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COMMUNITY AS GIFT-GIVING: COLLECTIVISTIC ROOTS OF VOLUNTEERISM

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Who in America volunteers what and why? And what impact does volunteering have? It is widely believed that the typical volunteer is middle-aged and middle-class and that volunteerism is rooted in American cultural individualism. Undocumented and unexplored are collectivistic roots of giving, which may have a different social base than individualistic-grounded volunteerism. Characteristics of collectivistic-rooted volunteerism, conditions under which it transpires, and group and community effects of such giving are explored here. The analysis is based on ethnographic research in a predominantly "old immigrant" working-class inner-ring suburb. Collectivistic-rooted volunteerism is shown to be community-embedded and to have group, community, and class stratifying effects.

APPROXIMATELY HALF of all Americans claim to volunteer time and money to a cause. Such charity is typically thought to be a personal, discretionary matter, rooted in American cultural individualism (e.g., Wuthnow 1991:23). This conception, however, ignores collectivistic bases of giving. Collectivistic-based volunteerism involves acts of generosity that *groups* (rather than individuals) initiate, inspire, and oversee; individuals participate because of their group ties. As an ideal-typical construct, collectivistic volunteerism has characteristics that distinguish it from individualistic-grounded volunteerism. Although in practice the two types of volunteerism may be intertwined, in principle each has distinct roots, dynamics, and impacts.

First, in the case of collectivistic-rooted volunteerism, groups (organizations, institutions) coordinate the activity and determine what is given, when, how, to whom, and

why. The giving may be associated with the group's *raison d'être*, or result from group embeddedness or leadership initiative. Second, collectivistic-rooted volunteerism is group-induced regardless of the reasons members individually have for giving. Groups legitimate and sanction, and compel and reward, the volunteerism they promote. Third, collectivistic-grounded volunteerism involves group resources or group-mobilized resources, which may be monetary, labor, or in-kind goods. The resources may also be symbolic, bestowing legitimacy, honor, or moral support. Fourth, collectivistic-grounded giving is bounded by group norms and networks. And fifth, collectivistic-grounded giving has group effects, which may differ from the reasons groups give. The giving may enhance the stature of a group or its leadership, set in motion or reinforce intergroup chains of reciprocity and expectations of reciprocity, and foster intragroup, intergroup, and community solidarity, commitment, and respect. Group rewards are not necessarily immediate.

Anthropologists have long noted collective roots of giving in pre-industrial societies (Benedict 1959:173–222; Levi-Strauss 1969, Malinowski 1927; Mauss 1967). They show that forms of giving both reflect and affect the culture, social organization, and

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social bonds of groups, and that the nature and significance of gift-giving is explicable at the collective, not the individual, level. The acts of giving they analyze are group affairs, premised on reciprocity. The exchanges build trust, and over time they provide societal "glue." The gift-giving helps unify groups, generations, and kin, and solidifies the power of rulers. The gift is its own reward in that it induces social obligations, including repayment with a counter-gift (Mauss 1967:34; Simmel 1950). Thus, there is no free gift, and giving and receiving entail obligation, constraint, and self-interest. Gifts are part of a system of reciprocity, although items exchanged are not necessarily of equal value. Unequal exchanges contribute to and reinforce honor, prestige, and authority.

VOLUNTEERISM IN AMERICA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Most studies of contemporary volunteerism in the United States emphasize its individualistic roots and middle-class base. Compassion, notes Wuthnow (1991:303), is consistent with American individualism in that it centers more on the caregiver than on relationships and rarely serves as a basis for establishing lasting ties with the people served. With reference to the middle class, Bellah et al. (1985) note that commitment to voluntary associations in America is increasingly a private affair and that voluntary organizations no longer serve as bridges to the larger public, the community, the nation, and the world.

Putnam (2000) points to the organizational base of volunteerism. He notes that the shriveling of donations to charities and volunteering since 1960 (except briefly in the 1980s, when donations rose in response to temporary changes in the federal tax code) is attributable to a decline in group participation. As group involvements tapered off, people's social networks thinned. In this changed context, volunteerism became more individuated, fragile, and sporadic, and shifted from community projects to one-to-one assistance. Putnam (2000:117) distinguishes *doing with* from *doing for*. Putting a check in the mail has different ramifications than network-based giving. Putnam finds those who join groups nearly 10 times more

generous with their time and money than nonjoiners. Giving, volunteering, and joining are mutually reinforcing. Group involvement encourages giving because (1) people are more apt to volunteer if asked, and the more involved people are in social and community networks the more likely they are to be asked, and (2) organizational involvements inculcate civic skills conducive to volunteerism. Putnam's findings suggest that pockets of community giving might persist where thick social ties and civic engagement still thrive. Putnam, however, does not explore the conditions under which such ties might be likely, and he provides no analysis of how, when, or why *groups*, and not merely individuals, tend to engage in sociologically significant, normatively grounded networks of reciprocal giving.

There is no a priori reason why collectivistic-grounded community giving is confined to pre-industrial societies and to the America of the past, and no a priori reason why the middle class is the most giving class. Gouldner (1960), for example, argued that a norm of reciprocity was universal and that it patterned acts of giving. Titmuss (1971) argued that even the donation of blood to a stranger was socially and culturally bounded. In most contexts, donations presume a sense of obligation and reciprocity (though not necessarily by the recipient to the donor), approval, interest, and a feeling of inclusion in society—not pure altruism. Neither Gouldner nor Titmuss, however, focused on how *group* networks and norms might induce reciprocal giving and receiving.

Modern institutional life both influences and is influenced by patterns of giving (see Carson 1995). Caplow et al. (1982:225–45), in a restudy of Middletown, for example, noted that gifts affirm relationships. An implicit family-based calendar of gift-giving prescribes what gifts to give, when, and how, even though Middletowners think their generosity is voluntary. This calendar replaces an earlier cycle of patriotic festivities. It celebrates family and ensures its continuity at a time when the family is at risk. Although the authors do not focus on class bases of gift-giving, the shift accompanied a change in Middletown's class structure, from predominantly working-class to more middle-class.

Organized religion, for both social and cultural reasons, has similarly been shown to influence volunteerism.¹ Approximately half of all charitable giving in America is religious in nature (Putnam 2000:124). Wuthnow (1991:122–27, 152–53) notes that the Biblical tradition inspires altruism, although less so now than in years past and primarily through activities promoted in church. He adds that in the United States such caring is rooted in religious individualism.

Students of religion have highlighted how Catholicism inclines the laity to value caring and sharing.² Tropman (1995) speaks of a “Catholic Ethic” that emphasizes altruism, benevolence, compassion, and charity, and argues that this ethic is embedded in family and community. Any such ethic does not in itself, however, explain *specific* Catholic patterns of secular generosity, differences among Catholics in generosity by ethnicity, class, and gender, and why Catholics gave a smaller portion of their earnings to charity at the end of the twentieth century than they did a generation earlier (Putnam 2000:126). The ethic also does not account for non-Catholic giving of time and money, especially in a society whose dominant culture is premised largely on Protestant-inspired values. While recognizing religious roots to giving, Putnam (2000) attributes the overall drop in per capita giving among Catholics (as well as among non-Catholics) to declining civic involvement, not to a withering of commitment to a religious ethic or to declining religiosity.

Ostrander and Schervish (1990) point to the reciprocal nature of relations between donors and recipients. However, they do not explore relations *among* donors or recipi-

ents. Ostrower (1995) addresses relations among charity-givers within a class context, arguing that philanthropy affects relations among donors. Elite philanthropy conforms with class norms and strengthens class bonds: The wealthy give, in part, to reaffirm their class standing. While pointing to the group-based social and cultural underpinnings of volunteerism, Ostrower focuses exclusively on upper-class giving and presumes the patterning to be rooted in private initiative, individual organizational involvements, and individualistic cultural values (except in the case of Jewish philanthropy, which she attributes to communal values and bonds).

From an individualistic vantage point, studies concur that the archetypal American volunteer is middle-aged,³ educated, employed, lives in a small town, is involved in the community, is a woman,⁴ and in addition is middle- or upper-class and religiously involved (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1984:27; Ostrower 1995; Putnam 2000:118–31). Yet persons who fit the standard profile give mainly in response to personal solicitations. Over three-fourths of people asked agree to volunteer. And because the middle and upper

³ Putnam (2000:129–30) notes that middle-aged parents of school-age children are especially likely to volunteer, and that middle-aged individuals donate the most blood. However, he notes that seniors account for most of the increase in volunteering in the last quarter century. He attributes their increased volunteerism to their historical experience and not to their age per se. They are members of the long “civic” generation, unlike the baby boomers.

⁴ Women are the primary informal gift-givers and caregivers. Studies document that, compared with men, women give more time to children, the infirm, and the elderly (Abel and Nelson 1990); they cultivate and invest more in family relationships (Di Leonardo 1987); and they are more effective in motivating volunteers and building community spirit (Daniels 1985). But gender patterns vary by social class. Elite women tend to give more of their time and money to philanthropy, especially to social service and social action causes, than do men of their social standing or less well-to-do women (Ostrander and Fisher 1995; Ostrower 1995:71–85). Meanwhile, lower-class women are especially enmeshed in informal personal support networks (Roschelle 1997; Stack 1974).

¹ Churches disseminate information about opportunities to volunteer. They also provide opportunities, solicit volunteers, and sanction such activity. Much of the church-linked volunteerism reaches beyond narrowly defined religious activity (Hodgkinson and Wuthnow 1990).

² Catholicism is not the only religion, however, to inspire and pattern giving. Wuthnow (1999) examines different patterns of volunteering for religious and nonreligious causes among Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelical Protestants. He reports that church-going mainline Protestants volunteer the most for nonreligious activities.

classes are believed to be the most generous, they are the constituency most typically targeted, individually and through organizations, for donations of time and money (O'Connor and Johnson 1989:408, 409).⁵

Community-level research finds giving to be greatest in small, relatively affluent, homogeneous settlements with few elderly and minorities (Wolpert 1995). Giving in such environments may be influenced by a "demonstration effect" (Weisbrod 1988:93): The more others give, the more likely any particular individual is to give.⁶ The studies ignore, however, intergroup dynamics at the community level that influence who gives what, how, when, and why.

In sum, then, past studies leave several aspects of collectivistic-rooted giving in America poorly documented or unexplored. We still know little about (1) intergroup giving, the contextual factors that shape group-induced giving, and group effects of giving; (2) working-class group-based volunteerism; and (3) the embeddedness of community-based group giving (i.e., how community norms and networks influence patterns of giving, including through religious and other institutions).

COLOMBO: DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES AND DATA SOURCES

My analysis of collectivistic-grounded volunteerism rests on an in-depth study of a predominantly Italian American but ethnically diverse community of some 4,500 people in an inner suburb in the Greater Boston metropolitan area. Although Irish immigrants had previously settled in the area, followed by French Canadians in one neighborhood, between the 1920s and mid-1960s Italian immigrants became the dominant group. According to the 1970 census, after the last significant wave of Italian im-

migration (here, as elsewhere in the United States), 64 percent of all residents were of Italian origin, and all but 1 percent were white.⁷ Mainly working-class, two-thirds of those with jobs were craftsmen, foremen, operatives, and clerical or service workers. Eighty-eight percent of all residents had no more than a high school degree. Demographically there was little residential turnover: Nearly half of all residents had lived in their homes 20 or more years, and nearly half of residents were homeowners.

Close to a generation later, Italian Americans continued to be the principal local force—socially, culturally, politically, and economically. Although still the largest ethnic group, their proportion declined: According to the 1990 census, 39 percent of the population claimed Italy as their principal ancestry.⁸ The younger generation of Italian Americans, who coveted homes of their own, were priced out of the community with the dramatic rise in real estate values between 1970 and 1990, while economically successful families left for more spacious and elegant neighborhoods. At the same time, new condominiums, apartments, and middle-class-affordable homes attracted non-Italians to the area.

Both the residential turnover and intergenerational socioeconomic mobility among long-term residents contributed to an educational and income upgrading of the community. By 1990, almost half the population had studied beyond high school. In current dollars, the median income rose to \$48,000, up from \$11,000 just two decades earlier.

The neighborhood, which I call Colombo, is part of an upper middle-class and heavily Jewish suburb.⁹ In 1990, Colombo's median family income, average education level, and mean housing value were the lowest or sec-

⁵ With respect to requests for political contributions, Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (1999) show people with the highest income and education to be targeted the most.

⁶ Similar factors, other than community size, account for variations in nonprofit generosity at the state level. Wolpert (1995) found that contributions to a variety of health and cultural causes were greatest in the least populated, wealthiest, most progressive states with low distress levels.

⁷ Prior to 1970, the government used different census tracts. The tract containing Colombo reported 13 percent foreign-born in 1950 and 47 percent foreign-born in 1960.

⁸ The census asked people their country of origin in 1970 and their principal ancestry in 1990. In 1990, 19 percent claimed Irish ancestry and 5 percent claimed English ancestry, the second and third most frequently reported identities.

⁹ According to the mayor's office, the suburb was approximately one-third Jewish, one-third Catholic, and one-third "other."

ond lowest of the 14 subsections of the suburb. The typical Colombo resident was from the working class or lower-middle class.

I relied on a range of sources to study Colombo. I consulted census data, church records, suburb-wide studies, and 30 years of neighborhood newspaper articles. But the in-depth interviews that I conducted over a five year period, between 1994 and 1998, are my main information source.¹⁰ I interviewed 124 individuals in depth (some several times). I interviewed 26 current and former leaders of Colombo groups, 13 shopowners, tradesmen, and businessmen, 15 politicians and political activists, 6 school-related personnel (principals, teachers, school committee members), 12 individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds active in the community, 12 "successes" (that is, Colombo residents who had moved away but had retained community ties), 18 government employees who worked in Colombo or worked for the town and had Colombo ties, 7 past and current religious leaders (priests, minister, pastoral assistant, temple overseer), 10 rank-and-file residents, and 5 nonresidents knowledgeable about the area.¹¹ In addition, I attended local events and frequented local hang-outs.

I located interviewees by first identifying local organizations and institutions and contacting their chief officers. I then asked each interviewee for names of other local groups, influential persons, and persons of diverse

backgrounds. I relied on the halo effect—as associating with key figures in the community—to gain the confidence of people locally.

I asked interviewees to describe their group memberships, the range of activities in which their groups engaged (including group volunteerism), the nature and frequency of their contacts with other groups, and how group and community life had changed over the years. I also asked for biographical information. Local religious leaders and businessmen as well as civic group leaders were queried about current and past group giving, the evolution of the community, and their personal backgrounds.

THE WEB OF GROUP GIVING AND RECEIVING IN COLOMBO

The 14 main Colombo groups include local decades-old Italian-based mutual aid, fraternal, social, and religious adoration societies, plus newer Italian cultural, folk dance, village-of-origin, and nominally nonethnic community groups. The groups also include affiliates of national and international institutions and organizations. Group memberships range from a few dozen to about 800. Regardless of size, their local importance is grounded mainly in the informal relations they foster. The numbers of people they involve and affect sometimes are far greater than formal membership figures or attendance at group meetings suggest.

While these local groups relied on members for activities they sponsored, each typically also relied on support from other community groups. Intergroup giving involved volunteer labor (in a variety of forms), financial donations and fundraising assistance, and lending of equipment and building space for group functions. Table 1 shows that among groups central to local volunteerism: (1) giving is a group activity; (2) group giving is not unidirectional; the six main groups all gave to and received from one another; (3) groups were most likely to donate labor; (4) the main group donor was also the main recipient of donations from other groups; (5) groups that donated money also received money from the groups to which they gave; and (6) group giving involved exclusively

¹⁰ As a resident of the suburb, I interviewed key individuals formally over a two-year period and informally and intermittently over a five-year period. I also attended community events during the five years of the study. The present study on collectivistic-grounded volunteerism is an unanticipated outgrowth of research I undertook on working-class ethnicity in suburbia among "old" ethnics presumed to have been assimilated into mainstream America. Drawing on a grounded theory methodology (see Glaser and Strauss 1967), the present analysis testifies to how empirically rooted theorizing enables a broadened understanding of volunteerism, conceptually as well as descriptively.

¹¹ To protect interviewee anonymity, I often refer to persons who currently or previously held top posts in local groups as activists (a term residents use) and stalwarts, rather than by the precise group position they held.

Table 1. Types of Intergroup Giving and Receiving among Core Groups in Colombo: 1994 to 1998

Group Donor	Group Recipient					
	Christmas Association	Sons of Italy	Boys and Girls Club	American Legion	Blessed Virgin Society	Parish Church
Christmas Association	—	M, L	M, L	M, L	M, L	M, L
Sons of Italy	M, L	—	M, L	M, L	M, L	M
Boys and Girls Club	L	L	—	L	L	—
American Legion	M, L, S	S	M, L, S	—	L	M
Blessed Virgin Society	M, L	M	M	L	—	M
Parish Church	L, S	S	S	L	L, S	—

Note: M = money, L = labor, S = space/equipment (goods in-kind).

local groups as well as affiliates of national and international organizations and institutions.

The matrix suggests that giving generates its own rewards: Giving and getting are intertwined. It also suggests that considerable gift-giving is not readily quantifiable and is not subject to tit-for-tat reciprocity. And the intergroup financial donations suggest that groups value giving and receiving independent of needs. There is no apparent effort among the groups to even out monetary exchanges or to settle accounts.

The leaders of the core groups were late middle-aged or older, working-class, and male. The leading activists in the American Legion and the Christmas Association were the oldest. Groups with limited ties to the web of local group affiliations were more likely to have middle-class, middle-aged, and female leaders, like the archetypal volunteer highlighted in sociological studies.

The core groups active in Colombo were the Christmas Association and the Society of the Blessed Virgin (both pseudonyms), and local affiliates of the American Legion, the Sons of Italy, the Boys and Girls Club, plus the parish church. Annually scheduled community events these groups sponsored or assisted included festivities for children and the elderly, a *festa* in honor of a Madonna and a *festa*-linked carnival, a Columbus Day celebration, a Family Day picnic, a

fundraising roadrace, and Memorial Day (weekend) activities.¹² While specific groups took responsibility for organizing different events, each counted on contributions of time, labor, and in-kind goods from other local groups. Local businesses and the parish church (plus church groups) also contributed to the web of community giving such that secular and profane, profit and nonprofit, activities were intermeshed. Involvements of the Christmas Association, church-linked groups, and local businesses illustrate how groups in different institutional domains were embedded in similar organizational networks of giving and getting and were guided by a shared commitment to collectivistic-grounded community giving.

THE CHRISTMAS ASSOCIATION AND ITS WEB OF INTERGROUP GIVING

The Colombo Christmas Association, the hub of community volunteerism, served as a window through which to view collectivistic-grounded local giving of time, goods, and

¹² I am concerned here with the relationship between intergroup relations among local groups and affiliates of nationally federated groups, and volunteerism. For information about other effects of membership in nationally federated groups, see Skocpol et al. (1999).

money.¹³ It was the main donor to local groups, and symbolized and reinforced a community norm of giving. By the turn of the century, it had doled out 1 million dollars to social causes, mostly local.

The Christmas Association was also the main recipient of local volunteerism. Its very existence depended on individual and group giving of time, goods, and money, as it had no dues-generated revenue and no United Fund support, no corporate sponsors, and no official funding. Under the aegis of its 70 year-old leader, a near full-time volunteer for three decades, the Association mobilized more volunteers, raised more money for charitable and community causes, and touched the lives of more people than any other local nonchurch-based group.

Government authorities forced the Christmas Association to register as a nonprofit organization, to have a set of officers, and to file annual tax returns. But the group had no formal meeting space or regularly scheduled meetings. Everyone knew it as Marcello's (a pseudonym) group. A former cement contractor, Marcello was the organization's sole leader and nobody questioned his authority. The Association was an organizational extension of him, and traveled with him. Locals, town officials, and district politicians knew where to find him at different times of the day. He tended to hold "office hours" at noon, at a local luncheonette.

The Association had both a calendar and life-cycle base to its community gift giving. Its festivity calendar was reminiscent of Middletown's (Caplow et al. 1982), but Colombo's calendar of gift-giving was more organized, more group-grounded, and more collectivistic in its cultural underpinnings.

At its peak, before Marcello's health deteriorated, the Christmas Association ran functions for thousands of children and seniors. It did not charge for the events. Anyone was welcome, no questions were asked. Instead, it relied on voluntary contributions to support group events. During the years of large-scale events this working-class group drew in as much as \$100,000 a year (Town News-

paper, August 17, 1993, p. 1).¹⁴ But the events also depended on the labor of 200 to 300 volunteers, in-kind donations, and cut-rate deals for items purchased.

The first major activity the Christmas Association sponsored was an annual Christmas party for children. Marcello built on a modest festivity that a pre-World War II non-Italian town mayor, who lived locally, had organized for poor neighborhood youth. But Marcello's undertaking involved more extensive gift-giving and more organizational coordination. He spent months collecting donations and purchasing items at special rates. "He got the most for a dollar of anyone," noted a leader of a collaborating group. Then Marcello called on the Boys and Girls Club, the American Legion, the Sons of Italy, a local social club, and the Society of the Blessed Virgin to mobilize their members to pack thousands of gift-bags for the children attending the Christmas party and to arrange furniture, prepare food, and provide entertainment. Marcello, dressed as a chimney-sweep, orchestrated the event, at which Santa arrived by helicopter. Santa subsequently gave each child one of the packaged gift bags, containing stuffed animals, candy, plastic toys, and comic books. Marcello, explained a local alderman, was "... like Mary Poppins. He demonstrated a generosity of spirit." The event at its peak was a \$30,000-a-year operation (Town newspaper, August 17, 1993, p. 4). Although the event targeted children of the neighborhood, leftover bags went to an orphanage.

For seniors, Marcello organized a huge cookout with free food, alcoholic beverages, and entertainment (including a belly dancer!). This event cost the Association up to \$23,000 a year (Town newspaper, August 17, 1993, p. 4), and like the holiday party required a broad network of group-mobilized volunteers. Volunteers collected food and drink donations, baked, prepared sandwiches and other dishes, borrowed and set up equipment, chauffeured guests in poor health, and waited on tables.

The Christmas Association also helped local families suffering the death of a loved

¹³ Space does not permit description of the full range of volunteerism in which each Colombo group engaged. Each group had overlapping but somewhat distinctive involvements.

¹⁴ The newspaper name has been deleted throughout to maintain the anonymity of the town.

one. If a family was short of funds, the Association helped finance burial costs and Marcello pressed the local mortician to discount his charges. The Association's efforts complemented the "death benefit" support the Sons of Italy and an Italian village-of-origin association routinely provided families of deceased members. Here, the Association built on a community-wide sense that death was a shared experience. When someone dies, reflected a local alderman, "It is a community event. The funeral service and wake are affirmations of community. They are very comforting."

Respect for the deceased included group homage, collective symbolic giving, to people who died serving their country in foreign wars. The son of one of the most respected and wealthiest local families explained, "The community reveres people who give their lives to something bigger, to their country. The idea of giving of oneself is the ultimate form of giving, in a community that values such giving. People here are taught this view at an early age, and it becomes part of you."

The community accordingly honored veterans. For a number of years, Marcello, through the Association, financed and organized a Memorial Day parade. Locals proudly touted that their parade "outdid the Mayor's official parade by a long shot. We embarrassed the city!" Local groups participated in the parade, helped in its planning, and mobilized Colombans to prepare food for paraders.

Also reflecting homage to veterans, Marcello, together with American Legion activists, successfully lobbied Town Hall to construct neighborhood memorials to honor men who lost their lives in the Vietnam and Korean wars, as well as in World War II. They also built a special memorial for a neighborhood boy who lost his life in combat. Marcello often could be found, alone or with other men, cleaning and decorating the memorial parks.

On Memorial Day weekend, a community entourage (with a bus to transport the elderly) visited the different war memorials. At each site, veterans held commemorative ceremonies. Informal collaboration between the Christmas Association and the American Legion in the activities was such that who do-

nated time to whom was blurred. The two groups shared a core of activists who influenced what both groups did (and did not do).

The Memorial Day events involved other local groups as well, though less centrally and more symbolically. Reflecting symbolic involvement, at the different memorial sites, local groups were called upon to place wreaths of respect. Economically successful Colombans who had moved to wealthier neighborhoods returned for the somber community commemoration of members of their family who had died in combat.

The Christmas Association tended to individual needs as well. In the words of a former alderman, "Marcello was Medicaid and welfare rolled into a cigar box."¹⁵ These acts of kindness also built on collectivistic norms, commitments, and networks. Sick? Hospitalized? Injured? "The Boys from Colombo" would console you with a fruit basket, flowers, or a radio. Noted a prominent Irish-American fireman who grew up locally, "people looked forward to being sick!" Then, on Easter, "The Boys" delivered lilies to the elderly. Although Marcello was seen to be the mastermind behind such gift-giving, the collective signature of "The Boys from Colombo" symbolized the (gendered) community base of caring. And the selecting, purchasing, and delivering of gifts reinforced bonds among donors (including the shopowners who sold the items to the Christmas Association at discount).

Not only did the Association tend to Colombans individually, it also relied on the people it tapped for financial support. Indeed, Marcello would neither forgive nor forget recipients of Association generosity who never donated to the group.

When soliciting contributions, the Association built on community norms and networks. And Marcello, in letters co-signed with other key officers, sought contributions that summarized recent community undertakings. Every donor received a follow-up thank you note, often with a personalized note of appreciation. A January 2001 note, for example, stated:

¹⁵ Marcello always carried a cigar box, in which he put contributions, including to his weekly lottery. The box came to symbolize local good will.

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your generosity and thoughtfulness. . . . We continue to provide assistance and services to many needy causes. Like our donors we are comprised of volunteers of all ages. . . .

Over the past years we were able to support such programs as Little League, . . . Boys and Girls Club, . . . the ill and bereaved. Above all, our commitment to our Veterans is fulfilled 100%. . . .

Our pet project, the lighting and decorating of (the) . . . park with over 30,000 lights was enjoyed by young and old alike. . . . The Boys and Girls Club Postal Department responded to all letters written to Santa.

Without your support these accomplishments would never come to pass and we would be unable to function. If we can assist in any way, just call. . . . All we . . . can say is, Thank You!

Letters, moreover, were personalized. On one letter to me, Marcello added, "Hi Sue, Thanks again." On another letter, he inscribed "How ya doin? Stop by for coffee!" Letters sent by the nonprofit organizations that target middle-class donors, in contrast, are more impersonal, and their response rate is far lower. Over half of the recipients of letters on Marcello's 1,500 "active list" send in contributions.

The Association, in addition, acquired individual contributions through the weekly lottery Marcello operated out of his signature cigar box. Rarely did anyone win, and when they did, they typically told Marcello "to keep the (\$25) prize for the box." People bought chances in order to contribute to the causes Marcello championed.

Groups that benefited from Christmas Association good will and that helped make Association generosity possible also sponsored community giving on their own. For example, the Colombo American Legion Post is, in the words of a former commander, "a focal point for community charity. It serves the community." Community embeddedness induced Legionnaires to focus not only on veterans: They also donated money to local groups, mobilized volunteers for community events, and allowed local groups to hold functions in their building free of charge. The former commander lamented, though, that they used to "serve the commu-

nity more." The change came when the government outlawed money-making slot machines, the group's primary source of charity funds in years past.

The groups and individuals whom Marcello assisted helped him in turn. He was rewarded symbolically: Group giving confirmed his stature as community leader, even though he never demanded the recognition. His informal stature earned him the honorary title "Mayor of Colombo"—a title in which he took great pride. Marcello also benefited materially: Community leaders presumed that he raided Association funds for private use. The community tolerated this because "he did so much good for the community," because he lived a humble lifestyle, and because he "worked for the people. He didn't just come for the speeches." "Other groups pay their staff," locals note. Colombians were so appreciative of Marcello that they also raised funds for him when he was in need. When sick with lung cancer, the community raised \$6,000 for him. And years earlier, when he was arrested for breaking the law, the community bailed him out. Even the local priest helped him—when Marcello's brother died, for example, the priest charged less than the usual rate for funeral services.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE WEB OF GROUP GIVING

If religion is as fundamental to American volunteerism as studies suggest, can religion have collectivistic roots? In Colombo, the parish church was enmeshed in the web of group giving through the values it inculcated in parishioners, through the activities it encouraged, and through community involvements of priests and parishioners. Yet religion, both organizationally and culturally, was not the primary basis of group generosity. Moreover, religious life set boundaries to giving, the church was a key beneficiary and not merely an inspirer of generosity, and community norms and networks influenced religious-related activity.

Within the church, clergy cultivated a spirit of giving. "Collections enable the church to give back to the Lord good things that the Lord has given us," explained a priest. At the same time, the main priest was seen as symbolizing the community spirit of

giving. Group leaders felt the priest was "gracious to give services" when a family could not afford to pay. And they appreciated the Irish American priest sanctifying the yearly *festa* by marching in the procession honoring the Blessed Virgin and ending the four-day celebration with a benediction at the church.¹⁶ The community's core leadership interpreted the priest's involvements as gift-giving, not as a sacred right, priestly obligation, or a service for which they paid. They felt this way even though the church benefited substantially from the priest's involvement. The church received about 25 percent of the \$25,000 to \$30,000 the multi-generational Italian male-only Society of the Blessed Virgin raised at the annual *festa*-linked carnival (organized with the help of other local groups). Only the Christmas Association received a larger donation from the Society. In essence, the church and the Society both benefited from the priest's involvement in the *festa*. One benefited monetarily, the other symbolically. Both gave "gifts" the other coveted. Meanwhile, the priest's involvement in the *festa* and the religious tenor of Society-sponsored *festa* activity illustrate how an international institution and the "Catholic Ethic" it inculcates may take on distinctive local meaning.

Church groups, in turn, engaged in community volunteerism. A charitable parish group sponsored social events, including dances, bocci games, bazaars, and picnics, to raise money for the church and the religious order with which it was affiliated. The same group also participated in the annual *festa* procession at the request of the president of the Society of the Blessed Virgin, and donated funds to the Christmas Association. Women, more church-involved than men, here engaged in activity that simultaneously fostered community unity and their own group camaraderie, and combined secular giving with church-group giving.

Just as Catholic values permeated community secular life and the web of group giv-

ing, so too did the converse occur. Christmas in Colombo highlighted how community values and norms influence sacred celebrations. At the Christmas Association-decorated park stood a large fiberglass Santa Claus, symbolizing the individual spirit of giving and the local norm of generosity. Alongside a small crèche, Santa served as a grandfatherly reminder of a secularly fused religious-based holiday. Caplow et al. (1982:234-35) noted that in Middletown, Santa epitomized individualism, as the bearer of specific gifts to individuals, within the context of family. Such individualism in Colombo, however, had ties to the network of group reciprocity that spanned the formal secular/sacred divide. The Boys and Girls Club had its teenage members answer letters that neighborhood children deposited in Santa's mailbox, while the Christmas Association paid the postage for the approximately 500 responses the Club wrote each year. The church, in turn, sent its choir to lead a sing-along in conjunction with the annual turning on of the tens of thousands of Christmas lights in the park that the Christmas Association provided and strung.

In essence, there was a "natural affinity" between parish and local secular group life that was grounded in common and complementary norms and networks. Reflecting this affinity, a prominent local family member explained that *feste* "represent a convergence of religion and community." Yet the depth of the secular-sacred fusion varied somewhat over the years. Not all priests assigned to Colombo willingly collaborated in local activities. Moreover, there were limits to the church's secular generosity. Even the turn-of-the-century community-friendly Irish American priest did not donate money to local groups; his offerings typically were symbolic or in-kind.

Local Jewish temple involvements reveal that Catholic-linked groups had no monopoly on secular/sacred intergroup giving. But temple activists, only minimally integrated into the web of local group affiliations, gave and received less. The temple relied mainly on Jews outside Colombo for its funding and membership.

Yet the temple overseer understood the benefits of community giving. He regularly donated money to the Christmas Association

¹⁶ Italian immigrant communities are known for their *feste*, festivities that combine religious with secular activity and that build on village-of-origin traditions. For example, the North End in Boston has a calendar of Saint's day-linked *feste* (also see Orsi 1985).

and honored Catholic Marcello in a kiddush—a specially blessed ceremony—and invited him to serve on a synagogue committee. Marcello saw himself as an honorary member of the temple. The temple benefited, in turn, from its symbolic and material good-will. Activists from the Christmas Association, American Legion, and Sons of Italy mobilized Catholic neighborhood contractors and landscapers to volunteer their labor for temple renovations and yard work; they also called on the neighborhood to protect the building against vandalism and anti-Semitic desecration. In addition, these groups donated money for temple projects. So intertwined was the giving and receiving that community stalwarts took great pride in the protection they provided and in the temple overseer's public appreciation. At a Sons of Italy banquet, the overseer affirmed the working-class community's sense of self-worth when he said, "This is an area where you don't have to worry about swastikas."

The Evangelical Baptist church was more marginal than the temple to the web of local group life. In over 30 years of local service, the minister had only occasional contact with the parish priest but never with Marcello. The only civic group he knew was the neighboring American Legion Post. The reverend invited the Post to partake in a patriotic service, and his congregation, in turn, received a \$1,000 contribution from the Post; he also spoke twice at special Legionnaire services. Despite this reciprocity, the minister never learned to cultivate ties with other local groups. His inability to recruit any Colombans to his church confirmed his isolation from the community.

BUSINESS TIES TO THE WEB OF GROUP GIVING

Although businesses, by definition, are mainly concerned with money-making, many local family-owned retail storeowners and tradesmen were integrated into the web of group giving. They personally joined local groups and their businesses supported local associations and the activities they undertook.¹⁷

For decades, the Christmas Association had the most extensive network for tapping into the local business community. Marcello solicited business contributions through mailings and in-person appearances, with help from his close collaborators. But other groups tapped into the business community as well. The Boys and Girls Club, the Sons of Italy, the Society of the Blessed Virgin, and the Italian Hometown Association called on local businesses to "buy tables" at their respective dinner fundraisers and to contribute to money-making ad-books the groups distributed at their events. Businesses thereby became directly associated with local groups, and the activities they made possible reinforced community ties and community values.

The businesses most apt to give had local clienteles and felt themselves part of the community. Reflecting business embeddedness, the head of an Italian cultural group explained that "storeowners and the bank are considered one of us, an integral part of the community and responsive to community needs." The Italian immigrant local bank manager, in turn, explained that when Colombans "approach us, we know them. It is hard to say 'no.'"

Some businesses were so committed to the spirit of community giving that they sponsored charity activity and encouraged volunteerism on their own. With other business assistance, a local Italian restaurateur, for example, organized an annual neighborhood roadrace to raise money for college scholarships in the name of a neighborhood

ment commitment and managerially mediated intercorporate relations, and not merely market criteria, influence corporate giving (Galaskiewicz 1989; Useem 1988). Although less is known about volunteerism among small and medium-sized firms, Burlingame and Frishkoff (1996) found that in Indiana and Oregon firms with fewer than 500 employees and less than \$10 million of revenue donated at least as much per employee and as a percentage of net income as larger firms did. The small and medium-sized firms, moreover, were more likely to donate equipment and services and to volunteer their time, with much of their giving motivated by community relations. On small firms, see also Levy (1999). Giving among the different sized firms, as in Colombo, was good business.

¹⁷ Studies highlight that institutional factors, namely firm size, community setting, manage-

youth who died in a car accident. The restaurateur donated the use of his facilities for a hang-out at the finish line, while other Colombo business owners helped prepare and serve food and oversee the event from start to finish. The same restaurateur also sponsored a dinner-dance fundraiser for the local Italian cultural association and a float in the annual *Carnivale*, a Mardi Gras-type parade the association organized.

Local bars were also involved in community volunteerism: They sponsored sports teams and helped raise funds for local groups. For example, a widow of French Canadian descent, whose late husband used to run a local bar, cooked and served food at the roadrace, sponsored a float adorned with the bar's shamrock symbol in the Italian cultural group-led *Carnivale* parade, and donated money in the name of the bar to the Christmas Association, a local cerebral palsy organization, the Colombo Sons of Italy, and the Boys and Girls Club.

An employee of the town's department of elderly affairs knew how to tap into local business generosity. She noted that "all the stores in Colombo give. The pharmacy, the bakery, the liquor store, the delicatessen, and the like. The new ones as well as the old." To illustrate her point, she noted that a new local florist donated plants for door prizes for one of the annual parties for seniors that she organized. "The florist even gave more than asked." By contrast, most of the other florists in the suburb refused her solicitations.

Businesses (as well as town agencies) also allowed community collections on their premises, which fostered the community spirit of giving. For years, the Christmas Association raised some of its funds by placing empty ice cream containers, donated by a local ice cream shop, on store and office counters. A top-ranking fireman, who grew up in Colombo, remembered "people would automatically put change in."

Business donations built on a sense of reciprocity. Noted a third-generation Irish American owner of a local plumbing company, "I'm part of the community. My business is here, and I'm a pain in the ass here with my trucks. The least I could do is have my business donate to the Christmas Association. Moreover, Marcello does things that

we wish to do but don't for lack of time." The local banker echoed this view, "The community gives to us so we feel we should give back to them."

While many businesses willingly supported community causes, some shopowners felt pressured to give. The less integrated a business was into the web of group affiliations, the more involuntary was community giving. A non-resident storeowner, for example, had her window stoned when she first moved in. As it happened on Halloween, neighborhood youth probably were to blame. However, she felt her shop was more secure after she contributed to the Christmas Association. She explained that "while setting up the store a Christmas Association representative approached me for a contribution. Telling him that I had no money at the time, when reapproached some months later he said 'I see you had your window broken. Stick with us and you won't have any problem.'" A neighboring storeowner had warned her that she should "give to local charities, the local mafia."¹⁸ Although the new storeowner came to learn that the collections were for good, concrete community projects, she paid "for protection."

What was good for the community proved good for business. While business donations benefited groups directly and the causes they championed indirectly, Colombians developed good feelings about the businesses. Also, through contributions to the group-sponsored special events ad-books, businesses got publicity among a likely clientele. They were seen as friends of the community. Giving and getting thus transcended the profit-nonprofit divide as well as the secular-sacred divide.

HOW COLOMBO GROUPS INDUCE VOLUNTEERISM

With the working class not known to be joiners or volunteers, how do Colombo groups

¹⁸ Although Marcello had ties to the Boston mafia, particularly in decades past, he was never a big-time player. Colombians used the term "mafia" loosely and metaphorically, to refer to Marcello and his close network of Italian-American tough-talking friends who in presentation-of-self fit the ethnic stereotype.

mobilize recruits and induce them to donate time and money? And how are members convinced to give to causes unrelated to group *raisons d'être*? Shared networks and norms, plus leadership that built on a combination of nonvoluntary and voluntary inducements, elicited the giving.

Groups enticed volunteerism by appealing to Colombans in ways they valued. Core groups raised money mainly by organizing events that allowed for sociability, such as dinner dances, picnics, golf tournaments, community parties, and beano nights. Donors thereby had fun in doing good.

The mobilization of volunteers also hinged on leadership energy and skills. Marcello, the master mobilizer of community volunteerism, succeeded because he was charismatic and hard-working. Colombans saw him as the ultimate giver, sacrificing family time for the community. In their words, he was their "godfather," their "Robin Hood." Other group leaders, who did less for the community typically mobilized Colombans mainly within the confines of their own group.

Effective leadership built on respect, authority, and fealty. Volunteerism accordingly was partially involuntary: Families and groups taught Colombans to defer to people in authoritative positions and to value loyalty. "You'll give and not complain. That is part of our culture," explained one of the community successes, now a top-level city official. The official, describing Marcello, noted that when the master-leader "says something he needn't waste much time to win people over. He already has a groundswell of support on which to build. He has credibility. People here believe he has the interest of the community at heart. It's a given. . . . He's a martyr, a genius. He's goddamn brilliant." The town official added, "Loyalty is also important. If you work for (Marcello) he is *really* loyal to you."

As the premier volunteer, Marcello could elicit volunteerism, if not immediately forthcoming, in a manner no other leader dared. Sometimes he was sharp in his orders. He swore. He shouted. Colombans did not approve of this behavior, but Marcello's commitment to the community led them to tolerate his demeanor and to defer to his demands.

Volunteerism, furthermore, hinged on personal solicitations. Even some nonresidents when called upon volunteered for community projects. A non-Colomban municipal employee and American Legion Post member, for example, helped out at the Christmas Association-sponsored picnic for seniors "because someone at the Post asked me. I bartended. It was hard work." In volunteering when asked, Colombans were not unusual. But in Colombo, groups called upon the working class, and men as well as women.

People responded to group requests when the volunteerism built on community norms as well as networks. "We believe in community helping," noted a man who spent long hours at the Boys and Girls Club as a child. "At the Club we first learned to give beyond our family." In affirming community values, giving and getting were intertwined. Group giving reinforced a community-linked sense of self-worth.

So committed were many Colombans to the spirit of giving that they sometimes volunteered for group-sponsored causes that were at odds with their private views. The Italian American men who helped repair the Jewish temple, for example, could be heard among themselves mouthing anti-Semitic slurs. Giving to the community had a life of its own and Colombans were not to let their personal prejudices get in the way.

Reciprocity, and anticipated reciprocity, also induced intergroup collaboration. An American Legion wives' group activist, who organized an annual fundraising bazaar for the Post, noted that when "asked by the church to help organize a bazaar, some Legionnaires thought we should not share our secrets. But we borrow tables from the church for our bazaar. The least we could do is help the church. We all help each other. It stays within the circle." Similarly, Marcello acknowledged, "We get back what we give. We gave \$10,000 to the firemen when some firefighters died on duty. Now they give to us."

Belief in "community helping" and reciprocity at the group level built on individual and family traditions of mutual assistance. Reflecting the fusion of family and community, a Boys and Girls Club administrator portrayed the Club as well as the community

as "an extended family." Colombians saw local groups as an extension of homelife, not a world apart.

LIMITS TO GROUP-BASED GENEROSITY IN COLOMBO

If group networks and norms influence what is given, when, how, and why, so too should they set boundaries to generosity. And if generosity is collectivistic-grounded, those limits should be explicable at the group level.

There are territorial limits to the web of group giving. Activities honoring veterans reflected this: Colombo-funded memorials and annual Colombo group-organized visits to memorials involved only sites in and on the borders of the community, not elsewhere in the suburb. And Marcello's initial impetus for organizing his own multigroup Memorial Day parade was to ensure a procession through Colombo, since the town mayor at the time refused to route the official parade through the community. Similarly, when the Boys and Girls Club sought a larger facility, community leaders fought to have it located in or near Colombo. They wanted the Club to remain "theirs," to serve them, even though it formally served the entire suburb.

But because community boundaries are socially more than territorially defined, Colombo's community boundaries were somewhat porous, in terms of both giving and receiving. When groups benefited from or gave to causes beyond the area's borders, they typically built on local networks and norms. For example, when Marcello went beyond community borders for contributions or cut-rate deals, he invited donors and their affiliates to his events. The more Marcello relied on outside contributions to make his events possible, the larger his events became.

To induce Colombians to donate time and money, groups had to keep their requests within limits the community accepted. When groups exceeded those limits, they ran into difficulty. For example, a non-Colombian professional fundraiser, hired to oversee a large capital drive for the new Boys and Girls Club facility, met with resistance when she had the Club ask local groups to give

substantially more money than they had in years past. In this vein, an American Legion activist complained that "we used to give \$5,000. Now they want \$50,000. They're becoming the rich man's toy." Thus, members of the Post lost interest in supporting the Club.

Beneficiaries of community good-will included nonlocal groups who solicited impersonally through the mail. Such donations appear to defy the intergroup basis of local giving, as well as the sociological research that highlights the network as well as the middle- and upper-class base of contemporary American giving. This anomaly is rooted mainly in Colombo's ethnic identity and ethnic bonds. Yet ethnicity set limits to the outside groups benefiting from local group good-will. The Sons and Daughters of Italy, for example, contributed to a nonlocal Italian American orphanage, a nonlocal Italian American home for the elderly, and a national organization concerned with a Mediterranean illness afflicting people of Italian descent (although it affected no one in the community).

Local groups also contributed to some mainstream national charities, such as to Alzheimer groups and a hospice, from which they did not expect organizational reciprocity and with which they had no ethnic ties. In such instances, they gave money, not time. These contributions most closely approximate the altruism that Titmuss (1971) argued was the exception even in anonymous donations of blood—but group, not individual, altruism. Colombo groups made such donations because members either knew someone who suffered from the illness or felt that they might some day suffer from it. In the latter case, they might be future beneficiaries of the charity, or of a cure the charity helped develop. For the time being, the selective donations to national causes reconfirmed group commitment to the spirit of giving.

Cerebral palsy was the national charity that the community took most seriously. But Colombians championed the cause for locally rooted reasons: A nephew of Marcello's suffered from the disability. Like Marcello, the father of the boy was integrated into the web of local group affiliations. Nevertheless, over the years the cause took on a life of its own. A group of locals annually sponsored a party for children so handicapped, and the

event became part of the calendar of group volunteerism.

Similarly indicative of the boundedness of local giving, "new immigrants" and other residents not integrated into the web of local group affiliations, who moved to Colombo because of the relatively low cost of local real estate (both rentals and home purchases), neither contributed to nor benefited from Colombo generosity. While the old-timers—the Irish and French Canadians, as well as Italians—prided themselves on how they "all got along," as a retired delicatessen owner recounted, "The Orientals are worlds apart. They stay to themselves. They don't work and shop where we do. They eat different food."

There were also symbolic and in-kind limits to community generosity. Colombans, for example, restricted which outsiders they allowed at their events. In election years, politicians tried to come to the *feste* and other local festivities seeking votes. But local leaders, Marcello above all, refused to allow politicians to take advantage of them; they tried to exclude politicians whom they did not want to win, whom they felt did not serve the community, and who did not help out at local events.

Colombans were not generous in symbolic gift-giving, even "to their own," when they felt betrayed. Thus, while residents supported the renaming of the major local park in honor of Marcello's wife after she died, a group of women opposed the renaming of a smaller park in honor of another local woman. Marcello's wife, as a top school official who grew up in Colombo recalled, "was considered nothing short of a saint for her work [with] . . . children, as well as her volunteer work in numerous community groups. She was selfless. In the best sense of the word, she was a giver" (Town newspaper, September 9, 1998, p. 10). The other woman had also worked many years for the community, for the elderly as well as for youth, and she was married to the local bank manager. But she moved to an upscale suburb once her father, one of the community's most prominent figures, died. Upon moving, her community involvements ended. Resentful, local activists complained that "she made her money here so she should not have moved."

Colombans did not categorically shun the economically successful who moved away. They welcomed those who remained involved in the community. Indeed, Colombans called upon such individuals to serve on boards of directors of local groups (e.g., the Boys and Girls Club), to help in local fundraising, to defend community concerns at the municipal level (e.g., rights to a municipal building and lot for the new Boys and Girls Club), and to speak at local events. The community's most revered local hero, a once world-class boxer turned prominent state-elected official, for instance, no longer lives in Colombo. But he plays a crucial role in reinforcing community-based giving. He is committed, in his words, "to giving something back to the community." Thus, he marches in a prominent position in the annual *festa*, he attends local veterans activities and fundraisers, and he initiated, in 1992, the local Columbus Day community celebration that local groups helped execute.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE WEB OF COMMUNITY-BASED GROUP GIVING

This research suggests that seven factors, in combination, create conditions conducive to community-based group giving.¹⁹ Future studies will need to verify whether all seven are necessary and sufficient. The factors, and hypothesized reasons for their significance, are as follows.

SEVEN FACTORS AFFECTING COLLECTIVISTIC-GROUNDED GIVING

(1) COMMUNITY SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HOMOGENEITY. In a nationwide study, Wolpert (1989) found volunteerism to vary with community homogeneity. Colombo is fairly homogeneous socially and culturally. A core of families shared a common ethnic heritage, including common Italian villages-

¹⁹ The importance of the community-level characteristics is inferred from information obtained from census material, an understanding of the community based on my full set of interviews, and knowledge obtained from reading relevant sociological literature.

of-origin.²⁰ And common origins provided the social base of several local groups.²¹

The meaning of shared ethnicity changed over the years, however, and in a manner that strengthened local ties and identity. The shift came, on the one hand, with American assimilation, and with changes in Italy on the other hand. In the process, Italian identity became more important than village identity. As Italy became more integrated as a nation-state, successive waves of émigrés arrived with a greater sense of a shared heritage and a common language, whereas pre-World War II immigrants spoke dialects known only to others from their community of origin.

As with ethnicity, so too with religion. Although the community had long been predominantly Catholic, religious differences among Catholics diminished over the years. "We all have our rosaries, our Virgin Mary in our houses, and we take confession," noted a French Canadian American multi-group activist. In years past, Italians, Irish, and French Canadians worshiped separately (the Irish upstairs and the Italians downstairs in the same parish church, and the French Canadians in a separate "national church"). Faced with fewer church-goers and fewer clergy, and ethnic assimilation, the archdiocese consolidated all Colombo Catholic activity. Here, national religious trends contributed to local religious homogenization (see Herberg 1956).

In the process of interethnic fusion, Ital-

ians established themselves as the hegemonic local social and cultural force. They maintained this hegemony, even after immigration from Italy tapered off in the mid-1960s, by dominating local groups, and through these groups setting and reinforcing local norms. Non-Italians and non-Catholics who integrated into the web of group life played by rules set by Italian Americans. Local assimilation entailed Italian American conformity, not merely the Anglo-conformity that mainstream America underwent in the course of the twentieth century (see Gordon 1964).

(2) SHARED VALUATION OF GIVING. The community culture of giving builds on a cluster of values—a shared commitment to reciprocity, family, and the "Catholic Ethic" filtered through the community core's southern Italian heritage (and their ongoing reinterpretation of it). Together, the values, *as put into practice*, blur boundaries between kin, group, and neighborhood, and encourage collectivistic and individualistic-grounded generosity. The kinship-grounded generosity, however, was not rooted in mounting family frailty, as in Middletown. The calendar of community volunteerism began when Colombans had large, local, and strong families.

(3) SHARED NEEDS AND WANTS. Local immigrant families in decades past, whatever their ethnic origins, shared a sense of economic insecurity that induced them to help each other. They arrived poor, uneducated, and nonconversant in English. Noted the retired delicatessen owner, "We had a survival bond with those we grew up with. No one had any money, which brought us together." And a laborer-turned-alderman echoed, "Everyone had the same problem: no money."²²

At the same time, negative dealings with the outside world reinforced community

²⁰ Highlighting the importance of homogeneity among Italians, a study of ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous suburbs of Providence, Rhode Island reports that ethnic attitudes and behavior varied in the two communities. Residents in the more homogeneous suburb were more likely to read Italian newspapers, and their friendship networks included more Italians among successive generations of both blue- and white-collar workers (Roche 1982). To the extent that ethnicity contributes to collectivistic-grounded giving of time and money, Roche's study suggests its impact is a function of community homogeneity.

²¹ Ethnicity provided a cultural glue for Italian Americans in Colombo, and it provided the basis on which several (though not all) groups organized. Yet, the Middletown study suggests that kinship networks, independently of ethnicity, may form an important bases of community solidarity in ethnically heterogeneous communities (Caplow et al. 1982:195–224).

²² Poverty did not reproduce the much debated "amoral familism" that Banfield (1958) argued kept southern Italians poor. While poverty so extreme as to cause subsistence crises may turn families against one another in the fight for survival, life in Colombo was not so precarious. Colombo was not immune to family feuds, including carryovers from Italy, but most immigrants lived better materially in their new setting than they had in their homeland. Moreover, faced with a shared, somewhat hostile, environment, poor émigrés came to feel *common* personal, cultural, and ethnic bonds.

bonds. At the high school and at work, Colombans experienced anti-Italian discrimination. "The outside pressure brought us together, it gave us a sense of solidarity," reflected a second-generation successful contractor.

Impoverished immigrant families depended not only on kin and neighbors but also on what they perceived to be the goodwill of local merchants, including Jews. Storeowners let them "buy on the cuff," helped them apply for citizenship, and packaged gifts for family still in Italy.

The spirit and practice of giving persists even though the prejudice, poverty, and shared village-of-origin bonds that initially induced local goodwill have become insignificant. Indeed, the changed conditions contributed to the extension of the norm and practice of reciprocity from kin to group and community, to a shift in the nature of "gifts" exchanged, and to a modification of the meaning embedded in giving. Giving became less individually need-based and more symbolic and neighborhood-linked. Leadership helped redirect people's energies and commitments as well as the bases of giving and getting.

Complementary and not merely shared *group* needs sustained intergroup giving in recent decades. Groups could do little on their own. They lacked sufficient money, labor, and goods and in-kind services on their own. As a Boys and Girls Club administrator noted, "It's a gray line as to who is working for whom. . . Someone helps you and your group, so you help them. It's a barter system." The Club, for example, depended on special fundraising events and group and individual contributions for one-third of its budget.

(4) LOW RESIDENTIAL TURNOVER. Local kinship and friendship ties, affection for the community, and home ownership contributed to low population turnover. And by selling and renting homes by word-of-mouth, Colombans for decades informally kept the community largely to themselves. The low residential turnover, in turn, reinforced community networks and norms.²³

²³ The low residential turnover implies that families with shared values, identities, and concerns remained in close proximity to one another.

The community as socially and culturally constructed used to be territorially confined (and defined), but by the 1990s local residency no longer was a prerequisite. The much repeated mantra, "you can take the boys out of Colombo but not Colombo out of the boys," reflects the feelings of many, including people who moved away.

(5) CLASS HOMOGENEITY. Colombo's class base reinforced community solidarities and values. The resident core was enmeshed in a blue-collar world that involved minimal career and geographical mobility. Many of Colombo's men were tradesmen and low-skill municipal employees who worked in or near Colombo. "We're all blue collar, ditch diggers, and city workers," noted an American Legion/Christmas Association stalwart. Even many storeowners who grew up locally identified themselves more as working-class than middle-class.

The class base to the collectivistic-grounded giving shaped what was given as well as how and why gift-giving occurred. It inclined Colombans to give labor and not merely money, and to give to local over national causes. It also inclined them to give in ways that involved them personally. The working class in general, and the southern Italian working class in particular, is known for such personalized bases of involvements (see Gans 1982; Putnam 1993).²⁴

But the meaning of social class, as well as of ethnicity, changed over the years. Colombo laborers have become better educated, more skilled, more economically secure, and less parochial in their world view. No longer are they the struggling immigrants of yesteryear. Involvement in U.S. institutional life, through schooling, the mass media, the military, and work, together with macro-economic changes (that increased labor market options and earning power), modified class experiences and mentalities. Colombans bring their changed class expe-

Proximity, however, does not necessarily induce collectivistic rooted giving (see Roschelle 1997:188-89).

²⁴ Personal ties, however, play an important role in giving among other social classes and ethnic groups as well. Ostrower (1995), for example, shows that elites take philanthropy and adapt it to an entire way of life.

riences and outlooks to local groups. Local working-class-based groups do not merely reproduce the status quo ante.

(6) INSTITUTIONAL OVERLAP, INSULARITY, AND EMBEDDEDNESS. Local giving of time, goods, and money is traceable to overlapping institutional involvements as well. Group members met in diverse social settings that reinforced community identity and volunteerism. The community was large enough to support a parish church and an elementary school, but small enough to induce the "demonstration effect" that Weisbrod (1988:93) argued prompts community charity. And because parish and community boundaries coincided, religious activity and values centering on caring permeated the community collectively. At the same time, institutional overlap, along with neighborhood insularity and group embeddedness, set boundaries to collectivistic giving.

(7) LEADERSHIP. Collectivistic-based giving also hinged on a leadership core that organized group volunteerism and personified it. Marcello was the most charismatic and devoted volunteer, but clergy and other group activists were important as well. Core activists included "native sons" who moved away but who remained active in local groups and were compliant, at least locally, with community norms.

What distinguished Marcello was his intuitive understanding of the community and matters important to its people, his near full-time commitment to volunteerism, his uncanny ability to build on community traditions of caring while adapting to changed times, and his capacity to motivate others, in part by not distancing himself from the rank-and-file. His initiatives contributed to a shift in focus from economic to social, from family to group and community, from village-of-origin to a multiethnic community. And while insisting on being in charge, he did not force groups to concede their autonomy. His involvements vitalized the groups and strengthened their leadership while reaffirming his own community stature.²⁵

²⁵ Ehrenhalt (1995) argues that authority is central to community but was nonexistent in the 1990s (in contrast to the 1950s). Marcello had less influence in the 1990s than he did in the 1970s and 1980s, especially over the more as-

Because Colombans respected Marcello's commitment to community giving, they tolerated aspects of his private behavior they disliked. Women, in particular, disapproved of the "two wives" he had for many years, one legal, the other common-law, as well as his "run-ins with the law." Colombans had a hierarchy of values and they ranked community volunteerism, their conception of public morality, higher than personal morality.

CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Assuming these seven factors induce collectivistic-grounded giving, their weakening might erode community generosity. Indeed, there are indications of such weakening. For one, the "old immigrant group" base of the community has ceased to reproduce itself, now that European, along with French Canadian, emigration has tapered off. Newcomers to the area not only lack the ascriptive prerequisites for membership in a number of the local groups (e.g., Italian, or specific Italian village-of-origin) but they also are not embedded in the community networks and norms on which intergroup giving and getting build.²⁶ Meanwhile, they have no collective identity or organizations of their own. At the same time, some of the Italian Americans who have moved away have broken with their past.

Second, neighborhood needs and wants are changing with prosperity. Marcello sees wealth as corrosive, as inclining people to think mainly of themselves and to be ungenerous. Minimally, with more material possessions, families have become more "inwardly oriented."²⁷ Colombans can afford to

simulated and educated younger generation, but his continued commitment to acts of generosity helped preserve both his authority and the social significance of community.

²⁶ Some groups, however, have introduced less exclusionary membership criterion to offset demographic as well as other social trends weakening group involvements. The Sons of Italy, for example, no longer requires members to be of Italian origin; spouses of Italians now are eligible. Similarly, the American Legion no longer limits membership to veterans of foreign wars.

²⁷ Television-watching and the automobile have turned families "inward." As a result,

go away on weekends (including to inexpensive vacation homes some of them have acquired), so fewer of them are around to partake in the calendar of activities rooted in collectivistic-grounded volunteerism. Even the fundraising success of the Boys and Girls Club adversely impacted the web of group giving. Seeking funds beyond the community's means, the professional fundraiser looked elsewhere for donors, and she replaced the former director, who was integrated into the web of group affiliations, with a more "professionally qualified" outsider who was less committed to local inter-group giving and getting. What was good for the Boys and Girls Club was not necessarily good for the community.

Third, the community leadership base is aging, with no obvious successor to Marcello. And fourth, macro-economic trends are increasingly permeating the community in ways that erode community mores and networks. With deindustrialization and public sector downsizing (owing to the privatization of service-provisioning and fiscal belt-tightening), there are fewer labor market options accessible through local contacts. At the same time, the better-educated younger generation qualify for jobs in the Boston metropolitan area that do not build on and reinforce community networks and norms. Accordingly, conditions that enabled Colombo to avoid, in Putnam's (2001) words, "bowling alone," may be waning, a generation later than it did in middle-class America.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A systematic conceptualization and understanding of collectivistic-grounded volunteerism has escaped the sociological imagination for several reasons. First, current research on volunteerism focuses mainly on the types of giving characteristic of the middle class that is most entrenched in what

Bellah et al (1985) refer to as individualistic "habits of the heart." Second, the methods used in most studies are inappropriate for fully capturing community roots of volunteerism. Extant research relies heavily on aggregate data on fundraising, and on surveys in which the individual is the basic unit of analysis, not the community. Even in Colombo, without field work the collectivistic roots of giving would have remained undocumented and unanalyzed. Finally, sociologists typically have *assumed* that U.S. volunteerism is rooted in individualistic cultural precepts, so they have rarely explored alternative or complementary bases.

The Colombo experience shows that who volunteers, when, how, why, and with what effects, differs when volunteerism is collectivistically rather than individualistically grounded. The two bases of volunteerism are sociologically explicable, but at different levels of analysis. Homogeneous working-class communities that value caring, have low residential turnover, have a somewhat insular and overlapping institutional and organizational structure, and whose leadership is committed to group giving, provide a social context conducive to collectivistic-rooted volunteerism. Together, these conditions induce volunteerism that defies the middle- and upper-class, middle-aged, small town, and female base of the individualistically grounded giving featured in sociological studies to date.

The Colombo experience also shows group giving to be a process. Time-stretched exchanges are premised on underlying trust and a shared commitment to mutual assistance. For this reason, collectivistic-grounded volunteerism is confined to those integrated into community networks and norms. Group giving is parochial and contained in its altruism, limited to people and groups associated with the community as socially constructed. Meanwhile, the gift-giving contributes to the delineation of community boundaries, as well as in-groups and out-groups.

The patterning of group generosity, in turn, has broader class ramifications. As Ostrower (1985) documented, elites engage in their own class-based sociability-linked philanthropy that involves gift-giving of a different scale and scope than that in Co-

Colombians spend less time on their porches and less time walking neighborhood streets. They therefore have less contact with one another than they had a generation ago. Putnam (2000) similarly traces the decline in civic society and social capital to television-watching.

lombo. Elite gift-giving is grounded in different norms and networks and it involves more monetary and less in-kind donations. Consequently, the different social ties in which elite and working-class giving are rooted reinforce class differences and class stratification, as well as promote intra-class solidarity. The Colombo experience suggests that the working class may feel good about its generosity and the sociability in which it is embedded, while remaining oblivious to the stratifying effects it has.

While ethnography allows for "discovery," it raises questions of generalizability. Indeed, I studied Colombo not because it was a representative "inner suburb" but because it appeared to defy sociological conceptions about "old" white ethnic group experiences and accordingly invited new theorizing. Ethnicity remained important among successive generations of immigrant families, even though many residents by the 1990s had the human capital and economic resources to assimilate fully. And the community appeared more organized than earlier studies of working-class ethnicity suggested (e.g. Gans 1982; Whyte 1969). This in-depth study thus offered an opportunity to elaborate new ideas, in principle applicable beyond the case at hand. Ragin (1994:85) noted that an ethnography need not merely be a "case study." It can serve as a "case of" a new analytic frame. In the present study, the approach provides for a better understanding of collectivistic-grounded volunteerism. Future studies in other social contexts will help determine which aspects of collectivistic-grounded volunteerism are generalizable and which are unique to Colombo—and why.

In particular, future research should determine the role ethnicity plays in collectivistic-grounded volunteerism. Other studies highlight Italian American "exceptionalism," especially among the working class. Italian Americans for decades lived in more residentially concentrated and insulated neighborhoods than did other immigrant groups (Gans 1982; Lieberman 1980:15; Thernstrom 1973). More recent surveys and census tract analyses show that ethnic identity and residential concentration remain greater among Italians than among other "old" white ethnics, in "outer" as well as "inner" suburbs

(Alba et al. 1999; Alba, Logan, and Crowder 1997; Waters 1990:28–31). In essence, the residential bonds conducive to group-based community giving appear to be exceptionally strong among Italian Americans. Nonetheless, the Colombo experience suggests that families of diverse European and French Canadian stock may be integrated into a web of group giving even when Italian Americans are the hegemonic force.²⁸

The Jewish experience suggests, however, that collectivistic-grounded giving may not be unique to Italians with their variant of the Catholic Ethic. American Jews often cluster in distinct neighborhoods and identify with a broader international Jewish community that inspires philanthropy (e.g., see Wenger 1989). However, Jewish ethnicity, together with social class, patterns Jewish giving somewhat differently than that which occurs in Colombo (Ostrower 1995:50–68). Upper-class Jews give to social as well as religious causes, typically without involving themselves in donor groups. And Jews among the social elite, who identify more with their social class than with their ethnicity, give mainly to organizations with no explicit Jewish affiliation.

Within the working class, the Colombo experience may speak to an emergent trend among "new immigrant" groups who cluster residentially and who are enmeshed in extensive ethnic-based social networks. "New immigrant" ethnic enclaves (Portes and Manning 1986), for example, are premised on common ties and identities, and the new-comer cultural "baggage" often includes collectivistic values. This is true, for example, of Latinos, who make up the largest contemporary immigrant group. Even the transnational ties noted among "new immigrant" groups (Levitt 2001) are collective and community-based as well as family-based. Third World governments that encourage home-

²⁸ The multi-ethnic involvements suggest an emergent white American or pan-European (plus French Canadian) ethnicity in Colombo like elsewhere in America (Alba 1990; Lieberman 1985; Yancey, Erickson, and Leon 1985). However, with Italian Americans the hegemonic force in Colombo, multi-ethnic assimilation in the community has not produced a melting pot in which all white ethnic groups *equally* influence a re-making of ethnicity.

town associations in the United States with cross-border links, moreover, have the effect, if not the intent, of fostering community solidarities among émigrés.²⁹

In sum, to assume that American generosity is rooted in nationally held individualistic cultural values obscures as much as it elucidates contemporary reality. In an era of multiculturalism and large-scale immigration, we sociologists need to focus on delineating and understanding differences as well as similarities among socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

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²⁹ Mexico's President Vicente Fox, for example, initiated a program, "Three-For-One," that offered federal, state, and local matching funds to overseas hometown associations that remitted money to their community-of-origin for "collective goods," such as for schools and road construction. In so doing, the national government encouraged community fundraising as well as other activity in neighborhoods settled by Mexican immigrants.

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