LAND, WEALTH AND THE ORIGINS OF MINORITY COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

by

Robert A. Sanborn

B.A., University of Massachusetts at Boston
(1981)

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
DEGREE OF

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES AND PLANNING
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
August, 1986

Robert A. Sanborn 1986

The author hereby grants to M.I.T. permission to reproduce and to
distribute copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author

Department of Urban Studies and Planning
August 8, 1986

Certified by

Tunney Lee
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Philip L. Clay
Chairperson, Master of City Planning Committee
Revolutionary political theory can only develop in response to the new problems and tasks raised by mass struggle...

David Fernbach--Introduction, Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile
Dedication

To my father, Forrest R. Sanborn, whose humanity was known and felt by many.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements**

**Abstract**

**Chapter 1 Introduction**

1. Footnotes

2. **Chapter 2 Communities Ideal and Real**

3. Reality: Communities and Capitalism

4. The Role of the State and Development

5. Criteria for Evaluating Case Studies

6. Footnotes

7. **Chapter 3 Brownsville and the Nehemiah Plan**

8. The Nehemiah Project

9. Community Wealth and Brownsville

10. Summary

11. Footnotes

12. **Chapter 4 Roxbury and Community Empowerment**

13. A Neighborhood Organizes

14. Organizing and Empowerment

15. Summary

16. Footnotes

17. **Chapter 5 Thinking About Change**

18. Visions of What Could Be: Dudley and Nehemiah Reconsidered

19. Wealth and Community Control

20. Race and Class

21. Keep the Land, Lease the Keys: A Case for Community Ownership

22. Conclusion

23. Footnotes

24. **Bibliography**

25. Footnotes
Acknowledgement(s)

The ideas contained in this paper originate from several years of working and organizing in poorer communities. It is a document that begins a discussion that I hope will continue for sometime to come.

Initially, I would like acknowledge two mentors from the early years, Barbara Napoli and Craig Spratt, who impressed upon me the need for racial equality and social justice. To the folks at Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, where as an intern, I experimented with a few of the ideas outlined in this thesis; thanks go to Melvyn Colon, Arne Abramson and Ricardo Medina. More recently, to my classmates in Urban Studies at MIT, who helped sharpen my arguments (and thoughts) through many formal and informal debates. Inclusive of this group are: Paul Bockelman, Rink Dinkinson, Jim Hexter, Richard Krushnic, Roanne Neuwirth, John Ruston, Jennifer Tully, and Jon Warner. A special note of thanks to Beth Marcus and Kelly Quinn for believing that ideas matter and that people who struggle with ideas that lead to change, matter even more. In addition, to Tarry Hum and Jonathan Feldman, whose faith and commitment to empowering people set a standard for all of us to follow. Also, to Susan Bailey. Susan challenged and reinforced my thoughts about class struggle within capitalism, that is, the day-to-day struggle which remains the basis for objective change in a person's life. Moreover, a sincere appreciation for her many (lengthly) comments, and faith in my ability to develop new concepts. Lastly to Ramon Borges-Mendez, a budding polemicist, thinker, and good friend.

Further acknowledgements are accorded to Tunney Lee, Marie Kennedy, and Chris Tilly. Together, they combined the "brain trust" known as my thesis committee. Their fortitude and unrelenting (but friendly) criticism of my concepts were necessary. In the end, we all struggled together without deference to faculty rank, friendship, or state-of-mind.

Finally, to the staff of the Department of Urban Studies, who provided many moments of comfort and joy: Rolf Engler, Sandy Wellford, Carol Escrich, Jeannie Winbush, and Mary Grenham. Also, to Professor Ben Harrison for encouraging an activist to apply to MIT and Professor Frank Jones for sustaining a fledgling student at critical points during this process. And, to the folks at Community Fellows for their generous contribution of office space and moral support. Further, a special point of appreciation goes to Community Fellows administrator Samantha George. Because we all need to eat and pay bills, my gratitude for finding money to subsist on is extended to Jose Duran.

On a more personal note, I would like to acknowledge Mel King. My vision and indeed many of my ideas were (and still
are) influenced by his actions. I have observed and worked closely with Mel King for a number of years. I had the opportunity for the last two years to be closely associated with him at MIT. It was during this period that my thoughts about empowerment and community wealth were formed, it is in large part due to his commitment and vision that a road to a more just society exists.

A postscript goes to pinch-hitter Jim O'Brien. He gave form to a document in need of a fresh view and red pen.

Although copyrights are required for this thesis, in this case, it is a disliked necessity. Therefore, any properly footnoted quotation of up to but not more than 2,000 total words, may be used without permission, by any (non-profit) group or individual who organizes on behalf of poorer communities. Anyone quoting more than this amount should seek permission before publication.
Abstract

Land, Wealth and the Origins of Minority Community Empowerment is about how poor communities of color organize for political and social change. I describe the basic concepts of empowerment and community wealth. Empowerment is the political action that redirects the question of power to community residents. This can be accomplished by organizing a community along multi-neighborhood multi-racial lines or by a more contained neighborhood maintenance effort. By combining my concept of community wealth I advance the notion that individual ownership in ghettos is not the correct way for revitalizing a poor community. It is only through collective ownership—using land trusts or cooperative housing—that poor communities evolve without pitting lower-income people against each other.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

America, viewed for a moment as a single entity, is in many ways a strange country. We are rich enough to abolish poverty, but too selfish to do so. We produce vast wealth, but live in the midst of squalor. Worse, we deny this reality.--William Tabb (1)

Poor communities under capitalism suffer from high unemployment, inadequate housing, and political disenfranchisement. In communities of color, these problems are further compounded by racial discrimination in areas such as housing, hiring, credit, and municipal services. Ghettos result, filled with what Manning Marable has described as "a subconscious apathy toward the political and economic hierarchy, fostering a nihilistic conviction that nothing can ever be changed in the interests of the Black masses."(2) Ghettoization erodes the will of people who turn their frustration into despair.

The moral and physical breakdowns combine to inhibit a community's ability to respond collectively. That is, society fragments the essence of humanity by dividing communities against each other instead of encouraging mutual interests. For organizers in poor communities it must be clear that building coalitions that leverage people's power for the interest of a community as a whole is important. Further, linking one community's interest with another develops the basis for common action.
This thesis will illustrate how two methods of organizing affect the political process in two improvised minority neighborhoods: Brownsville in Brooklyn and Roxbury in Boston. Brownsville and Roxbury were chosen because both neighborhoods are (or soon will be) undergoing significant redevelopment. Each community evolved with distinct organizing strategies, offering different results. Also, within limits, community groups in both neighborhoods are playing a significant role in the planning process. Neither Brownsville nor Roxbury has had development plans imposed on it by city, state, or federal officials.

Two concepts will be especially important in this thesis: a) empowerment and b) community wealth. Empowerment is the political organizing process through which communities develop the ability to dictate how they will evolve and who will benefit from this evolution. It flows from concrete struggles for such community needs as quality jobs, education, health care, and transportation, as well as housing. More generally, empowerment means the development of the leadership capacity and institutional ties that are needed to bring stability to the community. Most of the concrete gains are won in the form of concessions from capitalist institutions, and they are won through pressure exerted by a well-organized community. This pressure increases over time, provided that residents are able to win the indispensable demand of security from displacement. If this security is won, residents can devote energy to other needs. Further, they can consolidate their control over land
use, allowing more people access to shelter. Although control does not necessarily lead to ownership, it does create what I call community wealth.

Community wealth is the resources that a community (whether or not it is confined to a particular neighborhood) has control over. It may include such intangibles as the varied cultural resources brought by different ethnic groups living side by side. It may also include community-based social services. If the community is defined by a neighborhood, then community wealth ought to include land, in the sense that the community ought to have substantial control over the process of land development in its neighborhood.

The distinction between neighborhood and community is also important to the thesis. A neighborhood is defined by its geographical location and can be described in terms of the property it contains. A community, on the other hand, is defined by a common identity shared by people who may live in the same neighborhood but may also be scattered among many neighborhoods. For example, it is possible to talk of a "gay community" or a "women's community." In this thesis, however, the word "community" is used to denote people living in a neighborhood who share a common identity whether defined by race alone or by networks of community institutions.

As a common link throughout the thesis I address the issue of ownership. I make the distinction between ownership defined by individuals and ownership defined by the community
at large. Housing investment decisions affect the lives of low-income people, thereby determining the future characteristics of neighborhoods. For this reason, the consequences of ownership must be understood and examined. It is further necessary, within poorer communities of color, to ask if individual ownership can contribute toward community stability? I suggest it cannot.

By understanding the concept of community wealth an organizer can combine political action (empowerment) with development. The importance of this point reveals itself when I examine how organizing influences development decisions in Roxbury and Brownsville. As we will see, the type of organizing strategy that is chosen can have a profound effect on housing. In Brownsville a traditional model encourages individual over collective ownership, while in Roxbury an alternative strategy based on more collective values, is promoted. The results of these cases provide useful insight and comparison for future organizers.

However, as in any analysis there are a few topics not covered and, as always, several points not fully elaborated on. As for the former, I did not detail the role of feminism in community empowerment. The role of women in shaping multi-neighborhood coalitions is another important story to be told. The points not fully covered in this thesis include the problems of class struggle within the Black and Hispanic community. Capitalism is not only divisive between races but within as well.
Footnotes


3. Gaston and Kennedy make an important theoretical and practical distinction between neighborhood and community. A neighborhood should be thought of as having a particular location made up of buildings and land, while a community should be thought of as people with a sense of common identity or purpose. The later has social and political as well as physical and spatial realities. (Gaston & Kennedy, 1985, p.7)
CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITIES IDEAL AND REAL

In whose interest should the development process be working? ...It must begin with the people who are on the land.--Chuck Turner (1)

One way to look at an "ideal community" is to ask some fundamental questions. For example, can a community provide affordable, accessible housing? How does a community protect itself from losing residents due to increased rent and property values? And, even if a community organizes itself, which demands are most important? Among the many points discussed in this paper is the ability for a community to determine its own needs. This point runs contrary to programs centrally controlled by a bureaucracy. Decentralized community development means letting people decide what kind of housing to build (or if they should build at all), based on their human needs. Communities like Roxbury and Brownsville suffer because market forces dictate that they are not worthy of investment, except when sufficient public money is introduced for improvements. An ideal community should focus on people's needs rather than on land and housing as commodities. The following serves to highlight several main points concerning an ideal community:

Access--building neighborhood diversity by encouraging access to all people regardless of color, national origin, age, sex, or sexual preference. It means dispelling fear born out of isolation and segregation.
Local Decision Making--the city or state cannot assume primary responsibility for planning a community. It can initiate a process for planning to occur, provide money to buy supplies, or even regulate the private market. But local decisions on the use of land and buildings must remain locally controlled, provided that access is not limited by race and class.

Decommodification of Housing--housing built on the basis of providing shelter, not in the interest of making a profit. Resale restrictions, land trusts, and cooperative ownership are essential for low-income communities. Encouraging social rather than individual ownership yields more housing for human needs.

Such notions of an ideal community conflict with the reality of capitalism. The ideal community acknowledges the shortcomings of the marketplace. By redirecting those political decisions that now predispose housing development to the private market, poor communities can play a critical role in revitalizing the neighborhoods they live in.

Reality: Communities and Capitalism

The city is the high point of human achievement, objectifying the most sophisticated knowledge in a physical landscape of extraordinary complexity, power, and splendor at the same time as it brings together social forces capable of the most sociotechnical and political innovation. But it is also the site of squalid human failure, the lightning rod of the profoundest human discontents, and the arena of often savage social and political conflict.--David Harvey (2)

Neighborhoods like Roxbury and Brownsville are viewed by capitalists as commodities, with an explicit exchange value. Moreover, because communities evolve from neighborhoods,
capitalists view the people who live in these neighborhoods as reproducers of labor power. The reproduction of these communities fulfills the need for cheap labor, both directly by employing people at low wages and indirectly by creating a labor reserve pool which depresses wages.

Increasingly, cheap labor and dependency systematically divide the work force and neighborhoods by race and class. Through the dynamic of creative destruction capital must renew itself through premature obsolescence. This allows the dialectic of productive forces within capitalism to evolve while developing social relations that support this transformation (e.g. managerial elite in a growing service sector economy). Moreover, destroying capital also eliminates skilled workers as well as changing the roles of family, individualism, community and state.(3) The notion that security will flow from individual freedom enhanced by greater material wealth is a hollow dream. Free market competition manipulates the legitimate desires of people, denying any sense of community. The domination of capital encourages fragmentation of households, heightening tensions over scarce resources. This merges into what Harvey call "consumerist narcissism and longings for self-realization."(4) That is, the individual responds to increased alienation caused by the inability to gain access to housing by increasing petty consumer consumption. This pattern of consumption works to the disadvantage of communities at large by drawing people away from solidarity of struggle.
For people of color, living in urban centers painfully confirms a bad situation getting worse. Market forces combine to create problems of availability, inequality, and oppression. The price of housing forces consumers to pay an ever-higher percentage of their wages for housing at the expense of other basic needs. As a result, more workers are needed per household, and pressure builds on workers to remain passive for fear of losing their jobs (which, in turn, creates further exploitation). Ghettos exist precisely due to capital's exploitative ownership patterns. In turn, the needs of communities of color will always be in conflict with capital.

If the people who live in ghettos are viewed by capital as a source of cheap labor, the land in ghetto neighborhoods is treated in two different ways. These two ways can be called disinvestment and gentrification. They may seem contradictory but often they are two stages of the same process.

Disinvestment allows uneven development in a city where services are withdrawn, unemployment is high, and human relations are fragmented. In essence, capital furthers inequality by "respond/ing/ to the demand of those with money to spend, so the resource allocations tend to favor the rich; the economy produces what people can pay for, not what they want or need if that is not backed up by purchasing power." It is the ability to demand (public and private) services which separates poor communities from rich ones.
People who remain in poor communities remain without security of shelter, with little comfort in knowing that this may indeed be the last stop for affordable housing if that at all. For poor communities of color, lack of services manifests itself through garbage-laden streets, underfunded public recreation facilities, and inadequate fire and police protection. As the process of underdevelopment engulfs poorer communities, land increasingly becomes vacant.

Nowhere are disinvestment and the lack of institutional support more evident than in Roxbury. In 1986, 57 out of 82 acres in an area known as the "Dudley Triangle" are vacant. Since the mid-sixties the triangle has lost 70% of its housing stock and during this period the city of Boston, due to foreclosure caused by abandonment and arson, became owner of 37% or 21 acres of the vacant land.(7) Also, during this same period, land owned by the Catholic Church became vacant totaling an additional 4%.(8) Combined, the two institutions own 41% of the vacant land in this section of Roxbury. While the city tries to ameliorate the dearth of low-cost housing, the empty lots serve as repositories for illegal dumping.

It is in the very process of disinvestment that a neighborhood is made vulnerable to a sudden influx of capital which has the potential of drastically changing the class and racial composition of the neighborhood. As competition and concentration of resources for capitalists increase, so will their need to expand. Expansion into poor neighborhoods occurs because urban space is limited. Communities like Roxbury and East Brownsville offer capital large amounts of
inexpensive land with few ownership problems; that is, because of previous disinvestment the city is the main landlord. In the next section of this chapter we will see how federal money under the urban renewal program has been used to displace massive numbers of poor people from their homes.

The Role of the State and Development

Urban Renewal programs cannot be considered steps toward rational, overall social planning but rather specific responses to particular needs of monopoly capital and downtown business. --James O'Connor (9)

As the crisis among poorer neighborhoods is weighed against the growth of capital, political struggle occurs. The struggles over community wealth (people and land) intensify when capital and community pursue control simultaneously. Potentially, governmental agencies could play a positive role in support of community interests. For example, city governments might transfer abandoned property to local community groups. In this case, the city could get out of the difficult position of trying to broker capital without upsetting the delicate political balance many urban coalitions survive on. More commonly, however, city governments have played a negative role, facilitating displacement and gentrification. In that role they have been mighty supported by the federal government, particularly through urban renewal.

Urban renewal received its impetus from the Housing Act of 1949. The substance of this act provided federal monies
that could be used for the nonresidential redevelopment. However, federal money could not be used until cities established a local urban renewal authority. These authorities often operated for the express interest of the powerful, mainly concerned with rebuilding the central business district at the expense of low-income neighborhoods. As a matter of convenience, most of the early federal money was use to clear "slums," setting the stage for large-scale private sector investment.

One early example of rebuilding a central city occurred during the late fifties. Herbert Gans in his seminal work *The Urban Villagers* has described how federal money was used to level the West End of Boston. The result scattered 2,700 households leaving many working-class residents on their own to find new housing. In fact, as Gans notes, the federal government provided less than 5% of their total renewal money for relocation. Of the 2,400 units that now occupy the West End, only one building consists of apartments for people of low and moderate incomes. In Roxbury an equally destructive renewal program occurred. The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) under the leadership of Ed Logue, with the help of Boston's middle-class Black community, removed nearly 8,000 units in Washington Park. During the 1960s, federal legislation increased involvement of private enterprise fueling the gentrification process. As support for increased private sector involvement developed, urban renewal collapsed into a new
program in 1974, under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act, creating the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). In the years subsequent to 1974, unabashed emphasis was placed on attracting private sector investment to inner cities.

To be sure, between 1977 and 1980 the federal involvement expanded to require targeting of low- and moderate-income groups within designated neighborhoods. Although this was a much needed boost for inner-city neighborhoods, CDBG money often bankrolled city bureaucracies before reaching the vital needs of a community. It was the limited use of these funds--no construction money for low-income housing, few benefits for renters, no guarantee that residents would not be displaced--that discouraged community-based initiatives. The often overlooked but nevertheless troublesome point in federal outlays is their self-destructive nature: publicly funded programs are seldom given the time to develop, money to sustain themselves, or any clear notion as to how they might succeed.

Under the Reagan administration, CDBG funds have been drastically curtailed in favor of Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG), grants targeted specifically to encourage private sector development in cities. Programs such as UDAG encouraged private sector investment by creating write-downs or subsidies for projects. The immediate effect of this shift from public to private involvement was to virtually stop development in poor neighborhoods. Equally important, however, private capital increased its leverage over cities
as federal funds were withdrawn and decision making was concentrated in fewer hands.

It is ironic that the federal government is now in the business of selling off its housing stock. The economic and political forces that reduced federal assistance to poor neighborhoods are simply buying rather than bulldozing people from their homes. As market forces set the stage for further displacement, communities like Roxbury seek to respond. The conflict takes place at the point where values and power become irreconcilable. According to Neil Smith, the movement of capital into a city is more than the consumer participating in the process of transforming neighborhoods (gentrification), it is also part of a production problem. In large part the banks, developers, and city agencies participate in the process. Further, this represents a symbiotic relationship between consumption and production where the producer plays the dominant role. Gentrification as representative of one form of power, can be seen as a movement back to the city, not so much of people as of capital.(13)

Criteria for Evaluating Case Studies

The overriding criterion of success in a community's effort to defend itself from the processes that have been described is its ability to bring about development without displacement. Just as it should be able to exert significant control over the new building that takes place in its
neighborhood, a community should be able to protect its poorest members from being shoved out in the interests of capital.

In turn, I believe that a community's ability to defend itself in this manner depends on two things: a) building a network of institutions that represent all segments of the community and function effectively as vehicles of community empowerment; and b) reaching out to other communities in building inter-neighborhood coalitions that are capable of exerting substantial political force on behalf of proposals that will benefit more than one community. This is important because of the specific nature of underdevelopment in poor neighborhoods. If poverty were locally generated and contained then the question of organizing to rid a community of it would be simple. But poverty and the resulting effects of poor housing are not unique to one place. The problem is inter-neighborhood and global. Hence, by examining each case study with two perspectives an organizer can compare the consequences of a narrow single-neighborhood approach versus a broader inter-neighborhood approach.

Later in the thesis I will argue that community ownership of land must be part of a realistic strategy for responding to the subordination of human needs to capital. Consumerism in the form of private ownership fuels capitalism at the expense of the poor. First, however, it is important to take a close look at two communities which have adopted divergent approaches to empowerment and the building of coalitions.
Footnotes


3. Ibid., p.273.

4. Ibid., p.272.

5. Michael Stone argues that most people are shelter poor, that is, people can not even afford to pay the "conventional" rate of 25%. He estimates that in 1983, a family of 4 with an income from wages of less than $23,000 cannot afford to pay 25% for housing if they are to meet their other human needs adequately.


8. The 4% represents 2% controlled by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston and 2% controlled by the Little Sisters of Assumption.


CHAPTER 3

BROWNSVILLE AND THE NEHEMIAH PLAN

I want to make one thing very clear.... I do not in any way glorify the poor. I do not think that people are specially just or charitable or noble because they're unemployed and live in crummy housing and see their kids without any kind of future and feel the weight of every indignity that society can throw at them.... Too often I've seen the have-nots turn into haves and become just as crummy as the haves they used to envy.--Saul Alinsky (1)

Brownsville, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, evolved like many urban communities during the early 20th century. It developed a rich cultural and ethnic mix from the settlement of new immigrant families. Brownsville was home to thousands of Jewish workers who worked primarily in the needle trades. Increasingly, Brownsville also became home to sizable numbers of Germans, Irish, Italians, Russians, Poles, Greeks, and Blacks. The population had grown so large that by 1925, East Brooklyn had 304,330 residents. The almost five-fold increase was complemented by 372 stores along a popular 14-block shopping street known as Pitkin Avenue. During the 1920s these shops generated about $90 million dollars in business while the main attraction, a 3,700 seat, $3 million dollar Loews Theatre, served as an entertainment and social center for the area.(2)

As incomes increased, most of the white working-class residents moved to outlying areas like Flatbush, Canarsie, Mill Basin, Long Island, and Westchester County.
Brownsville's population grew increasingly poor and non-white. A long-term decline in manufacturing jobs in Brooklyn meant that newcomers to the neighborhood had little chance for desirable blue-collar employment. To the extent that new blue-collar jobs opened up, they tended to be low-wage jobs in the service sector, with little security. Brownsville residents lived increasingly in run-down housing, often in violation of minimum standards of health and safety.

Disinvestment in Brooklyn was encouraged by schemes devised by real estate agents. During the late sixties and early seventies local real estate firms engaged in wholesale fraud at the expense of the Federal Housing Administration's guaranteed mortgage program. What started as a way of encouraging home ownership ended in a loss of nearly 200 million dollars of federally backed loans in Brooklyn alone. The methods used by real estate firms included a series of block busting techniques devised to panic white families into selling their houses at prices that were far below market values. Brokers pocketed the difference realized in the resale price by selling homes to first-time Black or Hispanic buyers. During an investigation into the FHA scandal, evidence was uncovered indicating that some unsuspecting home buyers stood little chance of ever meeting mortgage payments. Moreover, in many cases, the clients were fictitious. Eventually, many homes in already hard-pressed neighborhoods like Brownsville fell victim to arson.(3)

During the late '60s and through the 1970s, New York City withdrew services from neighborhoods considered a drain
on limited resources by planning to shrink the size of neighborhoods. As Robert Fisher explains, city officials "hoped the residents of these neighborhoods would be coerced into moving out of the city and beyond the city's burden, preferably to the sunbelt where jobs were said to abound."(4)

In 1980 the total population of Brownsville was 73,908.(5) Nearly 11,000 families live in one of the 418 low and high rise public housing units.(6) Most of the public housing is situated in areas marked by large clusters of vacant land. In Brownsville this problem is further exacerbated where disinvestment and redlining caused a shortage of private housing stock. By the early 1980s public housing became the only shelter for even middle-income people. The underdevelopment of Brownsville resulted from the massive ghettoization of people of color. Institutions, including the city of New York and local lenders, created conditions that culminated in the economic exploitation of people submerged in urban decay. It threatened to make permanent the "subconscious apathy toward the political and economic hierarchy" which Marable describes as a pervasive feature of poor communities of color.(7)

Seemingly, the dual victory of capital in destroying communities, and then denying funds to rebuild, appeared complete. However, while corporate leaders were blackmailing the city government into submission, neighborhood responses to urban problems accelerated with the economic crises of the 1970s. By the end of the 1970s community groups were seeking
answers to corporate control over public policy. In Brownsville community empowerment began when a group of churches banded together to form East Brooklyn Churches.

The Nehemiah Project

To find leadership we are not as much believers in grass-roots organizing in the traditional way. We don't believe you start with people with the most difficulties...the most crises...living close to the edge and ask them to rebuild, reorganize, and empower themselves and their neighbors. I think it's a little unrealistic.--Doug Shaefer (8)

East Brooklyn Churches (EBC), a coalition of 46 churches representing as many as 25,000 dues-paying members, was formed in 1980. It crossed both denominational and race lines in its composition. EBC hired organizers from the Industrial Areas Foundation, and immediately organized for cleaner supermarkets, safer neighborhoods, and more street signs. They carefully used smaller issues as building blocks in developing relationships with people who were potential leaders.

Influencing East Brooklyn Churches' strategy for community empowerment is the organizing approach of Saul Alinsky. Alinsky's initial conception was influenced by his experience as a labor organizer with the CIO in the 1930s. He attempted to define community organizing by using the workplace as the conduit for organizing the home. This indirect method evolved into Alinsky's neighborhood based strategy. Simply put, Alinsky argued that a city was made up
of two components: neighborhood and the "enemy" outside the neighborhood. (9) He reasoned that poor and working-class neighborhoods suffer from external decision makers who controlled the internal distribution of goods and services. As a result, Alinsky's approach developed into a consumer organization, defined by specific neighborhoods. Four cornerstones were incorporated as essential elements in developing organizational strength: churches, ethnic groups, political organizations, and labor. Organizers would cultivate existing leaders in these sectors in developing a neighborhood organization which could bring a united pressure to bear on the causes of neighborhood problems. Here, Alinsky argued that a strategy should focus on a problem that is visible, local, and capable of being corrected.

The East Brooklyn Churches used this tactic in upgrading the sanitary standards of local supermarkets. Several members of EBC, with badges and evaluation forms, would "inspect" local supermarkets. (10) Each store was rated in a formal report. Store owners fearing boycotts responded by participating with EBC in upgrading their produce, service, and sanitary conditions. Although these efforts served to build community awareness of EBC as an organization, conditions for organizing have changed in the 1980s. Perhaps the most significant change to take place is the continued and unchecked separation of workplace from residence. (11) Initially Alinsky attempted to translate labor organizing into the home; however today few factories or retailing or wholesaling operations exist in urban neighborhoods. Further,
due to increased corporate mergers and centralization, company offices are now located in "rebuilt downtowns" with regional markets. For local neighborhoods this may mean that people go without high-paying jobs and vital services (i.e., cleaner streets, health clinics, and food stores). In large part then, of the four distinct building blocks originally conceived as forming the basis of coalitions, the churches appear to be the only block claiming significant participation by community residents.

In 1983, EBC proposed to build 5,000 new homes in the Brownsville area of East Brooklyn. The area was chosen because it had a large amount of vacant land and the city was the principal landowner. The devastated neighborhood became the site for a development project named "The Nehemiah Plan," after a biblical episode in which the people gathered to rebuild Jerusalem. In 1986, the homes sold for $53,000, for families making between $20,000 and $40,000 a year. From 1983 to 1986, East Brooklyn Churches began clearing and building new homes, reaching a machine-like pace of 20 homes a week. According to the developer, I. D. Robbins, Nehemiah's success is based on "home ownership, critical mass, low density, and low-cost mass-production building techniques."(12)

Easy access to money supported EBC's quick build position. Unlike other community development projects, Brownsville organizers assembled a $12 million construction fund. A large proportion ($8 million) was contributed by Brooklyn's Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The construction fund
alone saved $3,000 a unit in finance costs. (13) In keeping with their organizing strategy, a political decision by EBC prioritized quantity. This decision affected the design and cost of housing, leading to mass production techniques. A type of "Fordism" writ large dominated the political and organizational agenda of EBC, focusing everyone's attention on the number of units being built. The decision for EBC to develop housing based on individual ownership was barely debated. From the beginning, the area churches seemingly wanted to repopulate parts of East Brooklyn by using Brownsville as the anchor. Development then became a means to an end. It was not a political decision driven by issues like long-term affordability, but an immediate practical decision to halt the further decline of an impoverished neighborhood.

The coalition that supported production as a method of revitalizing a neighborhood did so in the name of pragmatism. The winnable solutions turn to numbers, making organizing efforts that stress quantity inevitable. The serious compromise in EBC's approach arises when housing built is made affordable and available to families living outside Brownsville. The hard question of providing stability for current residents remains unanswered. EBC for its effort created low-cost housing in Brownsville, but did nothing to secure future affordability or provide shelter for the majority of current Brownsville residents.

To the outside observer, Nehemiah may seem like a reasonable approach to ghetto development. The rationale
becomes less convincing when we look at the intra-class bias involved in East Brooklyn Churches' approach. There are a couple of catches to owning a Nehemiah home. One, buyers must have an income between $20,000 and $40,000 a year. Two, they must make a $5,000 down payment and pay $2,722 in closing costs. In other words, this is for people who are too poor for the upscale New York real estate market and too rich for welfare housing.(14) EBC's exclusion of low-income people from participating in the Nehemiah plan goes along with, rather than resisting, practices widespread in the private market. Further, the goal of homeownership in a poorer community is a class issue. In Brownsville, the issue is complicated because the goal of EBC predicates homeownership as the basis for revitalizing a neighborhood. Further, they do so on the basis of splitting moderate-income from low-income families. The point for East Brooklyn Churches to consider is not individual ownership per se, but what to do with the people who are without permanent shelter.

The thrust behind Nehemiah was rebuilding a neglected neighborhood, but the repopulation of Brownsville is limited only to those with certain income. For Blacks, out of a total of 15,288 families that live in Brownsville, 11,301 have incomes below $15,000, while 1,734 families make between $15,000 and $19,999 and 2,253 earn more than $20,000.(15) Why go to all the trouble of organizing a neighborhood only to restrict access to housing by income? Additionally, except for repayment of a $10,000 loan upon sale (at any price), no
provisions for resale restrictions are made or even contemplated, making future affordability problematic. Although the statistics are not published, according to I. D. Robbins, nearly 50% of the people moving into the new homes are people of color. Unlike Roxbury (where Black families could very easily be displaced by white gentry), this is not an immediate problem for Brownsville. Even so, the issue of creating wealth extends beyond the boundaries of Brownsville and not limited to owning a home. The lack of foresight over future affordability eclipses the strategic victory won for the few families.

Community Wealth and Brownsville

John Turner, in response to critics of his book *Freedom to Build*, argues that the central issue in housing is of control. East Brooklyn Churches' contribution to Brownsville rests on its ability to control and therefore dramatically improve the landscape and lives of local residents. EBC's failure is in its decision to use its powerful organizing ability to benefit moderate/middle-income over lower-income people. The reason for this is in part historical and in part conditioned by goals set by EBC.

Historically, as I have noted, Brooklyn suffered from a changing economic and housing base. During the 1950s people of color began to move into East Brooklyn, transforming what had been a white working-class neighborhood. The combined problems of redlining and lack of capital infrastructure
development created a waste land. As the economic base changed from jobs that paid a reasonable income to those that paid lower wages and demanded even lower skills, the demand for low-cost housing increased.

The question of participation by lower-income people of color illustrates the problem of an Alinsky model as adapted by East Brooklyn Churches. By refusing to analyze the root cause of class differences, EBC inaccurately challenges individual representatives of institutions rather than the capitalist institutions as a whole. Further, accepting the notion that individual ownership empowers a poor community of color negates the reality of poverty and the process of empowerment. (17) By choosing what is in many ways the easiest strategy for dealing with the housing crisis in Brownsville, EBC is dividing its ranks on intra-class lines, justifying the decision on the grounds of expediency. Moreover, it affects race by turning people of color against the struggle for collective concerns. It produces for capitalism a destructive suspicion among people thwarting a community's ability to organize for mutual material and cultural interests. (18) The tactical victory of Nehemiah came at the expense of community people most in need of stability and shelter. This is unacceptable. Divisions within (as well as among) neighborhoods, causing hostilities between different class and race groups, are fully encouraged by capitalism. Ghettos are an example of this clash. An organizing strategy should not erode the fragile psyche of a
community by encouraging people with limited resources to compete against each other. In Brownsville, the organizers decided to exclude most of the community rather than taking the time to build a broad-based coalition.

In Chapter 1, I argue that by organizing as a collective body based on democratic planning and control of resources (i.e. land) a community challenges capital's hegemony of space. The process of taking a position against the dominance of capital is known as community control. Through control a community develops what I call "community wealth," the ability to control resources, that is, preventing displacement while allocating equity normally extracted by speculators to community groups and residents. The resulting transformation shifts power toward communities like Brownsville by recognizing how ownership patterns trap poor people from actively participating in decisions. If you are poor, non-white, and a renter, displacement is always a concern. The responsibility of the organizer is to insure full participation (e.g. veto power over harmful development projects), making displacement difficult to occur.

Summary

Organizers in Brownsville used their political savvy to wrestle control over a substantial housing development. In turn, this project will add considerable momentum to the revitalization effort in Brownsville. However, the organizers failed to carry out the final stage of community control. By
encouraging the individual ownership of property, they stopped short of community empowerment. To be sure, the benefits of Nehemiah are substantial. No one can emerge from an examination of Brownsville without acknowledging the accomplishments of East Brooklyn Churches: in 1986, many people have a real opportunity for good housing. Brownsville is more liveable, more alive today then it has been for nearly 30 years. This by itself is considered remarkable. But for future community organizing efforts, does Nehemiah offer a blueprint consistent with community wealth? I argue it does not.
FOOTNOTES


5. U.S. Census: General, Social & Economic Characteristics by Race and Spanish Origins, 1980, p.44.


18. Ibid.
Community is important for establishing a common bond across our city, for creating a sense of identity, for maintaining and creating cultural continuity, for giving social expression to oneself as a part of a larger whole, for developing an ever-widening sense of community, city, state, nation, and world.--James Jennings and Mel King (1)

How people define a community often determines the way in which organizing occurs. For example, are people interested in increasing the value of their land, or are they interested in long-term stability of current residents? Organizing in turn influences the direction in which a community evolves and the willingness of others to participate. But more importantly, how organizers define the involvement of community residents invariably affects their empowerment. Just as community organizing in Brownsville has been heavily influenced by the theories and techniques of Saul Alinsky, organizing in Roxbury has been influenced significantly by the approach advocated by Mel King, a long-time Boston activist and five-term state representative from the racially mixed South End. His approach relies more than Alinsky's on the long-term development of community empowerment as opposed to short-term solutions. King has also placed much more emphasis on the forging of inter-neighborhood coalitions. It is hard to speak of a "King
approach" since all of his organizing work has been in conjunction with other people; in his electoral campaigns he has been seen as a symbol of a range of social movements in which he has been a participant without necessarily being the acknowledged leader.

Leadership as demonstrated by Mel King and Saul Alinsky is formed by the historical conflicts that change the role of community activism. In Brownsville and Roxbury this change manifests itself (materially) by increasing community control over land. If a community owns, develops, and grows, power evolves de facto. If a community remains fragmented, transient, and neglected by local institutions, then the ability to control decisions like development is less likely. Moreover, I will argue that by forming institutions that emulate capitalism a community by definition forces itself into passive existence. For neighborhoods like Roxbury and Brownsville, building community power is the only way in which the poor form social relationships that break conditions influenced by capital. For poor communities one way this change occurs is when they have power to dictate development by controlling its size, scale, and impact on their community.
A Neighborhood Organizes

We want to make sure that whatever happens is to the benefit of the community, and that means little or no displacement and that current residents have the opportunity to participate.—Nelson Merced (2)

Organizing Roxbury is far from an easy task. Roxbury is part of an economy that in recent years has seen unemployment drop to the lowest in the industrial states, housing prices climb 38% in one year, and a burgeoning state surplus reach 350 million dollars. Situated as an island amongst a sea of affluence, Roxbury remains impoverished. The following figures show the contrast between Roxbury and the city as a whole:

*Income – U.S. Census, 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BOSTON</th>
<th>BOSTON EXCEPT ROX.</th>
<th>ROXBURY</th>
<th>**N.DOR. &amp; DUDLEY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>562,994</td>
<td>505,202</td>
<td>57,792</td>
<td>12,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Mean</td>
<td>$16,212</td>
<td>$16,505</td>
<td>$12,260</td>
<td>$12,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita</td>
<td>$6,550</td>
<td>$6,810</td>
<td>$4,322</td>
<td>$3,908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* From Mauricio Gaston and Marie Kennedy, From Disinvestment to Displacement (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1985), p.68.

** North Dorchester/Dudley population is for the Boston Redevelopment Authority's planning district 9. This is known as the Dudley Square area and is at the heart of the BRA's scenario for Roxbury development.
Some of the recent data suggest more disturbing trends. Between 1979 and 1984, prices for a two-family home in Ward 8 (which includes the Dudley Square area) increased 300% or $9,343 to $37,339. However, the median income for a family increased only 42% or from $10,312 to $15,312. A simple pro forma reveals that a conventional debt service for a Ward 8 household, representing 28% of a yearly salary (before taxes and utilities), will qualify the family for a home costing no more than $34,536. The obvious problem with the increase in housing costs for Dudley and North Dorchester is that the average family's wages are far from keeping up with the cost of buying a home. Then, the obvious question is, Why push for homeownership when it appears impossible for people to own? And even if ownership occurs, how does a lower-income family pay for the long-term maintenance costs.

By the end of 1980, home ownership was 4% in the Dudley Square area and 13% in Roxbury, compared with 27% for the city. As of 1983, one-half of all the land parcels in Roxbury were foreclosed and tax-delinquent, in comparison with 13% for the city. In 1985, the area known as the Dudley Triangle has 738 vacant parcels of land, which represents 7% (or 10,542 parcels) of the total vacant land in the city. When we compare ownership city-wide, Roxbury has disproportionately more city-owned land than any other neighborhood. Clearly something is wrong.

As Dudley emerges as the focal point for Roxbury's revitalization, more pressure is placed on the community to respond. Jennings and King argue in their book From Access to
Power (1986) that the problem of leadership during the mid-seventies centered around individuals who wanted to build personal power rather than community power. During the decade after 1975, however, four events helped to galvanize the Black community politically while reaching out to progressive whites.

First, in 1975 Black community leaders filed suit against the at-large voting system for City Council and School Committee elections, which had effectively prevented Black and Hispanic representation on the city's governing bodies. The federal judge ruled against the plaintiffs, but the action set the stage for two ballot votes, one in 1977 and another in 1981. The campaign for district representation in 1981 stressed both the issue of racial justice and the argument that all neighborhoods of the city would benefit from the change; the proposal won convincingly.

Second, in March 1979, the Black Political Task Force was formed uniting over 27 different organizations and agencies. The task force was formed as a broad-based political group to empower all people of color while holding elected community officials accountable for their actions.

It was during the early eighties that building power and empowering other neighborhoods merged as a single force influencing decisions now affecting Roxbury. Mel King's proposal that construction companies using city funds be required to favor Boston residents and minorities in their hiring policies won wide support. Empowering people across
the city united many other neighborhoods with behind issues that were important to communities of color.

Finally, Mel King's second campaign for mayor in 1983 (he had run in 1979 and received a surprisingly high 15% of the vote) was significant both for its remarkable mobilization of the Black and Hispanic vote and for the responsive chord his "Rainbow Coalition" struck with many progressive whites. As writer and activist James Green put it:

This foray into electoral politics offered us an unusual opportunity to transcend the limits of one-issue campaigns. We could work in a multi-national, multi-cultural coalition that brought together a range of issues and offered a progressive program we could take to ordinary people. (6)

Although King won only slightly over 20% of the white vote in the runoff election against popular City Councilor Ray Flynn, the passion and grass-roots enthusiasm of the Rainbow campaign had a real impact on the city. Shortly, after Ray Flynn's victory, someone commented that even though Flynn had won, he did so with Mel King's issues. It was an apt characterization of a campaign that challenged the status quo of the city of Boston.

Organizing and Empowerment

In the Fall of 1984, four separate planning and development processes were unfolding, each occurring without the knowledge of the others, but together all focusing on the future of Roxbury.
In the summer of 1984 one process began at the behest of Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation with the support of the Riley Foundation. Nuestra CDC was formed in 1981 by La Alianza Hispana and the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation (HOPE), the two largest Hispanic social service and planning agencies in Boston, while the Riley Foundation is a philanthropic organization located in Boston. Together they founded the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). The Initiative is a collaborative effort of groups concerned with the revitalization of the Dudley Street neighborhood. Participants are diverse in age and occupation and represent Black, Cape Verdean, Hispanic, and white culture. They targeted as overall goals increasing community collaboration and generating new resources for housing and business development. The DSNI now operates a storefront office on Dudley Street. They specifically argue for community ownership, for recognition that development is both a short- and a long-term process, and for requiring that investment in the neighborhood benefit the largest number of community residents. The DSNI board is primarily made up of people living in and around the Dudley Triangle. One concrete result of recent organizing effort has been a campaign to oppose the selection of Roxbury as the new site of a city dump. DSNI turned out 300 residents who voiced their opposition to the plan.

Concomitantly, a community development corporation in the Highland Park section of Roxbury, called the Roxbury Action Project (RAP), released a study written by Mauricio
Gaston, Marie Kennedy, and others from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The report, *Dudley in 2001* (8) detailed the history of Roxbury and more importantly Dudley Square. After describing Dudley as it exists today--one of the poorest areas of the city and in danger of further deterioration--the report introduced three development scenarios so that community residents could intelligently understand the future potential of their neighborhood. These scenarios can be summarized as follows:

* **Disinvestment**--The year 2001: If nothing is done to prevent further disinvestment, by the year 2001, population will drop by at least 20% complemented by a decline in per capita income. The loss of housing stock and business development will strain city resources inviting a vicious cycle of arson, abandonment, and isolation.

* **Gentrification/Displacement**--The year 2001: If new public transportation is installed while encouraging reinvestment without protecting existing residents then massive displacement will occur. The one-time cultural and commercial center for Boston's Black population will become an area where white professionals occupy most of the businesses and households.

* **Popular Control/Balanced Development**--The year 2001: In this case the increased population is met with protection from displacement. Allowing for some "controlled gentrification," the area will remain primarily populated by people of color. Displacement will be prevented by absorbing the immigration of new residents with expansion of new housing and commercial development.

The key to the Gaston-Kennedy proposal is that the community conditions development to the extent that a racially and economically mixed neighborhood evolves. As the Gaston-Kennedy study unearthed a number of critical choices for
consideration, another study was released, albeit "unofficially."

In late December 1984, the Boston Redevelopment Authority leaked its version of how to develop Roxbury. A report titled Dudley Square Plan (9) was leaked to the press causing an immediate uproar. The universal condemnation was so intense that the BRA never released the report in an official version. The study, which credited over 80 BRA personnel with a part in its formulation, made no place for involvement by the community itself. It raised the spectre of massive ($750 million dollars) private sector investment with no analysis of the effect this investment would have on housing and other costs within the neighborhood immediately surrounding Dudley Square. This is despite the BRA's own statements that only four dollars per person on average separates Roxbury from the poorest area in Mississippi.(10) The resulting transformation would drastically limit the ability of people of color to live in what is now their own neighborhood.

Accompanying all this activity was the formation of the Organizing Committee for a Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (OCGRNA). The OCGRNA formed in part out of a need for a community-based group to lead the development effort in Roxbury, and in part to awaken the Flynn Administration about the needs of people of color. With the leadership of Mel King, the OCGRNA held its first meeting on January 12, 1985, at La Alianza Hispana. La Alianza was chosen because it was the focal point for much of the area's recent activity (both
as a social service agency and establishing a community
development corporation). The nearly 50 people in attendance
included academics, residents of the surrounding
neighborhood, and many long-time activists. What interested
most of the participants was the notion that land use and
community control could merge into a process for revitalizing
the Dudley neighborhood. However, the organizational capacity
of many groups in the area was too small to handle
redeveloping Dudley as a whole. A series of meetings over the
next month culminated in a press conference on February 14,
1985. Community leaders at that time went public with a
declaration of opposition to any new development unless there
was significant input from residents during the planning
process.

In the succeeding months the OCGRNA won a highly
significant agreement from Mayor Ray Flynn and BRA director
Stephen Coyle. Under this plan, a interim PAC (Project
Advisory Committee) would be formed, with members elected to
represent all segments of the Roxbury community, and in
particular the Dudley neighborhood area. In addition, the
OCGRNA secured agreements with the city guaranteeing housing
for low-income residents along with provisions for future
affordability.

As of Summer 1986, the results have been mixed. The
OCGRNA was forced to sue the BRA for failing to submit the
agency's urban development plan before the public. However,
in the meantime, CDCs like Nuestra Comunidad Development
Corporation have matured and gained sufficient experience as developers to argue for larger projects. Further, the continuing role of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative means that the organizing of Dudley residents continues apace. There is an effective division of labor in which the DSNI concentrates locally, leaving the larger issues to the more broadly representative OCGRNA. The challenge for the future is whether the multi-level organizing effort can coalesce residents into affecting the development of Roxbury. Unlike Brownsville, a specific plan has yet to take hold.

Summary

One of the important lessons realized from Roxbury is how a poor community builds political power as a result of broad-based organizing. For years the lack of developed institutional ties to the rest of the city encouraged disinvestment and threatened displacement of the remaining residents. But it was through the changing political landscape that a process of growth created vision and the momentum for community empowerment. For Roxbury this means more control over development of its land.

The exact direction that development in Roxbury will take has not yet been decided. It may follow the lines of private ownership and of exclusion of the poor; it may, on the other hand, take a course of collective control and of inclusion. What is striking as we look at the situation today is the degree to which Roxbury as a community of color has organized to defend itself and its own interests. It has done
so both by organizing within itself and by reaching out to other communities in the city on the basis of common interests. Roxbury as a community has the potential of actively shaping the course of its own development. The transformation of Roxbury into a community characterized by stability, local control, and collective wealth is not an impossible dream.
Footnotes


10. Ibid, unpagedinated.
Perhaps it is the growing individualism of society, the changing character of families and neighborhoods, but there seems to be a growing tendency to regard security as an individual matter—with a material bottom line, perhaps it is more difficult to expect or hope for more. Perhaps affluence creates illusions of independence, and the perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, until it seems no more is possible.—Chuck Matthei (1)

This thesis is about change. I have examined two neighborhoods where poverty and race combine to form, as Fusfeld and Bates argue, the "chief distinguishing factors of urban ghettos."(2) Communities like Roxbury and Brownsville need more equitable allocation of wealth, land, and political power in order to survive.

The organizing model defined by the residents of Roxbury (unlike Brownsville) combines increased control over land with broad-based political action. However, the struggle that looms is for restriction of the speculative value of private property. Consequently, the heart of the problem lies in preventing land values from being inflated to the point that the socially desirable needs of a community are subservient to those of capital. A community's wealth is its ability to generate benefits from living in one geographical area. If capital profits from denying these benefits then something must give: either people are forced to leave or capital compromises in favor of social benefits. As John Davis notes, the question remains how best to remove speculative benefits.
from land, where exchange value is taxed or taken away, and where land for the most part ceases to be a commodity. In order to achieve the goal of bridging theory with practice, I propose collective ownership of land as one way communities of color stabilize, grow and empower themselves.

Visions of What Could Be: Dudley and Nehemiah Reconsidered

To provide every person with housing that is affordable, adequate in size and of decent quality, secure in tenure, and located in a supportive neighborhood of choice, with recognition of the special housing problems confronting oppressed groups (especially minorities and women).-- Emily Achtenberg and Peter Marcuse (4)

Struggle over housing has intensified as scarce land within central cities becomes a battle ground for new investment. There has been a shift in the function of ownership that is directly related to problems in the economy and housing industry. Since 1974, when unprecedented inflation coupled with lack of new construction drove up values of existing homes, ownership transformed increasingly into a vehicle for investment, especially by those in upper income brackets.(5) Neighborhood policies influenced by urban renewal set the stage for gentrification, prompting tenant activism and coalition building around issues of community control over development. Therefore, popular struggle turned to political acts, like Tent City or Southwest Corridor in Boston's South End, with the aim of increasing more low-income housing or stopping displacement. These actions address the need for broad-based coalition
building due to the crisis in poorer communities fueled by new capital investment. Broad-based organizing is the linking of similar interests among people in many neighborhoods. In the case of displacement residents across a city can simultaneously address the issue.

The two models of organizing I have examined are distinguished by their attitudes toward common action. Some organizations fail to broaden their concerns for affordable housing and community control, while others recognize the value of linking everyone affected by the housing crisis. The different methods in which Roxbury and Brownsville have attempted to achieve control highlights issues concerning affordability, security and empowerment.

Wealth and Community Control

Evaluating each community development effort as part of a larger process of empowerment is crucial. Throughout this analysis, empowerment relies on everyone having equal access to programs like low-cost housing. I want to illustrate that even with the best intentions community groups that ignore the issue of fairness are faced with other dynamics of capitalist development, notably the quality of jobs. Under the best of conditions, Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation will offer housing tied to the rate of financing, perhaps a family of four with an income of $17,000 a year will own a home. But what happens if incomes drop? How can a community respond to structural problems inherent to
capitalism? One way is to follow the example of East Brooklyn Churches. In Brownsville, local organizers placed a floor on who may own housing, that is, only families making $20,000 need apply. But in fact families making as little as $15,000 could afford the mortgage. The contradiction with East Brooklyn Churches' approach is not with rebuilding Brownsville, but the self-imposed intra-class constraints. This exclusive policy is what the private market is all about.

Empowerment in the case of Brownsville fails to include people least likely to withstand displacement and housing discrimination. People left out of the process increasingly look towards consumption patterns that elevate expectations in name of individualism. This of course, dilutes any base of support East Brooklyn Churches or any other organization may count on for future support. The only way success could be measured by EBC is based on material gain; thus as organizers, they must feed the system victims in order to produce results. Cultivating the seeds for change empowers a community by including the diversity of its people in the organizing process. Limiting this dynamic channels artificially the direction of people's desires leaving the already weak links behind. Community empowerment strengthens a community by drawing from the diversity of its people. It may be that housing development is an issue in some neighborhoods and rehabilitation in others. It may be access to better jobs or improved transportation that empowers someone else.
For Roxbury and other communities of color I argue the issue of who owns or controls development of land is of primary importance. The point is best illustrated by the actions of the Emergency Tenants Council (ETC). During the late fifties and through the mid-sixties a large in-migration of Puerto Ricans settled in Boston's South End, an area targeted for urban renewal. Activists joined local and national Puerto Rican groups to force the Boston Redevelopment Authority to designate ETC the developer of a large parcel of land. Today 815 units of low-income housing have been built preserving an important ethnic community.(6)

In Roxbury, efforts are being made to address this concern, albeit slowly. But unlike Brownsville, where only the tangible effect of a house being built addresses the success of EBC, Roxbury is developing deep roots among a new generation of community activist. This is the origin of minority community empowerment. The current generation is inspired by a previous (and still active) leadership.

Indeed inequities from the past unfairly mortgage the future of communities of color, but the struggle has sharpened insights contributing to stronger demands. Community wealth as defined earlier represents the recognition by residents that for the future of their neighborhood, people as well as land must be preserved. This occurs by developing the leadership base which can argue for control. Control is determined by the ability to maintain security of land tenure by what Chuck Turner calls the "democratization
of the political process." For people of color, building institutions means building social relationships of the kind that will empower communities of color as they work, not only for low-cost housing, but for better-paying jobs and a quality education.

Race and Class

The process of empowering people can be categorized in at least two distinct traditions of organizing: a) neighborhood maintenance tradition, often characterized by professionals who either offer a social service delivery orientation or people who use their education and class status to maintain a neighborhood based on material self-interest; b) a broad-based neighborhood tradition promoting class and race alliances across neighborhood boundaries. Moreover, the two models for organizing offer different results for communities when the narrowly defined interest of one community is pitted against another. For people of color, exclusionary economic policies form a double-edge sword. They cannot afford housing because of educational and employment barriers, and when an opportunity for low-cost shelter does indeed arise, they are shut out of the process predetermined by society at-large. Consequently, a clear understanding of race as it relates to neighborhood organizing is very important.

In advanced capitalist societies race increasingly becomes a tool for dividing workers within the workplace and
neighborhood. For whites this is often a difficult question to address. First, they must look beyond self-interest and recognize that exploitation and oppression occurs at two levels: a) extraction of surplus labor power and b) discrimination due to race. As a result, class alliances with white communities must be based on a clear understanding of the causes of underdevelopment—it is not simply a matter of better-paying jobs for everyone. In neighborhoods, contradictory strategies for redevelopment arise when organizers favor narrow economic solutions without carefully understanding the impact of race. An example would be the acceptance of "controlled" gentrification as part of upgrading a community without any restrictions on the resale or future value of property.

Capitalism undeniably encourages racial divisions, often profiting from antagonisms that result from these divisions. What is not as clear is the connection for the antagonism. A proposed resolution to this problem is offered by Harry Chang, however. Chang argues that the connection linking race and class be found in the historical evolution toward capitalism, that is, the advent of "civil society" or, in other words, society as it currently exists (as opposed to households in ancient slavery and estates in feudalism). Whereas class relations were very personal in pre-civil society, class relations in civil society are mediated by society at-large. The key to this mediation is control of capital. Mediation may include decisions as to which community receives money for public infrastructure.
development, and on what terms. Only by understanding the uniqueness of capitalist society can we begin to reach an understanding of the convergence of race and class. For example, over a long period following the Civil War in the U.S., people of color were forced off land, with their own economic interests being subordinated to the imperatives of capital concentration. The experience of people of color in urban centers has also shown an interplay of race and class, as in the myriad laws and practices that have restricted the jobs open to non-whites. Sometimes the immediate effect had been to benefit white workers, but the long-run effect had generally been to strengthen capital vis-a-vis a badly divided workforce.

In Chapter 1, I talked about organizing as it relates to a concept described as community wealth. "Community wealth" is posited as a critique of liberal policies, that is, policies which encourage a neo-classical approach to housing and community development. The neo-classical housing approach can be summarized as policies that rely on private markets without considering how people gain access to those markets. In other words, if a city encourages the development of housing without carefully assessing the means by which people can acquire and maintain homes, problems of stability are never resolved. On the other hand, if we heed the writings of Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars such as Castells, Gaston and Kennedy, Harvey, and O'Connor, we find that there are serious questions as to how wealth is to be
generated for people of color. We can differentiate wealth, on the one hand as it applies to affluence (money) and, on the other, wealth as it applies to power (capital). Wealth in the latter sense is what influences zoning laws, insurance rates, labor-union apprenticeships, and the composition of corporate boards (to name a few). Community wealth therefore is inextricably linked to forming the relationships that create power.

Through methods employed by either Saul Alinsky or Mel King, these newly formed relations challenge the bastions of wealth that oppress rather than encourage people of color to participate in society. Although the elimination of racism per se does not do away with exploitation, it then becomes the challenge for organizers to bridge the difference of race and class into coalitions that leverage community power.

Keep the Land, Lease the Keys:
A Case for Community Ownership

For people of color defining a neighborhood is often tenuous due to an indifferent political and economic system. Low-income people need some mechanism to ensure stability, which in turn yields a social rather than speculative gain. The mechanism I suggest is found in land trusts with decision-making powers decentralized to community members.

A land trust is in essence a measure of land reform. It takes property away from private market forces and places it in a legal and political framework that controls equity and
long-term ownership. Further, it undercuts the central problem communities have to contend with—speculation. Speculation prevents a community from using land as an equity base for local development and balancing social needs like long-term affordable housing. It stimulates economic and social transformation of a neighborhood without concern for the emotional toll paid by friends and family or the set of legitimate interests of a community. The characteristics of a land trust are then important to understand.

One important function of a land trust is to radically alter the land-use functions normally governed by the private market. This can be accomplished in at least two ways: a) ownership of residential land by a community organization and b) ownership of homes by low- and moderate-income people. In the first instance, the decommodification of land eliminates the opportunity for speculative profit. In the second instance, creating access to quality shelter for lower-income families is facilitated by lease-purchase contract.(7) Lease-purchase contracts allows low-income families to develop credit over a number of months or years, through lease payments, before actually assuming a mortgage. All preliminary lease payments eventually are credited to the purchase price, further reducing the cost of housing. Land trusts also are a good vehicle for transferring abandoned property in inner cities to community groups.

In Boston, the non-profit corporation known as the Boston Citywide Land Trust was set up to "bank" property owned by the city. In order to assure that property or homes
were available for low-income families, the land trust would use limited equity agreements and long-term ground leases to preserve housing affordability. Land trusts are often used in conjunction with cooperative housing agreements. In this case, the land is held in perpetuity, in a trust, while the shares of each owner are commonly held. Cooperative housing agreements and land trusts combine to preserve affordability by lowering finance charges due to change of ownership and price increases.(8)

Land trusts are neither new or uncommon. For a number of years land has been protected by preservationists, who, rightfully seek to save unusual natural areas for posterity. For example, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national non-profit land trust organization uses its ability to attract large foundation grants and even larger mail solicitations for acquisition of open space. In 1983-1984, the TPL supported 21 projects in nine states, representing 56,684 acres of land. Land trusts also are local in nature, that is, the administrative offices remain in cities or small towns. In the case of Burlington, Vermont, the city helped fund a land trust program. Represented by a cross-section of community leaders, the Burlington Community Land Trust (BCLT) turned $200,000 into 1 million dollars of housing preservation and development for low-income residents.(9) Further, the BCLT declares its trust "is the creation of perpetually affordable housing democratically administered by a grassroots organization."(10) Although the BCLT received its impetus
from the city, it remains an independent non-profit organization.

My thesis argues for the control and eventual reallocation of equity through a land trust. This point is of central concern. For control to take place there must be a recognition that land has a higher use-value than speculative value (or exchange value). Exchange value is determined by the location of property, particularly in neighborhoods undergoing new development. The value increases or decreases based on the perception of profits derived from land. Because speculative profit increases wealth of an individual disproportionate to another, decommodification of land is important. Why? Individual ownership is not possible for people of color en masse. Even if it were, the problem of individual concentration of wealth at the expense of someone else would still be the case. Further, for reasons already noted, the legacy of poverty is disproportionately burdensome for people of color.

By encouraging stability through homeownership, conditions like the FHA scandals witnessed in Brooklyn will occur. People are tricked into believing that everyone has access, can receive a good education, and can own a home. This illusion destroys a family because the self-doubt of earning a decent wage leading to a "normal" life style is full of constraints all conditioned by the capitalist institutions.

In the United States, equity is usually synonymous with the "owners interest."(11) Land trusts take this notion one
step further identifying equity with community interest. This establishes the control over profits in humanistic terms.

Conclusion

Advocating for collective ownership in the United States runs contrary to the aspirations of most Americans. Constraints placed on speculation are viewed with skepticism, even though many people are unable to own property. The contradictions inherent in this view emerge as the crisis of affordability reaches middle-class Americans. Further, the goal of collective ownership is undermined by legal challenges reinforcing the right to private ownership and a reasonable return on investment. But again, this view is distorted because the federal government provides generous tax deduction and depreciation allowance for property owners. Still, some believe that private ownership exemplifies rugged individualism, that is, by working hard you own a house as a just reward. For poorer communities this view is complicated by the impression that all poor people can "make it," too. The view is rigorously promoted by commercial advertisers regardless of the reality that poverty is endemic to capitalism. Individual ownership in a ghetto environment does not address basic problems that concern people of color, e.g., better-paying jobs, access to credit, and improved city services. If a commitment is made to redevelop poor neighborhoods like Roxbury and Brownsville, then protecting
current residents must be a priority. From an organizer's perspective, this can be accomplished by encouraging residents' control of local resources, which will lead to self-reliance. Freedom realized from self-reliance releases the poor from the domination of capital by encouraging communities to evolve based on human values.

For a community to gain self-determination, control over the development process is key. As capital increases monopoly control over the housing market, who controls development rights of strategic parcels of land determines the pattern of development. For poorer communities this means that gaining access to land as a prerequisite is fundamental. However this does not necessarily solve the problem when a community suffers from capital depreciation leading to disinvestment. Therefore gaining control of development is important but it does not assure communities of color of further capital investment. Controlling capital and hence controlling development depends on the extent to which social relationships of production have evolved. For a community this means ensuring that capital cannot unilaterally impose exchange value of land over an entire community. Moreover, this means for people of color that race is no longer a determining factor dividing poor communities.

Land trusts change the role of ownership by making it a legal mechanism towards the redistribution of large land holdings and equity to communities. Also a land trust provides a basis for maintaining ownership of publicly financed projects while protecting tenants' long-term shelter
needs. But a specific mechanism like a land trust is less important than the overall approach that is taken to the development of poor communities. If the goal is development without displacement, then it is very important that institutions of community empowerment be worked out that represent the poorest residents as well as those who have the resources to thrive in a laissez-faire development process. I suggest that community ownership of land is a necessary part of such empowerment.
FOOTNOTES


8. Finance charges for cooperative housing are usually determined by one of two methods: individual or blanket mortgages. The disadvantage of individual mortgage agreements result in higher refinance costs when the property is sold. However, with blanket mortgages the new share holder only pays a portion of the overall mortgage--this way no new finance charge enters into the picture for the house as a whole.


10. Ibid, p.3.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


United States Census: General, Social and Economic Characteristics by Race and Spanish Origin. 1980
