RINKU SEN

MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

ACTION

STIR IT UP

LESSONS IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY

COMMUNITY

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STIR IT UP

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INTRODUCTION

Community Organizing—Yesterday and Today

This book is grounded in many theories and practices that have emerged mainly from community organizing. While it is certainly not necessary to have a historical knowledge of the field in order to do good organizing, sometimes it is helpful to be able to place a particular effort into the established landscape of diverse networks and models. From such an overview we can learn that there are no pure models. Developing a practice that works for us is a matter of begging and borrowing, stealing, and only occasionally having an entirely new idea. I begin with a review of the major features of contemporary community organizing, including the contributions of Saul Alinsky, the innovations created by the expanding pool of organizing networks, and the major critiques of Alinsky's rules. Then I consider the relationship of community organizing to key social movements from the 1950s to the present and discuss what community organizing can contribute to social movements and vice versa. After I review the landscape of the past, I argue that community organizing should now move into practices that support the emergence of new social movements with the potential to win large-scale progressive change. To that end, I identify what appear to me as the most encouraging trends and practices in organizing since the early 1990s. In part, this review provides a backdrop to the organizing efforts I highlight in subsequent chapters.

Establishing Principles for Community Organizing

The term *community organizing* refers to a distinct form of organization building and social activism that grew in the United States mostly after World War II. Community organizing in its most traditional form involves the building of a membership organization; such an organization sometimes comprises institutions with existing memberships, such as churches and labor unions, and other times it is made up of individuals and families. These membership organizations engage in specific campaigns to change institutional policies and practices in particular arenas, ranging from education to income to the environment. Community organizations have logged significant victories, many of which complement or enforce historic gains in federal policy, such as the programs of the Great Society, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the War on Poverty. There are thousands of community organizations in the United States today, even if we exclude seemingly apolitical neighborhood associations and Community Development Corporations. In these organizations, perhaps millions of regular people gather to demand accountability from city councils, public health departments, police departments, corporations, and other institutions. There are at least six major organizing networks in the United States, each with its own methods and theories. Since World War II, community organizing has grown into a profession, with its own body of literature, standards, and training institutes.

The oldest of these organizing networks is the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), founded by Saul Alinsky. Alinsky is widely acknowledged, especially among white, working-class community organizers, as the father of contemporary community organizing because he was the first to devise and write down a model of organizing that could be replicated. He created dozens of community organizations, all designed to test out a new portion of the theory, in addition to the IAF. Alinsky's pragmatic, nonideological approach to social change has been both emulated and challenged by organizers and groups, many of which arose to fill perceived gaps in Alinsky's work.

Alinsky was raised in Chicago during the turn of the twentieth century in a solidly middle-class, Jewish-immigrant household. He studied sociology and criminology at the University of Chicago, focusing on behavioral trends among juvenile delinquents and career criminals, before becoming a social worker just as the Great Depression hit. Radicalized by his exposure to systemic poverty and dissatisfied with the limitations of a social work approach, which he argued simply taught people to resign themselves to their lot, in the early 1940s Alinsky set about looking for a new way to make change. His search resulted in an experiment that would make him famous, the establishment of an "organization

of organizations"—churches, labor unions, and service organizations in the meat-packing and stockyards section of Chicago, which was heavily populated by Polish and other southern/eastern European immigrants. To build the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, he recruited key actors from existing community institutions to constitute a sponsoring committee; then the committee members pressured, cajoled, and attracted other groups into the new organization. In addition, the leader of each institution contributed his own membership to the new formation. Thus, pastors brought in church members, shop stewards brought in union members, and service groups brought in clients. This incorporation of members of established institutions accounts for the reputation of institution-based groups for turning out thousands of people for local actions. The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council quickly gained a reputation for beating city hall into submission and winning expanded social services and educational access.

These accomplishments generated media and political attention and began to put Alinsky on the map. Expanding on this model, Alinsky later created the IAF to test adaptations of the model in other cities. The IAF began to work out its theory of building organizations of organizations by establishing relationships among leaders of institutions; the IAF asserted that these organizations could revive neighborhood-based civic life and improve conditions by winning concessions from local institutions. The IAF now provides leadership training for nearly forty organizations representing over one thousand institutions and one million families, principally in New York, Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nebraska, Maryland, Tennessee, and the United Kingdom. IAF organizations are funded largely by substantial annual contributions from institutional members—churches being among the wealthiest U.S. nonprofits—and foundation grants. Over time most have become faith-based, grouping together congregations, perhaps because of the general decline of labor unions and white ethnic organizations.

In the late 1960s, the Alinsky model for unifying communities came to be embraced as an alternative to race riots and urban unrest, and communities began calling on the IAF to help them reduce racial tensions through productive organization building. The first such request came from Rochester, New York, after a series of race riots in 1964. There, Alinsky built a white solidarity organization to support black demands. The new organization, Friends of FIGHT, focused first on winning concessions to black community demands from the largest local employer, Eastman Kodak. Alinsky is famous for accusing Eastman Kodak of having contributed nothing to race relations but color film. In 1974, Ernesto Cortez went to San Antonio and started Citizens Organized for Public Service, which is now the best-known IAF group; and in 1994, an IAF organization, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, designed and won the first local living wage ordinance, sparking hundreds of similar campaigns nationally.

Alinsky laid out his organizing theory in two important works: *Rules for Radicals* ([1970] 1989) and *Reveille for Radicals* ([1946] 1991). The subtitle of *Rules for Radicals, A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals,* speaks to Alinsky's devotion to what works rather than to any specific theory. He had five basic premises:

1. The role of the organizer and the role of the community leader should be distinct in order to reflect an organizational model that has both local volunteer leaders and professional staff. In Alinsky-style organizations, the unpaid volunteer leader, who should be indigenous to the community in which the work is taking place, represents the organization, gets in front of the media, and negotiates with the power structure. The organizer works behind the scenes—recruiting, coordinating, doing research, taking notes, buying donuts. In *Rules for Radicals,* Alinsky also assigns leaders and organizers different motivations: "This is the basic difference between the leader and the organizer. The leader goes on to build power to fulfill his desires, to hold and wield the power for purposes both social and personal. . . . The organizer finds his goal in creation of power for others to use" (p. 79).

2. The building of the organization should be the major expression of a community's growing power in recognition of the fact that people power is mostly a matter of having overwhelming numbers. Alinsky also predicted that a shift in power relations would take place between institutions and the organization, rather than among individuals or within the community at large.

3. Issue campaigns should be focused on a specific, individual decision maker.

4. Organizing should target winning immediate, concrete changes based on the "needs, interests and issues" of local people rather than on developing an explicit ideology (Delgado, [1993] 1997, p. 11). Alinsky's main idea was that organizers were to enable the changes members wanted without imposing their own ideology on a group: the organization should be more concerned with winning concrete improvements for its members than on defending any particular ideology, such as Marxism or Communism. He seemed to believe that organizers would fall into ideology mode if they weren't vigilant about their own behavior and that organizations would be otherwise free of ideology. In *Rules for Radicals,* he wrote that an organizer must have "a free and open mind, and political relativity. The organizer in his way of life, with his curiosity, irreverence, imagination, sense of humor, distrust of dogma, his self-organization, his understanding of the irrationality of much of human behavior, becomes a flexible personality, not a rigid structure that breaks when something unexpected happens. *Having his own identity, he has no need for the security of an ideology or a panacea*" (p. 233; emphasis mine). In this framework, ideology is bad; it has the potential to become dogmatic, undemocratic, and divisive, and can deny the organization the tactical flexibility it needs to win.

5. The mode of organizing should be 24/7; the organizer needs to devote all emotional, physical, and intellectual resources to the work.

Though his prohibition on ideological line drawing made people suspicious, Alinsky is best known for helping regular people engage in campaigns that challenged the power of major corporations and unresponsive government. Stories of his organizing imply that Alinsky was opposed to at least the most obviously abusive forms of racism and rampant capitalism, though his sexual politics were rather less developed. His record also reveals that he believed generally that U.S. democracy would work if only citizens took their place in the line of protest (Horwitt, 1989; Delgado, [1993] 1997). Many people have defended Alinsky's politics, noting that what he did, though perhaps not what he said, challenged liberalism as well as conservatism.

Expanding Networks

Alinsky's ideas have been expressed again and again in the major organizing networks that have established themselves since the IAF was founded. People adapted Alinsky's basic concepts to match the changes they thought necessary for their communities and their theories of social change. Fred Ross Sr., who had been the IAF's West Coast director, was the first to make significant adjustments to the model when he developed the Community Service Organization (CSO). CSO organized Latinos in Los Angeles; it registered thousands to vote in 1948 and helped elect the first Latino city council member in 1949. Ross, reacting to the limits of the institutional model in reaching out to and finding leaders among people not already in an existing organization, developed the individual-membership model; he eventually helped Cesar Chavez start the United Farm Workers (UFW), an organization built through house meetings, which are small recruitment gatherings of people connected through a social or family network. Initially, both CSO and the UFW built their base of individuals through a *mutualista,* or mutual-aid, structure, in which members pooled their money to start purchasing cooperatives and revolving loan funds. With leadership from Chavez and Ross, the UFW organized the first national union of immigrant farmworkers, entirely outside the purview of the then exclusionary AFL-CIO, and introduced the country to an influential model of alliances through its grape boycott.

John Baumann and Dick Helfridge, priests who led the movement among Jesuits to begin new community organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, founded an organization composed largely of Christian churches and other congregations, and established a model of what is now called faith-based organizing through a

new network, the People's Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) (website: www.piconetwork.org). Congregations of all denominations are the building blocks of these community organizations. PICO's emphasis on the "development of the whole person" in addition to respect for human dignity and the creation of a just society reflects in part an implicit criticism of the IAF reliance on formal leadership and its shortcomings in developing leaders among the rank and file of participating institutions.

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is the undoubted leader among traditional community organizations based on the model of bringing individuals together into new formations that did not rely on existing institutions. Few contemporary activists, however, know that ACORN has its roots in the civil rights and welfare rights movements. In 1968, a chemistry professor and civil rights leader named George Wiley, active in the Congress of Racial Equality, implemented the idea of combining community organizing, which he saw winning significant victories, with the racial justice commitments of the civil rights movement in a new formation called the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). Although it survived only six years, among its lasting legacies was the creation of ACORN, which was started by Wade Rathke, who had been sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, to build an NWRO chapter in 1970. ACORN was the first to design a replicable model for the individual-membership organization. Today, ACORN has organizations in twenty-six states and counts among its successes winning many local living wage campaigns, resisting redlining by banks and insurance companies, and reforming local public schools. ACORN's outreach to individuals and its continued commitment to organizing the very poor makes it an important supplement to the IAF and PICO, institutional models that address only marginally the question of the unorganized (Delgado, 1986).

Other IAF organizers and people trained in this thread of activism started additional networks. These include the Citizen Action network and National Peoples' Action, based in Chicago. In its heyday, Citizen Action had a tremendous base among the elderly and won many health care victories at the state level. Although Citizen Action started out largely as a set of individual-membership groups, over time it built more coalitions than membership organizations and contributed a great deal to our thinking about effective coalitions. Much of the former Citizen Action network has been reconstituted in a formation called U.S. Action, which is active in some states today. National Peoples' Action was founded by a former minister, Shel Trapp, and includes institutional- and individual-membership organizations, as well as coalitions. Trapp, in turn, was trained by Jesuit Tom Gaudette, former IAF organizer, during his effort to start regional training centers for organizers.

As the number of networks increased, so did efforts to train organizers and to professionalize the field. Every network has its own training centers. The IAF conducts ten-day trainings nationwide for its organizers, leaders, and potential members. PICO has a training institute. ACORN has its Leadership School. Citizen Action built the Chicago-based Midwest Academy, which survived the demise of the original network. The Midwest Academy established a successful and long-lasting collaboration with the United States Student Association, a national organization of progressive student associations, in the Grassroots Organizing Weekends (GROW), where student activists are exposed to the skills of community organizing. In addition to these training resources, some graduate schools of social work, such as those at Hunter College of the City University of New York and San Francisco State University, established tracks of study in community organizing. By 1980, the first masters of social work degrees were being awarded to students who had focused on community organizing.

Critiques of Alinskyist Approaches

As often as Alinsky's ideas were taken up, they were criticized by other organizers and activists. Particularly in communities of color and among feminists, people took issue with Alinsky's rules, the issues he considered good to work on, the lack of a deeper analysis, and his reliance on formal leadership. Alinsky's rules had many implications for these populations because his principles dominated training curricula for professional organizers, foundation funding, and media attention. As the stakes became clearer with time, organizers raised important questions about Alinsky's model. These critiques led to the formation of alternative networks for people of color and for women, many of whom now dominate the National Organizers Alliance (NOA). NOA, a membership organization composed of organizers, provides practical as well as intellectual support to those working in the field.

The Antiracist Critique

The antiracist critique centers on three concerns: the domination of community organizations by white staff and white "formal" leaders such as priests and union officials; the refusal of most community organizations to incorporate issues focused on racism; and the lack of flexibility in the rules of leadership and tactical planning.

With rare exceptions, when I came into the work in the mid-1980s the staffs of most community organizations were white and male, although the membership

was often mixed or even primarily people of color. In addition, the formal leadership of institution-based groups was also white and male, ranging from priests and local bishops to union officials. Many explanations have been offered for this trend. Some theorized that the low pay for organizing jobs deterred people of color, who usually entered the work with few financial assets and who were often responsible for the financial health of an extended family. Another explanation was that the networks and organizations were not yet mature enough to attract former members and children who had grown up as a part of those organizations. Finally, competing movements and organizations vied for the energy of young people of color, and many of them were more amenable than traditional organizations to the leadership of people of color. In communities of color, people were organizing in cooperatives, alternative labor structures, the civil rights struggle, anticolonialist movements, and explicitly socialist groups. Different decades offered different attractions, but these movements competed with community organizing for staff of color. By the 1990s, however, more people of color populated the staffs of community organizations than had previously.

A related critique is that community organizing's issues and rules do not match the political cultures and priorities of communities of color and antiracist activists (Delgado, 1986; Fellner, 1998; Blake, 1999). The question of appropriate issues became particularly important as a conservative backlash against the gains of the civil rights movement gathered steam in the 1980s and 1990s; this challenge from the right effectively divided communities of color through legislative campaigns that criminalized urban youth and undocumented immigrants, among others. As immigration and refugee resettlement from the Korean and Vietnam wars led to massive rises in immigration, communities struggled with the shifts and loss of traditional neighborhood boundaries; the neighborhood had always been the key site of community organizing. Shifting demographics and conservative attacks greatly challenged community organizing in the racial arena after the 1980s. Gary Delgado, founder of the Center for Third World Organizing, wrote in a monograph originally published in 1993, *Beyond the Politics of Place*, that community organizing faces the threat of becoming irrelevant if it does not keep pace with the changing identity of urban communities. He said that the development of "communities of interest" requires addressing issues that are not geographically based but are instead rooted in the identities and subsequent attacks faced by the marginal—immigrants, youth, women of color, and the very poor. If community organizing wants to survive, Delgado asserted, it has to abandon a focus on short-term, geographically based, winnable issues and move to the more complicated and controversial issues affecting new communities.

In a detailed response to Delgado's urging, Mike Miller of the Organize! Training Center agreed with the need to deal with these issues but defended the "traditional" organizing record:

> [Delgado makes] an assumption that there is a specific way in which race and gender issues must be addressed. Organizers and leaders have to have a conscious ideological construction, including notions of racism and its oppressiveness. It is their job to transmit these ideas to the membership and followers in an organization. But "traditional" community organizing has found other ways. People of diverse backgrounds are coming together on the basis of mutual respect, shared values, confidence in their own identities and self-interest issues. With the exception of independent organizations in communities of color, racial issues have been subsumed by issues of class solidarity in most community organizations. The same has been true of gender [Miller, 1996, p. 28].

Finally, people of color argue that many of the rules of community organizing run counter to the political traditions, cultures, and realities of communities of color. They point to three community organizing trends in particular: the separation of leader and organizer roles, the refusal to advance a fundamental critique of capitalism and U.S. democracy, and an overreliance on confrontational tactics as the only sign that institutional challenge is taking place. In many communities of color, organizers are a part of the community's leadership, publicly acknowledged and included in decision making. Sometimes these leaders are paid to do their organizing, and often they aren't. Examples abound, from Fannie Lou Hamer to Anna Mae Aquash. While many organizers of color see the importance of leadership that generates new leaders, they resist drawing a false line between leader and organizer.

In addition, many organizers of color share a fundamental distrust of U.S. institutions and are often excluded from the organizations meant to negotiate between them and the institutions; as a result they are critical of government and corporations and want to express that critique through organizations. They have been abandoned and abused by registrars of voters, business regulators, the school system, and so on, and they are disinclined to check fundamental criticisms of these systems. Much of the richest work in communities of color has been conducted by socialists, some raised here in the United States and others in countries from which they immigrated.

Many people of color have little faith that simply raising their voices will have a dramatic effect. Tactically, communities of color are accustomed to finding other ways to challenge institutions, including building alternatives. Some refugee and

immigrant communities approach conflict cautiously, and some actions are carried out disguised as community fairs and cultural events.

Undoubtedly, some of the resentment directed toward white organizing networks has to do with the unacknowledged appropriation by white male organizers of techniques and models that have been in use in communities of color (interview with James Williams of Grassroots Leadership, 1995). Alinsky's own contributions had been used in other movements that pre-dated or ran concurrently with community organizing. In the pre–civil rights era, organizations of black people in the South, for example, relied on the alliance between existing social institutions, predominantly black churches and service societies, as the infrastructure for supporting community confrontations with local institutions. Some of these methods were replicated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in its struggle for voting rights and desegregation. Building community through buying clubs and cooperatives, as Ross did in the CSO, was a common experience of Mexican and Central American immigrants, and doing so in the United States resonated with those communities.

Some of this critique stems from negative feelings about Alinsky himself, and it is irresistible to take a look at his own track record. Was Alinsky a racist, as he has been accused of being? He has been considered with great suspicion by leaders in the civil rights and antiracist movements. Organizers he trained and their organizations have been accused of ignoring the racial dimensions of neighborhood issues, refusing to take up explicitly racial issues, and undermining the leadership of local leaders of color. At the extremes in this debate, organizers of color accuse Alinsky of having been actively racist, while white organizers attempt to defend his legacy of bringing black and white communities together in common cause. Most likely, Alinsky was well-meaning but naïve in regard to matters of race. Certainly, he was easily able to condemn the racist motivations of extremist white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and of white working-class people who moved out of urban neighborhoods as blacks carried out their migration from South to North. He was hardly alone in these views.

But his efforts to disrupt that kind of thinking were frequently simplistic. Particularly after the mid-1970s, as conservatives learned that they could hide racist behavior in coded language that attacked vulnerable populations, Alinsky's definition of racism as explicit discrimination became outdated and ineffective. But even before the resurgence of conservatism, Alinsky's reputation on race was greatly damaged by the active segregationism of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in the late 1960s, when it fought to keep blacks from migrating into its neighborhoods. Alinsky considered white flight a problem not just for the loss of an urban tax base but also for the loss of community power. However,

the only solution he could think of at the time was a quota system limiting the number of blacks in any neighborhood to 10 percent—the amount he thought that racist whites would be willing to handle and that would also be acceptable to blacks as a better-than-nothing option (Horwitt, 1989). Alinsky's effort to have a race-relations committee in the early Back of the Yards configuration never took hold and fell apart when he left the organization. His one attempt to convince the Back of the Yards leadership to allow the 10 percent quota failed miserably. So, Alinsky knew enough about race to be embarrassed by explicit racism but not enough to embrace organizational practices that could centralize antiracist work and that could develop a sophisticated antiracist analysis that kept up with the efforts of the right wing. As years passed, the larger community organizing networks tended to follow that lead—they often included people of color and whites working on common issues that benefited both constituencies, but they rarely held explicit political discussions of race issues or waged campaigns that attacked race discrimination directly (Delgado, 1986). While whites and blacks working together on anything, as they did in Rochester, was radical in 1960, by 1990 it was no longer unusual.

The antiracist critique led directly to the formation of an additional set of networks that paid explicit attention to issues of race. The oldest of these, and the first to be founded and operated by people of color, is the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO, pronounced C2), which was started in 1980 by Gary Delgado, a former welfare rights and ACORN organizer, and Hulbert James, a former SNCC and HumanServ organizer. In its more than twenty years of work, CTWO has become the premier network and training ground of organizers of color and the community organizations for which they work. CTWO advanced a strategy based on two notions: that people of color occupied a colonized position within the United States and could find common cause across the lines separating black, Asian, Latino, and Native American communities, and that community organizing offered potentially strong forums for such politics if it could be conducted with clear antiracist analysis and priorities. CTWO's major contributions include training thousands of organizers and volunteer leaders of color in community organizing embedded with antiracist politics, testing new forms of multiracial organizing among urban people of color, and questioning the effectiveness of organizing wisdom in achieving racial justice. Also in the early 1980s, Grassroots Leadership was founded by Si Kahn, a Jewish organizer and singer/songwriter, to be an explicitly biracial network of community organizations in the South that continued the tradition of combining art and culture with organizing practice. In the 1990s, there were further additions: the Black Radical Congress was founded in 1997 and led to the formation of groups like the Black

Autonomous Network of Community Organizers (BANCO); since 1990, the environmental justice movement has spawned a number of new local organizations and networks of color that fight on a combination of environmental and economic justice issues.

The Feminist Critique

Feminists also found plenty to critique in Alinskyist organizations. These criticisms have four targets: community organizing overemphasizes intervention in the public sphere, does not allow organizers to balance work and family, focuses on narrow self-interest as the primary motivator, and relies on conflict and militaristic tactics.

Feminists point out that Alinsky believed that organizing should take place entirely in the public sphere. Alinskyist organizations direct their energy toward reforming public institutions while ignoring the potential of using the private sphere—home and family. Because the arrangements of postindustrial capitalism created a sharp distinction between the two spheres and relegated women to the private, women's issues and contributions are easy to ignore if we focus only on behaviors and issues in the public sphere. Feminists argue that many of women's contributions to organizing have in fact taken place in the private sphere, as women turned home into community and expanded their notions of family. What Stoecker and Stall (1997) call "women-centered" organizing efforts have focused less on the policy outcome of a particular struggle and more on the process of building nurturing and compassionate relationships among participants and on offering learning opportunities. Important solutions were developed by women working together in the private sphere long before they confronted public institutions to get them to address the same problems. The domestic-violence and women's health movements provide good examples of such efforts; they led to major changes in popular opinion and behavior and only later led to institutional changes as well (Stoecker and Stall, 1997). My own experience suggests that the division of labor based on gender re-creates the public and private spheres even within community organizations as men work heavily on the external strategy questions and women work on membership recruitment and leadership development.

Alinsky's insistence on "toughening up" young organizers by holding strategic discussions late into the night excluded people, especially women, who had responsibilities in both spheres, what we now think of as the double and triple shift expected of women. In his writing about organizers, Alinsky referred only sporadically to women organizers, perhaps knowing that women's reproductive duties would be impossible to combine with the 24/7 work schedule he expected.

He wrote in 1970 about his training conversations with organizers: "Frequently domestic hang-ups were part of the conferences. An organizer's working schedule is so continuous that time is meaningless; meetings and caucuses drag endlessly into the early morning hours; any schedule is marked by constant unexpected unscheduled meetings; work pursues an organizer into his or her home, so that either he is on the phone or there are people dropping by. The marriage record of organizers is with rare exception disastrous" (Alinsky, [1970] 1989, p. 233). As a result, the majority of members in organizations were women, but they had a hard time getting staff positions until more recently.

Feminists also object to Alinsky's views on motivations and tactics. Feminists argue that women-centered organizing is not motivated primarily by self-interest, an idea that was paramount in Alinsky's theory, but by compassionate sympathy for vulnerable members of the target community and the community as a whole. Feminists also contend that Alinsky's emphasis on conflict runs counter to the many successful women's organizing efforts that emphasize cooperation and compromise to generate neighborhood improvements. In part because many women-centered organizing efforts often looked like and led to service provision, organizers in the Alinsky tradition of conflict would not recognize them as organizing, even though they also involved regular people in fighting for institutional change.

Feminist critiques of Alinskyist organizing led to the creation of new networks, such as Citizen Action, which was started by Heather Booth, as well as feminist networks that often combined social services, advocacy, and organizing around policy issues. Academic groups like the Education Center on Community Organizing at Hunter College have documented and analyzed the specific contributions to women to organizing practice. Extended networks of women working on specific issues, such as women's health and reproductive rights, domestic violence, and women in nontraditional work sectors, all have prominent national networks, with newly emerging efforts addressing the needs of women of color.

Points of Light: New Efforts at Organizing the Disenfranchised

Throughout the 1990s, activist gatherings were characterized by sometimes bitter debates based on the critiques of community organizing. In 1999, three years after the formation of NOA, the national gathering in Asheville, North Carolina, featured a series of engaging discussions, involving hundreds of organizers, about the sacred cows of organizing. NOA's members are largely identity-based activists (although many do engage in building membership-based community organizations) rather than traditional New Left, labor, or community organizers.

These discussions specifically challenged the notions that issues have to be widely and deeply felt, that democratic decision making is an appropriate reason to advance regressive politics, and that winnability is of primary importance in choosing issues. These challenges pointed to a fundamental tension between the goals embraced by traditional organizers and those of new activists.

In many ways, the lack of sophistication that traditional community organizing applies to large-scale economic, racial, and gender questions resulted in the lack of explicit ideological discussion in most traditional organizing networks. Over time, the pragmatism that Alinsky espoused came to characterize community organizations; it determined the path of internal conflicts about class, race, and gender, and eventually of those about immigration and sexuality. If a particular issue was bound to divide a community or was difficult to address entirely in the public sphere, most community organizations did not deal with it. Domestic violence and police brutality provide excellent examples of issues that could divide a community and that local institutions resisted dealing with. Only recently have some organizations modeled loosely after the traditional—that is, having a membership and engaging in direct action issue campaigns—taken on police behavior, for example. Throughout the 1980s, as the War on Drugs blew up the prison rolls, most community organizations campaigned for an increased police response to chase out drug dealers rather than for action on the larger issues surrounding the War on Drugs.

Over time, additional forces and new movements have changed community organizing by creating an imperative for different methods and politics. These forces include, but are not limited to, shifting demographics caused by migration within the United States and immigration into the country, growing inequalities in wealth and income, vast increases in private and public prison building and in incarceration, and rising expectations among people of color and women. In an increasingly conservative atmosphere, constituencies under attack have found ways to fight back. Whether these efforts take place within or outside traditional structures, they have begun to interact with community organizing in ways that shift practices. Three different kinds of efforts have been particularly critical to organizing the disfranchised. Like their forebears, they all have significant strengths and severe shortcomings. They do not constitute "the answer." Rather, they point to what needs to be done and to factors that need to be considered. First, New Labor is organizing the most marginal workers both within and outside the AFL-CIO. Second, identity-based movements among women of color, lesbians and gays, and immigrants have clarified the relationship between who people are and the issues that emerge from their experiences. Third, community organizing practice has begun to answer earlier critiques and to create new practices that enable work that is deeper and more effective than in the past.

New Labor

Many of the criticisms directed toward community organizing are somewhat milder versions of racial, economic, and gender critiques directed at the mainstream labor movement, now epitomized by the AFL-CIO. Organized labor has a long and explicit, often bloody, history of excluding blacks, immigrants, and women; it chose to protect white male workers from these constituencies rather than building an inclusive movement. For much of the twentieth century, the United Auto Workers was the only union that included black men and had a multiracial identity. Only the establishment of independent unions for workers of color, the civil rights movement, and the overall decline in union membership led eventually to some unions' embracing new constituencies. This change was a result of the work known as New Labor.

New Labor consists of both community-based worker organizing and progressive initiatives within the AFL-CIO. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a wealth of new organizing among marginalized workers, those who had been ignored or shut out by the AFL-CIO; much of this organizing is taking place in immigrant communities. These community-based worker organizations are usually known as workers' centers because they often provide services, such as job placement, cooperative development, and legal services, in addition to organizing workplaces or industries and running issue campaigns. The workers' center movement was fed and influenced by a number of political factors. First, AFL-CIO unions, with only a few exceptions, revealed a lack of interest in immigrant and low-wage workers until the mid-1980s, when many Latin American, Asian, and Caribbean refugees and immigrants gave up the notion of returning to their home countries and decided to settle in the United States. Second, even after some unions—namely the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE)—began to organize low-wage workers and immigrants, the industry-based structure of unions and legal limitations on them made it necessary for community organizations to step into worker organizing. Currently, unions take their identity from a particular industry, and each contract struggle is based on a discrete workplace. If a worker switches from industry to industry (for example, being a hotel worker by day and a janitor at night), unions are not structured to accommodate that person's membership in more than one. In addition, labor law is supremely unfriendly to low-wage, temporary, and other contingent workers (such as those who work under contract rather than as direct employees), limiting their rights and protections, including the ability to organize a union. The situations of undocumented immigrants, who are easily exploited and controlled by employer sanctions, and welfare-to-work participants are telling examples.

Operating with a fraction of the resources available to organized labor, workers' centers represent the cutting edge in organizing marginal workers. In her book, *Sweatshop Warriors,* Miriam Ching Louie calls workers' centers "a bit like small guerilla warriors fighting a more heavily armed opponent; . . . [they] 'organize outside the box,' and utilize tactics and strategies based on their ethnic backgrounds—like the 'war of the flea,' tai chi, jujitsu, haikido and the ideas of Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and the Zapatistas—techniques that deflect and toss their opponents' weight back at them" (2001, p. 22). Workers' centers organize farmworkers, garment workers toiling in sweatshops, immigrants working in electronics factories, domestic workers, day laborers in construction and landscaping, and cafeteria workers, just to name a few of the sectors affected. They are known for winning changes where unions have been unable to by conducting extensive leadership development and expanding the definition of workers' issues. While all workers' centers focus on labor issues, many also take on social and political issues such as amnesty for undocumented immigrants, affordable housing, education, and access to health care. Many of these organizations are key to local community/labor alliances. Many are also active in issues of the immigrants' homeland.

The building of these community-based organizations to get to marginal constituencies pushed innovative organizing within the AFL-CIO; the result was the creation of an insurgent arm of organized labor that has challenged earlier political positions (Gapasin, 1999). Forced to change simply to survive, organized labor has begun to organize nontraditional workers and to take up nonworkplace issues such as child care, housing, and immigration law. In the 1980s, SEIU and HERE began organizing janitors and other service workers, many of them immigrants and people of color. In addition, the AFL-CIO has made new commitments to moving contingent and temporary workers toward the collective bargaining process. Unions have worked for the reclassification of contingent workers through creative mechanisms. In Los Angeles, seventy-four thousand home care workers classified as independent contractors joinedSEIU in February 1999, after pressuring the county to set up a public agency to act as their employer in collective bargaining. And unions have used contract negotiations for standard workers to win improvements in the status of contingents. The United Parcel Service strike of 2000, for example, featured full-time workers demanding that part-time deliverers be given full-time status and accompanying benefits (Cook, 2000).

The election of John Sweeney, former international president of SEIU, as president of the AFL-CIO in 1995 raised the hopes of many labor activists that the AFL-CIO would now devote more resources to new organizing efforts and would improve some of its policy positions. Sweeney's politics are quite different from those of his conservative predecessor, Lane Kirkland, who had resisted the immigration-reform work of groups that did not do "straight organizing"; one

such group was the California Immigrant Workers Association, which helped launch strikes by southern California construction workers and built resistance to anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1994 (Bacon, 1995). Unlike Kirkland, Sweeney began with a platform that included the legalization of undocumented immigrant workers, the repeal of employer sanctions, and the use of resources to organize new sets of workers. In addition, AFL-CIO unions, particularly SEIU and HERE, are investing increasingly in building alliances between unions and community organizations of all sorts. Both Sweeney's election and these new policy positions are in part a response to insurgent groups within the AFL-CIO, such as the A. Phillip Randolph Institute for black workers, the Labor Immigrant Organizing Network, Out at Work, and the AFL-CIO women's division.

Both workers' centers and the new progressive union initiatives have weaknesses as well as strengths. According to Jennifer Gordon (1999), founder of the Workplace Project, while workers' centers have done excellent work in enforcing existing labor regulations and developing new leaders among immigrants and people of color, they lack a broad strategy to deal with the limitations of current laws. They do not have the clarity, resources, and experience to launch and win long-term legislative campaigns. Louie (2001) notes that workers' centers have many strengths, but they have not yet been able to take on the forces of global capital in a comprehensive way by themselves; their victories are still largely at the local level. Workers' centers, unlike unions, are not allowed by the National Labor Relations Act to engage in collective bargaining, so they have had limited success in winning new comprehensive contracts. On the AFL-CIO side, progressive unions and labor councils are frequently held back by conservative unions, particularly in the building trades and manufacturing, and AFL-CIO positions on social and political issues frequently work against key constituencies. For example, the AFL-CIO took positions in line with President George Bush's war on terrorism and said little about the effects of civil liberties violations or international isolationism. While the AFL-CIO's legislative capacity is somewhat better than that of the workers' centers, most unions have concentrated on winning union-recognition elections and contract fights rather than on legislation. In addition, the basic structure of the industrial union has not changed in a century. These and other limitations will have to be dealt with if New Labor is to reach its true potential.

Identity-Based Movements

Identity politics is an overarching term for a broad set of ideas and organizations that emerged mostly after the decline of the 1960s' mass movements, partly in reaction to the contradictions apparent in the setup of the movements themselves.

The participation of specific constituencies within mass-based organizations—
for example, women in the peace and civil rights movements, people of color
in the economic justice movement, and gay and lesbian people in the New Left—
revealed contradictions that, by the mid-1970s, could no longer be ignored. In
part, identity politics started as an analytic movement, a movement of ideas,
that upheld the importance of the political experiences of marginalized con-
stituencies and expected progressives to unify around the imperatives of attack-
ing racism, sexism, and sexual oppression as they had around class. Identity
politics—a political vision that recognizes the problems of societies in which re-
wards and punishments are distributed by massive systems according to physical
attributes—led to some of the most important theoretical and political movements
of the last thirty years of the twentieth century; these movements ranged from
black feminism to the anti-AIDS campaigns to the community-based worker or-
ganizing described above, and they have, in turn, profoundly affected community
organizers and their ideas.

By the mid-1970s, feminists of color and other marginalized groups outlined
the principles of identity politics to counter the limitations of earlier "universal"
movements, which were usually oriented around class. Universal movements to
fight capital were designed around what I call the same-boat argument—that all
workers experience the same exploitation at the hands of the same bosses but do
not see their similarities because of capitalist manipulation. Three assertions pre-
sented substantial challenges to this simplistic framework for movement building
and organizing. First, activists exploring identity politics developed the idea that
identities that had been considered biological are socially constructed. Social con-
struction is a matter of giving biological characteristics meaning by assigning val-
ues, behaviors, stereotypes, and status to meet the needs of society and its
institutions.

Second, activists developed the idea that these social constructions create vastly
different experiences among people as they relate to the institutions of private and
public life. In acknowledging this difference in life experience, activists were forced
to grapple with the reality that black autoworkers require voting reform as well as
union membership or that women might rebel against the nuclear family because
that structure burdens them a great deal more than it does men or that black
women's priority gender issue might be welfare while white women's might be
abortion.

Third, identity politics raised the idea that one solution might not fit all: con-
trolling capital might not prevent institutional racism; third world liberation might
not address women's oppression. Activists observed that movements for one kind
of liberation might not embrace the issues that would lead to other kinds of lib-
eration, and they urged attention to all the different systems from which people

need to be liberated. In their seminal work about the liberatory possibilities of identity politics, a group of black feminists wrote in the Combahee River Collective statement that "the major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions" ("Combahee River Statement," [1983] 2000, p. 269).

The ideas behind identity politics led to new movements. The old forms of organization frequently became obsolete as particular groups of people sought places in which they could do their own political work. Women, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people, immigrants, and poor people left those organizations that could not integrate their needs and formed new organizations whose issues varied substantially from the bread-and-butter issues of the Old and New Left, the first- and second-wave women's movements, the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and the black/red/yellow power movements. In the late 1970s and early 1980s we saw remarkably innovative organizations such as ActUp and Queer Nation, which brought new attention to the structural nature of heterosexism; organizations of women of color fighting domestic violence; and immigrant-rights organizations working on amnesty and workers' issues. Often, the creation of independent identity-based organizations led to the inclusion of these constituencies in more mainstream groups—for example, in the creation of the Out at Work caucus within the AFL-CIO and of the women of color antiviolence network in the larger, white-dominated domestic violence organizations.

More important, identity-based organizations created both political and cultural change. In 2000, for the first time in U.S. history, a National Gay and Lesbian Task Force analysis of election exit polls showed that more than half of Americans support equal rights for gay and lesbian people (Yang, 2001). A range of women of color organizations, inspired by the black women's health movement and the National Black Women's Health Organization, have provided healthier environments for women and girls of color and have raised questions about women's health priorities, just as the women's health movement created a culture, followed by public programs, that encouraged women to explore rather than hate their bodies. Most recently, women of color who have been active in fighting domestic violence have initiated a new national effort to define responses to domestic violence that are more appropriate to communities of color than are traditional solutions.

Identity politics has been soundly attacked by white self-named leftists who bemoan the loss of the universal politics they believe lead to mass movements (for example, Todd Gitlin, 1995, and Michael Tomasky, 1996). They contend that progressive movements have been destroyed by the inherent narrowness of identity politics, that the privileging of individual identities is an obstacle for universal mass

organization, and that U.S. activists have lost sight of the positive values of European liberalism (the Enlightenment). Some in these circles perceive the need to devise new words for identifying people (the many names for describing various peoples of color and sexual minorities stand as supremely frustrating examples) and the need to address issues that affect small numbers of people as dangerous distractions to the larger purpose of relieving poverty through attacks on capitalism. The implication here is that class war is universal, but race, gender, and sexual liberation are particular and are not appealing to all of humanity.

Their comments reflect growing resentment among white leftists (including many community organizers) toward the attention afforded identity-based movements, as well as a troubling nostalgia for universal labor and populist movements that regularly excluded people of color, encouraged nativist violence, and kept women out of the paid labor force. As Kelley (1997) writes, "They either don't understand or refuse to acknowledge that class is lived through race and gender. There is no universal class identity, just as there is no universal racial or gender or sexual identity. The idea that race, gender and sexuality are particular whereas class is universal not only presumes that class struggle is some sort of race and gender-neutral terrain but takes for granted that movements focused on race, gender and sexuality necessarily undermine class unity and, by definition, cannot be emancipatory for the whole." Researcher of conservative movements Jean Hardisty puts it more bluntly when she writes, "To the heterosexual, white, male leaders of the Old Left, class oppression (and hence the demands of the labor movement) was the movement's principal concern. The neglect of 'other' oppressions stems from their lack of relevance to that leadership" (1999, p. 197). The real challenge here, suggest Kelley and Hardisty, on behalf of activists in identity movements, is to advance ideas and policies that are truly inclusive and that are based on a complete, sophisticated analysis of the issues. It should be noted that traditional community and labor organizations also failed to build mass-based movements that speak to the broadest range of peoples' interests and achieve impact beyond the local level. Focused on bread-and-butter, motherhood-and-apple-pie issues that were easy to defend, many chose to ignore the problems their own constituencies faced daily—problems around the very issues the New Right (the conservative organizations and leaders that emerged in the late 1960s) chose as its priorities, including affirmative action, immigrants, gay rights, and reproductive choice.

Certainly, identity politics has limitations, just as community organizing does. Even in identity-based organizations, it is possible to find contradictions—for example, gay/lesbian organizations that blindly support capitalism or feminist organizations that lack an understanding of immigration. I sometimes refer to them as identity-without-the-politics organizations because they are designed to deal

only with an immediate problem—let's say AIDS—and a narrow constituency—such as white, gay, upper-class men living with AIDS. Kelley (1997) makes the excellent point that white men protesting affirmative action policies are also exercising identity politics, a conservative set. In addition, identity politics arose at the same time as did therapeutic models for dealing with these structural issues, and some identity-based organizations are more therapy-oriented than political. In some cases an overemphasis on experience has acted as a barrier to the broadening of analysis and political strategies. But these limitations are no secret to activists from these communities, who consistently work to weave together the threads of different constituencies and issues and who engage in a fundamental economic analysis as well.

Identity movements and community organizing have both been growing but largely along parallel tracks; they speak little to each other and share few issues and resources. The question is how to achieve the goal of scale without leaving important nonmajority issues and constituencies by the wayside. As Hardisty writes, "In fact, people who have had trouble being heard may be the very people who hold the key to new visions, new ways of formulating solutions, or new views of equality in post-industrial capitalism" (1999, p. 233).

New Community Organizing Practices

In a significant shift in practice, community organizations are increasingly taking up the issues and constituencies mainstream groups refuse to touch. There has been significant innovation in three particular areas. First, groups have begun to organize the most marginalized people rather than those occupying the middle. The organizing of undocumented immigrants, victims of police brutality, and single mothers is indicative of this trend. Second, groups choose issues that enable the organizing of the worst-off, sometimes privileging those concerns over blander issues that might be more winnable. Third, political education has been added to organizing practice. Often, activists interpret the imperative to establish democratic organizations, in which members own the political decisions that are made, as the avoidance of ideology. But the notion of the nonideological organization has been increasingly challenged as the New Right gains power and success. That notion has led many organizations to avoid ideologically difficult issues and to suppress that kind of discussion in their organizations. Activists are beginning to recognize that the nonideological organization doesn't exist. All individuals and organizations operate from an ideology; an ideology is simply a world-view, and everybody has one, whether stated or implicit.

These developments in community organizing practice have significant implications for the organizer's role. First, the line between organizers and volunteer

leaders needs to become less distinct. Innovative organizations are already blurring that line, largely out of a need for sophisticated human resources and out of the commitment to diverse leadership that arose out of the identity movements mentioned above. Second, organizers have to take their educational role more seriously; we need to become better teachers and help volunteer leaders develop that capacity as well. Third, organizers have to consider themselves learners as well as teachers. And, fourth, they have to be far more systematic about documenting and evaluating organizational activities.

Conclusion

A look at the history of community organizing reveals a number of different models, each based on a specific theory of constituency building and social change. Identifying specific models of organizing can be both liberating and limiting. If we know the model on which our tactics are based, we can follow that model to a logical conclusion, get help from others who have used it, avoid its pitfalls, and describe ourselves effectively in our attempts to raise money and train new leaders. But discussion of models can also limit our ability to innovate, which is at the heart of successful action. Pure models do not exist; every idea we have has seen the light of day somewhere in the world, sometime in history. Effective organizers mix and match, sometimes being able to identify the source of their idea, sometimes not. The history of community organizing and social movements is replete with tactics learned in one movement being applied to another. The important thing is to be able to articulate our particular theory of social change and hold on to or adjust it as we organize.

Although Alinsky is credited with having "invented" community organizing, he actually codified and developed a set of rules with roots in many other movements, including the settlement houses and the racial-liberation and labor movements of earlier decades. While he can be blamed for not acknowledging his sources, I cannot blame him for appropriating ideas that worked. Alinsky's stolen rules have been both adopted and challenged by organizers who have come after him, and both adopters and challengers have made positive contributions to struggles for economic and social justice. The potential for community organizing to remain relevant and helpful in advancing emerging justice movements is enhanced by the rise of New Labor, as epitomized in community-based workers' centers and new initiatives within the AFL-CIO, by the creation of identity-based movements, and by the development of innovations in organizing practice. If we look closely at the leaders of these efforts, we will see that people have moved from one sort of organization and movement to another, taking skills and lessons with them.

The organizations profiled in this book emerge from all the political phenomena mentioned in this Introduction. The Workplace Project and the Chinese Staff and Workers Association are among the best known and oldest workers' centers in the country. The Los Angeles Alliance for Fair Employment, Working Partnerships, the Campaign on Contingent Work, and the Women's Institute for Leadership Development represent some of the newest thinking amongAFL-CIO leaders as well as that of the most effective community-labor alliances. The Center for Third World Organizing; Direct Action for Rights and Equality; Justice, Economic Dignity and Independence for Women; and the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network have roots in traditional community organizing, welfare rights, or antiracist work. The Center for the Child Care Workforce, 9to5, Wider Opportunities for Women, and the Women's Association for Women's Alternatives come out of women-centered organizing. Whatever their origins, these organizations present hybrids that work to garner great results in the struggle for justice.

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