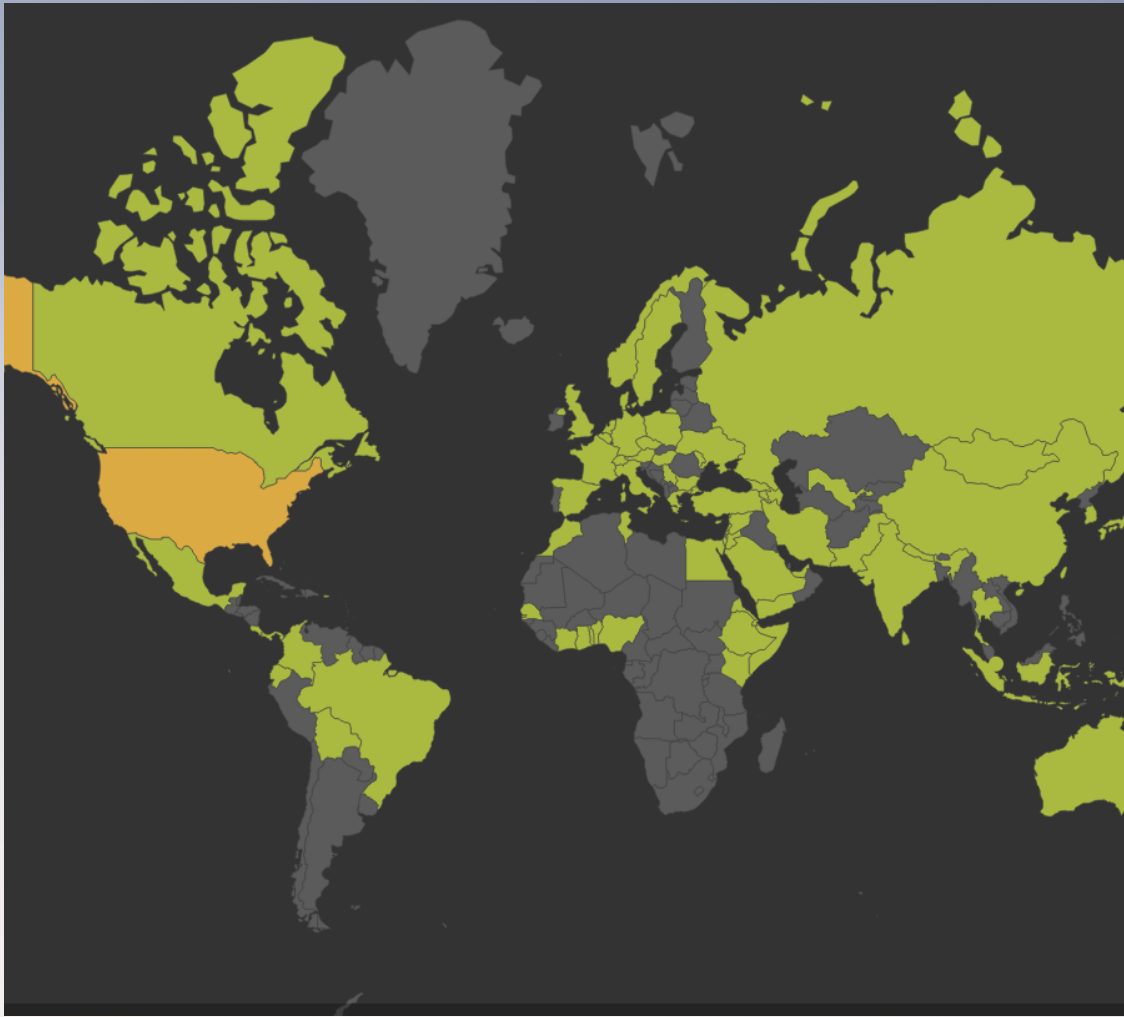


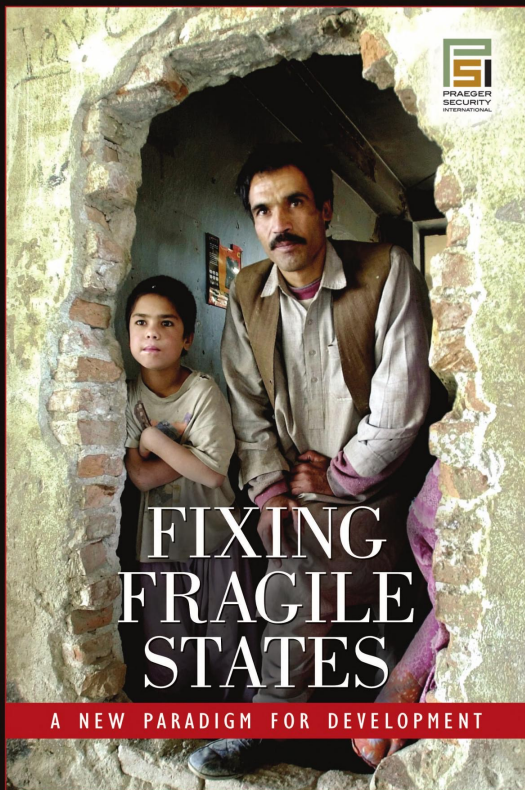
# Why American society is in trouble, and what we can do about it

*Seth D. Kaplan*  
*Johns Hopkins University*



Green = places  
visited





PRAEGER  
SECURITY  
INTERNATIONAL

# PATHWAYS FOR PEACE

INCLUSIVE APPROACHES TO PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

Inclusive Social Contracts in Fragile States in Transition

## Strengthening the Building Blocks of Success

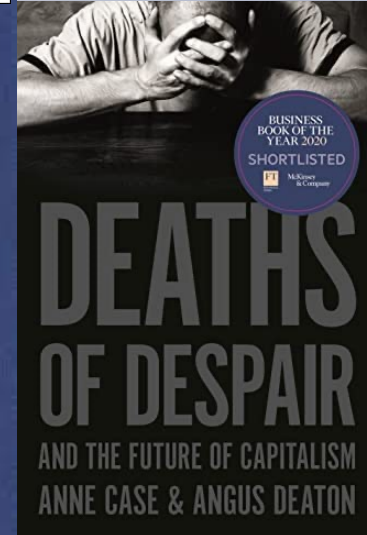
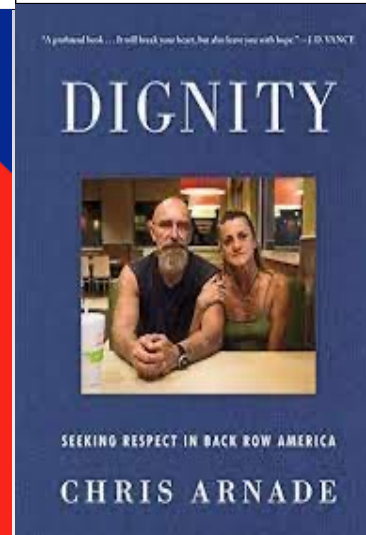
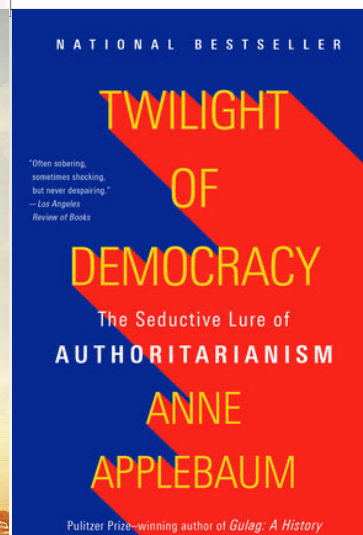
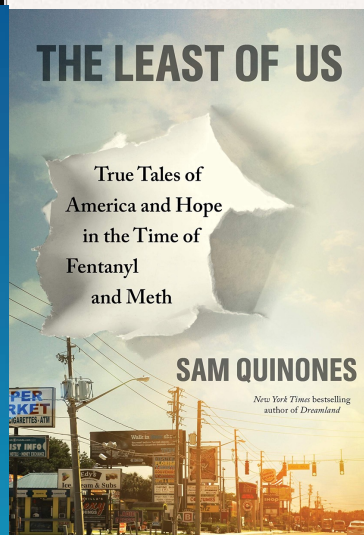
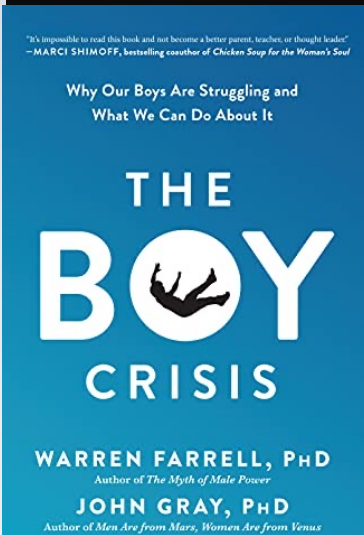
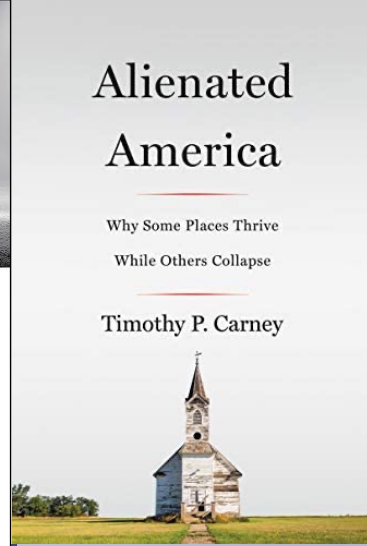
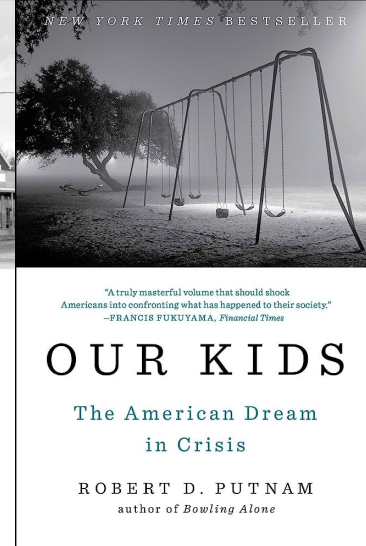
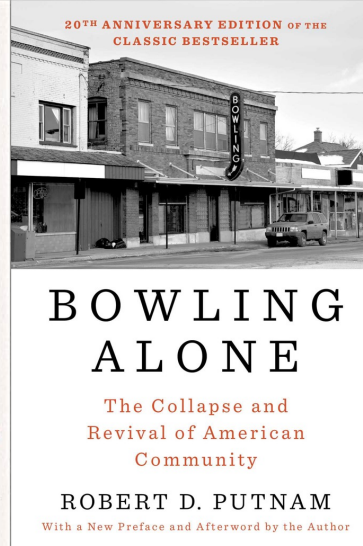
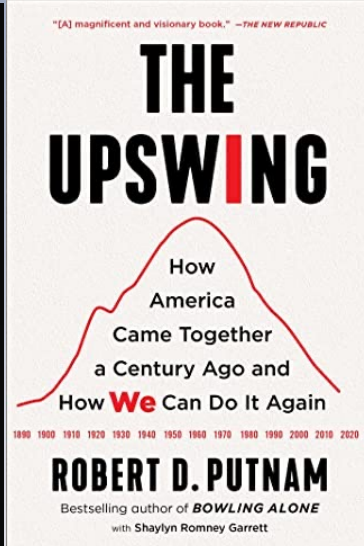
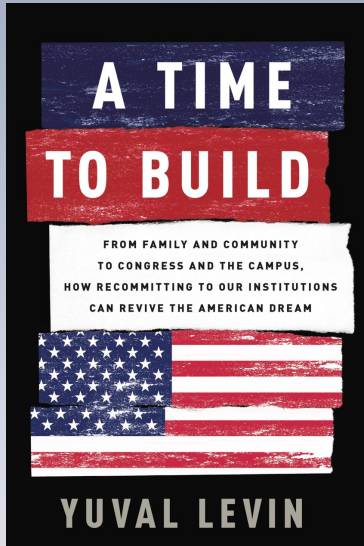
SETH KAPLAN, MANAGING EDITOR



September 2017

Why the book?

Lots of questions, but  
where are the  
solutions?



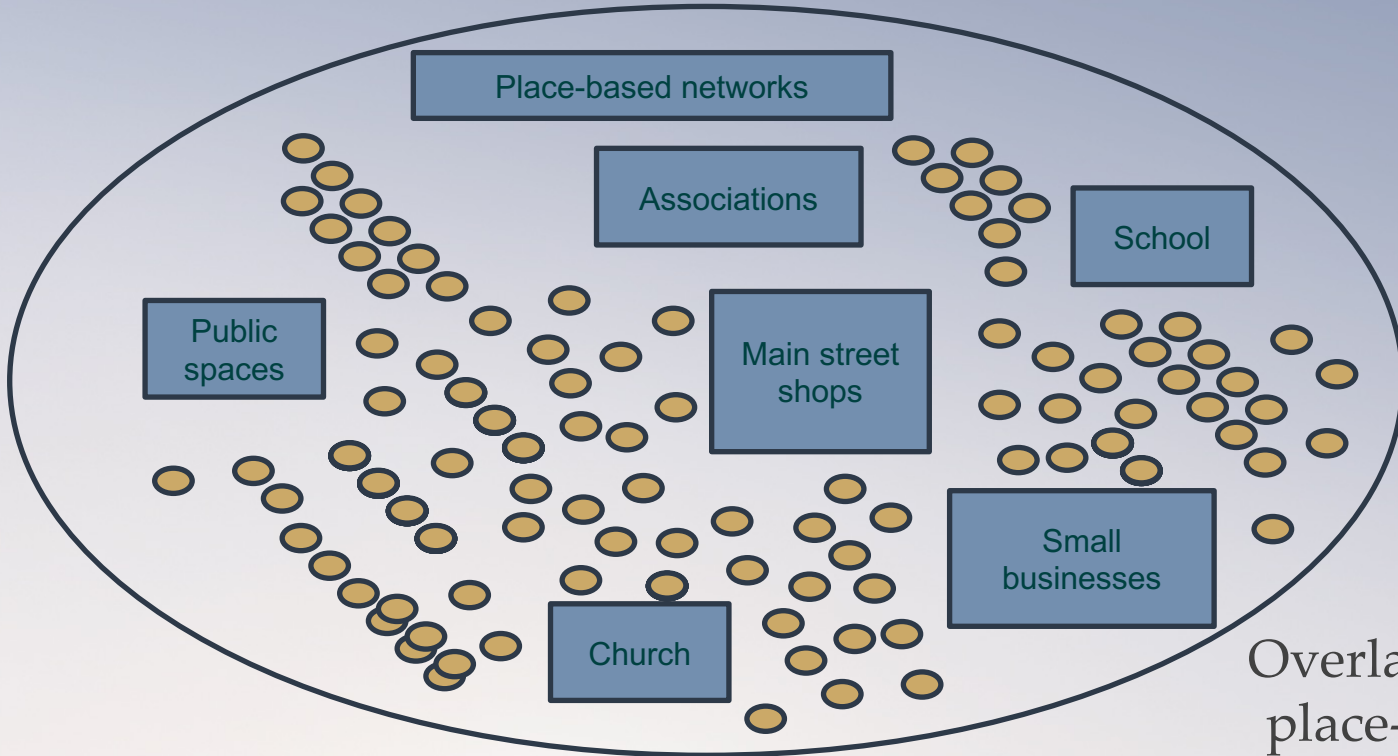


*“The very fabric of our connections with each other has plummeted, impoverishing our lives and communities.”*

*— Robert Putnam*

What changed with our  
relationships?

# What we had



Overlapping  
place-based  
institutions/networks

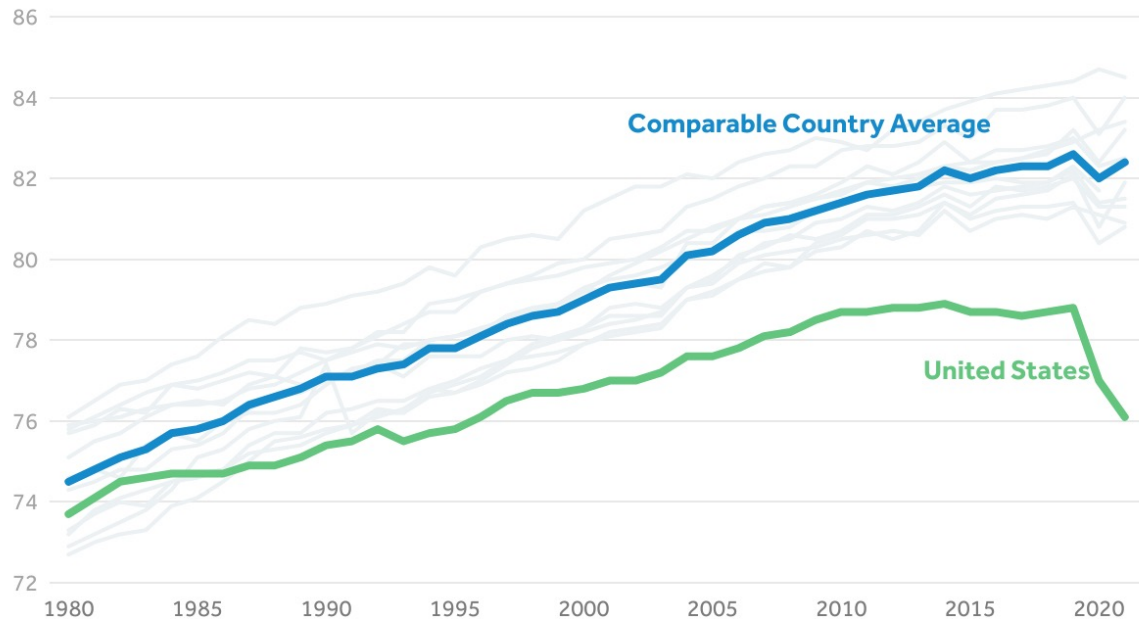
# What we have



Some have great  
networks, others  
poor or no  
networks



## Life expectancy at birth in years, 1980-2021



Notes: Comparable countries include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada (except for 2021), France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. See Methods section of "How does U.S. life expectancy compare to other countries?"

Source: KFF analysis of CDC, OECD, Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and UK Office for Health Improvement and Disparities data

Peterson-KFF

**Health System Tracker**

# Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the  
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community

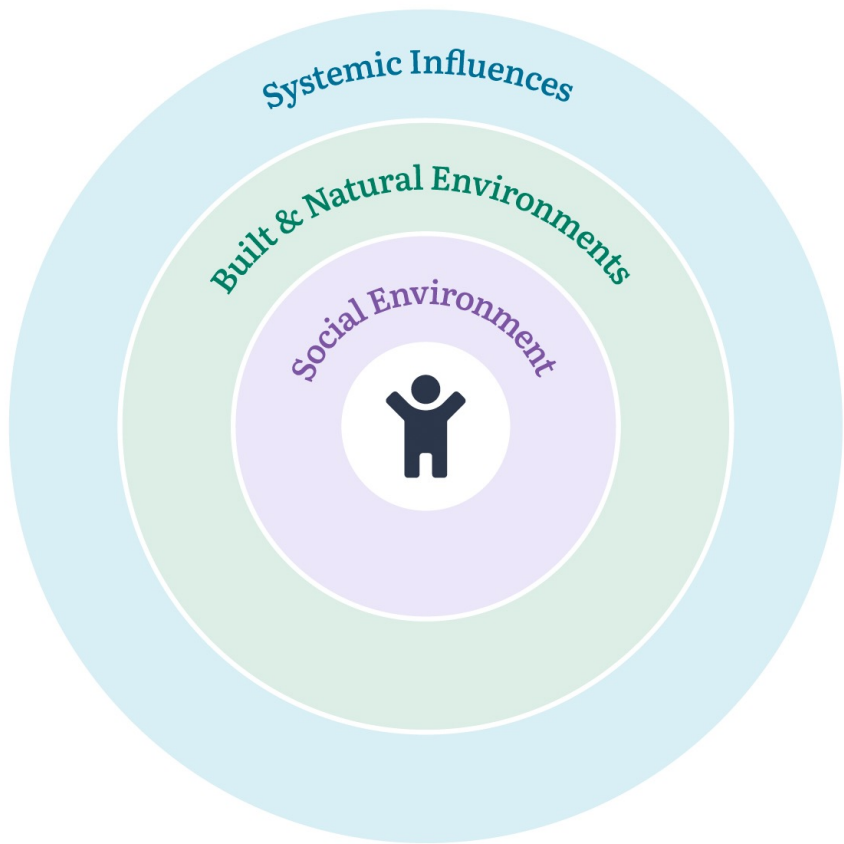


“Rebuilding social connection must be a top public health priority for our nation. It will require reorienting ourselves, our communities, and our institutions to prioritize human connection and healthy relationships.”

**Vivek Murthy**  
United States  
Surgeon General



# Place Matters

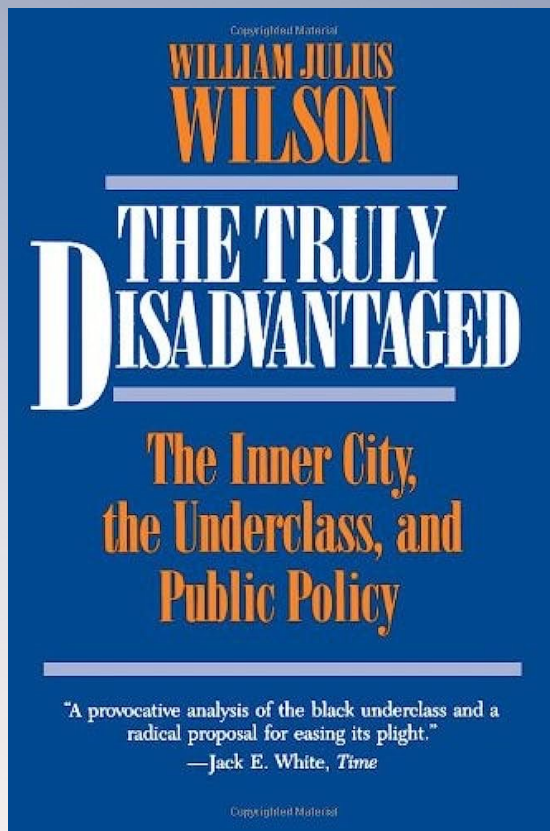


## Place Matters: What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

How the environment we create shapes the foundations of early childhood development



Center on the Developing Child  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



*“Neighborhood  
effect”*

— *William  
Julius Wilson*



*“The neighborhoods in which children grow up shape their earnings, college attendance rates, and fertility and marriage patterns.”*

*— Raj Chetty, etc.*

But social poverty  
affects the well off too



*“Even at the... upper echelon of society... these connections are weaker. They’re fraying and people feel very worried about imposing on others and even embarrassed that they are not... totally self-sufficient.”*

*— Naomi Schaefer Riley*

Neighborhoods have  
a huge impact on  
society and individual  
wellbeing

Many of our social ills  
sit downstream from  
neighborhoods

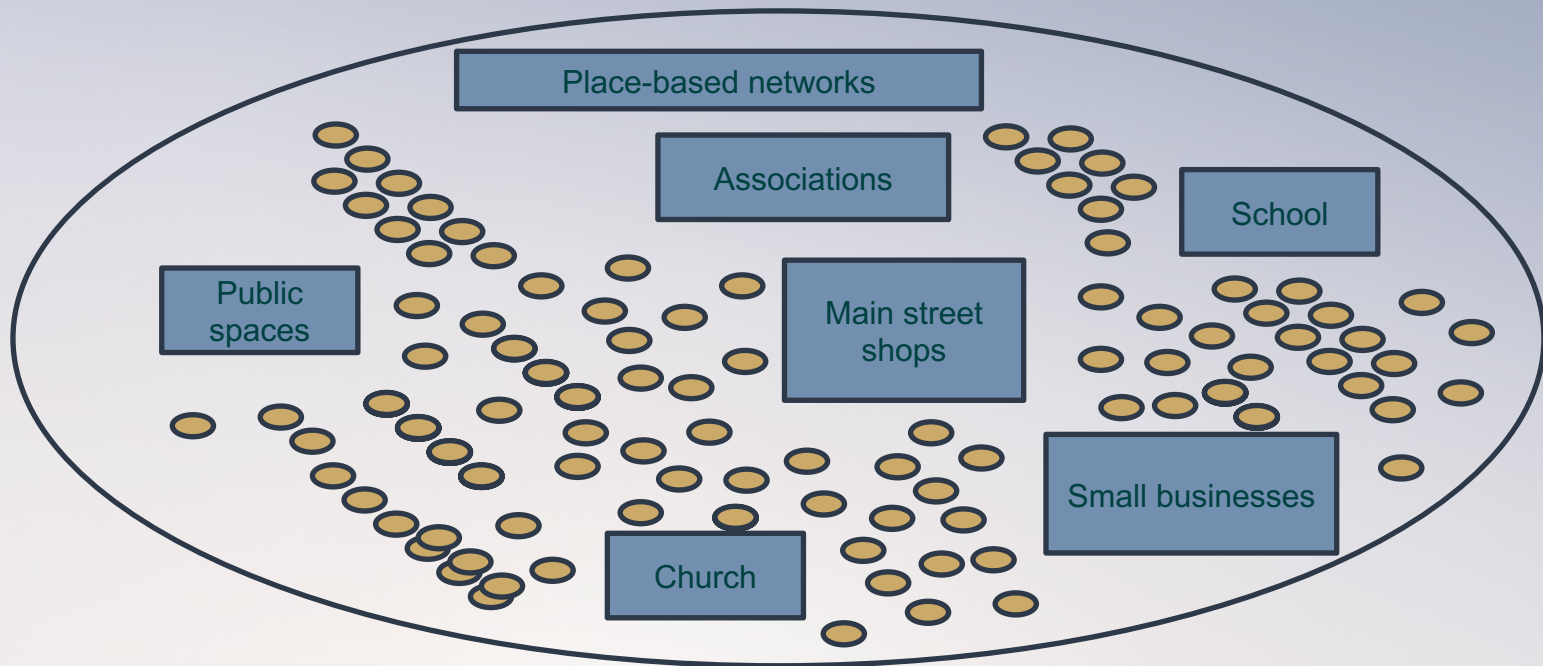
We all live in a  
place

And yet we have built a  
placeless society that  
maximizes isolation  
and vulnerability



What can we do  
about it?

# Ensure everyone lives in a flourishing neighborhood



# Strong, overlapping institutions



Kinship



Religious



Education



Associations



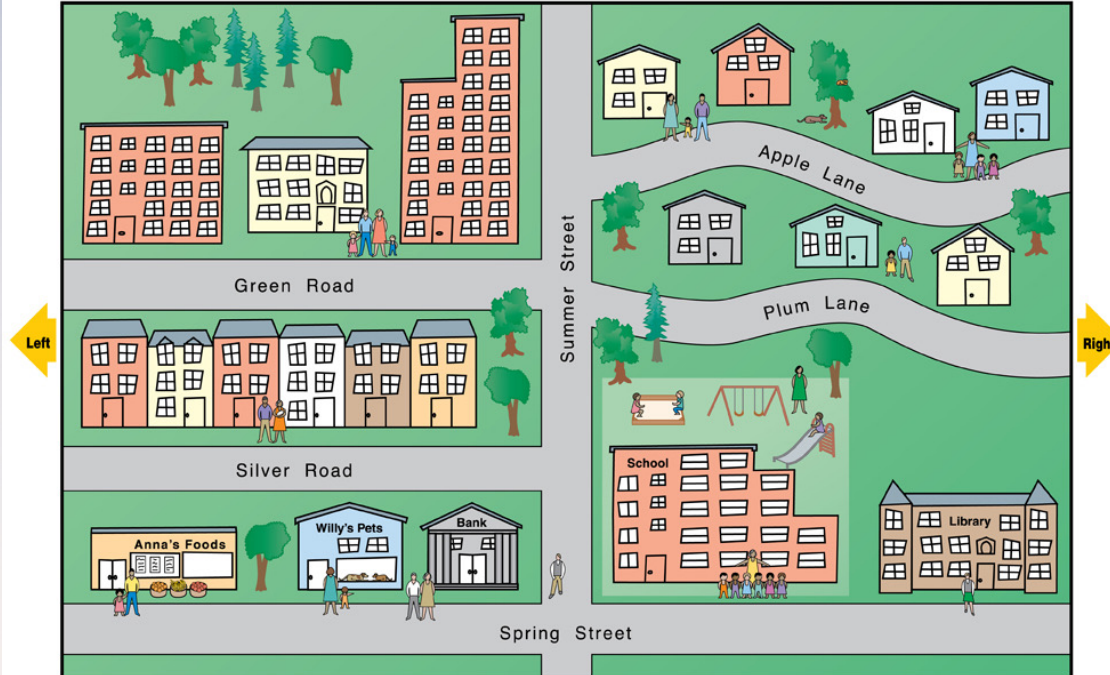
Economic



Political

# Supporting landscape

Neighborhood Map





*Our neighborhoods, cities, and nations need collaborative, ground-up repair. As we create relationships of trust across neighborhoods, we are literally at the ground level fighting against the storm of individualism and polarization that is ripping us apart.” — Tim Soerens*

What can strengthen  
neighborhood  
relationships at scale?

# Inter-Family



# Baltimore



Ryan and Sarah



# Two faces of social poverty



Dunbar High School



Johns Hopkins University

The challenge:  
overcoming the  
“insanity going on  
outside the school.”

The answer: create a family-like social support system like the one that “had pulled Ryan up when things had fallen apart.”

# Exceptional individuals in extraordinary circumstances

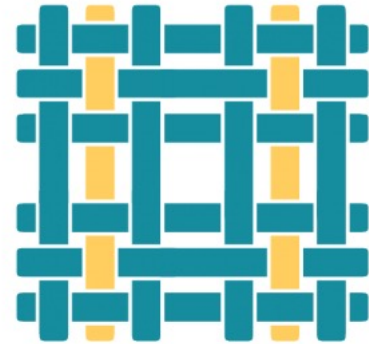
Students



Volunteers



*Threads*

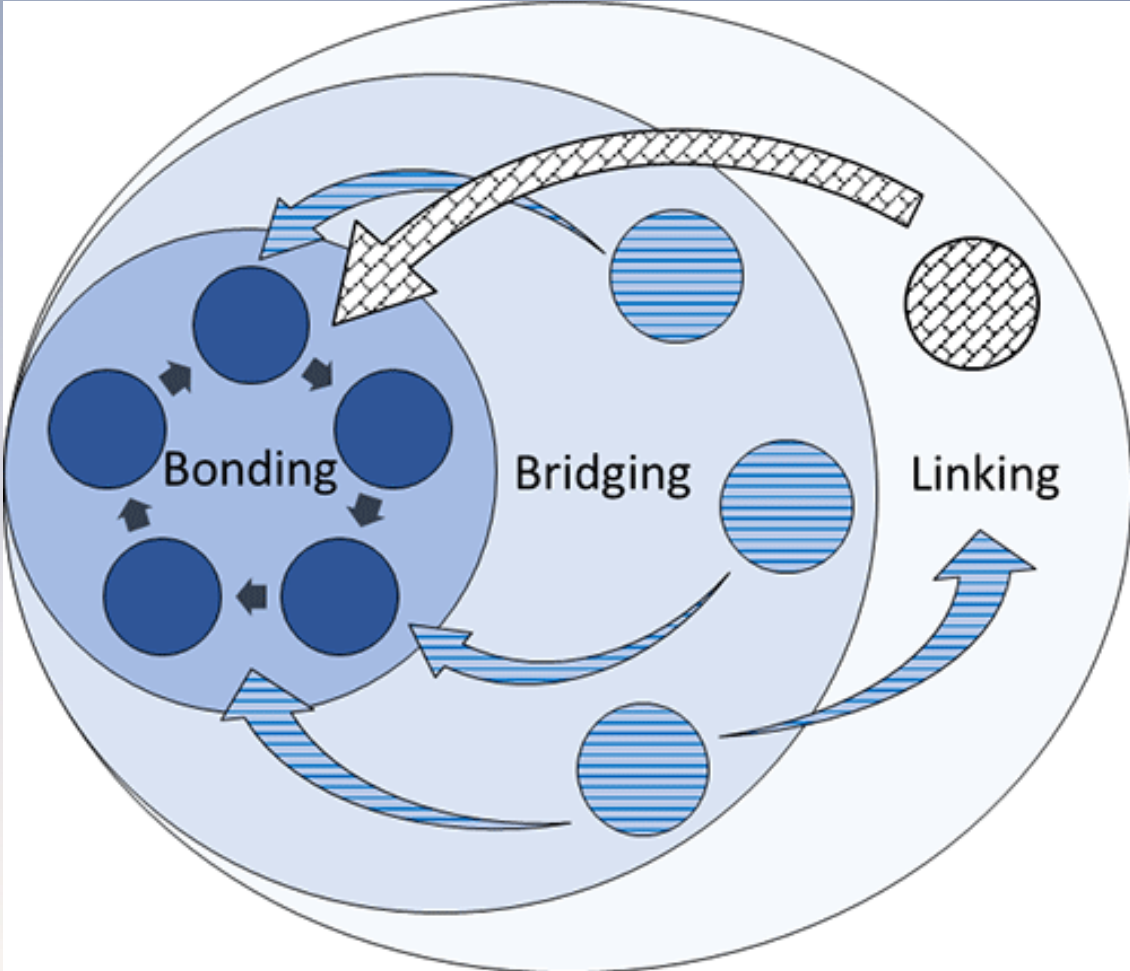


Ten-year 24/7 commitment



*“Unconditional love is so rare in life that it is identity-changing when somebody keeps showing up even when you reject them.”*

“wealth of  
human  
connection”



“Relationships are  
the key things that  
bring about real  
changes.”



*“If you address the issue of social isolation, everything else takes care of itself.”*

## Compelling Student Success

**77%**

—  
overall high school graduation rate for  
Thread students

**100%**

—  
of students remain enrolled for 10  
years, no matter what

**57%**

—  
of student alumni have completed a  
4-year or 2-year degree or certificate  
program

Education outcomes 10x comparable group

A flourishing society needs  
to be built on flourishing  
neighborhoods with  
highly connected and  
empowered people

Momentum is key

# Neighborhood Flourishing Continuum



# Flourishing depends on

- Micro institutions (Household, interfamily, informal networks)
- Community institutions (efficacy/bonding of schools, churches, businesses, associations)
- Bridging ties (interlocal connectivity/influence)
- Built/physical environment
- Sources of income/wealth
- Policies/culture/economy
- Levels of safety/violence
- Practical/political skills/knowledge

# Neighborhood flourishing is promoted by

- Establishing a neighborhood quarterback
- Centering government around neighborhoods
- Strengthening key micro, intra- and inter-local institutions
- Using an ABCD and community empowerment lens
- Bolstering community economic ties and wealth producing capacity
- Reshaping physical landscape

# Tipping Point

At-scale investments in built landscapes, economy, education, and social dynamics

Emergent, self-sustaining investment in relationships, property, and business

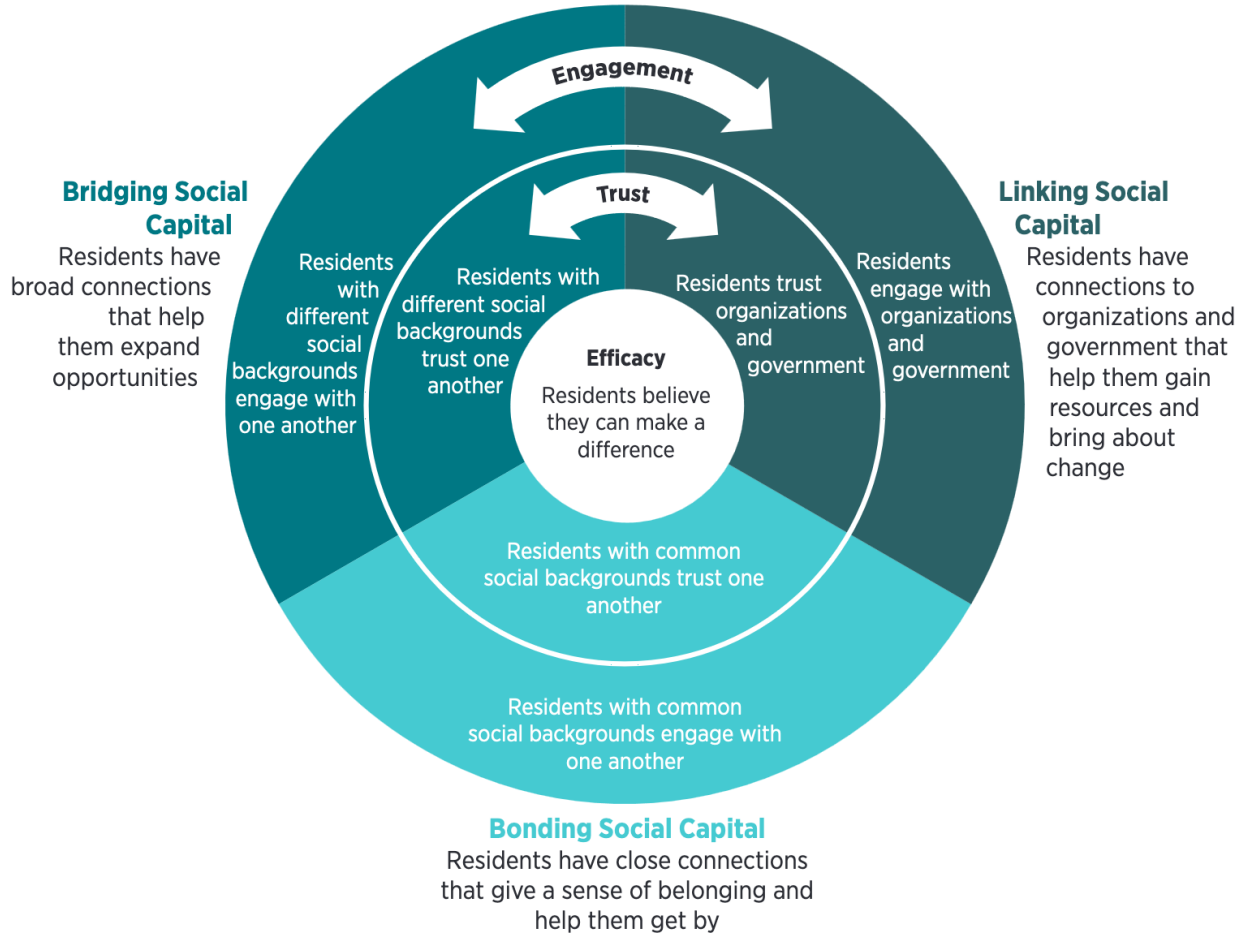
Reversing the cycle puts neighborhoods on the path to self-sustaining health

*Decline and poverty*

*Growth and wealth creation*



FIGURE 3. COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL MODEL



What can you do?

- Ensure every community is rich in institutions (schools, civic associations, churches, govt) and meeting places (parks, cafes)
- Use education to provide every student with 1) roots that come from a sense of pride in their home, 2) wings that give them the belief they can aspire to any path in life
- Strengthen the home and surrounding community – the first and arguably the most important classrooms
- Use early warning systems and prevention where possible
- Take an incremental approach to improvement
- Encourage government and nonprofits to switch from a siloed program focus to a place and neighbor-based approach



*“The big problems we face as a nation, in other words, have to be combated with lots of smaller, local solutions.”*

*— Dreama Gentry*

An urgent exploration of  
why American society is in trouble,  
and how to fix it,  
starting with the places we call home.

<https://sethkaplan.org/>

