

9. Community Organizing for What?

Progressive Politics and Movement

Building in America

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Civic engagement and political participation (including voting) do not occur automatically. They require mobilization—that is, organizations with resources to reach out, identify, recruit, educate, and mobilize people to get involved. For example, Rosenstone and Hansen show that a “decline in mobilization” accounts for much of the drop-off in voting in recent decades.¹ As personal contact gives way to TV advertising and direct mail, and as political parties, labor unions, and other groups have lost much of their capacity to mobilize low-income and working-class citizens, civic engagement suffers. The wide class disparities in voting that we take for granted in the United States do not exist in other democratic societies.

The current progressive Left has no unifying vision, strategy, or mobilization vehicle. It has, instead, a huge mosaic of organizations that focus on separate issues and separate constituencies. There is a growing recognition by community organizers—as well as those in the labor, environmental, feminist, and other social movements—that this fragmentation of progressive forces undermines the effectiveness of each component of the broader movement. Moreover, all of them are playing on a constantly changing economic, demographic, and political field that requires constant rethinking of strategies. If community organizing is to make a difference, it has to address these challenges. Here I examine the strengths and weaknesses of community organizing, and the challenges it faces, at the start of the twenty-first century. This chapter reviews the world of community organizing as part of the broader movement for progressive social change.

THE PROGRESSIVE LANDSCAPE

To those progressives suffering from political hopelessness, Rick Perlstein’s book, *Before the Storm*, about how conservatives recovered from the devastation of Barry

Goldwater's 1964 defeat, offers some solace and lessons. At the time, almost every pundit in the country wrote the conservative movement's obituary. Goldwater's right-wing supporters were viewed as fanatics, out of touch with mainstream America. But the GOP's right wing regrouped. With the help of conservative millionaires, corporations, and foundations, the right-wing leaders created new organizations, think tanks, and endowed professorships at universities to help shape the intellectual climate and policy agenda. They created a network of right-wing publications and talk radio stations. They recruited a new generation of college students, funded their campus organizations, and got them internships and jobs within conservative organizations and with conservative government officials and agencies. They identified potential political candidates and cultivated and trained them. They brought together the two major wings of the conservative movement—the business conservatives and the social/religious conservatives—in an uneasy but relatively stable coalition to elect conservative Republicans. Then they took over the atrophied apparatus of the Republican Party. They helped change the political agenda. In 1980, they elected Ronald Reagan. In 2000, they helped Bush steal the election. In 2004, they helped Bush win a second term, almost fair and square.²

Let us consider the landscape of the progressive movement. For the sake of argument, let us assume that the annual operating budget of the progressive movement added up to \$25 billion. That includes the organizing, advocacy, and research staffs of the labor movement, the thousands of local community organizing groups and the major community organizing networks (some of which are covered in this volume), environmental groups like the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, national women's groups like NOW, civil rights and immigrants rights organizations, gay rights groups, the network of "public interest" groups like Common Cause, Public Campaign, the Center for Responsive Politics, the Public Interest Research Groups, and the Naderite networks (like Congress Watch), and civil liberties groups like People for the American Way, and the ACLU. Let us add the national policy groups and think tanks like the Economic Policy Institute, the Center for American Progress, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and many others, and some local counterparts like the Center on Wisconsin Strategy and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy. Throw into the mix the budgets of various progressive media outlets—*Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, *American Prospect*, *Sojourners*, *Ms.*, *Dollars & Sense*, the Air America radio network (which includes the Al Franken Show), Web sites like AlterNet, TomPaine.com, and Common Dreams, and many others. Include the various progressive nonprofit public interest legal groups like the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund, Lamda Legal Defense Fund, the National Women's Law Center, and others. Add the various national and regional organizer training programs. This list does

not even include the various political action committees (the union PACs, Emily's List, and others), the liberal churches and Jewish groups, the AARP, MoveOn.org, or various peace, human rights, and international "solidarity" groups.

Now let's reshuffle the deck. If progressives were starting from scratch and had, say, \$25 billion a year to spend, how should they spend it? How many organizers? Researchers? Lawyers? public relations and communications staff? What kind of organizations—single issue and multi-issue? How much would be allocated to unions, community organizing, environmental groups, women's rights groups, civil rights organizations, and gay rights groups? In what parts of the country—which cities, states, congressional districts—should they focus organizing work? How many staff would be based in Washington, D.C.? How many in "the field"? What issues should they focus on? What policy agenda?

Obviously, this is not how the real world works. Every organization emerges out of specific circumstances, develops its own constituency and issues, raises money from members and outside funders, and tries to expand to fill a niche. There is no progressive king or queen to assemble all these resources and make a rational allocation of money based on some agreed-upon criteria. But this mind game does help us think about the condition of progressive forces in the United States and how progressives might want to build an effective movement that was able to take political power.

THE FRAGMENTED MOSAIC OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

In the late 1960s, the United States witnessed the beginnings of what Harry Boyte called a "backyard revolution," a mushrooming of local community organizing groups and community development organizations, hoping to stem and perhaps reverse the decline of urban (primarily minority) neighborhoods.³ With some funding from private foundations, thousands of community groups emerged that worked on a variety of issues, using a variety of organizing strategies, and with uneven effectiveness. Almost every U.S. city (and a few suburbs) now has at least one community group that does organizing. Some cities have dozens of such groups.

When people read about or see large-scale protest demonstrations in the media, they rarely think about the organizational resources required to make them happen. Mobilizing protests is only one aspect of effective organizing. Few people recognize how hard it is to build membership-based community organizations among the poor. It is extremely labor-intensive, requiring constant attention to identifying and developing leaders, building organizations, raising funds, engaging in traditional lobbying and occasional direct action, conducting research and policy analysis, and developing media savvy and other skills.⁴

Many (perhaps most) of the community organizing groups that emerged in the last four decades eventually fell apart or remained small and marginal, unable to sustain themselves financially, economically, and politically. A few hung in, grew, and gained in strength, in part by becoming part of broader networks at the city, regional, or national level.⁵ No one really knows how many community organizations exist, the total size of their budgets, the number of staff people who work for them, how long they have been in business, how many are linked to larger networks, or how effective they are. This makes any serious evaluation of the strengths and weakness of community organizing, or these organizations' role in progressive politics, difficult.

What seems clear, however, is that among the thousands of community organizations around the country, most engage in relatively modest efforts. These include, for example, pressuring the police to close down a local crack house, getting city hall to fix potholes, or getting the parks department to clean up a local playground. Some groups are more ambitious. Their community organizing has included forming tenant unions, building community development corporations, combating banks' redlining, challenging police abuses, fighting against environmental and health problems, mobilizing against plant closings and layoffs, and reforming public education and even setting up charter schools. In some cities, housing activists have joined forces with unions and other groups to push for inclusionary zoning laws and municipal housing trust funds, such as the \$100 million annual fund in Los Angeles enacted in 2002.⁶

Community organizations have won many neighborhood-level and municipal victories. Some organizing networks have built statewide coalitions to address state-level issues and change laws, regulations, and priorities. But the hard truth is that despite the tens of thousands of grassroots community organizations that have emerged in America's urban neighborhoods, the whole of the community organizing movement is smaller than the sum of its parts, as Paget described (and bemoaned) in 1996 and is still true today.⁷ With some important exceptions, described later, community groups that do win important local victories are not always capable of building on their success and moving on to other issues and larger problems. For the most part, community-based organizing has been unable to affect the national agenda—or, in most cases, even state agendas. As a result, these organizations often improve only marginally the conditions of life in many urban neighborhoods.

Compared with groups like organized labor (with 13 million members) or even AARP (with 35 million members), community organizing groups are not very powerful at the national level. But that may not be the appropriate criteria. ACORN, for example, is just one of many organizations that do "community organizing," just as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is one of many organizations that do "labor organizing." Some of this fragmentation problem is due to

“turf” competition between groups for funding, membership, and media attention. Some of it is due to the way funders, particularly foundations, evaluate organizing groups, requiring each group to identify its accomplishments, distinguishing them from the accomplishments of other groups within a broader movement. Some of it, as Burns describes in his chapter on New Orleans, is due to the reality that different groups, often in the same city or metropolitan area, sometimes work on similar issues but do not join forces. Likewise, Shirley and Evans’s chapter on local school reform efforts shows how three organizing groups, ACORN, PACT, and Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), never collaborate, “even when they operated in the same cities and represent the same constituencies.” With a few local exceptions, the various community organizing networks and groups do not work together, forge a common sense of purpose, or engage in common campaigns.

Observers of community organizing sometimes examine the differences between various “schools” of organizing. There are certainly differences between various organizing networks and training centers in terms of the class and racial/ethnic base of their constituencies, how or whether they deal with religious congregations, how they train leaders, how they raise money, and other matters. But those engaged in the organizing typically exaggerate the distinctions—what Freud called the “the narcissism of small differences.” Wood’s chapter on PICO, Staudt and Stone’s chapter on EPISO (an IAF affiliate), and Swarts’s chapter on ACORN, for example, reveal more similarities than differences.

As Fisher and Shrage observe in their chapter, community organizing today still feels like an “interest group,” a cluster of organizations that use a common strategic approach but do not form a “movement.” This is not inevitable. For example, there were many divisions within the civil rights movement (over strategies, tactics, and goals), but there was also some coordination and a sense of common history and purpose. There is no umbrella group for community organizing comparable to the labor movement. The labor movement is now split into two separate umbrella groups (the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win coalition), but even so, the reality is that the world of community organizing is much more fragmented, and thus less effective, than it could be.

While community organizing can be looked at as a separate political strategy and approach to social change, it is best examined as part of a broader progressive movement, with consideration given to whether it contributes to the Left’s efforts at building political power for poor and working-class people. The purpose of progressive politics and movements is to reduce the level of poverty and the level of class, racial, and gender inequality in the nation, promote sustainable growth, and promote peace and human rights at home and overseas.

Despite our vast wealth, no other major industrial nation has allowed the level of sheer destitution that exists in the United States. In light of this reality, it is

understandable that community organizing proponents often talk about their work in terms of “organizing the poor.” One of the most important roles for progressives is to organize the poor to speak and advocate for themselves, so that they are at the political table and able to bargain and negotiate for their own concerns. But as a strategy for political and policy change—especially at the state and federal levels—this, on its own, is inadequate. Basic arithmetic tells us that the poor alone do not constitute a majority in any city, state, or congressional district, so that any effective organizing requires allies who are not poor.

For purposes of organizing, the demographic characteristics of the poor are important. We can figure out how many live in cities, suburbs, and rural areas and what the race and gender breakdowns are. We should know how many live in high-poverty neighborhoods and where those neighborhoods are. We should know which state legislative and congressional districts they live in and what proportion of eligible voters they represent in each district. We can identify how many are the “working poor” with steady jobs, how many are marginally employed, and how many are jobless. We can find out how many lack health insurance, how many live in housing that is too expensive, how many are hungry, how many face environmental dangers in the communities and workplaces, how many send their kids to underfunded schools.

But how does this information inform organizing? Without being part of a broader movement, there is no way for organizing groups to decide how to allocate progressive resources, to prioritize where and how to organize, to figure out which campaigns would be most effective in recruiting and mobilizing the people. Instead, different organizations—unions, community groups, environmental justice groups, and others—make decisions based on where they are located, what they are interested in doing, where they can get money, and other concerns. Currently, the Left is simply too fragmented to act in any coherent way. It operates on the principle of “let a thousand flowers bloom” and hopes that some of the flowers will grow into gardens.

THE REVIVAL OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing emerged in the early 1900s, when the United States was becoming an urban and industrial society and when most urban workers were employed in factories and lived in nearby neighborhoods. It also emerged at a time when the U.S. working class, disproportionately composed of immigrants and their children, was part of a growing industrial labor movement.

In the early 1900s, New York City, like other industrial cities, was a cauldron of seething problems—poverty, slums, child labor, epidemics, sweatshops, and ethnic

conflict. Out of that turmoil, activists created a progressive movement, forging a coalition of immigrants, unionists, muckraking journalists, settlement house workers, middle-class suffragists, tenement and public health reformers, upper-class philanthropists, and radical socialists. Although they spoke many languages, the movement found its voice through organizers, clergy, and sympathetic politicians. Their organizing involved both workplace battles and community struggles. Although these issues involved separate campaigns and constituencies, there was considerable overlap because many of the activists saw themselves as part of a broader movement. Their efforts produced laws that improved factory conditions, slum housing, and sanitation, among others. Many of the activists and leaders of that era—such as Francis Perkins, who became President Franklin Roosevelt’s secretary of labor—helped lay the foundations of the New Deal decades later.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Saul Alinsky originally viewed community organizing as a partnership with labor unions. As Orr notes in chapter 1, the people who worked in Chicago’s slaughterhouses worked in the same factories, lived in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, went to the same churches, participated in the same sports leagues, and were members of the same unions. The people who lived in that neighborhood were “citizens” and “community residents” as well as “workers.” The problems they faced were interconnected. As a result, Alinsky viewed both labor organizing and community organizing as dual strategies for addressing the problems facing working-class people. Unions helped community groups win victories around municipal services and jobs; community groups helped unions win victories against the meatpacking companies and other employers.

Alinsky had a tremendous influence on the next generation of community organizers. He inspired many civil rights, student, and antiwar activists to move to urban ghettos and organize the poor. Many adopted his ideas about strategy, tactics, and building “people’s” organizations. His theories influenced organizers in the early years of the environmental movement, feminism, and consumer activism. His ideas were particularly important in shaping the growing efforts of community organizing, even as organizers revised his theories to adapt to changing circumstances, constituencies, and issues.

But one of Alinsky’s key strategic impulses was noticeably absent from the upsurge of community organizing in cities around the country during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This was the connection between community and labor organizing. One important exception was the work of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers union. The southern civil rights movement provided much of the impetus for community organizing in northern cities in the 1960s. A number of New Left activists moved from campuses to urban neighborhoods to organize the poor.⁸ Some community organizing efforts were funded by the mid-1960s federal antipoverty program, through grants to social service agencies, legal services offices,

and Model Cities programs. Veterans of these efforts helped expand community organizing initiatives, which mushroomed in the 1970s and 1980s.

The issues around which urban residents organized varied greatly. Community groups formed to protest racial discrimination by employers, landlords, and real estate agents, as well as school segregation and inequities in school funding. Tenants organized in many cities to expand renters' rights.⁹ Another major target of urban protest was the federal urban renewal program, which was implemented by local governments and sometimes labeled "Negro removal" because of its impact of bulldozing black areas in cities. Community activists protested plans for highway construction that sliced through low-income neighborhoods. Organizers also pushed for stronger police protection, and limits on police abuse, in minority neighborhoods. They opposed the razing of housing and small businesses to make way for megaprojects such as convention centers, sports complexes, and upscale housing developments. They mobilized to oppose expansion of hospitals, airports, and other institutions encroaching on their neighborhoods.

Some community organizing groups also engaged in service delivery and community development activities. They started community development corporations (CDCs) to help turn their protests against the urban renewal bulldozer or bank redlining into positive visions of stronger neighborhoods. With some exceptions, foundations preferred channeling funds for these service and development efforts, which were less controversial than protest and conflict. In 1970, 100 CDCs existed. By the 1990s, at least 2,000 CDCs operated around the country, with support from private foundations, local and state governments, businesses, and religious institutions. Many of the early CDCs struggled to undertake physical redevelopment projects. They lacked the financial, developmental, and management experience needed to construct and manage low-income rental housing competently. Although a few of these early groups managed to survive, grow, and prosper, many fell on hard times and ultimately went out of business. Some of their housing projects were mismanaged; some fell into foreclosure. In the 1980s, starting with the Reagan administration, the federal government instituted sharp cuts in assistance for low-income housing, exacerbating the abandonment of inner-city areas by private landlords and developers. This new wave of CDCs emerged to address the deepening decline of inner cities, against overwhelming odds, which included an unsympathetic federal administration, patchwork financing, high-risk development projects, and undercapitalization. For community groups, service and development efforts provided a steadier source of funding but sometimes led to tensions with their organizing work. Only a handful of CDCs got involved in community organizing and mobilization.¹⁰

Community organizing groups generally operated on shoestring budgets, funded by government grants, foundations, and some membership dues. They had few staff persons. Their organizers were generally inexperienced, and there were

few people or resources available to provide training and mentoring. By the late 1960s, only a few organizations—such as Alinsky’s IAF (Chicago) and the Highlander Center (Tennessee)—were available to provide training. The number of training centers expanded in the 1970s and 1980s—such as the Midwest Academy, the National Training and Information Center, and others—and helped expand the number of community organizing groups, link them together into networks, and strengthen their capacity.

Many of these local neighborhood and community organizations won some victories, but they often had difficulty sustaining their accomplishments. This limitation was due in part to a lack of sustained funding, as well as to organizations’ inability to develop strategies for strengthening their base and moving on to new issues. In addition, the resources or authority needed to address a neighborhood’s problems are often not available at the neighborhood level, and not even at the city level. This was particularly problematic as U.S. cities faced an increasingly serious fiscal crisis in the 1970s, making it difficult for local governments—even the most progressive local regimes—to address the problems facing low-income people and low-income neighborhoods. Some organizers recognized that battles at the local level can win improvements in people’s lives but that real solutions to the nation’s economic and social problems—including urban problems—required changes in federal policy.

THE CHANGING PLAYING FIELD FOR ORGANIZING

The success or failure of progressive movements must be examined in the context of broader trends. What obstacles and opportunities did they confront? Were they able to take advantage of opportunities? In hindsight, it may appear that progressive successes (as well as failures) were inevitable. In fact, they were the result of leaders’ decisions about tactics and strategies, and their capacity to mobilize people, to recruit allies, and to identify openings and possibilities and take advantage of them, often against enormous odds.¹¹ Marion Orr discussed the changing political and economic ecology of central cities in chapter 1. In the following, I outline some broader trends, reminding the reader that to be effective, progressive organizing groups must adjust their strategies and coalition efforts to adapt to the broad changes in the economic, demographic, and political landscape.

The Urban Fiscal Crisis

Typically, community organizing groups want more funding for housing, police and fire protection, hospitals, schools, parks and playgrounds, and other municipi-

pal functions. But since the 1970s, municipal governments and many state governments have confronted chronic fiscal crises. City governments are often perched on the brink of fiscal distress. Even in cities with strong economies, local public officials compete on a playing field tilted toward their suburbs, with few mechanisms to promote city-suburb cooperation so that suburban wealth can be tapped to help reduce poverty or promote private investment that generates good jobs. Urban politicians worry that higher taxes on business and the middle class, higher wages, and more regulations on employers and developers will exacerbate further flight to the suburbs, to other states, and even to other countries. Most urban leaders are trapped in what they perceive to be a fiscal straitjacket.¹² To the extent that progressive victories require additional funding resources as well as regulatory policies, it has become more difficult for progressive groups to win significant victories at the municipal level. Without additional federal funding, it is difficult for cities to seriously address their housing, infrastructure, public safety, education, and other problems. Progressive local regimes (such as those of former mayor Harold Washington in Chicago, former mayor Ray Flynn in Boston, and current mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in Los Angeles) have helped promote the agendas of community organizations, but they are limited in resources and authority to solve even local problems. In her chapter, Swarts observes that ACORN's shift to national campaigns occurred in part because cities had less and less to offer. Burns writes about the lack of resources available to public officials in New Orleans. Staudt and Stone suggest that this is also true in El Paso.

The urban fiscal crisis, the decline of ward-level political machines, and the retrenchment of government services have led some municipal governments to forge "partnerships" with community-based organizations to provide a variety of social services. In her chapter, Swarts describes ACORN's programs, such as housing loan counseling and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) tax preparation. Staudt and Stone describe EPISO's efforts to coordinate job training. As Fisher and Shragge note in their chapter, this is a two-edged sword. When community organizing groups engage in development and service delivery, this can shift part or even all of their focus and energies. Some groups are able to walk this tightrope better than others.

Decline of Urban Power Structures

In the 1930s, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council took on the powerful meat-packing companies in Chicago. In the 1960s, the FIGHT organization in Rochester, New York, another affiliate of Alinsky's IAF, challenged the Eastman Kodak Corporation, that city's dominant employer. In the period after World War II, urban politics were dominated by pro-growth coalitions that pushed for the physical redevelopment of downtown areas. Typically, they were preceded by the formation

of organizations of corporate leaders such as the Coordinating Committee in Boston, the Committee of 25 in Los Angeles, the New Detroit Committee, and Central Atlanta Progress. These groups brought together the key business leaders to smooth over differences, forge a corporate consensus on public policy, marshal elite support for a pro-growth agenda, and promote local involvement in the federal urban renewal program. Most of these corporate-sponsored urban policy groups, weakened by changes in the corporate economy, are no longer the powerful bodies they were in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. As Orr writes in his chapter, referring to FIGHT's battle with Rochester's dominant employer, most major local employers are now branches of large companies, run by branch managers. These managers have less of an economic, political, and personal stake in the city and region. Burns shows how New Orleans, once ruled by an exclusive social aristocracy and business elite, has become what he describes as a "nonregime city"—a city without a coherent corporate power structure or governing regime. Staudt and Stone show how the tight-knit Anglo business community that ruled El Paso for many years has gradually been transformed, allowing new groups, including a new Latino professional class, to exercise some influence.

This transformation has consequences for community organizing. For example, groups working against bank redlining no longer can confront the directors of the local bank on their own turf. These banks are now run from distant boards. Local unions, community groups, and environmental groups working to restrain Walmart can find local organizing "handles," but they must find ways to work together across the country to influence decisions made in Bentonville, Arkansas, where Walmart is headquartered. Without some kind of national network or movement, local groups are limited in their ability to bargain with large corporations and influence federal policy.

The "Business Climate" and Capital Mobility

Whenever community organizations, unions, environmental organizations, and other progressive groups propose policies to make business act more responsibly, business leaders react in horror that it will destroy the incentive to invest and will hurt the business climate. As a result, most officials accommodate themselves to the business community's priorities. Although many local officials want to improve conditions for the poor and near poor, they also want to make their cities attractive places to do business and retain middle-class residents. Living wage ordinances, "linkage" fees on new commercial buildings that target the funds for affordable housing, business taxes, clean-air laws, inclusionary zoning laws that require housing developers to incorporate units for low-income families, and rent control force

politicians (and local organizing groups) challenge business's priorities and are thus labeled as "anti-business."

Corporations may be bluffing when they threaten to leave if cities enact such laws, but it is hard for local officials, unions, and community groups to know for certain. Business warnings are not always empty threats. Even sympathetic politicians are not sure when businesses are bluffing, and politicians tend to err in favor of business.

Although some businesses are mobile, many are tied to the local economy. Progressive city officials and activists need a clear sense of when business threats are real and when they are not. This knowledge would spare cities costly bidding wars and prevent businesses from playing municipalities off each other to attract private investment. At the national level, federal laws actually promote competition between cities, regions, and states. The Taft-Hartley Act, for example, allows states to enact antiunion "right-to-work" laws. Our federal system allows cities to establish their own property tax rates and can cut special deals for particular investment projects, exacerbating bidding wars for business. Progressives need to fight for federal and state legislation that puts restrictions on bidding wars between cities and states for private investment. Tax, environmental, labor, and other laws should be reformed to make it more difficult for companies to play Russian roulette with our cities. We need to enact a common national standard and establish a more level playing field.

Suburbanization

More than half of the U.S. population—and more than half of all voters—live in suburbs. The 1992 presidential election was the first in which suburbanites represented a majority of voters. In the 2004 elections, some analysts attributed Bush's reelection and other Republican victories in key swing states to voters in the newer (exurban) suburbs, especially among lower-middle-class churchgoers, many of them regular congregants of new "megachurches" that have grown along with suburban sprawl.¹³

Almost half of the nation's poor live in suburbs, too. There is a widening economic divide *within* suburbia, as a recent Brookings Institution report on economic segregation reveals.¹⁴ Suburbanites are not a homogeneous constituency that lacks any shared interests with central cities. Perhaps a third of all suburbs are doing worse than central cities on such indicators as poverty rates and the incidence of crime. Congress and many state legislatures are dominated by suburban districts. But most community organizing groups have focused on low-income areas of inner cities that typically are represented by liberal Democrats who occupy reasonably "safe" seats

in state legislatures and Congress. This is no longer adequate in terms of building political strength. In terms of influencing policy, strength in inner-city neighborhoods gives community groups an important role in influencing municipal politics. But such influence is insufficient for winning victories in state and federal politics. The progressive Left needs a strategy for building a base in the swing state legislative and congressional districts that are primarily outside cities.¹⁵ Without an organizing strategy policy agenda that addresses the concerns of some significant sector of suburbanites—especially but not exclusively those in inner-ring suburbs—community organizing and labor unions will become victims of these trends.

The building blocks for an effective progressive movement today start in cities and move outward to working-class suburbs and some liberal middle-class suburbs. Some labor unions and community organizing networks recognize this and have begun to reach out to the suburbs, often in alliance with religious congregations, whose denominations include urban and suburban institutions. They must find common-ground issues that can help them develop a *regional agenda* to channel jobs and economic development into declining business districts, in contrast to cutthroat competition between cities in the same region trying to outbid each other for private investment or to limit suburban sprawl and traffic congestion.

Immigration and Racial/Ethnic Diversity

America's neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan areas are highly segregated by race. But as many demographers have noted, the demographic trajectories of our major metropolitan areas are more complex and diverse than ever before. They are no longer dominated by the dynamic of whites fleeing to the suburbs as central cities become increasingly populated by blacks. The massive wave of immigration over the last four decades and the increased suburbanization of blacks, Latinos, and Asians have moved our metropolitan areas beyond the paradigm of "politics in black and white." Although most large central cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, are becoming less white, they are also becoming less black, as African Americans suburbanize and as immigrants and their children take the place of the native born. Most suburbs are also becoming more heterogeneous in racial and ethnic terms.

Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, these transitions are not pitting whites against blacks but are creating more complex patterns. Although the full political implications of this shift have yet to play out, new forms of ethnic expression and, in some cases, cooperation are being overlaid on the black-white racial tensions that drove urban politics in the postwar period. The emerging politics of interethnic relations is not going to be easy, but at least it is less likely to be locked in racial polarization. More complex interracial coalitions will form.

With obvious exceptions, racism and racial discrimination are more subtle and less overt than they were in the past. Nevertheless, considerable documentation indicates that landlords, real estate agents, appraisers, lenders, police, doctors, and others today treat whites differently than they treat blacks and Latinos, even when income is factored in. Anyone stopped for “driving while black” can attest to this. It may be possible that *intentional* discrimination has been reduced over the past few decades, but that more covert, *institutional* forms of racial discrimination persist.

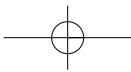
Public opinion polls consistently show that white Americans are more supportive of laws against racial discrimination and of racial integration in neighborhoods and schools than they were twenty-five or forty years ago. But it is difficult to mobilize public support around more subtle forms of racial discrimination or around institutional practices that result in racially disparate outcomes but which appear, on the surface, to be racially “neutral” in intent or procedure. The backlash against affirmative action is one symptom of this. Clearly the Bush administration’s response to the Katrina disaster, particularly in New Orleans, resulted in part from the fact that New Orleans is a majority black (and mostly Democratic) city. But accusations that Bush was a “racist” met with considerable skepticism among opinion leaders.

These dynamics create dilemmas and opportunities for progressive organizers. Community organizing groups have a long history of dealing with racism and discrimination by schools, employers, banks, landlords, and police, but, as Santow describes, rarely have they been successful at addressing the problem of residential segregation. How do we deal with the reality of racism and segregation and still find a common ground for building majoritarian support?

Militarism and Globalization

A discussion of the challenges facing progressives would be incomplete without some focus on the military-industrial complex and the dilemmas of globalization. We will never solve our domestic problems as long as we continue to spend such a large part of our federal budget on national defense. Today, almost two decades after the end of the cold war and in spite of all the talk about a “peace dividend,” the United States has not significantly reduced its reliance on military spending. Indeed, the “war on terrorism” has necessitated increased federal funding for war and “homeland security.”

This reality has three serious consequences. First, there is not enough money in our federal budget to adequately fund domestic economic and social programs. Second, our private economy is still dominated by military research and production, which means we divert much of our scientific and technical expertise to defense and invest too little in civilian industries. Third, the United States uses its



military, economic, and political influence to promote many regimes overseas that limit human rights and workers' rights. This provides a friendly business climate for corporate investment, but it promotes a "race to the bottom" in terms of working and living conditions, what some call the "Walmart-ization" of the economy. In general, the community organizing movement has few links to movements that focus on human rights, militarism, opposition to unregulated free trade, and solidarity with movements at home and overseas that promote fair trade. In part this is a function of the limits of "localism," and in part it is a result of the internal culture of community organizing groups that focus on domestic issues.

The Internet and New Technology

The introduction of the Internet, e-mail, cell phones, the blogosphere, and other new technologies has made communication easier and faster. It has accelerated corporate globalization by allowing firms to access information quickly and efficiently from different parts of the world. It has made it easier for government officials and agencies to communicate with citizens and vice versa. It has changed how candidates campaign for office and how interest groups participate in campaigns, including fund-raising, voter education, and voter turnout. The new technology has also made it easier for grassroots activists to communicate with each other, educate and alert people about pending issues, and mobilize people for letter-writing campaigns, rallies, elections, and other efforts. The emergence of groups like MoveOn.org and daily blogs about political issues has reshaped the political landscape.

ORGANIZING NETWORKS, FEDERATED ORGANIZATIONS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In *Diminished Democracy*, Theda Skocpol laments the decline since the early 1900s of mass-membership grassroots and mixed-income organizations and their replacement with advocacy and lobbying groups run by professional staff with little capacity to mobilize large numbers of people.¹⁶ She discusses the importance of having "federated" organizations—national organizations with local chapters that are able to mobilize members at the local and national levels simultaneously. Among community organizing groups, ACORN best represents a "federated" structure. Its constituent base consists of its chapters in cities across the country, primarily in low-income areas. As Heidi Swarts discusses in her chapter, ACORN also has a national infrastructure and the capacity to wage campaigns simultaneously at the local, state, and national levels. More typically, organizing groups that have local chapters and also want to influence national policy forge networks, some looser

than others, usually on one issue. In recent years, several issues have catalyzed local organizing groups into working together at a national level, sometimes as part of a federated structure, or as part of a network or coalition of organizations. To illustrate, I review five examples—community reinvestment, environmental justice, living wage, sweatshops, and immigrant rights. Each reveals why local community organizing is essential but insufficient to address the changing economic, demographic, and political conditions.

Community Reinvestment

The community reinvestment movement is a place-based movement that has linked local groups to change federal policy and negotiate with national and local lenders. It emerged in the 1970s to address the reality of declining urban neighborhoods and persistent racial discrimination in housing and lending. At that time, a number of astute activists began to recognize that many long-term homeowners and small-business owners—even those who were obviously creditworthy—were finding it increasingly difficult to obtain loans from local banks and savings-and-loans institutions to repair their homes or expand their businesses. Local activists and organizers concluded that their neighborhoods were experiencing systematic disinvestment. Banks accepted deposits from neighborhood residents but would lend money primarily to home buyers in suburbs. Activists tried to convince bankers to revise their perceptions and practices. Other efforts involved consumer boycotts—“greenlining” campaigns—against neighborhood banks that refused to reinvest local depositors’ money in their own backyards.

Some neighborhood groups achieved small victories, including agreements between banks and community organizations to provide loans or maintain branches in their neighborhoods. Eventually, activists working on similar issues around the country discovered one another and recognized their common agendas. From such localized efforts grew a national “community reinvestment” movement to address the problem of bank redlining

Community groups came together to focus attention on the role lenders played in exacerbating neighborhood decline and (to a lesser extent) racial segregation. Its first major victory, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA), was passed by Congress in 1975, followed by the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) in 1977.¹⁷

The CRA had minimal impact at first but gained momentum in the 1980s, despite resistance from the Reagan and Bush administrations and their appointed federal bank regulators. But by the mid-1980s, local activities coalesced into a significant national presence, thanks to the work of several national community organizing networks. The networking of local groups organizing around the same issue made it possible for them to learn from one another through several national

organizing networks and training centers, particularly National Peoples Action (NPA), ACORN, the Center for Community Change (CCC), and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), as well as the Woodstock Institute and Inner City Press. These networks provided groups with training and linked them with one another to make the federal government more responsive to neighborhood credit needs. Through these networks, grassroots groups pressured Congress to strengthen both the CRA and the HMDA several times in the late 1980s.

The most important aspect of the CRA was that it provided local groups with an “organizing handle” to use with banks and government regulators. By requiring banks to meet community needs as a prerequisite for obtaining various approvals from federal bank regulators, and by giving consumer and community groups the right to challenge these approvals, the CRA provided the groups with leverage to bring banks to the negotiating table. The community reinvestment movement’s effectiveness resulted from its ability to identify organizing campaigns and policy remedies at the local, state, and national levels simultaneously. These remedies included local linked deposit laws, state linked deposit and antiredlining laws, and, of course, the enactment, and then the strengthening and improved enforcement of, the federal HMDA and CRA. Consequently, groups could organize, and achieve victories, on several fronts. Local groups joined forces on state- and federal-level campaigns. Under pressure from community groups and national advocacy networks—and from some elected officials, bank regulators, and the media—banks responded with increased investment in previously underserved communities.

Thanks to these laws, and to grassroots organizing, the community reinvestment climate has changed dramatically in the past few decades. Banks are now more proactive in working with community organizations to identify credit needs and create partnerships to meet them. Government regulators are more active in evaluating lenders’ CRA performance, despite resistance from the banking industry. The community reinvestment movement pushed many banks to reluctantly increase their lending in minority and poor neighborhoods that had once been written off. The CRA has resulted in more than \$1 trillion in private investment being channeled into urban neighborhoods. The homeownership rate of blacks and Latinos has increased significantly since 1977, and the homeownership gap between whites and racial minorities has narrowed.

Environmental Justice

In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, a new form of community-based organizing grew to national scale with the visible emergence of the environmental justice (EJ) movement, which criticized the mainstream environmental movement for its class and racial bias. The “mainstream” environmental movement, with its focus on conser-

vation and the protection of wildlife and open space in remote areas, dates back to the early 1900s. At that time, a more radical wing of the movement, based in urban areas, focused on public health, tenement reform, workplace safety, and access to urban parks and recreation areas. The former wing of the movement was dominated by affluent Americans; the latter wing was led by a combination of working-class activists and middle-class reformers.¹⁸

A new wave of mainstream environmentalism emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, its beginnings identified with Earth Day in 1970. Its efforts overlapped with the emerging consumer movement, typically identified with Ralph Nader. Its early victories included the passage of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act; creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; consumer-friendly informational and warning labels on medicines, cigarettes, and other products; and the shutdown of many existing nuclear power plants. Most of the major environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, the Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, the Wilderness Society, and Friends of the Earth, were overwhelmingly white and middle-class in terms of their staff and membership. To different degrees they were national public interest and advocacy groups that rarely mobilized members for action. Some of the more radical environmental groups, such as Earth First and Greenpeace, were more decentralized but shared with the mainstream groups their predominantly white and middle-class membership.

In the 1980s, the EJ movement challenged the mainstream environmental groups for their lack of diversity and for ignoring the concerns of low-income and minority communities. It helped redefine environmentalism, linking its issues with public health, workers' rights and occupational health, land use and transportation, and economic and housing development. It focused on issues such as the siting of toxic waste facilities, public health, access to parks and open space, and land and water rights. It represented a convergence of community organizing, civil rights, environmentalism, and, in some cases, labor unionism.

For example, in the 1970s, the United Farm Workers union linked immigrant worker rights to health and the use of pesticides. In 1982, in Warren County, North Carolina, residents protested against a proposed PCB landfill. The protest was unsuccessful, but it helped spawn a new movement and a new environmental awareness. Subsequently, the U.S. General Accounting Office conducted a study of hazardous waste landfills in the Southeast and found that blacks were a majority of the population in three of the four off-site landfills (not associated with an industrial facility) in the region. In the mid-1980s, Mexican American women in Los Angeles organized Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA) to stop the construction of a state prison in their neighborhood. In 1987, members of MELA fought successfully against the siting

of a hazardous waste incinerator near their community. A few miles away, women in South Central Los Angeles organized the Concerned Citizens of South Central to successfully fight a proposed solid waste incinerator, the LANCER project, targeted for a neighborhood that was more than 52 percent black and 44 percent Latino.

Research began to confirm the patterns of environmental racism and injustice identified by these groups. In the late 1970s, sociologist Robert Bullard examined the siting of garbage dumps in black neighborhoods in Houston and identified systematic patterns of injustice. He wrote several reports and papers based on this research, culminating in *Dumping in Dixie* in 1990.¹⁹ In 1987, a report by the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, found common themes among these different efforts. It popularized the concepts of environmental racism and environmental justice, concepts that focused attention on racial disparities in the siting of toxic facilities and public health indicators such as cancer and asthma rates; the failure of mainstream environmental organizations to address these concerns; and the failure of government environmental agencies and laws to deal with such disparate racial outcomes.²⁰

As local groups became aware of each other, often at environmental conferences or through the media, they recognized their common outlook and concerns. A turning point came in 1991 when groups came together at the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., attended by more than a thousand activists from all fifty states, as well as other nations. The summit participants forged alliances and networks. According to Chang and Hwang, "the new language made it possible for local grassroots organizers to begin to understand their work differently. Soon regional environmental justice networks began springing up across the country."²¹ In the South, black organizations joined to fight hazardous waste proposals and to clean up communities. In the Southwest, Latino and indigenous organizers formed the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ). In the Northeast, West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT) led the fight over the North River sewage treatment plant, drawing in activists across twelve northeastern states, which resulted in the formation of a multistate regional network, the Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN). The Farmworkers Network for Environmental and Economic Justice began in 1993 when several labor leaders held a historic meeting of independent farmworker groups. They also advocated international approaches to farmworker issues and invited the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CONFENACA) from the Dominican Republic. By the late 1990s, the network included farmworker groups from nine states. Given their emphasis on economic justice, it is not surprising that these groups made connections with organized labor, seeing a common bond between workers exposed to toxic chemicals on the job and communities exposed to poisoned groundwater.

The EJ movement has had an impact on several fronts. It has influenced federal policy to become more sensitive to racial disparities in terms of both environmental hazards and environmental laws. For example, in February 1994 the Clinton administration issued Executive Order 12898, charging each cabinet department to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission,” with the EPA as the lead agency. Clinton’s EPA administrator, Carol Browner, created an “office of environmental justice” and appointed a national environmental justice advisory council dominated by environmental advocates. The EJ movement has also influenced the mainstream environmental movement to become more aware of racial and income concerns, as well as the diversity of staff and leadership. The Sierra Club, for example, now has an ongoing campaign around toxic dumping in poor and minority areas through which it has forged ties with local environmental justice groups. The EJ movement has also pushed the mainstream groups to forge closer ties to organized labor, to find common cause around fighting for safer workplaces and healthier communities, pushing for “clean energy” solutions that create jobs, holding corporations accountable, resisting the framing of issues as “jobs versus the environment,” and working together around fair-trade agreements that include environmental and workers’ rights.

Living Wage

A dramatic example of organizing success is the growing number of cities that have adopted living wage laws, a tribute to the alliances between unions, community organizations, and faith-based groups that have emerged in the past decade. Baltimore passed the first living wage law in 1994, following a grassroots campaign organized by Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), an IAF affiliate, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (whose members work for local governments). By 2004, community, labor, and religious coalitions had won living wage ordinances in 117 cities.

The movement received a major impetus from efforts by city governments to contract public services to private firms paying lower wages and benefits than prevail in the public sector. Proponents have also been motivated by the proliferation of low-wage jobs in urban areas. The movement was also spurred by Congress’s failure to raise the national minimum wage, which has not been adjusted since 1997, when it was increased to \$5.15 an hour.

Yet these underlying factors alone do not account for the movement’s success in getting so many cities to adopt local living wage laws in so short a period. As Martin and others (including Swarts’s chapter in this volume) have shown, the movement’s effectiveness is due in large measure to the existence of two national networks and federated structures—the labor movement and ACORN—that have

both spearheaded local living wage campaigns and spread their strategic and tactical experience to new cities.²²

The national unions and ACORN's national office have provided training, research, fund-raising, strategizing, and coordination. ACORN's "federated" structure made it possible to juggle a number of local living wage campaigns at the same time. This is also why the IAF was unable to build on its initial innovative success in Baltimore. The IAF is a much looser national network. Each local or regional group is essentially on its own in terms of designing campaigns, hiring staff, and raising money. Moreover, ACORN's close ties to the labor movement provide resources for national and local living wage efforts that would not be available to a locally based organization on its own.

Living wage laws cover only a small proportion of a city's workforce (about 12,500 out of 1.7 million workers in the city of Los Angeles), typically employees of firms that do business with city government. In recent years, voters in San Francisco, Santa Fe, and New Orleans endorsed ballot initiatives to create citywide minimum wage laws that set minimum wages significantly higher than the federal level. As Burns discussed in his chapter, the New Orleans law was overturned in state court.

The living wage movement has built on these local successes to widen its horizons of political and economic reform. It has helped change the public's view of the poor and the social contract. Two decades ago, the concept of a "living wage" was a radical idea. Today, it is part of the mainstream public debate. President Clinton's rhetoric that government policy should "make work pay" helped shift public attitudes. Today, there is widespread popular support for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which provides income assistance to the working poor. The popularity of Barbara Ehrenreich's best seller about the working poor, *Nickel and Dimed*, and growing protests against Wal-Mart's low pay indicate that concerns about inequality and poverty are moving from the margin to the mainstream of American politics.

ACORN's strategy, in conjunction with unions, church groups, and others, to inject the living wage issue into state ballot measures is another important step. In early 2004, ACORN initiated a statewide ballot measure in Florida to raise the state minimum wage, registered thousands of residents, mostly in low-income, minority neighborhoods in cities, to increase turnout on election day, and won a decisive victory the following November. After its victory in Florida, ACORN and its labor allies planned grassroots minimum-wage initiatives in six other states in 2006, particularly where Democrats have a chance to expand, or hold on to, key offices (twenty-one states have minimum wages higher than the federal level). The strategy was designed to increase voter turnout and to provide candidates with a clear economic-justice issue. Activists also hoped that this state-by-state strategy would lay the groundwork for raising the federal minimum wage. Equally important, they believed it could help liberal Democrats win various congressional and Senate seats

by raising voter turnout among the poor and liberals. The strategy had some initial successes. For example, two Republican senators who faced tough reelection campaigns in 2006—Mike DeWine of Ohio and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island—were among eight Republicans in the Senate who support raising the federal minimum wage by a dollar.²³

Global Sweatshops

In the early 1900s, the battle against sweatshops was fought on local turf. Unions sought to organize immigrant garment workers (typically women and young girls) and, along with their allies among middle-class reformers, pushed for local and state legislation regulating wages, hours, and safety conditions in the teeming sewing factories of New York, Chicago, and elsewhere. The movement made steady progress. Its achievements were so significant that in 1953, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) president David Dubinsky claimed that "we have wiped out the sweatshop."²⁴ By the mid-1960s, "more than one half of the workers in the U.S. apparel industry were organized and their real wages had been rising for decades."²⁵

Today's antisweatshop movement fights on a global battlefield. Like its earlier counterpart, it is a coalition of consumers and workers. It was jump-started by the labor movement in the mid-1990s, was fostered by college students, and has been aided by environmentalists, feminists, consumer groups, religious groups, and human rights advocates. It draws on some of the strategies and tactics of community organizing, waging campaigns for corporate responsibility and government regulation of business, and using innovative strategies to address the challenges posed by organizing on a global political playing field.

The apparel industry is the most globalized, footloose, and exploitative industry in the world. It is dominated by giant retailers and manufacturers (brand names) that control global networks of independently owned factories. Low wages reflect not low productivity but low bargaining power. An analysis in *Business Week* found that although Mexican apparel workers are 70 percent as productive as U.S. workers, they earn only 11 percent as much as their U.S. counterparts. In industries whose production can easily be shifted almost anywhere on the planet, worker organizing is extremely difficult. The antisweatshop movement emerged in the 1990s to organize consumers as workers' allies.

The explosion of imports has proved devastating to once well-paid, unionized U.S. garment workers. The number of American garment workers has declined dramatically, although in a few cities, notably Los Angeles, garment employment has expanded, largely among immigrant and undocumented workers. Recent U.S. Department of Labor surveys found that more than nine out of ten such firms violate

legal health and safety standards, with more than half troubled by serious violations that could lead to severe injuries or death. Working conditions in New York City, the other major domestic garment center, are similar. Retailers squeeze manufacturers, who in turn squeeze the contractors who actually make their products.²⁶

Two exposés of sweatshop conditions captured public attention. In August 1995, state and federal officials raided a garment factory in El Monte, California—a Los Angeles suburb—where seventy-one Thai immigrants had been held for several years in virtual slavery in an apartment complex ringed with barbed wire and spiked fences. They worked an average of eighty-four hours a week for \$1.60 an hour, living eight to ten persons in a room. The garments they sewed ended up in major retail chains, including Macy's and Robinsons-May, and being sold with brand-name labels such as B.U.M., Tomato, and High Sierra. Major newspapers and TV networks picked up on the story, leading to a flood of outraged editorials and columns calling for a clampdown on domestic sweatshops. Then, in April 1996, TV celebrity Kathie Lee Gifford tearfully acknowledged on national television that the Wal-Mart line of clothing that bore her name was made by children in Honduran sweatshops, even though tags on the garments promised that part of the profits would go to help children. Embarrassed by the publicity, triggered by a National Labor Committee report, Gifford soon became a crusader against sweatshop abuses.

In August 1996, the Clinton administration brought together representatives from the garment industry, labor unions, and consumer and human rights groups to grapple with sweatshops. After intense negotiations and much controversy, in April 1997 the Department of Labor issued an interim report, and in November 1998 the White House released the final forty-page report, which included a proposed workplace code of conduct and a set of monitoring guidelines. Several labor and human rights groups quit the Clinton task force to protest the feeble recommendations, which had been crafted primarily by the garment industry delegates and which called, essentially, for the industry to police itself. This maneuvering would not have generated much attention except that a new factor—college activism—had been added to the equation.

The campus movement was started by a handful of college students who had worked as summer interns at Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE), the garment workers' union, and sought to find a way to link college students (in their roles as consumers) and labor issues. It began in the fall of 1997 at Duke University when a group called Students Against Sweatshops persuaded the university to require manufacturers of items with the Duke label to sign a pledge that they would not use sweatshop labor. Following months of negotiations, in March 1998 Duke's president and the student activists jointly announced a detailed "code of conduct" that barred Duke licensees from using child labor and required

them to maintain safe workplaces, pay the minimum wage, recognize the right of workers to unionize, disclose the locations of all factories making products with Duke's name, and allow visits by independent monitors to inspect the factories.

The Duke victory quickly inspired students at other schools, and the level of activity on campuses accelerated. In the summer of 1998, disparate campus groups formed United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), which had weekly conference calls to discuss its negotiations with Nike, the Department of Labor, and others. It sponsored training sessions for student leaders and conferences at several campuses where the sweatshop issue is only part of an agenda that also includes helping to build the labor movement, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the World Trade Organization, women's rights, and other issues. Antisweatshop activists employed the USAS listserv to exchange ideas on negotiating tactics, discuss media strategies, swap songs to sing during rallies, and debate the technicalities of defining a "living wage" to incorporate in their campus codes of conduct. Within a few years, some 200 colleges and universities adopted antisweatshop codes of conduct in response to student protest.

The antisweatshop movement has been able to mobilize wide support because it has struck several nerves among today's college students, including women's rights (most sweatshop workers are women, and some factories have required women to use birth control pills as a condition of employment), immigrant rights, environmental concerns, and human rights. At the core of the movement, however, is a strong bond with organized labor. Unions and several liberal foundations have provided modest funding for student antisweatshop groups. Since 1996, the AFL-CIO's Union Summer placed thousands of college students in internships with local unions around the country. The campus movement is also linked to a number of small human rights watchdog organizations—Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, and the National Labor Committee—that operate on shoestring budgets and provide technical advice to student activists. These groups have brought sweatshop workers on speaking tours of American campuses and have organized delegations of students to investigate firsthand sweatshop conditions in Central America, Asia, and elsewhere.

Global apparel firms make clothing for the \$3 billion college market in thousands of factories around the world. Neither the universities nor the student activist groups had the resources to monitor all these workplaces and hold them accountable to the antisweatshop standards. Their solution, announced in 2005, was the Designated Suppliers Program (DSP), which commits universities to purchase much of the clothing bearing campus logos only from factories that have been approved by an independent board that evaluates employers' respect for workers' rights. With the help of the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), USAS identified a number of factories around the world—particularly in Asia, Mexico, Central America, and the

United States—that could qualify under these more stringent worker-friendly standards. By mid-2006, nineteen major universities and colleges and universities had agreed to support the DSP. Student activists believe that if enough universities adopt these standards, the number of sweat-free factories will steadily increase. This will demonstrate that even in the highly competitive global clothing industry, companies can do the right thing by their employees and make a profit.

Immigrant Rights

In early 2006, a grassroots immigrant rights movement emerged on the national scene. It was catalyzed by widespread opposition to a congressional bill, sponsored by Representative James Sensenbrenner, that would have turned all illegal immigrants into felons and criminalized aid to them by employees in welfare agencies and religious organizations. Opponents mobilized millions of immigrants and their supporters across the country in protest rallies and other activities. These protests generated enormous media attention and forced both political parties to rethink their positions on immigration reform.

Although the news media generally characterized the movement as coming “out of nowhere,” the reality was more complex. Labor unions, community organizations, and immigrant rights groups had been mobilizing around similar issues since the late 1990s. When President Bush was elected in 2000, it appeared he would try to forge a compromise legislative plan around guest workers and gradual legalization. In 2001, unions and immigrant rights groups collaborated with the Mexican government to persuade Bush and the Congress to grant legal status to many illegal immigrants, but 9/11 derailed any momentum around immigrant rights in Washington.

Despite this, grassroots groups around the country, including unions, continued to push the issue in various ways. The Los Angeles labor movement’s success in unionizing and mobilizing immigrant workers had helped persuade the national AFL-CIO to change its long-standing opposition to legalizing undocumented immigrants. In June 2000, more than 20,000 people attended a rally at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, sponsored by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, that called for amnesty for undocumented workers. Labor. The participants were mobilized primarily by labor unions (especially SEIU, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees [HERE] union, and UNITE) but also by religious organizations and community organizations, including immigrant resource centers.²⁷ Similar labor-sponsored public forums were held in other major cities around the country to highlight this new stance and build support for federal legislation.²⁸

In 2003, HERE initiated a two-week campaign, the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, involving more than 900 immigrants and supporters, in eighteen buses,

who traveled from Los Angeles, Seattle, and eight other cities to Washington and New York to raise awareness about immigrants' rights. The brainchild of Los Angeles HERE leader Maria Elena Durazo, it drew support from the same network of unions, religious groups, immigrant rights resource centers and advocacy groups, and civil rights organizations. As their buses crossed the country, they held rallies in more than 100 cities. The organizers self-consciously sought to build bridges across racial lines. In each city, they invited immigrant workers from Haiti, China, Mexico, Africa, and elsewhere to speak. The New York rally drew 100,000 people. According to the *New York Times*, "The demonstrators called for granting legal status to illegal immigrants, for creating more family reunification visas and for increased workplace protections for immigrants because they are often exploited on the job. In addition, the demonstrators called for an end to civil liberty violations against immigrants, complaining that many law-abiding immigrants have faced harassment and detentions since the September 11 terrorist attacks."²⁹

In January 2004, President Bush reignited the debate by declaring, "The system is not working." This helped fuel right-wing anti-immigrant groups and right-wing radio talk jocks, who interpreted Bush's statement as favoring amnesty or legalization. This, in turn, triggered growing hostility toward immigrants by local, state, and national Republican politicians and grassroots anti-immigrant groups. In early 2005, the Minutemen, an anti-immigrant volunteer group, began patrolling the Mexican border to "catch" undocumented immigrants trying to get into the United States. Some politicians called for Congress to allocate money to build a fifteen-foot high wall on the U.S.-Mexican border.³⁰ This growing grassroots nativism increased the sense of urgency among immigrant rights groups. But it was the House of Representatives' passage of the Sensenbrenner bill that catalyzed the mass mobilizations.

A turning point was a February 2006 statement by Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Mahony declared that if the Sensenbrenner bill became law, he would tell priests to defy the requirement that they check for residency documents before providing assistance. "Giving a sandwich to a hungry man could theoretically be a criminal act," he said.³¹ With this statement, the head of the nation's largest Catholic archdiocese (with its huge immigrant population) essentially endorsed civil disobedience as a tactic to oppose the Sensenbrenner bill. It was an important stimulus for the mobilizations that would follow the next month.

Los Angeles was ground zero for the immigrant rights movement, so it was no surprise that the first mass protest, which mobilized more than 500,000 people, occurred in that city on March 25, 2006. According to the *Washington Post*, this protest "put the immigrant movement on the map."³² The County Federation of Labor, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, the Central American Resource Center, and the Catholic church spearheaded the local effort while simultaneously reaching out to national groups and other local groups.

The success of the Los Angeles protest, including major attention newspapers and broadcast media in English, Spanish, and languages, inspired organizers around the country. SEIU and UNITE/HERE's national staffs, along with other organizations and networks (the National Capital Immigrant Coalition, the National Council of La Raza, and the Catholic church, as well as the Center for Community Change) joined forces, creating the We Are America Alliance (forty-one immigrant resource groups, unions, churches, day laborers, and Spanish-language disc jockeys) to oppose the Sensenbrenner legislation and called for a national "Day without Immigrants" protest. They used e-mail and conference calls, and occasionally meetings, to brainstorm and plan the May 1, 2006, mobilization. Protests and boycotts took place in more than seventy cities. Millions of people participated—at least 400,000 in Chicago alone. Many immigrants took the day off from work to underscore the importance of immigrants to the national economy. In many cities, stores, restaurants, and factories were forced to close for lack of employees. Farmworkers in California, Arizona, and elsewhere refused to pick lettuce, tomatoes, grapes, and other crops. Truck drivers, who move 70 percent of the goods in the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, did not go to work. Although the vast majority of immigrants were Latino, organizers made sure to involve organizations representing immigrants from non-Spanish-speaking countries.³³

The immigrant rights movement has already demonstrated its capacity to mobilize large numbers of people in cities across the country. Whether it can sustain and institutionalize its activities is still unclear. The different groups within the movement—a network of networks—do not agree on short-term and long-term goals. They do not yet have a coherent lobbying strategy around agreed-upon legislation. They still have not shown whether the movement can "transform the marchers into voters for lasting gains."³⁴ Leaders of the various groups within the movement have been meeting—hosted by the Center for Community Change, among other organizations—to iron out differences, strategize, coordinate, and figure out how to raise money. The labor unions, and some foundations, are the primary sources of funds for the movement. As a result, the unions have disproportionate influence within the network.

The emergence of separate immigrant rights organizations underscores the importance of ethnic, racial, immigrant, and community identities as catalysts for organizing. Alinsky would certainly understand this. But he viewed the labor movement as the linchpin of progressive politics and as the key mobilizing force for working people in their workplaces and communities. His initial Depression-era effort in Chicago organized Polish, German, and Irish immigrants through unions, churches, sports leagues, and community organizations. With the current immigrant rights movement, we appear to have come full circle in terms of the mosaic of organizations involved, although they are now organizing on a larger playing field.

WHAT NEXT? OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES FOR
PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZING

From the 1930s through the early 1970s, the American “social contract” was based on the premises of the New Deal—a coalition led by the labor movement, its strength focused in cities, its core constituency immigrants and their children, African Americans, and, to a lesser extent, white southern small farmers, with allies among middle-class reformers (i.e., planners, intellectuals, journalists, social workers) and some liberals within the business community. During this postwar era, the United States experienced a dramatic increase in per capita income and a simultaneous decline in the gap between the rich and the poor. The incomes of the bottom half of the class structure rose faster than those at the top. Urban community organizing as we know it—based on the Alinsky model and its offshoots—was not a major component of the New Deal coalition.

In the 1960s, many progressives hoped to build on this foundation. Representing the left wing of the Democratic Party, United Automobile Workers (UAW) president Walter Reuther had been making proposals since World War II to renew and expand the New Deal and engage in national economic planning. He advised Presidents Kennedy and Johnson to champion a bold federal program for full employment that would include government-funded public works and the conversion of the nation’s defense industry to production for civilian needs. This, he argued, would dramatically address the nation’s poverty population, create job opportunities for African Americans, and rebuild the nation’s troubled cities without being as politically divisive as a federal program identified primarily as serving poor blacks.

Both presidents rejected Reuther’s advice. (They were worried about alienating southern Democrats and/or sectors of business that opposed Keynesian-style economic planning.) Johnson’s announcement of an “unconditional war on poverty” in his 1964 State of the Union address pleased Reuther, but the details of the plan revealed its limitations. The War on Poverty was a patchwork of small initiatives that did not address the nation’s basic inequalities. Testifying before Congress in 1964, Reuther said that “while [the proposals] are good, [they] are not adequate, nor will they be successful in achieving their purposes, except as we begin to look at the broader problems [of the American economy].” He added that “poverty is a reflection of our failure to achieve a more rational, more responsible, more equitable distribution of the abundance that is within our grasp.”

Although Reuther threw the UAW’s political weight behind Johnson’s programs, his critique was correct. Since the 1960s, federal efforts to address poverty have consistently suffered from a failure to address the fundamental underlying issues. Most progressives understood that the civil rights victories, such as the Voting Rights Act, Civil Rights Act, and Fair Housing Act, were a necessary but not

sufficient condition for reducing poverty and inequality. It was at this point that community organizing played a significant part in local and national politics—demanding, and in some cases implementing, antipoverty and community development programs, fueled in part by the requirement that local residents get to participate in these programs. Even so, the most influential supporters of the War on Poverty were liberal labor groups, civil rights organizations, and, with much ambivalence, many big-city mayors. In the 1960s and 1970s, cities were still very important in terms of the size of the population, the number of voters, the location of jobs and of union members, the composition of congressional districts, and the power of their congressional representatives (such as New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell).

In the 1970s, the New Deal and Great Society gains were supplemented by other victories that emerged out of civil rights, women's rights, and environmental and consumer activism, fueled by the emergence of the Naderite network, feminism, environmental groups, and an upsurge in community organizing. These included affirmative action, the Clean Air Act and other environmental laws, strong regulations on business regarding consumer products and workplace safety (such as OSHA), and significant improvements in the legal and social rights of women, including reproductive freedoms. The major victories that emerged from community organizing (linked to civil rights) were HMDA (1975) and the CRA (1977), which resulted from the ability of groups to link local and national campaigns around bank redlining.

Many community organizations were born in the 1970s in the aftermath of the civil rights and antiwar movements, when activists were rethinking how to build (or rebuild) a progressive movement for social change. These groups emerged at a time when the post-World War II prosperity—fueled by the rise of the United States as a global superpower, steady economic growth, a narrowing gap between rich and poor—was coming to an end.

Starting in the mid-1970s, major U.S. corporations began an assault on the labor movement and the living standards of the poor and working class. This view was best expressed by *Business Week* in its issue of October 12, 1974: "It will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow—the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more. . . . Nothing that this nation, or any other nation, has done in modern economic history compares with the selling job that must be done to make people accept this reality."

Since the late 1970s, liberals, progressives, and Democrats have been on the defensive, seeking to protect the key components of the New Deal, Great Society, and subsequent victories from being dismantled by the increasing powerful right-wing forces—led by the uneasy alliance between big business and the religious Right, and the mainstream of the Republican Party.

Surveys find that Americans are generally in favor of activist government. For example, a majority of workers support unions, most Americans are pro-choice and want stronger environmental and gun control laws, and most Americans believe that the minimum wage should be raised and that the nation should do more to combat poverty. But liberals and progressives have not been successful in countering conservative forces in terms of the political infrastructure or an ideological “frame” or message. Progressives have not yet found a twenty-first-century agenda to replace the New Deal and the Great Society, to counter the right wing’s “antigovernment” message, and to find a way to protect and expand social democracy at home in the midst of globalization.

The challenge and opportunity posed by Wal-Mart (and the Wal-Martization of the economy) illustrate the dilemma confronting the progressive movement. There is growing interest among different constituencies—women, immigrant rights, labor, environmentalists, faith groups, fair trade activists, and small business—in challenging Wal-Mart. Unions in Los Angeles and elsewhere have worked closely with churches and community groups to stop Wal-Mart from opening supercenters in their areas. But a “stop Wal-Mart” campaign cannot be sustained. Campaigns to “unionize Wal-Mart” and “hold Wal-Mart accountable” (for better wages, health care benefits, and so on) make more sense. Over the next decade, major unions—SEIU, Teamsters, UFCW—will be waging major campaigns to unionize Wal-Mart and make the company a more responsible corporate citizen. Community organizing can play key roles in these campaigns if they view themselves as part of a broader movement and forge alliances with unions and other organizing groups.

Progressives understand that we really cannot solve our nation’s economic and social problems—including the problems facing the urban poor—without changes in federal policy. What is needed is a policy agenda around which progressives can agree, a new way of framing this agenda to mobilize public opinion, and a political strategy to mobilize voters to win a majority in Congress. For example:

1. To level the playing field for union organizing campaigns, we need to reform the nation’s unfair labor laws.
2. To improve conditions for the growing army of the working poor, we need to raise the federal minimum wage and expand participation in the Earned Income Tax Credit.
3. To address the nation’s health care crisis, we need some form of universal national health insurance.
4. To provide adequate resources for housing poor and working-class families, we need a national housing trust fund or other legislation to expand federal subsidies.
5. To improve our public schools, especially those that serve the nation’s poorest children, we need to increase federal funding for smaller classrooms, adequate teacher training, and sufficient books and equipment. We cannot rely primarily on local or even state funding for public education.

6. To provide families with adequate child care, we need a universal child care allowance that reaches families regardless of income. This can be accomplished only with federal funding and some state matching formula that accounts for variations in states' (and parents') ability to pay.
7. To redirect private investment in cities and older suburbs, we need to provide sufficient funds to clean up toxic urban brownfields.
8. To address the problems of growing traffic congestion, we need federal funds to improve public transit of all kinds, as well as federal laws to limit tax breaks and other incentives that promote suburban sprawl and "leapfrog" development on the fringes of metropolitan areas.

Political victories are about more than technology and election day turnout. They are about message and movement. Successes on election day are a by-product of, not a substitute for, effective grassroots organizing in between elections. Over the past century, the turning points for improving American society involved large-scale mobilizations around a broad egalitarian and morally uplifting vision of America, a progressive patriotism animated by "liberty and justice for all." These movements drew on traditions of justice and morality. They redefined the rights and responsibilities of citizens, government, and business. In the Gilded Age, it was agrarian populism and urban Progressivism. During the Depression, it was the upsurge of industrial unionism linked to Roosevelt's New Deal. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the civil rights, women's rights, and environmental movements, promoting a vision of how the nation's prosperity should be shared by all but not squandered for future generations.

The United States today is holding its breath, trying to decide what kind of society it wants to be. Progressive forces are gaining momentum but still lack the organizational infrastructure needed to effectively challenge conservatives' message and movement. They have begun to invest in building that infrastructure—think tanks, grassroots coalitions, technology, staff recruitment, identification and training of candidates. Community organizing has an important role to play as part of a broader progressive movement.

NOTES

1. Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and American Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

2. In his book *Politically Incorrect: The Emerging Faith Factor in American Politics* (Dallas: Word, 1994), Ralph Reed, former director of the Christian Coalition, recounts how his movement built itself up from scratch, utilizing the network of conservative pastors and churches and providing sermons, voter guides, get-out-the-vote training, and other resources to create a powerful organizational infrastructure.

3. Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

4. The chapters in this book reflect the strengths and weaknesses of many community organizing efforts. For example, Staudt and Stone look at two groups in the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez border area. One, EPISO, is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network of local and regional organizing groups. The other, Coalition Against Violence, is a loose network of individuals, some of whom have good media and political connections, but not really a community organization in the sense of a grassroots organization that mobilizes people and develops leaders.

5. Most local community groups are not linked to any regional or national organizing or training networks. Those that are tied to such networks have been helped in various ways to improve the capacity of local groups to develop leaders, mobilize campaigns, and win local victories.

6. Kelly Candaele and Peter Dreier, "Housing: An LA Story," *Nation*, April 15, 2002, 22–23.

7. Karen Paget, "Citizen Organizing: Many Movements, No Majority," *American Prospect*, June 23, 1990, 115–128.

8. James Miller, *Democracy in the Streets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

9. Peter Dreier, "The Tenants Movement in the United States," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 8 (1984): 255–279, reprinted in *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, ed. Rachel Bratt, Chester Hartman, and Ann Meyerson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Ron Lawson, ed., *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904–1984* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); W. Dennis Keating, Adnrejs Skaburskis, and Michael Tietz, eds., *Rent Control and the Rental Housing Market* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research, 1998).

10. For a good discussion on CDCs, see Avis Vidal, *Rebuilding Communities: A National Study of Urban Community Development Corporations* (New York: Community Development Research Center, New School for Social Research, 1993).

11. See, for example, the research on "resource mobilization" by Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Peter Dreier, "Rosa Parks: Angry, Not Tired," *Dissent*, Winter 2006, 88–92.

12. Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

13. The most fascinating factoid from the exit polls of the November 2004 election revealed that when voters' loyalties were divided between their economic interests and other so-called moral values concerns, union membership was a crucial determinant of their votes. For example, gun owners favored Bush by a 63 to 36 percent margin, but union members who owned guns supported Kerry 55 to 43 percent, according to an AFL-CIO survey. Bush carried all weekly churchgoers by a 61 to 39 percent margin, but Kerry won among union members who attend church weekly by a 55 to 43 percent margin. Bush won among white men by a 62 to 37 percent margin, but Kerry carried white men in unions by a 59 to 38 percent margin. Bush won among white women by 55 to 44 percent, but Kerry won among white women in unions by a 67 to 32 percent margin. In 2004, the labor movement poured enormous resources (money, staff, and members) into the election. The labor movement worked in coalition with community groups like ACORN and environmental, women's rights, consumer, and civil rights groups. But there were simply too few union members to overcome the Bush forces' edge. The long-term decline in union membership is perhaps the most important factor in explaining the gap between how well the Kerry and Bush forces did in mobilizing their respective bases. Union membership—35 percent of the

workforce in the 1950s, 25 percent in the 1970s—is down to 11 percent today. Had union membership been at its 1970s levels, Kerry would have won by a landslide.

14. Todd Swanstrom, Colleen Casey, Robert Flack, and Peter Dreier, *Pulling Apart: Economic Segregation among Suburbs and Central Cities in Major Metropolitan Areas* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2004).

15. See Timothy Egan, "'06 Race Focuses on the Suburbs, Inner and Outer," *New York Times*, June 16, 2006.

16. Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

17. Mara Sidney, *Unfair Housing: How National Policy Shapes Community Action* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Gregory Squires, ed., *Organizing Access to Capital* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

18. Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, revised and updated edition (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005).

19. Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).

20. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Rachel Stein, ed., *New Perspectives in Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); J. M. Evans Adamson and Rachel Stein, eds., *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002); Christopher Foreman Jr., "Winning Hand? The Uncertain Future of Environmental Justice," *Brookings Review* 14, no. 2 (1996): 22–25; Robert D. Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

21. Jeff Chang and Lucia Hwang, "It's a Survival Issue: The Environmental Justice Movement Faces the New Century," *Color Lines* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2000).

22. Isaac Martin, "Do Living Wage Policies Diffuse?" *Urban Affairs Review* 41 (May 2006): 710–719. In some cities, unions or union-sponsored organizations (such as the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy) initiated the living wage campaigns, then brought community, religious, and other groups into the coalition. Elsewhere, ACORN took the lead and (in most cities) recruited labor unions and religious and other community groups into the organizing effort.

23. Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Senate Republicans Block Boost in Minimum Wage," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 2006.

24. Cited in Robert Ross, *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

25. Alan Howard, "Labor, History, and Sweatshops in the New Global Economy," in *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: Verso, 1997), 155.

26. Ross, *Slaves to Fashion*; Edna Bonacich and Richard Applebaum, *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

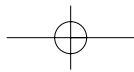
27. See Janice Fine, *Worker Centers*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

28. Nancy Cleeland, "Migrant Amnesty Urged; Rally: About 20,000 Rally in Los Angeles to Demand Federal Legislation," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2000.

29. Steven Greenhouse, "Immigrants Rally in City, Seeking Rights," *New York Times*, October 5, 2003.

30. John Broder, "Border War: Immigration from a Simmer to a Scream," *New York Times*, June 21, 2006.

31. John L. Allen Jr., "Mahony on Immigration," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 14, 2006.



32. Darryl Fears, "Immigrant Supporters to Counter Bush Speech," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2006.

33. Terese Watanabe and Nicole Gaouette, "The May Day Marches: Converting the Energy of Protest to Political Clout," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 2006, A1; Randal C. Archibold, "Immigrants Take to U.S. Streets in Show of Strength," *New York Times*, May 2, 2006.

34. Watanabe and Gaouette, "The May Day Marches."

