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Review of *The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Robert Fisher, Ed.

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result in their inability to successfully adjust in times of economic transformations.

The strength of this book is that it highlights multiple factors that result in homelessness for many people—a shift from a Soviet-style to an open-market economy which caused a drastic increase in poverty, especially among people with mental illness and substance abuse problems or in dysfunctional families. Eloquently, the researcher incorporates personal experiences and reflections, as well as qualitative inquiry, to highlight the subjective perception of the problem through linguistic and cultural idiosyncratic expressions.

On the other hand, there is a need to understand the multiple factors that can potentially cause homelessness based on age, family construction, substance abuse problems, criminal record, policy changes, economic disadvantages, or personal choice. Moreover, the problems of bank and housing fraud are especially important to evaluate in transitional economies. Finally, the argument that violence among generations is one of the causes of homelessness is worth further attention.

In sum, the book stresses the concept of space through the social stratification paradigm and the reality of having limited living space provided by the welfare state and charities to the homeless. The role of social capital and family support are presented as almost the only guaranteed pathways for individuals to remain human and come back to established society. The understanding of the larger context and the conditions that lead to loss of housing in Russia as well as how personal problems affect human dignity are worth further investigation.

Sviatlana Smashnaya, Boston University

Robert Fisher, Ed., *The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009. \$69.95 hardcover, \$27.95 paperback.

In *The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice*, editor Robert Fisher continues his efforts to advance theory, strategies, and tactics of achieving social justice while providing community

organizers with frameworks to support their work. In previous work Fisher achieved these goals by exploring historical models of organizing and examining specific issues, such as the influence of social and economic conditions, on community organizing efforts. In *The People Shall Rule*, Fisher uses the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) as a vehicle to expand our understanding of the field of community organizing while reminding his readers of our collective obligation to pursue economic justice.

At the time the book was written ACORN was, according to its website, "the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, working together for social justice and stronger communities." Today ACORN is beleaguered, making framing a book review awkward as it is hard to know if the book serves as an historical artifact or a review of an existing organization. The edited volume contains 12 chapters that explore ACORN from theoretical and applied perspectives. Individually, the chapters provide organizers with tools and frameworks to support their work.

Against a backdrop of controversy, ACORN has become emblematic of some contemporary tensions. For example, in the first chapter, Peter Dreier juxtaposes the possibilities of community organizing represented by President Obama's inspirational presidential campaign with contrary challenges, such as attacks from the right and fragmentation of the left. While the strategic goals of many community organizing efforts often have a single focus, Dreier points out that ACORN has been successful in bridging strategic areas. ACORN's work has included building a membership organization, advancing electoral politics, and combining organizing with community development and social services. While ACORN's use of multiple strategies has been effective, it will be interesting to observe in subsequent analyses if ACORN's wide focus has contributed to its present problems.

Most chapters are case studies about ACORN covering historical, comparative, empirical, and narrative enquiries. Topics range from school reform, housing, predatory practices of tax preparation organizations, voter mobilization and gentrification. Each chapter has lessons for organizers in the areas of strategy, leadership, partnership, issue-framing,

identifying targets and tactics, motivating people/groups for social change, and how “old fashioned organizing [was able to] trump resources and sophistication ... of a well funded public relations effort.”

Fisher claims that many community organizing efforts are hampered by four dominant trends within the field: (1) a turn from organizing for economic justice to culture; (2) a turn from oppositional strategies to community building; (3) a turn from building power to local organizing; and (4) a turn from social movement building to community organizing—and that these trends dampen social justice efforts. ACORN has bucked these trends, and Fisher uses its successful 38 years to remind organizers that there are alternatives to accepting dominant trends.

Fiduciary issues raised against ACORN—a source of possibly trumped up scandal—are not addressed until page 251. Chapter author Gary Delgado links the questions of ACORN’s future existence to the possibilities associated with “developing the internal and external strategies to grow beyond” its existing success. ACORN has seen more difficulties since Delgado wrote these words, and yet ACORN still has many lessons to teach. These include: how many of ACORN’s problems are a result of attacks from the right, and therefore an outgrowth of its success; and how many result from poor management decisions that left the organization vulnerable to such attacks?

No matter what the future of ACORN entails, the future of community practice theory is always strengthened by Fisher’s probing eye, and this book is no exception.

Elizabeth Beck, Georgia State University

Frances Smith Foster, *‘Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. \$21.95 hardcover.

Documenting the history of Africans in America from slavery through the century has typically proved to be a difficult task. Many slaves and, later, free Blacks were not literate, making it difficult to document the events in their lives. Researchers interested in writing about the lives of Africans in