley crew, but with far less criminal intentions. The desire for the next spoon full of heroin has been replaced by the desire for the next wicked grind. This is
not to suggest that the local skateboarders are angels polishing their halos between runs, but they are far preferable than the previous inhabitants. Designers and sociologists spend significant time and money trying to reduce crime in criminogenic areas. Laughing in the face of the well-paid and the over-educated, a bunch of disenfranchised “punks” did it for free, for their own reasons and using methods that will never be found in a book.

Two out of three researchers agree. The trilogy.

Of the sociological theories presented, CPTED would suggest that crime rates should be equal to, or perhaps higher, at Burnside than the surrounding areas. In contrast, Defensible Space and Broken Windows theories would suggest that there should be little crime at Burnside. Dahlgren’s assessment that Burnside is a “CPTED nightmare” may be overstated, but he is not far from the mark. Though slightly off the beaten path, Burnside still has rapid access to major thoroughfares, particularly by car. The local skateboarders have no trouble providing surveillance to the site, but the socially sanctioned police have far more difficulty.

On a positive note, Burnside is perhaps the most defended space on the west coast. The locals’ investment in Burnside is so obvious and profound, it is surprising modern adherents to the theory don’t cite Burnside as an example. Due to this investment, the incivilities that Broken Windows suggests will drag an area in depths of debauchery, such as trash, graffiti, and vagrants, are almost completely absent from Burnside. Though vagrants do occasionally appear, they are singular incidents. Considering the allure of a shaded, dry area and the rampant vagrancy in the neighborhood, one vagrant hardly constitutes a “homeless” problem.
The numerical crime statistics presented confirm the idea that Burnside was built in a marginal neighborhood. The Buckman neighborhood is crime prone in comparison to the city as a whole. In addition, Buckman is also crime prone in comparison to the adjacent communities. In short, Buckman is not near, or part of a bad neighborhood. Buckman is the bad neighborhood. The crime maps presented confirm this assessment. A select few types of crime are evenly distributed across the neighborhood, but unfortunately most crimes appear more frequently within the mile radius around Burnside Skatepark than other areas in the neighborhood. The conclusion being that Burnside Skatepark is located in a questionable part of a questionable neighborhood.

Despite the prevalent crime in Buckman, the neighborhood does not resemble a traditional slum. Though some buildings are in various states of disrepair, none are crumbling at the foundation. This is perhaps due to an active community association that is attempting to keep the quality of life in Buckman from deteriorating any further. The locals are well aware that they live in a crime prone neighborhood and are willing to say it. Community association minutes and personal reports from residents confirm that graffiti, vagrancy, and drugs are reoccurring problems throughout the neighborhood.

Despite being in a neighborhood high in reported and unreported crime, the known crime at Burnside is a mixed bag. Some crimes such as robbery and bike theft are completely absent. Others crimes such as auto theft, theft from auto, and drug violations are extremely rare at Burnside. Aggravated assault, alcohol violations, other theft, vandalism, and "all other" crimes have occurred at Burnside, but they also clustered in multiple other mapped areas. The only crime with any demonstrative association with Burnside is simple assault. Even in the case of simple assault, Burnside is not the only location within the
mapped area that the crime is associated with. In addition, there have been only five incidents of simple assault over five years, averaging out to a meager one occurrence a year. Considering the chronic crime problem previously recorded at the site, one simple assault a year is small potatoes.

When unreported crime at Burnside is examined, the crimes that do not occur at the site are far more relevant than the crimes that do. Completely absent during observation and interviews were all major crimes (Type I) and most minor ones (Type II). Robbery, aggravated assault, all thefts, and prostitution were not observed or reported. Other crimes such as drug dealing and hard drug use were reported but have been “dealt with” and are no longer present. Unfortunately the method of dealing with these issues may have been a simple assault or two. This method was used as an absolute last resort after more gentle encouragement was ignored. The locals are more akin to protective homeowners than a band of thugs.

It appears that through interviews and observations, crime is reduced to bums, beer and blunts. Of these undeniably minor infractions, the only one that is prevalent is the beer. Only one vagrant was observed during the observation period and more pot is smoked in most high schools than Burnside on a daily basis. They do love their beer at Burnside, but the majority of locals are of legal drinking age. Considering the previous criminal dynamic that was formally at the site, a few beers among adults can likely be tolerated.

The next person to mention a video game is going to get smacked

Despite the fact that every skateboarder recognizes the legend of Burnside, the general public only knows Burnside as the skatepark featured in the *Tony Hawks Pro Skater*
video game. Many would say that the video game has immortalized the original outlaw skatepark. Unfortunately, the concept that someone seated on a comfortable couch drinking Red Bull and frantically pushing buttons is connected with Burnside is laughable. Reducing the experience of riding Burnside to computer generated polygons where a player can produce moves accessible to only seasoned skaters is a complete divorce from the experience Burnside was built for. Ironically an internet search for “Tony Hawk, Burnside” will quickly reveal multiple sites with “cheat codes” allowing the indescribably lazy to unlock the Burnside level with out even learning the game itself.

Understandably, few people, including a thirty-three year old researcher, will ever have the skills or guts to actually ride Burnside. Fittingly, this is exactly how the situation ought to be. Every aspect of Burnside requires investment. There was investment required to build it, investment to ride it, investment to maintain it, and investment to protect it. Playing a video game or writing an exceeding long research paper about Burnside does not give ownership, these acts are tangential at best. If you want part of the experience, pay the price, the locals did. Fortunately the all mighty dollar is not legal tender at Burnside. The price is paid through blood left on the concrete and sweat beading on the forehead. The price requires skill on a skateboard, but it also requires mundane tasks such as picking up trash and long days painting with a roller. The locals that invest in Burnside have the only claim of ownership, despite what some insignificant paper filed at City Hall may say.

Though Burnside initially grew out of the simple desire for a place to skate, the act of clandestine construction has grown to a testament of far more than skateboarding. In a time when an unheard squeaky wheel reacts by squeaking louder, the Burnside locals decided to
stop squeaking. While many look to others to solve their problems, Burnside locals looked, and continue to look, to themselves. They stopped asking for change and began to build the world they desired. Burnside serves as an example to every voice clamoring to be heard and is soundly ignored. Burnside is perhaps the purest expression of righteous indignation fueling civil disobedience in the United States. Burnside is as potent a symbol of freedom as the Statue of Liberty, and at least Burnside was built by Americans. Of course such lofty goals were never the intent of the builders, but Van Gogh never intended to be a great artist, he just wanted to paint.

Fortunately the city has decided to give its overrated sanction to Burnside along with their implied threat of potential destruction if the locals get out of line. The threat is particularly disturbing. If someone is committing a crime at Burnside, simply arrest the offending party. Don’t threaten to jackhammer the entire place and destroy the work that so many people put their time and effort into creating. Global consequences are not the way the world works, it is the way a small mind thinks. If the city of Portland is ever foolish enough to decide that the local skateboarders no longer deserve the fruits of their labor, they will find an unlikely voice screaming in indignation. An intrepid researcher who is so inept on a skateboard that he can’t even ollie a three inch curb.
Conclusions

For the conclusions of this study, this thesis will make a strict departure from standard form. For hundreds of pages the finest word in the human language has been omitted, the word “I”. I will infrequently use this taboo word particularly when discussing causation. The vast majority of research is written in the third person. Apparently this detaches the researcher from the text and provides the illusion of pure objectivity. It is as if the text is actually a disembodied voice from the clouds accompanied by distinct rays of light representing the definitive knowledge bestowed. This is of course, ludicrous. The truth is that research is done by people with all the glorious imperfections and bias inherent in the species. While statistics and analysis can be dealt with in the third person, putting the conclusions in the third person is simply a smoke screen. The following will be my conclusions derived from my research. I encourage the reader to question my conclusions using the data provided. Or better yet, go out and get some additional data to support or challenge my conclusions. The data is what it is, but the conclusions are a combination of the data and my brain. The inherent subjectivity of my perceptions is all over my conclusions just as they will be all over yours. The objective truth has never been printed and never will. All writing is an expression of a beautifully subjective humanity. Learn the lesson Dorothy learned on her fateful trip to Oz. Always pay attention to the man behind the curtain.

Correlation

There are three possible answers to the question, “Is there a correlation between the studied skateparks and crime?” There could be a positive correlation, meaning that the skatepark has more crime than surrounding areas. There could be a negative correlation,
meaning that there is less crime at the skatepark than the surrounding area. The third possibility is that there is no correlation between the skateparks and crime.

**Are you positive?**

The first possibility is a positive correlation, as a rule, this does not appear to be the case. None of the sites were focal points for crime in the surrounding area. In every case the site experienced average to lower crime than the surrounding neighborhood. This is not to say there was never crime at the skateparks, just that it is definitely not a focus point for crime.

[Image of a skatepark]

Making the case that FDR Skatepark in not criminogenic is simple. Over the five year study period not a single recorded crime occurred at FDR. Very few places in Philadelphia can make a similar claim. Though there was purportedly an incident at the Fourth of July party in 2004, this never showed up on official statistics. The likely reason is because no criminal charges were filed, which would call into question its status as a crime. Criminal charges were filed in the incident at the Fourth of July party in 2005, but this was after the study period. It should also be mentioned that the party attracts many people who would not normally be at FDR. Everyone questioned strenuously maintains that the people involved in the 2004 and 2005 incidents were not skateboarders. In addition, these events have been going on for years with no problems. Again, in five years not a single recorded crime.

FDR is also relatively free of unrecorded crime. Drug dealers and prostitutes can be seen from the elevated vantage point of FDR, but they park well down the road. The extent of criminal behavior at FDR is an occasional beer drunk or joint smoked. Even these minor
infractions are discouraged by some. FDR is the only site studied where someone stated that they would confront someone smoking marijuana. In addition, during observation not a single incident of confirmed criminal behavior was witnessed. In fact there was only one incident of suspected criminal behavior. If my suspicions are correct, people actually left the skatepark to get high. No, I don’t think there is any evidence that FDR is positively correlated with crime.

Denver Skatepark, as a whole, experiences little recorded crime. Six out of nine crimes do not have a single recorded incident at Denver Skatepark. Two of the remaining three average well under one incident a year. The only crime that occurs with any regularity is theft. Denver Skatepark does experience about five thefts a year. When compared to the immediate surrounding area, there are indeed more thefts at Denver Skatepark than the vacant lots that surround it. When the concentration of theft at Denver Skatepark is compared to adjacent populated areas, the concentration is far less dramatic. Theft is a globally prevalent crime and seems far more connected to population than the skatepark. Comparing the crime in the busiest park in the Denver Park System to a crime in vacant lot is unfair. Regardless, no other crimes are annually recorded at the site, despite the increase in population.

Ironically, the “nicest” skatepark has the only tenuous connection to a positive correlation. It could be argued that graffiti and local skateboarding damage can be linked to Denver Skatepark. Adjacent Commons Park has a surprising amount of graffiti that seems to radiate southwest from the Denver Skatepark. The graffiti is exclusively stickers or small tags and by no means dominate the view. It is surprising that there is any graffiti at all in Commons Park. The city takes a very aggressive approach to removing graffiti at the
skatepark keeping it effectively graffiti-free. Apparently, this rigorous maintenance has not extended southwest into Commons Park. The locals could plead innocence, but it is difficult to believe when they are holding a can of spray paint.

By design or chance, Commons Park is not conducive to skateboarding and receives little damage. Privately-owned Commons Plaza has clearly been skated frequently. Blue-black streaks flecked with rusted steel are on most of the granite ledges. The owners are employing off-duty police and BID ambassadors to discourage skateboarding. The signs make it clear that here, skateboarding is indeed a crime. This outcome is unsurprising considering every skateboarder in Denver, and many from elsewhere, are passing through.

Though vandalism is a crime, the term criminogenic must be applied narrowly and with multiple qualifiers. Remember no other crime follows this pattern, or any other pattern because the crime doesn’t exist. The idea that skateboarding damage is going to increase when you funnel every skateboarder in the area to one spot is not difficult to grasp. Think of this area as the sacrificial lamb that is reducing skateboarding damage in the precious suburbs. Unfortunately, that does little to console the owners who are watching their granite get scuffed. Regardless, I don’t think that an increase in a specific type of vandalism is near enough to term an area criminogenic as a whole.

Calling Burnside criminogenic is quite a stretch. Though Burnside experiences more incidents of crime than FDR or Denver Skatepark, Burnside is by far in the worst neighborhood. The Buckman neighborhood crime rate is typically in the top-five of Portland. The wealth of reported crime in the Buckman neighborhood is distributed more evenly than FDR or Denver Skatepark. In addition, Burnside is in the middle of a warehouse
district and does not benefit from sparsely populated adjacent park space. The immediate area surrounding Burnside receives some crime and so does Burnside. Crime does not seem to focus or avoid Burnside. Simple assault and “all other” crimes are correlated, but only average to one incident a year. The only thing that seems to attract recorded crime in the area is the intersection of Burnside Street and MLK Boulevard. It is clear that intersections are criminogenic and should be bulldozed immediately.

There appears to be a significant amount of crime at Burnside that does not go reported. Some of this crime is unreported because local skateboarders take care of it themselves. The stories are multiple and varied, but they always include a prostitute, vagrant, junkie or drug dealer and inevitably have some darkly comical method of removing them. The locals themselves do engage in some minor indiscretions. An infrequent joint will be smoked, or a more frequent beer will be drunk at Burnside. Though pot appears for brief cameos, the starring role is held by Pabst Blue Ribbon. Drinking at Burnside is a fairly common occurrence. The drinking is kept low key, and most of the people at Burnside are legally adults. The crime is drinking in public, not “minor in possession” or “drunk and disorderly”.

If asked, “Would beer and pot be at the site if Burnside Skatepark was not there?” The answer is yes. Not only would there be beer and pot, but there would be crack, heroin, vagrants, prostitution and drug dealing. These crimes that Burnside still has to kick out of their skatepark would rapidly fill in the void. After trying to convince a bum he can’t sleep here, or a prostitute that she needs to sell her dignity somewhere else, I would need a beer too. Calling the location of Burnside criminogenic is arguable, calling the skatepark criminogenic is laughable.
Sharing a cigarette with negativity.

The second possible answer is that skateparks and crime are negatively correlated, meaning that skateparks act as a deterrent to crime in a specific area. This theory is routinely presented by skatepark advocates to alleviate a city’s concerns over crime. There is a distinct possibility that this is the case, particularly at FDR and Burnside.

At FDR there was no recorded crime in five years studied. It is possible that there would have been no crime if the skatepark had not been built. Perhaps FDR Park itself is what is deterring crime. When no crime is recorded, it is difficult to isolate the specific cause. Regardless, FDR Skatepark has a spotless criminal history during the five years studied. If FDR was acting as a criminal deterrent, then ideally the criminal records would show precisely what they do.

It appears that FDR has definitely had an effect on unrecorded crime. First the prostitution and drug dealing that is occurring on the far end of the bridge used to be occurring where FDR currently sits. Now the cars stay a few hundred yards away from the skatepark. The area that is suitable to buy crack, or whore out for crack, has been cut in half by the presence of FDR. No, the FDR locals are not going down the street to run the offending people off, but the locals sure won’t tolerate it at their skatepark. In addition, some locals actively discourage even minor crimes such as underage drinking and marijuana. It could even be argued that the presence of FDR reduces the effects of short dumping. After all, once the construction debris is incorporated into FDR it is no longer debris, it is construction. The exception to this rule is graffiti. Anyone doing graffiti in FDR while other are around will be run off, but mostly because they are in the way. Graffiti regularly appears and locals don’t do much to prevent it. In fairness, some of the graffiti is very nice stuff and it hammers home the urban decay aesthetic.
Denver Skatepark has little, if any, negative effect on the crime in the surrounding area. The fact is that the surrounding area is either park land or vacant lots. There was very little crime, or people, in the area to begin with. If there was any negative correlation it would be very difficult to identify. The site itself experiences very few crimes, the only one worth mentioning is theft. Considering the number of people at Denver Skatepark, five thefts a year is not absurd, particularly when other crimes are non-existent.

Any negative correlation between Denver Skatepark and unrecorded crime is minor. While older skaters, parents, or the Burrito Lady may confront unruly kids, the culture of enforcing local standards is not in place at Denver Skatepark. More than FDR or Burnside, Denver Skatepark is public space, owned by all equally. The behavioral standards are the same as all public places and typically enforced by the police. Others may get involved with minor social concerns, but once things get criminal the police are called. Addressing inappropriate behavior at Denver Skatepark is more like communal mothering than self-policing. The principles are there, but the enforcement is understandably less harsh. We are talking about a suburban kid with a smart mouth, not a strung out junkie with the shakes.

Burnside is perhaps the best example of a possible negative correlation between a skatepark and crime, though the GIS maps don’t show it. As mentioned, crime does still occur at Burnside despite the locals’ best efforts. As a whole, recorded crime does not avoid or focus on Burnside. At both scales the only thing that seems to attract the frequent crime in the entire neighborhood is the intersection of Burnside Street and MLK Boulevard. A crime
rate similar to the surrounding area may not seem impressive, but consider that all reports indicate that the area was previously full of crime and now it is average.

What Burnside has apparently had a drastic effect is on unreported crime. Though this effect can not be quantified, research clearly shows that prostitutes, junkies, vagrants and drug dealers formerly occupied the area. It is also clear that they do not currently occupy the area. Unfortunately this does not mean that after the undesirables were run off they got the idea and have stayed away. Stories of running junkies, bums and drug dealers can all be traced to the past year. Apparently there is always someone who didn’t get the memo that certain behaviors are not tolerated by the Burnside locals. Their methods are suspect, but the results aren’t. What was formally a criminal sanctuary now records one simple assault a year. Perhaps even more stunning is simple assault is the most frequent crime recorded at Burnside.

The story of undesirables being vacated to make room for Burnside is well known. This story becomes even more believable once visiting the site. Underneath the Burnside Bridge is a perfect location to shoot up or sleep off that fortyouncer of Colt 45. Chasing these people off is what let the local skateboarders get away with building Burnside, and it is what they must do to maintain it. Sure a few people are drinking beer down there, but they are the same people preventing the whores and drug dealers from setting up shop.

The safe money.

While the discussion of any correlation is inherently more interesting than the discussion of no correlation, the safe money is on no correlation. No correlation is the only answer that fits the GIS based recorded crime maps of all three sites. At FDR there is no
reported crime at the skatepark, but recorded crime is also exceedingly rare at FDR Park. Only two incidents were recorded in FDR Park over the five years studied. In Denver, recorded crime in the mapped area is rare, not only at the skatepark but also the majority of land that surrounds the skatepark. The crime that appears in the Buckman neighborhood is evenly distributed across the map, neither focusing nor avoiding Burnside Skatepark. If I was placed under oath and had to justify the answer purely based on objective data, no correlation would be the answer given. Unfortunately, the recorded crime does not tell the whole story.

Estimates of the amount of unreported crime understandably tend to vary with context and type of crime. Despite this, most people believe that some crimes, particularly minor or victimless crimes, are grossly underrepresented by recorded crime statistics. How is it that a researcher spending twenty hours at FDR observes prostitution and a drug deal down under the bridge, yet police have not made a single arrest in five years? The crimes are simply unreported and likely not prosecuted. When these incidents are examined through interviews and personal observation, it becomes clear that skateparks do not exist in a vacuum. In addition, these skateparks typically interact with the social context in which they are placed. This applies to many subjects including crime. Would there be five thefts a year at Denver Skatepark if no one was there with possessions to steal? I doubt it. Would there still be drugs and prostitutes at site of Burnside if the locals did not run them out? The magic 8-ball says, “Likely.”

Impressions of unrecorded crime are difficult to justify even if personally witnessed, but the fact remains that the crimes did occur. If reduced to what can be numerically proven in a court of law, then the answer is “no correlation”. Though this is simple and statistically
justifiable, it is clearly not the whole story. If this document makes a single methodological point it is that looking only at objective data is like seeing with one eye shut. Though the images are still there, the depth perception is horribly off.

I would kill for a “yes” or “no” at this point.

There is no positive correlation between the studied skateparks and total crime. In Denver Skatepark there is a correlation between the skatepark and vandalism, but no other crimes. In FDR and Burnside there is a negative correlation between the skateparks and crime, particularly unrecorded crime. There is no correlation between recorded crime and FDR or Burnside.

Causation

While determining what type of correlation exists seems simple, which it wasn’t, determining why the correlation exists is more difficult. Causation defies objective data when there is no reliable measurement of behavior. These conclusions are based on sociological research, interviews and observation. The three sociological theories reviewed in this text are notoriously difficult to gain quantifiable data for. Those sick of seeing numbers will be given a blessed reprieve. Those who can smell subjectivity are undoubtedly getting a whiff. Though subjective, these conclusions are supported through extensive research. Feel free to challenge them, but pack a lunch, it will be a long day.

It would be nice to present one theory that universally fit the studied skateparks. It would be equally nice if this theory applied over all skateparks in all contexts. Unfortunately, that is not going to happen. For each site a different dynamic with crime has developed and must be addressed individually. There will be marked similarities across the skateparks, but there will also be marked differences.

Never underestimate an intolerant government.

Of all the sites, FDR had the least recorded crime, and possibly the least unrecorded crime. There are numerous things working in their favor. The CPTED principle of
restricting traffic benefits FDR. No one stumbles on FDR; there are very few passers by. Random criminal acts are not going to happen at FDR. Though CPTED refers to police surveillance, at FDR the local skateboarders provide more surveillance than the police. When you walk into the park they look at you, stare is more like it. The chance of committing a crime without being seen is non-existent.

The principles of Defensible Space also apply here. To call the locals invested is a raging understatement. They love FDR because they built it. They love FDR because it is one of the best skateparks in the country. They love FDR because it is the only legal place to skate in Philadelphia. Though no one came out and said it, I think they love FDR because it is a big “fuck you” to the ignorant government that banded them from iconic Love Park. All of which are perfectly legitimate reasons to love FDR.

As Newman predicted, the locals are willing to defend their space. There is a code of behavior at FDR that, if violated, the offender will be informed of their transgression. This is FDR: that crap is not cool here. Fortunately by all reports crime is very rare at FDR and extreme intervention is rarely, if ever, required. To the majority of skateboarders the question, “What would you do if you witnessed a crime?” is truly hypothetical, and hopefully it will stay that way. Though no rules are posted, the locals make it very clear that in their house, they make the rules.

Though Broken Windows theory would suggest that there should be significant crime in the area, this is not the case. Though most trash at FDR was picked up, there was significantly more than Denver Skatepark or Burnside. In addition, FDR is covered from post to stern with graffiti. Despite all of this there is less reported, and possibly unreported, crime at FDR than anywhere else.
FDR also benefits from being in a very low crime area. FDR Park provides a massive buffer between FDR Skatepark and the rest of the urban grid. It takes people to commit a crime. Public parks that are sparsely populated typically have low crime rates. In the five years studied there were only two incidents of any criminal activity anywhere in FDR Park. Though technically in Philadelphia, FDR is detached from the urban grid, which may be a pain when the locals want a cheese steak, but it keeps crime well away from FDR.

The level of investment the locals have in FDR Skatepark can not be understated. Unfortunately, when you really love something you are vulnerable to having it taken away. The city of Philadelphia has a track record of blind intolerance toward skateboarding from the beginning. Some locals feel that if any problems, including crime, occur at FDR then the city would level it without question. Perhaps one reason they are so intolerant of any kind of criminal behavior is that the threat of demolition looms over them like the shadow cast by the I-95 Bridge.

Sure you are invested, but are you invested enough?

Unlike FDR that was built where they could get away with it, Denver Skatepark was specifically sited. Fortunately the skatepark was placed in an area already low in crime. With the exception of theft and vandalism, crime at Denver Skatepark is rare. The locals never had to remove any existing crime, so a precedent for confronting crime was never set. It undoubtedly required investment to get a project of this size built, but once the funds were approved the rest was done by the city. The construction, maintenance and defense unquestionably contributed to the ownership of FDR and Burnside. The local Denver skateboarders have genuine affection for their skatepark, but the level of ownership just isn’t the same. Many of the sociological principles applied to FDR can be applied to Denver Skatepark, just with different results.

Though Denver Skatepark has the quickest routes to and from the skatepark, the skatepark does benefit from the CPTED principle. At the specific request of the Denver
Police, views into the skatepark are wide open. There are no shaded retreats to take a nap out of sight. A person at Denver Skatepark feels exposed, because they are, and people rarely commit criminal acts while exposed.

The principles of Defensible Space apply here but to a lesser degree. The resident skateboarders do clearly have investment in Denver Skatepark, but not on the same level as FDR or Burnside. Though a few older skateboarders can confront inappropriate behavior, they have no real power to remove someone from the skatepark. Though technically FDR and Burnside may be public places, they are not perceived as so. The locals own FDR and Burnside, while Denver Skatepark is indeed a public place. The locals do not dictate or enforce the rules, the police do. The city built it and the city maintains it, they also have the responsibility of enforcing the rules. A few may speak up and address inappropriate behavior, but that is all they will likely do.

With out question, Denver Skatepark has fewer of Broken Window’s dreaded incivilities than the other sites. In fact Denver Skatepark is cleaner and more aesthetically acceptable than many parks, period. What is ironic is the effort required to keep it that way. Even though graffiti is removed daily, there is always more the next day. Supposedly keeping a surface graffiti free will insure that no further graffiti will appear. Apparently the people at Denver Skatepark have not gotten the memo. Each day Denver Skatepark is cleaned and each day it is spray painted anew. In addition, unlike FDR and Burnside, the skateboarders themselves are responsible for the majority of the graffiti. If locals had to scrub the concrete themselves they may be less tolerant of graffiti, but the city does all the maintenance, including graffiti removal.
While the threat of demolition is always in the background at FDR and Burnside, Denver Skatepark has no such worries. The city spent a large amount of money to build it, and more money to maintain it; the last thing they are going to do is shut it down. If there are problems the police will take care of the offending parties, global consequences are not even on the table. This is not to suggest that the resident skateboarders do not care what goes on in their skatepark, they do. It is that the actions of others, criminal or otherwise, have a very small chance of impacting the majority of people that skate Denver Skatepark. The skatepark will be there tomorrow long after the police arrest the idiot who had a joint in one hand and spray paint in the other.

It is important to mention the positive correlation with theft. I believe that the correlation with theft can be directly attributed to the increase in population at Denver Skatepark. Five thefts a year is high for an average park, but Denver Skatepark can hold a couple of hundred people without seeming crowded. Theft is a notorious crime of opportunity and when a large population is carrying expensive electronics in small packages, a few are bound to get stolen. The most reported things stolen are cell phones and I-Pods. Unless the act is witnessed, a full cavity search is required to recover the stolen item. It is tough to blame non-skateboarders because few are around. Even so, this does not prove that skateboarders are any more prone to theft than another population. Multiple thefts are often committed by single perpetrators, and a couple of bad apples certainly do not implicate the whole barrel.

The correlation between vandalism and Denver Skatepark also deserves a few words. Vandalism comes in two flavors: graffiti and skateboarding damage. The graffiti does appear to be connected with the skatepark. It is difficult to determine why people skateboarding at Denver Skatepark are also doing the graffiti. The suggested rationale is that Denver has a much younger population than Burnside or FDR. All of the people at Denver Skatepark with spray paint were under eighteen. In addition, the lack of personal ownership may contribute to the problem. Kids driven to rebel, usually deface someone else’s property, never their own.
A self-perpetuating legend.

Why do the locals react like they do Burnside, because it is what has always been done and it is what is still required. Perhaps Kent Dahlgren’s assessment calling Burnside a “CPTED nightmare” is a little harsh, there is little in CPTED to recommend it. Access is slightly restricted but two major thoroughfares are conveniently located a mere two blocks away from Burnside. The fifteen foot concrete exterior walls make Police surveillance of Burnside is near impossible. That’s Ok though because the police don’t keep crime out of Burnside, the local skateboarders do. It is what has always been done and it is what is required.

Burnside is unquestionably the most defended space in the study. The skatepark was built on the principles of Defensive Space and it prospers today because of them. Initially the undesirables needed to be moved because they were in the way. Initially maintenance was done on the site purely to keep it in good enough condition to skate. Somewhere along the way this changed. Prostitutes and drug dealers began to be removed, not because they were in the way, but because they were in the skateboarders’ space. The trash was picked up not to clear a path for a skateboard, but because as Chad Balcom puts it, “It’s like cleaning your room.” (Balcom 2005) At some point it became a matter of principle to keep their meager skatepark free of problems, human and otherwise. Later it became a necessity, as the locals were told that if the relationship between Burnside and its neighbors ever deteriorated then the concrete would be jack hammered out. The positive vibe between Burnside and its neighbors was predicated on the removal of undesirable elements, it is clear what is required to stay in the neighbors’ good graces.
Initially removing undesirables may have been considered a matter of survival, but those days are long gone. Burnside is firmly entrenched in the skateboarding cannon and the cultural fabric of Portland. It is highly unlikely that the city would make Philadelphia’s mistake and outlaw a skateboarding icon. Regardless, the maintenance on the space continues without the immediate threat of demolition. Perhaps even more surprising is that the pride and ownership of Burnside has perpetuated for fifteen years. Original builders are long gone. They have grown up, settled down, and had kids. One of the original builders has even been reported to go dancing with his wife (Dahlgren 2005). A whole new generation, some barely out of diapers when Burnside was built, now maintain and defend Burnside. Though the faces have changed, the policy has not. Burnside is still owned by the locals, who will succinctly tell people that they need to “skate it or beat it.” It is their house, their rules and you are not going to be told twice. Perhaps the locals can be a bit over zealous defending Burnside, but it is what has always been done and it is what is still required.

The principles in Broken Windows theory are applicable at Burnside. The incivilities mentioned by Broken Windows are absent at Burnside. There is little trash, less graffiti, and no indication that the space is neglected, as far as the locals can control. Being under the Burnside Bridge has some inherent limitations. The perpetual shade on the loading dock means it remains dry and dark. As Chad Balcom says, “It is very conducive to being a bum.” (Balcom 2005) It is also conducive to every other type of crime imaginable. This ideal location insures that Burnside will be dealing with the homeless and junkies for years to come.

Admittedly the locals’ own indiscretions are tolerated, but the crimes are minor. An adult drinking a beer or smoking a joint is not seen as serious, particularly when a known local is engaging in it. Frankly, I get the impression the locals feel that they have some leeway, provided by the years of a positive relationship with their neighbors. In fairness, they may be right. As long as the locals don’t get out of hand, a few beers between friends is not going to cause much of a problem. Unfortunately, the only way to know when the locals
have gotten out of hand is when Burnside’s neighbors are pissed. By then the battle has been lost and the war is half over.

The conclusion of conclusions.

In the three sites studied, none had a positive correlation with global crime. Only one, Denver Skatepark, had any positive correlation with crime and it was with only two crimes. This can be attributed to the population increase at the site. Two skateparks, FDR and Burnside, showed a strong tendency towards a negative correlation with crime. Though some may point at any reference to alcohol or marijuana as clearly a correlation to crime, they may want to get some statistics on their local high school. Though public consumption of alcohol and marijuana may be crimes, they are so prevalent in America, it would be a surprise if they never appeared at skateparks. Alcohol and marijuana are far more correlated to American culture, than skateparks.

What is missing from this document is the global statement that covers all skateparks regardless of context. It is missing because this statement does not exist. Investment appears to be important, but creating the level of investment seen at FDR and Burnside is problematic in a public space. This is because FDR and Burnside are not perceived as public spaces. They are owned by the locals who skate them. The locals built it, the locals maintain it, and so the locals defend it. Gaining this level of investment on a government owned and maintained park may be impossible. The locals at Denver Skatepark show that they can have true affection and investment in a public skatepark, but expecting the results seen at FDR and Burnside is unrealistic. FDR and Burnside are cultural icons that were born out of a hostile climate when no other option was available. They were not created due to
legislation, but action. Glorify them, idolize them, adore them, but of all things do not expect FDR or Burnside to be the norm.

With the simple catch all answer unavailable, skateparks will have to be considered as individual sites, each with their own social and criminal context. Though this significantly complicates things, requiring people to think, the results will undoubtedly be worth it. If nothing else, a deeper knowledge of the site will be obtained, one that extends well beyond quick references or dots on a map. The cultural dynamic will show itself to be intricate and complex with many different facets and players. Once you reach that point, you will realize that simplistic assumptions of skateboarders and crime are woefully inadequate. Treating people as a group with the same attitudes and behaviors greatly simplifies things. Unfortunately, stereotypes are notoriously inaccurate. Even more inaccurate are second-hand stereotypes gleaned from historical perception and the pervasive mass media. To gain some small perspective on skateboarders behavioral and intellectual diversity simply spend some time around them and, dare I say, talk to them. A few meager hours at skateparks or in conversation with skateboarders will not provide a full picture, but it will be a start. It may even be enough time to learn that skateboarders are just people, gloriously imperfect people, just like you and me.

After all these pages I find that I have little more to write. Though I have much more to say, what has been presented here will have to suffice. If some one has actually read the entire document, I am shocked. If you have only read the conclusions, I understand. I only hope that whatever portion the document that was read was instructive. Certainly, writing the document has provided me with insights well beyond skateboarding and crime,

Brought to you by the letter B
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