



Figure 1.1. Shoe-shine men in Parque Central in San José, Costa Rica



Figure 1.2. Pensioners in Parque Central in San José, Costa Rica

require place preservation. This rather obvious point is crucial when dealing with the material environment and issues of cultural representation.

## 2. CULTURAL ECOLOGY THEORIES

Anthropologists employ a variety of theories of how cultural ecosystems work in particular places over time. For example, Bennett (1968; also see Netting 1993) modeled the ecological dynamics of natural systems to understand socio-political changes in the cultural ecosystems of farmers. Cohen (1968) developed a cultural evolutionary scheme to predict settlement patterns and sociocultural development in the developing regions. Many of these cultural ecology theories have been subjected to historical critiques; nonetheless, the dynamic and predictive aspects of cultural ecosystem models are useful when examining social change on a particular site (Barlett and Chase 2004).

The case of historic Parque Central in San José, Costa Rica, illustrates this



Figure 1.3. Vendors and religious practitioners in Parque Central



Figure 1.4. Redesigned Parque Central

point. Up until 1992 Parque Central was a well-established, spatially organized cultural ecosystem made up of shoeshine men on the northeast corner (figure 1.1), pensioners on the southwest corner (figure 1.2), vendors and religious practitioners on the northwest corner (figure 1.3), and prostitutes and workmen on the center inner circle. The established cultural ecosystem, however, was disrupted in 1993 when the municipality closed the park and redesigned the historic space (figure 1.4) to remove users perceived as unattractive to tourists and the middle class (Low 2000).

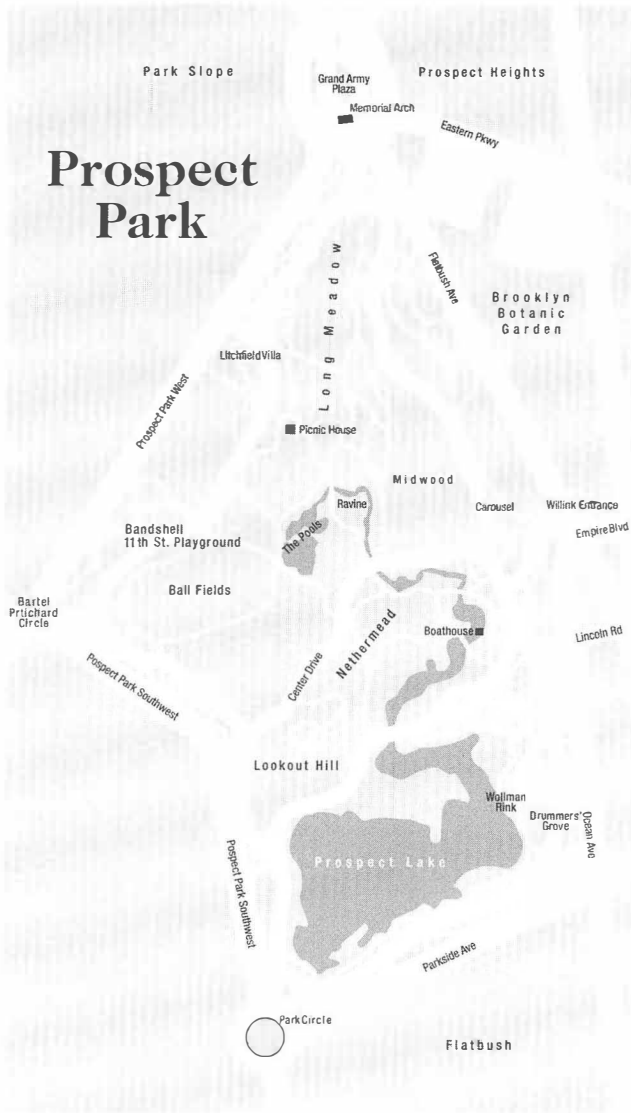
The redesign, however, destroyed the social ecological balance. A new social group, a gang of young men, took over the public space, creating a dangerous and even more undesirable environment, and Nicaraguans, rather than Costa Ricans, became the main inhabitants on Sundays. This case illustrates the fragility of existing cultural ecosystems (and their diverse niches); when the socio-spatial niches (places) are destroyed, the system may not be able to maintain



Figure 2.1. Romantic detail—Clefridge Span in Prospect Park

etry in Brooklyn, Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, and others. Mount Auburn Cemetery and its progeny soon became popular resorts for outings and picnics among middle-class city dwellers. The rural cemetery was an important precursor to the urban landscape park in demonstrating the popularity of a romantic landscape of winding paths, groves of trees, ponds, and beautiful views. These cemeteries whetted the public appetite for large parks.

Contrasting vernacular traditions in recreational landscapes coexisted with the development of formal parks. One such landscape tradition was the undesignated and unplanned, but popular, common open space. In the small town and growing city alike, informal open spaces lying just outside the developed area were appropriated for outings, get-togethers, picnics, sports, and games. These spaces are hard to document because they were not formally planned, designated, or designed, and most gave way to urban development long ago. Jackson (1984) contrasts the formal town park of the mid-nineteenth century—



Map 3.1. Prospect Park

prosperous residential sections. These and other neighborhoods around the park have remained heavily residential: Brooklyn's industrial and office districts are all some distance away. The adjacent neighborhoods each have an immediate spatial relationship with their side of the park, and the park's ethnic makeup and general atmosphere changes from one neighborhood's zone of influence to another.

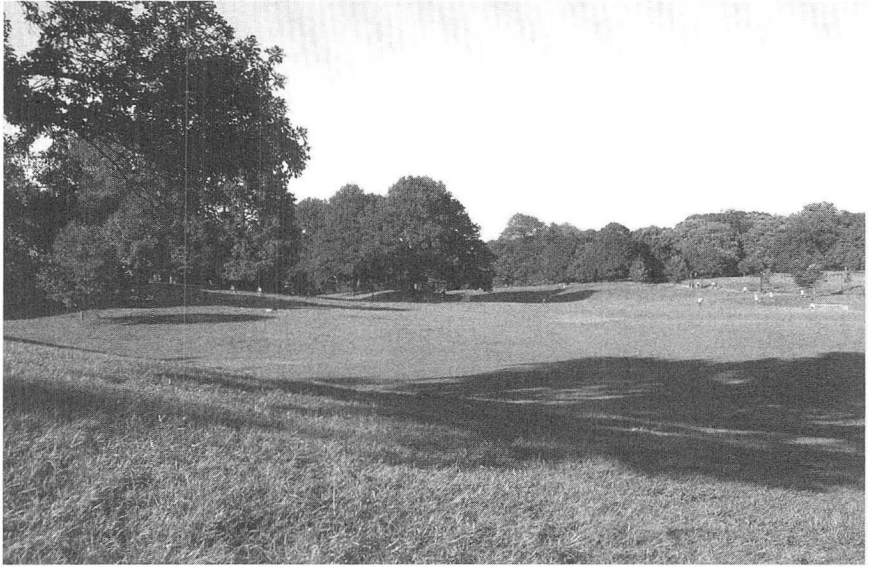


Figure 3.1. The Long Meadow in Prospect Park

rambles over the scenic wooded grounds, through the flower gardens, or along the lakeside paths. They can pass a pleasant half hour in one of the numerous rustic shelters overlooking picturesque Mohonk Lake, take a rowboat out on the water, or play croquet on the lawn. Prospect Park was planned to be very like Mohonk, only free of charge: a pastoral retreat with gentle meadows and wooded groves, picturesque waters, charming carriage drives, a hilltop overlook, and comfortable facilities for visitors designed tastefully to blend with the landscape. In this genteel environment working-class and immigrant visitors were expected to learn the social skills they were thought to need to better themselves and become good citizens. People would learn to behave well and to interact with one another; the park's genteel constituency would provide models of good sportsmanship and of how voluntary groups come together and interact in the public realm. Olmsted saw his parks as training grounds for citizenship.

### *Built Features*

Prospect Park has several crowd-attracting features. The Bandshell, along Prospect Park West near the Ninth Street entrance, is the site of a popular, summer-long program of outdoor pop music concerts. On the opposite side



Figure 3.2. Sunbathers at Prospect Park



Figure 3.3. Winter day, Prospect Park

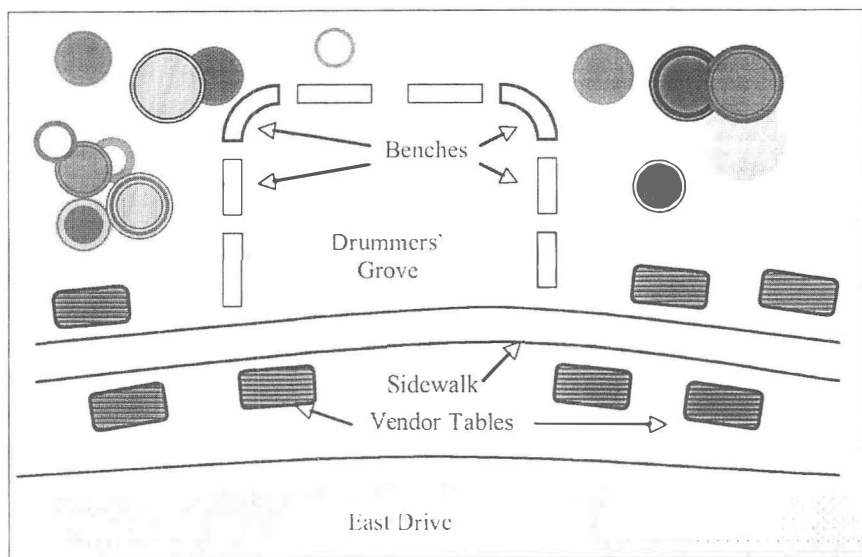
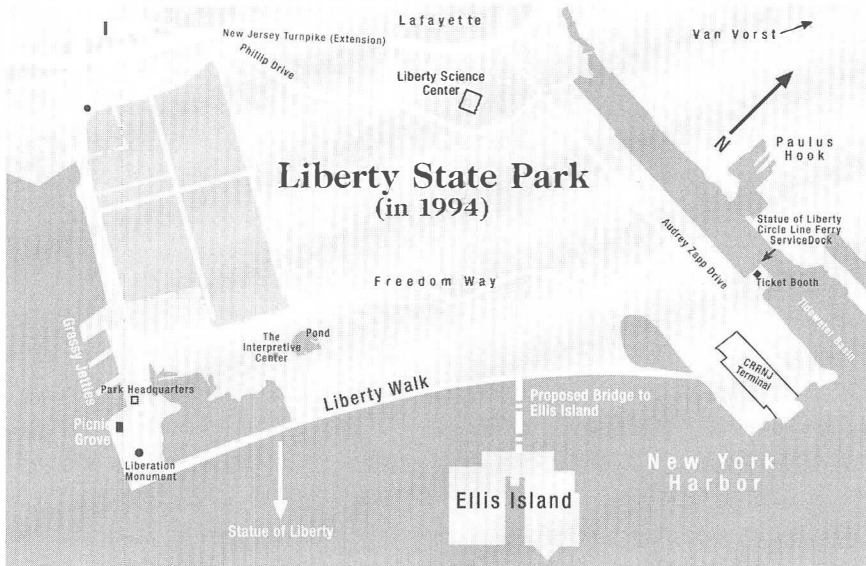


Figure 3.4. The drummers' grove in Prospect Park

that most Rastafarians avoid direct participation in activities that they, or Jamaicans in general, call “Obeah” or “science.” These are folk terms for what others might call witchcraft or Vodun. The drum beats audible today are often associated with such practices, and the offerings in evidence corroborate this conclusion. All in all, as it seems today, the drumming is not simply a gathering of musicians, but also an event of religious and cultural content—even of religious and cultural significance.

Most of the people interviewed here come to the drummers' grove to hang out as well as to listen to the drums. Here they can eat, socialize, watch people, and examine the arts and crafts goods for sale. Several people said that they come to support the drummers. Some Sundays, depending on weather, the drumming sessions can go until 10:00 or later, and people remain in the area well past midnight.

Many of the African American and West Indian participants in the user study knew of the drumming event and spoke of it favorably as a cultural tie to the park. Not everyone in park management was as appreciative, some remarking that the intensive weekly activity would weaken the trees in the area from soil compaction. However, when the grounds around the Parkside-Ocean entrance were reconstructed in 1999 and 2000, management worked with the drummers to continue the drumming tradition. They first agreed on a temporary alternative location and then worked with the drummers to plan their return to the grove once reconstruction of the surrounding grounds was finished.



Map 4.1. Liberty State Park and Proposed Bridge

Ellis Island can only be reached by a ferry that services both the Statue of Liberty and the museum site. The majority of visitors leave from the ferry landing at Battery Park, located at the tip of Manhattan in New York City, but a New Jersey ferry from the marina near Liberty State Park also provides limited service. There has always been considerable contention about who “owns” Ellis Island. New York and New Jersey have joint jurisdiction of the island and its surrounding waters and share the revenue. However, for most visitors, Ellis Island is a New York–associated tourist event.

In order to make Ellis Island more accessible to New Jersey residents, Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey introduced a bill in Congress that would allocate \$15 million to construct a bridge from Liberty State Park to the National Park Service site. He argued that the people of New Jersey needed better access to the island that lay only four hundred meters off their shoreline and that it would promote tourism and encourage the people of New Jersey to visit this national treasure. Further, it would complement the developing of Liberty State Park on the Jersey City shore.

Historic preservation groups in New Jersey and New York, the Circle Line ferry company that provides access to Ellis Island, and the tourist office and mayor’s office in New York City had already organized the opposition by holding numerous public meetings about the dire economic consequences of building a bridge. The *New York Times* ran a series of scathing commentaries about New Jersey’s inability to manage the barrage of tourists expected to arrive by





Figure 4.1. Circle Line ferry from Battery Park to Ellis Island

buy ferry tickets here for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. It is the major site of tourist activity in the park. Castle Clinton has entrances onto both Eisenhower Mall and the harbor's Admiral Dewey Promenade, both of which are lined with pushcart vendors. The gun emplacement apertures of Castle Clinton are used as shelter by couples and young tourists in the rain, and by homeless individuals at night. The entire structure is enclosed by a guardrail, which serves to control lines of tourists waiting to board the Liberty and Ellis Island ferries.

Admiral Dewey Promenade is a curved esplanade that connects Castle Clinton to the harbor and outlines the southern edge of the park. Along the eastern edge of the promenade is a war memorial plaza, an abandoned kiosk, another outdoor restaurant, and docked boats in the harbor (figure 4.2). Between Castle Clinton and the south end of the park are located the ferry landing and various harbor pier posts. This part of the park is elevated above the promenade and is lined with pay-binoculars and benches. Pushcart vendors and street performers concentrate their work along the promenade and on the elevated area. The promenade is just wide enough for performances to take place in front of the long lines of tourists, for the vendors to sell T-shirts, and for dump trucks and patrol cars to be able to pass by (figure 4.3).



Figure 4.2. Battery Park landscape with Castle Clinton in the background



Figure 4.3. Caricatures for sale, Battery Park

Table 4.3. Value Orientations at Battery Park

Value Orientation	Examples	Number of Responses
Economic	“good for business” “bad for the ferry”	23
Access	“will allow more people access to Ellis Island”	13
Social Priorities	“the money should be spent on the homeless” “we should be helping children stay off drugs”	10
Choice	“you will lose the ferry option” “it’s democratic, people can choose to walk or ride”	9
Health and Recreation	“it’s fun for children to walk” “it’s healthy for people to walk”	9
Political	“it’s part of the New York and New Jersey conflict” “it’s a [political] hot potato”	8
Personal	“I do not want to walk”	8
Aesthetic	“nice view from the bridge” “how will it look?”	6
Park Quality	“it will improve Ellis Island”	6
New Technology	“it is progress” “it is modern”	5
Safety and Comfort	“People feel safer on a bridge than in a tunnel”	4
Education	“people could learn something”	4
Ecological	“it is a swamp” [and should be protected]	2
No Impact	“it is not going to make any difference at all”	9

ing the concerns of the large number of workers interviewed (28). But there are also a large number of responses that relate to access, choice, and social priorities (42), involving evaluations of the larger sociopolitical implications of this decision for the majority of people. And only eight individuals were concerned solely with the impact of the proposed changes on themselves.

### *Liberty State Park*

#### PHYSICAL SETTING

Liberty State Park occupies 1,122 acres of land and tideland along Upper New York Bay in Jersey City, New Jersey. The site was a vast railroad yard through most of the twentieth century. By the 1960s, all passenger rail and freight operations on the site had been abandoned. The state of New Jersey acquired the site and has been gradually transforming it into a public park. The first phase of Liberty State Park opened in June 1976, in time for the national Bicentennial

Table 4.5. Neighborhood Value Orientations

Value Orientation	Lafayette	Van Vorst	Paulus Hook	Total
Cost	17	15	3	35
Park Quality	8	9	3	20
Access	9	3	1	13
Health and Recreation	8	0	1	9
Education	3	4	1	8
Community Quality	5	2	0	7
Aesthetic	4	1	1	6
Economic	6	0	0	6
Choice	2	3	0	5
Ecological	0	4	0	4
Political	3	0	0	3
Safety and Comfort	2	1	0	3
Social Priorities	0	2	0	2
Personal	0	1	0	1
New Technology	0	0	0	0

concerned about the possibility of increased traffic in their neighborhood. In fact, many see the increased traffic as a positive good, bringing more people into their community. Residents of Lafayette are very proud of Liberty State Park, and many see the park as the best thing that has happened to the neighborhood in many years. It was clear from the way that people spoke about the park that it is very important in their daily lives, and they would like to expand their educational and recreational horizons to include Ellis Island. As it now stands, Ellis Island is an expensive tourist site that is only visited as a onetime experience with a school group. The ferry ride is viewed as a tourist experience, and not something for local residents. For a middle-class family, a visit to the “islands” is an activity that might take place with out-of-town visitors. But for the majority of residents in Lafayette, most of whom live a ten-minute walk from Liberty State Park, the cost of a visit to Ellis Island is prohibitive.

#### *Value Orientations Findings*

The value orientations of the communities are reflected in the differences in priority given to health and recreation (Lafayette vs. Van Vorst and Paulus Hook), ecological concerns (Van Vorst vs. Lafayette and Paulus Hook), and economic concerns and community quality (Lafayette vs. Van Vorst and Paulus Hook), as can be seen in Table 4.5. The residents of Lafayette, in fact, discussed concerns related to access, health and recreation, economics, and community

quality more than the other two communities. Lafayette is the closest to Liberty State Park and has the largest number of families living below the poverty line. Thus, their discussions of the proposed changes to the park reflect their need for recreational space and improved community facilities and their very real concerns about local employment. Interestingly, cost and park quality were the greatest concerns for all three communities. When the three communities are treated as one neighborhood, cost, park quality, and access emerge as the dominant value orientations of residents, in contrast to the economic and health and recreation concerns of Battery Park and Liberty State Park users, respectively.

## Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the comparative analysis of the three study areas: Battery Park, Liberty State Park, and the neighborhoods surrounding Liberty State Park. Our most important observation, however, is reflected in all the findings: that is, that the people we talked to were overwhelmingly interested in the questions we asked and were quite sophisticated in their understanding of the problem and its consequences, regardless of cultural or educational background. Thus, assumptions that the general public would not be able to evaluate the access alternatives or would not care about the proposed changes to Ellis Island and Liberty State Park were unfounded. This finding suggests that the environmental assessment and planning processes can be enhanced by consulting local populations through the REAP process.

Table 4.6 presents the value orientations compared across the parks and neighborhoods. What is clear from this comparison is that each area has slightly different priorities and concerns. Battery Park workers and users are not at all concerned with the cost of the ferry or the bridge, but instead are concerned about the possible economic consequences of the proposed access alternatives. Liberty State Park workers and users, on the other hand, are concerned with the health and recreation advantages and park quality disadvantages of the access alternatives. The residents of Lafayette, Van Vorst, and Paulus Hook are most concerned with the cost of the ferry or proposed access alternatives. Cost, access, park quality, and economics were the most frequently mentioned concerns for all groups. Table 4.6 is useful in understanding the variation among these populations and can be referred to as a way to judge how often a concern was expressed by participants in this study.

The bridge is overwhelmingly the preferred access alternative for reasons of safety, cost, ease of access, choice of time and space, and health and recreation benefits. Because of safety and cost concerns, almost no participants thought that a tunnel is a good idea. A few participants thought that an elevated rail

Table 4.6. Value Orientations: Comparison across Parks and Neighborhoods

Value Orientation	Battery Park	Liberty State Park	Surrounding Neighborhoods	Total
Cost	0	7	35	42
Access	13	8	20	41
Park Quality	6	11	20	37
Economic	23	7	6	36
Health and Recreation	9	11	9	29
Choice	9	7	5	21
Aesthetic	6	8	6	20
Social Priorities	10	7	2	19
Political	8	5	3	16
Education	4	3	8	15
Personal	8	3	1	12
Safety and Comfort	4	5	3	12
New Technology	5	5	0	10
Ecological	2	3	4	9
No Impact	9	0	0	9
Community Quality	0	0	7	7

might be fun or exciting; however, they added that it would be too costly and might break down. Participants from all economic groups were negative about the proposed subsidized ferry because of issues of cost, crowding, and governmental intervention.

A large proportion of participants, especially those from low-income areas and those who were interested in the needs of low-income families, were concerned about cost issues, including the high price of the ferry and a possible charge for the proposed bridge.

The differences in attitudes toward the proposed access alternatives were not predictable by constituency group. Instead, there was a marked difference between the attitudes of immigrants and native-born participants, and between the attitudes of people who work rather than recreate in the parks. The native-born participants and the workers were more concerned about the negative impact of the proposed access alternatives. Native-born participants were skeptical about the political decision-making process and the social priorities reflected in the decision to build a bridge. Workers were concerned about losing their jobs or profits, or the negative impact of a bridge on the quality of the park.

People perceive the potential impact of building a bridge, elevated rail, or tunnel on the Ellis Island experience in similar ways, but they interpret that impact very differently. For instance, all groups agree that a bridge would increase



Figure 5.1. Jacob Riis Park bathhouse, promenade, and beach

ranging from gardening and flying radio-controlled model airplanes to cycling, bird-watching, and camping. At the same time, we found that some of the hangars have been used for years by the helicopter unit of the New York Police Department—a use that makes sense except for the premise that this is supposed to be a park.<sup>1</sup>

At Riis Park, the boardwalk, the bathhouse, and other buildings along the boardwalk, the parking lot, and the landscaped grounds constitute the Jacob Riis Park Historic District—essentially the whole park. Billy Garrett told us “there may be some non-historic intrusions, so to speak, that would not be considered part of the historic district”—playgrounds, for example, added since the “period of significance” (the 1930s)—but they are few. The effort to tether the park to a “period of significance” leaves management less able to be flexible in adapting to changing needs. While a nonhistoric playground can be rebuilt or eliminated, the historic 72-acre parking lot, which is more than half empty on even the hottest summer days, must be preserved. As of 2000 the Park Service had spent \$15 million to reconstruct portions of the bathhouse structure in keeping with preservation standards, but long-term development plans and lack of funding do not allow for indoor showers and changing rooms.



Figure 5.2. Picnickers at Jacob Riis Park



Figure 5.3. The Clock at Jacob Riis Park



of some parties can range between 30 and 75 individuals. Many of the groups include persons representing two or three generations of a family.

### *The Clock*

The Clock area is located adjacent to the boardwalk at Bays 5–6, west of the bathhouse, opposite Riis Park's old-fashioned street clock. The area lies between a baseball diamond and a playground that has sprinklers.<sup>6</sup> The picnicking area has seven cookout grills in the space closest to the beach. Wire trash bins are scattered throughout the area, and a large red metal drum for coal disposal is situated near some of the grills. The Park Service delivered new picnic tables to the area during the summer. Now the area has approximately a dozen new wooden tables in addition to two fairly worn-out ones.

The area has a combination of shaded and open spaces. The area closest to the boardwalk is predominantly without shade although there are a few small, twisted black pines and several dead hardwood trees planted several years ago that did not survive in the sandy soil. The back wall of a closed down concession booth on the boardwalk and the walls of a closed-off concrete tool shed

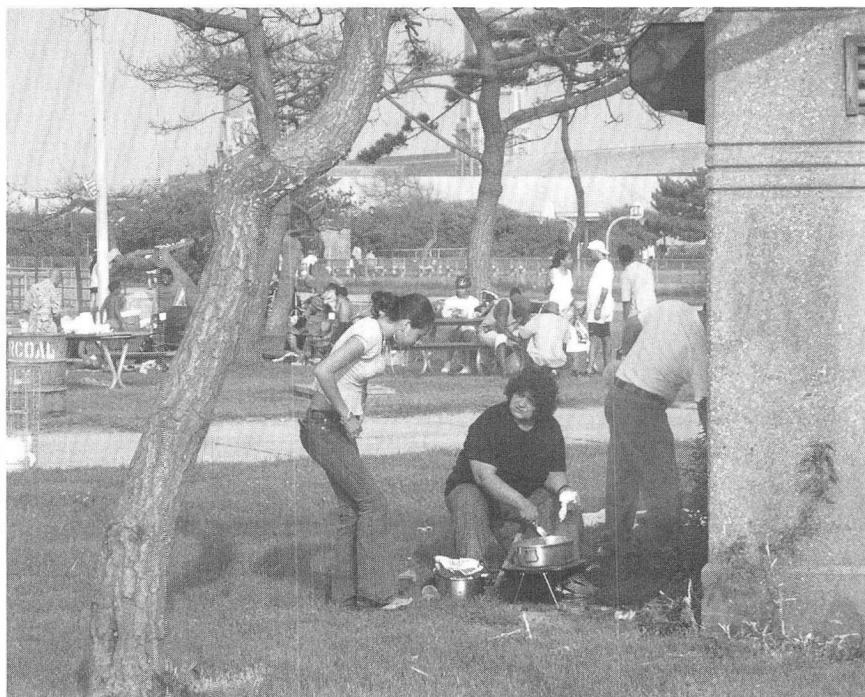


Figure 5.4. Park visitor cooking in shade cast by concrete wall, Riis Park

## Orchard Beach in Pelham Bay Park

*Parks and Symbolic Cultural Expression*

### Introduction

On the Fourth of July in 1996, I (Suzanne Scheld) made my first visit to Orchard Beach. Typically, this holiday conjures up images of barbecues, festive good moods, and the colors red, white, and blue. That day I found all of this in the park. The colors of the American flag were prominently displayed. More often than stars and stripes, however, I saw triangles, rectangles, and crosses—the red, white, and blue symbols of the Puerto Rican and Dominican flags. These markers of Latino and Caribbean identity were tied to tree branches and to posts in the picnic area. Narrow pieces of twine were drawn between tree trunks so as to create private spaces and to delineate one family's picnicking space from another's. These decorative and expressive forms of territorialism impressed me. The park became a common ground for diverse cultural groups to share and to reshape one national holiday.

Orchard Beach is our second case study of an urban beach. In contrast to Jacob Riis Park,<sup>1</sup> Orchard Beach is a well-utilized park. It is thriving, full of life, activity, and cultural expression. Orchard Beach, located in the Bronx on the border of Westchester County, is part of Pelham Bay Park, New York City's largest public space (map 6.1). While it is visited by many, it is especially enjoyed by Latino visitors, seniors, and naturalists. This chapter describes the symbolic expressions of these cultural groups, and it suggests that the number and types of cultural symbols displayed underscore how deeply attached visitors are to the park. The design, planning, and management of a park can stifle the cultural expressions of visitors. In the case of Orchard Beach, however, a *laissez-faire* approach to management—which is at times intentional and other times unintentional—enables visitor groups to elaborate unique symbolic displays of their connections to the park.

As a thriving public space, Orchard Beach has additional significance. It is a resource for bolstering Latino community identity and thus contributes to sustaining New York's cultural diversity. In this light, Orchard Beach is similar to American Beach, a Floridian seashore park celebrated for its role in African American history. Located on Amelia Island in the northeastern corner of the





Figure 6.1. Promenade at Orchard Beach

### *Methodology*

The Public Space Research Group (PSRG) conducted a user study of Pelham Bay Park between July 1996 and June 1998. Orchard Beach was a major focus of the study, although other parts of the park were also examined, including the separate “southern zone” along Interstate 95 and Rodman’s Neck.

Periodically park managers conduct user studies to better understand the populations they serve and to efficiently target efforts toward creating a successful public space. Typically these studies focus on describing the demographics of the visitors and collecting user evaluations of the park through widely distributed, self-administered surveys. The park managers of Pelham Bay were open to a complementary cultural approach that entailed extensive participant observation, behavioral mapping, key informant interviews, and face-to-face interviews in addition to a census survey (see Chapter 8 for a fuller description of methods).

The personal connections managers have with the park appeared to be a factor in their receptiveness to an ethnographic study. The administration and staff revealed in key informant interviews that they themselves had strong cultural ties to the park. Many related using the park for exercise and for family get-togethers. Several talked about growing up in the park using particular