

*Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*

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Introduction:

Democratic renewal in America

On May 2, 2000, three thousand people converged on the State Capitol in Sacramento, California. But these were not the usual well-heeled lobbyists serving the interests of the well-off. Rather, these were working poor, working class, and lower-middle income folks lately referred to as "working families," who went to Sacramento because they were tired of living on the verge of financial ruin or physical debility. They went to demand adequate health coverage for Californians left out by our for-profit medical system - and they were angry about that, at a time when remarkable wealth was being accumulated all around them and California was running a \$10 billion budget surplus.

They came for an "action" entitled "Healthcare for All Californians: Reweaving the Fabric of American Communities," sponsored by the Pacific Institute for Community Organization. During the day's event, they drew on recent academic research showing that 7.3 million Californians held no health insurance, including 1.5 million children eligible for subsidized coverage but still uninsured due to onerous inscription procedures. Most relied on community clinics or emergency rooms for their medical care - or did without.<sup>(1)</sup>

They packed the huge Sacramento Community Center Theater, plus a nearby hall linked via television monitors, with a crowd approximately 40% Latino, 40% white, and 20% African American and Hmong immigrants from Southeast Asia. And they were loud, as they believed they had to be to turn around a state government that so far refused to address the health care crisis. More than a few leading California politicians and political aides reportedly did double-takes as they entered the largest and most multiracial political gathering in Sacramento in years.<sup>(2)</sup>

The event began with a reading from the book of Amos, the Hebrew prophet who denounced an earlier time when the wealthy violated God's covenant by turning their backs on the poor:

I hate, I despise your feasts

I take no pleasure in your solemn festivals.

When you offer me holocausts [sacrifices] and grain offerings

I will not accept them...

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an overflowing stream.<sup>(3)</sup>

- Amos 5:21-24

The event continued with a prayer by a San Francisco pastor, Bill Knezovich:

Holy God, be here with us. At the beginning of our work, send upon us the spirit of Amos, so

that we may go forward knowing that change will only be done by ourselves, advocating for our

families and for all those not here with us. Hold before us all those old people forced to choose between food and medicine; all those couples ruined by medical diseases; all our own children whose health is neglected because we cannot afford to pay for medicine. Hold them before us so that we might fight with a righteous anger, as Amos did.<sup>(4)</sup>

There was much more, including testimony by a woman traumatized by her husband's suicide: he preferred to kill himself rather than ruin his family financially through a long illness. There were reports in English, Spanish, and Hmong from families suffering the gnawing anxiety of living without medical coverage. There were demands that part of California's surplus be used to alleviate the health care crisis, a specific proposal to better fund community health clinics, and talk of a legislative bill to expand the "Healthy Families" medical insurance program in California.

PICO leaders then challenged a series of state political figures to commit themselves to work with PICO on this agenda. Among others, the President Pro-Tempore of the California Senate, John Burton, stepped to the microphone saying, "First of all, I'm overwhelmed at this magnificent turnout." He then committed himself to working with PICO to expand health coverage in California for the working poor.

More followed, but the flavor of the evening is perhaps best captured by two phrases. The first was reiterated by a number of PICO leaders: "Healthcare now, for *all* God's people! Alleluia! Amen." The other was invoked repeatedly by leaders calling out "Se puede?" (Spanish for "Can it be done?"), in response to the political mantra of "no new entitlements" common in American politics today. Each time, the crowd thundered back, "Sí, se puede!," with the English-language speakers gradually adopting the chant.

This event and related work by PICO and its allies during the ensuing months dramatically shifted the political dynamics surrounding health policy in California. Within months, it led to \$50 million in additional funding for community health clinics, the easing of bureaucratic requirements that kept many eligible immigrant families uninsured, and within a hair's breadth of winning \$130 million in new state money to provide health coverage for "working families" in California. Though they lost the latter when the state legislature's computer crashes on the last day of the 2000 session, less than a year later they would win it back - despite a dramatic worsening of the state's financial position.

I will return to this story in Chapter 2. For now, I note only that this is a story of grassroots work successfully reshaping public policy around a prominent issue (health care) in one of the largest political arenas in the United States (the state of California), pursuing the interests of those families at the lower rungs of the American social ladder. Furthermore, it is a story of using the language of religious faith - and, in a parallel analysis, the language of racial/ethnic identity - in the public arena to promote the interests of low-income Americans. This book is written for all those who want to understand this work for the lessons it offers for building a more democratic future, as well as for scholars and students seeking insight into the intersection of religion, race, and democracy in America.

Our national political life has been saturated with religious language in recent years: The rise of the Christian Coalition and other elements of the religious right has made family values, issues of sexual morality, and (in a theological stretch) income and corporate tax reduction salient issues of "religious politics." More recently, the Bush administration's "faith-based initiative" has pushed to facilitate provision of government-funded social services by religious institutions. The faith-based organizations studied here also represent the intersection of religion, politics, and

social issues, but how they draw on religious commitment - and the goals they pursue in doing so - differ quite dramatically from these models for linking religion and politics. In contrast to President Bush's faith-based initiative, these organizations draw on religious institutions to re-shape government policy through the exertion of democratic power. Religious institutions thus become socio-political critics of government and social policy, rather than channels for government-funded social services. As we shall see, the tension between these two understandings of the role of religion vis-à-vis government raises important questions about the faith-based initiative. In contrast to the religious right's emphasis on individual and legislative moral change, these organizations struggle to improve the socio-economic lot of poor, working class, and middle-income Americans.

So this book is fundamentally about democratic renewal. The last thirty years have produced deep tears in our social fabric: real family incomes have declined steadily since the early 1970s, with only a marginal recovery in recent years. The gap between the well-off and the working class has become a chasm: Apathy and cynicism - or perhaps just honest recognition that standard forms of participation make little difference - lead to rampant refusal to participate in political life. Families confront ever-mounting financial and cultural pressures. Though until recently masked by the longest peacetime expansion of our economy in memory, these trends cannot bode well for the future of America. Democratic life has a hard time flourishing in the hard soil of a society deeply divided between haves and have-nots.<sup>(5)</sup>

But this book carries a more analytic focus as well. It is about the underpinnings of democracy in the cultural dynamics, social capital, and institutions of American society. It is about politics - but politics in the broad sense of our shared life as a nation. I approach this as a matter of political culture, conceptualizing political culture in a way that takes politics seriously:<sup>(6)</sup> How do those excluded from the full benefits of societal life organize themselves to project political power in defense of their interests and as a voice for the common good? When they do so, how do they build an organizational culture to sustain their political engagement? I argue that we can adequately understand the struggles, successes, and failures of this kind of democratic organizing only if we look carefully at the *cultural dynamics* within their work. That is, strategies, political opportunities, and financial resources alone do not determine the outcomes of these struggles. Alternative cultural strategies for building political power give different organizations quite differing access to community ties and social capital, and at the same time deeply shape the flow of internal cultural resources within those organizations. I will show how both these culturally-rooted factors impact the organizing process and its political outcomes.

The increased inequality of American society provides concrete evidence that the fruits of democratic life are not being distributed to all. The popular perception of politics as a degrading vocation, unworthy of people of integrity, suggests that many Americans recognize this democratic failure (even if they misdirect the blame for it). At the same time, there are promising signs from some of the deepest wellsprings of American democracy. As has occurred throughout our history, twin traditions of democratic activism and religious commitment are producing new forms of civic engagement. The embers of the democratic fire are being stirred by new efforts to hold our economic and political systems accountable to our common interests, and to the needs of poor, working, and middle-class families. So I write with a sense of hope in our future, a faith that our democratic yearnings may help us confront the challenges and embrace the opportunities of the new global economy and of ethnic and religious diversity in American life.

Two presuppositions lie behind my focus on those at the lower end of American society, their allies in more advantaged positions, and their joint efforts to build a more democratic society. First, that to live up to its promise, democracy must be constantly renewed and perpetually deepened to include groups heretofore denied the full fruits of democracy. When American society succeeds in that democratic renewal, it rescues whole segments of its populace from being condemned to economic, political, and cultural marginalization - and replenishes its own democratic wellsprings. Second, that if we fail in this democratic calling in our time, future generations will be haunted by that failure.

I do not argue that grassroots organizations or movements can alone renew American democracy, but rather that they are one crucial source for such renewal. They will require collaboration from allies in the political world, foundations, academic and cultural institutions, the media, labor and the corporate world, and from ordinary citizens. Their story is a challenge and invitation to such potential allies.

### Models for Renewal: Faith-based and race-based organizing in multiracial communities

The two models of grassroots political participation on which I focus both fall under the rubric of "community organizing." Both often work in highly multiracial settings, but one pursues an explicitly faith-based model of such organizing, while the other pursues a secular model.

The term "community organizing" typically describes work inspired or influenced by the dean of community organizers in the United States, Saul Alinsky, whose work spanned four decades and deeply shaped subsequent grassroots organizing throughout urban America.<sup>(7)</sup> Both models of community organizing analyzed here incorporate certain techniques of organizing promulgated by Alinsky, but they also transcend his legacy in important ways.

I primarily focus on the style of organizing practiced by the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO, which sponsored the California action described above) and other organizations, known as "faith-based," "congregation-based," "broad-based," or "institutional" community organizing. Faith-based organizing roots itself institutionally in religious congregations, and culturally in the diverse religious practices and world views of participants - their religious culture. Though linked to religious congregations, such efforts occur in organizations independent of any specific congregation or denomination, and incorporated separately as tax exempt, non-partisan organizations [typically as 501c(3) organizations under the IRS code].<sup>(8)</sup>

Although faith-based organizing remains rather unknown in academic circles, the first nationwide study of the field shows it to be the most widespread drive for social justice among low-income Americans today, other than the labor movement.<sup>(9)</sup> With 133 local or metropolitan-area federations linking some 3,500 congregations plus some 500 public schools, labor union locals, and other institutions, faith-based organizing can plausibly claim to touch the lives of some two million members of these institutions in all the major urban areas and many secondary cities around the U.S.<sup>(10)</sup> These federations operate in 33 states and the District of Columbia, with strong concentrations in California, Texas, New York, Illinois, and Florida.<sup>(11)</sup> Their median budget is \$150,000 per year; the vast majority of federations are affiliated with one of four major faith-based organizing networks (see Chapter 1).

Much of this book focuses on this broad field of faith-based community organizing, using PICO as a case study to understand the organizing techniques that have allowed it to build so broad a

movement and gain the level of success exemplified in the PICO California Project, other statewide and regional efforts, and a host of local organizing projects. This focus will also allow us to understand how faith-based organizing bridges the divide between the faith lives of congregations and the social and political world around them, and the lessons this may hold for our democratic life.

This book also analyzes a second influential model of community organizing, known as "race-based" or "multiracial" organizing. Multiracial organizing roots itself culturally in the racial identities of participants, appealing to potential participants as "people of color." Here, the title *Faith in Action* applies in a rather different sense: participants in this kind of organizing place a great deal of their political faith in the power of "direct action" to change institutionalized power relations. They devote a significant portion of their energy to changing society and public policy by revealing the ways that current political and economic institutions exclude large numbers of people - particularly people of color. The organizing techniques used in doing so are quite similar to those used in faith-based organizing, but appeal to cultural elements identified with participants' racial, ethnic, or national traditions, rather than those identified with religious traditions.<sup>(12)</sup> Likewise, multiracial organizing works through local institutions, but here of a different kind: instead of religious congregations, it is rooted institutionally in social service agencies serving low-income urban residents - but only in a limited way, in order to remain institutionally autonomous.

Nationally, race-based organizing operates on a smaller scale than faith-based organizing, but can be found in metropolitan areas and some rural areas throughout the country. Its local proponents sponsor "accountability sessions" similar to Healthcare for All action, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale. One of its leading institutional proponents is the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO). Like faith-based organizing, race-based organizing represents an influential movement for social justice in America. It has gained particular influence in urban settings with populations of high racial diversity, and is important here due to its local influence, its focus on building a multiracial political culture, and for the comparative light it sheds on the broader cultural and institutional dynamics of community organizing.<sup>(13)</sup>

So two models of community organizing lie at the center of this story of democratic life in low- and middle-income America today. Both sponsor high-profile public events to force political institutions to better serve the interests of low-income residents. These events are typically led by local organizations affiliated with faith-based organizing networks or with CTWO, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, or myriad local and regional groups; less often, they are led by independent local groups. Both models organize in highly multiracial settings, but each adopts a quite different "cultural strategy" for doing so - a different approach for appealing to the identities, beliefs, and commitments of potential participants in order to engage them in the work of non-partisan political organizing. I focus on the institutional and cultural dynamics arising from their cultural strategies. By institutional and cultural dynamics, I mean how their appeals to religious culture or to being "people of color" shapes the internal political culture of each group, its ability to collaborate with other institutions, and ultimately how these factors affect its ability to project democratic power. I draw on concepts from political sociology and recent studies of social movements, and at the same time move beyond those concepts to address broader questions regarding the political culture of American democracy - including the way culture (whether linked to religious or racial/ethnic identity) enables and constrains democratic action.<sup>(14)</sup>

### Why PICO and CTWO?

Both faith-based and race-based community organizing work to re-shape local politics (and increasingly state-level politics as well) to better meet the needs of low-income communities. In the language of democratic theory, each organization strives to empower its constituents to articulate their public concerns in the political arena, in order to re-direct governmental policy to better meet the needs of less privileged members of society. In the process, they seek to transform the relationship between citizens and public institutions.

I analyze faith-based and race-based organizing by looking in detail at two of their most successful sponsors. The PICO/CTWO comparison makes it possible to hold constant a number of factors which otherwise would confound the analysis of their institutional and cultural dynamics. These factors include:

*Locale:* Rather than abstractly comparing the overall organizing efforts of CTWO and PICO in differing local contexts, I look at their respective projects in one city: Oakland, California. This allows me to focus on specific cultural and institutional dynamics of interest here, and to hold constant the wider social environment faced by the two organizations.

As important as their location in the same city, PICO and CTWO organize within essentially identical neighborhoods in East and West Oakland. CTWO targets particular sections of those neighborhoods, notably the poorer sections and those where incidents (such as police abuse) may have generated particular discontent related to their organizing. PICO's church-affiliated organizing committees typically include members from within such sections, but also incorporate broad swaths of low- and moderate-income inner city neighborhoods, and a few somewhat more affluent neighborhoods.

*Political opportunities:* Closely related to the organizations' locale is the set of political opportunities faced by each organization. Scholars call this the political opportunity structure that an organization faces - a structure because it is a product of the specific setting and historical moment in which a political movement exists, both of which lie beyond an organization's control.<sup>(15)</sup> Political opportunity structure includes such factors as the relative openness of political institutions to influence by new political actors; the stability or state of flux of governing political alignments; and the presence or absence of possible allies within governing elites. The first two features are essentially identical for CTWO and PICO in Oakland, since they operate in the same political environment; the third feature differs due to differing possible allies available to CTWO and PICO by virtue of their cultural strategies and organizational cultures - precisely the factors explored here.

*Resources:* The financial resources on which CTWO and PICO's efforts in Oakland draw are quite similar: During the course of my primary fieldwork, PICO's organizing budget in Oakland remained relatively stable around \$180,000 per year, and CTWO's organizing budget in Oakland declined slightly, from \$150,000 per year for several years to just below \$130,000 per year.<sup>(16)</sup> Out of this budget, each pays rent for office space that includes a meeting room and several small offices, and supports professional organizers (during most of this study, two full-time and one part-time at CTWO; three full-time at PICO). Primary funding for both organizations comes from foundation grants.

Finally, both organizations draw on the expertise regarding organizing, fund-raising, media work, and staff development of their central organizations. That is, the home offices of CTWO

and PICO (both located in Oakland and thus equally available) provide significant input in these areas. It is difficult to measure the actual value of the services rendered, but they appear to be similar, as both PICO and CTWO hold strong reputations among community organizers nationally.

*Issues:* Despite superficial differences, the issues addressed by CTWO and PICO's organizing efforts in Oakland were structurally quite similar. In the period prior to my fieldwork, CTWO had successfully pursued a comprehensive children's immunization program, testing for lead contamination, improved translation services at the local public hospital serving most indigent patients, morning "nutrition breaks" at public schools, and distribution to social service agencies of drug-connected assets seized by the Oakland Police Department. PICO had successfully pushed the city to improve parks, recreation services, and street lighting in flatland neighborhoods; convinced the public schools to improve learning conditions and programs in classroom and strengthen the reporting of public school attendance; and convinced the Oakland Police Department to institute a "Beat Health" unit that uses violations of public health and zoning laws to shut down "crack houses," and later launch a citywide "community policing" program.<sup>(17)</sup>

Simply listing these issues creates an illusion of dramatically different organizing efforts, but this masks significant underlying similarities: Through these issues, both organizations have targeted city and county governments and the Oakland public schools to extract improved services for low-income areas under their jurisdictions. Both have included social services, educational conditions, and changes in police practices within their demands; and neither set is discernibly more liberal or conservative than the other.<sup>(18)</sup>

During my fieldwork, CTWO and PICO both succeeded on a set of higher-level issues - that is, issues they considered more challenging because they required the organization to enter a broader political arena (e.g. citywide politics instead of one city councilperson), entailed overcoming greater political opposition, or involved forming broader coalitions. For PICO, these include economic development in East and West Oakland, conversion of a traditional public school to a teacher- and parent-run (but still publicly funded) "charter school," and (in a partnership with the local teachers union) re-direction of public school funding priorities to reduce the number of children in each teacher's classroom and increase teachers' salaries. It was also part of a successful statewide PICO effort to reform secondary education to provide more effective preparation for college and the "school-to-work transition," and for more extensive after-school programs funded with public dollars. CTWO successfully promoted a campaign to guarantee funding for public schools in Oakland, re-distribute drug seizure money from law enforcement to social service agencies, and continues to seek greater civilian oversight of police operations. It has collaborated in statewide efforts to organize immigrant women workers, and an effort to increase police accountability in several cities nationwide.

Again, though superficially different, these issues are structurally similar; thus, the issue areas pursued by the two organizations before and during my fieldwork are reasonably parallel: Both had a history of extensive success with "lower-level" issues, both successfully pursued more challenging issues during the course of this study, and both came to dedicate significant organizational effort to statewide or multi-city initiatives (with differing success, as we shall see).

*Organizing techniques:* The core organizing techniques of the two organizations are remarkably similar, many having a common source in the Alinsky community organizing tradition. These

include an emphasis on organizing through person-to-person meetings, the strategic use of conflict and tension within the organizing process, evaluation sessions after meetings, a focus on "challenging" and "holding accountable" other participants in the organizing process, and an effort to have non-professional participants, rather than paid staff, take all public leadership roles- all practices to which we will pay some detailed attention later. Even where the organizations' terminology diverges, substantial overlap of organizing techniques exists: "political actions" in PICO and other faith-based organizing networks are in nearly all respects structurally identical to CTWO's "accountability sessions"; the role of "political education" in CTWO is discernibly different from the role of "training" and "reflection" in PICO - but only marginally so. As will become clear, these organizations have different emphases and styles of work, but they are not separate species; their actual practices of organizing make them siblings in the work of democracy - or at least close cousins.

*Demographics:* The racial and ethnic demographics of the two organizations differ, but not radically: PICO in Oakland primarily draws African-American and Latino participants (in approximately equal numbers), plus 20% non-Hispanic whites and a handful of Asian-Americans and Asian immigrants. CTWO in Oakland primarily draws African-American and Latino residents, plus 10-20% Asian-Americans and Asian immigrants, and a handful of non-Hispanic whites. Both can be fairly described as multiracial organizations, assuming that term includes white participation. Also, though demographics of the organizations vary from one local neighborhood to another, African American and Latino participation divides roughly equally in each organization taken as a citywide whole. Gender demographics diverged more strongly: CTWO's leaders were predominantly women, and PICO's leaders divided quite evenly between men and women.<sup>(19)</sup>

The socio-economic status of participants tells a more complex story. PICO's constituency reflects church membership in East and West Oakland: Some quite impoverished, periodically unemployed, or supported by welfare; many working-class laborers or low-level office workers; many struggling to stay within the lower middle class, the older ones homeowners and the younger ones renting and with little prospect of purchasing a home; and a few members of comfortable, two-income households. The primary constituency for CTWO's organizing effort in Oakland covers only the lower part of this spectrum: the working poor, lower middle class non-homeowners, and those supported by welfare (formerly mostly AFDC, now TANF). CTWO thus primarily represents a highly marginalized constituency, whereas PICO's constituency includes both the highly marginalized and those with more significant though limited economic, political, and cultural resources. This clearly gives CTWO a certain affinity for a more anti-institutional political tenor, and PICO some greater access to certain kinds of cultural skills. But the overlap is substantial, and the socio-economic differences do not appear to predominate in determining the organizations' political development.

Other than their divergent cultural strategies, PICO and CTWO thus display significant similarities: they use similar organizing techniques to organize in essentially identical neighborhoods of Oakland; face closely similar political opportunities; address similar but not identical issues; have access to comparable financial, in-kind, and strategic support; and display overlapping demographic profiles whose differences are rooted in their contrasting cultural and institutional bases of appeal. By analyzing the internal dynamics and political experience of the

two organizations, we will gain insight into the implications of two key cultural strategies for pursuing greater democracy in American life.

#### How I studied PICO and CTWO:

To study the process of community organizing, I carried out what sociologists call participant observation of both organizations. I spent three years systematically observing the organizing process in PICO's Oakland project, two years in CTWO's Oakland project, and subsequently tracked events in both organizations via interviews and newsletters. In both organizations, I regularly attended monthly meetings of the core citywide leadership, and often attended weekly meetings of smaller subcommittees in CTWO and organizing committees at individual churches in PICO. As part of my role in both organizations, I periodically provided Spanish translation of public actions or written documents. I also acted as one of five key "leaders" of the PICO organizing committee in my own local congregation. I thus became at least a low-level participant in both organizations; this helped me gain far greater insight into the experience of other participants. It also gave me greater entree to the inner workings of CTWO and PICO; I was able to attend internal agenda-setting meetings of the core leadership in each organization, watch evaluation discussion to which outsiders are not normally invited, and have very frank conversations with participants at all levels. But of course this role also challenged me to maintain a critical distance from their work; scholars, friends, and other organizational outsiders played crucial roles in helping me gain perspective on what I was seeing. <sup>(20)</sup>

I also observed both organizations' political events, cultural celebrations or prayer vigils, and fundraising events, as well as their background research meetings with political officials, academics, and corporate leaders; and their participation at government-sponsored public hearings. I attended training workshops led by PICO organizers, political education and study groups led by CTWO organizers, the five-day "national training" run by PICO, and some parts of the summer-long training institute for minority organizers run by CTWO. Finally, in order to more fully understand the cultural underpinnings of faith-based organizing, I attended worship services at all the churches which were members of PICO in Oakland, then selected the key comparative cases discussed in the second half of this book and attended worship in those churches multiple times.

I conducted 70 formal interviews with participants, in addition to scores of informal interviews before or after the meetings I attended. Some 35 of the formal interviews were in Oakland and in Denver, the only other city in which both CTWO and PICO sponsor organizing efforts. These interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and included organizing staff, local leaders, and religious pastors, as well as political leaders the organizations have targeted. <sup>(21)</sup> I provide further information on my interviewing method and questions in the Appendix. I learned more about faith-based organizing through 40 additional formal interviews in PICO federations in 5 cities nationwide. The strategy of concentrating on Oakland while doing brief research in other cities (and more recently in other networks, research not reported here) allows me to take advantage of the rich ethnographic data possible through in-depth case studies while also assessing and highlighting those patterns that are typical of faith-based and race-based organizing, rather than idiosyncratic to Oakland.

Sometimes trying and often exhausting, this research was also a great deal of fun, due to the generous spirits of the people involved and the joys of sharing in their idealistic-yet-pragmatic

political work to deepen democracy. I hope that the insight gained through this research will provide the reader some taste of this democratic work; offer its practitioners some guideposts for their own reflection and praxis; and invite all of us to more thoughtful engagement in overcoming the dilemmas of market-based democracy.

### Structure of the book:

The chapters ahead integrate narrative and analytic modes to draw an account of contemporary democratic organizing in America. The narrative sections focus on how these movements promote democratic participation and egalitarian social policies, while the analytic sections explore the longer-term significance of these movements by examining how they confront the institutional and cultural dilemmas of modern democracy. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on faith-based organizing at the local, metropolitan, and statewide levels. Chapter 3 focuses on race-based organizing as practiced by CTWO, in order to highlight its contrasting cultural strategy and resulting political experience. Chapter 4 comprises the analytic heart of the first half of the book. It draws on the concepts of social capital, civil society, and the public realm to comparatively analyze how faith-based and race-based organizing confront two key institutional dilemmas of modern democracy: the weakening of social capital in low-income urban communities, and the gulf between those communities and our political institutions. This analysis highlights how differing cultural strategies lead to differential access to social capital, with important political consequences.

These early chapters leave unanswered a series of questions concerning the place of cultural factors in sustaining and strengthening democratic life: Beyond the access it provides to social capital, does culture also matter directly *as culture*? In particular, does that form of cultural life we call religion matter *as religion*? Or does religion perhaps just provide a perception of legitimacy, access to social capital, and some organizational and financial resources to sustain political engagement?

The second half of the book examines these questions through a much more explicit cultural analysis of the organizing process in CTWO and PICO. Chapter 5 explores the cultural dynamics within faith-based organizing, particularly how the intersection of practices and beliefs rooted in democratic or religious cultural strands of American life together shape an organizational ethos I term "ethical democracy." Chapter 6 draws on recent studies of political culture, social movements, congregations, and the sociology of organizations to highlight the cultural dilemmas of modern democracy, and outlines a framework for examining how democratic movements resolve those dilemmas. The closing part of this chapter and all of Chapter 7 apply this framework to three different congregational settings to show that asking how "religious culture" affects political organizing is much too broad a question. By examining the impact of three distinct religious cultures on faith-based organizing, these chapters show that much depends on the particular forms of religious culture. The Conclusion again places race-based and faith-based organizing in comparative perspective, now in light of how they overcome or are undermined by the cultural and institutional dilemmas of democracy; and reflects on the implications of this analysis for the future of American democracy. Three appendices provide a list of faith-based organizing and CTWO-affiliated organizations nationwide, a fuller account of the development of PICO over the last 25 years, and a brief discussion of the research methods used..

### Diagnosing democracy and democratic movements:

Democratic theorists and other social scientists have diagnosed the shortcomings of contemporary democracy and civic life under several rubrics, most prominently as a matter of declining social capital; the inculcation of democratic skills in ways skewed by socio-economic inequality, racial/ethnic identity, and gender; weakened political institutions; and the distortion of communicative dynamics in the public sphere.<sup>(22)</sup> Chapter 4 will draw on these diagnoses to argue that a key institutional dilemma of democracy lies in the *structural fragmentation of the public sphere*, and to analyze the potential for faith-based and race-based organizing to overcome this fragmentation. Here, I note briefly how other scholars have assessed the democratic potential of similar movements, using two exemplars of such assessments.

In his now-classic study of urban social movements in Europe, the United States, and Latin America, Manuel Castells highlighted the democratic aspirations of such movements, but ultimately came to believe them incapable of overcoming the weakness of their structural position.<sup>(23)</sup> In the final analysis, these movements try to change cities too beholden to international capital flows and elite political power to meet democratic and egalitarian demands. Castells closes the book with great sympathy for such movements, but profound pessimism regarding their democratic potential.

In contrast, in a series of books about citizen democracy in the United States, Harry Boyte and his co-authors argue for "the democratic promise" of citizens' participatory movements, including the kinds of organizations studied here. The title of one book (1996) gives a flavor of this literature: *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work*. These books tout the accomplishments of such efforts, and are optimistic about their potential for transforming American life.

How are we to understand this contrast? Is Castells too pessimistic to see the democratic implications of modern social movements? Is Boyte too optimistic in his reading of their potential impact? Or has the strategic ability of urban movements changed enough in the last 20 years to justify an optimistic stance where only pessimism made sense previously? *Faith in Action* suggests a cautiously hopeful answer: Partly due to their sophistication in working with grassroots institutions and drawing on the social capital embedded there (analyzed in Chapters 1-4), and partly due to having recently developed a more sophisticated political culture (analyzed in Chapters 5-7), some versions of contemporary urban organizing have indeed transcended the limits that Castells saw in the late 1970s. At the same time, this hopefulness is tempered by the overwhelming social fact of our time: a global economy unaccountable to democratic pressures or the needs of local communities. Whatever its costs and benefits - and there clearly are many of both - the global economy clearly transcends the abilities of traditional democratic institutions to regulate it. I thus strive to present the difficulties and ambiguities inherent in new forms of organizing as they face the obstacles of the new global economy.

Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, formal democratic governance is widespread, but there is cause for real concern about the *substance* of democracy in America. Never perfect, yet ever challenged by marginalized groups and prophetic leaders to live up to its democratic ideals, American democracy today faces new temptations and confronts new social dynamics that threaten to undermine its foundations. The vast wealth accumulating among a new elite in American society tempts them to ignore the struggles and anxieties of those at the bottom of the economic

pyramid. The nation's status as the only "hyperpower" and the locus of global financial capital bring new temptations to abuse our global power. Our situation also opens up new windows of opportunity to address national and global inequities, but only democratic pressure from below and visionary leadership from above will lead us to take advantage of those opportunities. Meanwhile, under the surface of American society, powerful dynamics may be eroding our ability to generate effective democratic pressure and elect visionary leadership. If money continues to dominate our politics, if working class folk have unequal opportunities to learn civic skills, and if social capital in middle class and marginalized communities continues to erode, these citizens will find it impossible to shape the political and economic decisions that affect their lives. The organizations studied here provide no panacea for these challenges, but understanding their achievements and dilemmas may help us all build a more democratic future.

1. PICO relied extensively on research by the Health Insurance Policy Program, based out of the Center for Health and Public Policy Studies at UC-Berkeley and the Center for Health Policy Research at UCLA; and the Insure the Uninsured Project based in Santa Monica, California. The data quoted in this political event came from "The State of Health Insurance in California, 1999" report by the UCB/UCLA group (Schauffler and Brown 2000).
2. I was not in the vicinity when these politicians entered the hall, and thus did not observe this. It was the object of much mirth after the event, with PICO leaders re-enacting the looks on politicians' faces as they walked in and saw the crowd.
3. The closing lines from Amos also, of course, evoke the American civil rights movement and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who used them frequently in his work - most memorably in his 1964 "I have a dream" speech at the March on Washington.
4. Here and elsewhere, speeches and prayers at large actions are quoted as reconstructed from the author's notes, recorded simultaneously with the events reported.
5. See *Inequality by Design* by Claude Fischer *et al.* for one account of this heightened polarization in America -- already one of the most inegalitarian advanced industrial societies in the world. Recent increases in the minimum wage and tight labor markets have marginally improved the situation of the working poor, but have barely dented the polarization between rich and poor.
6. This in contrast to an older literature on political culture, originating in the work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963).
7. The best source on Alinsky's career is Horwitt (1989); see also Alinsky's own statements (1969; 1971). For an excellent brief analysis of how his version of radical democracy influenced faith-based organizing, see Hart (2001).
8. The following include some analysis of faith-based community organizing: Boyte (1989; 1992) and Greider (1992). Rogers (1990) provides a popular account of this work. More recently, excellent scholarly analyses have appeared; see Hart (*op cit.*) and Warren (2001).
9. Several factors explain the rather invisible nature of faith-based organizing: 1) though they indeed make up a coherent field of similar organizations, the 133 federations go by a diverse set of names so that one might move from one city to another and never know that the same organizing model is at work. See Appendix for a full list of all 133 federations. 2) a large portion of the national-level publicity on the field has focused on the Industrial Areas Foundation, thus blurring the perception of the wider field. 3) though faith-based organizing groups have been

mentioned frequently as examples of civic engagement, until recently little scholarly work has focused the field. 4) faith-based organizing has escaped the attention of national political observers because until recently none of the networks were capable of operating in arenas of political power beyond local or county governments; see discussion in Chapter 2.

10. These and the following data are from a forthcoming study sponsored by Interfaith Funders, the first study to gather data on the entire field of faith-based community organizing (Warren and Wood 2001). The 2 million figure is the midpoint between high and low estimates of total members of congregations sponsoring this organizing. All numbers listed in text are projections, as follows: The study interviewed the directors of three-quarters of the organizing federations around the country that could be identified (network-affiliated or independent, with the criteria for inclusion being that they had to practice a form of organizing recognizable as faith-based community organizing and had to have an office and at least one full-time staff member on the payroll at the time of the study). Data were then projected from the 100 responding federations to reflect the full universe of 133 federations nationwide, with the projection weighted by network to reflect differential participation. Numbers are rounded off, in keeping with methodological uncertainties and the projected nature of the data.

11. I use the term "federation" here to describe the typical organizations that carry out faith-based organizing in a single location (usually a city, though in some instances in one part of a city or in an entire metropolitan area). Some of the networks would not use this terminology, instead referring to their typical citywide units as "broad-based organizations" or just "organizations," for example.

12. Because CTWO staff prefer the term "multiracial organizing" to describe their work, I will use it except in contexts where it will create confusion. Primarily, this is where I compare their constituencies: since both CTWO and PICO are highly multiracial (in different ways), I then use the term "race-based organizing" to describe CTWO' work.

13. See Anner (1996) for the only available book-length account of multiracial organizing. See also Delgado (1993) for a leading insider's account of multiracial organizing and its contrast with the Alinsky tradition.

14. The most influential of the social movements work has been done by Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, David Snow, and their students. Core concepts in much of this literature include political opportunity structure, mobilizing structures, collective action frames, strategy, and action repertoires. See Tarrow (1992) and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) for summaries of this work. My focus on institutional and cultural dynamics overlaps with these approaches, but links them to the overall institutional and cultural dilemmas of democracy. On strategy in social movements, see Marshall Ganz (2000).

15. On the role of political opportunity structures in shaping social movements, see Tarrow (1992) and McAdam (1982). For a critique of this concept, see Goodwin and Jasper (1999).

16. The budget figures cited are for CTWO and PICO's projects in Oakland only, called PUEBLO and OCO respectively; i.e. they do not include the central office budgets of CTWO and PICO, both of which are based in Oakland. Note, too, that by the year 2000, OCO's budget had grown significantly, to about \$447,000. PUEBLO's budget had remained about the same. In-kind support to both organizations is limited to occasional donations, plus space for meetings when they are held away from the central offices. Both organizations draw on the latter, but PICO more substantially: organizing committees typically meet once a month at their sponsoring

churches (more often immediately before actions), whereas CTWO held meetings at social service agencies only a few times a year.

17. Both the lead contamination project and the Beat Health project, initiated under pressure from CTWO and PICO respectively, have reportedly been used as models for similar projects nationwide. The term "community policing" covers a range of models that focus on police having a stable presence and "problem-solving" orientation in high-crime neighborhoods, rather than primarily pursuing a reactive crime-response model of policing. See Skogan and Hartnett (1997) and various publications available from the website of the National Institute of Justice.

18. One partial exception to the similarity in the two groups' political orientation can be seen in occasional PICO support for "increased police presence" in high-crime neighborhoods, whereas CTWO wants to reduce that presence. Some participants see this as evidence that CTWO represents a more "radical" political stance, and PICO a more "mainstream" stance. There is some truth in this, but more striking is the similarity between the two groups' actual relations with the police department: both sought specific concessions, including measures (asset forfeiture, Beat Health, community policing) opposed initially by the Department and/or the police officers' union. Their negotiations regarding these matters were at times confrontational and at times rather friendly; and both ultimately won limited concessions that impinged somewhat on police autonomy but largely left intact the political power of the law enforcement lobby on local American politics.

19. The four core leaders in PUEBLO (CTWO) during most of this study were all women, as were 11 of the 14 people in a broader group of those attending organizing meetings more or less regularly. Of the 22 leaders who attended OCO Executive Board (PICO) and organizing meetings more or less regularly, 10 were men and 12 women.

20. Other participants in PICO and CTWO were informed that I was writing a study of the organizations, and I regularly identified myself in that way.

21. "Participants" as I use it here includes the three groups playing key roles within these organizations: (1) "Leaders," i.e. the residents in neighborhoods and members of congregations or other institutions (and, more ambiguously, the clients of social service agencies that attend political events); (2) religious pastors and social agency staff who provide entree to their congregations or agencies and sometimes are active in the organizing process; and (3) paid organizing staff in each organization.

22. See especially Putnam (2000); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); Casanova (1994); Habermas (1989); Calhoun (1992); Benhabib 1992); and Cohen and Arato (1992).

23. See Castells' *The City and the Grassroots* (University of California Press, 1983).