

Muslim, Buddhist, Unitarian, and other faith traditions sometimes participate in faith-based community organizing, Christian congregations predominate in this work generally and in New Voices. Regarding Cornel West: the speaker drew especially from his *Prophesy Delivered: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982). See also Mark David Wood, *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), and West's *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

49. Though beyond my purposes here, see Kleidman's argument regarding the negative consequences of nonideological organizing. Robert Kleidman, "Volunteer Activism and Professionalism in Social Movement Organizations," *Social Problems* 41 (1994): 601-620.

50. Note that this cutoff is somewhat arbitrary, but these are the organizers, clergy, and laypeople most centrally involved in the key question here: strategic direction and organizational deliberation regarding New Voices. A broader listing of overall public leadership would reflect greater diversity among participants, particularly with regard to Latino leaders and clergy, and African American organizers.

51. Author interview with national fund-raising coordinator Denise Collazo, December 2004. She notes, "We've been building toward [serious national money], but it's hard to get start-up money. Funders want to fund particular issues, particular campaigns . . . more money will come once we get to the stage of having particular issue campaigns."

52. Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995).

53. For example, Ganz notes that farm workers "selected themselves" into leadership roles within the UFW and its predecessors (Ganz, "Resources and Resourcefulness," 1029).

54. For examples, see coverage in the following newspapers: *San Diego Union-Tribune*, October 18, 2004; *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 2004; and *Denver Post*, October 17, 2004.

55. See coverage in the following newspapers on November 19, 2005: *Oakland Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, *Orange County Register*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and *North County (San Diego) Times*.

8. Contextualizing Community

Organizing

Lessons from the Past, Tensions in the

Present, Opportunities for the Future

Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge

Community organizing is "hot" now. While some may think of it as little more than an artifact from the 1960s, it is both older and more contemporary. It has roots dating back at least to the late nineteenth century and continues today with a vibrancy and variety of expressions uncommon for such conservative times. Efforts from community development corporations to national organizing networks proliferate and expand widely. Foundations reflect and fuel this growth. After funding individual-oriented efforts in the 1980s and then family-oriented ones in the 1990s, many foundations turned in the late 1990s to community as the locus and vehicle of critical social initiatives. Theorists were ahead of foundations regarding the salience of community work. New Social Movement theory instructs that community-based organizing both in cultural and geographic communities has become the dominant form of resistance and social change since the 1960s.¹ These theorists argue that organizing at the community level proliferates widely in a postindustrial world, as in dustrial forms of organizing around labor and class become less salient. Communistarian theorists underscore the growing clamor for community and connection as a result of our decontextualizing global order.² More recently, the critique of Skocpol argues against the professionally managed advocacy organizations, often based in Washington, D.C., that dominate contemporary civic life and have taken the place of more participatory, membership-based, federated forms of local engagement.³ Whether theorists see the membership-based community efforts about which we write as proliferating, declining, or displaced, attention increasingly focuses on their importance. For scholars, however, the challenge is to get below general observations to a closer look at the complexity, competing ideologies, and variety within community organizing that are revealed in the longitudinal analyses and case studies offered in this volume.

This chapter underscores not only the proliferation and diversity but also the disconnects and limits of community organizing. It first discusses the varied types

of community organizing that have persisted over time and asserts some selective lessons learned from them. In addition, this chapter focuses on several important tensions in the field of community-based social change. The first is the tension between different traditions and visions of community-based work. One, most often referred to as *community organizing* or *social action*, makes demands on both public-sector and private-sector targets. It seeks greater social intervention, improved conditions, and social, urban, and economic programs. It uses mobilization and the power of people to work toward change. It offers an extrapartical or extrapartimentary approach, because it (1) lacks the necessary power to have its claims heard and power exercised through official channels and/or (2) seeks a fundamental change in the social, political, and economic structure. Its opposition can be a means and a vision, a strategy as well as an alternative worldview. To achieve broader ends it employs a variety of tactics, from direct action to negotiation and partnering with those in power. In contrast, other organizations work within a framework called community development, which focuses on improving communities through a variety of self-help or service programs. These programs may be financed from the outside, but their goal is to improve local conditions through local solutions. They too may have broader objectives, as with oppositional groups, but it is more common for them to follow a pluralist politics that seeks to win incremental victories and deliver services within a context of current power relationships or modestly shifting ones. We will discuss other ways of classifying organizations later, but it is important to point out the diversity and coexistence of a range of political stances within what can be described as community organizing.

A second tension emerges from an examination of the results of progressive community organizations. There are many of these throughout the United States, as illustrated later in this chapter, that work on a variety of social and economic issues. The larger of these organizations have the capacity to organize multicity campaigns, and some have a strong regional presence. Some of the organizations have long traditions; organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) date back to the late 1930s. However, despite local successes this work has not significantly impacted the wider national agenda or translated into the traditional political arena. Except for coordinated national networks with broad agendas such as ACOBN, which has been in existence for more than thirty years but has grown remarkably with the recent interest in community-based initiatives, progressive work on the ground remains at the level of the local community, sometimes at the regional level, but rarely contributes to the national agenda in a significant way.

A third tension results from the fragmentation of the field of community organizing. Though the political context has been stacked against these organizations, in part their limited success results from the absence of connection between them. The many progressive initiatives have not been able to find ways to unite into

a broader social movement or coalition for social justice. This might have a lot to do with differing origins, traditions, suspicions between leaderships, differences in their social bases, and competition for limited funds. However, until these divisions are addressed more effectively, the progressive tendencies within the community sector remain largely limited to the local arena.

Finally, there is an ongoing tension between local community organizing and social movements. These movements have played a key role in opening political opportunities for a variety of local organizing activities. The early work of Alinsky in Chicago would not have succeeded if it had not been for the militancy of the industrial labor movement. Similarly, in the 1960s, Alinsky's work built on the strength of the civil rights movement. On the other hand, once in place, local organizations have had difficulty connecting to wider social movements. For example, there has been little connection between the wave of youth activism linked to anticorporate globalization and progressive local organizations. This disconnect, like some of the other tensions noted earlier, poses challenges to the field of community organizing at the same time the field is experiencing a significant revival. We will explore these tensions later in this chapter.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

In the interest of sharpening the discourse, we have drawn upon the two dominant approaches usually cited in the literature: community development and social action. Of course, these dominant types overlap and interact within and between organizations. Nor is this a static situation. Organizations change dominant strategies over time, not uncommonly from social action to community development. The work of one affects the other, even if unintentionally. For example, the very existence of social action efforts can give community development initiatives more room to maneuver and often more funding for their work. Nevertheless, in general at any given moment organizing efforts tend to prefer community development or social action. In a nutshell, social action represents an engagement in the struggle for social change through organizing people to pressure government or private bodies. Central to this perspective is an oppositional politics and the use of conflict strategies and tactics.⁴ This kind of organizing may challenge social inequalities and oppressive power by offering an alternative politics, a critique of current conditions and power relations. Or it may focus on specific winnable local demands. In contrast, community development assumes a shared interest in society. It seeks primarily to bring together diverse community interests in a common process that contributes to the well-being of the community as a whole.⁵ It often results in a strengthened sense of community, referred to as community building, and/or

delivers tangible community projects such as housing or social services.⁶ The development approach is best illustrated by efforts to strengthen the local (usually neighborhood) economy through either neighborhood protection efforts or more contemporary community development corporations (CDCs) and groups like Habitat for Humanity, which build affordable housing for low-income tenants and homeowners.⁷ Community building focuses less on service delivery and economic improvement and more on developing community identity and connection. While it is currently seen as more connected to the community development strategy, community building is viewed now as important by both perspectives.

Of course there is much more complexity in the world of community organizing than appears in any simple dualism. For example, aside from the differences between community development and social action approaches, community-based efforts range from small, poorly funded, informal, local organizations focused on a single issue and/or cultural identity to large, much better funded, more formalized, regional and national networks of community organizing efforts working on a number of broad issues that seek national impact. Boyle criticizes staff-dominated citizen action groups that primarily canvass "members" and remain without substantial roots in communities or impact on community institutions.⁸ Despite the diversity and divisions in the field, this chapter is guided by a single critical assumption: for community organizing to have a true social change orientation, both directions are simultaneously required. Organizing is about both building community and engaging in a wider struggle for social and economic justice. We will conclude with an approach that recognizes the limits of the action/development duality and asks how each contributes to building social integration or opposition.

ESSENTIAL LESSONS FROM THE PAST

A few lessons must suffice, but they are essential to contextualizing contemporary discourse about the practice of organizing. First, community organizing has a long history. Community organizing has been an ongoing, integral, and significant part of civil life for more than a century. People continue to choose in astounding numbers to participate in voluntary-sector, civil society activity, including community organizing and development projects. This is a historical phenomenon. Americans turn most easily to community organizations at the grassroots level to build community, participate in public life, and meet individual and collective needs. With the devolution of the nation state and the shifting of public responsibility to non-profits and community groups, this may be even truer today than it was a hundred years ago.⁹

Second, community organizing cuts across various political stances and strategies. Although almost all community organizing is a public activity that brings peo-

ple together to discuss and determine their collective welfare, it is not inherently radical, liberal, conservative, or reactionary. Nor is it inherently democratic and inclusive or authoritarian and parochial. It is above all an extrapolitical activity, a strategy used by different segments of the population to serve certain interests, achieve specific goals, and advance clear or ill-defined ideologies and political perspectives. For example, right-wing groups have flourished in the past few decades as social action groups. The form an organizing project takes depends on a host of factors, especially the ideology and goals of its leadership, the goals and needs of the constituency being organized, the sources of funding, and the broader social ecology in which the effort is situated. We should never assume that just because an effort is a community organization that it inherently seeks progressive social change. Nor should we accept claims that community-based efforts are not political—that they are just about building relations and partnerships to better serve their communities. All community work is political, that is, about power, whether the community efforts are explicit or implicit, intentional or not, about their political nature. In order to understand the full range of community organizing efforts, we use a definition of power that reflects both pluralist and conflict theory. Lipsitz says that "power in the modern world is not just a matter of allocation of resources, it is also a matter of legitimation."¹⁰ Winning victories and a place at the bargaining table is essential to community organizing efforts. They want to influence policies, programs, and governance. But for those with a more oppositional orientation (discussed later), building a larger power bloc and mobilizing constituents and allies requires challenging the basic legitimacy and practice of those in power, as well as providing alternatives to it.

Third, the relationship between local community organizing and national (or international) social movement activity is critical to understanding the origins, nature, and success of local efforts and the importance of social action community organizing. Often local efforts serve as the building blocks of broader movements, what sociologists call social movement organizations (SMOs). These SMOs can provide the democratic spaces, organizational opportunities, skill development, and political education critical to broader movement building. Like social movements they serve a significant political role by (1) pushing new issues onto the public stage, (2) legitimizing previously ignored claims, (3) having these claims cause divisions in the larger society and with more formalized political institutions and processes, and (4) forcing political parties and other institutions to address these heretofore ignored grievances. By opposition we mean both contestation for power with elites and activity that seeks to build an alternative to existing structures and relations. It extends beyond issues of governing and governance to influencing far broader social change.

Social movements provide opportunities, direction, and support for such local efforts. Even more than community organization, they have the power to force

claims, politics, strategies, and tactics onto not only the local but also the state and national political stage, thereby legitimizing and catapulting them beyond traditional barriers. Consider the civil rights movement, which began based on generations of prior local work as well as local efforts after World War II. It grew to national proportions and spawned, directly and indirectly, organizing efforts at that time such as the New Left, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Black Power movement, not to mention later efforts around the rights and power of women, other ethnic and racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and so forth.¹¹ The social ecology and strategies of the civil rights movement were not limited to official channels, at either the local or national level. As with all successful movements, however, its impact was much greater than the sum of its local parts. It is this heritage of and interaction with social movement opposition that recently has been dropped out of the discourse related to community organizing.

Fourth, community organizing efforts develop in a broad context that heavily influences the effort as well as the overall dominant form of community organizing in any era. Social movements are one critical part of that broad context. The social ecology in which an organizing effort is situated heavily influences its daily practice and long-term objectives. That context includes the local neighborhood or cultural community; the city, suburb, or rural environment; the metropolitan area; the state; the nation; and the globe, all contributing to a multilevel social ecology of community organizing. They all reflect varied levels, which both situate and influence community-based efforts. Clearly, local conditions directly nurture, spawn, and limit community organizing projects. The participants (organizers and members) and a myriad of conditions at the grassroots level combine to mold consistently unique organizing experiences. But while community organizing projects have a significant nature and existence at the local level, they are also products of a broader context that extends to national and even international political-economic developments. In large degree, the macro political-economic context heavily influences the goals and strategies, the general tenor, the type of organizing selected, and the likelihood of success of local efforts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Throughout the twentieth century, dominant forms of community organizing emerged in different eras. The liberal reform political economy of the Progressive Era, the period from approximately 1900 through 1917, responded positively to the impulse for reform at national, state, city, and community levels. Although other types of community organizing existed in this period, it was the integrated ap-

proach that blended community development and social action—exemplified in the best of the social settlement houses—which dominated the era.

In the Great Depression of the 1930s the community development approach had much less salience and support. As capitalism collapsed, as one reform solution after another failed to halt the economic depression, the social action type, most notably the urban populist work of Saul Alinsky in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago, came to dominate grassroots activity. The hotly debated and precarious political economy of the era legitimated citizen action and political ferment at the factory as well as the communities where workers lived. Alinsky's work drew on the militant organizing in the 1930s and 1940s derived from the union and radical movements. It proposed to "rub raw people's resentments" as a way to get them involved and fight the established powers.¹² Conflict was not the only strategy and tactic used by Alinsky and his staff. Community building, developing relationships in the community, and winning trust and support through "one-on-one" encounters were also important parts of the work. Opposition almost always includes a broad variety of tactics. Conflict is one of many means community members and organizers use to win power. But it was central to Alinsky's strategy.

In the post-World War II era the conservative cold war economy stifled social action and encouraged more accommodationist forms of community development, both at home and abroad. Of course, community development efforts, such as homeowners' and property associations, had a long history. But conservative eras, such as that created by the cold war politics of the postwar era, tied this necessity for neighborhood associations to a reactionary politics. Segregationist goals were intertwined with community betterment, interconnecting the protection of property values with a politics of neighborhood exclusion.¹³

The relationship between the national political economy and community organizing is not a one-way street where the dominant form of community organizing is determined by the national political economy of an era. The historical process is a much more complex dialectic. In the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s, when the social action type of community organizing came to dominate again, the national political economy both produced the change and was the product of it. The grassroots resistance of the southern civil rights movement, the student New Left, and the rebellion in black urban slums pushed the national political economy left, expanded the political discourse to legitimate grassroots resistance, and demanded the passage of social legislation to address the needs of the poor and people of color. The interconnection between the broader social movement and local-based community organizing was clear and critical. The shift in political economy at the national level, expanded with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty programs, encouraged both social action and community development

approaches, though social action infused almost every effort. On the heels of these developments Boyte heralded a "backyard revolution" in the making.¹⁴

It is this interpenetration between the national political economy and community organizing that comes across so vividly in the history of community organizing efforts. The legacy of Alinsky organizing, the civil rights movement, and the New Left are examples of oppositional social action strategy grounded in popular democracy and direct action. We will see that with the period of restructuring beginning in the late 1970s, new practices that were more embedded in processes of governance and service delivery began to dominate.

CONTEXTUALIZING CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

The importance of the national, even global, political economy in shaping the nature of community organizing is evident in the past few decades, especially in (1) the proliferation of the community organizations with a variety of mandates and practices; (2) the increasing importance of the community development and community-building approach, and (3) the widespread adoption by most community-based efforts of more moderate strategies and the dramatic decline in salience of oppositional strategies and conflict tactics. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the legacy of social action community organizing diminished.¹⁵ These changes take on even greater significance in light of the broad proliferation of community efforts and even broader interest in the practice and potential of community organizing.

In the 1980s the United States made a clear turn to neoconservative politics at the national level. The twelve years of Reagan/Bush policy from 1981 to 1993 promoted a neoconservative agenda grounded in promoting corporate interests and right-wing programs, policies, and discourse. Responding to the heightened demands of an emerging global economy and the challenged status of U.S. corporations in it, neoconservatives sought to cut social costs. They went after labor unions, government programs, and claimant movements; they shifted even the limited political dialogue about human needs completely to corporate needs; they delegitimized the public sector and public life and pushed people in to increasingly private spheres and private conceptions of the good life.¹⁶

In the neoconservative decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the impact of national context on local organizing was enormous. A wide variety of efforts continued to promote democratic resistance and left insurgency, but it was the neoconservative political economy that largely determined the direction of most community organizing during the decade, moderating them and pushing them away from oppositional strategies. In fact, the load shedding of public responsibility by the national

government foisted new burdens as well as opportunities on local groups. The dramatic increase of nonprofit organizations in the past three decades, including but not limited to community-based efforts, is a manifestation of this national policy. Clearly the proliferation of community work since the late 1970s should be seen as an outgrowth of 1960s activism and a growing desire for democratic participation. But the proliferation of such community work must also be understood as well as a by-product of neoconservative politics and policies.

Rinku Sen argues that three contextual trends have had a major impact on progressive organizing since the 1970s. These are "the resurgence of conservative movements and the power gained by such movements in the United States since the early 1970s; the character and organization of the new economy, which is distinguished by the rising use of neo-liberal policies and contingent workers; and the continued and unyielding role of racism and sexism in the organization of society."¹⁷

This chapter will focus on the first contextual trend. The emergence of the neo-conservative movement and neoliberalism (the more global variant of neoconservatism in the United States) as the ideology that defines social and economic policies has had a contradictory impact on the community sector. The increased importance of community organizations for economic and urban development is a reflection of the processes of globalization and the consequent rearrangement of power at both the national and the local level. Local restructuring is at stake because the nation-state has revised its traditional role and functions. Consequently, the regulation function of the state has been redefined, relying on market and related competition, as well as local nonprofit associations for provision of goods and services.

There are many different paths from what Jessop describes as the shift from the Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) to Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regimes (SWPR).¹⁸ But regardless of the specific route, all subordinate social policy to economic policy with downward pressures on working conditions, and all seek to get people to become "enterprising subjects" and less dependent on state welfare programs. They diminish national governments, place greater emphasis on local, regional, and supranational levels of government, and accord new powers to social partnerships with related processes of negotiation.

The combination of extensive use of public-private and other partnerships and the involvement of diverse stakeholders in building agreements for how to adjust to the international competitive realities is coupled with expansion and support for the third sector and the social economy. The neoliberal ideology places markets at the center and implies that they should be open and, as far as possible, "liberated from all forms of state interference."¹⁹ Both governments and foundations have policies that have promoted local entrepreneurial strategies both private and social, as well as accommodating investment through private-public partnerships. The process is contradictory insofar as these bodies have been active in promoting and

supporting community organizations. And it is paradoxical that these organizations have moved into a vacuum created by the cutting of public services while also having to respond to the deteriorating social and economic conditions.²⁰

In the United States, the Reagan-Bush-Clinton period recast the role of the state, and the agent of social change was redefined from the people and the government to the corporations.²¹ The government launched unprecedented attacks on the power of trade unions and the poor in order to minimize social costs and support corporate allies in the competitive globalized market. In addition, the full force of the technological revolution transformed the industrial core of the United States into decaying centers of unemployment and despair. Community organizations, faced with mounting social problems such as poverty and unemployment, and without resources, were forced to be innovative; they created new forms of support and social solidarity. Food banks, shelters for the homeless, self-help organizations, and economic initiatives aimed at meeting basic needs and urban revitalization emerged. In some cases, such as community economic development, new formal partnerships were established, drawing community organizations and other actors into a consensus-building process, often with banks and other businesses formerly seen in the social action model as the cause of community problems. The community efforts of the 1980s and 1990s tended to lose their explicit political edge and found a new place alongside government and the private sector in reconstructing social and economic provision.

MODERATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

In the 1980s and 1990s, the dominant community organizing practice became community development.²² In a social action model, power is the goal, a valuable commodity that enables people and their communities to get things done. Neo-Alinsky organizations, for example, try to "give people a thirst for power."²³ Recent models of community development define power in terms of technical skills or as untapped capacities resting within the community—in-ternal power, which the community already possesses but needs to develop or access. Community work focuses on building relationships in the neighborhoods, developing partnerships with the powerful, using consensus strategies and tactics in order to actualize community capacity. This is important and valuable work that has tended in the past two decades, not always by choice, to adopt more conservative, businesslike strategies and tactics. As economic support for social services and solving social problems declined due to opposition at the federal level and shrinking tax bases at the local level, and as political discourse in the nation revolved around free-market solutions to all problems, many community organizing efforts moved more into the business of economic development.²⁴

This trend was nowhere more evident than in the rapid growth and spread of community development corporations (CDCs), which dominated the field of community organizing from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s. CDCs began in the 1960s and experienced a "second wave" in the 1970s, when under the Carter administration they became central components of the limited, but significant, federally assisted neighborhood development movement. Beginning around 1980, however, CDCs found government support drastically cut. A new, third wave of CDCs developed in the privatization campaigns of the Reagan years and were forced into becoming much more businesslike than their predecessors. They had to exhibit "business talent and development skills once thought to be the exclusive province of the for-profit sector."²⁵

The bottom line for most CDCs, as with seemingly everything else in these decades, was economic success. The primary goals were to "correct the market's failure to provide jobs and services to the community," as well as help build a nonwhite middle class by developing highly specific and measurable development projects in which neighborhood people could work for their own economic betterment.²⁶ Most avoided political controversy, were dominated by professionals with a technical orientation, had narrow memberships bases, and rejected social action activity. Although market demands forced most CDCs to become so oriented to economic success that they were not able to sustain their social action work, they did not always give up on these goals by choice. They were often forced into it, and then adapted to it. This was true of social action organizers as well. Neo-Alinsky organizer Shel Trapp saw a natural progression in his work. First, organizations defend the neighborhood; then they take an "offensive" stance. "That's when you start to link development with organizing."²⁷ Robert Rivera, an IAF organizer, put it similarly: "There are two types of organizing. One that is for, the other is against. Now you have to be for something. It's a different style of organizing."²⁸ But at play in the 1980s was more than a "life cycle" of organizing. Community economic development and building community partnerships with local economic and political elites became the dominant form of community organizing because of the demands and constraints of organizing in a neocconservative political economy. Of course many efforts held on to conflict strategies and tactics, even while combining them with economic development projects, especially older efforts with roots in the politics of the "sixties" such as ACCORN, National People's Action, and the Center for Third World Organizing. But the pressures against social action turned most away. From the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, community economic development seemed to become virtually synonymous with community organizing.

Of course, while CDCs have become to a large extent private market developers and followed a path of consensus development and the conservative trend in local work, a fuller picture of the relationship between CDCs and community

organizing is more complicated. As noted previously, CDCs have a complex history with multiple generations recognized in the literature, and these have shaped the vision that they carry into their practice of community development.³⁹ They often began, for example, as organizing efforts. Defilippis describes those created in the late 1970s and early 1980s as emerging out of protest movements. "They [second-generation CDCs] emerged out of localized problems and conflicts, and it was not ideologically inconsistent to deal with local-scale problems as a developer rather than an adversarial activist."⁴⁰ With the transformation of the relationship between the state and community organizations, described earlier, there was greater pressure on CDCs to take on a state replacement role and become the key local service provider.⁴¹

In the past decade, while community economic development work has remained significant, a new community-building emphasis developed in response in large part to the discovery of worsening community conditions and relationships, especially in but certainly not limited to poor and minority communities. Communitarian authors such as Putnam and Etzioni argue for the rebuilding of "social capital" as a means of re-creating civil society.⁴² The emphasis is on the local as a way of creating participation of citizens in socially oriented networks. Similarly, Kretzmann and McKnight construct an important perspective combining community building and community development that is based on the analysis that the prospect for outside help is bleak because of budgetary constraints and that significant community development can take place only when local people and local institutions discover and invest their own resources and efforts. The basic goal is to mobilize assets to build community involving "virtually the entire community in the complex process of regeneration."⁴³

From a social action perspective, this version of community building emphasizes consensus and collaborative strategies, de-emphasizes community tensions, and ignores the causes of many community problems. It usually does not deal with underlying structural and contextual issues that caused community problems, such as banks that redline the community, corporations that abandon it, absentee landlords who run it down, or private and public policy that undermines it. The new community building posits itself as an alternative to both the social work model, which for McKnight⁴⁴ reduces citizens to clients, and to the Alinsky/social action model, which Kretzmann and McKnight⁴⁵ dismiss as grounded in community deficits and problems rather than community assets. As with Mike Eichler's "consensus organizing" strategy, there is a basic understanding that the context of the 1980s and 1990s required new models of organizing that could be "sold as a real conservative program."⁴⁶

Returning to Sen's observation on the changing context, we can see two important elements. Changes in work have important consequences for asset-based prac-

tice. With the loss of regular work and the precarious employment that replaced it, the hours of work have become redefined, and they are predictable. Working in part-time low-wage sectors destabilizes family life because members often have to balance several jobs with irregular hours. As a consequence, there is neither the time nor the energy to participate in such new forms of community life. The availability of predictable time shapes the possibilities for voluntary commitments. With the restructuring of wage labor, this is not a realistic option for many members, particularly of low-income communities. From a social action perspective, the prescriptions of McKnight and the others create an idealized and decontextualized view of community. Similarly, when a feminist analysis is added, the idea of community as a voluntary means of caring becomes problematic. Feminists have argued that women who participate in the labor market have a double day, with both domestic and wage labor. Currently with the realignment of state services and the appropriation of them in the community, this further increases the demand on women, who traditionally have provided much of local direct and unwaged services.⁴⁷

Social action groups have been affected as well by the moderating influence of the conservative context. Most neopopulist, political activist community organizing efforts during the 1980s and early 1990s adopted more moderate strategies and a more moderated version of oppositional politics. Battle lines shifted. "To a surprising extent the grass roots no longer 'fight the power.' They fight for a share of the power. Sometimes they win a sizable share. . . . [Sometimes they] team up with the established elite that they once derided and that once spurned them."⁴⁸ Even National People's Action (NPA), another organizing network based in Chicago, one criticized by some organizers as too confrontational, opposed in the early 1990s being "out in the streets making symbolic statements, when you can be in the boardroom negotiating specific agreements that win for neighborhoods."⁴⁹

Consider the evolution of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the direct descendant of Alinsky organizing, which currently has about sixty-two organizing projects around the nation, but it is in Texas where the IAF network is the strongest. Throughout the state, in San Antonio, Houston, El Paso, Austin, Fort Worth, and the Rio Grande Valley, IAF organizers and active members struggle for utility reform, improved public education, government accountability, health care for the indigent, and basic public services, including water and sewers for the "colonias." Most visibly, they organize "get out the vote" efforts to promote bond packages to help IAF neighborhoods, hold "accountability sessions" to keep politicians publicly in line with IAF objectives, encourage voter registration, and work to improve "alliance schools" by halting the dropout rate, stopping drug use and violence, and getting parents more involved. More quietly, in the day-in and day-out practice of community organizing, they serve as "schools of public life," empowering neighborhood

residents by giving them an opportunity to do something about public issues that have "frustrated [them] all their lives."⁴⁰

IAF organizations do all this remarkably well, as many commentators have noted. Applebome proposed in 1988 that the IAF Network is "in ways large and small . . . changing politics in Texas."⁴¹ Mary Beth Rogers, who served as chief of staff to former Texas governor Ann Richards, concluded that the IAF efforts in Texas "are virtually the only organizations in America that are enticing working poor people to participate in politics."⁴² Mark Warren's more recent study of the Texas IAF, written within the social capital discourse, is equally flattering. Warren sees the Texas IAF as an impressive example of "community building to revitalize American democracy."⁴³ Without doubt its achievements and victories have been many.

But it is not a static organization. While still following much of the Alinsky style of organizing, the IAF adapted a new organizing strategy in the 1980s and 1990s to meet the needs of new constituents and the demands and openings of a new conservative context. Whereas most CDCs look for consensus, IAF groups focus on the importance of "standing for the whole."⁴⁴ Of course, many in power still see IAF as a radical protest group, and even during Alinsky's lifetime some IAF projects, such as The Woodlawn Organization, shifted from "conflict to coexistence."⁴⁵ IAF remains a strong, progressive, and democratic voice; it is a powerful organization with dynamic leaders, a large mass base, a confrontational style, and substantial funding. But in a conservative context this success came with costs. The funding tended to be more for moderate projects such as building civic capacity in public schools. Moreover, the more moderate strategy encouraged IAF organizers to distance themselves from radicals and social movements. Whereas the early Alinsky took pride in being a radical, in the IAF radicals are seen as alienated outsiders. "IAF now almost makes a fetish of its commitment to moderates," noted veteran organizer and trainer Mike Miller.⁴⁶ The strategy of moderation, the commitment to moderates, the grounding of IAF efforts in mainstream religious institutions, and a definition of power that emphasizes building relationships may have led, however, to a politics that limits the parameters of IAF's work and its overall long-term effectiveness.

Of course, organizations cannot "do it all." In such a complex recipe, especially in a conservative context, other features of organizing pull energy and attention away from social action community organizing. In addition, pressures for development, traditional community building, and demands for accountability make it hard for organizations to find the flexibility to carry out an action agenda. Even in ACORN, which has done a better job of both continuing its progressive politics and using direct action tactics, one staff member, commenting on the Comprehensive Community Initiative in the South Bronx in which ACORN was funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to "do it all," noted, "It's a real struggle

to not compromise our work culture to fit [this project]. We spend a lot of time making sure that our culture stays intact. . . . Direct action is our culture."⁴⁶

REINSERTING OPPOSITION

It is no paradox neoconservatives call for neighborhood-based solutions and "empowerment" of citizens; they know well that these are less expensive strategies for problems that require costly national and global solutions and neighborhood-based initiatives. Without the existence of a social movement able to push the national political discourse left, win funding for social programs and redistributive policies, and struggle for state power, we can expect, at best, incremental change from the top and important but modest victories at the grass roots. Whatever the context ahead, community organizing, even with its limits, will remain essential: as schools of democracy and progressive citizenship; as seeds of larger resistance efforts; as demonstrations of the persistence of public life in an increasingly private world; as the vehicles of struggle in which we win victories, develop skills, forge identity, and legitimate opposition; and as potential grassroots components of the next major social justice movement. To play such roles, however, community organizing must both build on and go beyond the contemporary context. It must benefit from the new skills and strategies learned in the past generation and challenge the neoconservative political economy, which heavily shaped organizing in the past decades. While the history of community organizing makes clear that national context is fundamental, it also instructs that opposition—ideological and direct action challenges—is essential to push the context, policies, and programs toward meeting basic human needs and implementing more democratic processes.

Take, for example, the work of ACORN and its recent successes around both predatory lending and predatory tax preparation. Using a national network now located in some sixty-five cities, towns, and rural areas, as well as new efforts in Canada and Peru, ACORN continues to use a variety of strategies and tactics to move the issues that most affect its primarily low-income constituents, issues for which ACORN can get funding support and on which it can win, and issues around which ACORN can generally build the organization while keeping closely tethered to its overall identity as part of a larger social justice movement. In the predatory lending campaign, ACORN brought a number of major financial businesses, including Household Finance Corporation, one of the largest banking and lending agencies in the world, to the bargaining table through a variety of tactics such as broad participation by community members in direct actions at Household corporate sites, board meetings, and the homes of members of the board of directors;

public relations in local and national media, including newspapers, radio, and television; legislative initiatives at the local, state, and national levels; regulatory campaigns at multiple levels; and shareholder strategies. ACORN was able to win significant victories with Ameriquest, Citigroup, and Household Finance, all major financial institutions.⁴⁷

ACORN also demonstrated a variety of strategies and tactics in a national campaign around the exploitation by commercial tax preparers of low-income residents eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), who are encouraged to take, at often exorbitant interest rates, a Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL) in order to get their tax refund quicker. Research by the Brookings Institution concluded that in 2001 of the \$32.4 billion in refunds under the EITC program targeted at the working poor some \$1.9 billion went to commercial tax preparers.⁴⁸ RALS are usually short-term loans that charge an annual percentage rate of anywhere from 67 to 774 percent.⁴⁹ ACORN, which noticed this problem was affecting its members, determined that H&R Block and Jackson-Hewitt offices were actively operating in the same low-income communities that ACORN was organizing. ACORN met with policy analysts who had done work on this issue, secured funding from the Marguerite Casey Foundation for a direct action campaign targeting H&R Block and Jackson-Hewitt, and utilized similar tactics as in the predatory lending campaign. Especially effective was ACORN's ability as a national network of local community efforts to mobilize protests in the winter of 2004, during the early part of tax season, at some fifty offices of H&R Block on the same day and on more than one occasion. The turnout of members participating in the actions varied, but the chanting, aggressive demands, anger against the injustice of these predatory practices, and publicity in national and local media, and the fact that those protesting were community people all got Blocks attention. While the results of the campaign are still uncertain, the fact that H&R Block signed a negotiated agreement with ACORN within five months of the first protest points to the power of ACORN's social action organizing. It demonstrates the effectiveness of direct action strategies and tactics, when coupled with a national network and a relatively steadfast ideological commitment to fighting against class and race inequality and for a more democratic and egalitarian society.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDES

Another significant challenge for contemporary community organizing is to address the fragmentation that exists not only between community development and building approaches, on the one hand, and social action efforts, on the other, but also between grassroots community organizing efforts themselves, as well as

between community organizing efforts and contemporary social movements. If community organizing is to have an impact greater than the sum of its parts, these divides must be addressed.

The first divide is the disconnection between community organizing efforts themselves, undermining their overall impact. Until very recently the national and regional networks—IAF, ACORN, Gamaliel, National People's Action, PICO National Network, and others—essentially acted as though they were ignoring each other. Most of them ignored comparable organizing in the workplace or efforts around culture and identity rather than geography. Increasingly, local efforts steeped in the development and service tradition do form coalitions with each other—for example, around homelessness, AIDS, or domestic violence—but this is less common with the social action efforts. More recently connections have improved. The national networks have been working with labor unions around living wage, immigrant, and get-out-the-vote campaigns. ACORN has close ties with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in Texas and Louisiana. Moreover, ACORN and Gamaliel have been working together in an inside-outside relationship in metropolitan areas where ACORN continues to organize in inner-city neighborhoods and Gamaliel focuses on inner-suburban communities with similar problems. But historically and still predominantly today these organizing efforts tend to work alone, ignoring the work of counterparts and, at their worst, putting down the efforts of the others. This tension has a long history and results from solid choices about where to put scarce resources and the obvious limits of coalition work. There are also ideological and practice divisions, not to mention competition for limited funding. But what seems to keep them apart as well are narrow issues of turf, organizational maintenance, personalities, and sometimes even a tradition of arrogance bred by a political culture hardened to outsiders. As the world and its challenges become larger and more integrated, community organizations are rethinking this isolation. The very fact that globalization foists its social problems onto communities that are unable to handle them underscores the need for larger, more powerful organizations to confront them.⁵⁰ This point is not lost on the national networks, especially ones like IAF and ACORN that have been around for more than a generation. ACORN, for example, has doubled its number of locals since 2003, an extraordinary rate of growth. Nevertheless, the divides that separate organizing efforts remain wide and daunting.

The second divide is with social movements. As the challenges to community organizations become greater, the need for connection with contemporary social movements becomes more obvious. Local organizing, with all its benefits, has its limits, especially in our globalizing context. Our world is increasingly characterized by centralization of power and decentralization of production.⁵¹ Economic power concentrates as the task of cleaning up the mess of neoliberal policy and economic

globalization fragments. Unless organizing can both build on and surpass a localist focus, the result could be internally directed local democracies and corporate control of everything else. New community developers recognize the local basis of democracy. They are correct in their encouragement of participation in the building of "civil society." There is a base of people with expertise who participate in a wide variety of community activities. But the local is only the beginning, and a single community organization or even a single national network, no matter how effective, is terribly overmatched by the size and power of corporations and governments. Democracy has to build outward and confront the wider agenda that has been universally accepted by corporate leaders and politicians of all stripes. Clearly, the opposition has to be constructed from the ground up, but it must also connect to global concerns and developments and especially to oppositional movements working for social change. Unlike some who think the nation-state has been surpassed by the new global economy,⁵² and therefore is inappropriate as a target of organizing, we propose, along with others, that community efforts need to expand their work beyond the local to put the state back in to regulating corporate practice and ensuring the welfare of its citizens.⁵³ Problems lived locally are connected internationally and mediated by governments. In the United States those public bodies tend to be weak and underfunded, so groups like ACORN have had more recent success targeting private corporations. Nevertheless, the connections between public and private are there to be made. Appropriate alliances and demands have to be made to build effective politics at all levels. Public policy remains essential to any long-term social justice agenda. Community organizing with a social action politics has the greatest potential to articulate demands and promote alliances, which reach beyond the local community.

The best way to do so is to mend the huge disconnect and divide between community organizing efforts and contemporary social movements. Consider the youth/antiglobalization social movement, a strong force prior to September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. As impressive as they were, the Battle in Seattle and the Asa demonstration in Washington, DC, needed to be grounded in actual organizing and daily practice. It is no wonder community organizers, especially those in the national networks, dismissed contemporary social movement activists because they were "not really organizers" and "don't have a base." Organizers were critical of antiglobalization road show politics in which confrontations at international meetings became played out without much ongoing programmatic activity. We propose that politicized community organizations can serve as bridges between mass events and between mass events and local alliance-building and popular education. Politicized community organizations such as ACORN can serve as day-to-day, on-the-ground organizing opportunities for those first engaged and mobilized by the larger social movement. At the same time, we need wider political organizations to pro-

note demands and alternative visions that can sustain local struggles. Some like ACORN propose an alliance of community organizing with labor organizing and electoral politics, as seen in their work with the SEIU and the Working Families Party in New York. Effective community organizing needs a national, even an international, social movement, just as this broader movement depends on grassroots organizing. As noted earlier, this is a key lesson in the history of community organizing. The dialectical relationship between social movements and local organizing is essential to understanding both the potential and the limits of local work.

The third divide is between the community development and social action models of organizing. The action and development models and the related literature examine practice elements and strategies. The politics tends to be limited to what can be described as "pragmatic reformism," that is, improving social conditions within the boundaries of what exists. How can community organizing move beyond this and contribute to greater social change and a politics of redistribution that underscores the United States as a shared, democratic, and inclusive community? The issue is complex; it is not easy to separate limited gains from long-term social change because engagement in the "real world" inevitably leads to pushing for specific victories. The difference between those practices that are limited to specific gains and those that see practice as part of a process of wider social change is due to factors such as intention, vision, process, and alliances. Both action and development can contribute to social change or can play a role in maintaining the status quo. Both can also have a lasting impact by changing the consciousness of the groups they serve, thus creating conditions for mobilization for social and political change.

The renewal of activism in the current period challenges the split between social action and development. The mobilizations on issues of international trade have brought together actors and organizations from a variety of social and political movements. The mobilizations that received extensive media coverage represent one aspect of their activities. There has been extensive local organizing at the core. Younger activists, interviewed by Shragge, did not split along the action-development divide but saw their work, whether it was developmental such as loan funds or collective gardens or organizing labor or fighting corporate power, as being in opposition to the relations of power in the society dominated by the interests of large international capital.⁵⁴ Similarly, the literature on this new wave of activism does not distinguish between action and development but examines the commonality of opposition.⁵⁵ The link that facilitates these approaches to organizing has been the blending of social movements and local or community organizing. Activists become organizers at the local level and find local activities that allow for the expression of their oppositional politics. This is not new. The social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s produced similar results as first the student movement and

New Left and then the women's movement established local organizing and service projects that linked their radical politics and community organizing practice. Eventually some of these services became mainstream, such as homeless or domestic violence shelters. Based on these experiences and with our analysis of the moderation and contemporary role of community organizing, we present another conceptualization, both attempting to make the politics more explicit and acknowledging the underlying complexity of practice.

Table 8.1 addresses the tension between the development and action approaches and their relationship to the question of social change. It also provides a new model for understanding community practice. The terms *integration* and *opposition* are used to contrast the politics of practice. Integration strategies are used to increase people's participation in the system as it is or to enlarge resources or distribute some goods a little more fairly without challenging the basic assumptions of the system itself. This can happen either through pressure group tactics or through a variety of social programs. For example, local organizing to pressure the municipal government to improve traffic patterns or garbage pickup can better the quality of life in a neighborhood but does not challenge the domination of the car or the patterns of waste production. Similarly, programs such as job readiness attempt to place people in the labor market but do not necessarily raise questions about working conditions or about the pattern of linking jobs to participation in consumer culture. Integration practices support the maintenance of the fundamental power relations of our society and are designed to help people either meet their needs or make gains within existing structures and processes. It assumes that the system can expand to accommodate and bring people into either the jobs or the lifestyles defined by corporate capitalism. They do not question the limits and competitive nature of the system. Organizing within this approach does not go beyond the limitations of a singular focus on either local winnable demands or service and development.

Those working on the opposition side understand local organizing as part of a process of fundamental social change. This can include both organizing opposition to different aspects of society, such as specific policy or forms of oppression, and inequality, and creating local alternatives such as cooperatives and services. These practices challenge the basic relations of power and create an alternative political and social culture based on democracy and direct control by citizens of these organizations. Further, the process of reaching these ends occurs through mobilizing citizens to play an active role. This is a key element, and the one aspect of practice that has been reduced since the 1980s. Power relations can be challenged and shifted only through the collective actions of citizens. Community organizing, to be a force for social change, has to be able to mobilize locally but must act in conjunction with wider alliances that share a politics of opposition.

Table 8.1. Redefining Community Practice Models

	Integration	Overlapping Practices	Opposition
Development	Service provision and development initiatives based on professional leadership and a consensus model Tradition: asset building (e.g., McKnight)	Service provision at the local level	Building alternatives that create new democratic or nonmarket economics, new practices that are "prefigurative"
Action	Pluralist pressure group organizing Tradition: pluralist pressure groups (e.g., Alinsky)	Organizing people in a neighborhood to pressure for local improvements	Social movement organizing and critical consciousness, challenging the legitimacy of existing power relations Tradition: Social movement organizing—locally (e.g., antiglobalization activism)

Source: Eric Shragge, *Social Activism and Social Change: Lessons for Community and Local Organizing* (Guelph, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), 198.

The differences are not always clear-cut, and it is hard to classify actual day-to-day practices. It is for that reason the middle column—overlapping practices—is added to the table. For example, community-building and community development processes also have the potential of moving people into action. In some respects, the actual activities are less important than the processes around them. This means, for example, that specific demands, campaigns, or services at the local level are integral to community organizing and fall within a process of building opposition. The process of organizing is what is important, not just the outcome. This includes raising critical consciousness in those participating in the organizing process about the necessity of social transformation as the means to achieve social justice and democracy. Fabricant and Fisher propose that "community building stripped of political intention tacitly demands that neighborhoods solve their problems within the confines of present economic and political arrangements. . . . Through the community building process and their own lived experience, residents come to understand that personal need and community problems are rooted beyond the neighborhood to the structural arrangements of the society

as a whole."⁵⁶ In addition, local work must be connected to broader social movements and coalitions that are part of a struggle for social change. Guiterrez and Lewis, for instance, understand specific activities by feminist organizers at the local level as tied to the broader social movement.⁵⁷ Table 8.1 illustrates the dimensions of integration and opposition along with the action and development approaches and traditions in order to illustrate each approach. The quadrants have to be understood as types that show the general orientation of practice. The day-to-day reality is more complex. However, community organizing has to move beyond the traditional divides and become part of both a wider opposition movement and its local face.

CONCLUSION

This chapter makes a case for community organizing that is willing to build opposition, use confrontation as part of its diverse arsenal of strategies and tactics, and emphasize organizing that begins at the local level and builds outward. The argument for more than two decades has been that social action is passé. This critique came first from neoconservatives outside of the field of organizing. If you risk social action, your organization will pay the price of being marginalized and defunded. This is always a risk. Grassroots social change is never easy; it is inherently an audacious act. But we think several factors create the conditions that make opposition more acceptable and more effective. Economic competition and uncertainty have left many with little stake in the status quo. The contradictions of our contemporary world—the growing class inequalities, the revival of ethnocultural hatreds, heightened repression, the increased salience of right-wing regimes, and the continued wanton degradation of the Earth, to name but a few—continue to mount. The tyranny of the “marketplace” and pursuit of the corporate agenda have been arrogant and successful. People have fundamental needs that are unmet and which the new community development cannot meet. Support for the neoliberal order is fragile; chinks in the armor, let alone a major crisis, could engage many people. A combination of uncertainty and a lack of legitimization of the social order creates conditions for opposition and contestation. Challenges to the existing order, in the national campaigns of ACORN and in the earlier antiglobalization protests in Seattle and Washington, D.C., confront the corporate proponents of social moderation, which fear the expanded social costs of democratic dissent and economic democracy. Even with the events of September 11, 2001, and the turn to even more conservative regimes since 2000, including the Bush victory in 2004, it seems limited and shortsighted for organizers, activists, and community-based service providers not to seriously consider the potential of reinserting social action in their work as a way to build a broader opposition and alternative politics.

NOTES

Selected parts and earlier versions of this chapter first appeared in other works of ours, including Robert Fisher's *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America*, and Eric Shragge's *Activism and Social Change: Lessons for Community and Local Organizing*.

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5. Rothman, "Three Models of Community Organization Practice."
6. The social action model is similar to that developed as the "social action" and "political activists" models, respectively, in Rothman, "Three Models of Community Organization Practice," and Fisher, *Let the People Decide*. The community development model combines the community-building and economic development components as expressed in what Rothman, in "Three Models of Community Organization Practice," calls "locality development" and Eric Shragge, in *Community Economic Development: In Search of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997), refers to as community economic development.
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