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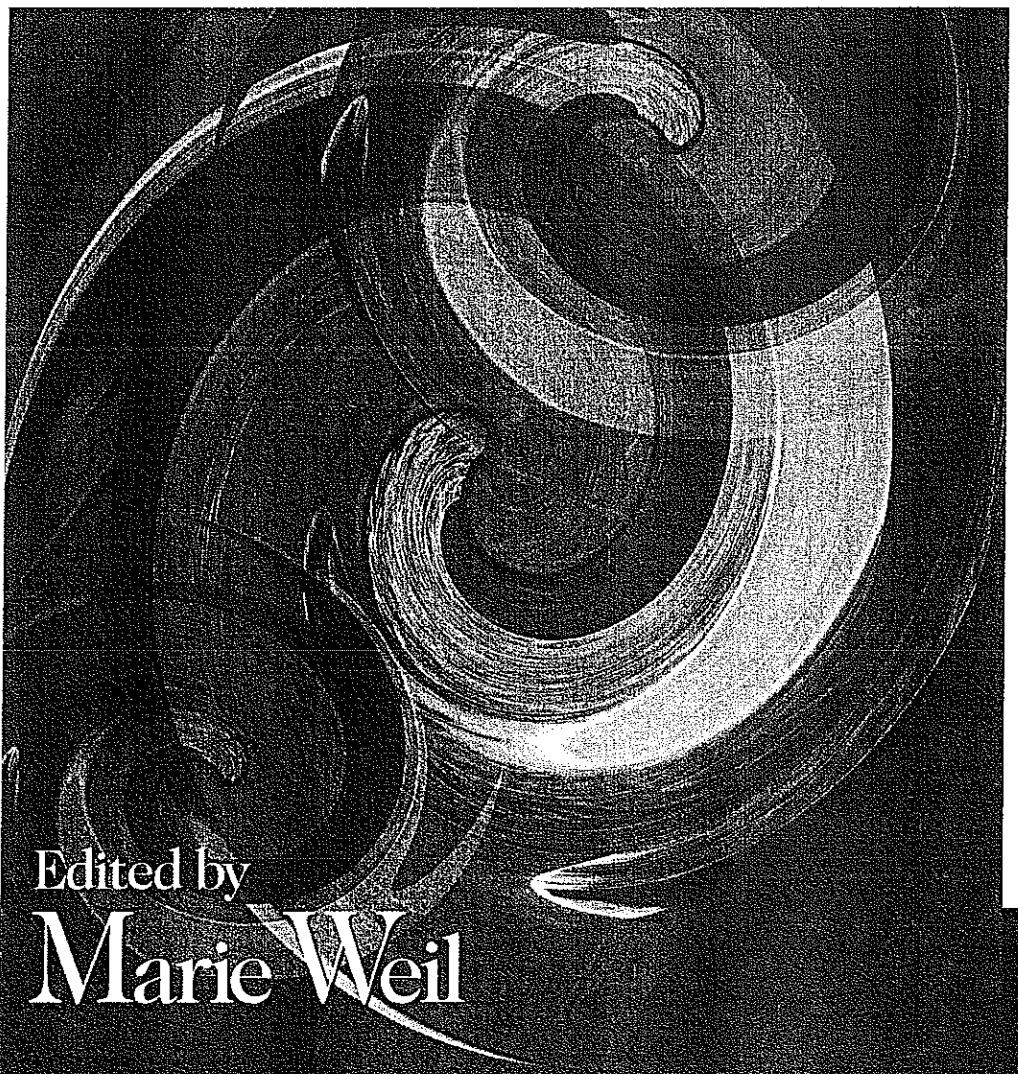
The Handbook of COMMUNITY PRACTICE



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SAGE

CHAPTER 3

Diverse Populations and Community Practice

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"A way of seeing," British statesman Edmund Burke suggested, "is a way of not seeing." Taking this admonition to heart, we will offer some nontraditional perspectives on organizing with communities of color. On the other hand, doing so means that we will give short shrift to some expected explorations of community practice. Addressed are aspects of the evolution of community practice with diverse populations, current and changing issues in this practice arena, and an emerging model of practice consisting of related cultural competency views and personal qualities needed for successful organizing.

Ethno-Racial Context for Organizing in Communities of Color

> *The depth of white fear is underestimated and misunderstood by progressive thinkers and the media. . . . The best that can be hoped for is a multiracial capitalist society without a white majority.*
>
> Maharidge, 1996, pp. 11, 21

Racial and ethnic demographic changes in the United States have resulted in a landscape in which White people are becoming a numeric minority and people of color,

in aggregate, are becoming the majority (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that the current population is 75% White, 12% Black, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 8% multiracial or some other race, and 13% Hispanic (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). Hispanic respondents can be counted as White or non-White for census purposes. In either case, the Hispanic population doubled nationwide from 1980 to 2000 (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The race and Hispanic origin categories together constitute a minority category growing at a rate that will quickly outpace White population growth (Perry & Mackun, 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). The minority population is significantly younger, concentrated in urban centers in states along the coastal borders of the nation, and experiencing disproportionately high birthrates. Projections for the future suggest that by the year 2050, the entire country will follow California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and the District of Columbia, all of which are currently inhabited by a majority of minorities (Hicks, 1997; Hobbs & Stoops, 2002; Nelson & O'Reilly, 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). This reality has sparked reactions from widespread fear to anxiety and resentment among White people, all along the continuum from racists to well-intentioned liberals who have never thoroughly examined their personal motivations for social justice positions. Not only low-income, but also angry middle-class White males have expressed feelings of encroachment and fear of losing economic ground; they blame civil rights equity-building policies for creating a more competitive marketplace where White skin privilege is increasingly challenged (Chappell, 1995; Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001; Lynch, 2000; Maharidge, 1996; Tempest, 2003; Webber, 2003). Recently governmental leadership has evidenced disinterest and invidious contempt for the particular needs of people of color—related to economic and civic exclusion. Policy changes, indeed, have limited protections and affirmative action for minorities of color. These policy changes accompany increasingly negative public sentiment, with some Whites assuming that any earlier issues of discrimination have been solved, while others express active hostility, viewing people of color as competitors who threaten "White jobs" rather than deserving equal treatment.

During this enormous shift in both demographics and mainstream perceptions of people of color, racially motivated hate crime has increased (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). A series of regressive public policy initiatives has targeted people of color across the nation in an attempt to turn back the hands of time on progress, access, and mobility opportunities (Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001).

Backlash Against the Progressive Politics of the 1960s and 1970s

Our society needs formation and social action by multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural coalitions to improve access to education, employment, and health care for all people, particularly minorities of color and all people who are poor. Equally, there is need to respond to the disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS, homicide, poverty, teenage pregnancy, low-birthweight babies, and substance abuse

in diverse communities. Instead of public policy and social responses to these egregious problems, we are experiencing a backlash against the political and socially progressive politics of the 1960s and 1970s. In this climate, people of color are blamed for the injustices affecting their communities. Once again, people of color and low-income people are made the scapegoat of irrational blame and fear-driven attacks. One impact of this "blaming of victims" is evidenced by clients of human service agencies who present with shame and guilt about circumstances that are beyond their control, apologizing for simply being themselves. Barbara Solomon, in her groundbreaking book *Black Empowerment* (1986), documented these structural conditions that create internal personal barriers as well as enforce external barriers to resources and opportunities.

A right-wing Republican, conservative political agenda has become organized against affirmative action, bilingual education, immigration, and crime definition. These efforts have resulted in the criminalization of young Black and Latino males, the demonization of immigrants, an assault on bilingual education, English-only crusades, and anti-affirmative action efforts (Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001). These actions together constitute a neoconservative backlash against the progress of the civil rights era, a backlash that began with the conservative 1980s and gained momentum during subsequent Republican presidencies (Fisher, 1994). Although in periods of major elections, neoconservative politicians may court the votes of people of color, their policy proposals often further disadvantage minority communities.

This capitalist nation remains ambivalent about responding to the uprising of low income, disenfranchised, ethnically diverse, and oppressed people. Although class, gender, sexual orientation, and income status create constellations of diversity in American society, race continues to be an enduring, significant, and defining characteristic that limits access to opportunity. In the American capitalist context, oppressed people struggle at the margins of society and are vilified, often viewed as dysfunctional, incapable, and damaged. The civil rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which advocated for people of color, is a foundation for all subsequent grassroots and national social activism. The feminist and gay and lesbian rights movements followed closely in time. White feminists, however, took a long time to recognize the specific and unique aspects of Black feminist/womanist thought and engagement (Weil, 1986). As Barbara Smith, a prominent Black lesbian social activist, has pointed out, the mainstream gay rights movement has sometimes alienated people of color with a narrow, single focus while ignoring that people of color who are gay or lesbian most often have strong social justice concerns in multiple spheres (Diehl, 2000). In both these instances, Black activists have been acutely aware of insufficient attention to issues of race, poverty, homelessness, and police brutality in both the mainstream feminist and gay rights movements. Indeed, notable Black feminist writers Paula Giddings, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde have commented clearly on the historical and current exclusion from the center of mainstream feminist politics the concerns of women of color, ranging from the omission of Black women's rights during the suffrage movements (Giddings, 1988) to polarization of women of color and White women's issues (hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984). While the civil rights, feminist, and gay and lesbian movements together paved the way for later organizing efforts for populations such as the aging and

people with disabilities, one shortcoming in the aftermath of the civil rights movement was the absence of a flexible blueprint for use when addressing future injustices as they arise (Ladner, 2000).

Beyond Cultural Awareness, Appreciation, and Competence

Is Harriet Tubman, architect of the underground railroad, the visual image we conjure when considering a community organizer in American society? Did Saul Alinsky (1971) fully consider people of color in diverse populations when he proposed the rules for radicals? From the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era, during the Settlement Movement, throughout the New Deal and World War II, most visibly during the civil rights era and more sporadically during the current conservative backlash, at every point of societal development in the last century, diverse populations have been organizing for freedom from oppression and for increased access to social, political, and economic opportunity. However, in the community organizing literature, people of color have all too often been ignored, overlooked, and disregarded, their issues minimized and viewed as not deserving special attention or a unique political or theoretical approach (Betten & Austin, 1990; Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Lubove, 1965; Rothman, Erlich, & Tropman, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2001; Warren, 1998).

Although the history of community organizing in the social work profession can be traced prior to the Gilded Age, not until the recent American interest in its expanding multicultural society have serious scholarly works been dedicated to the unique community organizing needs of diverse populations (Bradshaw, Soifer, & Gutiérrez, 1994; Edwards, Drews, & Seaman, 1994; Garvin & Cox, 2001; Glugoski, Reisch, & Rivera, 1994; Gutiérrez & Alvarez, 2000; Gutiérrez, Alvarez, Nemon, & Lewis, 1996; Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1994; Rivera & Erlich, 1998). As a result, despite rhetoric to the contrary, community organizing with people from oppressed groups (people of color, women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes) has been marginalized for much of social work's past. These people represent the very populations that today we think of as the center, those who carry the burden of disenfranchisement in our society through the real-life experiences of targeted oppression and discrimination.

Effective Community Organizing With People of Color

Basic tenets of community organizing with diverse populations follow the canon of organizing protocol with special considerations related to the historical, sociopolitical, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, economic, and ability/disability experience of the community members. It is, however, more important with diverse populations to recognize the sociopolitical and historical context of the organizational effort because it may be inextricably connected to a community experience of marginalization in another social, political, or historical realm. Research with

these populations also requires knowledge of community organizing history, admission through gatekeepers, and development of trust (Gibbs & Bankhead-Greene, 1997).

Many of our most successful examples of community organizing in the United States are found in communities of color (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). Equity-building activities that occurred during the civil rights era and union organizing by farm workers are two clear examples. Black and brown people have frequently engaged successfully in collective action resulting in community empowerment.

Considerations for Organizing in Communities of Color

It is important for organizers in communities of color to be familiar with certain historical assumptions and current realities. Throughout much of the literature, there is an unacknowledged assumption of color blindness. More specific is the assumption that universal strategies and tactics may be applied when organizing diverse communities (Betten & Austin, 1990; Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Lubove, 1965; Rothman et al., 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2001; Warren, 1998). The focus on low-income status as a contributing factor to disempowerment in communities has resulted in an overemphasis on social class, along with inadequate attention to the particular and harmful consequences of racism (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). White activists have been caught in a double bind when organizing in communities of color, in that they are alternately seen as able to infuse the struggle into a larger (White) community and often are unable to be fully trusted because of their outsider status. Dissent by people of color has been viewed by the mainstream as a threat to the social order, in part because people of color in the United States remain engaged in an ongoing struggle to be recognized as fully human. Confrontational empowerment historically has been the most successful tactic employed by communities of color in the fight for social justice, where community members have relied on informal networks, the value of insider status, and adherence to hierarchical mobilization efforts. The following is an expanded discussion of concerns for organizing in communities of color.

1. Assumption of effective color-blind strategies and tactics. The history of community organizing is replete with the arrogant assumption that a single set of strategies and tactics can be wrapped around an infinite set of problems. This one-size-fits-all approach to organizing communities disrespects the unique challenges, triumphs, cultural values, and real and powerful experiences with oppression that create cohesion within and shape boundaries around a community.

2. Inadequate emphasis on the impact of racism in society. Historically, economic status and class struggle have been overemphasized with corresponding neglect of the significance of the deleterious impact of racism on people of color. Community organizers themselves are much to blame for framing this debate through a White middle-class view of capitalist society. The age-old debate among organizers regarding whether poverty or racism is the worst problem deflects attention from the intricacies of the interaction of the two (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). Race, class, and

gender are all significant; however, it remains reasonable to focus on race, as it continues to be a leading motivating factor not only for discrimination but for violence, hate crimes, exclusion, abuse, and incarceration.

3. Double bind for White activists. Historically, White middle-class liberal community organizers have been thought of by members of communities of color as engaging in a cathartic process of clearing their own consciences, particularly with regard to being undeserving beneficiaries of white skin and often economic privilege. These liberal, sometimes progressive thinkers may be well-intentioned organizers, but they are also ensnared in a double bind—carrying with them their own struggles, issues, and complexities, which may diminish their effectiveness as social change agents with culturally different populations. Although the authors strongly encourage White activists to stand up, comfortably and with a clear conscience and passionate heart, to counter injustices in communities of color, it is essential that they be aware of the often problematic legacy of historical cross-cultural organizing efforts and that they tailor strategies and tactics to honor those realities.

4. Democratic dissent as a threat to the social order. At the heart of the struggle for people of color has been a cry for their humanity to be fully recognized. In this nation, women, people of color, and the poor have historically been seen as not fully human—as not possessing the capacity, credibility, or worth to hold dissenting views. Marginalized people in the United States have thus always been engaged in an equity-building agenda that will ultimately admit them to full status in the human race as credible, capable, and worthy to be complete, vocal, and respected participants in civil society.

In the 1960s, a focus in organizing efforts was on teaching and sharing tactics. Of central import was a political and theoretical perspective that argued for recognition of the humanity of people of color, particularly young Black men. One common slogan adopted from Malcolm X was "by any means necessary." This militant approach served a dual purpose both to inspire other people of color to get in touch with the power they possessed and to create shock and awe in mainstream White society. Although many people, both Black and White, were alienated by this aspect of the movement, these images are some of the most potent, memorable, and powerful from the period.

5. Confrontational empowerment. The civil rights era's model of social justice organizing for people of color is rooted in a militant, public-protest framework. Actions such as public demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, and, in rare cases, a call to arms have challenged legal limits of the social order and created some fears and anxieties for all involved in this style of protest. Unfortunately, this legacy has alienated would-be activists who fear association with groups that could be considered lawless, groups that sometimes engage in illegal activity even if it is to challenge unjust laws. In addition, this style of confrontational empowerment has courageously relied heavily on an analysis of power, privilege, and the pathway to compromise.

6. Informal networks. Although all of community organizing might be thought of as occurring in loosely formed networks, diverse populations may have more

skepticism, resistance, and caution about formal organizing efforts, especially when initiated by an outsider or when providing material resources for some limited special segment of community members is a goal. For example, if an affordable housing campaign, marketed as helping the whole community, is in fact designed to benefit only a few investors, community activists will understand the marginal benefits to the community, but they may not want to erect barriers to a questionable project because it will at least provide a needed service to some community members. This reliance on and trust in loosely formed, informal, and kinship networks is related to the historical experiences of diverse communities, wherein a heightened degree of guardedness and reasonable suspicion of outsiders is warranted.

7. Insider status valued. Since the height of the civil rights era, the trust of outsiders has eroded among members of communities of color. This mistrust developed following widespread negative experiences with organizers who had their own unstated agendas. In the case of the environmental movement, mainstream environmental organizations, claiming to care about environmental racism, have narrowly defined environmental justice to focus on air, water, land, and pesticides and have actively excluded the race factor in location of these hazards, even though several studies conducted in communities of color since the late 1980s have found disproportionate amounts of toxic waste, polluted water, and environment-related public health concerns (Chang & Hwang, 2000). For example, before the South West Organizing Project (SWOP) began the environmental justice movement targeting environmental racism in New Mexico, mainstream environmental organizers would contribute to the problem by dispassionately and inaccurately advocating on behalf of communities of which they were not members (Calpotura & Wing, 2000). These more recent out-group activists sometimes acted as informants who posed as organizers but who were more interested in gathering intelligence to counter organizing efforts within communities of color. Some aimed to sabotage or dismantle plans from within community groups, as did segregationists in earlier periods, who were deceptively working to cause harm to communities under the guise of offering assistance. What emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s was increased emphasis on single-issue, single-race, single-gender, single-ethnic group organizing efforts because common cultural understanding, in-group membership, and a more intimate connection to the specific issue result in a deeper investment in both the process of organizing and the outcome. For example, a low-income Latina living in New Mexico may not have to worry about the *possibility* of toxic waste; she has to organize her neighborhood because the toxic dump is already there. Single-issue, single-group organizing efforts minimize need for suspicion of outsiders and may create greater solidarity.

8. People of color's hierarchical relation to community organizing. People of color are likely to become impassioned about issues central to increasing the value, equity, and quality of life for all people. Perhaps the reason people of color have been less likely to become involved in animal rights is because of this pragmatic sensibility that places human welfare first. People of color may desire a more hierarchical structure for mobilizing organizing campaigns. Such a model would have strong leadership, a clear outcome, and a shared vision. Consensus decision making and

participatory democracy would precede a more linear command structure to operationalize the plan. This model suggests that multiple demands on the lives of people of color in modern society may place value on efficiency in implementing an organizing plan.

Considerations for Organizing in an Evolving and Diverse Society

Community organization with diverse populations has evolved to cover many macro practice activities. These include community-based organization and corporate economic coalitions, community building through public social action, fact-finding for social planning, organizational development, and social justice demonstrations in the form of marches, sit-ins, and organized civil disobedience. In this section, we will discuss trends that may suggest changes needed in community organizing approaches as society is diversified through the introduction of new technologies, as some members of communities of color strengthen their economic base and attain greater socioeconomic status, and as tolerance for violence in society increases.

Hate Groups Flourish

Technology, in a number of ways, creates social and physical distance between individuals, organizations, and communities of color. There is the appearance of intimacy because of the sheer volume of electronic communication many receive; however, this substitute for face-to-face contact often leads to distortion in our perception of the world around us. Recent rapid technological advancement has paved the way for nonphysical communities to organize, exchange information, and spread messages anonymously. The emergence of the faceless virtual community can be witnessed in the fearless proliferation of Internet-based hate groups that advertise messages encouraging attacks of African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and gays and lesbians. Such technology is powerful in its ability to support racially motivated hate groups by offering them a faceless voice. The Internet has, therefore, become a vehicle for negative coalition building of conservative and neoconservative group members wishing to share ideas in private that they might not feel justified sharing openly in their physical communities.

Rise in Acceptable Injustices

With the increasing population of middle-class people of color has come a corresponding increase in physical isolation and a kind of apathy that could not be held when communities of color more typically lived in the same neighborhoods regardless of class status. The relocation of many middle-class people of color to the suburbs has created physical and social distance from their low-income counterparts, who have largely been left in urban centers. The result is fewer physical

boundaries for communities and a transformation to cultural communities that are organized around identity with reference to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This reality has changed the face of organizing in communities of color such that today's organizing efforts are less connected to physical place and more concerned with the politics of identity (Delgado, 1994). With the absence of physical boundaries to designate a community, we find fewer positions on which community members are able to interact enough to find agreement. As a result, there seems to be increased tolerance for "acceptable injustices." Small and large everyday hassles, annoying insults, and other racially motivated inconveniences are routinely tolerated. Injustices such as the disproportionately high rate of Black and Latino incarceration and inadequate police response in communities of color are accepted as endemic. Insufficient access to positions of power—for example, the disproportionately low rate of people of color who are top business executives and run successful large businesses—is seen as an intractable problem, firmly rooted in racism. These injustices are viewed by professionals of color as things that likely will not change in their lifetimes.

Independence Valued Above Interdependence

The American cultural promotion of radical individualism and its concomitant devaluing of interdependence are in stark contrast to the traditional cultural experiences of many people of color. This major difference in orientation to life can create cultural conflict as members of communities of color struggle to maintain their social and community responsibilities emphasizing interconnectedness while they increasingly have to accommodate to efficiency-based models in other aspects of their lives. Increasingly, they experience external cultural pressure to emphasize private benefit and independence over community advancement (Gibbs & Huang, 1989; Lum, 2003).

Violence as an Acceptable Means of Resolving Conflict

Violence in America as a whole, and even more so in some communities of color, is too often seen as an acceptable means of resolving conflict (Children's Defense Fund, 1995). This unfortunate reality disproportionately impacts people in communities of color, the same people who are discriminated against in our legal system (Adams, Onek, & Riker, 1998; American Civil Liberties Union, 1999; Davis, Estes, & Schiraldi, 1996; Koetting & Schiraldi, 1994; Males & Macallair, 2000; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000).

Ignorance or Amnesia? Current Issues in Organizing Diverse Communities

It is unclear if post-civil rights era generations are misinformed and uneducated about the historic challenges and hard-won advances of large-scale community organizing efforts, or if these struggles simply have been forgotten or ignored with

the lapse of time and distance from media coverage. Regardless, this dulling of memory has resulted in a complacency through which some people of color are willing to tolerate an inordinate number of acceptable injustices. Contemporary organizing efforts within oppressed populations are plagued by deception and disloyalty. For example, a large multiservice public-benefit organization in San Francisco, with an $8 million annual budget, received a substantial city grant to provide education about violence against women and self-protection for children of color. However, the funding was primarily used to cover the organization's existing overhead expenses. The case was complex; however, the agency was largely administered by and for low-income people of color during a time of dwindling government grants. Nevertheless, the targeted issue of violence against women and girls of color in this community went largely unaddressed because of a deceptive and disloyal use of funds.

Competing and conflicting alliances occur, often both inside and outside community organizing efforts. An example internal to an organizing effort would be the conflict that some low-income women of color feel about their economic advancement, which often facilitates their ability to move out of a community that they have helped transform into a healthier place. This phenomenon happened several times in the Girls After School Academy (GASA), a women's and girls' economic and social justice empowerment project located in a large public housing development in San Francisco. The organization provided weekend and after-school education support, tutorial services, and recreation and leadership training for girls; organized public forums and justice campaigns for the community; and offered training and testing for community mothers seeking high school equivalency diplomas. One conflicting effect of such a successful program is that talent can be drained from the community because as the most capable participants become more empowered and self-sufficient, they often move out of the community and disengage as a community resource. There are also many competing agendas outside of communities of color, such as the current resurgent conservative political agenda.

A nationwide deceptive backlash is under way in the United States, which aims to advance a conservative political agenda by using progressive key words and phrases such as civil rights, racial privacy, law and order, and increased educational opportunity (Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001). This backlash has a different and negative impact on communities of color. These efforts pander to fearful, conservative, uneducated, and older people, and even to average professionals who are too exhausted and overwhelmed by the demands of daily living (overcrowded cities, difficulty with transportation, challenges negotiating goods and services, high housing costs, and inadequate leisure time) to thoroughly investigate changing public policies, consider ballot initiatives, and think about how they might actively participate in civic life. Through convoluted media misinformation using progressive labels for regressive policies, an overall deceptive message has emerged that advances conservative causes (Armbruster, Geron, & Bonacich, 1995; Brimelow, 1995; Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001; Muller, 1997; Preston & Lai, 1998; Taqi-Eddin, Macallair, & Schiraldi, 1998). After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, we witnessed an emergence of nativist ideologies that were exploited by conservative politicians and spokespersons, who stretched the truth and used fear to aid in violating civil rights

and overstepping boundaries of protection, free speech, and privacy (O'Leary, 1999; O'Leary & Platt, 2002; Scraton, 2002; Thomas, 2002). In communities of color as diverse as South Central Los Angeles and emerging Southeast Asian immigrant communities in San Francisco, we are experiencing a wartime hysteria that supports public belief in very thinly veiled exaggeration. This tendency to stretch the truth is described in Daniel Ellsberg's new book, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers,* in which he concludes, "The President's men think they have a license to lie that never expires" (quoted in Mirsky, 2003, p. 46). This sentiment is nowhere more apparent than in conservative political leaders' pronouncements about communities of color.

Competing and conflicting alliances among ethnic group members on issues such as whether to support Rodney King or O. J. Simpson are resulting in perceived disloyalty and side-switching on issues, which compromises the potential efficacy of multiethnic, multiracial coalitions. As a consequence, issue-oriented coalition building has emerged among communities of color. For example, a select community group might get behind an effort that monitors police for racial profiling; however, that same watch group may not be able to unite in pressing for a better transportation infrastructure and clean air. These coalitions are fragile and dependent solely on the degree to which each represented community can benefit. The guiding principles in the new age of organizing are less dependent on what is the right thing to do and more a reflection of who will benefit the most.

Not Your Average Hippie's Struggle

An emerging theme in community organizing combines a rise in apathy, concerns about deception, and a neoconservative political agenda. Deceit takes advantage of elders, people who are uneducated, and middle-class citizens who advocate only for policies that offer private rather than public benefit. The neoconservative, covert assault on affirmative action, bilingual education, immigrants, the unemployed, people of color, and addicts puts a modern cloak on a vintage problem. The current conservative political agenda and the response to it will likely not follow a 1960s-style confrontational empowerment model. Response to political manipulation of capitalist values requires being prepared for cynical misrepresentations of public issues by neoconservative strategists, who routinely put a colored face, like that of Ward Connerly (the Black man who is a University of California Regent and the major sponsor of that state's Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action initiative, and Proposition 54, the so-called racial privacy initiative) or Linda Chavez (a Latina who has campaigned for anti-immigrant initiatives) on the latest conservative crusade. The new racist policies benefit the diminishing White majority and result in dwindling opportunity for all. Some of these regressive policies, such as Proposition 209, could result in sanctions through reduced federal support for state violation of federal equal opportunity mandates. Proposition 187, the so-called Save Our State Initiative, demonized immigrants and overstepped the boundaries of California's jurisdiction in its effort to set federal immigration policy (Gibbs & Bankhead, 2001).

An alarming trend related to individualism and privatization is disinterest and emotional distancing by middle-class people of color as well as Whites on issues that contribute to the strengthening of civil society and the common good. The not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) mentality has been widely adopted by middle-class would-be activists who in prior generations may have lent a hand to protesting social injustices. For example, during the 1960s, many people across racial lines committed to equity activism. However, during the 1990s, there was much less support for social action, particularly among the middle class and others not immediately impacted by particular injustices or social problems.

The aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, created and has maintained a vision of America under attack. This sparked in the American people an unexpected level of reactive patriotism, prompted by widespread fear that accompanied a long-delayed recognition of the vulnerability of this nation and the consequences of world domination (O'Leary & Platt, 2002). In this light, the emerging model that we propose for work with diverse populations in the 21st century is a mixture of uncommon sense and current realities of racial, ethnic, class, and sexual politics. There are two aspects of this paradigm. The first addresses cultural competence; the second explicates qualities of organizers that we believe are intimately related to organizing success.

The Cultural Incompetence Reality

Few issues in the recent history of social work and social work education, to say nothing of community organization, have generated as much difficulty and confusion as cultural competence. For individuals and organizations alike, cultural competence goals have become badges of honor. Unfortunately, the rhetoric of commitment is rarely matched by the reality of knowledge and sensitivities.

A bit of history is instructive here. In the face of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) structured meetings around the issues of diversity. One of the raging debates was whether a single course devoted exclusively to diversity was better than a commitment to address diversity questions throughout the social work curriculum. Over time, it became increasingly clear to people in the field and in the classroom that both were necessary, especially because it appeared that if either approach became primary, the other could be more easily ignored. (It is interesting to note that despite CSWE members' noble goals to address diversity, they often did not follow through in action; during meetings, White, Asian, African American, and Latino groups each had their own place to congregate.)

The current status of cultural competence and awareness in the field is hardly cause for celebration. Of the enormous number of problematic examples that might be cited, perhaps a simple one will suffice. A bilingual Latina student of one of the authors was placed with a small-town rural family agency serving a population that was about 55% primarily or exclusively Spanish-speaking. She was the only Spanish-speaking staff member in the agency. With instructor support and encouragement, she raised this issue with the agency. The response was the all-too-typical, "We would like to hire more bilingual staff, but we just can't find any."

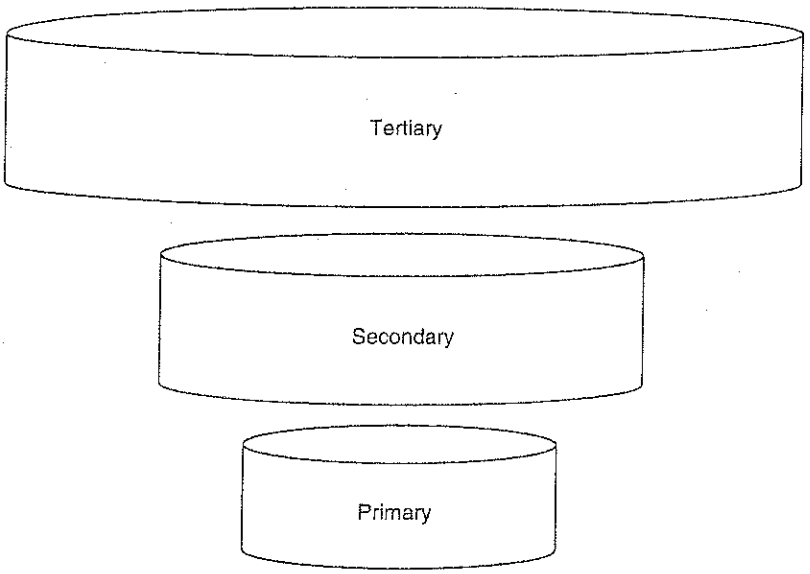

Figure 3.1 Contact Intensity and Patterns of Influence

NOTE: As the figure illustrates, primary intensity indicates greatest identification, possibility of influence, and connection to a specific community of color, while tertiary workers would not be members of that group but would be able to provide advocacy, perhaps technical assistance, and supportive influence in the broader community. The primary cylinder indicates the likelihood that workers having these primary connections will be fewer in number while the broader community will have a large number of social workers carrying out diverse functions.

an African American community, or a Turkish Muslim in an Afghani-American community would not qualify.

The secondary level requires a similarity of culture and experience but not language fluency (of course, the more language skill the better). Particularly when the organizing functions are likely to stress serving as a bridge between the organizing community and broader communities, this level of contact intensity seems viable. However, a sensitive and thorough awareness of community culture is necessary if the organizer is to be effective in helping to interpret the needs of the organizing community to the broader community, and interpreting the service perspectives of the broader community to the organizing community. Here the Puerto Rican, Haitian, and Turk described above might well have an important role.

The third or tertiary level would involve someone who is easily and clearly identified as an outsider working for the welfare of the community. Linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or racial similarity is not required. The brokerage, advocacy, and information-gathering and -dissemination functions would need to be especially significant. Technical skills in appropriate roles are highly desirable. Both dissimilar people of color (e.g., the Puerto Rican in an African American community) and Whites may be particularly effective at this level.

What if no people of color are available? The frequently heard lament, "What if no people of color are available?" in many parts of the United States is more an

justice. The issue of who can do what for whom under what circumstances is neither simple nor easy. There has been extensive documentation of indigenously led, successful organizing efforts in African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American communities (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). There is, however, no guarantee of success for people whose background is the same as or similar to that of community residents. As Rivera and Erlich (1998) note, by way of example, in certain Mexican American communities, there are conflicting loyalties to different leaders in Mexico's complex revolutionary history. Ignorance of this history or preconceived ideas about presumed identification with certain leaders can lead to awkward moments for an otherwise exceptionally sensitive Mexican American organizer. Likewise, many immigrants from Southeast Asia over the last few decades have arrived with long-standing political and social loyalties that put them in conflict with longer-term residents or newly arriving countrymen.

For a variety of complicated reasons, most community organizers and people teaching about community organization have been White males. Many of the teachers bring with them the organizing experience of the student, anti-war, and civil rights movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Liberal and radical alike, it is their credo and gut-level sense that White people can be effective organizers in communities of color. Freire (1994) talks about "naïve consciousness," or a tendency to take a romanticized view of intensely rewarding past events (like fighting the "good fight" for justice, brotherhood, and truth) and trying to force that view into the future without adequately taking account of not only the more subtle dimensions noted above, but also the racial and ethnic uniqueness of a particular population; differences in kinship structures, power, and subsystem patterns; and, perhaps most important, the development of critical consciousness and the process of empowerment.

For the authors, then, cultural competence in community organizing needs to be viewed differently than it might be in work with individuals, families, and small groups. Zuniga (2003) notes that workers in the latter context need knowledge of culturally relevant, community-based agencies and resources. For organizers, this is only one place for important investigation. Stopping at that depth, organizers risk being regarded as culturally incompetent. Both knowledge of and identification with the community must be addressed. Successful strategies and tactics depend on the nature and intensity of the contacts the organizer has with the community, as well as the constraints these contacts place on the organizer, no matter how much like the people in the community the organizer may be. Rivera and Erlich (1998) have developed a multi-tier model that we believe is useful in exploring both the meaning of cultural competence in organizing and the essential roles that can be played by culturally varied organizers. The authors have, it should be noted, taken some conceptual liberties with the model and altered it to meet their view of current political and social realities. Rivera and Erlich posit a three-tier design of "contact intensity and influence." The authors suggest the model might more properly be termed to encompass "contact intensity and patterns of influence" at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of community involvement (see Figure 3.1).

The primary level requires racial, cultural, and linguistic identity with the community. Thus, full ethnic solidarity with the community is needed for intimate entry at this level. A Puerto Rican in a Mexican American community, a Haitian in

Over the next 7 months of her placement, nothing more was said. Although there certainly is a lack of bilingual staff in the region, benign neglect is not likely to turn up possible recruits.

In an effort to contain costs and increase efficiency, the ideological commitment to cultural competence has been trumpeted while infrastructure to support it has been absent or starved for resources. A well-delivered annual 2-hour in-service on cultural competence cannot possibly keep a staff sharp in this arena. The illusion is maintained, inexpensively and with little challenge to the status quo. Consider the observations of Lecca, Quervalu, Nunes, and Gonzales (1998):

> Look . . . at the number of minority faculty in our institutions of higher learning, our research programs, and in the management and administration of both private and public entities . . . the numbers are dismal. (p. 254)

Surely, when social work practitioners and students look around them in most agencies, the underrepresentation of culturally relevant staff (in relation to the groups represented in the populations served), especially bilingual staff, is apparent. This representation is even more evident in top-level positions in a wide range of agencies. Unfortunately, this problem appears to be even more evident among organizers working in communities of color. The simple answer, "Well, I guess we're just going to have to use White organizers," is self-limiting. That is, although there are roles that White organizers can usefully play (as noted below), to deny the absolute necessity to recruit and train African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American organizers is to avoid one fundamental challenge of cultural competence.

The standard view of current cultural competence within social work, if such may be said to exist, is significantly based in the 2002 diversity standards of the CSWE's *Educational Policy and Accreditation.* As Lum (2003, p. 1) summarizes, curricula are expected to contain and/or encourage:

> Content that promotes understanding, affirmation, and respect for people from diverse backgrounds
>
> Content that emphasizes the interlocking and complex nature of culture and personal identity
>
> Social services that are culturally relevant and able to meet the needs of groups served
>
> Diversity within and between groups that may influence assessment, planning, intervention, and research
>
> Skills on how to define, design, and implement strategies for effective practice with persons of diverse backgrounds

For us, this is a place to initiate, not end a search for true cultural competence as it relates to working with communities of color. Our core objective must be empowerment. Much as we might prefer it otherwise, there is no way to go directly from sensitive awareness to equality-based, cross-cultural interaction and social

justice. The issue of who can do what for whom under what circumstances is neither simple nor easy. There has been extensive documentation of indigenously led, successful organizing efforts in African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American communities (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). There is, however, no guarantee of success for people whose background is the same as or similar to that of community residents. As Rivera and Erlich (1998) note, by way of example, in certain Mexican American communities, there are conflicting loyalties to different leaders in Mexico's complex revolutionary history. Ignorance of this history or preconceived ideas about presumed identification with certain leaders can lead to awkward moments for an otherwise exceptionally sensitive Mexican American organizer. Likewise, many immigrants from Southeast Asia over the last few decades have arrived with long-standing political and social loyalties that put them in conflict with longer-term residents or newly arriving countrymen.

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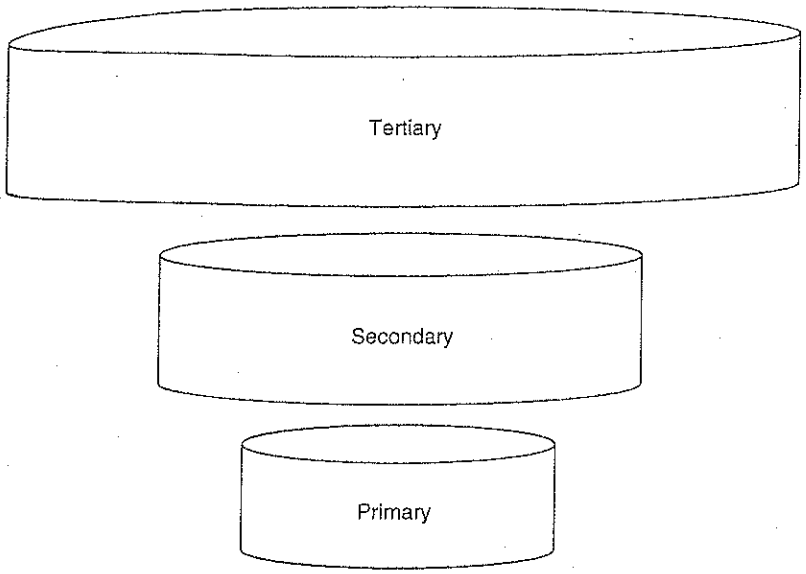

Figure 3.1 Contact Intensity and Patterns of Influence

NOTE: As the figure illustrates, primary intensity indicates greatest identification, possibility of influence, and connection to a specific community of color, while tertiary workers would not be members of that group but would be able to provide advocacy, perhaps technical assistance, and supportive influence in the broader community. The primary cylinder indicates the likelihood that workers having these primary connections will be fewer in number while the broader community will have a large number of social workers carrying out diverse functions.

an African American community, or a Turkish Muslim in an Afghani-American community would not qualify.

The secondary level requires a similarity of culture and experience but not language fluency (of course, the more language skill the better). Particularly when the organizing functions are likely to stress serving as a bridge between the organizing community and broader communities, this level of contact intensity seems viable. However, a sensitive and thorough awareness of community culture is necessary if the organizer is to be effective in helping to interpret the needs of the organizing community to the broader community, and interpreting the service perspectives of the broader community to the organizing community. Here the Puerto Rican, Haitian, and Turk described above might well have an important role.

The third or tertiary level would involve someone who is easily and clearly identified as an outsider working for the welfare of the community. Linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or racial similarity is not required. The brokerage, advocacy, and information-gathering and -dissemination functions would need to be especially significant. Technical skills in appropriate roles are highly desirable. Both dissimilar people of color (e.g., the Puerto Rican in an African American community) and Whites may be particularly effective at this level.

What if no people of color are available? The frequently heard lament, "What if no people of color are available?" in many parts of the United States is more an

excuse for avoiding serious recruitment efforts than a statement of absolute reality. There are, however, places in the country—many rural areas and some areas dominated by small cities or towns—where communities of color are currently very small in number, and often composed of newly arrived immigrants or migrants with little experience with English or with organizing. In these areas, organizers of color are often in short supply and are greatly needed. Academic programs in or near these places have a challenging balancing act to manage. On the one hand, social work academic programs need to educate their current students to provide needed and relevant services, programs, outreach, information, brokering, bridging, and advocacy for communities of color. On the other hand is the even greater professional responsibility to seriously strengthen recruitment and retention efforts and to provide financial and other resources for students of color. Of particular importance is to recruit, retain, and engage students from established and emerging communities of color in community practice so that they can take on the primary and secondary contact intensity roles requiring racial, cultural, and linguistic identity with the communities they serve, as well as the secondary roles of bridging between communities of color and the broader community. In our view, as long as Whites take on roles in which people of color are clearly to be preferred (as noted above), the efforts toward empowerment, self-determination, and local control will be blunted. Education in cultural competency is important for all students—but the greater the distance, the greater the risks of cultural incompetence. Communities of color are most likely to engage more quickly and more closely with workers who share their culture and concerns. The three-tier conceptualization of contact intensity and patterns of influence offers a partial guiding framework for organizer effectiveness.

Emerging Practice Model of Organizing in Diverse Communities

What should an organizer bring to the organizing task? The model we offer for work with diverse populations is about organizer qualities that we believe are intimately related to organizing success. Following the work of Rivera and Erlich (1998), we suggest certain qualities of sensitivity, knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and attributes that are most likely to lead to success. In a sense, our model is more of a statement of goals to be mutually explored between community and organizer than it is an expression of absolutes on which the fate of organizing efforts absolutely depends.

1. Similar Cultural and Racial Identification

There is no stronger identification with a community than truly being part of it. The most successful organizers, at least since the 1960s, are people who resemble the community in their own culture, race, language, and sexual identity. To some degree, this may also be true of the class identification of the organizer.

2. Familiarity With Traditions, Customs, Values, and Social Networks

A solid and thoughtful grounding in the traditions and customs of the community being organized is vital. This is particularly the case for people with racial, cultural, linguistic, and sexual (as appropriate) identification but who, like many graduate students, may have been away from their own communities for a significant period of time. One of the core problems is often generational and cultural. That is, younger, more formally educated organizers may find themselves at odds with community elders in a variety of ways. Elders may be much more conservative than the organizers and prefer discussion and various forms of mediation to confrontation and other forms of direct action. Respect for the elders' culture and traditions will go a long way toward reducing the likelihood of unnecessary struggles and battles. Patience with what G. K. Chesterton called "the thunder of the authority of human habit" is required. A typical issue is the dynamics of organized religion in the target community, and how that has changed in the recent past. Ignoring this area can put the organizer at perceived spiritual odds with the community in a way that can completely undermine an organizing effort.

3. Intimate Knowledge of Language and Group/Subgroup Slang

Although this is clearly related to the cultural dimensions already listed, we regard it as being of such importance that it requires specific attention. True understanding of the group or subgroup language style is indispensable when engaged with communities that are mono- or bilingual. Idiomatic expressions that are acceptable in some communities may be highly offensive in others. Terms with sexual overtones come immediately to mind. The pejorative way homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals are referred to in many Latino, Asian, and African American communities suggests another significant example.

4. Leadership Development and Style

Although organizers must be leaders to be effective, an essential part of that leadership is working with established and emerging leaders in an ongoing training process. Many individual attributes, such as roles, values, and political perspectives, need to be nourished and explored. A key for both organizers and community leaders is the respectful use of power, which often seems at odds with the disrespectful way power is expressed by nonindigenous leaders in relation to communities of color.

5. A Framework for Political and Economic Analysis

Although an analysis of the dynamics of oppression is desirable for community leaders, it is essential for organizers. This includes social class as well as structures of authority within the ethnic community and the systems of internal power (both

formal and informal). Without this framework, points of political leverage and access tend to remain obscure if not completely mysterious. What, also, are the sources of mediating influences between the local and wider communities? Understanding the economic status of the community is vital in appraising its roles and functions (however limited they may be) in the greater community. Kinds of employment and the extent of under- and unemployment are examples. One important aspect of this is for organizers to let the community know about their willingness to offer information about the interaction between the economics of the community and the broader economic and social systems.

6. Knowledge of Past Organizing Efforts and Plans for Sustainability

We believe it is imperative that organizers educate themselves about past organizing efforts (and their relative success or failure) in the communities in which they work. This information needs to be archived so that future organizers can have the benefit of it. Unfortunately, the tendency is for most community organizers to treat history as an impediment to action. Although we do not believe that those who ignore history are always doomed to repeat it, there is much to be learned from what worked and did not work in the past, especially if illuminating explanations can be found.

The organizer must make a commitment to communities of color that goes beyond the immediate and short-term goals of the present organizing effort. Too often, communities that have experienced an organizing campaign were left in the aftermath without support for much-needed additional organizing efforts. It is essential that a plan for sustainability be articulated so that community members have relative assurance that their efforts will have a long-lasting effect.

7. Skills in Empowerment Through Conscientization

Disenfranchised communities need to be supported in developing the kind of critical consciousness that can lead to empowerment. Problem solving without building power, as Alinsky (1971) so importantly noted, is likely to have limited medium- or long-term consequences. The consciousness that leads to power involves an understanding of personal experience and political processes and how they affect each other.

Emerging community power may take many additional forms. Developing trust between organizer and community, as well as mutual reliance on each other's commitment to change, is one important form of this power building. It is also to be seen in a special kind of love—of family, of community, of everyday life—that motivates organizer and community.

8. Skills in Assessing Community Psychology

With the recent proliferation of interest in and materials about diversity and cultural competence, there has been an unfortunate tendency to lock in on what

appear to be progressive concern stereotypes, as with the expectation of male dominance in certain Asian cultures. Although rooted in cultural traditions, these can be stereotypes nonetheless. On the other hand, ignoring information about traditional cultures can have equally deleterious consequences. The balance needs to be aimed at appraising what the community is as an organic entity. Is it growing, mature, or declining—or are different parts at different stages? Are there families that have roots extending back generations? Are there new arrivals or waves of recent arrivals? Does language serve as a cohesive force within the community or a divisive one? Is this an area of conflict between generations? Does the community feel somewhat frustrated and powerless? Has it lost (or won) a recent effort at community improvement? Is the sense that "you can't fight city hall" pervasive? Or is there anger focused on a particular problem or issue that can be a catalyst for mobilization?

9. Organizational Behavior and Decision Making

Although an understanding of organizational behavior is currently regarded as a necessity in training human service professionals, the views presented tend to be theoretical and conceptual rather than truly digging into the reality of the complex tangle created when people join together in organizations. This important understanding may apply equally to both the organizational targets of change and whatever kind of community-based organization is being created. Special attention needs to be drawn to how the established patterns of decision making impact organizational effectiveness and change. Problematic issues of the use and accumulation of dysfunctional personal power should not be ignored by organizers; nor should efforts to control dissemination of information for personal gain. Organizers have the responsibility to coach and assist group members in "keeping their eyes on the prize" and on the common good of the organization and the community.

Often disregarded are what Bachrach and Baratz (1970) call "decisionless decisions"—when nondecisions are actually decisions in terms of impact on decision-making processes. A frequent explanation is that "things just happen." Bachrach and Baratz (p. 247) suggest that nondecisions as decisions may be defined as

> a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced or kept covert; or killed before they can gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or, failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process.

10. Skills in Participatory and Evaluative Research

Communities of color have often been victimized by research that has defined their problems and needs without any significant community participation. Who, for example, should control the understanding and meaning of rates of teen pregnancy? Frequently, the data are used to support action that is politically expedient in the wider community or meets the operational needs of the most powerful service providers in the community. What is needed is an expanded role for

organizers in analyzing demographic data, population projections, and social problem specification. At the same time, a vital context for current research must explore the strengths and resilience of communities, which enable them to survive in the face of declining social, economic, and political bases, as well as open hostility from majority communities, restricted employment opportunities, and encroachment on civil rights and liberties. Crime, especially drug-related crime, must be addressed in this context. Participatory approaches to research, in which organizers and community members come together as equal partners, need to be sought.

Skills in evaluation research should become part of the organizer's tool kit. This includes both appraisal of programs intended to benefit the community, as well as assessment of the effectiveness of organizing strategies and tactics. This is also an area where groups of organizers from different communities can get together to share information and experiences that might reduce major mistakes and increase effectiveness. In this regard, full advantage needs to be taken of new technologies, particularly the Internet and specialized databases.

11. Proficiency in Management, Program Development, and Planning

Reasonable levels of expertise in these arenas are important to provide guidance for community-based organizations so they can function effectively and serve as a training ground for community members to prepare to take on administrative and managerial responsibilities inside and outside the community. Mentoring may turn out to be a much more important function than previously recognized.

12. A Strong and Flexible Vision of the Future

One important aspect of power building is belief in the possibility of a better future. Although it is often said that community activists must be optimists or they would quit in frustration, too often this adage is not effectively communicated to the community members with whom they work. Part of the problem is that most organizers feel they have to appear "tough" and skeptical to be credible, but that should not preclude a shared vision that things truly can get better. That sense of hope for transforming the future is part of what makes organizing possible.

Both for themselves and for the community, it is important that organizers have a view of what a stronger, healthier, more empowered place could look and feel like in the future for the people who live there. This means not a high-minded, simplistic laundry list of all the things that should be improved, but a clear and concrete vision of how, for example, safer streets might feel to the people who live on them, or what the old crack house might look like as an employment opportunity center. The vision must, however, remain flexible in the face of the ever-changing reality of community politics and the broad influences to which they are subject.

13. The Myth of Superorganizer

Where can one find the "superorganizer" who has all the characteristics and skills described in this list? It would be unreasonable to expect that one individual could excel in all these areas. Like models of strategy and tactics, this is a design to be worked with and modified as each situation requires. Perhaps most important is that organizers recognize that they may lack vital knowledge and skills and then work hard to obtain them for the community's benefit. Being a good organizer also means being willing to ask for help and being able to step aside in favor of someone who may bring more of what is needed to a particular situation.

Organizers must be keenly aware of their own limitations, especially in relation to handling frustration and high stress. The consequences of burnout are too well documented to require additional repetition, but even the strongest organizers must be prepared to catch themselves taking out their distress on the communities they are trying to serve. Care should be taken to provide for one's own rest and relaxation.

Finally, great care should be taken not to assume a position of "doing it for the community"—or to allow others to cast the organizer in this role. This can destroy or seriously limit the effort toward empowerment, as well as create an organizer who risks feeling "eaten alive." Organizers who withdraw from a community because they have put themselves in this position do a great disservice not only to themselves but also to communities whose reputation as a place where change can occur may be seriously compromised.

Conclusion

In our discussion, we have tried to illustrate that organizing in communities of color is not static but rather a complex, difficult, and always evolving practice that must flexibly meet the needs of the community of interest. Organizing in communities of color offers practitioners a moving target, where they must be concerned with history, biography, labor, and policy in response to rapidly shifting political, economic, and social conditions. To be effective, not only must organizers be compassionate, culturally competent, and aware of subtle cultural as well as racial differences, stereotypes, and the legacy of historic organizing efforts, but also they must critically assess their relationship to power, the future vision of the community of interest, and the long-term meaning of the work. They must also articulate why community members should trust them and invest time and talents in the organizing effort. It is essential in this organizing process that people of color are not blamed, even inadvertently, for circumstances beyond their control, for their values and attitudes, or for simply being themselves. All too often, low-income people of color who seek assistance are put in the position of feeling they must begin by apologizing for who they are. We believe that it is part of the mission of social work to truly preserve human dignity by affirming people with the skins they are in.

Community organizing with people of color is at a crossroads. The aftermath of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, tight budgetary constraints, increasing

political polarization and cultural conflicts highlighted in the media support a broad political dominance of right-wing ideology. The resulting racial tensions are very much part of our daily lives, and little resolution is in sight. In this context, the question of appropriate roles for White people in organizing communities of color takes on special meaning.

Clearly, people of color and White people must work together to challenge the oppression of people of color, or what Garland (2003), in relation to imprisonment, has aptly termed "the culture of control." Yet, in many ways, the powerful social movement toward individualism deems this scenario less likely now than at any time since the 1960s. So in a period where profound racial tensions are boiling just below the surface, as well as out in the open, there is an urgent need to fill leadership roles in community organizing with people who have the closest possible "contact intensity" in relation to communities of interest. Most often, this will mean people of color who are primary or secondary participants in these communities as we have suggested. The challenge to encourage and assist people of color in taking leadership roles in their own communities is intense. Vitally important is to inspire White people to be engaged in the struggle and to genuinely value their efforts in standing up for the concerns of communities of color, even though they are playing supporting roles. For the future of our struggling communities of color, we can do no less.

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