University of Massachusetts - Amherst
ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst

Masters Theses 1896 - February 2014 | Dissertations and Theses

2009

The Search for Self-Fulfillment: How Individualism Undermines Community Organizing

Rachel Rybaczuk
University of Massachusetts - Amherst, rybaczuk@soc.umass.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses

Rybaczuk, Rachel, "The Search for Self-Fulfillment: How Individualism Undermines Community Organizing" (2009). *Masters Theses 1896 - February 2014*. Paper 278.
http://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/278

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1896 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-FULFILLMENT: HOW INDIVIDUALISM UNDERMINES COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

A Thesis Presented

by

RACHEL RYBACZUK

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

Department of Sociology

© Copyright by Rachel Rybaczuk 2009

All Rights Reserved

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-FULFILLMENT: HOW INDIVIDUALISM UNDERMINES COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

A Thesis Presented

by

RACHEL RYBACZUK

Approved as to style and content by:

_____
Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Chair

_____
Robert Zussman, Member

_____
Millie Thayer, Member

_____
Donald Tomaskovic-Devey
Department of Sociology

DEDICATION

To my neighbors, both past and present.

To community organizers who are working to save housing and communities.

To people with privilege who could do more to create a just and equitable world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my friends who encouraged and supported me through this lengthy process. There is no way I would have finished this without your love, attention and time. My sincerest thanks, in no particular order, to:

Karen Barnes, for hours and hours of listening, encouraging, and company, especially in those final hours. Felicia Lundquist, thank you for sharing your time, space and cleaning habit. Javiera Benavente, for belief in me, encouragement, support, and free writing help you paid for once. Jonathan Black, the best downstairs neighbor I could ever hope for. The Weils and your lovely, well-lit, comfortable, love-filled, food-stocked compound. Mary Doherty and Lisa Wall, you knew exactly what I was talking about and your understanding was critical. Alex Jarrett, Amy Kotel, Martin Urbel, and Ruthie Oland—your attention and generosity made space for this to happen. Jenny Ladd, you ask the best questions of anyone I know and your brilliant coaching supported that final push. Jason Rodriquez, I would not have made it past the first year without you. Sue Tippett, I would not have made it the last many without you. Maureen Warner and Juliet Carvajal gave me unending support in the institutional day-to-day, thank you.

The workers, spaces, and owners of: Haymarket Café, Northampton Coffee, Amherst Coffee, the Bookmill, the Lady Killigrew, and Woodstar Café. These spaces make community more possible, unless you kick people out for being there "too long".

All unsecured wireless networks and the people who own them: thank you, thank you.

To my perfectly-composed committee: Gianpaolo Baiocchi, my conceptual cheerleader, whose simple response "Of course you can study failure" accounts for the last four years of my life. Robert Zussman, my fastidious, prompt, invaluable editor—your attention to the nuts and bolts made all the difference. Millie Thayer, my bastion of balance—your calm and understanding kept me going. I am so grateful to all of you for your patience and commitment to this project.

And, of course, this would never have happened without the dedicated residents of the Green Street neighborhood and their allies, who persisted against formidable odds. And who, unfortunately, lost the first phase of the fight, but whose message endures.

ABSTRACT

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-FULFILLMENT: HOW INDIVIDUALISM UNDERMINES COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

May 2009

RACHEL RYBACZUK, B.A., HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Gianpaolo Baiocchi

This paper focuses on the role of individualism in community organizing. My case study follows the organizing efforts of the Coalition for Affordable Northampton Neighborhoods (CANN) and residents' attempts to save an affordable neighborhood from Smith College's campus expansion. As a resident and co-founder of CANN I was particularly interested in identifying the reasons for our difficulty in organizing residents whose homes would be torn down. While attending community and city meetings, interviewing core activists and activists who left the organizing efforts, I observed individualism undermining community organizing and political involvement. People's search for self-fulfillment was in conflict with the level of commitment necessary to sustain a social movement. Coupled with the "progressive politics" of a "Paradise City" where indulgent self-care permeates the culture, individualism emerged as an explanation for dwindling numbers of active residents. Identifying individualism as an issue for activists can provide much needed insight and subsequent action to address and solve the problem of erratic, unpredictable participation of individuals in political and community organizing. We can learn how to not only create, but also *sustain* strong social movements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

ABSTRACT..... vi

INTRODUCTION 1

HOW DOES ONE EXPLAIN FAILURE?.....5

DATA AND METHODS 14

THE GREEN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE INCEPTION OF CANN.....16

HOW INDIVIDUALISM UNDERMINES COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.....20

NORTHAMPTON'S POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CULTURE: THE RELEVANCE OF PLACE.....28

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?.....34

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....37

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2003, twenty-six residents in the Green Street Neighborhood in Northampton, Massachusetts were mailed pre-eviction notices from Smith College. Unbeknownst to them, the college had been planning this for years: to tear down their neighborhood of naturally-occurring affordable housing in order to build a science and engineering building the length and width of a football field and the height of the tallest building in the nearby downtown—a five-story hotel. This building is the first of three that will make up the science complex: up to 400,000 square feet situated around a lawn. The construction will destroy up to 100 units of housing and about a dozen locally-owned businesses. Residents were alarmed—those who were going to lose their homes, as well as those who would remain in the shadow of a building significantly out of scale with the old, multi-family houses that made up the small neighborhood. One resident shared a common sentiment at the first community meeting held to discuss Smith's planned development:

> I live right next to the hot tubs so my building's the last building that doesn't have the big X on it and isn't being evicted. But, basically I have no idea about the timeline and at what my living situation is going to be. I just have this impending sense of doom of like, this huge construction site right next to my building. I live right out front. I have these bay windows. I'm right out front of the street. Is it going to be years of just god-awful construction? I'm just wondering. I don't know.

The letters were the catalyst for a few residents to begin asking questions of the Smith administration and the Mayor of Northampton. This led to a determined drive to organize residents throughout the city in hopes of preserving one of the few remaining affordable neighborhoods in a quickly gentrifying area. Through a series of community

meetings, residents established themselves as the Coalition for Affordable Northampton Neighborhoods (CANN).

As a long-time resident and organizer in the Green Street neighborhood, I would talk to people about Smith's plans to destroy my neighborhood. People who know Northampton, a town with a reputation for progressive politics, often looked at me with bewilderment and said, "In all places, you'd think people in Northampton would stop that" or "I'd think that if there's anywhere you could succeed in a struggle like that, it'd be Northampton". Despite these sentiments, attempts to create a strong, consistent movement failed as a dwindling number of residents volunteered their time and energy for the cause. The responsibilities of creating a city-wide coalition—organizing community meetings, door-knocking to collect signatures, publicizing and recruiting for public hearings, participating in CANN steering committee meetings, and passing out flyers at the weekly farmer's market—fell on the shoulders of seven people, five residents in the neighborhood and two allies. And, despite the liberal reputation of Northampton's politics, the Mayor and city councilors were conspicuously absent at community meetings and blatantly unsympathetic at public hearings of the city council, zoning and planning board meetings. Resident requests to deny Smith permits were discounted when the boards routinely voted in favor of Smith's plans by granting exemptions to zoning restrictions regarding height of the proposed building and discontinuance of city streets.

As an activist, I wanted to stop Smith from building. As a researcher, I wanted to understand and explain why CANN was failing—both to educate organizers and contribute to the body of social movement literature that attempts to account for

movement outcomes. The situation was baffling. We seemed to have many of the conditions necessary for organizing a successful movement to save the neighborhood from destruction. People's material needs were at stake; the city is known for its progressive politics; we have a mayor with a commitment to affordable housing as evidenced by a specific affordable housing advisory committee; our adversary was an institution with a stated commitment to social responsibility[1]; all within a community with a reputation for harboring leftist, political activists. Still, CANN had little effect on Smith's plans. After a year and a half of participant observation and sociological research on politics and culture and social movements I began to wonder why CANN had difficulty building a large group of dedicated, core activists who would share responsibility for creating a coalition effective enough to save the neighborhood. Initially, CANN drew a core group of approximately 20 people interested in functioning as committees dedicated to a variety of tasks including drafting a mission statement, organizing a block party fundraiser, creating a website and drafting outreach materials. Over a couple of months time, I observed activists dropping out of organizing as they stopped attending meetings and withdrew from participation in the online listserve used to communicate between meetings. Why were people dropping out? What were people doing instead of working with CANN? Why weren't more people getting involved? Despite numerous door-knocking trips, leafleting, teach-ins and outreach to elected

[1] "'Smith has built its distinctive sense of community through uniting the culture of the New England private college with a socially progressive vision. It is a private college with a public conscience.'…words that have become a signature for her administration. While stressing the core values of academic excellence that drive Smith's mission, she emphasized that the community must extend beyond the ivy-decorated campus buildings to the world outside in Northampton and throughout the globe….'This is not a woman's world, or a man's world; it is a human world'" (Carol Christ, Smith College President, Inaugural speech; Daily Hampshire Gazette, 10/21/2002)

representatives on advisory committees—that put me in contact with countless sympathetic and interested residents—CANN's numbers hovered around five to seven people. As participation dwindled I began to wonder about the political culture of Northampton. This led me to social movement literature as a source of possible explanations for our difficulty.

CHAPTER 2

HOW DOES ONE EXPLAIN FAILURE?

Social movement literature spans a huge range of issues—from characteristics and definitions of social movements to criteria for successful organizing and explanations of factors that contribute to a social movements' success (Amenta and Young, 1999; Bates 2000; Bernstein 2003; Gamson 1975, 1990; Jackson et al. 1960; and Staggenborg 1989, 1995). I am, however, most interested in explanations for movement failure. And here, there is surprisingly little to draw on because many scholars focus on success, or factors that influence mobilization. Shriver (2000) affirms this in his study of movement recruitment and participation patterns where he notes, "few contemporary social movement analysts focus on the *absence* of mobilization, or quiescence" (322). This gap in the literature supported my decision to study CANN's failure. Jackson et al. (1960) argue that studies of unsuccessful movements are equally necessary in order to properly identify the conditions needed for a successful movement. Studying failed social movements can help us to know if success is truly contingent on specific conditions.

How failure is defined is tricky because "failure" may have many different meanings. Success may be easier to quantify if organizers and activists begin with a goal that they reach; the steps taken to meet that goal lay the groundwork for studying effective strategies. But researchers, participants, organizers and observers may all have differing opinions as to what constitutes failure. In the case of CANN, the group started out with a stated objective of "zero displacement" and to save specific houses but lost the buildings. Because they were given concessions along the way (replacement housing of a different quality and location, rent control for two years after displacement) some might

consider that a victory while others would call it a failure as it did not meet the original goal of zero displacement.

Giugni (1999) substantiates this point when he specifies the dangers of pursuing research that sets out to explain a movement's success or failure. He notes that "…to concentrate on success raises the problem of subjectivity. Briefly put, success is often not assessed in a single manner by everyone" (xx). Other issues in social movement research include the prevalent assumption that movements are homogenous entities so success or failure is attributed to an entire movement. Instead, he recognizes that "social movements are complex sets of groups, organizations, and actions" with different goals and strategies (xx). The third problem Giugni notes in talking about success is that it "overemphasizes the intention of movement participants in producing certain changes" which overlooks the possibility that "their [social movements] consequences are often unintended and are not always related to their demands" (xxi). Despite the challenges of studying social movement efficacy, Giugni asserts the importance of continuing to do so with attention to methodological choices like gathering data widely, looking at broad social-change variables, using comparative research designs, studying processes over time, and movement outcomes—"in terms of movement goals, this means studying failure as well as success" (xxiv).

The challenges of conceptualizing success are compounded by the difficulties of relying on case studies. Giugni (1999) provides an overview of the ongoing debates within social movement research that illustrate the variability of each social movement case study. Two major areas of debate are disagreements about whether disruptive tactics are more effective than moderate actions, and the role of internal versus external

resources on movement outcomes (e.g. Steedly and Foley 1979; Mirowsky and Ross 1981; McAdam 1983; Tarrow 1998; Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975; Piven and Cloward 1979, 1993; and Schumaker 1978). However, Bates (2000) points out the necessity of considering the full dynamic of an organization, not simply tactics or resource mobilization, to evaluate its success or failure. "Political failure can be a result of both external constraints (e.g. the nature of political opportunity structures), and internal weaknesses (e.g. leadership rigidity). And to understand this dynamic one must also recognize the interactive nature of insurgency. Political failure can be both a result of lessened member commitment and also a cause of lessened member commitment as they interact to produce a downward spiral of decline" (Bates 2000:20). Bates is correct in pointing out the complexity of social movements, organizations made up of individuals interacting with a multitude of factors beyond tactics and resources. Formulating theories about social movements would benefit from studies of a lack, or noticeable decline, of member commitment, and the reasons in order to understand why movements fail and how to increase their likelihood for success.

In the case of the Coalition for Affordable Northampton Neighborhoods, I am arguing that political failure was the result of lessened member commitment due to high levels of individualism—a "condition" prevalent in U.S. culture and exacerbated by Northampton's self-centered social and consumer culture.

Evaluating the tactics and strategies of this particular organizing campaign would undoubtedly reveal ways activists could have leveraged more power, responded differently to the opposition, or employed more effective communication strategies within the group. While there are many unanswered questions, and a number of

alternative explanations I have not explored to explain CANN's failure to preserve the neighborhood, as a participant observer a recurring theme in my observations centered on the role of individualism and its effects on undermining community organizing. For these purposes, the study of social movements merges with the study of civic participation more generally.

For decades, scholars, social commentators, politicians, and average citizens have been debating the reason for decreased civic participation. Explanations vary: a decline in individuals' sense of political efficacy; the rise of mall culture; mass media; new-age ideology or metaphysical politics; suburban sprawl; overwork; and technology (Boggs 1997; Putnam 2000). Some argue there is no cause for concern; others suggest potentially catastrophic repercussions for civil society (Bellah et al. 1985, 1996; Boggs 1997; Etzioni 1993, 1998, 2004; Lasch 1979; Putnam 2000; Rieff 1966). The consequences can include lower work productivity, fewer personal and business contacts, diminished emotional and physical health, and at its most extreme, higher levels of crime and political extremism (Putnam 2000).

An overriding theme in these debates focuses on individualism. Communitarian scholars argue that individualism threatens the public good because, "as self expression and private life become more important they pull down morality, political dedication, and public virtue" (Lichterman 1996:10). Commitment and obligation are central components to the communitarian perspective. "What is at stake is not merely warm, cuddly feelings or frissions of community pride….our schools and neighborhoods don't work so well when community bonds slacken, that our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital" (Putnam

2000:27-8). Taken this way, rampant individualism has serious consequences for local and national politics, grassroots organizing, and overall quality of life for individuals within their neighborhoods and communities.

Robert Putnam's (2000) study of declining civic engagement highlights these consequences for society and individuals as well as the benefits of strong social capital. He describes the 'private' and 'public' good of social capital in the form of organizations that provide scholarships and emergency relief as well as friendships and business connections. In addition, "Social connections are also important for the rules of conduct that they sustain" by involving "mutual obligations" and fostering "sturdy norms of reciprocity"—both between specific individuals, and in the expectation that giving more generally will benefit the individual at some point down the road (2000:20-21).

Contrary to some impressions, many contemporary communitarians are not attacking individuality or individual rights—more recently, there is an attempt to conceptualize a middle ground. Amitai Etzioni, scholar and founder of the Communitarian Network, articulates the balanced position of communitarians who do not seek extremes, rather: "When Communitarians argue that the pendulum has swung too far toward the radical individualistic pole and it is time to hurry its return, we do *not* seek to push it to the opposite extreme, or encouraging a community that suppresses individuality. We aim for a judicious mix of self-interest, self-expression, and commitment to the commons—of rights *and* responsibilities, of I and we" (1993:26). Academicians, social commentators and activists who make up the new communitarians concern themselves with "the balance between social forces and the person, between community and autonomy, between the common good and liberty, between individual

rights and social responsibilities" (Etzioni 1998:x), not simply the common good over all individual desire and action.

Paul Lichterman (1996), in particular, attempts to show how individualism may actually contribute to a commitment to the common good by showing how individualism is a catalyst and point of connection for individuals who get involved in political work. In this way, Lichterman, unlike many traditional communitarians, holds out the possibility of utilizing individualism and its positive effects for the common good. Lichterman offers us an examination of how activists practice commitment in everyday settings and "how personalism as a culture influences the ways that activists both talk about and practice commitments" (1996:23). Rather than undermining political involvement, he suggests that individualism explains why some are motivated to participate in the public sphere.

Lichterman (1996) distinguishes between two types of individualism: instrumental and narcissistic. Instrumental individualism centers on one's effort to get ahead. Narcissistic individualism is reflected in excessive self-centeredness and a focus on personal growth. His research focuses on the latter, what he refers to as personalism: "ways of speaking or acting which highlight a unique, personal self. Personalism supposes that one's own individuality has inherent value, apart from one's material or social achievements, no matter what connections to specific communities or institutions the individual maintains". He goes on to explain that this personalism does not deny the existence of community as an influential force, but it "accentuates an individualized relationship to any such communities" and develops "by reflecting on individual biography, by establishing one's own individuality amidst an array of cultural, religious,

or political authorities" (Lichterman 1996:6). It is this strong sense of self, a commitment to one's self that trumps commitment to a group or greater good. Absent in this idea of personalism is the understanding that sustaining strong ties to a larger community or movement has significant benefits for the individual. But, Lichterman argues, this absence is not inevitable.

What Lichterman finds in his particular case studies are activists who "participated in bonds of commitment that highlighted the individual person as an important locus of political efficacy" (1996:24). The individuals who practice this "personalized culture of commitment" think of themselves as agents of social change, change their personal lives to reflect their political beliefs, and align themselves with a larger political movement of "progressive" or left-liberal politics by politicizing their everyday lives (Lichterman 1996:24). As a result, this personalism does not prevent people from participating in community groups. Rather, he argues that individualism is what enables activists to work together and can enhance public, political commitment.

Lichterman's attempt to reconcile the negative implications of individualism with the idea that it can enhance political commitment and actually build community is compelling. Rather than worry about the corroding effects of individualism on all aspects of civic life, Lichterman offers us some hope that Americans' seeming preoccupation with personal fulfillment can actually encourage and enhance public, political commitment. While this positive outlook applies to some of the activist groups Lichterman studied, there are examples that illustrate the long-standing communitarian critique of social life.

In my case study, individualism, by which I mean an attitude and behaviors that are self-focused, thereby privileging one's "needs" (often, preferences referred to as needs), feelings and desire above other individuals and/or groups of people, may explain why CANN struggled and ultimately failed to achieve their goals. Activists dropped out of organizing efforts to privilege their individual needs over the group or larger political issue. I argue that individualism—Lichterman's personalism—is a quality that ultimately makes groups unstable. While personalism may motivate people initially, this version of individualism undermines community organizing and impedes long-term, sustainable social change. This is not to discount the significance of class, race, gender; power relations between institutions and residents; or any number of related conditions that interfere with or prevent people from participating in community organizing. However, dismissing individualism as secondary to other explanations for movement failure prevents activists from strategizing ways to *sustain* their organizing efforts.

My observations suggest that the culture of self-fulfillment has serious consequences for public commitment. As the data will show, respondents dropped out of this local organizing effort for "personal" reasons: CANN's inability to meet their goals, as an act of self-care or preservation, and/or unwillingness to commit. Rather than a point of connection, I maintain that narcissistic individualism, what Lichterman calls personalism, can make groups unstable and ineffective over a long term. If people privilege themselves and believe that they can come in and out of activism or community organizing as they "feel" like it, organizations will struggle to keep going. Given the occasional drudgery, frustration, and seemingly endless meetings required to organize

people into a collective social movement, personalism adds an additional obstacle to sustaining the hard work of activism.

CHAPTER 3

DATA AND METHODS

Lichterman contends "few studies have addressed the debate about personalism and political commitment with observations from everyday life in social movements" (1996:25). He criticizes research that relies on interview talk to project and explain people's behavior, namely, their lack of public-spirited commitments. Drawing on participant-observation *as well as* interviews I illustrate the effects of a highly individualistic culture on group solidarity and the ways it *undermines* community organizing. I attended all neighborhood and CANN organizing meetings; general community meetings intended to educate or mobilize; public forums held by CANN and the Paradise City Forum[2]; the ad-hoc working group organized by the Mayor's office including representatives from Smith College, CANN, affordable housing advocacy committees, and the planning board; and many public hearings of the City Council over a three year period. I spoke with meeting attendees, activists who participated in various ways but who were peripheral to our organizing, and residents in the neighborhood who did not get involved in organizing. As an organizer I had extensive contact with residents throughout the neighborhood and the city when door knocking and tabling at the farmer's market. I also had many casual conversations on the street, in restaurants and in line at

[2] The Paradise City Forum is "A nonpartisan, citywide network of residents. The Paradise City Forum was formed in November 2001 after citizens identified common interests and needs shared by people throughout the city. These needs include providing an independent forum to share strategies and information on local issues, and creating a network that could provide residents active support when needed" (http://www.paradisecityforum.net/about-the-pcf/). PCF will organize forums about local issues at venues like a local middle school or community center.

the local grocery store that added to this research. The numbers of informal conversations informing this study are in the range of 50 to 75 people.

I conducted seven formal, taped interviews ranging from one and one half to two hours with seven of the nine original core activists—four initial organizers who left and three who stayed active. My respondents include five men and two women; one who identifies as Latino and white, the remaining four identify as white; their ages range from 31 to 67; and people identify as either working or middle class. The remaining two not interviewed include me and one person who were not available for an interview. My observations and experience as a resident and organizer will be included and noted as such.

As a resident in Northampton for eight years, prior to beginning graduate work and research, I have witnessed the changing nature of Northampton, and have participated in many aspects of the social and political happenings of the city.

My position as a long-time resident in the neighborhood and initial organizer put me in a unique and complicated role. There were certain advantages and some limits I cannot fully know the effects of. Certainly my familiarity to neighbors, core activists, and activists who left gave me access in a way outsiders would not have had. And, my role as an organizer undoubtedly influenced how and what some people shared with me in the course of informal conversations and formal interviews.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREEN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE INCEPTION OF CANN

In November of 2003, twenty-six residents in the Green Street Neighborhood were mailed pre-eviction notices that served as the catalyst for a few residents (two of whom did not live in Smith owned properties) to begin asking questions of the Smith administration and the Mayor of Northampton. Despite Smith's assertion that they were being "above board" by listing their property purchases in the local newspaper, and that made it obvious what they were planning to do, residents overwhelmingly felt shut out of the planning process that would culminate in the destruction of their homes and the Green Street Neighborhood.

Meetings with both the Mayor and College administrators yielded little in the way of information, let alone hope to save the neighborhood, so the three residents organized a community meeting publicized via flyers and postings on local online forums. The first community meeting, held at Green Street Café, drew over 60 people despite a raging blizzard. In addition to neighborhood residents, administrators from Smith College, representatives from City Hall and two city council members attended the meeting.

The initial community meeting was intended to mobilize residents in order to send a message to Smith and the Mayor that there would be organized resistance to Smith's takeover of the neighborhood. At the very least, residents were demanding more information about Smith's project, how the college had decided to expand south into a residential area, and what alternatives were possible.

Over the course of a few weeks, resident-organizers set up another community meeting with the goal of strategizing next steps and encouraging more people to

participate in organizing other residents. Many people expressed an interest in getting active and wanted to send a clear message to the college; they came up with a position of "zero displacement" and urged the college to investigate alternative sites.

Following the second community meeting, people who wanted to build a movement to save the neighborhood met in a small room in the Green Street Café, a business that was itself put in danger by Smith's development plans. They agreed to form committees responsible for a variety of tasks: outreach, flyer-making, website development, planning a block party. Each committee would have one representative on a smaller steering committee that would meet to discuss strategy and execution. In addition, after hours of deliberation by these core members, the Coalition for Affordable Northampton Neighborhoods (CANN) formed in January of 2004. The main issue at the center of those deliberations was the effectiveness of a coalition versus a neighborhood association. It was argued that a coalition could form alliances with other neighborhoods, community organizations, politicians, and residents throughout the city who were fighting similar battles. Conversely, a neighborhood association would only represent the interests of residents in the targeted neighborhood. It was decided that a coalition could "draw more support" for a cause that would ultimately change the composition and quality of life throughout the entire city of Northampton.

Shortly thereafter, the Mayor convened an ad-hoc working group comprised of three neighborhood representatives, anywhere from three to five Smith administrators depending on the day, two members of the Northampton Housing Partnership (an advisory committee to the Mayor on issues of affordable housing), the Economic Development Coordinator for the city, the Director of Planning and Development, and a

member of the Planning Board. Many people throughout the city saw this as a step towards success—it gave organizers an opportunity to influence Smith's plans. Smaller negotiations came up during the working group process as well: organizers were able to pressure Smith administrators to reduce a 25% rent increase in formerly rent-stable properties, recently acquired by the college.

The result of many months of meetings and negotiation was a 30 page document outlining a series of design principles that reflected the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, needs of the parties involved. The principles, which included "preservation of the neighborhood", were intended to guide Smith's expansion. Concepts like "smart growth" and "preservation" became synonymous with destruction as the college moved forward with their original design. As a result, the final working group document includes two appendices, a Smith response and a CANN response to the design principles, both of which attempt to defend their position in this struggle.

Throughout the working group process, CANN continued to hold community meetings and organized various events to raise awareness throughout the city: a block party with a political message, a neighborhood-wide tag sale, and leafleting at the weekly farmer's market during the summer. In addition, residents held a teach-in at Smith and coordinated efforts with a student group interested in social justice issues. CANN requested a meeting with the Board of Trustees by sending a formal letter to each member but was refused. Smith students affiliated with CANN did meet with trustees but believed this was simply a gesture of condescension, as their concerns did not have any influence on the trustees' decision-making.

Different ideas for forms of protest were brought up routinely at meetings and a couple were adopted. Most prominent was a rally in the neighborhood prior to a "community meeting" called by Smith College to present architectural drawings of the proposed building. Organizers and a handful of residents from different parts of the city gathered at a house in the neighborhood where they were met by approximately fifteen activists who marched through the campus carrying signs and beating empty pails as if they were drums. Once at the meeting protestors stood along the back wall with signs, some had duct tape over their mouths.

After six months of door-knocking and community meetings, collecting signatures to bring to the mayor's office, and occasional public protest, an initial organizer encouraged members to plan statements and mobilize residents to attend planning and zoning board hearings. The overall focus of the group became about participating in these bureaucratic, city-run processes in order to influence whether or not the college received the requisite permits. To some organizers, this strategy seemed to be the most promising way to stop the college's expansion. During this time, four of the nine core activists stopped attending steering committee meetings one by one, while the same smaller core group persevered.

CHAPTER 5

HOW INDIVIDUALISM UNDERMINES COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Former CANN participants would speak passionately about the need to fight for the neighborhood, but stopped coming to meetings. Elaine, a longtime resident in the Green Street Neighborhood explained that she got involved because, "it was really local…I feel like that's exactly the kinds of things that I'm interested in. And because it's housing it's like, a right, in my opinion. It had to do with affordability which really, it's social justice, it feels really important".

Paul, a recent transplant to the city had a strong belief in community and the power of groups to create change. Even though he didn't live in the targeted neighborhood he felt strongly about participating: "From a social standpoint, these are my neighbors. We have to stick up for each other. If we don't…if *I* don't, then I'm a hypocrite. From an economic standpoint it's obvious. If these places that are affordable get kicked out, then the whole place just goes up in prices". Heather, another former member who also didn't live in the neighborhood stressed the affordability of housing as a key issue and one she felt called to participate in, citing her own past difficulty trying to find an affordable apartment and current financial insecurity and subsequent inability to buy a home in Northampton because of high real estate prices. Her passion for CANN's struggle reflected her own housing and financial insecurity.

By my accounts, these are well-meaning people who want to make change—people with strong communication skills and experience working in groups. They are people with awareness of social problems and who have a sense of what should be done to make things better—for themselves and others. They are similar to the individuals

Lichterman describes as “agents of social change” who “align themselves with a larger political movement of ‘progressive’ or left-liberal politics by politicizing their everyday lives” (1996:24). What I found in interviews with these core activists who dropped out was that their initial motivation gave way to frustration with the process of the group or the organizing itself. CANN was not living up to their individual expectations or satisfying their personal interests or goals. Their initial motivations included the following: it’s important because it’s local; housing is a right; class and economic justice; it is critical to stand up for others; to connect with neighbors; be part of a community. Rather than stay and steer the course of CANN they dropped out in order to tend to personal matters and spoke of activities they worked on instead: starting an astrology group, envisioning an intentional community, gaming, and working on an anti-war publication. Their original passions were not sustainable in the face of tedious group dynamics. The individual’s preferences trumped the need for group solidarity in this community organizing effort.

Paul is a white, 31 year-old-male who lives in a cooperative household that runs a worker-owned business as well as a food co-op. He is explicit about wanting to create an alternative to shopping in businesses downtown, to using conventional forms of money, and he and a housemate are actively planning an intentional community. He got involved with CANN because the destruction of the neighborhood resonates with his beliefs about the importance of community and his critical analysis of social class inequality. He explains the reasons for his withdrawal from active organizing with CANN:

> Some of it’s just living; some of it’s just trying to live a lifestyle that is sustainable. Some of it is working on the structures that make this community possible…. Some of it was just learning how to glean, learning how to build a root cellar, learning how to build these things that bring us

> out of the economic system and then empowers us to have more time and freedom to do other things.

Paul stated that the organizing was necessary from a social and economic standpoint and that his personal projects are intended as collective activities to empower "us". But, his personal goals and lifestyle necessitated he step back and put energy into living a "sustainable lifestyle" on an individual level. Combined with his personal mission to create alternatives to capitalism, Paul went on to share about his unwillingness to commit:

> I help out with things here and there. I haven't committed to anything yet. I think trying to start my own community is something I want to focus more on, so I haven't wanted to get too committed yet…. I still don't think I'm mature enough in my understanding of what it is I'm trying to get at, and sometimes I'll commit to something but it's like I'm facing a dam and there's tons of cracks in it, and I keep putting my fingers in the crack, but I really want to get to the other side and figure out what's causing the cracks. So I'll stop along the way thinking I've found it, but it's just another hole. So I'm just being cautious lately with committing.

Paul emphasizes community and social justice, but his struggle with commitment to a cause enables him to prioritize his personal, individual vision, one he notes is vague, over the important work of organizing and maintaining community. He is struggling to find his individual locus of political efficacy while an existing movement struggles to keep members.

Jerry, a 35 year-old white male is the only person in my sample who identifies as and votes Republican. He is originally from California but moved to Northampton a year and a half before the interview to work for a local, nationally known video game development company. Jerry's priority is to work his way up in the company and to minimize stress because of a heart condition that he suggests is potentially fatal. During

one of my first conversations with him, when he first moved into the neighborhood, Jerry asked who I call when I'm sick and can't go out to buy groceries. He expressed concern that he didn't know his neighbors well enough to do so. About one year later, during our interview, he explained his initial involvement was a way to meet his neighbors in order to build community, presumably for both personal and instrumental reasons. When asked why he couldn't sustain his involvement he said:

> Well, I think that I had originally achieved some of my objectives, which is: I built some connections with people. I thought that this absolutely was a development that was going to happen, that what was needed was just a longer-term type resistance to private interests we're going to show, and that I had a lot of personal issues to deal with, I had my career to attend to and my health to attend to, so it was...I just didn't have a lot of available energy that I could continue to throw in this, which wasn't directly part of my core personal mission when I came out here.

Initially an opportunity to cultivate and sustain strong personal and instrumental relationships in a common effort to save the neighborhood, Jerry used it solely to satisfy a personal objective, only to leave once he met his goal.

Rather than commit to organizing efforts in the neighborhood, Jerry decided to attend weekly game nights at a local comic book store. His need to conserve energy had serious repercussions for CANN. Jerry had established a website for CANN but dropped the maintenance of the site when he decided to step back. He was difficult to reach and seemed to avoid the main organizers in the neighborhood because he didn't return emails or phone calls. Because Jerry had set up the account no one had access to the content nor was anyone able to manage the site. As a result, the site—which had been listed on all of CANN's flyers and posters—was impossible to update and experienced a deluge of spam email on the public blog section.

Interestingly, over one year later, Jerry decided to stop paying his rent as an experiment—to see if the management company working for Smith would notice, and then as a sign of personal protest. When they threatened him with eviction and legal action he contacted CANN for assistance and advice.

Heather is a white, 48 year-old woman who works as a freelance graphic designer who chose to live in Northampton a number of years ago for quality of life reasons, particularly the walk-ability. She considers herself politically progressive and believes affordable housing is an important political issue worth fighting for. However, she took issue with the activities of the group. She suggested ways CANN could proceed that would "get [her] going again", in the form of not being so explicitly "anti-Smith" and by persuading the city council to adopt "safeguards or visions…in terms of neighborhood diversity and affordability" such as imposing limits on how much money individuals can make when selling real estate in order to preserve affordability—a move that would more directly satisfy her personal goal to live affordably and someday purchase a home of her own. So while Heather recognizes the importance of CANN's work, their collective goal of stopping the destruction of an affordable neighborhood did not manifest in a way that could benefit her. She "never meant to make a weekly commitment" because she doesn't make commitments very easily. Ultimately, Heather chose to leave CANN, in part to focus on other parts of her life and justifies it this way:

> It's the work of the 20 to 30 year old, before you have your kids and your mortgage, get active. And then maybe you can continue some of it or maybe some other youngster will take your place. And I don't mean that only young kids should do this but I just think in answer to maybe one of your background questions is that now that I have friends over fifty they, you know, they have great jobs, like they work for the union or you know, they're people who always wanted to do something to help out the world but they're not, they're going to Pilates, they're not going to, you know,

> and they need to keep their balance, and pay their mortgage and drive their kid around.

The activists who left are able to articulate their points of disagreement, and the shortcomings of CANN's strategy. Rather than commit themselves to influencing the trajectory of the activism, they "steer away" or "step back", articulating their need to take care of themselves or prioritize their personal lives over the needs of the group. Again, this can happen when the difficulty of group work comes up. Elaine, a 34 year-old white woman who has been most active with a local anti-war chapter, describes her experience with activist groups more generally:

> Frankly, the groups that I've been involved with, they get tied up in themselves like they start to be personal conflicts or things that feel like personality conflicts within a group that just, I can't handle it, I can't. It takes too much of my energy to feel like I can negotiate that and stay with the task that we're trying to do instead of getting into like worrying about how everybody feels about whatever. Which is important. I really actually believe that that's important stuff to work through. And that it's all in the name of building a better community, building a better coalition, or whatever it is, but it's exhausting. And sometimes, like I've stepped out of, I'm thinking of a social justice group that I just had to say, it wasn't my thing because it was too, it felt too mucky. It felt like we weren't getting where I wanted to go with it.

Elaine is complaining about her experience with activist groups that involve personality conflicts that interfere with her ability to stay on track with the group's goal. What she recognizes as important emotional work, in the name of building solidarity, gives way to frustration and overwhelm. Elaine stops participating because it feels "too mucky" and her goals aren't being achieved as reflected in her statement: "…we weren't getting where *I* wanted to go with it" (emphasis added).

Elaine explains how she dealt with frustration and feeling overwhelmed in regard to CANN: "Like, I wasn't sure how to make that happen [to get people she knew to care more] and I felt like I wasn't involved enough to make it happen so I felt like I needed to

step back a little bit more to get like, just like okay, put myself in the, in more of a supportive place than an angst-filled place". In this case, Elaine didn't see herself as effective, both because of her confusion about how best to get people involved, her own level of involvement, and her emotions. Despite being a long-time resident and one of the core activists, thereby positioning her as one of the more informed and effected people, Elaine felt uncomfortable about her involvement. She would take time off, sometimes months, unsure of her ability to contribute. Her emotional state prevented consistent participation. But this created a perpetual backlog of information and a continual need to step back—the more she pulls away from the group process, the less informed she is, the less empowered she feels to make a difference, the less she gets involved.

A few of the dropouts spoke to the issue of commitment, something communitarian scholars highlight in their critique of individualism. In my interview with Elaine, she implied that she *intentionally* maintains a certain distance. When we discussed this further I asked if it gave her the option to choose when and how she would be more involved, as opposed to committing to a specific role in the group and she replied: "Yeah, yeah, I squirm at that. I think it's accurate but it makes me like, 'ugh, I'm not very committed', and like, I have all sorts of judgment about that way of being in the world, but its true". She went on to explain that her decision to come and go is "oftentimes just personal, whatever else is going on in my personal life" by which she meant with her family or romantic relationship. Earlier, Elaine explained her involvement with CANN as consonant with her values, describing affordable housing as a right and local organizing being exactly what she is interested in. However, personal,

private concerns repeatedly override her commitment to the group. This type of sporadic participation undermines group solidarity—a critical component of community organizing efforts. Elaine has developed an "individualized relationship" to community, and participates in a "personalized culture of commitment" that initially inspires her to engage in local organizing efforts, but these qualities do not sustain her connection in the form of long-term, consistent participation.

Cultivating balance is necessary to maintain effective social movements—depleted, resentful activists will not effect long-standing social change. But when is this *need* to take care of oneself a justification to avoid the sometimes-difficult work of community organizing? What is reasonable to expect of one another as our neighborhoods face gentrification or destruction? In the case of CANN and Northampton, individuals privileging their need to take care of themselves, to "step back" out of frustration with group process or their desire for self-preservation undermined community organizing efforts. I believe the activists who left in search of self-fulfillment reflect a major reason people don't get involved in the first place, particularly in a community that emphasizes self-care as a lifestyle.

CHAPTER 6

NORTHAMPTON'S POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CULTURE: THE RELEVANCE OF PLACE

People in and out of the city describe Northampton's politics as progressive—it is something I have heard for over a decade as a resident. The most "obvious" indicators of liberal politics are the openly gay mayor, Northampton's reputation as the lesbian capital of the northeast, the vigil against the war in Iraq held weekly for years in the major intersection downtown, and support for Green party candidates in local elections.

In many ways, liberal "politics" are conflated with a lifestyle that reflects a specific demographic—white, middle and upper class adults with consumption and lifestyle patterns reflected in the businesses downtown, activities, and events rather than actual political decisions being made on behalf of all residents, not simply property owners. Main Street in Northampton is populated primarily by locally owned businesses: coffee shops, upscale clothing stores, hair salons with mini-spas, a couple of bookstores (the third long-standing new age bookstore went out of business and the owners opened a hot tub spa in another college town nearby), and an eclectic range of moderate to high-priced restaurants. There are four yoga studios within two miles of each other, two meditation centers, numerous acupuncturists, chiropractors, massage therapists, "bodyworkers", and other practitioners of alternative medicine and healing modalities, as well as close to two hundred psychotherapists listed in the local phone book. Franchise businesses are at a minimum—a Quizno's Subs franchise store opened and closed within two years. When they opened, their major marketing angle was "locally owned and operated". The owner and his wife had moved to Northampton during the initial phases

of construction and renovation in order to make that claim, knowing that many people in Northampton were opposed to corporate controlled franchises.

Bulletin boards in Laundromats and independently owned cafes are covered with flyers for “structural yoga therapy” clinics, meditation classes, Reiki trainings, conscious communication workshops, ads for vegan roommates, and support groups of various kinds. Many of the healing services available are listed in *Many Hands*, the Northampton-based resource magazine for “personal and social transformation through non-traditional approaches to medicine, bodywork, counseling and the development of intuitive abilities” (http://www.manyhands.com/about/). There is also a small but sustaining population of people who support a couple of tattoo and piercing enterprises.

There is no living wage ordinance despite a couple of petition drives by residents; Wal-Mart set up shop without an organized fight; without rent control, real estate prices have pushed most low-income people to the periphery of town or to adjoining towns; many downtown, market-rate apartment buildings have been converted into condos; franchises have been able to occupy storefronts on Main Street without issue from City Hall; and the locally-owned hardware and office supply stores moved outside the commercial center. Most recently, economic development trumped resident organizing to save the historic Northampton State Hospital; to oppose a new highway exit interchange within a residential section of town; and to an organized resistance to a new Hilton hotel behind the only park in town and adjacent to low-income subsidized housing. The State Hospital is being razed to make way for mixed income housing and commercial development; the interchange is going ahead, as is the hotel.

In many ways, the characteristics of Northampton's consumer culture, which is heavily influenced by new-age, therapeutic, self-help ideology reinforces a prevalent individualism rampant in U.S. culture. The emphasis on the self makes self-improvement a prevalent hobby and takes people out of the public sphere.

> Like the utopianism of early prophets, mystics, healers, and religious missionaries, metaphysical thinking is devoted to a search for empowerment, identity, salvation, even divine intervention in a society rife with change and uncertainty. It affirms the struggle for individuality, self, and autonomy in a situation where collective forms of action may seem hopeless. And it looks for transcendent values and sources of authority in a world where external forces may appear fixed, irreversible, and awesome. Significantly too, its gaze lies essentially *outside* the public sphere, far removed from the difficult and brutal terrain of actually-existing politics (Boggs 1997:754).

The evidence of individualism—a prevalent theme in U.S. culture—combined with Northampton's perceived progressive culture that actually emphasizes personal growth and an individual's well being exacerbates individualism and undermines sustainable social movements in need of collective solidarity. In addition, its reputation for liberal politics obscures the reality of Northampton's actual political culture, creating complacency as people assume justice and equity prevail because "it's Northampton". Combined with the idea that by merely living in Northampton and shopping at locally owned businesses, or attending the annual Labor Day celebration, one is contributing to making their community, or the world a better place is misguided. More active participation is needed to insure progressive values and policies are enacted in the community.

Self-fulfillment is readily available at any number of support groups, yoga studios, group chants, or practitioners, making it less appealing or necessary to seek it in

the sometimes-difficult process of group decision-making. And, because of the relative ease in Northampton, people can be lulled into complacency. Elaine, a long-time resident describes it as pretty "homogenized", that it's "really white and it's really middle class…it is easy to forget about reality".

Northampton is simultaneously applauded and disparaged for its progressive politics. Depending on which side you're on, Northampton is either a haven for liberals who value social justice, or, a pretentious city of hyper-political correctness. One long-time resident and former city councilor describes it this way:

> Well, you get a sense of irrelevance living here, you know, um, you get a sense of being voiceless, sometimes, from being here, you know. You have a kind of um, a cult of, what can we say, not niceness (with a questioning tone)…I mean, the people that run this town, want to run it as a, basically like an attractive piece of real estate that they'd like people to invest in. Where there are successful businesses and everything is wonderful and we've got a mayor that's a nice person and we're politically correct, you know. And, so, anybody that points out anything in this town gets run over. Anything negative, they get pretty well clobbered.

David's comments reflect the contradiction of Northampton as a community of political correctness with a reality experienced by some people that runs counter to the "Paradise City" image.

As I've argued, there are instances where motives of self prevent true collective action as people feel they can drop out of community organizing any time, leaving other members to do the work. Northampton's reputation for progressive politics sets up an expectation that, at any time, there will be options for other forms of political involvement. As well, it is the kind of place where people don't necessarily feel a sense of urgency as illustrated in Elaine's comments:

> I think there is a good political community. Like, I tend to agree with a lot of the political views in town. I mean, it's largely democratic for just sort of at baseline and I'm not even that party affiliated. But, you know, there are more progressive people around…. I do tend to be more isolated, a little. Like, I tend to put myself out of the scene a little bit. I like that it's there. I like to be able to tap into it and it's not like a huge—I don't have to create something new every time I want to be involved with something…. So, it's a little bit lazy that way, it's easy.
>
> I can go around yelling against some political issue and everyone's like 'yeah, yeah' instead of questioning what I'm saying. It's not totally true but it feels like there's a lot more at least acknowledgement of progressive ideas. It just doesn't feel like that's reality in the larger world. And it feels like it gets, you know, I feel kind of put to sleep by that too. Like, I sort of don't fight as much as I might if I was somewhere where issues were pushing harder on me.

Heather, the dropout who thinks it is possible to "age-out" of activist work shares a similar sentiment to Elaine based on the perceived political culture in Northampton:

> Yeah, so maybe I shouldn't have to work as hard because now I'm here can't I just pay my taxes, you know? To some degree, you think, well aren't there a few people on the city council who are talking about smart growth and won't they keep going with it? I want to in some way, assume that, I think at least unconsciously, um, [pause] I think, you know, a place like Hartford that was so oppositional, it's almost easier to get yourself excited. Cause there's nothing gonna happen unless you do it. And there's more happening here…in Northampton you don't have to make it happen.

This shared belief undermines community organizing—if people don't feel a sense of urgency, why sacrifice their personal time and participate in the challenges inherent in organizing? Carlos, a core activist and initial organizer who lives in the neighborhood shared his explanation as it pertains to Northampton's culture: "Maybe, in general, the quality of life has not gone down here, *yet*. So, everyone is like, kind of, a little bit lackadaisical about all these things that begin to happen and uh, I don't know what's, how many destroyed housing units, how many big boxes it's going to take before…" he trailed off and waved his hand through the air, suggesting a certain sense of defeat.

Northampton's political culture is unusual, specifically in comparison to surrounding towns and cities that are regarded as more conservative. Northampton, despite its reputation for progressive, activist politics geared towards social justice and equality, is actually a breeding ground for self-centered individualism. The abundance of venues for self-improvement and healing, and dearth of public-spirited commitment, suggests that heightened self-awareness equals progressive politics and activism. Given the conspicuous lack of participation in CANN's struggle by residents in and out the neighborhood, as well as the absence of like-minded groups fighting for social justice *within* Northampton, the reality is that personalism, in this case self-development and self-care exacerbate an existing individualism and trump action and commitment to the collective whole.

CHAPTER 7

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This case study suggests that the search for self-fulfillment may lead activists into social movements but it cannot, of itself, keep them there. Emphasizing one's needs over the common welfare of the group can undermine community organizing. Group solidarity is contingent on individuals negotiating complicated lives in order to maintain some connection to activism in their neighborhoods or larger communities.

Individualism is problematic for sustainable social movements. By its nature it interferes with communal and altruistic action. While an individual's need for self-fulfillment through connection, community, and/or social justice motivates them to engage in community organizing, my case study shows it is not enough to sustain their involvement. The challenges of group dynamics and processes are inevitable in social change and activist groups. Without a recognition of the need to hang in and commit to community organizing efforts in our neighborhoods, civic and activist groups of all kinds—from the PTA to clean water rights—will struggle to make strides on behalf of individuals.

My small case study, situated in an ideal environment for collective social action, speaks to a larger political culture and climate. People have internalized a prevalent discourse and are simultaneously responding to economic conditions. The American dream is contingent on one pulling oneself up by their proverbial bootstraps, without the help of others. People are responding to and acting in accordance with history and expectations in mainstream political and social culture.

Rather than conclude that individualism is bad and the cause of a hopeless state of affairs, I want to recognize the effects while also taking a balanced and honest look at the role of individualism as an obstacle in community organizing. This gives activists an opportunity to come up with realistic solutions to the problem of limited or waning group membership. How can we inspire people to hang in past the point of initial connection to a cause or group? How do we mediate the effects of a broader social and political landscape informed by individualism on our attempts to create cohesive social movements?

We have to bring the issue of individualism back into public discourse. And not simply by focusing solely on the *individual* and *interaction*, we need to focus on what it means to build community and how to more effectively create and sustain it; especially as it relates to creating movements for sustainable, effective social change. We need to focus on how individualism is undermining collective action in most cases, especially on a large scale. Suggesting that individualism is actually a good thing because it initially binds people in a common effort suggests we need not change it.

Activists would benefit from strategizing not only around issues of diversity and inclusivity, but to address their own tendencies to move from group to group, to withdraw commitment when things don't go their way, and how to recruit and keep other activists.

These questions and this research are relevant because as I noted earlier, rampant individualism can have serious consequences for the collective experience in towns, neighborhoods, boroughs and municipalities. If people withdraw, community bonds diminish and our individual quality of life decreases. Increasingly, solutions for social problems and issues of justice are falling on the shoulders of residents within

communities: small cities, towns and neighborhoods, given trickle down effects of a federal government that cuts spending to local governments to fund military projects and a crashing economy. People in need of affordable housing, childcare, healthcare and jobs, have to rely on grassroots organizing to hold local, state and federal governments accountable. In order for effective social change to happen, people must integrate their preoccupation with self and a personal need to enact change with efforts to build political community that includes accountability to others and a steadfast commitment to a cause.

Activists, organizers and community groups can explicitly address the issue of commitment and realistic ways to balance work within the group with employment, self-care, and time with family and friends. Groups can take time to discuss the importance of commitment to the effort and develop realistic goals, along with specific actions and tasks that people can take on given their level of availability.

More importantly, and less tangible, is a call to individuals to practice self-reflexivity regarding the degree to which each of us bypasses commitment to organizing in favor of indulgent self-care. Can we interrogate our avoidance of difficult personality conflicts because they are "too hard" when it means withdrawing much needed support and work to push for critical social change? What about looking at our unwillingness to sacrifice time or comfort in the name of social justice that can really transform society, as previous periods in history have shown? Perhaps CANN's failure can inspire individuals to reflect on the impact their withdrawal can have on a group and maybe reconsider leaving.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amenta, Edwin and Michael P. Young. 1999. "Making an Impact: Conceptual and Methodological Implications of the Collective Goods Criterion." Pp. 2241 in *How Social Movements Matter,* edited by M. Giugni, D. McAdam, and C. Tilly. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bates, Vernon L. 2000. "The Decline of a New Christian Right Social Movement Organization: Opportunities and Constraints." *Review of Religious Research* 42(1): 19-40.

Bell, Daniel. 1976. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books

Bernstein, Mary. 2003. "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained? Conceptualizing Social Movement 'Success' in the Lesbian and Gay Movement." *Sociological Perspectives* 46(3): 353-379.

Boggs, Carl. 1997. "The Great Retreat: Decline of the Public Sphere in Late Twentieth-Century America." *Theory and Society*. 26(6): 741-780.

Etzioni, Amitai. 1993. *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Etzioni, Amitai, editor. 1998. *The Essential Communitarian Reader*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Etzioni, Amitai. 2004. *The Common Good*. Malden: Polity Press.

Gamson, William. A. (1975, 1990). *The Strategy of Social Protest,* 2d ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Giugni, Marco. 1999. "How Social Movements Matter: Past Research, Present Problems, Future Developments." Pp. xiii-xxxiii in *How Social Movements Matter,* edited by M. Giugni, D. McAdam, and C. Tilly. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Jackson, Maurice; Eleanora Petersen; James Bull; Sverre Monsen; Patricia Richmond. 1960. "The Failure of an Incipient Social Movement." *The Pacific Sociological Review* 3(1):35-40.

Lasch, Christopher. 1979. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Lichterman, Paul. 1996. *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rieff, Philip. 1966. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith After Freud*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Shriver, Thomas E. 2000. "Risk and Recruitment: Patterns of Social Movement Mobilization In A Government Town." *Sociological Focus* 33(3):321-336.

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

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1989. "Stability and Innovation in the Women's Movement: A Comparison of Two Movement Organizations." *Social Problems* 36(1):75-92.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1995. "Can Feminist Organizations Be Effective?" Pp. 339-55 in Feminist *Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by M. M. Ferree and P. Y. Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.