Michael Miller, "Beyond the Politics of Place": A Critical Review

Table of Contents (click on the section you want to read or browse down through the paper, as you prefer)

Introduction

Gary Delgado's "Beyond The Politics of Place" is an argument for a certain kind of community organizing, a criticism of "traditional CO" and an appeal to foundations to fund the former.

There is, Delgado would have us believe, a new kind of organizing that is emerging. It is independent of the organizing networks that developed in one way or another from the work begun in the late 1930s by Saul Alinsky. The new organizing is multi-ethnic and racial. It emphasizes race as a central category for understanding oppression. It has a perspective that is far broader than that of the organizing rooted in the Alinsky tradition. Its organizers behave differently from the organizers of "traditional CO." This new organizing addresses concerns that the old organizing did not or could not, including those having to do with the workplace, immigrants, race and others. It recognizes the importance of identity and culture for organizing.

Delgado contrasts the new organizing to "traditional CO" which was limited to organizing people in neighborhoods. According to Delgado, this old organizing was "nonideological and pragmatic." It ignored central issues of race and racism, as well as other identity-related concerns. As the context for organizing has

changed, this old organizing has lost much of whatever relevance it may once have had. The global economy has limited what local organizing can accomplish. The resources are no longer available in local governments to address many of the problems that the old community organizing could address. While identifying various accomplishments of the old organizing, Delgado thinks that the new community organizing is more promising as a vehicle to address social justice issues in communities of color, and that it deserves the support of foundations.

The following critical review disputes Delgado on his central thesis. To put it bluntly, I believe he is fundamentally in error. It identifies errors of omission and commission in his report. It argues that in trying to be both a statement to funders for support for his kind of organizing and a report that gives its readers a "better understanding (of) the types of activities and strategies that comprise CO; the history of the field, its achievements, limitations and needs, and ways in which donors concerned with communities of color and social justice issues might be supportive of CO," it fails at both.

1. "Beyond The Politics of Place": A Critical Review

Gary Delgado is one of a small number of former organizers who write about the subject with the benefit of experience. His work has the evidence of someone who toiled in the vine-yards and has taken time to reflect on the experience. It is worth reading and taking seriously.

It took me a while to finally write this commentary. There are enough topics for criticism in the world of the status quo, so why engage in an argument with a colleague? Delgado's essay has influenced the thinking of a number of people whose understanding of organizing is important to the work. I have, on several occasions, responded to it in conversations with funders. But that is always a tricky enterprise, running the risk of "bad mouthing" someone else's work. Since I have no problem saying what I have to say to whomever wants to listen, I decided it would be worth publishing these thoughts. Further, since there is little public discussion about organizing among organizers and their allies. I thought this might help clarify thinking in the field. Finally, one of the things Delgado argues for in his essay is the creation of forums for organizer discussion. Maybe this will contribute to that end.

Finally, in this personal dimension, Gary and I have been allies more often than not in an economic, political and social environment that is increasingly destructive of personhood, community and the environment. I hope I have conducted this criticism in a manner that will foster rather than diminish future efforts to work together.

My review is largely an "exposition of the text," an effort to follow, review, elaborate, correct, challenge and otherwise comment on what the author has already written. Thus it benefits from the text, climbing, as it were, on its shoulders. Quotations are from Delgado's piece unless otherwise noted, and are in bold type. Numbers in parentheses are the pages in his work. This kind of exposition requires attention to detail, for it is in the detail that God (or the devil) is to be found. The reader is encouraged to "follow along" in the original which can be ordered from the Applied Research Center in Oakland, CA.(a)

The title, "Beyond The Politics of Place," suggests an idea of organizing as limited to something called "the neighborhood group" which Delgado contrasts with "organizations based on identity and interest." (Page 7.) It is a contrast commonly used these days, and one I will dispute. I think this core conceptual framework of Delgado's essay is in error. At its core, this review is about how and why people act against injustice. Organizing is the only approach in which the people who themselves are unjustly treated come together to act in their own behalf. I believe no question is more important today than this one.

"Executive Summary" (Page 9)

The "Executive Summary" equates "Alinskyism" with the community organizing movement (Page 9). Alinsky's tactics have been widely copied, but the underlying principles and philosophy have been often neglected. So much so that in an early-'60s memo to his Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) staff (at the time about ten people), Alinsky said they shouldn't worry about his current popularity because, as with funding (and other) fads, it would soon pass. Many people in the mid-1960s and into the '70s called themselves "organizers" and mobilized (or at least tried to) large numbers of low- to moderate-income, typically minority, people to take action on issues adversely affecting them. But that was not what Alinsky was about; he and his associates had an interest in building units of permanent power, rooted in local communities, led by and accountable to local people. The unit that was built had dimensions of meaning for its participants that went far beyond specific issue victories--precisely those meanings which are rooted in, among other things, race and ethnicity.

"(M)ost of the organizing efforts (of interest to Delgado) in communities of color were developed separately from the major CO (community organizing) networks and from each other...(and) in most instances they were developed not to build power but to respond to particular forms of racial oppression...(Pg 11)" This formulation creates a peculiar juxtaposition. Did these efforts develop to respond to oppression powerlessly? Did they seek to define identity separate from the power to pursue interests? Many cultural groups do this, but are generally not grouped under the heading "community organizing." Does Delgado want to include them? Were these groups interested only in winning a single-issue? If so, this isn't anything new. Most local efforts are without the initial involvement of professional organizers.

Alinsky's "quintessential organizer was hard-nosed, pragmatic, non ideological, and usually white and male. The basic assumption in the Alinsky approach was that the organizer did not share the class, race, gender or cultural background of the organization's members" (11). Alinsky's inability to recruit organizers of color was a fact not an assumption--and a fact with which he struggled. In the major black community organizations with which he worked in the 1960s, the initial white organizer was generally succeeded by a black organizer (true in Rochester, Buffalo, Chicago's Woodlawn and Kansas City). Because his initial organizers were sociological strangers, they had to be especially careful not to give any impression of being spokespersons for a constituency in which they worked. But does Delgado think that African-American Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood is less interested in teaching, analysis, advocacy and being a spokesperson for his constituency (categories on page 11) than one of the "new kinds of organizers" he presents? Youngblood is the leader of a contemporary Alinsky-tradition organization. Does he think the organizer who works with Youngblood is uninterested in this? An ideal of many organizers coming from this tradition was (and is) to train as an organizer someone arising from among people with whom he or she is working. Past and contemporary failures to accomplish this ideal should be analyzed; they weren't (and aren't) "an assumption."

"Revitalization of cultural pride" is another dimension of Delgado's "new" organizing. Every major black community organization I know associated with Alinsky and his successors incorporates dimensions of cultural pride. From The Woodlawn Organization, whose slogan was "self-determination through community power" and whose local occasional newspaper wrote favorably about Malcolm X, to Rochester's Minister Florence who was associated with Malcolm X, to the current crop of predominantly black organizations associated with the IAF and other networks there is an interest in cultural identity and pride. There are, however, differences. Some of these organizations are not homogeneously made up of one group. If particular organizations are, they also see themselves as part of something larger. And, the African-Americans or Latinos or Asians within them may not be of one particular mind as to how their identity is to be celebrated. Thus they have to struggle with how particular identities may be celebrated in a context of wider unity. How that is done is a question to which I will return. That some organizers seek a common denominator so low as to exclude very important issues of race and gender is no doubt the case -- and Delgado is correct to identify this problem. But others, working in the same "model," don't have this problem.

Discussing "CO's Major Accomplishments" (12), Delgado tells us there are "over 6,000 community organizations in operation in the U.S." His list of accomplishments includes: development of sophisticated

leaders, of national networks that have mounted successful issue campaigns, replicable models, opportunities for new communities of interest to develop independent organizations representing their interests and a redress of the balance of power (and organizations that) "put the dispossessed 'at the table' with bankers, planners, and politicians."(13)

The problem with this discussion is that it fails to distinguish between the various kinds of "community organizations." A small number of these organizatians "put the disposed 'at the table'..." Only by including block club associations, single-issue organizations, other identity or interest groups (tenant, youth, homeowner, small business, age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc) and merging them with the broadly-based community organizations historically identified with Alinsky can his number of 6,000 be derived. The category is so broad that it makes the task of distinguishing its members from any other kind of voluntary association almost impossible. The problem of the 6,000 is further confused by Delgado's description of their budgets and staff. "The average staff size for a local community organization is 4 people, and budgets average in the $120-160,000 range."(13) I don't know where he's been, but I would have trouble identifying 600 local community organizations that have 4 staff and that budget -- unless the count includes service, single-issue, advocacy and community development groups. If Delgado is no longer talking about the 6,000, then what sub-group is he talking about?

The discussion of "CO's Limitations" is similarly puzzling. "Fragmentation within the CO movement has made it very difficult for local organizers and leaders not connected to a major network to be aware of, much less capitalize on, local victories or innovative strategies..." Is this a problem being "aware"? National Peoples' Action, one of the Delgado identified networks, is open to almost anyone who wants to be part of it. Citizen Action, another of the networks, is open to a wide range of groups. Do independent groups not join because they aren't aware? Or, might it be the case that many people prefer "independence..." or, put in a more negative light, would rather be big fish in a small pond? That is not a problem of "no coordinated CO infrastructure..." Rather, it is some combination of the frailty of human egos and the nature of politics. To use ideas of fragmentation and lack of coordination implies that the problem could be solved if only there were some rational planning process to solve it. (By stating the problem in this way, Delgado sets the stage for the heightened role he wants "intermediaries" to play.) His excellent point about the absence of forums in which differences can be explored, practice reviewed and theory discussed gets lost in the language of social planning.

Having defined the old organizing as "the neighborhood group" which ignored identities, Delgado then turns the definition into analysis and prescription. "The movement does not adequately address issues of race and gender. Locked in the old paradigm of the neighborhood group, traditional CO runs the risk of replicating the same power relations as the dominant society in terms of race, gender, and sexual orientation." Here are problem, analysis and solution. They need to be separated as follows: (1) Problem. The movement does not adequately address issues of race and gender. It runs the risk of replicating the same power relations as the dominant society... (2) Analysis. This weakness is because traditional CO is locked in the old paradigm of the neighborhood group. (3) Solution: Development of a new kind of organization--the identity groups Delgado wants to support with their new forms and relationships between organizers, leaders and members. I agree on the problem but disagree on the analysis and solution. In fact, "traditional CO" is, and has been, paying attention to the problem -- in part because Delgado (and others) have agitated around these questions.

"Roots of the CO Movement" (Page 19.)

Delgado accurately locates the "roots of modern community organizing (CO) (19)" in the work of "the indomitable Saul David Alinsky who advocated a reason for organizing that extended beyond the mere leveraging of additional goods and services: building organizations of poor people that could challenge the existing balance of power (19)." He identifies these "key elements in Alinskyism: (a) involvement of large numbers of people; (b) indigenous leadership with clearly distinct professional staff; (c) building power for

the newly organized constituency, and; (d) an approach...grounded less in a set ideology than in the application of proven techniques to specific problems. (20)" The organization "is to be 'non ideological and pragmatic'." (20, 21) The fundamental problem with Delgado's paper lies in his understanding of what Alinsky was about -- a misunderstanding that came to be shared both by some who claimed to follow Alinsky as well as others who were his detractors and critics.

According to Delgado, Alinsky sees the organizer as a "catalyst. It is his or her job to develop the leadership capacity of local people to articulate the interests of their constituency." This definition is partial. Alinsky's organizer was not available to any group of powerless people who wanted to "articulate the interests of their constituency." A group that wanted to articulate what Alinsky considered anti-democratic approaches -- like racial segregation -- would not get his support. Alinsky explicitly said, "the organizer is not a blank blotter" who goes into a community as little more than a facilitator or enabler. He is, Alinsky said, "an extraordinary teacher" who teaches values, democratic philosophy, strategy and tactics.

Delgado deepens the error when he characterizes the organization as "non ideological and pragmatic" (21) quoting from an unidentified source but implying the quote is directly, and in context, from Alinsky. "By this," Delgado says in elaboration, "Alinsky meant that the organization would originate out of the needs, interests, and issues of local people" (21). Does this mean that "ideological organizing" would, in contrast, originate out of the needs, interests, and issues of someone else? If so, who? If not, then how are the two different in this context? The error is compounded: "(Alinsky's) approach was grounded less in a set ideology than in the application of proven techniques to specific problems." What is a "set ideology?" Is it distinct from an "unset ideology?" Alinsky was grounded in "set values," which he considered the bottom line of everything he did. He summarized them as those found in Judeo-Christian ethics, the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Since the "mass organizations" Alinsky sought to build were grounded in these values, it was the goal of his "application of proven techniques to specific problems" to build organizations that could bring the United States closer to living out those values in practice. In these values, Alinsky found enough ideology. If critics think more is needed, then what are they talking about? Indeed, these values have been the basis of all the revolutionary movements of the last three centuries -- contextualized, obviously, in the particular cultural and national group making the revolution. By the 1960s, Alinsky had become impatient with criticism from the new left which alleged he was a mere pragmatist with no ideology. Despite his ample writings on the subject of democracy, the criticism continued. Alinsky's ego compounded the problem, contributing to his failure to have much impact on the 1960s student movement .

More fundamentally, what does it mean to be "non ideological and pragmatic?" (21) The question of ideology is a perplexing one when it comes from organizers. Rarely do people specify what they mean by "ideology," but let me suggest four elements to the idea: values, analysis, constituency and agency of change. Alinsky clearly situated himself as a "d" democrat committed to liberty, equality and justice for all. And he was specifically committed to the defense of particular communities -- so long as they did not discriminate against others or use their power to oppress others. His general analysis, made abundantly clear in numerous writings, speeches and workshops, was that as long as people were powerless they would be exploited, discriminated against, oppressed and abused. He argued that power gravitated to two poles: organized money and organized people. His life work was to organize large numbers of powerless, or relatively powerless, people so they could negotiate with organized money and its political representatives. Rather than speaking in behalf of others, Alinsky thought that it was those people who were themselves the powerless who had to become actors in their own behalf. Thus there was no separation between constituency and advocate; it was the indigenous leadership of the constituency who were to speak. Lastly, Alinsky identified the agency of change -- it was the "mass organization" and the professional organizer who brought it into being.

In order to exercise power, Alinsky thought that mass organizations should bring under one umbrella all the groups which comprised an oppressed community. He was explicit in identifying them: churches, civic clubs, mutual aid groups, sororal and fraternal organizations, youth and senior groups, athletic clubs, neighborhood merchant associations, unions (though in his later years he thought most of them had become too much part

of the establishment to be involved) and anyone else with a base in the community who could be pulled together. To the extent that some people would be voiceless in such a configuration, the job of the organizer was to help them develop their own organizations. For example, in his mid-'60s work in black communities, organizers were assigned to develop welfare rights groups, tenant associations in both private and public housing and block clubs. In this sense of seeking to include within an organization the diversity of the constituency for which it sought to speak, Alinsky could be said to have a "model," and it is to the idea of "model" that Delgado turns.

"The first significant variation on Alinsky's model was developed by Fred Ross Sr...(It was) a direct membership organization... A systems man, Ross brought a new kind of thinking to community organizing. He believed in starting 'where the people were,' and his organizing approaches reflected well-thought-through methods for building, expanding, maintaining, and funding community organizations. His innovations include:...a community-building strategy that would tie people together in new ways in an environment where pre- existing networks are weak." In particular, Delgado notes such mutual aid groups as food- and gas-buying clubs "to build social cohesion. These structures formed the base for more militant, direct-action groups."

"Alinsky's organizations were made up of existing groups...Ross developed organizational formations that relied on individual recruitment (because) many poor Latinos were not represented in existing organizations. Ross's methodology for systematic recruitment was the house meeting...The technology for the development of direct membership and small group process was later used by George Wiley and other organizers to build the National Welfare Rights Organization."

Finally, "Ross understood that many battles of the poor could only be won with the support of other, often unorganized, constituencies...He was instrumental in developing...an organizational structure...which could be operated by small staffs with meager resources." The example is the boycott committees developed by the United Farm Workers. (21, 22, 23)

Multiple problems again emerge when the text is scrutinized. Ross did, indeed, develop a direct membership organization. He did it, he said, because at the time he began his work with Mexican-Americans, the Catholic Church in Southern California was dominated by conservative Anglos. Ross could not get access to those with whom he wanted to work through the Church's formal structure. He told me he talked with Alinsky about it, and Alinsky agreed with him. Alinsky later distanced himself from Ross' approach, and omitted from his story-telling any agreement he might have made at the time with Ross. I tend to believe Ross because he had fewer ego needs to re-write history. But beyond this difference, there was little to distinguish what Ross was doing from what Alinsky did. In the mid-'60s, Alinsky and Ross worked together in a project initiated by Professor Warren Haggstrom at the University of Syracuse. Evidently they didn't think there were vast differences between them.

Because George Wiley and others used the technology of the house meeting tells us little about whether or not they were building power. Tupperware uses house meetings to sell its goods and many churches use them for Bible studies. Parenthetically, the house meeting is now widely used by IAF organizers as part of building institutionally-based organizations.

By calling Ross a "systems man" are we to conclude that Alinsky wasn't? If not, then what is meant? Alinsky saw the problems of the poor as interrelated and embedded in the socio-economic structure, and consistently criticized piecemeal attempts to solve them with narrow programs or single-issue approaches. The reader is left to her or his own devices to figure it out what Delgado means. Nor did Ross differ from Alinsky with regard to "starting where the people are" unless if by this one means that anyone who is any kind of existing leader in a community is neither one of the people nor in touch with "the people." Ample writing from Alinsky, Nick von Hoffman and others makes clear that the issues of the community are learned by listening to the people -- not by being imposed by organizers. Nor do mutual aid activities to "build social cohesion"

distinguish the two. In the urban work of Alinsky and his associates in the mid-west and east, there were already existing burial societies and other mutual aid organizations in the communities with which they worked. Ross organized mutual aid activities as a transmission belt into an action organization; Alinsky didn't need to. Nor does the development of support or ally groups clearly distinguish the two. The Farm Workers used students and farm workers to organize boycott committees, but it quite carefully followed the protocols of local labor councils and touched base with existing unions wherever it went; it did the same thing with other community organizations as well. "Friends of FIGHT" supported the Rochester black community's organization in its struggle with KODAK over jobs. Denominational agencies, leaders and seminarians were enlisted as allies in the FIGHT-KODAK struggle.

Alinsky made serious mistakes, and he would have been the last (yes, last) person to admit them. He didn't think Chavez could organize farmworkers. He was wrong. He didn't think the boycott could work. He was wrong. But these are not ideological questions. They are questions of political judgment.

What we are left with is a distinction of organizational form: the organization of organizations versus the direct membership organization. Much is made of this distinction these days, and I will return to it when I discuss the typology later developed in Delgado's book.

"Red-baiting and cold war repression kept Alinsky's approach in the political background until his organizing methods were profiled as a viable alternative to urban riots in Fortune editor Charles Silberman's 1964 book, *Crisis in Black and White*. Viewed by many civil rights advocates as a less threatening organizational alternative...Alinskyism had arrived -- just in time to take advantage of a set of conditions which made the impetus toward community organizing all the more potent." (23)

Throughout the '50s, Alinsky was building support for his work in Catholic Dioceses and agencies and in many mainline Protestant denominations. Isolated from most of the labor movement which had expelled its radicals, Alinsky turned his attention to religious bodies. He already had strong support from key Catholics in the progressive wing of the American church, ranging from Bishops to pastors and parish lay leaders and including many in such national organizations as the Catholic Committee for Urban Ministry and the National Conference of Catholic Charities. Successful work to win support from Protestants was going on throughout the '50s. By the late '50s-early '60s, Alinsky was obtaining funds from national agencies of the Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Church of Christ and other Protestant groups. In fact, soon after Silberman's book, Alinsky's influence began to wane, not "arrive," because of the rise of black power. Unlikely alliances of black militants and white conservatives began to block Alinsky's access to church funds and bitter struggles took place between black power advocates and Alinsky. Were these civil rights advocates "a (more) threatening organizational alter-native?" History would suggest otherwise. Their strategies of reliance on government money for organizing, electoral and single issue politics, use of officially mandated citizen participation mechanisms as a means to "empower" their communities (war on poverty, model cities, "community control," Law Enforcement Administration Act, various titles of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act, mental health centers and others) have left little behind. Most of their organizations no longer exist. Most of the politicians elected from their base have had little impact on the growing crisis of America's poor, particularly those of color. As these strategies began to fail, the civil rights movement began to divide into self-help/economic development, "Black capitalism," separatist, nationalist, Marxist, electoral politics in the Democratic Party and other factions and consumed itself with internecine battles.

In part, some of Alinsky's antagonism was a rationalization for his own failure to work out training relationships with CORE, SCLC AND SNCC -- the major new civil rights voices of the time -- though efforts were made in that direction. SCLC's Ralph Abernathy became a member of Alinsky's Board of Directors, and brief conversations went on between him and then-SNCC Chairman Stokely Carmichael. (Alinsky similarly failed to work anything out with the white northern student movement though he hired Staughton Lynd, one of its key figures, to be part of the training institute he started in 1968.)

In the period soon after 1964, Alinsky was largely defeated in his efforts to make an impact on the emerging black movement and to expand his base of support in the churches. Only with the development of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development could it be said that major steps forward were taken by his work. To respond to some of his critics, Alinsky began to talk about "Uncle Talk Toughs," but few were listening. Later he said black power would pass. It was, he said, "like Picasso's blue period." After an abortive effort to work with Sargeant Shriver and the Office of Economic Opportunity in Syracuse, Alinsky called the War On Poverty "political pornography." Indeed, the various government programs combined with the electoral strategy adopted at the time did lead to major changes in who held local governmental offices and who administered various government programs. Blacks, and to a lesser extent Latinos, replaced whites, often "white ethnics." But as they did, the resources to respond to the growing problems of the cities began to disappear as the middle class movement to the suburbs accelerated, many employers pulled up central city stakes and left and national politics turned in more conservative directions. We should have African-Americans, Latinos, women and others historically excluded from public office filling the positions of government. So should they be in all positions in the private and nonprofit sector. So should there be programs to recruit, train and promote people of color, women and others historically excluded from important dimensions of American life. But Delgado is interested in more than that.

The southern civil rights movement decisively broke the walls of legal segregation. In the north, housing and job discrimination was sufficiently challenged to make possible the rise of a new black lower-middle and middle-class. These were historic advances, but they left more fundamental problems of poverty, powerless and the growing concentration of power in American society relatively untouched.

"CO practice...argues that the people should speak for themselves, that the very process of doing so is empowering, and that this process of empowerment is as important as victory on a particular issue" (25). Here Delgado captures one aspect of community organizing and clearly distinguishes it from advocates and advocacy organizations which "might seek to win an issue...in which those affected would have limited capacity to participate, except as witnesses or parties to the litigation." He is right on target. But people speaking for themselves is only one aspect. Perhaps this is the crucial point. Empowerment and power are not the same thing. People may feel powerful if they demonstrate against an injustice. There is nothing like the heady experience of a militant demonstration, fiery speeches denouncing one's oppressors and perhaps a dramatic confrontation with the Tactical Squad of the local police department. That feeling, though, doesn't mean the demonstrators have the power to change the source of their oppression. To do that requires powerful organizations. We can tell if an organization has power by two simple measures. First, at what level in the power structure can it obtain a meeting? (Does it meet with: Police-Community Relations, for example, or with the Precinct Captain or Police Chief? The Affirmative Action Officer or the CEO of a major business enterprise? The Mayor or his Community Relations staff?) The ability to obtain and sustain such meetings is a sign of respect. Once in such meetings, representatives of the oppressed, discriminated against, marginalized, etc. can make proposals. There are counter proposals. Negotiations follow. Agreements are reached. More organizing takes place. The base of the organization expands. New proposals, getting at more recalcitrant problems, are made. The process continues. The second measure of power has to do with the proposals made once at the table. Do they get at more fundamental sources of the problems that led to organizing in the first place? Do they contribute to greater equality? Do they shift decision-making prerogatives from unaccountable hierarchies to more democratic and accountable mechanisms? Groups interested in building power use early, easy victories to build their strength to deal with more recalcitrant problems. As the '60s civil rights movement song put it, "Freedom is a constant struggle."

Ironically, organizations Delgado identifies as in the "new" organizing stream are often groups made up of activists speaking in behalf of someone else. Many of the worker rights organizations are of exactly this character. I visited one of those identified in Delgado's paper. They do wonderful work, but the affected workers are absentee members--paying dues, receiving benefits and only sporadically involved in the direction of the organization. In its ten years of operation, the organization's membership base has remained

relatively small. I was told by a principal staff member that workers in the sweatshops of the garment industry and in the neighborhood's restaurants didn't join, "because they are afraid of losing their jobs, being physically beaten or worse." This is often the heart of the organizing problem: to break through fear. It is relatively easy for foundation-funded liberal, progressive or radical advocates to speak for the oppressed, demonstrate against injustices visited upon them or file lawsuits in their behalf. As Delgado knows, it is much more difficult to get the oppressed to speak in their own behalf. It is, therefore, doubly unfortunate that his paper obscures these important distinctions.

"The Community Organizing Networks" (28)

Delgado develops a typology of community organizations, linking them to the various community organizing networks that have emerged in the last 25 years, as well as to the now over-55 year old Industrial Areas Foundation. In the first of a series of tables, he identifies three types -- direct membership, (permanent) coalitions and institutionally-based organizing; describes them; and looks at how each type operates in relation to tactics, constituency, change strategy, staff's role, decision making, sphere of influence and resource base. Finally, he notes advantages and disadvantages of each. It is no small accomplishment to develop typologies; therefore, this first foray is to be applauded. But it has serious problems as well. For example, the "constituency" of the direct membership organizations is "low/moderate income individuals." Coalitions' constituencies are "already organized public interest groups, unions, senior citizen organizations." Institutionally-based groups are comprised of "motivated members of religious institutions, including clergy." This description mixes apples, onions and oranges. Who are the people in the religious institutions? They tend to be low-, moderate- and middle-income individuals. Who are the people in the unions and senior citizen organizations? The same. To the extent that direct membership organizations reach unaffiliated people, that is an important distinction of constituency. To the extent that direct membership organizations involve people already in churches, parent groups or other associations, then the story is different -- but important as well. To the extent that their constituency is people who are more likely to be welfare recipients and unemployed as distinct from working poor or those higher on the income scale, that is important as well. The typology lacks the nuances to get at crucial distinctions.

In "change strategy," there are parallel problems. For example, the direct membership organization provides a "balance of power for its members," while the institutionally based organization "can powerfully articulate and represent the self-interests of their constituency." Does the former not operate on the self-interests of its members? Typologies require comparison on the same variables; we can't compare because we are told about different things. A similar problem exists in the discussion of "Staff's role" and "Decision-Making." In direct membership organizations, the staff is to "build the basic organization and develop indigenous leaders." But these leaders are somehow absent in "Decision-Making" where the "organizer frames and develops issues. The members choose issues that the group works on." (Where are the leaders?) This passive role is contradicted under "advantages." In direct membership groups indigenous people "play key roles in issue campaigns and are able to develop their analytical prowess." How do they do this if they don't "frame and develop issues"? Of permanent coalitions Delgado says, "staff frames and chooses issues, strategies and tactics." I doubt that elected union leaders in any coalition are uninvolved in the selection of issues, strategies and even major tactics. This lack of comparability continues in "sphere of influence": direct membership organizations, when in networks, "can be a formidable force in multi-state campaigns." But coalitions are "most effective...at the state and citywide level," while institutionally-based organizing groups "become significant 'players' in the local political landscape." National Peoples Action (NPA), a coalition, played a significant role in national anti-redlining campaigns. The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a direct membership organization, plays a similar role. Txas Interfaith, a grouping of IAF's organizations in that state, plays a significant role in statewide campaigns it undertakes and is taken into account by statewide politicians. The Pacific Institute for Community Organizing's (PICO) Louisiana and California groups are now moving at the statewide level.

The discussion of advantages and disadvantages of the approaches says of institutionally based organizing that "sometimes it simply increases the power of the established leaders in the church hierarchy." The "sometimes" is a big modifier, making it difficult to know who Delgado's talking about. But in the institutionally-based organizations I know, including in all the major networks, lay leaders, both new and existing, who learn about accountability in the public arena transfer that knowledge to action within the polity of their churches. In Texas, for example, members of a Catholic parish wanted to meet with the Diocesan Personnel Committee when a new pastor was to be assigned. They wanted to insure that they would get someone sympathetic to their continued membership in the local IAF organization. Of this situation the Bishop said, with a twinkle in his eye, "I didn't know they were going to start holding us accountable." But even if he didn't like it, it was too late. Delgado says institutionally-based organizing "excludes people who are not part of the member institutions." PICO's "model" explicitly provides for visiting people in the neighborhood who are not part of member congregations and inviting them to become members and leaders of the "Local Organizing Committees (LOCs)," which are the units within the member congregations for addressing issues and participating in the broader community organization. "Last, the issues that these organizations can become involved in are limited by the politics of the member religious organizations." But aren't the issues in which an ACORN group becomes involved in "limited by the politics of the members?" To the extent these members have religious and other affiliations and beliefs, just to that extent will these "limit the issues that these organizations can become involve in." To the extent the members have no other affiliations or beliefs, their direct membership becomes the principal shaper of their political identities. There are few direct membership organizations that start with such blank blotters. Further, constituency and allies always limit the issues in which one becomes involved if for no other reason than the organization must take these into account in its selection of issues. The exception is when the organization is unconcerned about constituency and allies. In that case we wouldn't be likely to call it a community organization. Those organizations that speak out on what they think is right, without regard to effectiveness, may be prophetic voices, but if that is all they do they are sure to remain far away from where decisions are being made.

Again, as elsewhere, Delgado neatly sums up an essential goal of good community organizing: "community building." (28) He approvingly quotes the first President of San Antonio's Communities Organizing for Public Services (COPS): "We came to see that the issues we work on are like dessert. The main meal is the rebuilding of communities." But this goal isn't even in his typology.

Another problem of omission is created with an emphasis on form or "model." Organizing is mostly a process of building powerful organizations, guided by values and interests. Within the form of a direct membership organization, radically different things can take place. To take two contrasting examples.

Organizer "A" enters a new neighborhood with no local "sponsorship," goes door-to-door, seeks prospective members who have no other organizational affiliations, convinces them of the merit of her organization, sells them a membership for $10.00 a year and invites them to come to a membership meeting. From among them, the organizer invites those she thinks would be good leaders to be on a planning committee for a founding meeting. If house meetings are used, the person holding the meeting is a "host" or "hostess," but plays little other role. The planning committee pretty much ratifies what the organizer presents, and turnout for the founding meeting is largely done by the organizer who does more home visits, makes "turnout" phone calls and mails a flyer to all who are invited to the meeting. Direct action against an unjust decision-maker almost immediately follows the meeting (or may be part of it). Out of the action, members are tested and leaders identified.

Organizer "B" enters a new neighborhood "sponsored" by some respected community leaders (religious or other), goes door-to-door asking questions to determine who in the neighborhood is trusted, visits these trusted people, convinces them of the merit of the organization, arranges a "call-back" meeting and asks the trusted persons to join at $10.00 a month. Having enlisted leaders through careful conversations with them, the organizer asks them if they would invite friends and neighbors to a house meeting where the invitor would ask these friends to join. The organizer asks those who "deliver" for a house meeting to be part of the

planning committee for an organizational founding meeting. The planning committee members are actively engaged in the process of planning the meeting because they have a bigger stake, a greater ownership in it. They do most of the "turnout" work for the founding meeting. Direct action follows (or is part of) the meeting, with the leaders playing a major role in the determination of issues, strategies and tactics. When Fred Ross, Sr. did his house meetings, he found local leaders to convene them. Frequently he found them by asking assistant priests and nuns in Catholic parishes for referrals to respected people in the community. How different from the organizer who makes "cold contacts" by going door-to-door. Both are building a direct membership organization, but to stop there in the analysis is to miss points that are more important than the direct membership character of the organization. If you start with the principle of building democratic power through local leaders, you can do it many ways. If you don't understand that principle it doesn't matter what "model" you use. "Model" is not the key variable.

"Shifts in Context" (31)

"By the mid-1980s community organizations had built a strong track record for achieving significant social change through citizen leadership development and empowerment....While CO was beginning to gain recognition...many of these local organizations were in crisis due to a number of factors. These included political and economic trends, the inherent limits of a local, geographically based organizing model, and the relationship of CO to other social movements. The following sections will briefly examine some of these factors...and explore two areas in which there has been significant growth: training intermediaries and independent organizations in communities of color." (31)

"Changes in Population"

"...(I)t is no accident that much of the rhetoric surrounding and legitimizing CO refers to 'citizen participation'. There are two problems with this assumption. First, in a number of states, a significant percentage of the population are not U.S. citizens...(and) many of these non-citizens are undocumented political and economic refugees. While this population is numerically quite significant in some cities, its interests are not represented organizationally." (31, 32). Here Delgado engages in a different kind of logical error. He first tells us about the rhetoric surrounding and legitimizing CO and then tells us that this rhetoric is an assumption. Hold on! Language used to justify, legitimize, rationalize or describe something may or may not tell us about an assumption -- either implicit or explicit -- or, for that matter, about the reality. We don't know without looking at the facts. Is it the case of immigrants that "their interests are not represented organizationally?" Would Caribbean blacks or California Latinos (whether legal or not) agree that their interests aren't represented when their churches are in institutionally- based organizations? When they are active in these organizations? When they play leadership roles in these organizations? When these organizations address their issues? I doubt it. It may be that Delgado wants to tell us that these organizations create a false consciousness among immigrant groups, mislead them, homogenize them in an assimilationist approach, are opiates of the masses or other such things. I don't think that's what they do, but we could talk about it. Others have made these criticisms. Try to find the powerful "people's organizations" they have built. You won't because they haven't.

Delgado defines away another issue. "Members of the (CO) could be mobilized to exercise collectively their first amendment right to participate in the democratic process...without fear that they would be subject to sanction." (31) Aren't fear of eviction, retaliation by gangs for anti-drug activity, losing a job or jeopardizing your welfare benefits examples of fear of sanction? Maybe Delgado means the likelihood of violence isn't as great in the US as in most of the countries from which the refugees come. But having failed to be clear about this, he goes on to say, "(I)t is unclear whether community organizations, whose primary tool is public confrontation, can represent a group of people for whom the possible exposure of their immigration status may have serious, even deadly repercussions. Thus, traditional CO tactics and strategies must be reconfigured to work effectively for new immigrants." Really? What about the immigrants involved in the militant direct action confrontations of Justice for Janitors? Or of the United Farm Workers' militants where, it turned out, it

was undocumented workers who were often more militant than Chicanos!? Fear of retaliation of some kind always stands between powerless people and action they take in their own behalf. Overcoming that fear is one of the arts of leadership and organizing. This isn't a problem of traditional CO anymore than it is a problem of anyone organizing any constituency.

Delgado told us "(T)here are two problems with this assumption." The first point he makes about immigrants is really not an assumption, and he is in error on the facts -- undocumented immigrants are involved, and do take risks. He compounds the difficulty when he says, "There is also a second dimension to the upcoming shifts in population: non homogeneity in city neighborhoods...(R)acial diversity will increase...dramatically over the next 50 (years)....For community organizations the challenge will be to 'make numbers count' in a different way -- by building multiracial/multilingual organizations that express common interests rather than replicating interracial competition." Isn't that something like what Alinsky did in Back of the Yards in 1939? The wars in the former Yugoslavia should give us a clue that the conflicts in Back of the Yards (between various Eastern Europeans as well as with the small Mexican-American population there) were very, very intense. As the carefully documented study *Back of the Yards* (Slayton; University of Chicago Press; 1986) makes clear, the antagonisms between different ethnic groups over historic conflicts and current issues, including competition over scarce resources, made many believe that nothing could bring the warring tribes together in one organization.

This point cannot be overstated: throughout its history, broadly-based community organizing has dealt with inter-racial and ethnic tension and conflict and has built multi-racial and ethnic organizations. Where that was not possible, broadly-based organizations in the black or Latino community, for example, worked on a basis of mutual respect with people in different organizations of different backgrounds.

Do changes in population count? Of course they do. But Delgado hasn't made the case that structure of organization, strategy or tactics of "traditional CO' can't and don't adapt to these changes and ignores the historic evidence to the contrary.

"Changing Role of Government" (33)

"In the original model of CO, most efforts of the neighborhood organization focused on local government. As the major institutional 'target' of CO activities, government units and individuals were, in the CO vernacular, 'isolated and iced'." (33) Delgado proceeds to identify the shrinkage of government resources, the international mobility of capital and the concentration of corporate decision making as contributing to a substantial change in context. A major consequence of the change is that local government no longer had the capacity to deliver the goods and services that earlier successful CO demands and action could compel. This change in context is widely agreed upon, though overstated in several ways. The first mis-statement is that it ignores the history of CO action against private sector abuse, oppression or exploitation of various kinds: cheating local merchants, redlining insurance companies and financial institutions, expansionist developers, exploitive or discriminatory employers (the Chicago packinghouse industry was one of the principal targets of Alinsky's first organizing effort), slum landlords, rip-off loan sharks and many others. Second, local governments still have considerable authority to act in ways that can benefit or harm the interests of low- to moderate-income constituencies, including people of color, the disabled and other groups with particular interests. Their authority to tax, plan, license, contract, regulate, float bonds, innovate and convene competing interests is different from the massive delivery of direct services, but it is not without consequence. And there is still plenty to argue about over how the resources are delivered even as they shrink. Third, there are businesses that don't and can't move and which are, therefore, susceptible to action on the part of community organizations. These are significant modifications to Delgado's generally accurate point, and undermine what he subsequently concludes from this point.

"John McKnight," Delgado tells us, "an observer of community organizing, wrote in 1986, 'those who plan a

neighborhood future based upon public support and private reindustrialization actually sentence most low-income clients to an ever growing poverty.' Thus (emphasis added) one of the successful measures of CO, its ability to deliver financial benefits to a constituency, was seriously threatened in a period characterized by cutbacks in public spending"(35). This point is part of a larger argument McKnight makes against confrontating local power structures. As he says, ("Community Organizing in the Eighties: Toward A Post-Alinsky Agenda," McKnight with John Kretzmann, *The Careless Society*; pg. 137), "In the kinds of (low-income) neighborhoods we are concerned about, it becomes less and less likely that strategies stressing...confronting of an outside enemy make much sense." McKnight is enthusiastic about self-help, mutual aid and community development, and devastatingly accurate in his critique of many social workers and social planners. But he's not so accurate in either his description of what "traditional CO" was all about or in his prescription for the ills afflicting the urban poor. Delgado correctly distinguished Alinsky's organizing from others ("Alinsky...advocated a reason for organizing that extended beyond the mere leveraging of additional goods and services: building organizations of poor people that could challenge the existing balance of power.") McKnight & Kretzmann miss exactly this point in their characterization of Alinsky organizing. Later, and contradictorily, in the McKnight/Kretzmann essay, the two authors advocate coalitions that can act nationally to hold institutions accountable. How the power is to be built to do this without beginning locally is not clear; nor is it clear how organizations that don't learn how to deal with power by dealing with smaller issues will somehow come together in national coalitions to deal with larger ones. Does Delgado want us to conclude that organizing should back away from confronting unjust institutions? That doesn't seem to be the case. But if not, how are we to understand his combining the accurate point of declining resources with a favorable view of McKnight's new strategy for the poor? The answer is not to be found in his text. The direct heirs of "traditional CO," of whatever organizational type, are all wrestling with the strategic problems posed by the changing context. The networks are part of the answer because they institutionalize the possibility of relationships that go beyond local organizing projects operating in isolation from one another; so are larger targeted constituencies for initial organizing; so are the local wins still to be had; so is mutual aid. But these are all part of building an organization and a movement that has the capacity to hold accountable society's dominant institutions.

"CO and Other Movements" (36)

"Just as CO's rise to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s was related to the successes of civil rights and student movements and the ready recruits to neighborhood organizing that these other movements provided, the decline of these movements had a negative effect on CO. Without a general atmosphere legitimizing progressive social change, recruits for staff and leadership, as well as resources for confrontational and conflictive social change, were difficult to find." (36) As earlier noted, Alinsky's direct influence began to wane by the late-60s. The new movements, typically identity movements, often single-issue, with little understanding of how power worked, composed primarily of middle-class activists or college graduates so alienated from American society that they chose to live on the economic margin, were intensely critical of Alinsky. What began as a dialog with Alinsky in the early '60s had become a polemic against him -- mostly defined by Alinsky's "lack of ideology." Activists in SDS, SNCC and other "new left" organizations, theoreticians writing in such journals as Dissent, Social Policy and Studies on the Left, black power militants in denominational bodies and others joined in this polemic.

To which COs does this connection between other movements and neighborhood organizing refer? Some organizations were disappearing along with the decline of the civil rights and student movements because they shared in these movements' weaknesses. It was "traditional CO" (that is Alinsky and those immediately around him) who tried to ring the bells of alarm: beware of precipitating a reaction that is bigger than the action you are taking; beware of becoming isolated from your own base; beware of dependency on government or foundation money. (Fred Ross, Sr. bemoaned the fact that by the mid-1960s people in low-income communities would ask him if they were going to be paid to come to a meeting. He turned the negative to a postive and used the fact that the poverty program paid people to be on boards to distinguish

independent organizing from government dependent organizing.)

The problem of dependence on government funding for organizing purposes was exemplified in the experience of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on whose staff I served as a field secretary from 1962 to the end of 1966. In Mississippi, SNCC had built the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a vehicle of local political, civil rights and civic organizations joined with the major national civil rights groups. From COFO's work developed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and the dramatic challenge to the seating of the "regular" Democrats at the 1964 Democratic Party Convention. The challenge was defeated, and the MFDP and SNCC never recovered. It was the beginning of the end of successful broadly-based organizing in low-income black communities in the state. Some left SNCC over the internal crisis that followed and went to work for the Child Development Group in Mississippi (CDGM), a statewide Headstart Program with a direct grant from Washington bypassing the state's racist political structure. When CDGM began to take on the appearances of civil rights movement activity, powerful Dixiecrat Democrats in both the US Senate and House reacted. Allied with Democratic mayors of northern cities who were similarly upset that the national OEO was bypassing their authority, they soon made it impossible for OEO to support these programs. Civil rights militants and activists throughout the nation were outraged. A national liberal- church-labor-civil rights committee was established to save CDGM. Its campaign ultimately failed. With the benefit of 30 years hindsight, shouldn't we be able to say that it couldn't have been otherwise? A fight had been picked that couldn't be won. On rare historic occasions those fights are unavoidable, but was CDGM one of these? I don't think history supports that case. What should be learned is that significant change won't be paid for by the government. Nor will it be accomplished by withdrawing from engagement with the government, major financial institutions, corporations or other institutions. By 1967, movement politics had either been absorbed in traditional electoral politics or become a cry of anger and despair without assessment of consequences. The cry was often accompanied by a rhetoric so shrill that it alienated most Americans from it -- including those in whose behalf it was shouted. Indeed, SNCC's exercise of black power varied inversely with the loudness of its use of the slogan.

In the face of these two tendencies -- electoral absorption and militant isolation --, "traditional CO" hunkered down. In 1968, the rise of conservatism to national power began with the election of Richard Nixon and the capture of significant numbers of white working class votes in the North by George Wallace. In that same year Alinsky started the IAF Institute. In 1972, he died. Through the 1970s, IAF experimented with various organizing approaches and strategies. In the late 1970s-early 1980s, under the direction of Alinsky's successor Ed Chambers, it began to consolidate its accumulated experience, and others engaged in institutionally-based organizing emulated its example and built successful projects in cities across the nation. In this period, ACORN and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) developed their body of direct membership organizing experience.

Delgado tells us the new movements raised challenging questions for CO, including: "...the preponderance of male staff, the ways issues were framed, the racial hierarchy within some CO organizations and...race as a major factor in the allocation of local resources,...the lack of critical analysis (of broader US foreign policy),...the movement's commitment to a narrowly defined concept of community" and the absence of CO in the environmental issue (37). Each of these may (or may not) be a legitimate area of criticism for CO. But none of them goes to the broader point Delgado elsewhere suggests they illustrate -- namely, that "traditional CO" needs to be supplanted by something else. First a factual point: people of color and women are rising in the ranks of all the major CO networks, and some are now in positions of top responsibility. "The ways issues were framed" is an unclear point. If by this he means that in some of the "new" organizations issues are framed by activists who don't have an organizing orientation, then he is right. But CO seeks to build broadly-based power in powerless constituencies. That means staying close to "where the people are" and formulating issues so that a broader base can be built. "Race as a major factor in the allocation of local resources" is clearly an implicit and explicit category of analysis in most of the major organizing networks. They may differ with Delgado in how they use this analysis, but do these differences warrant the view that

these organizing efforts don't represent the interests and points of view of people of color? The "narrowly defined concept of community" is a narrowness of Delgado's own earlier definition of "neighborhood group." It simply doesn't reflect the reality of the organizing world at the time he wrote. Last, whether these groups "lack (a) critical analysis (of broader US foreign policy) is a puzzling point. Do they pass resolutions or make public statements about the role of the US government in Africa, Asia or Latin America? No, they don't. But that isn't to say they lack a critical analysis of broader US foreign policy. They don't talk about it because it isn't something about which they can do anything. At least not yet. That some of them are interested in these things is attested to by the fact that they seek to develop relationships with groups that are engaging in democratic organizing in other parts of the world. Religious leaders from these areas attend the various intensive organizing workshops conducted by the organizing centers. Nor, as I will later elaborate, is this anything new.

As in many of his points, Delgado points to areas of weakness, then concludes these are inherent in the current practice of "traditional CO." He diminishes the validity of his points by failing to note changes that are taking place in part because of criticisms he and others sharing his views have made in the past. It is almost as if he is so theoretically committed to a point of view that he cannot admit his successes because to do so might undermine his theory.

"Growth of CO Training Intermediaries" (39)

..."(A) weeding out and consolidation process...took place in CO. In the late 1970s, a variety of organizing experiences were examined, analyzed, written down, and passed on by a new type of organization: the training intermediary. Surfacing first as mechanisms to support geographically dispersed projects and later expanding in capacity to initiate projects, train leaders and develop organizers, organizer training intermediaries have been the principal instruments responsible for the successful replication of specific organizing models. (39)...As the most stable component of the CO infrastructure, with the widest scope of work and the most experienced professional staffs, these intermediary organizations are likely instruments for improving, refining and consolidating CO activities." (43).

I think Delgado is right in his identification of the growing importance of "training intermediaries," though the term is a problematic one for reasons I will return to. What I would call "organizing centers" have done the things that Delgado identifies. In addition, they offer stability to local organizations which, in years past, depended on luck to find a new "lead" organizer when the current one would leave. Since organizers who are in networks now transfer within their networks, there is the possibility for smoother transitions. The major organizing centers all offer intensive workshops which both deepen knowledge about organizing and offer opportunities for local leaders to meet people different from themselves but who share their commitment to building democratic power. Some of them offer additional educational opportunities, including meetings and discussions with major intellectuals who are addressing central problems facing America today. They build the groundwork of relationships, shared stories and common values that can lead to regional, statewide and national efforts.

Delgado's examples of "CO Intermediaries" include ACORN and IAF, "monoracial formations addressing the interests of specific peoples of color," the Native American-based Indigenous Environmental Network, the Northern Rockies Action Group, The Highlander Center, the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste and others. The slippery definition of CO has slipped again; these are widely different. More important, there is no discussion of accountability of these intermediaries. Who is on their boards? How do they get selected? Do significant portions of their budgets come from groups they claim to/are meant to serve? What kinds of "on-the-ground" organizations are they building? How strong are those? When the intermediaries initiate new projects, how do these become accountable to a constituency?

Whatever the contribution of some intermediaries, they also pose serious questions for those concerned about

democratic participation and control. To the extent that intermediaries are not accountable to groups which are themselves accountable to real constituencies, and to the extent that intermediaries become the repositories of knowledge and the preferred recipients of foundation grants, then just to that extent is there the danger that the intermediaries create as many problems as they solve. Why no discussion of these issues? If we take democratic ideals seriously then shouldn't the people who are the intended beneficiaries of these intermediaries have signficiant ways of saying what they do?

With the emphasis on the intermediaries has also come an increased emphasis on Alinsky's notion of the organizers as "professionals." This concept offers positives and negatives to the organizing world. It is good that organizers seek to develop agreed upon standards by which to measure their work, define what it is that distinguishes their roles from those of leaders, hold each other accountable for ethical work and other benefits that are supposed to derive from being a "profession." But as we have seen from other professions, there are ways in which professionalization can create unnecessary distances between practitioner and client, including obscure language and status distinctions that lead to dependency and which insulate the professional from any client accountability. Indeed as organizing has become mystified, professional organizers have begun to blur the distinction between themselves and leaders, with such roles as spokesperson and selection of issues sometimes becoming the province of imperial organizers.

Yet another problem of the intermediaries is that they tend to minimize possibilities for "horizontal" relations between community organizations. Organization "x," affiliated with intermediary "a," is very unlikely to deal with organization "y" -- even if "y" is in its own city, in the next neighborhood or part of town. As local organizations become vertically integrated, the possibility for local alliances that could create new majorities and have profound impacts on cities, metropolitan areas or states diminishes.

On balance, I agree that the formation of organizing centers is a significant step forward. However, I believe any serious evaluation of organizing as a field requires some discussion of the negatives as well as the positives.

"Organizing in Communities of Color" (45)

"While community organizing was becoming a 'science' and models were being created and replicated by the training intermediaries and larger CO networks, many local activists in communities of color were struggling with community problems in a variety of ways.... Very often (organizers in communities of color) did not get involved to build powerful organizations....These organizers had no road map or model. They were forced to develop approaches and create organizations that reflected their own sensibilities and the interests of their communities. Nobody told them that community organizations were supposed to be strictly local and devoid of ideology...(or) explained that the people in the community were only supposed to be interested in specific 'nitty gritty' problems. Without the benefit of this guiding knowledge, these organizers have built bold, interesting, and effective organizations, which reflect an understanding of their own cultural base as well as an assessment of how the world works and how they can change it to benefit their constituents."(45)

In this statement, Delgado compounds error upon error, leading to conclusions which don't follow because their premises won't stand close scrutiny. He suggests a contrast between the "science" of organizing, presumably believed in by organizers in the Alinsky school, and those who "develop approaches...reflecting their own sensibility..." Who claims organizing as a "science"? Again the elusive quotations marks: there is a quote, but no source. For good reason; few, if any, organizers in the "Alinsky school" think organizing is a "science" in the sense that biology, physics or chemistry is. It is science, art and craft and it is contextualized in specific cultural and historic settings. Alinsky offered not science but some fundamental principles. For example, he said, "for every action there is a reaction." You ought to try to calculate the reaction of your adversary before you do something aimed at him. If you do, you can use the reaction to build your own organization, and if you don't, you might do the wrong thing and get overwhelmed and defeated by the

reaction. Is Delgado suggesting that organizers with "their own sensibilities" are better off not knowing such principles or ignoring them?

Were "models being created and replicated?" While some "Alinsky school" organizers like to use the term "models," other don't. Those who do generally mean little more than a type of structure and a process for building it. But to what is this to be contrasted? Having no idea of what you're trying to build? No sense of process or structure? And if organizers don't "get involved to build powerful organizations," what are they likely to build? Powerless ones? Campaigns that win an issue and then die because no one thought beyond the issue? And what are these approaches "that reflected their own sensibilities and the interests of their communities?" Are organizers who try to master the "science"/art/craft of organizing automatons? Do they lack sensibility? Are they without creativity? Are we to assume that they are involved in building organizations that don't represent the interests of their communities?

If Delgado is talking about the ego of the organizers, are we to assume that those who work without previous training are entirely selfless and that those who have some training or who are in networks are the Machiavellian servants of purposes contradictory to those of the people in the community?

And who is it who thinks the community organizations are supposed to be "strictly local"? Again we are faced with the slippery 6,000. There are some local organizations that want to be strictly local. But not the organizations in the "Alinsky school."

Who are the organizers who think the people in the community are "only supposed to be interested in specific 'nitty gritty' problems?" Delgado elsewhere told us that the Alinsky school organizers aren't only interested in the specific issues. They are interested in the underlying powerlessness faced by people in oppressed, discriminated against, disadvantaged, abused, etc. communities and view action to resolve issues from two points of view. These viewpoints are, first, solving particular problems and, second, building the capacity or power so that people can address more recalcitrant problems that take greater power. The two are interrelated, inseparable, the yin-yang of organizing.

What have these "bold, interesting and effective organizations" accomplished? How should their accomplishments be compared to those of the dull, uninteresting, ineffective organizations that are associated with the organizing networks? And who are these dull, uninteresting, ineffective organizations? ACORN? WORC? IAF? PICO? Gamaliel? Direct Action and Research Training (DART)? Organizing Leadership and Training Center (OLTC)? Regional Council of Neighborhood Organizations (RCNO)? National Peoples Action (NPA)? Citizen Action (CA)? Again, we don't know because the author doesn't tell us.

Finally, general principles and standards are necessary to do the very things for which Delgado praises the "training intermediaries" in the previous section!

"A Community of Interest" (45)

"Many organizers of color have analytical frameworks that include race, class, and gender, but for most, the bottom line is race...While many discussions of community organizations treat the 'community' as a geographic area or neighborhood, for this discussion a geographic definition of community is only marginally useful. For communities of color, the 'community of interest' is often based on a combination of racial solidarity and concern about a specific set of issues." (45, 46) Delgado makes this point in various ways. For now, I want to note that geographic definitions of community by organizers who draw from either Alinsky or Ross are not the same as those of physical planners. Nor do they see neighborhoods in simple spacial terms. No doubt there are many who think this way. They are, presumably, among those in the 6,000 neighborhood groups. But they aren't in the Alinksy-Ross tradition.

It is almost impossible to imagine organizing people who share nothing more than the boundaries defining

where they live. They may attend the same churches, share a common ethnic or racial background, use the same public facilities, experience the same crime or fear of it, have children in the same public schools, get exposed to toxic wastes of various kinds, etc. The place where they live is the place where they experience a wide range of social problems, as well as the place where they may experience significant social relationships. In Back of the Yards, Alinsky's first organizing experience, people who lived in the neighborhood also were largely Roman Catholic and many were employed in the Packinghouse industry. In The Woodlawn Organization, another Alinsky effort, the residents were mostly Black. The neighborhoods Fred Ross selected in which to develop CSO chapters were overwhelmingly Mexican and Mexican-American. ACORN selects neighborhoods in which there is some common bond beside the street boundaries within which residents live. In contrast, narrowly defined neighborhood organizations, which exist in almost every city I know, spend most of their time on zoning and planning matters, and they usually aren't very effective.

Does the "new context" means that none of the major problems now faced by people of color coincide with where they live. Crime? Drugs? Schools? Public transportation? Cheating merchants? Slum landlords? To repeat what was said earlier, of course there are changes in the context. Among them are shifts of the locus of some decision-making from local to global. But there are still significant local decisions to be made and, more important, people begin sustained (as distinct from crisis) involvement in public life on issues in their immediate experience. That is one of the meanings of "starting where people are." That the resources to fix a pot-hole now come from Washington in Community Development Block Grant money rather than from local property taxes doesn't change the fact that the pot-hole is local, in front of someone's particular house on a particular block and that the CDBG money is administered by the mayor's office. For a narrow strata of activists who aren't connected to anyone in particular but to "the people" in general and who organize around global issues of justice, these local matters may not matter. But where is the power they have built? Where are the major issues they have won? No one was more nationally focused than Martin Luther King, Jr., but he often used local targets to whom local demands could be presented (as in Birmingham) to create the crises he used to build a national conscience for new Federal legislation and Federal enforcement of existing laws.

"Organizational Configurations in Communities of Color (46)"

Delgado outlines seven categories of organizations. His report focuses on five of them: single-issue mobilizations, mono- and multi- racial community organizations, immigrant rights organizations and community-based workplace initiatives "because many of them have developed innovative responses to the contextual changes discussed in 'Shifts in Context'..." (47).

"Single-Issue Mobilizations (SIMs)" (47)

SIMs are often "the initial building block for developing organization." The initial specific issue often broadens -- as in the case of a campaign against a toxic waste dump becoming an organization dealing with a wide range of environmental matters and developing an understanding of "environmental racism." It is usually out of a single-issue, often reacting against some particularly onerous abuse, that many organizations have sprung up throughout American history. Those that survived victory (or defeat) often broadened their purpose. An incident of housing discrimination led to a campaign for a fair housing ordinance which led to an organization against discrimination in housing or, more broadly, against racial discrimination. Of course environmental issues are new, but what is the "innovative response"?

"Mono- and Multiracial Formations in Communities of Color." (50)

"One claim of traditional CO was that it was able to bring racial groups together around common concerns to fight a common enemy. While this notion of CO was accurate, two other things are also true."(50) Whose "claim" is this? The "traditional COs" associated with Ross and Alinsky were sometimes mono-racial,

sometimes not. They were multi-issue because it took a multi-issue approach to build the breadth of constituency, even in mono-racial areas, necessary to build significant power. Traditional CO didn't make the claim, so it isn't "accurate." It isn't an accurate observation either. But it is a premise for Delgado's next point: "First, CO did not have an explicit racial politic. This is evident from Fisher and Kling's examination of the Alinsky-initiated 'Back of the Yards,' whose self-interest politics ultimately led the group to organize to keep African-Americans out of its white working-class neighborhood." If they organized to keep blacks out, isn't that a "racial politic" which we abhor? Alinsky certainly did. When Back of the Yards blocked housing integration in its neighborhood, Alinsky opposed what they were doing. His stance in workshops, public and private discussions (he refused to get into a media controversy with the organization) was that as the groups he built moved people from being "have-nots" to either "have-a-little-and-want-mores" or "haves," they would become apologists for, and part of, the status quo. But there was more to the story. It is an important story because it is so widely cited by critics.

The Back of the Yards experience is routinely used to demonstrate that Alinsky's organizing couldn't get beyond narrowly defined self- interest and local prejudices. Soon after I met Alinsky in 1960, I pressed him on the point because I was deeply concerned about it. He had a broader answer. After World War II, he argued, the inter-racial experience in the Packinghouse industry which created on-going relationships between blacks and whites began to evaporate. Whites were able to move on to other industries while blacks, because of racial discrimination, couldn't. The Packinghouse Workers Union also moved its office so that it no longer served as a meeting place for blacks and whites. He named other factors as well. The relational basis for a non-discriminatory/nonracist position disappeared. Also, observation told white working class homeowners that when blacks moved into a neighborhood, it soon became mostly black. In those days, no one knew about red-lining banks and only a few people knew about panic-peddling realtors. Efforts to stabilize neighborhoods failed except in a few middle-class, college educated, neighborhoods. Alinsky supported quotas to break down housing discrimination and was attacked by liberals and conservatives for doing so. Despite this, many criticized Alinsky for what resulted in Back of the Yards. This was especially true of those who considered themselves critics to Alinsky's political left. Wanting to get to the bottom of what turned out to be a bottomless issue, I welcomed the opportunity to interview Jane March and her husband Herb, the legendary Packinghouse worker organizer. No two people could speak more authoritatively on the issue.

The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) brought together warring Eastern European ethnics groups who were largely Catholic with the Packinghouse Workers Union whose local organizer was an open Communist Party member. If anyone could tell me about the differences between Alinsky and the left on the issue of race, it would be Herb March and his wife Jane, an organizer in her own right and a knowledgeable observer of the Back of the Yards developments. But when we talked, they concluded that there was little anyone could have done to make things end other than the way they did. Herb said explicitly, "I had no strategic differences with Alinsky." When the two of them discussed race, given the times and the context, they agreed that nothing any single organizer or organizing group did or could have done at the time would have affected the outcome. Delgado quotes Fisher and Kling to support his view. Ironically, they contrast the Communist Party and its organizing to Alinsky's. They should talk with the then-Communist who was the principal organizer on the scene. (b)

Delgado continues, "Second, even when community organizations did reflect a progressive position on racial discrimination (and the majority of organizations did), they were often articulated not in multiracial, but in biracial (black/white) terms." Because of his ties to the Catholic Church, Alinsky's early involvements included work with Puerto Ricans and Mexicans/Mexican-Americans. Ross, as we have seen, began his organizing work with Mexican-Americans. No doubt in the '60s and before little attention was paid in national discussions of race to Latinos, Asians and other non-whites. But that fact characterized all organizations except those specifically focusing on these groups or in areas where there were significant numbers of them. These matters do not distinguish the "new" from the "traditional."

"How are indigenous mono- and multiracial formations different from traditional CO? There are three general areas of difference:

"(1) They tend to address a wide variety of issues that are not confined to local communities (many, for instance, oppose NAFTA and draconian immigration policies and support prison reform and multicultural education)... In order to understand these organizations it is important not to confuse them with the sectarian nationalist efforts of the 1960s and the 1970s. Many of these new indigenous organizations are successful examples of multiracial organizing."

There are far more "mono-racial formations" than multi-racial ones. Some mono-racial organizations cooperate with other organizations comprised of different groups. Others don't. Not all mono-racial organizations (or organizations overwhelmingly of one racial and/or ethnic group) are sectarian or nationalist. Isn't willingness to, and evidence of, mutually respectful work with others as important as whether the organization is itself multi-racial?

Leaving that aside, Delgado lists the issues these groups work on: school reform, police violence, water quality, toxic pollution, immigrant rights, organizing home daycare workers, utility rate increases and winter utility shut offs. These are general areas of interest. Traditional COs have worked within every one of these areas except, to my knowledge, that of home daycare workers, though they have been involved in organizing unorganized workers in different settings. Delgado would probably agree that issues, as used in organizing terminology, must be specific. By that definition, his list is of general areas of concern, not of issues. Within any one of them, numerous issues could be specified. We would have to look at a particular area of concern to see how different the presumed differences are. It is impossible to tell from the information given.

Traditional CO, if you include the Western Organization of Resource Councils, opposed NAFTA. Have the new groups worked to oppose GATT, the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund policies which lead countries in Latin America to eliminate free milk for poor children or World Bank loans which create environmentally disastrous projects? There are groups that work against all of those things. Generally, I'm in support of them. But these issues are not the ones that build powerful organizations in low-income communities. On some occasions, in some circumstances, traditional CO involves itself in larger issues. For example, some traditional COs worked to oppose California's anti-immigrant initiative, Proposition 187. Traditional COs in California won an increase in the state's minimum wage. The reasons for these efforts were particular and contextual, and beyond the scope of this review. But what can be said is that traditional COs would look at any of these issues from the point of view of building the power of their constituencies to act on their values and interests.

"(2) Analytical Framework: Many have a racially-based analytical perspective that is very different from the 'citizen's rights' perspective of the more traditional community organization...Each of these organizations has developed an analysis of social problems and a plan for change. The analytical assertions, confirmed in an independent survey of activists of color in early 1992, include the following: (51)

(a) "A perspective that views racism as a primary mode of oppression in U.S. society."

Since almost everyone who organizes in communities of color talks about racial and/or ethnic discrimination, I assume that Delgado means something more than that. Does he mean that others don't use his terminology? Maybe. But I assume that more than semantics is involved here. What is it? One of the classic issues of "traditional CO" has been red-lining. No practice more embodies institutional racism. Not only does redlining discriminate on the basis of race (and sometimes class), it perpetuates and deepens cleavages based on race and ethnicity by playing on the fears of whites and using these fears to make money.

But "traditional CO" organizers ask critical questions like, "How do you negotiate with racism?" and believe you can't. You negotiate with specific people in specific institutions who make specific decisions about

specific things. African-American, Latino, Asian and "Anglo" organizers working in traditional COs think you have to get a handle on "racism", and spend most of their time trying to figure out how to turn broad problems into manageable issues. It is different from Delgado's way, but why does he make this an invidious distinction? It is different from demonstrating against racism -- and it is the latter that often characterizes newer movements. If they are building powerful organizations, rooted in communities of color, among people who traditional CO couldn't reach, that's all to the good. But shouldn't the parties then seek ways in which to combine their respective power to maximize their ability to end racism in America?

(b) "An emphasis on developing the capacity of young people..."

Delgado's stress on youth organizing is important. Such organizing is not easy. It is even more difficult to organize young, middle-aged and older people in the same organization. Some organizers tend to organize young people because these organizers have written off those who are older. It's a great opportunity to be militant with a group that has few of the mundane responsibilities of older people. That is especially the case if you limit your youth organizing to the young people who are more likely to be on the street after school than those who go home to study, are in a church youth group or who have sports or other after-school interest. Lots of what presents itself as "youth organizing" is limited to organizing gang members or pre-delinquent youth. That's a very important thing to do; it is also limited. It is divisive if it fails to find ways to relate to other sectors of the constituency from which the youth come. In The Woodlawn Organization in Chicago, Rev. John Fry's First Presbyterian Church (an active member of TWO) worked with The Blackstone Rangers (a major gang in the area). His work created difficult tensions within TWO because there were conflicting views within that black community on how to deal with the Rangers. I know from my own conversations with Alinsky and Chambers at the time that Fry drove the TWO professional organizers crazy. Had he not pressed them, they would not on their own have tried to involve the Rangers in their organizing. From Fry's nudging and pressure came an effort to re-direct the Rangers into a major OEO-Department of Labor job training and placement program (which was undermined by then-Mayor Richard Daley and ultimately failed). But one can hardly say that TWO was uninterested in relating to youth.

To my knowledge, none of the recent peace pacts negotiated between major gangs were the work of traditional CO organizers. Yet they are extraordinary achievements. But the organizers who work with gangs are unlikely to bring about the kind of changes needed to create real alternative paths of opportunity and meaning without alliances with more stable and traditional groups within their own communities. And, where there are such organizations, that means alliances with congregation- based and direct-membership "traditional CO".

Tom Gaudette, an early Alinsky associate and inspiration for the PICO national network, organized "youth congresses" to parallel the adult "community congresses" which brought to-gether the various elements of communities in which he worked as an organizer. In these congresses, youth elected leaders and decided action to take on issues important to them. There's nothing hidden about this history, but in Delgado's report it is as if it never happened.

(c) "An international perspective. Not only do these organizations tend to eschew the 'non ideological' stance of the old Alinsky groups, but many have developed relationships with similar groups in other parts of the world. For instance, tactics used by Native American activists to fight strip mining in the Northwest have been transferred to aboriginal organizers in Australia..."

Alinsky doubted the applicability of what he did in countries where there weren't minimum civil liberties: free speech, freedom of assembly and freedom to petition the government being the most important. People close to Alinsky wanted to stretch him on this point, and did so. The Office of Urban and Rural Mission of the World Council of Churches was for many years directed by a long-time supporter of Alinsky's. It funded, either directly or indirectly, projects throughout Africa and Asia. Alinsky met and discussed organizing with leading Catholics internationally as well. He led an international workshop in Manila shortly before his death.

His early close associate Tom Gaudette traveled to Hong Kong and India and led workshops there. International-or-not has nothing to do with the "'non ideological' stance of the old Alinsky groups" If "non ideological" groups exist, they can be found all over the world. Apples and oranges again. Since no group is really non-ideological, such groups don't exist. But in Delgado's use of the term, it doesn't accurately apply to Alinsky. Nor does the "transfer of tactics" have anything to do with being ideological or not. Conservatives, liberals and radicals all can borrow tactics, and they do it internationally. Isn't that what right-wing groups and military coups do? Isn't it what the CIA teaches when it "transfers tactics" by teaching "low-intensity conflict" to repressive regimes throughout the so-called Third World?

In 1970, when the Manila squatter organization ZOTO, organized by an Alinsky tradition organizer, was in a struggle with the Marcos government over land rights, I was part of a delegation of American "traditional CO" organizers who went to the World Bank to put pressure on it not to approve a Marcos application for a port development loan until he negotiated an adequate re-settlement plan with ZOTO. But we knew that ZOTO had real power in Manila. Our solidarity with it was based on that understanding and on a relationship which existed between us and ZOTO's organizer. In our shrinking world, Delgado properly points us to the need for more attention to international solidarity, but it's not a new idea.

(d) "The ability to define issues racially and to expand their constituency based on the power of the definition."

How does this differ from the nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s from which Delgado wants to distinguish himself and the current crop of multiracial organizations? Is, for example, Pan-Third Worldism qualitatively different from Pan-Africanism? If it means more than using the word "multiracial," what more is that? If it is just that, then how is it more than rhetoric? Indeed, what does it mean to define an issue racially? Organizers talk about "cutting issues." By that they mean issues have to be immediate, specific and winnable. Quality education, in this sense, isn't an issue. It is a topic or a general goal. A set of proposals that dealt with specific problems being faced by black and Latino children could help an organization reach parents who want to improve their children's education. "(T)raditional COs" that define issues in this way have broad support among low-income and working-class parents in communities of color. Where are the broadly-based organizations that "define issues racially?" Perhaps Delgado has a different meaning for "issue." If so, he needs to tell us and then show us an example of an "expanded constituency" that resulted from this new definition. He doesn't. Nor is it likely that he can unless he points to specific single-issue mobilizations. But he has told us that the organizations of which he's now speaking work on a wide variety of issues, so it isn't the Million Man March or the California mobilizations against Prop. 187 or the so-called "Civil Rights Initiative" (anti-affirmative action initiative) that he has in mind. We are, as elsewhere, left without sufficient clarity to know exactly who this broadened constituency is or which organizations have organized it.

The problem persists in his next point. Does an African-American church like Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood's St. Paul's Baptist in Brooklyn "revitalize indigenous culture and values?" In his various writings and speaking on the subject, Youngblood seems to be telling us that he thinks it does. Does this count? Or is it discounted because Youngblood also thinks that there is more power in being part of an inter-racial alliance that includes organizations that are based in white ethnic communities elsewhere in New York and which aren't "progressive" in the sense that they have "a perspective that views racism as a primary mode of oppression in U.S. society." Anyone who tried to organize white ethnics in Queens on that basis wouldn't get very far. But Youngblood seems to prefer that he be in relationship with a broadly-based organization than with one that has a "progressive" way of understanding racism. And it is here that we begin to get at the nub of an important issue -- though we have to read between the lines to find out just what that is. Delgado wants organizations to have an explicit analysis of a lot of things. Alinsky tradition CO wants people to understand that their powerlessness won't be overcome unless they organize in substantial numbers and make alliances with people who are different from themselves. Traditional CO is interested in fostering respectful relationships that cross lines of historic division, whether that division be of race, age, geography, denomination or whatever. In the experiences that flow from such relationships are to be found the

opportunities to break down the "isms" of race, sex, nationality, age and others. People in broadly-based organizations enter into such relationships in the first place because some combination of values and self-interest leads them to. In the reflection and education that follow from such experiences it is possible to significantly alter the prejudices of large numbers of people. Without these experiences, it is unlikely that very many people will change. That traditional CO sometimes fails to go deeply enough in such reflection and education is no doubt the case. But this criticism doesn't demonstrate the efficacy of an approach that insists that before white ethnics can be organized they must have a "progressive" view of race and any other issues that are part of a "progressive" litmus test. Should the test include gay marriages? Or pro-abortion? Or: fill in the blank. While you're filling in the blank you better think about all the Latino and Black Baptists, Pentecostals and Catholics who agree with Catholic ethnics on some of these issues.

When I was on the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, there was a view that whites should organize "their communities" against racism. Friends of SNCC and others tried to do that. In more recent years, women's organizations have told men who were supporters of feminism that they should organize men against sexism. The result is that, in the first instance, white groups formed to oppose racism and, in the second, men's groups formed to oppose sexism. Neither has the capacity to move its own constituency much beyond those who are already convinced. The reason is simple: most people initially move into action in behalf of justice for their own reasons, not to be aligned with someone else. This is especially true if they have their own sources of oppression, pain, exploitation and abuse. Presenting insurmountable barriers to joint action is, in part, what created the vacuum that was filled in 1968 by George Wallace and is now being filled by Pat Buchanan.

When Gamaliel Foundation, another of the national organizing networks, works in Catholic parishes, they don't oppose the issue agenda of the religious right. They don't talk about the specifics that most concern the religious right. But they do talk about values. Because their organizing work taps into deeply held values and interests of parishoners, they effectively outflank the religious right. The things that most deeply concern the parishoners in these churches are drugs, youth and adult employment opportunities, investment in their communities, affordable housing, day-care and after-school youth activities. These parishoners care about their faith and want to take it into action. They want to be part of meaningful community life. They are tired of their powerlessness. The religious right claims that the central problem of our time is the rise of secular humanism. Their list of concerns is a familiar one. When Delgado suggests that the religious right is successful because, in part, it offers values while "traditional CO" is merely tactical pragmatism he misses one of the important things about congregation-based community organizing: it offers a successful, on-the-ground alternative to religious fundamentalism and the religious right. Elsewhere in his report, Delgado alludes to the fact that this kind of organizing is "values," not "place" based. But he fails to extend his observation to his entire analysis. If he did, he would have to revise much of what he says about "traditional CO."

(e) "An interest in revitalizing indigenous culture and values. These organizations reject the notion that 'democratic values,' as defined by Western European society, are universal and not race-specific. Instead, they tend to embrace spiritual values that articulate humankind's relationship to the earth and liberation theology's concept of social justice."

The spiritual values of which he speaks are most often associated with specific indigenous peoples, the so-called Fourth World, who have not been overwhelmed by the idea of conquering nature with modern technology. Aboriginals of Australia, Indians of the Amazon and Native Americans retain a respect for nature and a desire to live in harmony with it that is lost in dominant modes of Western thought. But if we delete the phrase "as defined by Western European society," aren't democratic values among the things for which people of color throughout the world are struggling? These values include: the right of self-determination, to govern themselves, and freedoms of religion and speech. More fundamentally, democratic values which are rooted in the idea of the dignity and worth of each human person are those that are in conflict with institutions embodying elitist values which justify the oppression of people of color and other poor and working people the world over. Of course these ideas are contextualized within specific cultures which, ironically, is exactly

what liberation theology does: it reflects in the light of the Bible on the experience of the poor in particular social situations. One could similarly reflect on this experience in the light of the Koran, but that's not what liberation theology does. Like any other reflection or, in another sense, ideology, universal values are expressed in particular cultural ways and historic formulations.

(f) "A skepticism towards the efficacy of reform in the electoral arena -- including the election of candidates of color."

If anything is characteristic of "traditional CO," it is this skepticism. In fact, Alinsky and Ross were less disengaged from electoral politics than some who claimed to follow in their footsteps. They used issues of key importance to the organizations with which they worked, combined with voter registration, education and get-out-the-vote, to affect the outcome of key elections. But it was a tactic, not a strategy, and they did it just often enough to leave a little fear in politicians who might otherwise think they wouldn't have to worry if they said one thing to one of these organizations and later did another. More recently, "traditional COs" in at least some of the national networks are using their clout to enter the electoral arena while maintaining a healthy skepticism toward politicians.

Several years ago, Delgado and I talked about electoral participation. At the time, he was arguing that "traditional CO" was wrong not to be involved in electoral politics, and that it was one of the things that distinguished the new organizing from the old. Nothing wrong with changing one's mind; I've done it many a time myself. But it suggests that these are not hard and fast lines that separate something qualitatively different from that which preceeded it.

(g) "A strong belief that social change in the U.S. can be made in collaboration with progressive white organizations if, and only if, people of color are represented 'in the mix' by organizations that are able to act independently."

Any group of people with particular identities and/or sources of oppression need to organize themselves in order to name their oppressors and find strength in who they are. This can be done in caucuses, independent organizations or other forms. The second part of the statement, however, has to do with "progressive white organizations." Which organizations are these? And can they deliver in white constituencies? If not, why collaborate with them unless it is on your terms--that is, unless they are "friends of" your cause. "Friends of SNCC" was such an organization: largely white northerners who supported the work of SNCC in the South, and took direction from SNCC. What is too often the case is that "rainbow coalitions" made up of groups which can't deliver in their own respective constituencies come together thinking that by doing so they can build their power. But borrowing power from the powerless isn't a very good idea. Nor do these groups cumulatively add up to much -- precisely because few of them can deliver within their own respective constituencies.

Several years ago, I was in Brazil and spent some intensive time with leaders of base Christian communities, the independent unions associated with the Workers Party, movements of the rural landless and urban squatters, staff people in various centers which support these movements and liberation theologians who reflect on and think about these issues. The work in Brazil reminded me of the best of the organizing work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Brazilians have successfully done things that none of us have done in the United States, including: creating a broader vision and developing a sense of solidarity that goes beyond single struggles or organizations. They have more clearly articulated the contrast between the values for which they stand and those of the dominant political and economic system. But they had severe problems at the time, and these problems have become even more clear with the two defeats of their favorite candidate for President, many set-backs on local and national campaigns and growing withdrawal by the poor from engagement in social struggles.

The people with whom I spoke were very interested in the kind of traditional CO with which I'm most

familiar. They wanted to learn how to incorporate in their practice some of the things we talked about that were based on my experience -- as I was interested in incorporating lessons from what they were doing in my work and thinking. None of us has a perfect organization, theory or practice. Why act otherwise? Delgado could foster this kind of cross-fertilization of ideas in the US if he choose to.

"(3) The organizers tend to have the same racial and class (emphasis added) back-grounds as the members of the group." (50)

In his description and analysis of the role of the organizer in communities of color, Delgado wants us to learn about the differences between these organizers and those in "traditional CO." Native American Gail Small tells us that "(People) keep asking me how many members we have and how much dues we collect. People in my tribe are born into membership -- it can't be bought." Is this really fair? I wasn't there, but isn't it possible that those making the query weren't asking about membership in the tribe? You are born into citizenship in many countries, but that doesn't make you a member of a particular organization. "On the other hand (Small continues), people say since you all are so close knit, organizing must be easy. That's also not true." Here Small gives any organizer, from whatever "school," some excellent lessons. She describes the particularities one has to understand to organize her people. These particularities are applicable in any other organizing setting: eat with the people; get local leaders to invite you in; the people are "real territorial...be respectful,...make alliances,...listen..." Some specifics may be different, but we aren't given enough information to know. They operate by consensus. Most of the organizations I know don't formally require it, though they come close. Votes are taken only when necessary, and 51% majorities aren't considered sufficient to move forward on important issues. Ms. Small considers organizing a "political vocation" rather than a "professional role." Why are these juxtaposed in this way? Most of the professionals I know feel called to do what they are doing; they could be making more money and have more free time if they did something else. They believe in what they do.

Sandra Davis, working in a multi-racial setting in Oakland, works with mono-lingual, non-English speaking people in her organization. So they are fully included, provisions are made for meetings in the (non- English) language of a majority group in a particular constituency and for translation at leadership meetings that bring the various groups together. She also has to deal with "misconceptions of the gay and lesbian community. We actually had to set up political discussions among the membership around these issues."

These stories preface Delgado's point: "As different as Gail Small's role...is from Sandra Davis', both roles are light years away from the traditional Alinsky organizer who is a behind-the-scenes player. In Alinsky-type organizations the organizer's job was to frame the issues and build the organization. The quintessential organizer was hard-nosed, pragmatic, non ideological, and usually white and male.

"Organizers in this mold did not provide services, seldom conducted individual advocacy, and almost never acted as spokespersons for the group. The basic assumption in the Alinsky approach was that the organizer did not share the class, race, gender or cultural background of the organization's members.

"Times...have changed, and the revitalization of cultural pride has paved the way for a new kind of organizer -- one with roots in the community of interest. The organizers differ greatly from the traditional Alinsky mold. They are leaders as well as teachers -- analysts as well as actors. These indigenous organizers must interpret the political sea in which their organizations swim in order to develop models of organization that are culturally coherent internally and politically effective externally." (55)

There are serious inadequacies and errors in almost every one of Delgado's characterizations of "the traditional Alinsky mold."

In 1968, the first annual convention of the Mission Coalition Organization had head-sets for 700 delegates with simultaneous Spanish- English translation. It took two days to set the head-sets up. I know; I was the

lead organizer. In Santa Barbara County, the traditional white male organizer worked with some carpenters to design a system which allowed mono-lingual members of the organization to plug a headset into a board and hear the proceedings of a meeting in their own language. The board was very portable, and could be set up wherever a meeting took place. When a listener spoke in his orher own language, there was translation into English.

The San Francisco Organizing Project, another "traditional CO," includes an Episcopal church whose membership, when I knew it, was about one-third gay. Gays served in the leadership of SFOP. When General Hospital threatened to cut a program that served victims of AIDS, members of many of SFOP's congregations supported the effort to stop the cuts.

There are some organizers in traditional CO who think meetings should be conducted only in English. Some of them are people of color; some of them are women. Their perspective has nothing to do with organizing model, male, white, traditional or ideology. It has to do with sensitivity and judgment. Sandra Davis, we are told, "was not simply responsible for building a winning organization. She...had to develop a structure and politic which reflected the community's diversity." Isn't that something she had to do to develop a winning organization? Doesn't any organizer in a multi-ethnic and racial situation have to work to get leaders of diverse backgrounds to come together on the basis of mutual respect? Delgado's "light years" contrast, like so many others in his paper, doesn't stand close scrutiny. To build an organization, an organizer has to build relationships with local leaders, as well as identify and train new ones. When one of your leaders is in trouble and without resources, you help him or her find them.

The fact that organizers are not principal spokespersons for organizations is one of the ways Alinsky sought to create space for the development of leadership and to protect the outside organizer from attack. But these outside organizers generally developed organizers from within the communities where they worked. By defining "community of interest" as people of color, Delgado defines away the problem of the organizer being from a different place. But his own quotation from Gail Small contradicts his point. "Our reservation has five villages. People have lived in their villages for four generations. One organizer can't just organize the reservation. You have to make alliances with people from other villages. Preferably, those people are well-respected and they come from large extended families. Those organizers then call a meeting and I come as their guest." In other words: she is an outsider in those villages and needs to be invited in. She is very smart about it and knows that sharing tribal identity isn't enough. Nor is this simply a function of the rural or Native American context of her work. Try telling a West Side African- American leader that you're a brother if you come from the South Side or try to do the same thing in San Francisco's Bayview if you're from the Western Addition. Finally, I doubt that all the organizers Delgado cites are of the same class background as the people with whom they work. On the contrary, they are often college graduates whose life options are far different from those of the people with whom they choose to work.

And what organizer in the "Alinsky mold" doesn't pride him or herself on being a teacher, analyst and actor. Indeed when Alinsky was pressed on exactly what an organizer was, he said he was "an extraordinary teacher." Almost everything Delgado attributes to Small and Davis is done by any good organizer. Some of the things aren't. Whether they should or shouldn't be is worth discussing, but they hardly make the roles "light years" apart.

Much of Delgado's discussion of the relationship of "traditional CO" to communities of color is simply inaccurate. From New England to California, "traditional CO" has organized multi-racial and multi-ethnic organizations. Many of these organizations have people of color on their organizing staffs. Many of them conduct bi- and tri-lingual meetings. A growing number of people of color are now directors of organizing projects within the networks. Further, most of the white males in these organizations are seriously addressing the gender and racial/ethnic imbalances in their respective networks.

"Immigrant Rights Organizing" (56) (and) "Community-Based Workplace Initiatives" (59)

To avoid repetition, I will limit my remarks regarding these sections to say simply that both organizing of immigrants and organizing at the workplace are, and have been, part of the agenda of some "traditional COs." Criticisms I have made elsewhere are appropriate to these sections as well. Many of the workplace organizations Delgado talks about in this section are not organizing. They mobilize, advocate, provide services and provide information about worker's rights. They don't organize, and sometimes don't even claim to. Does that mean they aren't doing anything worthwhile? Of course not. Just something different.

Major Accomplishments, Limitations and New Developments in Community Organizing (65)

The Limits of Community Organizing.

After a summary of CO accomplishments, Delgado notes that "the collective efforts of local organizations, with few exceptions, have never made an impact on a national scale.

Why? Some limits of the traditional CO approach include:

(a) "Fragmentation within the movement...CO networks are constantly in competition for public credit and media recognition..., for resources from funding sources, and, to a lesser extent, for members...(T)he overall (CO) infrastructure is very weak.

As before, Delgado is sometimes talking about 6,000 organizations; other times he is talking about the much narrower band of organizing networks. This makes it almost impossible to comment on this list of weaknesses. But some things can be said. Fragmentation of the movement is a serious problem, deriving largely from the sources he identifies. What will solve this fragmentation? It will take some combination of factors, including authoritative leadership -- highly respected people who are able to talk to both organizers and local leaders and funders. There will have to be issues so big and threatening that they clearly demand broader unity than any one network can develop. Finally, local leaders will need to meet across network boundaries, probably without the presence of organizers. Small efforts in this direction are already underway. DART and Gamaliel are jointly putting together a statewide effort in Ohio. Two local organizations in Oakland, one PICO related, the other Gamaliel related, have taken tentative steps toward joint action on education issues. But the new organizations are no different from the old in regard to Delgado's concern. They are fragmented and filled with rivalries as well. If they weren't, we would see a new national network comprised of these organizations that built on the strengths of traditional CO but avoided its pitfalls.

(b) "Race and gender issues. With the exception of independent organizations in communities of color, racial issues have been subsumed by issues of class solidarity in most community organizations....The same has been true of gender...CO has to address the 'identity politics' of the dispossessed as well as the way power is wielded in specific communities--or replicate the same power relations, in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation as the dominant society."

There is an assumption that there is a specific way in which race and gender issues must be addressed. Organizers and leaders have to have a conscious ideological construction, including notions of racism and its oppressiveness. It is their job to transmit these ideas to the membership and followers in an organization. But "traditional CO" has found other ways. People of diverse backgrounds are coming together on the basis of mutual respect, shared values, confidence in their own identities and self-interest. If Delgado wants more, he should tell us what it is. If he looks at the national picture of most of the main organizing networks, more and more women and people of color are playing key roles in their organizations.

(c) "Constituency...Given the growing trend away from organizing poor unorganized constituencies, how will their interests be represented in the larger society?"

No doubt organizing lower income people must be part of the organizing agenda. Delgado's essay gives us little idea how such organizing is to be sustained. Either external funding, organizer financial sacrifice or sponsorship from a broader organizing base is necessary to organize very low-income groups. Institutionally-based organizations are, and have been, engaging in various efforts to organize tenants, parents and workers who are not members of their churches. Direct membership organizations, like ACORN, have paid organizers sacrificial wages in order to make it possible to organize low-income constituencies. Ironically, their ability to recruit people of color is in part limited by this sacrificial pay. To quote "one organizer/trainer" who says "the middle class has more legitimacy and we need to use it to make changes" and imply that traditional CO isn't interested in anyone but the middle-class is a distortion of the facts. It may even be a misreading of the statement. That "we need to use (the middle class) to make changes" isn't necessarily saying we shouldn't be organizing the working class and poor.

(d) "The inability to articulate a comprehensive vision. It has been very difficult for movements such as CO, wedded only to tactical pragmatism, to compete with a reactionary movement grounded in 'values'."

We all would welcome a comprehensive vision around which we could rally. But articulating comprehensive visions is a risky business. My vision of how society ought to be organized may not be yours even if we can agree to work together on many things out of our common set of basic values. In the past twenty-five years, "traditional CO" has been articulating broad goals of justice and democracy, of participation and accountability, of mutual respect, of institutions that work for people and values rooted in the best of our religious and political traditions. More will be said as more people become involved. To say too much before they are involved is to make exactly the "sectarian" mistakes from which Delgado takes pains to distinguish himself. I think most organizers are too cautious in this regard; but it is not because they are "wedded only to tactical pragmatism." Rather, it is because they are unwilling to risk challenging some ideas held by the leaders and members in organizations with which they work. In this regard, we have much to learn from people like Myles Horton and Paulo Freire. But, again, these are not qualitative differences. Speaking of Alinsky, Horton said he "consciously used issues for educational purposes...He was very proud of the fact that people learned." [(c)](#) Current caution may, indeed, be a function of professionalization and the absence of a sense of being in a larger movement. Delgado makes important observations but places them in a theoretical framework which just doesn't fit.

(e) "Lack of adequate resources...Organizing cannot happen without money--and money for organizations that demand participation and power for the dispossessed is a rare commodity. Money alone, however, would not solve CO's problems...The movement has neither the money nor the infrastructure to attract and develop successive crops of organizers, researchers, and leaders who will make CO both viable in a changing economy and effective in representing the aims and aspirations of new populations." (68-71)

This lack of adequate resources is one of the sources of fragmentation. I wish Delgado would have addressed this. All organizing, of whatever stripe, has failed to generate money from the bottom up (by serious membership dues and membership fundraising activities) to fully cover both core organizational budgets and next tier structures (including "intermediaries"). The result is a politics of patrons, a kind of new feudalism in which various benefactors (foundations and others), unaccountable to the constituencies which they support, too often call the shots by creating guidelines and requirements that weaken the organic develop of individual organizing efforts. This arrangement also makes local efforts more dependent on intermediaries which stand between them and funding sources. It diminishes the possibilities for rival tendencies to come together in broader formations. Organized labor, because of dues check-offs, has been able to generate sufficient funds from members to pay both for individual locals and for a significant number of additional layers of organization (councils, state, regional, national and international organizations; central labor bodies, state federations and the AFL-CIO). Organized religion has been able to do this as well, but as anyone who works closely with churches knows the "big donor" has influence far beyond what a "one-person, one-vote" ideal would suggest.

"New Developments in Community Organizing:" (72)

"Analytical Development: Many community organizers, strategists and leaders are beginning to acknowledge the need for both formal and informal forms of community education and analytical work to complement the organizing work and to make it more effective. Eschewing the old CO axiom (from Fred Ross), 'we educate people to organize them, we don't organize people to educate them,' many community organizations have experimented with a number of different approaches to improve the analytical ability of their staff and leaders." (72)

The conversation about the relationship between more formal, analytic (as distinct from skills training) education is not a new one. Myles Horton and Saul Alinsky had it fifty years ago. Political education unrelated to practice is sterile. Practice without analysis limits those engaged to the categories given them by the dominant status quo. Neither is adequate. The demands of each are contradictory, and both are necessary. Organization involves action. In action there is a reaction, with the need to respond to that reaction. Time of leaders and members is limited. The organizer in action tends to get drawn into the logic of campaigns, forgetting that one of her central tasks is the development of people -- including their ability to think about their circumstances and understand the forces acting upon them. The educator uninvolved in action, however, often lives in a world of categories so abstract as to be meaningless to anyone outside his academic discipline.

As Delgado notes, there is now a move to correct the swing of the pendulum that took many organizers away from education and reflection. But all organizers, old and new, from whatever "model" are now engaging in reflection and education. The "old CO axiom" is ambiguous, and could be read quite differently. Ross doesn't dismiss or negate education. Read carefully what he says: "we educate people to organize them." That means education is related to purposive action in the world. Universities and colleges organize people to educate them: there is a process of application, admission, registration, classes, exams and graduation.

"New Communities of Interest: One trend evidenced by the successful initiation of congregation-based groups, independent organizations of people of color, women's and gay and lesbian organizations is the emergence of organizations that are based less on geography and more on identity and common values. It is, in fact, these commonalities that frame and reinforce the cultures of these new organizations and provide the 'organizational glue' that keeps people together when 'immediate wins' are not possible." (75)

Delgado's mis-statement of "organizations based on geography" has already been discussed. The glue of organization was never geography; the glue happened more to coincide with geography. But there is little evidence that power can be built without wins. The wins may be different, but wins there must be. Where are the organizations, other than those of activists whose connection to constituency is one of mobilizing rather than organizing, that have been built without such wins?

"Solidarity based on identity has been particularly important for dispossessed constituencies." Another of the constituencies Delgado includes in this group is the disabled. Single-constituency organizing among the disabled isn't new either. As long ago as the 1950s, a University of California blind professor, Jacobus ten Broek, was a leader of statewide and national efforts to organize the blind. They successfully pursued legislative reform which substantially increased benefits available to them, and they fought to break down barriers to blind people and prejudices against them. Any group with particular grievances will best define its problems and the solutions it wants to pursue for them. Only by so doing can it hope to shift from the status of victim to that of agent, from object to subject. What is new is the celebration of certain particular identities in ways that exclude the possibility of being part of something larger. No doubt membership in something larger always offers the risk of losing one's identity. As in all of life, there are tensions. But when solidarity based on identity becomes exclusive of a human solidarity that binds us together, we get precisely the kind of fragmentation which Delgado elsewhere observes and wants to overcome.

2. The Critique That Could Have Been

Those that follow in the "Alinsky-Ross tradition" have much to learn from earlier movements and contemporary ones. The arrogance of some of these organizers toward social movements is often quite extraordinary. In its ten-day workshop, the IAF used to include a typology that contrasted social movements with broad-based organizations. It led to dismissal of such things as the southern civil rights movement and Poland's Solidarity. I was told that wiser heads prevailed, and the session has been omitted. But others in organizing continue to perpetuate misconceptions about social movements. Unless I missed it, CO hasn't toppled any national governments, but Solidarity, the African National Congress and other movements have. Nor has it had the impact on the US that the southern civil rights movement had.

While careful discussion of the relationship between social movements and organizing would have been useful, it is not what Delgado provides. So would a careful discussion of many of the other questions he raises. (Through the years, Delgado has consistently pressed the leadership of "traditional CO" to give attention to, or improve their record on, numerous concerns: recruiting women and people of color as professional organizers; developing strategies to reach low-income constituencies; articulating the value-base of community organizing; incorporating more formal, structured, education (as distinct from training) into the work of organizing; developing broader analytic frameworks to understand what is going on in the world today; including youth as a constituency for community organizing, and; understanding the international context in which organizing now takes place. These questions have been, and are being, raised by organizers within "traditional CO." Though the record is far from perfect, there are many examples of traditional CO having addressed these concerns in its own history. The validity of Delgado's critique is diminished by his omission of these examples, his partial history of the work of Alinsky and Ross, and his efforts to impose a theoretical framework which doesn't fit the facts. To say the least, it is disappointing and puzzling that he proceeded in this way.

We all look at the world through the lens of our own experience, interests and values. The sociological imagination provides us with tools to reach beyond what instinct, tradition and our own particular situation might otherwise lead us to view as truths. Delgado has not made use of that imagination in this case though his other writing, his role in meetings we have attended together and his sharp mind in our personal conversations tell me this is a lapse to be otherwise explained.

Delgado is the founder of the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), which has become a vehicle to introduce many younger people of color into organizing. That is a major contribution. CTWO is now working out in practice some of the ideas that Delgado writes about in this paper through its direct work with organizations it has created. Some of Delgado's ideas are based on the CTWO experience. But wouldn't CTWO make a serious mistake to conclude that there's little or nothing to be learned from the existing "traditional CO" world? And if CTWO is successful in some of its efforts, shouldn't we all learn from them? Delgado's dismissal of the past doesn't contribute to this kind of reciprocity. From my conversations with CTWO-related organizers, and from reading their publications, they wrestle with many of the same kinds of problems that face "traditional CO" organizers.

Perhaps the answer to why this report is written as it is can to be found in the audience for whom Delgado's essay was originally prepared. "This report...was written at the request of staff at the Ford Foundation who were interested in better understanding the types of activities and strategies that comprise CO; the history of the field, its achievements, limitations and needs, and ways in which donors concerned with communities of color and social justice issues might be supportive of CO." (7) That's not what they got. This piece is better understood as an argument to donors to fund one strand of oranizing, the one Delgado supports. In this light, some of its omissions and emphases are understandable. But, this mode of argument and discussion with funding sources and others outside the field is limiting, though tempting and human. I've done it myself -- and later regretted it. If we are serious about devel-oping the broad base necessary to bring about fundamental

change, we will do far better to say, paraphrasing Scripture, there are many rooms in my father's mansion. My room is the one I've chosen, know best and am invested in. This allows one to emphasize his or her own strengths. I'm not suggesting that criticism can't be made, but when it is made it ought to be accurate.

In trying to make the case for a particular approach, while at the same time presenting what appears to be an "objective" assessment, Delgado falls short on both tasks. His audience gets a mix of insights, selective history and a theoretical perspective that does not explain many facts that contradict it.

Contemporary "traditional CO" is very different from what Alinsky did 25 years ago. Evaluating, adapting to changes in the external environment, improving community-building dimensions of organizing, increasing formal education activities, deepening values reflection and adopting new tactics and strategies to fit new situations are all part of the practice of most of the organizing networks. Adaptation is a necessity because these organizations start with where people are and have a general vision of where they want to go. In addition, unlike absentee owned and funded groups, most of these organizations are to some extent dependent on money coming from "the bottom up." If individual or organizational members don't like what they're getting, they can simply quit. That's not a sufficient condition for full accountability and responsibility, but it's a pretty good one. Delgado's argument for new organizations needs to be melded with recognition of the fact that "traditional CO" has evolved to incorporate many, if not most, of his criticisms.

The typical pattern of foundations is to ask for continuous innovation. In part, this is prompted by their understanding that they should help new things get started and, after they become institutionalized, move on to address new problems. Sources of institutionalization are thought to be government, the business community, entities like the United Way or individual donors. It is expected that in three years new needs will be assessed, programs defined to fix them and results obtained that can be incorporated in ongoing budget streams, existing agencies and programs, or reflected in legislation meant to address what now are the old problems. But different criteria are needed when the problem being addressed is one of powerlessness and alienation among broad sectors of people in the United States, and their exclusion from the places where decisions are made that affect their lives. Organizing is not a quick-fix solution to problems deeply entrenched in our social structure. To start new things every few years because that is the span of interest of foundations will not build the kind of movement needed to transform the unjust structures which organizing challenges. Organizing's allies in foundations and denominational funding agencies understand this; their voices need to be strengthened, not diminished.

The search by foundations for continuous innovation sets up an atmosphere that encourages fads and is not always so benign. It is sometimes driven by individuals seeking to make their mark with the projects they fund. Perhaps they imagine themselves to be the "government-in-waiting," hoping that their "model" will be adopted by a new Administration in Washington. Being on the "cutting edge" offers cocktail party talk and can turn into a game of one-upmanship. Even innocent and relevant questions which seek to determine "what is unique about your effort?" can have negative consequences when the responses to them "poor mouth" the work of others.

A contribution of Delgado's report is that it opens public dialog. Even its weaknesses are out in the open -- which is more than most are willing to risk. We need forums for intellectual encounter and arenas in which the diverse strands of a broad movement for economic, environmental and social justice can come together in action. No one has devised either. Ironically, Alinsky's old form--the organization that included everyone and had a lively internal politics--might profitably be revisited as an arena for action. Perhaps some CHD Bishops, their Protestant counterparts and others respected by the organizing world should convene some forums of community organization leaders to discuss the bigger picture. Delgado and I, and a few others, have written and published about this field. Other organizers ought to as well.

3. Bottom Lines

Because organizing is about both community and power, it is impossible to name a single bottom line by which to measure or evaluate the work. There are several. They include the development of individual people, the development and deepening of relationships among people and the relationship between people within an organization and their adversaries in unaccountable institutions of business, government and large nonprofits. The last of these relationships are relationships of power which, as Delgado says, "put the dispossessed 'at the table' with bankers, planners and politicians."

The bottom line of power is an organization's capacity to involve, and sustain the involvement of, large numbers of people. These numbers can boycott, vote, disrupt, embarrass, strike and otherwise make their numbers felt on institutions whose decision-makers would otherwise ignore them. When taken seriously and given the respect they deserve, they can negotiate, collaborate and plan with these same decision-makers. If we are honest with ourselves, no one in the world of organizing has come close to building the kind of people power necessary to affect the current concentration of wealth and power in America, to undo the deep structures of oppressive "isms," or to begin moving the nation toward economic, environmental and social justice. But if we can agree that the ability to organize numbers is one of the bottom lines of our work, then we ought to be able to evaluate practice. With that agreement, we could learn from one another, broaden and deepen the involvement of "the dispossessed," and develop the forums and arenas in which we might create the vision of where we'd like to go.

It is toward that end that these comments are written.

End-Notes

(a) Beyond The Politics of Place is available from ARC; 25 Embarcadero Cove; Oakland, CA 94606.

(b) (b) "Interview With Jane & Herb March" is available from OTC for $3.00

(c) (c) Myles Horton remarks at "Alinsky in Retrospect" seminar at Chicago's Columbia College, 1978.

(d) (d) "Beyond The Politics of Place": A Critical Review is available from OTC for $10.00.

ORGANIZE Training Center; 442-A Vicksburg; San Francisco, CA 94114

[Distributed on COMM-ORG, 9 October 1996.]