DILEMMAS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: ANTIPOVERTY ADVOCACY IN
THE POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

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Michael David Forrest

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Joe Soss, Dara Z. Strolovitch
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Dedication

For Pat, Dan, June, and James.

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Chapter 1: Advocacy and Representation in the Post-Civil Rights Era

The financial crisis that struck the US in 2008 resulted from and/or fed into several interrelated forms of socioeconomic hardship, such as underemployment, public school closure and, of course, foreclosure and eviction. Just as they did in ostensibly better times, many of these hardships fell disproportionately on the poor, racial minorities, women and other marginalized groups (Austin 2010a; Fishbein and Woodall 2006; Immergluck 2009; Rugh and Massey 2010). And they have continued to do so throughout the ensuing economic recovery (National Women's Law Center 2013; Fitzpatrick and Golab 2013). Their negative effects have included measurable changes such as increased housing instability, wage loss and student mobility as well as experiences with stress and trauma that sometimes stem from losing one's home, job or school (Bennett Scharoun-Lee and Tucker-Seeley 2009; Kingsley Smith and Price 2009; Lovell and Isaacs 2008; Morin 2010). Such disparate outcomes indicate that—as much as unregulated, profit-driven behavior (McLean and Nocera 2010) or overproduction in the world economy (Brenner 2009)—the recent crisis stemmed from elected officials' persistent failure to adequately represent the poor and other marginalized constituencies (Hacker and Pierson 2010; Strolovitch 2013).

At the heart of this failure is their role in supporting the rise, since the 1970s, of an increasingly neoliberal regime for managing poverty and social marginality more generally (Soss Fording and Schram 2011). Building on racialized and gendered myths about the "urban underclass" and the "irresponsible" poor, proponents of this regime have obfuscated inequalities such as those percolating through the crisis. And they have

focused instead on labeling and modifying behavioral deficiencies—everything from dependency and promiscuity to lack of training and education—that apparently reproduce poverty by impeding the development of personal responsibility, work discipline and self-sufficiency (Katz 1990; Schram 1995). Neoliberal poverty management draws on a matrix of policy initiatives that, in theory, aid such behavior modification by disciplining the poor to become competitive and successful market actors. However, by obfuscating the inequalities that permeate markets, they have actually done more to exacerbate the marginalizing effects of poverty, especially among people of color (Collins and Mayer 2010; Lipman 2011; Goetz 2013).

During the fall of 2009, spurred by the glaring representational failures of elected officials and the advice of a friend, I began participating in the public actions of an antipoverty advocacy organization in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I was attending graduate school. Formed in the midst of the financial crisis, this organization, the Minnesota Coalition for a People's Bailout (hereafter, Bailout Coalition), struggled primarily to halt foreclosure-related evictions in the city and raise taxes on Minnesota's wealthiest residents. Its organizers and members lobbied state legislators to enact a more progressive tax system and pass a moratorium on home foreclosures and evictions from foreclosed properties. They also took direct action, using protest, occupation and civil disobedience to oppose foreclosure-related evictions occurring among the city's poor and working class residents.

A long-standing tradition in the study of US politics conceptualizes organizations like the Bailout Coalition as political *participants* or "pressure groups" seeking to alter

the institutions of government and achieve better representation from elected officials. More hopeful versions of this tradition have located these groups in a "pluralist heaven" where political influence is evenly dispersed, allowing them to effectively advance their demands and interests (Truman 1951; Dahl 1961). More realistic versions have traced how inequalities limit their political influence and enhance the influence of the affluent (Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Schlozman Verba and Brady 2012).

Helpful as this tradition is for explaining the (limited) capacity of the Bailout Coalition and similar organizations to sway elected officials, it misses the extent to which these organizations themselves also play an important representational role in US politics (Warren 2003; Strolovitch 2007). As Dara Strolovitch (2007, 17) states, they "provide an institutionalized voice to and compensatory representation for the concerns of formerly excluded groups that still have insufficient formal representation." The Bailout Coalition, for example, not only sought to gain representation from elected officials in and around Minneapolis, Minnesota. They also positioned themselves as a compensatory source of representation for all poor and working class Minnesotans, one that would contest elected officials' harmful and neoliberalized accounts of these constituents' interests.

This dissertation examines how antipoverty organizations in particular and advocacy organizations in general work as alternative sites of representation for marginalized interests. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, I raise and address two interrelated sets of questions about these organizations' efforts, both of which also index broader concerns about the practice of democratic representation.

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The first set of questions is about how advocates use their representational efforts to articulate and disseminate different constructions of their constituents' interests: What are the different types of constructions that they use? How, in practice, do they actually fashion these constructions? And how do they construct *themselves* as legitimate representatives of the resulting interests?[1] These types of questions are often minimized or overlooked in studies of political representation. However, a long and diverse line of scholarship suggests that they should be central, as the symbolic side of representation ultimately shapes whether and, more importantly, *how* constituents gain voice in political and policy debates (e.g. Bentley 1908; Dewey 1927; Schattschneider [1960] 1975; Pitkin 1967; Edelman 1977; Schneider and Ingram 1993; Cohen 1999; Reed 1999a; Saward 2006; Strolovitch 2007; Disch 2012; Hindman 2013).

Bailout Coalition organizers, for their part, constructed poor and working class interests through a polemic centered on appeals to class struggle. The primary target of this polemic was unsurprisingly and justifiably the elected officials whose own representational efforts had exacerbated the marginalization of many poor constituents. As the Bailout Coalition's initial petition asserted:

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[1] Here, it is important to be careful about terminology. Some studies of advocacy suggest that constructions *attach* meanings to constituents' discrete, preexisting interests. Other scholarship, building on the work of Erving Goffman (1974), treats constructions as practices through which political actors *make* constituent interests into meaningful and intelligible discursive objects (Snow 2004, 384-85; Tarrow 1998, 21-22). I draw on this second understanding. However, unlike some of its proponents, I do not treat construction as an autonomous or self-contained act. Instead, following another groups of scholars, I locate constructions in relation to their historical and social contexts (e.g. Schram 1995; Ernst 2010; Disch 2012).

> Left to their own devices, Governor [Tim] Pawlenty [Minnesota's governor from 2003 to 2010], along with a host of politicians in the legislature, will enact legislation that serves the self-serving interests of corporations and the wealthy. They will attack public employees. They will try to scapegoat immigrants and the poor. And, they will try to push the burden of the crisis onto our backs.

With statements like this one, organizers situated the interests of the poor and other marginalized constituencies in opposition to the "self-serving," hostile intentions of Minnesota's elected officials and their wealthy allies. They suggested that, without a fight to redistribute resources and reorder society, these vindictive officials would blame the poor and others for the financial crisis and related problems. Moreover, as a "scapegoat," the poor would have to bear the "burden of the crisis" in the form of budget cuts to public assistance, an oft-cited concern in the Bailout Coalition's speeches and fliers.

Bailout Coalition organizers directed their polemic at the federal government as well. At every public event, they would lead supporters in the well-known chant, "Banks got bailed out! People got sold out!"—an overt criticism of the 2008 Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and the neoliberal response to the Great Recession. While authorizing $700 billion in public expenditures to cover debts in the financial industry, TARP, much to the chagrin of progressive advocates, failed to provide similar direct assistance to address the hardships facing the poor and other marginalized constituents.[2] The Bailout Coalition used their chant to re-signify TARP's emergency "relief" as a politically motivated "bailout" for moneyed financial institutions and a "selling out," or betrayal, of their constituents (the "people"). Through this re-signification, they again

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[2] The $700 billion figure has since been revised down to $432 billion.

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located the poor's interests in initiatives, such as a foreclosure moratorium, that would directly seize resources from "self-serving" elites and "bail out the people."

Finally, the Bailout Coalition's polemic also targeted the foreclosure prevention programs that elected officials at all levels of government pursued in response to the crisis. These programs aimed to expand financial counseling for current and potential homeowners, protect consumers against predatory lenders, and incentivize banks to reduce mortgage payments. Each, in its own way, held out increased market competitiveness as the solution to problems facing "responsible homeowners" (and sometimes renters). Organizers rightly argued that such programs for "responsible homeowners" did little to mitigate the housing-related issues facing many poor people. As proof, they pointed to the experiences of foreclosure survivors whose homes they had occupied, most of whom were African American women. One of these survivors—a homeowner of 20 years and retired hospital worker named Tecora—had been tricked, in 2005, into refinancing her home with adjustable rate mortgage (ARM). After the housing market crashed, she found herself facing unaffordable "balloon" payments for this ARM, a rapidly diminished home value, and a strong possibility of foreclosure and eviction. When she and her daughter initially reached out to various foreclosure prevention programs in the city, they received little meaningful assistance.

Keeping with their general criticisms, Bailout Coalition organizers presented this ineffectiveness as further proof that public officials had effectively "sold out" the poor, even while claiming to help them. Organizers often argued that these officials "lined the pockets" of "fat cat" bankers instead of enacting a foreclosure moratorium that, they

argued, would have more effectively reduced housing instability among the poor and other marginalized groups. The answer, they again suggested, was to articulate and organize class struggle between a united front of embattled poor and working class constituents and the "self-serving" wealthy and their political allies.

The second set of questions I tackle in this dissertation is about the challenges that advocates face as they represent and construct their constituents' interests: What are the sources and contours of these challenges? How do advocates negotiate them? And how, in the process, do their efforts aid and/or limit the struggle for equality in the post-civil rights United States?

One aspect of these challenges that features prominently in the coming pages centers on what activists and scholars have conceptualized as "intersectionality." Intersectionality refers to the fact that social marginalization—and, *ipso facto*, privilege—often emerges through multiple, overlapping and *intersecting* inequalities (Crenshaw 1991). In contrast to perspectives that treat the poor and other marginalized constituencies as unitary groups with common positions in society, intersectional perspectives underscore how intersecting inequalities produce cross-cutting and differentiated positions *within* these constituencies (Hancock 2007). For example, the long-standing inequalities—in educational institutions, the labor market, the welfare state, the housing market, the banking industry and other social spaces—that precipitated the Great Recession have not evenly affected all poor people in the US. Instead, these inequalities have operated and intersected in ways that marginalize some segments of the poor—such as African American men and female-headed households—differently and

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much more intensely than others (e.g. Brewer 1995; Williams 2005; Collins and Mayer 2010; Alexander 2010; Soss Fording and Schram 2011).

The challenge, for the Bailout Coalition and other progressive advocates, is to represent and construct the solidarity of marginalized constituents in the face of such cross-cutting differences. This challenge is heightened by the fact that, in the post-civil rights era, several segments of their constituencies have become especially visible, vulnerable, and stigmatized (Schram 2002; Hancock 2004). While advocates can respond to the challenge of intersectionality in ways that acknowledge within-group differences, most tend to neglect them in favor or maintaining some semblance of a unitary constituency (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010). A key contention of intersectional accounts is that advocates who rely on unitary constructions tend to underscore inequalities affecting their most privileged constituents and obscure those affecting their most vulnerable and stigmatized constituents.

The Bailout Coalition's representational efforts leaned toward a unitary approach, locating poor and working class interests in a common and class-based struggle to raise taxes on the wealthy and enact a foreclosure moratorium. As I became more familiar with their efforts, I wondered, in line with the critique of intersectionality scholars, how their unitary orientation encouraged them to highlight some segments and aspects of poor people's lives more than others. Was class unity easier to evoke because they could portray Tecora—the homeowner discussed above—as a senior citizen, someone with a respectable work history, a long-time homeowner and community member, and an unambiguous victim of predatory lending? What if she was not a homeowner but a renter

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who had moved into the property just months before its absentee landlord defaulted on a loan and had to foreclose? What if she was not a senior but a 23-year-old single mother? What if her work history included significant gaps in which she had collected Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits or spent time in prison? And so on. How would the Bailout Coalition have treated these cross-cutting differences and the inequalities that underlie them while maintaining their appeal to class unity? And which differences and inequalities did their demands for higher taxes on the wealthy and a temporary foreclosure moratorium actually address? Which did they ignore?

I also wondered where the people marked by cross-cutting differences actually *were* in the representational efforts of the Bailout Coalition and other similar organizations. After all, these organizations made claims not just on behalf of the Tecora's of the world but *all* poor and working class people. How did they construct and locate their most stigmatized and disadvantaged constituents—those who seem to embody and confirm myths about behavioral deficiency and poverty—in relation to people like Tecora—those who seem to embody respectability and, thus, undermine such myths? And how, as a result, did they contest and/or obfuscate some of the intersecting inequalities that remain unaddressed under neoliberal poverty management?

Taking the foregoing sets of questions as a point of entry, *Dilemmas of Political Representation* engages in three simultaneous conversations about political representation, advocacy, and the pursuit of equality. One conversation is about the general concept of political representation. I advance a conceptual framework, already developed by other scholars, that examines political representation as a symbolic act. The

second conversation focuses more specifically on how and with what political

consequences advocates represent and construct marginalized interests. Here, I clarify

practical challenges and choices surrounding advocacy and political representation,

especially as they relate to issues of difference in the post-civil rights United States. The

third conversation addresses the representational efforts of *antipoverty* advocates in

particular. I identify the specific difficulties of advocating on behalf of the poor and

pursuing egalitarian social change under the reign of neoliberal poverty management.

And I pay special attention to how racialized difference shapes these difficulties and

informs advocates' responses to them.

To work through these three conversations and the questions above, I conduct an

ethnographic and critical analysis of antipoverty advocacy. My analysis compares, in

particular, the representational efforts of the Bailout Coalition and two other advocacy

organizations in Minneapolis, Minnesota—a city that both features an active community

of such organizations and exudes many of the racial inequalities and stigmas surrounding

poverty in the US.

Political Representation beyond Responsiveness

Throughout the twentieth century, actors both in and outside of government have

used political representation to (re)construct the interests of the poor and other

marginalized groups. For example, conservative supporters of neoliberal poverty

management have linked poor constituents' interests to the pursuit of racialized and

gendered behavioral norms, such as "self-sufficiency," "family values" and "law and

order." They claim that the poor are marginalized primarily because of their deviance

from these norms and overall lack of discipline. And, to prove this claim, they associate the poor with behaviors—such as illicit drug dealing and high welfare use—that differentiate them from popular images of the middle-class and apparently reflect deeper underclass pathologies—such as criminality and dependency (Reed 1999a).

Progressives have, for their part, often *downplayed* racialized differences surrounding the poor. Many of them worry that even acknowledging differences in, for example, rates and types of welfare use will recall the underclass pathologies advanced by conservatives. Some acknowledge the potential significance of such differences in their informal "backstage" interactions, where public stigmas and stereotypes are of less immediate concern (cf. Eliasoph 1998; Goffman 1959). In their "front stage" performances, however, they "whiten" the poor by suppressing their racialized differences and highlighting their purportedly colorblind status as women, humans, families, or something else (Ernst 2010; also see Mittelstadt 2005, 69-85). Because of these performances, progressive demands for generous social policy come to rest on the "fact" that poor constituents exude many of the same attributes as respectable white middle class families and are, therefore, deserving of the same privileges.

In the academy, scholars of inequality and poverty have sometimes defended the usefulness of such colorblind constructions of the poor (Wilson 1987; Skocpol 1991). Others, especially intersectionality scholars, have critiqued them. The latter group argues that these constructions create a discursive vacuum in which conservative accounts of underclass pathology become the only widely available explanation for racialized differences among the poor (Ernst 2010; Schram 2002). They show, moreover, that

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progressives who use these constructions often obscure inequalities affecting poor women of color, low-income tenants, and other especially marginalized segments of the poor population (Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010).

Scholars of political sociology have highlighted additional links between political representation and the construction of the poor's interests. For example, social control and social movement scholars have shown that both elected officials and professional advocates often deploy constituent constructions that affirm dominant institutional arrangements and, consequently, obfuscate various poverty-related inequalities. They have also shown that advocates can "delimit the boundaries of their prospective constituencies" in ways that denounce dominant arrangements (Tarrow 1998, 21; Edelman 1977; Piven and Cloward 1977).

Despite such widespread concern about political representation's symbolic side, much scholarship on political representation has surprisingly little to say about it or the ways that advocates as well as elected officials construct the interests of marginalized constituencies. The reason is simple. Several studies draw on an understanding of political representation that renders such issues irrelevant.

These studies presume, more specifically, that political representation is primarily a matter of whether officials in government are *responsive* to already existing constituent preferences and concerns. For example, one group of studies has shown that, on average, elected officials are just as responsive to the poor as they are to the electorate as a whole (Kelly and Enns 2010; Wlezien and Soroka 2011). A second group tempers this finding,

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presenting evidence that responsiveness to the poor does, in fact, decline when their preferences deviate from those of the affluent (Jacobs and Page 2005; Gilens 2012).

Such studies are, for good reason, central to how many observers describe and evaluate the representation of the poor and other marginalized groups. They provide an indispensable account of the close ties between socio-economic and political inequality. But without an analysis of how representational efforts—stemming from both inside and outside government institutions—construct marginalized interests, they also miss part of the story.

A third group of responsiveness scholars has partially conducted this type of analysis. Further tempering the claims of the first group discussed above, they suggest that even moments of congruence between elected officials' policy decisions and marginalized constituents' concerns may not indicate responsiveness. Instead, these moments may be symptomatic of strategic manipulation. That is, they may result from elected officials' efforts to shape constituent preferences by spreading misguided constructions of their interests (Hacker and Pierson 2005; cf. Pitkin 1967, 233-34). While this argument invites further discussion about the symbolic dimension of political representation, it ultimately subordinates this discussion to the goal of discerning the presence of responsiveness. It treats constituent constructions as tools of strategic manipulation and as evidence of a so-called "crisis" of political representation.

Beyond studies of responsiveness, however, several scholars have developed a more thoroughly *constructivist* understanding of political representation—one that builds on and bridges the theoretical insights coming from discussions of intersectionality,

social control, social movements, and other topics. This understanding starts with the insight of Hanna Pitkin (1967) and others that political representation, far from simply reflecting constituent concerns, helps to "call forth a constituency by depicting it as a collective with a shared aim" (Disch 2011, 107).[3] In other words, representational efforts, manipulative or not, are always already involved in constructing and defending public accounts of constituents' interests.

Whereas Pitkin (1967) ultimately abandoned her insight in favor of championing a focus on responsiveness, a wide range of more recent studies have picked it up and treated it as central. These studies conceptualize political representation as, first and foremost, a symbolic act through which elected officials, advocates, and others compete to construct and disseminate accounts of their constituents' interests (see, e.g., Urbinati 2006; Saward 2006; Hayward 2009; Disch 2011). They also trace the political consequences of this competition, especially how it has aided or hindered efforts to mitigate inequality and marginalization (e.g. Cohen 1999; Reed 1999a; Strolovitch 2007; Beltrán 2010; Disch 2012; Hindman 2013).

Nadia Urbinati (2006, 121-22) helpfully explicates the constructivist understanding of political representation found in the studies cited above. Her explication focuses on the capacity of all political actors for "reflective judgment":

> In reflective judgment, the general principles and ideal norms under which we
> subsume the particular are not derived from experience nor given, but produced. I
> suggest we use this scheme of judgment to understand "representativity" or the

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[3] For more on the general idea that interests are constructed and generated through political action, see, for example, Bentley (1908), Dewey (1927), and Schattschneider ([1960] 1975).

"reflective correspondence" existing between representative and represented and moreover the unavoidable link between the process of representation and an archetypal reality (the will of the people) that, although fictional, must be assumed. […] Rather than a description, this involves the *creation of meaning* […]. Reflective judgment makes us see things from a particular perspective that is the creation of the mind (a situated mind, not an abstract entity), our "representative way" of seeing, but not a solitary perspective. […]

The nature of representativity as reflective adhesion (of the representative to the represented) cannot be understood without contemplating the role of imagination because, as we have seen, representativity does not pertain to an existential or factual presence to be replicated or mimicked, but to a presence through ideas and communication that the political actors (representatives and represented) create.

Urbinati locates the symbolic side of political representation in the constructions, or "'representative way[s]' of seeing," built through reflective judgment. These ways of seeing contain the criteria for understanding and responding to constituent interests (for achieving "representativity"). She argues that they emerge and operate through the discursive practices (the "ideas and communication") that "situated" political actors use to articulate and publicize constituent interests ("the will of the people"). And, ultimately, she asserts that the consequence of these practices can be seen in how they support different "ideological" accounts of the "general good" that tell "lawmakers and the citizens [how] to actualize liberty and equality in their norms and rules, or their concrete social relations" (125).

This constructivist understanding reveals that symbolic politics are at the center rather than the margins of how advocates and other political actors represent marginalized constituents' interests. It focuses our attention on the discursive practices through which political representation actually takes place. Like all discursive practices, those attached to representational efforts construct situated and partial accounts of reality

that they, in fact, treat *as* reality (i.e. as pre-discursive) (Derrida 1978). They make it

possible to say, in retrospect, that political representation is actually occurring. For

example, representational efforts that construct poor constituents' interests in terms of

their racialized and gendered differences from or similarities to the rest of society are

more than manipulative appendages to the core task of responsiveness. They harness the

symbolic side of representation that makes claims to responsiveness even possible

(Cohen 1999; Beltrán 2010; Strolovitch 2007).[4]

The constructivist understanding of political representation also helpfully

illuminates the particular relevance of advocacy. Under a responsiveness perspective, this

relevance is often hard to locate. After all, it is, for the most part, the actions of elected

officials that are most important for delivering actual *policy* responsiveness to the poor

and other marginalized groups. Outside of exceptional moments of instability and

dissensus, advocates' efforts are much less consequential for securing this responsiveness

(Piven 2006).[5] Accordingly, most studies of responsiveness focus on elected officials.

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[4] A logical extension of this point is that, although responsiveness and constructivist understandings of political representation are distinct, they are not *necessarily* mutually exclusive. Rather, each highlights a different theoretical moment in the same political process—the moment where political actors compete with one another construct interests and the moment where they do or do not respond to the interests and concerns that this competition yields. Scholars, depending on their questions, can justifiably focus on one or the other or even both. This manuscript clearly focuses on explicating the moment of construction. However, at different points, it also explicitly and consciously critiques advocates' efforts in terms of whether they are responsive enough to (what I regard as) the interests of *all* marginalized constituencies in dismantling neoliberalism.

[5] Although, see Weldon (2011) for a different perspective.

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Viewed through a constructivist lens, however, advocates' representational efforts reveal much that those of elected officials do not. Elected officials most often construct marginalized constituents' interests in narrow and symbolically problematic ways. Their repeated turns, for example, to myths about the "undeserving" poor confirm this point (Katz 1989). Advocates, on the other hand, work to contest and expand the range of constructions used to represent marginalized constituents (Ernst 2010; Strolovitch 2007). In doing so, they not only reveal the symbolic problems of elected officials' representational efforts. They also help us to explore possibilities for and challenges of redressing these problems.

Representing Marginalized Groups: A Framework

The constructivist lens introduced above offers three key insights that inform my analysis of advocates and their efforts on behalf of marginalized groups. Throughout the dissertation, I draw these insights into an overarching theoretical framework and argument, developed below. This framework specifies and clarifies the array of challenges advocates face, the range of ways they respond to those challenges, and the consequences of their responses.

Social Order

The first insight is that political representation does not occur in a vacuum, but in relation to a contingent and changing social order. As Urbinati (2006, 37, 122) states, representation is both produced by "a [socially] situated mind" and productive of "changes [in] the identity of the social" (Sewell 2005). This insight suggests that, in order to understand the challenges and consequences surrounding advocates' representational

efforts, one must begin by investigating the general social order of which these efforts are a constitutive and productive part (e.g. Piven and Cloward 1977; Cohen 1999; Schram 2002; Hindman 2013). I explore, in particular, the dominant social order surrounding advocacy on behalf of the poor.

I argue in several chapters and have already implied that, for people advocating on behalf of the poor, this order has emerged as part of the post-civil rights era of American democracy. As the label suggests, the post-civil rights period emerged in the wake of mid-twentieth-century struggles against civic and political marginalization (Cohen 1999; Reed 1999a). The "post" is not meant to mark the end or completion of these struggles. Even the most cursory reading of US politics confirms that various civil rights struggles—and the backlash to them—continue into the present-day (e.g. Currah Juang and Minter 2006; Wong 2006; Alexander 2010). Instead, the "post" directs our attention to the specific historical trends that civil rights era struggles helped to unleash.

I focus in particular on two racialized trends that define the post-civil rights social order surrounding poverty and poverty politics. Each trend intersects with several additional social distinctions, such as class, gender, residency status and housing tenure. Moreover, each also intersects and overlaps with trends articulated through other historical periods and events, such as the New Deal, the War on Poverty, the feminist movement, and the Cold War. Where appropriate, I note some of these intersections.

The first trend is the perpetuation of a political economy in which the inequalities surrounding poverty are highly racialized. This racialized political economy is marked most visibly by the co-occurrence of residential segregation, underemployment,

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affordable housing shortages, struggling schools, high incarceration rates, and high

poverty rates in nonwhite, especially black, urban neighborhoods (Massey and Denton

1993; Wilson 1997). Although most poor people do not actually live in these

neighborhoods, their existence points toward the deepest and most persistent inequalities

undergirding poverty in the US.[6]

As many scholars have pointed out, the racialized political economy of the post-

civil rights era depends much less on overt inter-group hostility than past versions

(though such hostility is by no means absent). Instead, it stems from the *layering* of the

neoliberal regime of poverty management described above on top of uncorrected pre-civil

rights inequalities (Katznelson 2005) and global inequalities that surround migration to

the US (Chacón and Davis 2006). This layering has reproduced and, in some cases,

exacerbated the overall range of inequalities affecting poor people of color and the poor

as a whole (Soss Fording and Schram 2011; Lipman 2011; Goetz 2013). Elected officials

pursuing neoliberal poverty management have, for example, demolished public housing,

enacted disciplinary welfare reforms, requested mass public school closures, and pursued

a punitive war on drugs—all in racially unequal ways. Additionally, they have mostly sat

idly by while deindustrialization has undermined private sector unions, the minimum

wage has deteriorated, and decent affordable housing has become less accessible.

The second trend is the persistence and re-articulation of racialized and gendered

myths about the "irresponsible" poor. As I suggested earlier, this persistence is at least

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[6] On the rise and challenges of suburban poverty, see Allard and Roth (2010) and
Kneebone and Berube (2013).

partly the product of how elected officials themselves have represented and constructed the poor's interests. Pointing to the persistent poverty in predominantly black, Latino and/or otherwise nonwhite neighborhoods, many of these officials have constructed poor constituents as an urban underclass that suffers from their own behavioral deficiencies (Reed 1999a). These deficiencies are said to include anything from licentiousness among single mothers and shiftlessness among the unemployed to less morally charged traits like lack of education and training—all of which purportedly cause poverty by eroding an individual's work discipline and market competitiveness. The blame, they argue, falls on New Deal and Great Society entitlement programs that supposedly encouraged dependency on the government and diminished the societal role of self-sufficient, hard-working and heterosexual male breadwinners.

The moral, however, of underclass myths about the poor is not simply that policymakers should reduce levels of public assistance. Rather, elected officials have used them to support neoliberal initiatives that purportedly serve the poor's interests by making them more "job-ready" and exposing them to the apparent benefits of market competition (Lafer 2004; Soss Fording and Schram 2011). The toughest initiatives, championed primarily by conservatives, compel work discipline and other forms of market participation by threatening the loss of public resources and basic rights. This list of initiatives includes many already mentioned, such as welfare reform, poverty deconcentration, and mass incarceration. Liberal officials have demanded alternative and less coercive measures, such as work-based tax incentives, education, and job training. In focusing so much on behavior modification, all sides have failed to clarify and address

the range of intersecting inequalities affecting poor constituents, especially poor people of color.

In response to the recent foreclosure crisis, most elected officials reiterated rather than questioned the underclass myths coursing through their efforts on behalf of the poor. They reinforced, for example, the myth that housing tenure is a reflection of one's individual "responsibility" and, thus, obfuscated the inequalities that have favored white middle-to-high income men on the housing market (see, e.g., Wyly et al 2006; Fishbein and Woodall 2006). Leading conservatives blamed the crisis on federal efforts— stemming from the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act and government-sponsored enterprises (Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac)—to reduce redlining and issue mortgages to low-income borrowers and borrowers of color. They argued that, by overstepping the market, fair housing efforts had granted these "predatory" borrowers the privilege of homeownership before they were ready for it. As a result, their argument goes, these efforts incubated the behavioral deficiencies that really perpetuate housing instability and poverty (McLean and Nocera 2010).[7] Many progressives responded similarly, albeit less harshly, suggesting that the low financial sophistication of poor borrowers of color— rather than their diminished access to income, affordable housing, and prime credit— made them susceptible to exploitative lenders and led to the foreclosure crisis (e.g. Bostic and Lee 2008).

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[7] Several studies have disproved the claim that fair and affordable housing efforts caused the foreclosure and financial crises (Avery and Brevoort 2011; Bhutta and Canner 2009; Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission 2011; Park 2008; Rugh and Massey 2010). Additional research suggests that it was, in fact, the *limited* implementation, or "blind spots," of such efforts that contributed to the crisis (Ashton 2010).

Drawing on the foregoing myths, elected officials buttressed the existing neoliberal regime of poverty management with programs to expand financial counseling for current and potential homeowners, protect consumers against predatory lenders, and incentivize banks to reduce mortgage payments. Relatively few of them constructed poor constituents' interests in ways that complicated the dominant discourse or supported efforts to directly redistribute resources and reconfigure power relations on the housing market. A similar symbolic politics surrounded officials' responses to other phenomena related to the broader financial crisis and Great Recession, such as high unemployment, budget deficits and "failing" public schools.

The two foregoing trends—the perpetuation of a racialized political economy and the persistence of racialized and gendered behavioral myths about the poor—*reinforce* one another and form a contingent social order that surrounds post-civil rights antipoverty advocacy. On the one hand, the perpetuation of a racialized political economy ensures that poor people of color remain highly visible, politically silenced and, therefore, easily stigmatized. In other words, political actors in many cities and states can readily point to socio-economic problems in low-income and racially segregated neighborhoods to "prove" underclass myths about the poor (Reed 1999a, 1999b). On the other hand, elected officials use these myths to authorize neoliberal initiatives that exacerbate inequalities affecting poor people of color, ensuring their continued presence on the stigmatized margins of US society (Schram 2005; Soss Fording and Schram 2011).

Constructing Interests

The second and most central insight of constructivist accounts is that political representation relates constituents to the social order not directly but by fashioning and deploying accounts of their interests. Urbinati (2006, 122) clarifies the point when she tells us in the passage quoted above that representational efforts grant constituents a meaningful presence by enlisting "ideas and communication" to create "'representative way' of seeing" their interests. This insight suggests the importance of understanding what these ways of seeing—what I call constituent constructions—are and how political actors build and draw on them in practice. I address, more specifically, how progressive advocates construct the interests of marginalized constituents through their efforts on these constituents' behalf.

This question itself has two parts. The first part is about the *process* by which advocates construct and represent marginalized constituents' interests. I argue that this process revolves around two basic challenges.

One challenge is for advocates to present and construct *themselves* as legitimate democratic representatives of marginalized groups. Unlike elected officials, advocates cannot establish and defend their claims to legitimacy simply by pointing to voters who mobilized to put them in office. Moreover, their efforts to establish their legitimacy through non-electoral mobilization frequently fall short, as marginalized constituents often lack the resources and capabilities needed to easily sustain this type of mobilization (Cohen and Dawson 1993; Soss 2000). For the poor and other economically marginalized groups, problems of mobilization have become even worse under the reign of neoliberal poverty management (Soss and Jacobs 2009; Soss Fording and Schram 2011).

Advocates' claims to legitimacy are, consequently, much more open to attacks from their opponents than those of elected officials.

I argue in chapter 5 that, in the face of these attacks, progressive advocates establish their legitimacy by supplementing mobilization with four additional tactics. These tactics include: *magnifying* the appearance of mobilized and supportive constituents; underlining *descriptive* characteristics that they hold in common with their constituents; emphasizing a strong and principled *identification* with their constituents; and *projecting* the presence of a mobilized and supportive constituency into the future. Through my analysis of antipoverty advocates, I show that each tactic is capable of providing at least some help in the quest for legitimacy (though none is capable of altering the problems of demobilization that make them necessary).

The second challenge is for advocates to actually construct coherent and intelligible accounts of their constituents' interests. This part of the process is challenging because—unlike demands, meeting schedules, and other aspects of advocates' efforts— constituent constructions are not reducible to bounded and discrete choices. As I show in chapter 6, they are the product of the totality of choices that advocates make about how to organize their representational efforts. Taken together, these choices send a series of messages about where constituents' interests lie. Advocates must ensure that the resulting messages continuously accumulate into coherent constituent constructions (versus a set of contradictory and incoherent claims).

For many advocates, neoliberalism has complicated this challenge by imposing a set of contradictions on their tactical debates. These contradictions all follow the same

format: while, in theory, neoliberal initiatives such as poverty deconcentration and school

choice promote equal opportunity through socio-economic incorporation, in practice they

often perpetuate the intersecting inequalities that plague marginalized groups (Soss

Fording and Schram 2011; Handler 2004). Because of neoliberalism's contradictions,

advocates receive few clear signals about which tactical choices will send the best

messages about marginalized constituents' interests.

In chapter 6, I show how advocates make their choices and effectively build

constituent constructions through their collective and intersubjective negotiations (and

not, as many conventional accounts suggest, by weighing a collective set of intrinsic and

extrinsic motives). As they compete to shape the terms of these negotiations, leaders and

organizers evoke and police assumptions about the purpose of their representational

efforts—that is, what one scholar calls their political "footing" (Eliasoph 1998; cf.

Goffman 1981). And, in turn, they appeal to these assumptions as they shape the tactical

choices and underlying constituent constructions that their organizations make.

The second part of the central question I raised above—how advocates construct

and represent marginalized interests—is about *outcomes*. In other words, what are the

different types of constituent constructions that actually emerge out of advocates'

representational efforts? I argue and show in multiple chapters that these constructions

meaningfully vary along two broadly relevant dimensions (see figure 1.1).

The first dimension is how they articulate the social solidarity that defines

marginalized groups *as* constituencies with identifiable interests. As Lisa Disch states,

"Representing rouses a constituency to action by giving it a picture of itself that enables it

to recognize itself in terms of a 'generality'—a common enemy, shared problem, shared virtue—that is neither given nor self-evident but must be narrated into being" (2011, 108). Following the intersectionality scholars, I examine more specifically whether advocates' constructions of "generality" and social solidarity are *unitary* or *intersectional*. Whereas the former evokes a vision of common interests rooted in a unified social position, the latter evokes a vision of shared interests rooted in intersecting and sometimes distinct positions.

Historically, many activists, commentators, and scholars have only granted widespread recognition to unitary constructions of social solidarity (J. Schwartz 1995). However, intersectional constructions stem from an equally relevant tradition of progressive politics, stemming from the activism and political thought of women of color (e.g. Combahee River Collective [1977] 1981; hooks 1984). Often ignored or relegated to "backstage" discussions, this tradition casts the solidarity of marginalized constituents not as an expression of an underlying sameness but, rather, as the product of situated and shared relationships to different sources of marginalization (Young 1994; Beltrán 2010). Its proponents actively challenge attempts to privilege any one (typically more advantaged) social position as more basic and unifying than the others (Collins [1990] 2000; Cohen 1997). Instead, as Dara Strolovitch (2007, 63) describes, they call for an "intersectionally linked fate" in which "advantaged subgroups identify the interests and well-being of disadvantaged subgroups with their own." In a widely cited essay, Cathy Cohen (1997, 461-62) located an illuminating construction of intersectional solidarity in the work of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:

Recently, the staff at the Task Force issued a position paper not only on the topics of gay marriages and gays in the military, but also on right-wing attacks against welfare and affirmative action. Here we have political work based in the knowledge that the rhetoric and accusations of nonnormativity that Newt Gingrich and other right-wingers launch against women on welfare closely resemble the attacks of nonnormativity mounted against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. Again it is the marginalized relation to power, experienced by both of these groups—and I do not mean to suggest that the groups are mutually exclusive—that frames the possibility for transformative coalition work.

The second dimension on which advocates' constituent constructions vary is how they articulate the political relationship between the poor's interests and dominant institutions (in the case of the poor, neoliberal institutions of poverty management). I examine whether the antipoverty advocates in my study construct this relationship as *adversarial* or *cooperative*—that is, as one in which policymakers must transform, or simply reform, dominant institutions to accommodate their constituents' interests.

This distinction between adversarial and cooperative politics is standard in discussions of advocacy (e.g. Piven and Cloward 1977; Saegert 2006; Swarts 2008; Sidney 2003). Scholars and commentators, however, often use it to categorize different *tactics* for responding to the interests of the poor. Consistent with my broader approach, I treat it primarily as a discursive distinction, not necessarily reducible to particular tactics, that captures different ways of constructing what their interests are (Schram 2002). Constructions of political relations certainly have tactical implications; adversarial constructions, for example, are clearly more likely to take shape through protest campaigns. And, as I just argued above, tactical choices almost always have implications for how marginalized interests are constructed. But each type of construction does not have a predetermined relationship to any particular set of tactics. For example, the work

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of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977; 1988) illustrates that, in practice, radical and adversarial constructions can inform conventional tactics—such as welfare and electoral participation—as well as more disruptive tactics—such as workers' strikes and civil disobedience.

Figure 1.1
Advocacy, Political Representation, and
Constituent Constructions

Cooperative

Common Inclusion   *Shared Inclusion*

Unitary ←   → *Intersectional*

Common Struggle   *Shared Struggle*

Adversarial
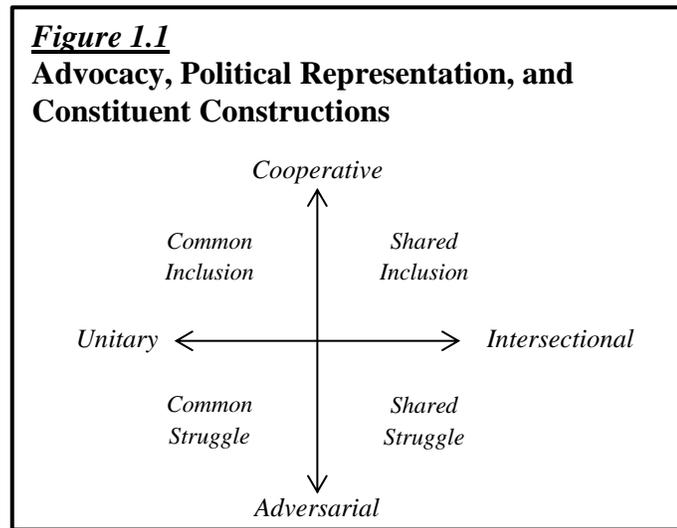
As advocates migrate along the dimensions discussed above—social solidarity and political relations—they evoke one of four general types of constituent constructions, each of which I specify more fully throughout the coming chapters. The first two types locate marginalized constituents' interests in efforts to better and more fairly incorporate them into dominant neoliberal society. One—unitary and cooperative—emphasizes the pursuit of *common inclusion*, that is, efforts to reform dominant institutions in ways that remove differential/discriminatory treatment and grant marginalized constituents' the same opportunities to participate and compete in society as more privileged groups. The second—intersectional and cooperative—attaches marginalized interests to *shared inclusion*, that is, efforts to reform dominant institutions in ways that acknowledge and

address intersecting and differentiated barriers to societal incorporation that exist among marginalized groups.

The other two types locate marginalized constituents' interests in efforts to reorder dominant society around a more overtly anti-neoliberal and egalitarian vision. The third type—unitary and adversarial—attaches marginalized interests to a *common struggle*, that is, efforts to transform dominant institutions in ways that directly alter the aggregate distribution of resources, authority, and life chances between privileged and marginalized groups. The final type—intersectional and adversarial—emphasizes the idea of *shared struggle*, that is, efforts to transform dominant institutions in ways that alter unequal distributions that cross-cut and differentiate as well as surround marginalized groups.

I am by no means claiming that the foregoing dimensions and types capture all of the relevant variation in efforts on behalf of marginalized constituents' interests. Nevertheless, if one's goal is to understand the symbolic politics of representing these constituencies, each carries a special importance. Both of the dimensions I identified correspond to a task that advocates *must* accomplish in order to represent marginalized interests. On the one hand, without an account of the social solidarity that draws marginalized constituents together, advocates could not make coherent and bounded claims on their behalf. And, on the other hand, if these claims did not come with an account of the political relationship between marginalized constituents and dominant institutions, then they would remain undirected and unfulfilled.

Social Position(s)

The third insight I draw from constructivist theories of political representation is about consequences. Seen through a constructivist lens, the main consequence of political representation is not whether it achieves responsiveness but how, by giving an account of constituent interests, it helps to alter or reproduce their position(s) in the broader social order. Urbinati again makes the point succinctly in the passage I quoted above. She states that political representation's most proximate effect is how it shapes "ideological" accounts of the "general good" that tell "lawmakers and the citizens [how] to actualize liberty and equality in their norms and rules, or their concrete social relations" (2006, 125). Building on this insight, I ask how and with what limits advocates' representational efforts actually contest the systemic and socio-economic inequalities that differently position and affect marginalized constituents.

The answer to this question, I argue, depends on how advocates' constituent constructions negotiate a paradox of difference embedded in the post-civil rights order (Minow 1990; Young 1990). The paradox is that advocates, as representatives, can neither hide nor highlight differences surrounding marginalized constituents without encountering significant political difficulties. It applies both to differences that divide their constituents from dominant society and to those, highlighted by intersectionality scholars, that cross-cut the constituency itself. On the one hand, if advocates attempt to suppress or transcend these differences, they run the risk of obscuring important inequalities that they might otherwise illuminate. On the other hand, if they highlight and address various differences, they risk fomenting divisions and stigmas that potentially

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derail their efforts. Either way, they must somehow deal with difference and confront the paradox.

For antipoverty advocates, the persistence of racialized and gendered myths creates incentives to suppress consideration of difference and construct the poor's interests on more "universal"—that is, cooperative/neoliberal and unitary/colorblind—terms. Yet, precisely because racialized inequalities are so basic to the structure of poverty, these "universal" terms can obfuscate crucial dimensions of the very issues they wish to address, such as welfare, public education and affordable housing.

In chapter 7, I show that, in practice, each type of constituent construction discussed above transforms the general paradox of difference into a specific political dilemma. Unitary constructions—*common inclusion* and *struggle*—generate dilemmas of *respectability* (Higginbotham 1993; Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). To boost mainstream appeal, antipoverty advocates using these constructions often underline the experiences and needs of their least disadvantaged constituents—who most resemble "respectable" working families—and equate them with those of the poor as a whole. In doing so, however, they risk obscuring inequalities that predominantly affect their *most* disadvantaged and marginalized constituents. In contrast, intersectional constructions—*shared inclusion* and *struggle*—emphasize the importance of such inequalities and lead, instead, to a dilemma of *otherness* (Minow 1990). In this dilemma, antipoverty advocates offer more inclusive articulations of solidarity but do so by emphasizing racialized, gendered, and other differences that opponents might use to suggest that the poor are dysfunctional 'others.'

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Cooperative constructions—*common* and *shared inclusion*—generate dilemmas of *moderation* (Schram 2002). Antipoverty advocates drawing on such constructions demand moderate reforms and greater incorporation into dominant society, maximizing political feasibility at the risk of affirming the neoliberal status quo. Finally, adversarial constructions—*common* and *shared struggle*—generate dilemmas of *radicalism*. By deploying these constructions and fighting for the transformation of dominant institutions, antipoverty advocates heighten antagonism between the poor and the status quo. Yet, precisely because they radically oppose dominant institutions, they find few entry points for influence in prevailing political and policy debates and risk appearing unintelligible or unreasonable to those who take the broad outlines of these debates for granted.[8]

Antipoverty advocates and other progressive advocates are, thus, embroiled in a constant battle to manage the constituent constructions underlying their representational efforts and negotiate the dilemmas of difference that these constructions evoke. Their efforts to negotiate the paradox of difference both enable and limit their ability to promote movement toward greater equality. Nevertheless, I argue in chapter 8 that, all else equal, advocates should favor the dilemmas of otherness and radicalism associated with *shared struggle*, as these dilemmas do less to shrink their capacity for dissent

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[8] My account of these dilemmas builds most directly on Sanford Schram's (2002) discussion of dilemmas of "accessibility" and "intelligibility." Specifically, I see the dilemmas of respectability and moderation as examples of what Schram calls "dilemmas of accessibility" (dilemmas associated with appealing to dominant logics and discourses). Likewise, I see dilemmas of otherness and radicalism as examples of what he (following Michael Shapiro) calls "dilemmas of intelligibility" (dilemmas associated with crafting counter-logics and discourses).

(Cohen 1997; Schram 2002). However, each dilemma presents considerable, though not always insurmountable, difficulties, denying any attempt to formulate a grand and idealized scheme for representing marginalized groups.

Chapter Outline

Drawing on my fieldwork among antipoverty organizations in Minneapolis (see Appendix), the coming chapters unpack the insights introduced above. My analysis throughout is inflected by a concern not only for how advocacy and political representation work but how they can better combat neoliberalism and aid movements for egalitarian change. In the process, I hope to make the general stakes of advocates' efforts more clear and to enrich strategic debates about how they *should* represent marginalized constituencies in the post-civil rights United States.

The chapters are divided into two sections. The first section paints a fuller picture of the post-civil rights and neoliberal social order discussed above and the place of antipoverty advocates within it. Chapter 2 extends my account of this order to Minneapolis, Minnesota, the site of my field research. I argue that Minneapolis—although it is, on the whole, more "livable" than many other major cities—exudes the racialized political economy and myths surrounding poverty and poverty politics in the US. Chapter 3 locates the antipoverty advocates of Minneapolis within an organizational field. I explore multiple dimensions of this field and demonstrate how it operates both within and against the post-civil rights order of Minneapolis. In chapter 4, I introduce the three advocacy organizations whose efforts I followed most closely and situate their efforts in relation to the trends and dynamics covered in chapters 2 and 3. These

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organizations are the Minnesota Coalition for a People's Bailout, which I discussed above—a multi-issue coalition focused on opposing foreclosures and evictions and raising taxes on the wealthy; the Minnesota Welfare Rights Committee—a welfare rights organization working to protect and expand access to welfare assistance for the poor; and the North High Community Coalition—a community-based coalition formed to protect and reform a public high school in a predominantly black and high poverty neighborhood of north Minneapolis.

The second section of this dissertation examines the efforts of these three organizations and, through this examination, clarifies several crucial aspects of post-civil rights advocacy and the political representation of marginalized groups. Chapter 5, as I stated above, specifies and examines the range of tactics advocates use to construct and establish their legitimacy as democratic representatives. Chapter 6 explores and compares their organizing meetings and internal communications. Through this comparison, I demonstrate the process by which advocates come to make tactical and representational choices that buttress some types of constituent constructions more than others. Chapter 7 moves away from organizing meetings and explores the collective actions through which advocates actually disseminate and defend their constituent constructions. I examine how advocates' representational efforts negotiate the paradox of difference and come to evoke range of dilemmas I discussed above.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I use my analysis to review and clarify the broad challenges surrounding advocates' efforts on behalf of marginalized groups.

Additionally, I outline some strategic lessons about how to move forward with these efforts, now over forty years into the post-civil rights era.

Chapter 2: The Livable City

The previous chapter specified the post-civil rights order that situates poverty and poverty politics in the contemporary US and, in many ways, came to a head during the Great Recession. I characterized this order in terms of a general symbiosis between two trends, both of which are fostered through neoliberal poverty management: the perpetuation of a racialized political economy and the persistence of long-standing racialized and gendered myths about the behaviorally deficient and "undeserving" poor.

In practice, however, the post-civil rights order has not taken the same form across all locales. Local and regional institutions have shaped its emergence in conjunction with the shifts in federal policy overviewed in chapter 1 (Sidney 2003; Soss Fording and Schram 2011). This fact holds special significance for antipoverty advocates, as many if not most of them maintain a local and regional rather than national presence.[1] Consequently, to properly examine their efforts on behalf of the poor, one must often follow them to particular cities and states.

For this project, I have focused my analysis on antipoverty advocates in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Over the coming pages, I examine the social order surrounding poverty in Minneapolis and show how it captures and extends the national trends specified in chapter 1. My examination centers on a local contradiction that has persisted

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[1] The reasons for the local focus of many antipoverty advocates and other types of advocacy organizations are likely manifold. But most important is that the barriers to collective action are fewer and less intense at the local and regional level (Berry 2010). Albeit, despite the high cost of politics in Washington DC, several antipoverty, labor, and economic justice organizations are still able to operate at the federal level (Strolovitch 2007; Schlozman Verba and Brady 2012).

throughout the post-civil rights era. On one side of this contradiction is the fact that residents of both Minneapolis and the broader Twin Cities region have, as an aggregate, performed above average on many socio-economic indicators related to poverty. This fact informs popular images of the city as a highly "livable" place (Schmickle 2010; Smith 2011)—images that most residents appear eager to protect.[2] On the other side of the contradiction is the fact that the city features a series of above average racial inequalities on the very same socio-economic indicators.

After first charting the foregoing contradiction, I relate it to local public officials' efforts in support of neoliberal poverty management. I show how these efforts have institutionalized and entrenched a racialized and gendered underclass construction of the poor and reproduced the racial stratification of social and economic challenges in Minneapolis' political economy.

Livability, Racial Inequality, and Poverty

Minneapolis rests at the center of a metropolitan region that has, since the 1970s, experienced strong and fairly consistent economic growth. Although not always the primary source of this regional growth, the city has played a key role in facilitating it.

While, during the same time period, most Midwestern cities struggled to cope with deindustrialization, Minneapolis thrived via a rapidly expanding and diversifying local economy. Local public officials drove this diversification by making aggressive use

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[2] In an annual survey of residents in the Twin Cities region, more than 95% routinely state that the region is a "slightly better" or "much better place in which to live, compared to other metro areas." In the same survey, residents routinely list "quality of life," "good economy," "good neighborhoods," or "education" as "the single most attractive" feature of the region (Metropolitan Council 2010).

of tax-increment financing (TIF)[3] to redevelop aging, downtown property. During the

1980s, the city's development agency used TIF to promote the addition of more than

750,000 square feet of downtown office space per year. The bulk of these new additions

were for corporate headquarters and producer services, presaging broader trends in the

US economy. In addition to office space, local officials helped finance the development

of two major sports facilities, a convention center and several shopping centers on

Nicollet Mall, the city's downtown retail hub (Nickel 1995; A. Schwartz 1995). Through

all of this growth, Minneapolis secured a position as the leading corporate and financial

center of the upper Midwest (A. Schwartz 1995, 166).

     As an aggregate, residents of Minneapolis benefitted greatly from this period of

economic growth. Unemployment rates, for example, generally remained below 5% (A.

Schwartz 1995; United Way 1995, 21). To be sure, as in most cities, an increasing

proportion of local employment fell in the low paying service industry, leading to

declines in average wages.[4] But, because of high labor participation and a large number

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[3] "TIF is a fiscal device that works by enabling local governments to use additional property taxes generated by development to finance certain development costs within a designated district. Initially the funding stream comes from the issuance of bonds to be repaid through the anticipated additional tax revenues. Then, the tax revenue generated by any increases in the district's tax base over a period of years (the 'tax increment') minus the amount needed for debt service is earmarked to support further development costs within the district's project area. As a consequence, the locality's general fund will forfeit the increases in revenue created by new development within the district. The fundamental premise of TIF, however, is that new development in the district – and the tax increment – would not have occurred 'but for' the public investments financed by the TIF scheme" (Fainstein and Hirst 1996, 111).

[4] While, from 1980 to 1988, the city lost over 14,000 manufacturing, construction, and wholesale trade jobs, it gained over 16,500 jobs in the service sector alone (A. Schwartz

of families with multiple wage earners, per capita and median household income in the city actually rose or stabilized and often exceeded national averages (A. Schwartz 1995, 165; United Way 1995). Partly as a result, poverty rates—despite rising throughout this period—fell below the average for major cities (Metropolitan Council 1994, 17).

As the 1990s became the 2000s, Minneapolis' economic growth waned. The city felt the negative effects of a development strategy that had worked by producing a glut of downtown office and retail space. Vacancy rates for both property categories rose fast and remained high throughout the decade.[5] Additionally, unchecked growth throughout the region contributed to a severe affordable housing shortage. Housing vacancy rates during this period fell well below 2 percent and, from 1996 to 2000, average rent increased by over 30 percent (Goetz 2003, 109). Finally, the city's development backlash overlapped with national economic crises in the wake of the September 11th 2001 attacks, the bursting of the telecommunications bubble and—following a brief recovery fueled by subprime lending—the housing crash. Unsurprisingly, during this period, poverty grew steadily, average incomes decreased, foreclosure rates rose, and unemployment more

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1995, 167). In comparison to other types of employment, these jobs were more likely to include low wages and irregular and/or part-time hours (United Way 1995, 22).

[5] For example, office vacancy rates in the Minneapolis central business district rose from only 6.8% in 2000 to 20.2% in 2004. Over the next several years, the rate remained above 13.5% for all but three quarters and rose again to 17.9% in the wake of the Great Recession (Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development [CPED] 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a). Vacancy rates for retail space trended similarly. As some critics had forewarned, the publicly leveraged, rapid development of downtown office and retail space in the 1980s and 1990s not only granted economic strength. It was also indicative of a broader tendency in the world economy for governments and private firms to finance unsustainable levels of production and productive capacity in growth periods (Brenner 2002; Brenner 2009).

frequently reached levels that the city had mostly avoided throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Minneapolis Department of CPED 2006; City of Minneapolis 2010a, 2010b).

Nevertheless, despite these setbacks, employment, labor force participation, educational attainment and per capita income in Minneapolis have remained above average (City of Minneapolis 2010a, 2010b). And while its individual poverty rate has approached levels more typical of other major US cities, its family poverty rate has remained below many of these cities (Minneapolis Department of CPED 2010b). Even in the wake of a recession-filled decade, depictions of Minneapolis as a "livable city" have endured (Schmickle 2010).

There is, however, another side to this story. Minneapolis' image as a livable city and the aggregate statistics used to project this image mask equally exceptional and enduring racial inequalities surrounding poverty. On the one hand, much of the city's large white majority has benefited from the region's periods of economic expansion and, in turn, maintained a relatively high standard of living during its recessions. On the other hand, throughout the post-civil rights era, people of color in the city have experienced a consistent deepening of their (already high) exposure to poverty, even more than in the US as a whole.

During the 1980s and 1990s—when the people of Minneapolis were supposedly enjoying the benefits of economic growth—underemployment among racial minorities throughout the Twin Cities remained at crisis-levels and, in fact, grew noticeably. By 1990, unemployment rates for African Americans and American Indians were anywhere from three to over five times as high as they were for whites, reaching as high as 22.1%

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in the case of American Indian women. In 1992, the employment disparity between white

and black men was the highest of any metro area in the US (United Way 1995, 26-27).

The real disparity was even higher, due to the state's astonishingly unequal black and

white incarceration rates, which lowered the number of blacks in the officially recognized

labor force (Sentencing Project 2004). Unemployment rates for black women, Asians,

and Latinos tended to be somewhat lower, though mostly still above the rate for whites.

Even when employed, however, women of color were among the most likely people to

work in the low wage, low benefit, and part-time segments of the local labor market

(United Way 1995; Wyly 1996).

Consequently, during the same time period, income inequality between whites

and people of color was also above average and increasing. Whereas per capita income

for whites in the region rose by over 20% during the 1980s, for African Americans,

American Indians and Asians it decreased significantly (Metropolitan Council 1992, 39).

Poverty rates for all three groups rose by over 35% and remained extremely high

throughout the decade (ranging from 26.4 to 40.6 percent[6]). Latinos were not far behind

this trend (United Way 1995, 30). These patterns continued in the 1990s, with the poverty

rate for blacks becoming, at one point, the second highest among the nation's largest

central cities (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997).

A major side effect of this extreme poverty was the decreased affordability of

basic needs such as housing. In 1990, more than 2 low income renter households existed

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[6] In households headed by women of color, the rate reached even higher to over 60
percent (Metropolitan Council 1994, 45).

for every affordable rental unit in the region (Metropolitan Council 1992, 14). This problem came to a head during the region's late 1990s housing crisis. As Edward Goetz (2003, 110) reports, "Low wage workers [a disproportionate number of which were people of color] were forced to spend more than 50 percent of their income to afford the region's average two bedroom apartment." Another major side effect of high poverty among people of color was increased gang competition and participation in the illicit drug trade. This expanding competition and participation tended to foster other social issues, especially violent crime. For example, in 1995 and 1996, gang competition over the illegal drug market led to a temporary and widely-reported spike in Minneapolis' homicide rate (Johnson 1996).

As in most US cities, the racial stratification of poverty in Minneapolis has mapped onto a highly segregated urban landscape. An analysis of the 1990 census placed the Minneapolis-St. Paul region among the 10 most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the US (Harrison and Weinberg 1992). Many people of color, as they had throughout the twentieth century, found themselves living in a few contiguous, high poverty neighborhoods—mostly northwest of downtown and in the near southern section of the city. Whites, in contrast, dominated nearly all middle to higher income neighborhoods (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997, 42). Audit studies indicate that discrimination continues to play a significant role in producing this racial and class segregation (Sidney 2003, 4-6). Residential segregation, in turn, generated a similarly segregated and divided school system (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997, 47-50). Racial

"achievement gaps," especially between the city and region's predominantly white and predominantly black schools, have, at times, been above the national average.

The financial crises of the 2000s, rather than leveling out the racial stratification of poverty in Minneapolis, mostly reproduced it. In particular, the crisis of foreclosure and finance surrounding the Great Recession exhibited this dynamic. Leading up to the crisis, people of color in Minneapolis, even more than in other major cities, had scant access to prime credit.[7] Because of this fact—along with their diminished access to living wages and decent affordable housing—mortgage lenders could much more easily draw them into the risky subprime loan market with promises of the "American Dream." Black borrowers at any income level were at least 4 times as likely as whites to receive a subprime home purchase loan. And borrowers living in predominantly poor, nonwhite neighborhoods were uniformly more likely to receive subprime loans, regardless of their race or income level (Institute on Race and Poverty 2009, 23-25; Crump 2007).

The effects of the crisis hit these neighborhoods and low income people of color across the city the hardest. Homeowners in segregated, nonwhite neighborhoods were most likely to experience foreclosure. Even more rental units in these neighborhoods were affected (Allen 2011). This churning led to increased housing instability, the shrinking of an already small tax base, increased student mobility and, evidence indicates, deepening segregation (Institute on Race and Poverty 2009; Allen 2011).

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[7] A 2007 study of the 25 largest metropolitan areas found that, whereas majority white census tracts in the Twin Cities had above average access to traditional bank branches, the region's majority nonwhite tracts ranked, by far, last (National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2007).

Moreover, as the crisis spread throughout the economy, people of color endured a

disproportionate share of rising unemployment, which further intensified their exposure

to housing instability and poverty.[8]

In sum, through both boom and bust, the aggregate livability of Minneapolis has

persisted alongside an *extremely* racially stratified distribution of poverty and

socioeconomic opportunity. This stratification came to a head in the summer of 2011

when a tornado tore through the predominantly black, Hmong and Latino high poverty

neighborhoods of north Minneapolis. The tornado, in addition to causing several injuries

and two deaths, damaged over 3,700 properties (Roper and Furst 2012). While these

effects would have been bad enough in any neighborhood, several others emerged due to

the heightened poverty among neighborhood residents. Many residents, for example, lost

forms of identification that are necessary for obtaining different types of public services.

Additionally, several poor tenants lacked renter's insurance, forcing them to bear all the

cost for belongings lost in the storm. Finally, as I already stated, several residents as well

as the neighborhood itself were already reeling from the effects of the foreclosure crisis.

In all of these ways and others, the 2011 tornado affirmed and exacerbated the

racialization of livability and poverty in Minneapolis.

Livability and Neoliberal Poverty Management

The racial stratification of poverty and livability in post-civil rights Minneapolis

and the US as a whole is not simply the product of overt inter-racial hostility or prejudice.

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[8] In 2009, among the nation's largest metropolitan areas, the Twin Cities had the largest
unemployment disparity between whites and blacks (6.6% to 20.4%) (Austin 2010b).

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Nor is it an epiphenomenon of ostensibly non-racial factors, such as differences in wealth or human capital—although these factors sometimes matter.

In part, the racialized poverty in Minneapolis and other US cities is simply a manifestation of inherited and unaddressed *pre*-civil rights inequalities. During the liberal New Deal era, for example, national legislators designed unemployment insurance, aid to dependent children, and other welfare programs in ways that fostered longstanding racial—and gender and sexual—inequalities (Katznelson 2006; Gordon 1994; Canaday 2009). These programs, on the one hand, brought many white male-headed households into the middle class, especially in places like Minnesota where activists and public officials vigorously pursued them (Koch 1968; Gilman 2012). On the other hand, they disadvantaged blacks and other racialized minorities by, for example: excluding agricultural and domestic laborers (occupations performed by many people of color); linking eligibility to work history (which, for people of color facing employment discrimination, was often unstable)[9]; and granting administrative control to white and frequently racist state officials. Many racialized minorities in post-civil rights Minneapolis have undoubtedly inherited the long-term effects of these disadvantages, especially those whose families lived in the south before the 1960s.

On top of pre-civil rights inequalities, uncorrected *global* inequalities have also contributed to the racialization of poverty in Minneapolis. Since the 1970s, international migrants to US cities—many of whom are people of color—have increasingly come from

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[9] Eligibility was also, in many instances, linked to one's marital status, a factor that intersected with the racialization of many New Deal problems.

countries where imperialist foreign policies (typically involving the US and other privileged nations) and/or the imposition of neoliberal economic reforms (usually through free trade agreements, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) have diminished popular access to wages, housing, food, health security, education, and other important socio-economic resources (Chacón and Davis 2006). Minneapolis, for example, has received substantial numbers of Hmong, Somali and Mexican migrants, many of whom originally resettled to the US under such conditions.[10] At least partly because of the inequalities surrounding these migrants, they and their families have been much more prone to experiencing poverty in the city than many white US-born citizens (Vang 2013; Kelly and Egbert 2011; US Census Bureau 2009).

While pre-civil rights and global inequalities have had a formidable impact on people of color in Minneapolis and other US cities, they are only part of the explanation for persistent racialized poverty. The other significant part, which I will focus on below, is the national and local pursuit of neoliberal poverty management. During the post-civil rights era, public officials and other important political actors in Minneapolis have structured antipoverty efforts around this pursuit. By layering neoliberal poverty management on top of the inequalities discussed above, they have fashioned two trends that, together, reinforce and reproduce a persistent and extreme racial stratification of poverty in the city. These two trends, already mentioned at the outset, are the

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[10] In underscoring these similar conditions, I do not mean to obscure the fact that the migration experiences and legal status of each group are also different in significant ways.

perpetuation of a generally racialized political economy and the reproduction of racialized and gendered myths about the "undeserving" poor.

To advance these points, the coming paragraphs focus, in particular, on local officials in Minneapolis and their efforts in support of poverty deconcentration—a neoliberal initiative aimed at dispersing the poor throughout expansive metropolitan housing markets. While poverty deconcentration has reshaped poverty management in several US cities, it has taken on an especially comprehensive form in post-civil rights Minneapolis, channeling efforts in education, policing, and welfare as well as housing. I argue that, in turning to poverty deconcentration, local officials obfuscated and exacerbated many of the inequalities discussed above. And, consequently, they have perpetuated and entrenched the marginalization of poor constituents around the city, especially poor people of color.

Poverty Deconcentration

Under the leadership of President Clinton and Henry Cisneros, Clinton's first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), poverty deconcentration became the nation's dominant approach to issues of poverty and urban planning. Though not new to the national scene—deconcentration was attempted as part of late 1960s integration efforts—this approach had never before attained such widespread and consistent federal support.

Poverty deconcentration aims to disperse the residents of high poverty and, *de facto*, often racially segregated neighborhoods. Federal, state and local policymakers have pursued this dispersal primarily through housing policies, such as the demolition of

public housing developments, the use of mobility programs to relocate poor families to higher-income neighborhoods, and the redevelopment and gentrification of high poverty neighborhoods (Goetz 2003, chap. 3).

The push for poverty deconcentration has also taken hold in policy areas related to housing. In the area of public education, for example, deconcentration supporters have debated and pushed for school choice programs meant to disperse poor students into predominantly middle-income, white schools (e.g. Orfield 2006). Others have pursued aggressive community policing efforts designed to remove "problematic elements" from high poverty neighborhoods (Goetz 2003, 117-22). Still others, especially at the state level, have pushed deconcentration through welfare policy, proposing laws that restrict access to public assistance for new or non-state residents. Proponents suggest that these residency requirements discourage in-migration of poor individuals and, thus, support regional deconcentration efforts (Schram and Krueger 1994).

The foregoing deconcentration efforts follow and reinforce a straightforward neoliberal rationale. This rationale hinges on two ideas that, together, evoke a vision for raising personal responsibility, "job-readiness," market competitiveness and, ultimately, societal incorporation among the poor by way of dispersal.

First, deconcentration efforts stress the importance of clearing and redeveloping high poverty neighborhoods. Proponents of these efforts dutifully cite evidence that such neighborhoods foster "a range of social problems whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Goetz 2003, 26-27). They suggest that these "concentration effects" emerge because high poverty neighborhoods are removed from "mainstream" society and,

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thereby, nurture anti-social behavior and joblessness among their residents. The result, we are told, is a rigid "cycle of poverty" that cannot be broken without an aggressive, state-led process of demolition, redevelopment, and gentrification (Bennett and Reed 1999).

Second, deconcentration efforts emphasize that policymakers must, in addition to redeveloping impoverished neighborhoods, reposition the poor themselves in more geographically expansive and competitive housing markets. Twentieth-century affordable and public housing programs entrenched the "cycle of poverty," the story goes, by "isolating" the poor and people of color from competitive markets and the opportunities they offer.[11] Poverty deconcentration, proponents argue, reverses this apparent isolation by repositioning the poor in "mixed-income communities" where they will learn and benefit from contact with their "self-sufficient" middle-class neighbors.

By the early to mid-1990s, the push for poverty deconcentration had taken an exaggerated form in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the previous twenty years, as I described above, the city and region had, despite maintaining strong economic growth and below average unemployment and poverty, experienced deepening and *above* average marginalization among its communities of color. Moreover, these communities experienced rapid growth—on both proportional and absolute terms—and intensified

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[11] This story of policy failure oversimplifies a complex history. Postwar public housing development certainly contributed to the segregation and marginalization of poor people of color and the poor more generally. Simultaneously, however, public housing provided key socio-economic and political resources that the poor themselves used to oppose their marginalization. See Williams (2005) and Arena (2012).

segregation, both of which rendered their marginality increasingly visible (see Appendix).

In response, officials instituted or advocated for virtually every type of deconcentration initiative mentioned above. Their single most important action on this front was the settlement of *Hollman v. Cisneros*, a class-action lawsuit against HUD, the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority, and other related agencies. The Minneapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Legal Aid Society filed the lawsuit in 1992 on behalf of residents of the Sumner Field, Olson, Lyndale, and Glenwood (hereafter, Sumner-Glenwood) projects—a set of adjacent public housing developments in the city's high poverty and disproportionately black and Hmong Near North neighborhood. Lawyers successfully alleged that the defendants had purposefully built the Sumner-Glenwood homes in a neighborhood with already high proportions of poor people and racial minorities and directed recipients of tenant-based (Section 8) rental assistance to settle in this neighborhood. The agencies had, thus, intentionally exacerbated the "isolation" and social problems of the area (Crump 2002).

The *Hollman* settlement, covered heavily in the local news, marked the shift to a poverty deconcentration paradigm in Minneapolis. The settlement resulted in a consent decree providing for the demolition of all 770 Sumner-Glenwood housing units; the forced relocation of their more than three thousand residents; the redevelopment of the site into a mixed-income community; the development of up to 770 new affordable housing units throughout the city and region; the addition of nine hundred Section 8

certificates and vouchers meant for the city's low-income residents; and more than one

hundred million dollars in additional HUD funding—all meant, in theory, to disperse

low-income residents of Minneapolis and expand their socio-economic opportunities

(Goetz 2003, chap. 6; Crump 2002). Despite the opposition of several antipoverty

advocates and public housing residents to the planned demolition and the resistance of

middle-class residents and officials to the development of new affordable housing units in

their communities, every provision was eventually implemented.

Beyond the *Hollman* settlement, city officials and concerned residents pursued

many additional deconcentration efforts. Health officials often chose to condemn and

demolish, rather than rehabilitate, housing units contaminated with lead, a

disproportionate number of which were located in high poverty neighborhoods.[12] City

agencies restructured the rules surrounding affordable housing subsidies to incentivize

development in middle-income neighborhoods (Goetz 2003, 124). Police departments

developed community-based drug prevention programs in which fearful homeowners and

middle-class residents worked with officers to investigate, arrest, and evict "suspicious"

low-income renters and people of color in the central city (Goetz 2003, 120-22). And

neighborhood activists used the city's Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP)—

"which provided millions of dollars to neighborhood groups that engaged in a planning

process to revitalize their communities"—to encourage the expansion of homeownership

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[12] From 1991 to 1998, the number of demolished housing units outpaced newly built
units by more than 2,250 (Goetz 2003, 125-26).

and discourage the development of affordable housing and social services in their communities (Goetz 2003, 123; Goetz and Sidney 1994).

A series of reports—produced by government agencies, scholars, public interest groups and news outlets—provided the neoliberal rationale behind deconcentration efforts in Minneapolis.[13] These reports demonstrated that high poverty rates in the city's fully developed and expanding "core" correlated with higher unemployment, lower labor participation, higher crime rates, lower school performance, higher municipal expenditures, and other apparent indicators of deficiency and dysfunction (e.g. Institute on Race and Poverty 1997; Metropolitan Council 1992). Pointing to these and other findings, they suggested that, without dispersing the poor and diversifying the class-composition of its "core," the city would soon experience the total "decay" already seen in majority-minority Midwestern cities:

> What happened in Detroit, Chicago, or Milwaukee is not just the story of a dying metropolitan core; their histories mark the path that our community follows today. If we do nothing to change our housing and education patterns and trends, the Twin Cities will join other northern communities whose central cities have decayed. (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997, 40)

Representing the Underclass

Poverty deconcentration, like many social policies, has received such widespread support mainly because its neoliberal rationale comports with the representational efforts of influential elected officials.[14] With deconcentration efforts as their focus, these

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[13] For a complete list of these reports, see Goetz (2003, 99-100).

[14] As many have noted, the *empirical* basis for accepting this rationale is shaky at best. See, for example, Bennett and Reed (1999).

officials have forged a consensus around myths that locate poor constituents' interests in efforts to label and address their behavioral deficiencies. By doing so, the myths suggests, they will become more economically competitive and achieve greater societal incorporation. As Edward Goetz (2003, 133) summarizes,

> The discourse surrounding the deconcentration of poverty accentuates the behavioral pathologies of the poor and places the focus for change on the poor themselves. This language is easily adapted not only by conservatives, who argue that the poor should change their behavior, but also by liberals, who argue that the poor must change their location in order to improve their lot (and, in the end, their behavior will change, too). The deconcentration-of-poverty paradigm has something for both camps.

Elected officials' behavioral myths focused on the now-familiar racialized and gendered construction of a dangerous and disorderly underclass. Ken Auletta (1981, 105-06) presented this construction succinctly in a controversial 1981 essay:

> Members of the underclass are responsible for a disproportionate amount of the crime, the welfare costs, the unemployment, and the hostility that beset many American communities. All too often, they operate outside the mainstream of society—as the arsonists, the chain snatchers, the passive people dependent on welfare, the hustlers rejecting society's values and choosing to make their living illegally, the defeated people […] who feel "crushed," and lose hope and sometimes steal, the traumatized, whether they become alcoholics, addicts, occupants of mental institutions, harmless shopping-bag ladies, or malignant killers. […] For the first time in America's relatively young history, the ghetto has become a permanent home for too many.

Auletta's remarks illustrate how underclass constructions reiterate long-standing behavioral myths about poor people of color and their interests and, in doing so, affirm the neoliberal rationale of poverty deconcentration. He suggests, first, that many poor people (of color) experience marginalization as members of an isolated—that is, 'under'—class that "operate[s] outside the mainstream society" and instead finds a "permanent home" in high poverty and racially segregated "ghettos." He then argues,

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more specifically, that this underclass suffers from a lack of discipline plaguing "ghetto" life. And, finally, to prove this claim, he associates the underclass with several racialized and gendered behaviors—such as participation in informal economies and high welfare use—that apparently reflect deeper pathologies—such as criminality and welfare dependency. Cast as part of the underclass, the poor, thus, deserve opportunities to exit socially "isolated" "ghettos" and achieve greater societal incorporation. But they can effectively do so only if they are removed from these neighborhood spaces and repositioned in more direct proximity to and competition with "self-sufficient" middle-class peers.

During the post-civil rights era, national politicians across the polarizing partisan landscape have turned to underclass constructions in pursuing poverty deconcentration and other aspects of neoliberal poverty management (Goetz 2003; Dreier and Atlas 1995). As with poverty deconcentration itself, this turn took an exemplary form in Minneapolis.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, local news outlets fueled the focus on underclass pathology, covering stories of drug-related violence among the city's growing and marginalized population of color, especially young black men ("Body Count" 1995). Residents, in response, exhibited heightened and gendered fears of crime stemming from these neighborhoods.[15] Polarized public officials debated, sometimes fiercely, the proper response to these fears. Almost all of them, however, grounded their representational

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[15] An annual regional survey showed that, from 1987 to 1993, the percentage of area residents listing "crime" as "the single most important problem" facing the Twin Cities skyrocketed from less than 15 to 61 percent. See Metropolitan Council (2009, 11).

efforts in underclass myths, legitimating the emergence of poverty deconcentration and other neoliberal initiatives.

The most thorough turn to an underclass construction of the poor occurred, unsurprisingly, in debates about deconcentration and housing. In the *Hollman* lawsuit, for example, Legal Aid attorneys deployed it to demonstrate the "decay" wrought by decades of race and class segregation. Lawyers described not only the housing stock but, at least implicitly, social life in the Sumner-Glenwood homes and the surrounding neighborhood as "deteriorated" and disorderly, articulating a clear need to remove and relocate rather than redistribute resources to low-income residents of high poverty and racially segregated neighborhoods (Goetz 2003; Crump 2002). Influential city officials also took this position, including Jackie Cherryhomes—a Councilwoman representing the high poverty Near North neighborhood—and Sharon Sayles Belton—City Council President from 1990 to 1993, Minneapolis' first black mayor from 1994 to 2001 and, at one point, a finalist for the position of HUD secretary under President Clinton (the job that went to Cisneros) (Crump 2002; Diaz 1995a; Diaz 1996).

Officials and neighborhood activists from more affluent city wards and surrounding suburbs referenced underclass constructions to illustrate the social costs of building affordable housing and the social benefits of attracting homeowners and higher income residents to high poverty neighborhoods. In doing so, they clarified their simultaneous support for demolition of public housing in high poverty neighborhoods and opposition to the development of affordable housing in their own communities (Diaz 1995b; Goetz and Sidney 1994; Goetz 2003).

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Outside of housing debates, local elected officials also referenced underclass constructions as they extended deconcentration efforts to other policy areas, such as social welfare (Schram and Krueger 1994), public education (e.g. Orfield and Wallace 2007), and crime prevention (e.g. Kerr 2012; Goetz 2003, 121-22).

Reproducing Marginalization

Elected officials in Minneapolis and other cities are sometimes quick to declare poverty deconcentration a success. To prove this success, they point to the disappearance of public housing from city landscapes and cherry-pick findings indicating an increase in quality-of-life among participants in various mobility programs. They say little to nothing, however, about poverty deconcentration's broader impact on the marginalization of the poor. Evidence suggests that deconcentration has, like most neoliberal poverty policies, reproduced rather than mitigated this marginalization and the racial inequalities surrounding it.

The process of reproduction has played out in three interrelated ways. First, middle-class residents, public officials, and business and property owners have taken steps—both legal (decreasing the availability of affordable housing) and illegal (discrimination)—to ensure that "those people" find few affordable housing options in their communities (Goetz 2003, 183-86, 239-40; Sidney 2003, 4-5). Second, many middle-income communities and cities have almost wholly privatized the provision of transportation, care services, and other necessary components of a satisfactory living arrangement. Thus, even if affordable housing technically exists, many poor people of color displaced from their previous housing face the difficult choice of either entering a

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community that is incapable of providing for their basic needs or returning to a place where much of the housing stock requires serious rehabilitation.[16] Third, the very presence of deconcentration efforts tends to exacerbate both of the foregoing problems by making the market for affordable housing more competitive. By lowering the availability of public housing and increasing the number of low-income people using tenant-based assistance, these efforts increase the demand for decent low-income housing in urban markets where the availability of such housing is often already dangerously low (Goetz 2003, 110).

Livability and Crisis

As public officials in Minneapolis repositioned poor constituents, especially poor people of color, in the marginalizing market relations partly described above, subprime creditors silently and drastically expanded the socio-economic insecurity associated with these relations. The result was, yet again, the perpetuation of the racial stratification of livability and poverty highlighted earlier in this chapter.

This expansion began with the invention of securitized mortgages. Before the 1980s, creditors limited the number of mortgages they issued based on the deposits they had available for lending. Put simply, they had to supply the capital to back their own mortgage loans. About thirty years ago, however, some discovered that they could raise profits by pooling and selling mortgages as securities instead of waiting to collect

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[16] In the aftermath of the *Hollman* settlement, eighty-seven percent of the displaced families simply moved to different housing in north Minneapolis—the exact same high poverty area where the Sumner-Glenwood homes were located. See Goetz (2003, 204-05).

borrowers' interest payments. Consequently, subprime mortgages and other risky loan products became more attractive and lucrative to creditors. Once converted to securities, their higher risk of default could (apparently) be managed by using investment formulas to pool them appropriately with low-risk prime loans. Selling subprime mortgages was, in short, an easy way to increase one's share of the securities market and raise profits even further (McLean and Nocera 2010; Wyly et al 2012).

If the advent of mortgage-backed securities generated an incentive for creditors to peddle risky mortgages, the market for this activity was largely created by the racialized poverty reproduced through poverty deconcentration and other neoliberal initiatives. Years of redlining, labor market segmentation, patriarchal and inadequate social policies, and a host of other factors had burdened residents of high poverty and predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods with diminished access to prime credit, affordable housing, and stable and livable income. Under these conditions, they became an easily identifiable and exploitable group of borrowers and renters.

Subprime creditors in Minneapolis and other cities aggressively targeted the most vulnerable residents of these neighborhoods, lending directly to them—in the case of homeowners—or to their landlords—in the case of renters (Allen 2011; Rugh and Massey 2010). Unsurprisingly, as I already stated, the emergence and fallout of the resulting financial crisis most negatively affected these same groups, prompting rises in their already high foreclosure and eviction rates, the persistence of chronic unemployment, and migration out of already weakened and depopulated public schools.

Minneapolis experienced all of the foregoing patterns of displacement, often to a much greater degree than other US cities (Institute on Race and Poverty 2009; Allen 2011).

Creditors around the country, though not formally involved with poverty deconcentration, appealed to its neoliberal rationale to legitimate the expansion of subprime lending. Drawing on the approval of deconcentration supporters like President Clinton and Andrew Cuomo (Clinton's HUD Secretary from 1997 to 2001), they framed this expansion as a move to remedy past housing discrimination and a deliver greater housing "choice"—and, thus, the benefits of full societal incorporation—to the poor and people of color. They claimed, to have done nothing less than extend the "American Dream" and "responsibility" of home and property ownership to all constituencies and all neighborhoods (McLean and Nocera 2010, 43, 49-50, 89-90, 303-04).

When mortgage defaults and foreclosures began rising, creditors again appealed to the logic of neoliberal poverty management, using it to deflect blame for the looming recession onto low-income people and people of color in high poverty neighborhoods. They suggested that these groups experienced housing instability and continued poverty because of their opposition to the middle-class norm of financial responsibility. We were told that those who purchased subprime home loans *should* carry the cost of their foreclosures, as they had defrauded banks by taking out exorbitant, unaffordable loans (McLean and Nocera 2010, 253). Tenants of foreclosed properties apparently warranted just as little sympathy, as they were largely ignored altogether.

Elected officials, for their part, mostly adapted rather than questioned the underclass constructions already underlying their efforts on behalf of the poor. They also,

as a result, failed to adequately address the links between the financial crisis and the inequalities surrounding the poor. Leading conservatives blamed the crisis on federal efforts—stemming from the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act and government-sponsored enterprises (Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac)—to reduce redlining and issue mortgages to low-income borrowers and borrowers of color. They argued that such fair housing efforts granted these "irresponsible" and "predatory" borrowers the privileges of homeownership before they were "ready" and incubated the dysfunctions that really perpetuate poverty.[17] Many progressives responded similarly, albeit less harshly, suggesting that the low financial sophistication of poor borrowers of color—rather than their long-standing diminished access to income, affordable housing, and prime credit—made them susceptible to exploitative lenders and led to the financial crisis (e.g. Bostic and Lee 2008).

Mired in the consensus around underclass constructions of the poor, these elites have buttressed the existing neoliberal regime of poverty management with programs to expand financial counseling for current and potential homeowners, protect consumers against predatory lenders, and incentivize banks to reduce mortgage payments.

These programs have further fueled the myth that housing instability and poverty stem primarily from financial irresponsibility, incompetence, and other behavioral deficiencies of the poor and working class. They reproduce, more specifically, a division between "responsible homeowners" (and sometimes renters)—who are predominantly

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[17] Several studies have disproved this claim. Other research suggests that it was, in fact, the *limited* implementation of fair housing efforts that contributed to the crisis. See, for example, Ashton (2010).

white middle-income males—and financially irresponsible others—who are disproportionately poor and racialized minorities and/or members of female-headed households. According to program proponents, such as the Obama administration, the former are otherwise deserving individuals whose crisis-related problems stem purely from simple financial mistakes, temporary loss of income, unnecessarily high mortgage payments and interest rates, and/or blatant fraud on the part of lenders—all short-term problems that financial counseling, modest loan modifications, and consumer protection are designed to address (Reynolds and Reckard 2009). By implication, the latter—whose problems are compounded by long-standing inequalities discussed throughout this chapter—become those who lack responsibility.

For several reasons, the foregoing programs have done little to mitigate the effects of the financial crisis on many poor constituents. First, despite being enacted after the crisis had already hit many communities, these programs are generally preventative and, thus, of little use to poor individuals and families who are already dealing with episodes of housing instability. Second, their purview mostly omits the experiences of renters, homeless people, and others who do not actually own homes or property. Third, even poor individuals who might benefit from these programs are, because of widespread stigmas and a basic lack of time, among the least likely to report fraud, pursue financial counseling, or find loan officers that are willing to negotiate with them. Finally, and most important, no amount of consumer protection, financial counseling and loan modification can fix the long-term inequalities in access to affordable housing, wages and income and prime credit that precipitated the crisis and keep many poor people, people of color,

women and other marginalized constituencies at a chronically high risk of housing instability (Ashton 2010; Fields Libman and Saegert 2010).

Even in Minneapolis, Minnesota—a city and state that have, in some ways, led the nation in implementing financial counseling, loan modification, and consumer protection programs—large disparities in foreclosure and housing instability have persisted between predominantly poor, nonwhite neighborhoods and the rest of the city (Allen 2011; Crump 2008). Minneapolis' experience confirms that these and other neoliberal policies, even if effectively implemented, tend to manage more than mitigate poverty.

Conclusion

Antipoverty advocates in post-civil rights Minneapolis have faced a localized social order that mirrors and exemplifies much of its national counterpart. This order, in times of both growth and recession, has exhibited deeply racialized patterns of livability and poverty. And, as at the national level, political elites in the city have reinforced and reproduced it through their support for neoliberal poverty management. The local turn to neoliberal poverty management crystallized most clearly around demands for poverty deconcentration, an initiative aimed at dispersing the poor and incorporating them into housing and labor markets. The neoliberal logic underlying these demands informed welfare, criminal justice, and public education as well as housing policies. While purporting to aid poverty reduction, poverty deconcentration has, in fact, done much more to perpetuate a long-standing racialized political economy that exacerbates the inequalities harming many people of color, poor constituents, and women.

Simultaneously, it has reiterated racialized and gendered underclass myths that stigmatize the poor as a *threat* to the "livable" city. The result, for the poor, has been persistent and racialized marginalization.

Chapter 3: Antipoverty Advocacy in Minneapolis

By the early 1990s, underclass constructions of the poor were percolating through

neoliberal poverty initiatives and other efforts to protect "livability" in Minneapolis. As I

described in the previous chapter, this shift both emerged in response to and perpetuated

deeply racialized patterns of poverty in the city. Its proponents included public officials,

middle class advocacy and interest groups, community groups, developers, and

mainstream media outlets.

No sooner had elected officials initiated the turn to neoliberal poverty

management than many of the city's progressive advocates began to challenge it. These

advocates fought virtually every action and initiative described in the last chapter—from

specific events like the demolition of the Sumner-Glenwood homes to the overall rise of

community policing, school choice, and welfare reform. They were, in short, among the

most outspoken and contentious representatives of the poor. Over fifteen years later, I

would meet many of them as they continued their work in the wake of the Great

Recession.

In this chapter, I situate post-civil rights antipoverty advocacy in Minneapolis

within an organizational field. First, I sketch a *very* brief history of this field,

highlighting, in particular, its longstanding relationship to the city and region's socialist

and black freedom movements.[1] While antipoverty advocacy in Minneapolis is tied to

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[1] I use these movement labels in their most generic sense. "Socialism" refers to an
egalitarian movement that attributes inequality and poverty to the aggressive pursuit of
profit and capital and the private concentration of wealth. "Black freedom" refers to a
movement, also egalitarian, that associates inequality and poverty with the failure to fully

many movements, its relationship to these two is especially important for understanding the ethnographic analyses in the coming chapters. Second, I outline three key features of antipoverty advocacy organizations in Minneapolis that have historically shaped and continue to shape their representational efforts. These features include the nature of their movement background (bridging or separating), the type of institutions on which they rely for support (indigenous or dominant), and the social position of their leadership (privileged or marginalized). Finally, I specify a repertoire of four constituent constructions that antipoverty advocates have inherited and drawn from their organizational field as part of their efforts on behalf of Minneapolis' poor.[2]

Socialism, Black Freedom, and Antipoverty Advocacy in Minneapolis

From Gilded Age battles for higher wages to more recent anti-foreclosure fights, Minneapolis has a long and rich tradition of grassroots antipoverty and economic justice advocacy (Gilman 2012). As I describe below, the city and region's socialist and black freedom movements have both played particularly important roles in shaping this tradition (Delton 2001/2002; Gilman 2012; Karger 1986; Koch 1968).

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incorporate and/or empower communities of color, with a special emphasis on African Americans.

[2] "Repertoire frames […] are properties of persistently identified and marginalized groups. They persist through time, constituting an ongoing cultural resource to activists engaged in movement construction. When activated, they serve not to distinguish movement groups from one another but to provide them with an umbrella under which to coalesce, however precariously and briefly. […] The concept of a frame repertoire emphasizes the historical embeddedness of contemporary protests undertaken by"—and, I would add, on behalf of—"persistently identified and marginalized groups" (Kim 2000, 58).

Neither movement has uniformly prioritized poverty in the post-civil rights era.

Many socialists in Minneapolis have instead focused their energy on related but distinct

labor issues, such as opposing "right to work" legislation (DeFranco and Molm 2012;

Ragsdale and Brooks 2012). Similarly, many black freedom activists have concentrated

on projects such as neighborhood revitalization, in which issues facing middle-class

property owners are often emphasized over those facing the poor (Goetz and Sidney

1994; Goetz 2003). Certain members of this group have even decried the representational

efforts of some antipoverty advocates, arguing alongside elected officials that social

welfare programs enable dependency and other underclass pathologies.[3] Poverty, in short,

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[3] One welfare rights organizer I met explained how she had encountered an especially
gendered opposition among some of the city's black pastors who, as she put it, "had a
conservatism":

> I've been up in north Minneapolis organizing and trying to get my foot in the
> door […]. Some of the churches and pastors up there have not been inviting.
> They just, they aren't hearing it. […] There's this one pastor, small bald-headed
> dude [two other women of color in the conversation identified him as a well-
> known pastor]. When he found out I was from Welfare Rights, he was not having
> it.

His opinion, she said, was that "we're [welfare rights advocates are] just encouraging
women to stay on welfare." A few others continued the conversation, stating that, where
it exists, the opposition of black pastors and other civil rights leaders to antipoverty
activism is also a "woman thing." One black community activist confirmed that "So
much of the leadership [in north Minneapolis] is dominated by men." Another responded,
"It's like a lot of them, they just, um […] they don't like assertive leadership from
women and they just want us to go off and let them do their thing." These criticisms
speak to an underclass construction articulated by many civil rights leaders—for
example, during the Million Man March—in which poverty reduction in the "black
community" depends on the pursuit of "'intact' heterosexual families with a male head of
household" (Hancock 2004, 53-55).

often remains under-addressed within local socialist and black freedom movements, reflecting and reinforcing the poor's status as an especially marginalized constituency.

Nevertheless, organizers in these two movements have, more than many, participated in and exercised a particularly strong influence on progressive antipoverty efforts in Minneapolis.[4] They have taken the lead in organized struggles against, for example, the demolition of public housing, disciplinary welfare reforms, public school closures, aggressive policing of low-income tenants and people of color, and foreclosure-related evictions. They have also coordinated efforts to promote the expansion of income assistance, affordable housing and other necessities.

Leaders and participants in these movements influenced all of the advocacy organizations that I observed (see chapter 4). For example, I frequently attended meetings and actions planned and/or attended by people such as former board members of the local NAACP chapter and organizers from socialist groups and progressive union locals. None of this is to suggest that socialist and black freedom organizers were alone. Participants in the local peace, feminist, environmentalist, disability rights, immigrant rights, LGBT, and anarchist movements also regularly participated. Even these groups, however, often followed, cooperated, and/or overlapped and intersected with the leadership of socialists and black freedom organizers. I encountered, for example, peace and immigrant rights advocates supporting anti-foreclosure efforts under the tutelage of socialist allies; environmentalists working in a campaign, led by both socialists and black freedom

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[4] This fact is unsurprising, as low-income people are, despite their disadvantages, still a numerically large sub-constituency of both movements.

advocates, to protect and improve public education in a disproportionately black high poverty neighborhood; disability rights activists citing a socialist welfare rights organization as the inspiration for some of their own antipoverty work; and women drawing on feminist ideas and practices in that same welfare rights organization. Additionally, antipoverty activism has also emerged *apart* from the socialist and black freedom movement bases in Minneapolis. But, especially for the purposes of my analyses in the coming chapters, the influence of these two movements has been among the most substantial and persistent.

Socialism

The socialist movement in Minneapolis emerged in earnest during the 1880s. With institutional support from the Knights of Labor, the Twin Cities' rapidly expanding workforce began demanding an eight-hour workday, livable wages, and other concessions (Gilman 2012, 33-37). The movement also received early support from eastern European immigrants, many of whom facilitated socialist and communist organizing in northern Minnesota (Gilman 2012, 48). Before too long, the local socialist movement became a major force in antipoverty battles. During the Great Depression, for example, groups like Teamsters' Local 574—led by Trotskyists—and the Workers Alliance—a group of "unemployed workers" backed by the International Workers of the World—engaged in protest and civil disobedience to pursue systematic public relief for the urban poor (Koch 1968; Gilman 2012). Because of the efforts of these groups, Minneapolis became an important local battleground in the national struggle over social welfare policy.

The socialist movement in Minneapolis, as in all of the US, waned as a result of Cold War politics and government repression. Nevertheless, socialist organizers have continued to lead advocacy efforts on behalf of the poor. During the 1990s, they challenged shifts in housing, public education, criminal justice and welfare policy that were enacted in conjunction with the city and nation's growing focus on concentrated poverty (see chapter 2). For example, women associated with the Freedom Road Socialist Organization—a cadre organization based largely (though not solely) in Chicago and Minneapolis—became leaders and organizers of the Minnesota Welfare Rights Committee (see chapter 4)—a group of current and former welfare recipients that protest cuts and disciplinary reforms to welfare programs and promote the expansion of welfare entitlements.

During my field research, two national events—the Wisconsin labor "uprising" and the Occupy movement—strengthened connections between the socialist movement and antipoverty advocacy in Minneapolis. For example, some of the advocates I worked with used Wisconsin solidarity protests as opportunities to spread antipoverty messages, such as "Welfare rights are workers' rights!" Additionally, they used these events to mobilize supporters for their own efforts around welfare, foreclosures, and other poverty-related issues. Many advocates were also active in the socialist faction of the local Occupy movement. Members of the Welfare Rights Committee, for example, forged links with other socialists in Occupy Minneapolis and began marshaling their presence at various meetings and protests. A number of these links formed specifically around an "Occupy Women's Rights" rally in which multiple welfare rights organizers and several

other feminist-oriented socialists participated. Even as the Occupy movement began to wane locally, many Occupy Minneapolis participants kept in contact with the Welfare Rights Committee and, in a few cases, eventually became active members.

Black Freedom

The local black freedom movement extends as far back as the 1850s and 1860s, when Minnesota's black population grew from approximately 40 to about 700 people. At that time, black residents in Minneapolis and St. Paul began drawing attention to the political, social, and economic inequalities that they and other people of color faced. Among the most important and immediate issues they confronted were the presence of outright racial hostility and discrimination, disenfranchisement, and economic distress (Green 1996; Green 1998).

The black freedom movement, like the socialist movement, provided a crucial vehicle for struggles to reduce poverty during the Great Depression. For example, local civil rights leader Gertrude Brown used the Phyllis Wheatley House—a predominantly black north Minneapolis settlement house that she headed—to form a Black Worker's Alliance with the local Urban League. Together, they fought for expanded job opportunities for African Americans (Karger 1986).

For many of the same reasons as the socialist movement, the black freedom movement also weakened as the twentieth century wore on. But movement participants continued to organize grassroots efforts on behalf of the poor. For example, in the 1990s, local movement leaders—such as progressive black pastors, the progressive low-income faction of the local NAACP, Minnesota ACORN, and the *Spokesman-Recorder* (a local

African American newspaper)—joined socialists in opposing the growing emphasis on poverty deconcentration. They took a hard stance, for instance, against the *Hollman* decision described in chapter 2 and the aggressive policing and removal of low-income tenants from public housing (Goetz 2003). Many of the same leaders also organized responses to the recent financial crisis. They demanded the protection and expansion of public assistance to poor communities of color—such as anti-foreclosure assistance, public school funding, and tornado disaster relief.[5]

More recently, the Occupy movement and the grassroots response to the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin partially reinforced ties between the black freedom movement and antipoverty advocacy. A handful of advocates, some of whom participated in the groups I studied, formed a Minneapolis chapter of Occupy the Hood, an extension of the Occupy movement dedicated to racial justice. Although the organization itself was not active for very long, it focused on the extreme marginalization of Minneapolis' poor people of color and drew more proponents of black freedom into the world of grassroots antipoverty politics. For example, one member of the group, an African American woman, began co-hosting an online radio show that addressed many of the poverty-related issues raised by Occupy the Hood, such as unemployment and the criminalization of black men. Local Trayvon Martin solidarity rallies—which were, not coincidentally, partly organized by leaders of Occupy the Hood—operated similarly.

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[5] As I described in chapter 2, on May 22, 2011, a tornado touched down in north Minneapolis, the area of the city with by far the highest poverty and foreclosure rates. The tornado damaged 3,700 properties and resulted in an estimated $80 million of public and private costs (Roper and Furst 2012).

Organizational Features

In the process of channeling socialist and black freedom movements into grassroots struggles on behalf of the poor, antipoverty advocates have built many different types of organizations. Three features of these organizations have played an especially important role in shaping the development of efforts on behalf of the poor in Minneapolis. These features are their movement backgrounds, sources of institutional support, and leadership. The following paragraphs describe each organizational feature, relate it to antipoverty advocacy in Minneapolis, and specify its practical implications for how advocates are able to represent poor constituents.

Movement Background

The first organizational feature is the movement background of antipoverty efforts, especially whether these efforts emerge out of the separation or joining of movements. Historically, socialist and black freedom organizers in Minneapolis have joined in powerful ways around efforts on behalf of the poor. Following the enactment of New Deal jobs programs and labor regulations, several aspiring civil rights leaders[6] allied with socialist-leaning labor unions to oppose employment discrimination, affordable

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[6] Some of the locally well-known names were Nellie Stone Johnson (who started off organizing for Local 665 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union—the first integrated union in Minnesota—and the Farmer-Labor Party and would eventually become a major civil rights leader in many of Minnesota's political organizations), Anthony Brutus Cassius (who got his political start as the head of a small, all-black waiters union and worked closely with the then-powerful Teamsters' local), Albert L. Allen Jr. (a lead organizer in Local 665 and president of the Minneapolis NAACP from 1946 to 1949), and Cecil E. Newman (whose newspaper, the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, publicized and supported efforts to bridge the local labor/socialist and black freedom movements in a political struggle for economic security) (Delton 2001/2002).

housing shortages, and other sources of poverty among the city's black population.[7] At

the same time, supporters in the socialist movement drew on the skills and neighborhood

connections that civil rights leaders provided, bolstering city- and state-wide efforts to

expand unionization and access to living wage employment. For some, this Great

Depression-era work would be the catalyst for their participation in future antipoverty

and economic justice struggles (Delton 2001/2002).

The status quo in post-civil rights Minneapolis, however, has been one of

movement separation. This separation mirrors the city's deep racial segregation.[8] As I

stated above, socialists have built a foundation in the working class and somewhat less

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[7] As Jennifer Delton (2001/2002, 427) writes, "In trying to convince black citizens of the benefits of unionization, these leaders became deeply involved with black organizations around the city, mainly the Urban Leagues, churches, and settlement houses. Their presence transformed and revived these organizations." She continues, "The labor movement demonstrated what could be accomplished when apparently powerless individuals united to improve their situation, but more importantly it suggested that black leaders need no longer depend simply on the largesse of rich white employers. It is no coincidence that the new leaders most insistent on organizing blacks came out of the labor movement" (428).

[8] In making this statement, I do not mean to suggest that the separation of socialist and black freedom movements is wholly attributable to deepened racial segregation. That said, given the overwhelming influence of segregation on urban social relations, it is hard to imagine that it is wholly unrelated to shifts in movement organization. Another contributing factor to increased movement separation was likely the declining political influence and relevance of the socialist labor movement in Minneapolis. Because the movement loomed so largely during the Great Depression-era, marginalized groups in the city—especially a small minority group like African Americans—had much greater incentives and opportunities to turn to it as a vehicle for pursuing their policy and political goals. With its decline, these incentives and opportunities diminished, compounding the effects of racial segregation.

racially segregated neighborhoods of south Minneapolis.[9] This geographic bias reflects the dominant race and class backgrounds of many leaders and participants in the movement. In contrast, the black freedom movement has cultivated a stronger foundation in the city's high poverty and disproportionately black (and Hmong and Latino) north side neighborhoods.[10] Antipoverty efforts grounded in these two movements have, as a result, often drawn leadership from fragmented groups of advocates and supporters. Indeed, one of the first things to surprise me in my fieldwork was the level of unfamiliarity between many antipoverty advocates working in different parts of the city.

Though they are not the norm, instances of local movement coalitions do exist in post-civil rights antipoverty efforts. As I describe in chapter 4, one organization I studied—a coalition focused on protecting and improving a public high school in north Minneapolis—included strong participation from black freedom advocates *and* socialists hailing from different parts of the city. The local Occupy movement and other smaller, cross-movement events created additional opportunities for these types of coalitions to form. Furthermore, some individual advocates planted the seeds for future coalitions by building and maintaining links to multiple movements. For example, one advocate I worked with multiple times had organized efforts led by several socialist and black

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[9] For example, all of the socialist-led organizations I observed had their regular organizing meetings at various venues in or near south Minneapolis, such as a church basement, the backroom of a coffee shop, a radical independent bookstore, and the office of a progressive union local.

[10] Again, this geographical bias is evidenced by the locations they typically chose for organizing meetings. They included, to name a few, a local high school, the local Urban League, and the community center of a public park—all located in north Minneapolis.

freedom organizations, including the local NAACP, a union local, an antiwar group, Occupy Minneapolis, an African American community newspaper—the list goes on.

Singular efforts and exceptional individuals aside, thoroughgoing and routinized movement coalitions—the type that existed between labor and civil rights organizers during the first half of the twentieth century—have been more sparse in the post-civil rights era.

Prevailing divisions between the local socialist and black freedom movements come with an obvious downside for antipoverty advocates—namely, the loss of potential supporters. Without a broad base of supporters, their ability to pursue especially dissident—that is, adversarial and intersectional—representational efforts also diminishes, intensifying already existing pressure to conform their efforts to the neoliberal and racialized status quo. On the other hand, movement fragmentation also tends to increase political homogeneity among antipoverty advocates. As a result, organizers can more easily manage and "align" their efforts, dissident or otherwise, with the political perspectives of their supporters (Snow et al 1986). Antipoverty advocates in organizations that bridge movements face the opposite tendency. They tend, in other words, to expand their base for pursuing more dissident efforts while potentially raising problems with managing these efforts (Snow and Benford 1988, 206-7).

Institutional Support

The second feature is the source of institutional support for antipoverty advocacy. Most important here is how advocates balance their reliance on indigenous—that is, community- and movement-based—institutions and dominant institutions. Like many

groups representing marginalized constituencies, antipoverty advocates in Minneapolis have historically found more support for their efforts through indigenous institutions.[11] For example, advocates from socialist backgrounds have depended on connections to progressive union locals, liberal churches, community centers (e.g. recreation centers, schools, parks, etc.), community-based and independent media, informal social networks, and movement organizations. Antipoverty advocates motivated by issues of black freedom have relied on similar types of indigenous institutions and also civil rights organizations, such as the local Urban League and NAACP.

     Antipoverty advocates in Minneapolis have also often forged supportive relationships with local and state-level dominant institutions. These institutions have historically leaned progressive, creating a more favorable environment for these relationships to emerge. During the 1920s and 1930s, for instance, Minnesota's socialist-led Farmer-Labor Party gained a significant hold in the state and federal government. At one point, the party controlled the governor, two senators, and over half of Minnesota's members of Congress, securing at least a modicum of dominant institutional backing for antipoverty and economic justice advocates (Gilman 2012).[12]

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[11] By "support," I mean money, sympathizers, meeting space, office resources, communication tools, and the like.

[12] Eventually, in 1944, Farmer-Laborites merged with the Democratic Party, creating the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), which is still the official name of Minnesota's Democratic Party. Pressures for this merger stemmed, on the one hand, from the declining strength of the Farmer-Labor Party and, on the other, from Franklin Roosevelt's fears that a split between the Farmer-Laborites and the Democrats would harm his electoral performance in Minnesota (at that time, a potential swing state). At first, the emergence of the DFL seemed to promise even greater support for socialism in dominant political institutions. By 1948, however, the Democrat-Farmer-Labor Party was

In other instances, local officials similarly supported antipoverty advocates in the black freedom movement. For example, Hubert Humphrey—who was elected mayor of Minneapolis in 1945—allied with organizers such as Nellie Stone Johnson (see fn. 6) who "tied civil rights to the liberal goal[s] of full employment" and economic security (Delton 2001/2002, 426).

Recent antipoverty campaigns have continued to partner with sympathizers in dominant institutions, such as the late Paul Wellstone, Keith Ellison and several lesser-known public officials in the state legislature, the city council, the school board, and other local government institutions. Minneapolis also hosts many liberal foundations that fund community-based advocacy work on issues such as poverty reduction. One of these, the Headwaters Foundation for Justice, regularly issues small grants to organizations that use civil disobedience and other oppositional tactics to pursue progressive social change. This type of foundation funding has been somewhat rare in the post-civil rights era.

Indigenous and dominant institutions generate competing pressures for antipoverty advocates. Indigenous institutions increase movement autonomy, creating potential space for these advocates to engage in more dissident representational efforts (Harris-Lacewell 2004). That is, they increase opportunities for advocates to highlight and oppose the full array of inequalities facing their most marginalized constituents and to radically oppose the neoliberal initiatives that perpetuate these challenges. But this autonomy is only partial. Even the most thoroughly indigenized advocacy efforts still

controlled by liberals, such as Hubert Humphrey, whose politics were more in line with the national Democratic Party. As Rhonda Gilman (2012, 101) notes, "The 'FL' in the party's name had become no more than a historic memory."

operate in the shadow of dominant institutions that favor neoliberalism (Arena 2012). These dominant institutions exercise a strong and general influence over the intelligibility and resonance of advocates' claims. Thus, advocates also face pressure to represent the poor on more affirmative—that is, unitary and cooperative—terms and capitulate to the neoliberal and racialized status quo.

In a different way, antipoverty advocates' links to dominant institutions also generate opportunities to engage in dissident representational efforts. When working with sympathetic elected officials, interest groups, foundations, and other institutional elites, they can more easily pursue these efforts in highly visible political spaces. However, links to dominant institutions also magnify pressures—already felt secondarily in indigenous institutions—to affirm neoliberal poverty management and underclass constructions of the poor (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; Arena 2012). If antipoverty advocates do not pursue affirmative efforts, they risk alienating elite allies and "mainstream" organizations whose own influence rest on their willingness to do so (Kim 2000; Arena 2012).

Leadership

The third key feature of antipoverty advocacy organizations is the social position of their leadership, namely, whether this leadership tends to come from more privileged or more marginalized segments of various movements. The position of leaders in antipoverty campaigns has varied across time and political context. But, with some significant exceptions, leaders have mostly tended to be among the most privileged movement participants. In the case of Minneapolis' socialist movement, these privileged

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participants are working class, white, men, long-time city residents, and sometimes homeowners. Among black freedom organizers, they are black and sometimes white, middle class, men, long-time city residents, and homeowners. As I discuss in chapter 4, several leaders in the organizations I studied did, in fact, have privileged social positions, relative to poor constituents and other antipoverty advocates.

That said, like the tendencies discussed above, the tendency toward privileged leaders and organizers is neither determined nor inevitable. Specific practices shape whether and how social privileges convert into organizational leadership (Kurtz 2002; Ransby 2003; Strolovitch 2007). For example, choices about matters seemingly as small as when, where, and how to meet help to shape who shows up and, consequently, who leads (Mansbridge 1980). Building on the ideals of many black feminists, the welfare rights advocates I worked with made choices that encouraged leadership from low-income women as well as more privileged working or middle class women (see chapter 5). Several of these low-income women were also women of color, most of them were renters, and all of them were current or former welfare recipients. In contrast, the public education justice advocates I studied made choices that empowered more privileged leaders—many, though certainly not all, of whom were middle class, men, homeowners, and long-time residents of the city.

Existing scholarship suggests that the social positioning of leaders influences how antipoverty advocates tend to represent the interests of their constituents. Privileged organizers lack experiential knowledge of some of the inequalities facing the most marginalized poor constituents, such people of color, single mothers, and informal or

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undocumented migrants. They are, thus, less likely to bring attention to these inequalities and cultivate intersectional understandings of solidarity that more adequately address them (Ernst 2010). The most marginalized advocates are, for the opposite reason, more inclined to reflect on and address at least some of the intersecting inequalities facing poor constituents (Naples 1998; Williams 2005).

That said, because these patterns are mediated by reflection, advocates can also reverse them. For example, in a study of welfare rights activists, Rose Ernst (2010) found that even privileged advocates tended to support intersectional efforts on behalf of welfare recipients when they shared leadership with more marginalized advocates and cultivated what Dara Strolovitch (2007) calls an "intersectionally linked fate." On the other hand, as unitary efforts gain more and more organizational traction, even the most marginalized organizers may start to comply with them (Eliasoph 1998).

Constituent Constructions and Antipoverty Advocacy

Through the efforts reviewed above, post-civil rights antipoverty advocates have forged and drawn on a repertoire of four constituent constructions. They are, namely, constructions of *class struggle*, *class inclusion*, *community struggle*, and *community inclusion*. In the following paragraphs, I introduce these constructions and describe how antipoverty advocates have used them in relation to the four general types of constructions I introduced in chapter 1—namely, *common struggle*, *common inclusion*, *shared struggle*, and *shared inclusion*.

Before doing so, a few prefatory notes are in order. First, antipoverty advocates are rarely able to *fully* embrace one construction over the others. The overlapping

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organizational features discussed impose cross-pressures that make it nearly impossible to do so. At the same time, as I illustrate in chapter 6, the need to negotiate these cross-pressures and the tension between different constructions usually leads groups of advocates to favor one over the others. Second, these constructions are not simply outcomes of advocates' representational efforts. Their underlying logics of social solidarity and political relations also help to guide these efforts (Goffman 1974; Eliasoph 1998). Finally, the four constructions I discuss below do not encompass the entirety of ways that advocates, in Minneapolis or anywhere, have constructed and represented the interests of poor constituents. My contention is simply that these four were prominent among the organizations I studied and offered among the most predominant and enduring accounts of the poor's interests.

Class Struggle

Of the four constituent constructions listed above, *class struggle*'s influence among antipoverty advocates stems most directly from connections to the modern socialist movement. This movement has based its outlook in Marx and Engels' famous claim that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (albeit, disagreements persist regarding the best tactics for "struggle" and who, exactly, the oppressed and ruling "classes" are). Socialists drew on the notion of *class struggle*, for example, in organizing disruptive clashes between unemployed workers and business leaders during the Great Depression (Piven and Cloward 1977). These clashes were prevalent in Minneapolis (Gilman 2012; Koch 1968). Today in the city, one can still easily find socialist news media, organizing pamphlets, public forums and movement

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participants converging on *class struggle*. Even local and state-level progressive

politicians sometimes appeal to this construction when they form alliances with socialist-

leaning advocates.

      Class struggle, as a constituent construction, locates the interests of the poor in a

zero-sum battle over resources, authority, and life chances.[13] Its proponents call for

efforts to mobilize an oppressed, majority poor and working class—often referred to as

the "people" or, more recently, the "99 percent." And they call on this majority to "fight

back" against a small but influential group of ruling class elites—who have amassed an

abundance of resources for themselves. According to this construction, most elected

officials have, in exchange for campaign and organizational support, fashioned neoliberal

institutional arrangements that increase the privileges of the "ruling class" at the expense

of everyone else. Aspects of these arrangements include, for example, regressive

taxation, lean and disciplinary public relief, weak labor protections, and publicly

subsidized gentrification.

      Class struggle, as this description should make clear, is firmly rooted in the idea

that the poor have an adversarial relationship with dominant neoliberal institutions. *Class*

struggle depicts these institutions as guarantors of distributive inequalities and

widespread poverty. Advocates drawing on this construction emphasize that, even when

ostensibly serving the goal of poverty reduction, dominant institutions have not

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[13] *Class struggle*, in the broader socialist and labor movements, has not and does not
always operate in an antipoverty register. In some iterations, its proponents construct the
interests of the working and/or middle class as distinct from and more significant than
those of the poor.

authorized more than meager public relief or support for equality. Poor constituents, thus, require an institutional transformation aimed at directly seizing resources and authority from the wealthy.

At times, advocates have linked *class struggle*'s adversarial logic to intersectional understandings of solidarity among the poor, casting it as a particular type of *shared struggle*. For example, some have used its focus on class differentiation and antagonism to highlight the flaws with models of racial and ethnic politics based in appeals to unity and/or authenticity. These models, they argue, almost invariably place more attention on inequalities facing the most privileged racial minorities than they do on those affecting poor and working class people of color (Reed 2000; Arena 2012). Others have similarly used *class struggle*, often alongside discussions of racism and sexism, to highlight the importance of intersecting inequalities and differentiation among women (Nadasen 2004; Ernst 2010).

Figure 3.1
Common/Class Struggle *as Constituent Construction*

Cooperative

Unitary ← → *Intersectional*

Common/Class Struggle

Adversarial
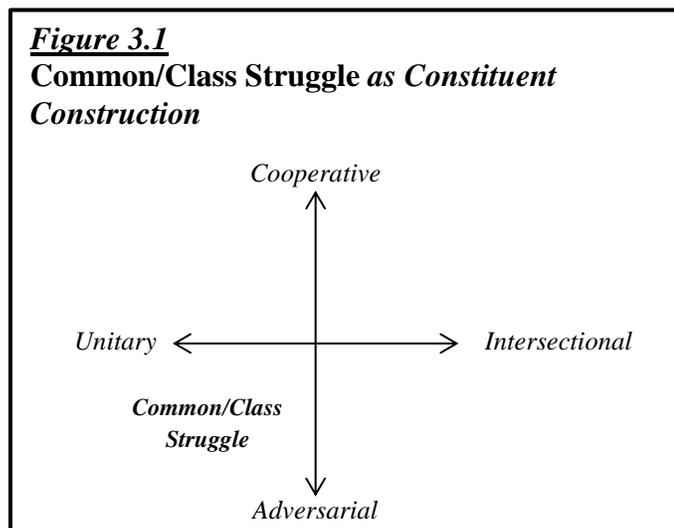
That said, antipoverty advocates have more often treated *class struggle* as a type of *common struggle*. This *common/class struggle* construction suggests that poor constituents have a unitary interest in the aggressive and downward redistribution of resources and life chances. Their interest in addressing class inequality becomes a lowest common denominator that links their fate to one another and to all other economically marginalized constituencies (Strolovitch 2007, 201-03). Poor constituents, in other words, face a common enemy—the wealthy ruling class—that seizes resources and authority for itself at their uniform expense. Other inequalities may exist, the story goes, but they are not foundational.

Class Inclusion

Class inclusion was the least prevalent, and most often criticized, construction among the advocates with whom I worked, regardless of their broader movement connections (see chapters 6 and 7). It has, however, found notable support among elected officials, more professionalized advocacy organizations, and private firms that sympathize and collaborate with progressive antipoverty groups. For example, during the post-civil rights era, liberal city officials have used it to link the interests of economically marginalized constituents to the production of publicly financed development projects, such as stadiums, retail centers, and office buildings (Nickel 1995, 367-70). Thus, even while many antipoverty activists have avoided and even policed against it, *class inclusion* has remained an active possibility in their available repertoire of constructions.

Unlike *class struggle*, *class inclusion* articulates a relationship between the poor and the existing regime poverty management that is reform-minded and cooperative.

Proponents of this construction usually suggest that the basic logic of poverty

deconcentration or other neoliberal initiatives is fine, as the goal of these initiatives is to

expand the poor's access the benefits of development and economic growth. The

problem, they argue, is that, in practice, many of these policies operate in discriminatory

ways and/or focus too much on disciplining the poor versus connecting them to the

opportunities they need to become economically competitive and more fully incorporated

members of dominant society. In other words, poor constituents are said to suffer from

the absence of antipoverty initiatives that more effectively address the barriers to

incorporation and economic competitiveness that they face.

While advocates in different movements are capable of deploying *class*

inclusion's cooperative logic in intersectional ways, antipoverty advocates—just as they

do with *class struggle*—tend to give it a more unitary focus. C*lass inclusion* becomes a

type of *common inclusion*. This *common/class inclusion* construction suggests that the

poor have are common and undifferentiated interest in attaining the same societal access

and socio-economic opportunities granted to the middle-class and the wealthy.

Figure 3.2
Common/Class Inclusion *as Constituent*
Construction

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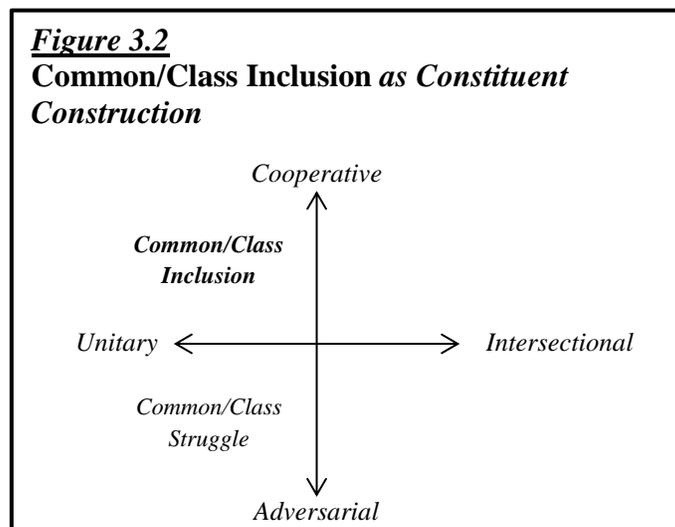
Community Struggle

Appeals to *community struggle*—and to "community" in general—date far back in US political history.[14] Its contemporary significance emerged out of the twentieth century black freedom movement, especially the efforts of Black Power, civil rights, and neighborhood organizers (Ture and Hamilton [1967] 1992; Kim 2000; Naples 1998). Several of these organizers drew on *community struggle* to clarify struggles for greater black control over institutions of all types (especially public education, business, and housing) (Ture and Hamilton [1967] 1992; Kim 2000). During the 1960s, some advocates tied the construction directly to antipoverty efforts through Community Action Programs (Quadagno 1994; Naples 1998) and through the welfare rights movement (Nadasen 2005). At the same time, an emergent class of black political leaders and leaders from other racialized groups also appealed to *community struggle*. Indeed, many members of this class partly built their political careers by appealing to it (Reed 1999a; Johnson 2007; Beltrán 2010). Appeals to *community struggle* have also appeared in Minneapolis, where racial justice advocates have sometimes used them to contest, for example, disparities in mortgage lending (Sidney 2003). Additionally, several socialists in the city have used this construction to cast the "self-determination" of communities of color as a necessary step in achieving economic justice.[15]

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[14] See, for example, Tocqueville's ([1835] 1969, 62-70) discussion of the "spirit" of the New England township.

[15] For example, many advocates who do take this position refer to the writings and statements of Harry Haywood (1898-1985)—a communist and black nationalist—on the African American "national question."

As a constituent construction, *community struggle*, similar to *class struggle*, portrays the poor as an oppressed constituency embedded in an adversarial relationship with dominant institutions. The goal is, once again, to undo the neoliberal logic underlying these institutions and transform them in ways that result in less poverty and a more equal distribution of resources and life chances. This stance stems from much the same source as it does under *class struggle*: if the interest of the poor is in achieving downward redistribution and the dismantling of ruling class privilege, then neoliberal institutions that assume and protect this privilege are, at their core, inadequate. They must be rearranged to make equality, rather than the expansion of market competition, their central goal.

But rather than focus on class antagonism, *community struggle* locates poor constituents' interests in efforts dismantle the dominant institutions oppressing specific communities. Proponents of the construction often—and unsurprisingly—identify these communities racially and geographically. So, for example, they might focus on labeling and dismantling inequalities related to job discrimination, residential segregation, and mass incarceration that affect poor people of color living in disproportionately black neighborhoods.

Many post-civil rights advocates have used and popularized *community struggle* in ways that link its adversarial logic to unitary understandings of solidarity. Black Power advocates, in many instances, exemplified this unitary turn. Poor blacks, they often implied, had a *common* interest with the rest of "the black community" in seizing control over resources and authority in society (Ture and Hamilton [1967] 1992). They accorded

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far less attention to the class-based and gendered inequalities that differentiated social positions and stratified control *within* black-led organizations, institutions, and neighborhoods (Johnson 2007). Furthermore, because they assumed a common rather than diversified relationship between marginalized blacks and privileged whites, they eventually allowed themselves to link black interests to neoliberal notions of "self-help" that—although appealing to more privileged blacks—have been incredibly harmful for the poor (Reed 1999a).

Figure 3.3
Shared/Community Struggle *as Constituent Construction*

Cooperative

Common/Class Inclusion

Unitary ⟵ ⟶ *Intersectional*

Common/Class Struggle   **Shared/Community Struggle**

Adversarial
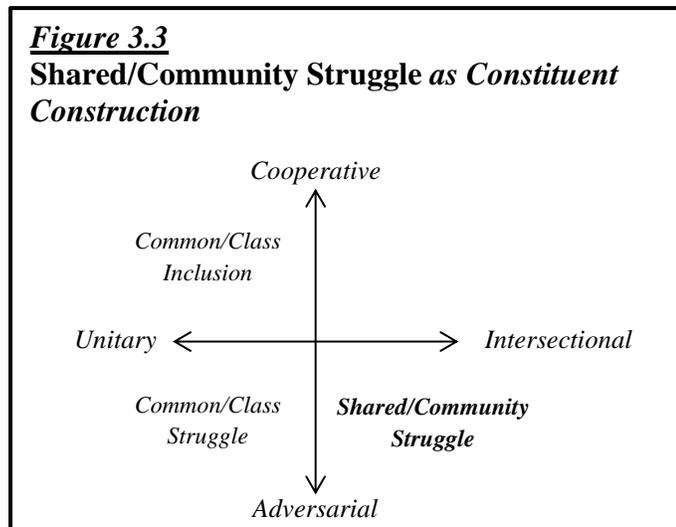
Antipoverty advocates, while not immune to such tendencies, have also used *community struggle* in ways that highlight differentiation and intersecting inequalities among the poor as a class. Indeed, as I show in later chapters, welfare rights advocates in my own study have used *community struggle* in this way—that is, as a type of *shared struggle*. Proponents of this *shared/community struggle* construction affirm, on the one hand, that all poor people are, indeed, marginalized as a class through neoliberal institutions. Their interests are, thus, linked. But, they add, these interests are also often

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refracted through inequalities that occur *among* and *between* poor constituents hailing

from different historically disadvantaged communities (Naples 1998; Nadasen 2005). For

example, poor white males potentially benefit from racial and gender discrimination in

the housing and labor markets in ways that poor women from segregated communities of

color do not. Proponents of *shared/community struggle* locate the interests of poor

constituents in efforts to directly overturn these and other types of community-based

inequalities that intersect with and differentiate the poor's class position, emphasizing

that they *all* attach to the neoliberal status quo (cf. Cohen 1997; Strolovtich 2007).

Community Inclusion

Antipoverty advocates in the post-civil rights era have adopted a second,

community-oriented constituent construction from the black freedom movement, namely,

community inclusion. Throughout the twentieth century, civil rights organizers in

particular have used *community inclusion* to articulate demands for greater civic and

political incorporation of African Americans (Costain 2005). Other organizers linked it to

calls for "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in 1960s Community Action

Programs (Quadagno 1994; Naples 1998). In Minneapolis, local civil rights activists were

especially successful at utilizing these programs (Goetz and Sidney 1997; Sidney 2003,

80). Even as federal funding for community action dwindled, appeals to *community

inclusion* lived on, for example, in local struggles to secure opportunities for communities

of color to participate in the management of banks, city agencies, and other dominant

institutions (Goetz 2003; Sidney 2003).

Unlike proponents of *community struggle*, advocates drawing on *community inclusion* do not attribute persistent inequalities and poverty to the inherent workings of dominant neoliberal institutions. In other words, for these advocates, the fact that dominant institutions rely on and enforce market competition as a mechanism for distributing resources and life chances in society is not the problem per se. Rather, they blame poverty on persistent and unaddressed barriers to economic competitiveness and societal incorporation facing the poor. Consequently, like *class inclusion*, *community inclusion* casts the relationship between the poor and dominant institutions as a cooperative one, in which the latter can be reformed to redress barriers to incorporation and grant the poor greater access to the benefits and opportunities of economic growth and market competition.

Figure 3.4
Shared/Community Inclusion *as Constituent Construction*
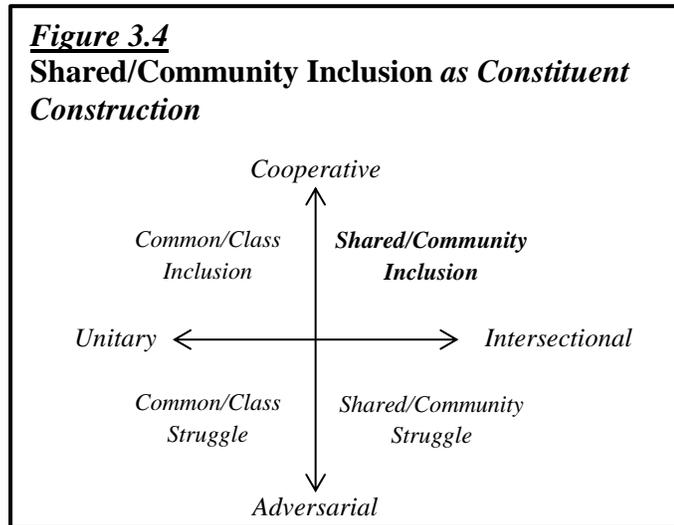
Similar to proponents of *community struggle*, advocates drawing on *community inclusion* have a well-documented tendency of crafting this construction through unitary understandings of solidarity (Goetz and Sidney 1994). However—in another parallel

between usages of the two constructions—antipoverty advocates in particular, including several in my own study, have exhibited an equally important tendency to deploy *community inclusion* in the intersectional register of *shared inclusion* (Naples 1998). Rather than locate the poor's interests in efforts to give them the same opportunities and access to dominant society as the middle-class and the wealthy—as in *class/common inclusion*—proponents of *shared/community inclusion* focus on addressing intersecting barriers to incorporation that differentiate and disproportionately affect poor constituents in particular and often racialized communities.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

The next chapter extends the analysis begun in this one, using it to introduce and situate the three antipoverty advocacy organizations on which the rest of this dissertation focuses. I will explore the movement background, institutional support, and leadership of all three organizations and offer initial descriptions of the constituent constructions that they deploy through their efforts on behalf of the poor.

Chapter 4: People's Bailouts, Welfare Rights, and Public Education

To understand how, in practice, advocates have represented the poor and wielded the constructions introduced at the end of chapter 3, I conducted extensive fieldwork among three antipoverty organizations (see Appendix): the Minnesota Welfare Rights Committee (hereafter, the Welfare Rights Committee), a socialist-led welfare rights organization; the Minnesota Coalition for a People's Bailout (hereafter, the Bailout Coalition), a socialist-led economic justice coalition that formed to mitigate the Great Recession's political and economic effects on poor and working class people; and the North High Community Coalition (hereafter, the North Coalition), an African American-led coalition that formed to reinvigorate support for a public high school in the city's poorest and most disproportionately black neighborhood.

This chapter outlines the representational efforts of these three organizations. Building on the discussion and distinctions introduced in chapter 3, I review each organization's movement background, institutional support, and leadership, and I specify the constituent constructions on which they predominantly relied.

Bailout Coalition

Formed in response to the Great Recession, the Bailout Coalition was a citywide working class and poor people's coalition. Its list of member organizations included, for example, welfare rights, antiwar, student, labor, tenants' rights, and immigrant rights groups. During my time with the Bailout Coalition, organizers focused primarily on opposing foreclosure-related evictions and altering state-level fiscal, social and labor policies that marginalized poor and working class Minnesotans. As one of the lead

organizers told me, the coalition's goal was, at its core, to inject "another side into the debates" so that the conversation is not a narrow one about "how much to cut [assistance to the economically marginalized]." I began attending Bailout Coalition events and, eventually, organizing meetings in the summer of 2010.

To pursue their goals as representatives, the Bailout Coalition operated on two fronts. First, they occupied the homes of poor and working class people undergoing foreclosures and mobilized several public actions on their behalf. The latter included protests and call-in campaigns directed at banks, courts, the mayor's office, and the sheriff's office. Additionally, they held several rallies and press conferences in front of occupied homes. Often working with another poor people's organization—the Minnesota Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign—the Bailout Coalition directed most of their efforts on this front around the homes of two African American women, both located in working class neighborhoods of south Minneapolis. After multiple years of public actions, bank negotiations, two illegal evictions (during the Minnesota winter!), and physical and mental exhaustion, one of the women, Tecora Parks, and her daughter, Leslie, eventually secured a more affordable mortgage and were able to stay in their home (Diaz 2010). Rosemary Williams, the other homeowner, was eventually evicted. Police arrested her and several activists after the Bailout Coalition had re-occupied her home in response to a prior eviction attempt.[1]

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[1] Videotape of the arrests can be seen online (glassbedian 2009). Police officers pepper-sprayed multiple protesters and kicked one woman, a locally well-known welfare rights activist, while she was lying on the ground.

The second front of the Bailout Coalition's representational efforts included grassroots lobbying in support of two pieces of "people's bailout" legislation, both at the state-level. One bill called for a two-year moratorium on home foreclosures and evictions from foreclosed properties in Minnesota. The other raised taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations. To push these bills, Bailout Coalition organizers worked closely with a handful of progressive legislators from the Twin Cities, secured bill sponsors and cosponsors, spoke at hearings and press conferences, and organized several protests at the state capitol. In 2009 and 2010, the foreclosure moratorium legislation received formal committee hearings in Minnesota's Democrat-controlled legislature. Beyond these hearings, however, the Bailout Coalition saw very little progress on their "people's bailout" legislation.

The 2010 election was particularly disastrous for the Bailout Coalition's legislative efforts. On the upside, for the coalition, this election delivered the governor's seat to Mark Dayton, a tax-and-spend liberal. The downside was that it also granted majority control of the state legislature to Republicans, who were experiencing an electoral resurgence across the country. This election marked the first time since the 1970s that Minnesota's Republican Party had won majorities in both the state house and state senate.

When the Bailout Coalition's legislative allies reintroduced their "people's bailout" bills in early 2012, the new Republican majority predictably refused to place these bills on committee agendas. In response, bill sponsors, at the request of the Bailout Coalition, organized an informal "people's hearing" at the state capitol. Several

Democratic legislators attended the hearing while the Bailout Coalition—supported by

allies in Occupy Minneapolis, Occupy Homes Minnesota, Neighborhoods Organizing for

Change, and other organizations—packed the seats.

Movement Background

The Bailout Coalition's movement background was, despite its wide array of

member organizations, predominantly socialist. Several key organizers were also

members of Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), the cadre organization

mentioned in chapter 3.[2] As the FRSO "Unity Statement" declares, "The challenge is

ours to apply the lessons that we have learned in the last decade to the body of Marxist

knowledge; to build a better socialist movement that can carry us through the next

century" (Freedom Road Socialist Organization [frso.org] 2001). While FRSO's

literature acknowledges the importance of "oppressed nationality movements"—

including the black freedom movement—it states in no uncertain terms that "a single,

unified, multinational communist party is needed to build the strategic alliance" between

the working class and "oppressed nationality movements" (Freedom Road Socialist

Organization [frso.org] 2004).

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[2] Currently, two organizations in the US call themselves Freedom Road Socialist
Organization. This situation is the product of a heated political split in the late 1990s.
One organization, based primarily in the mid-western United States, adheres to the
"science of [...] Marxism-Leninism" and its emphasis on building a "single, unified,
multinational communist party" (Freedom Road Socialist Organization [frso.org] 2004).
The other organization deviates from this "science," supports multiple party/movement-
building strategies, and explicitly defends the principles of intersectionality (Freedom
Road Socialist Organization [freedomroad.org] 2007). A number of advocates with
whom I worked were members of the first organization, not the second.

Many Bailout Coalition organizers also edited and/or contributed articles and photographs to *Fight Back! News* (hereafter, *Fight Back*), a movement newspaper associated with FRSO. Taking language directly out of a FRSO's membership brochure, the editors of *Fight Back* declare in the "About Us" section of their website that:

> We are not "neutral" or "even-handed" in our coverage. We are opposed to exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. We hold that the rich class of people who run the economy and government of this country are unfit to rule. We support all movements that challenge their power and privilege.[3]

Fight Back served as *the* primary journalistic outlet for the Bailout Coalition's efforts around foreclosures and other poverty-related issues.

Certainly not all Bailout Coalition supporters maintained strong ties to the US socialist movement. Some supporters of their anti-foreclosure efforts, for example, were simply showing solidarity with neighbors facing eviction. A number of organizers also held ties to other movements in which socialists only constituted one wing, such as the black freedom, antiwar, feminist, and immigrant rights movements. That said, the most common thread linking the Bailout Coalition's founders, leaders and, for the most part, supporters was their relationship to the US socialist movement.

Institutional Support

For institutional support, the Bailout Coalition relied primarily and unsurprisingly on local and indigenous institutions tied to the socialist movement. This reliance was intentional. Organizers were concerned that liberal elites and public officials who manage dominant institutions in Minnesota would attempt to moderate their efforts on behalf of

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[3] http://www.fightbacknews.org/where-we-stand.

the poor and working class. Barb—a FRSO member, Bailout Coalition organizer, and

former welfare recipient—captured this concern when she criticized another local

coalition for collaborating too closely with liberal foundations and high-ranking

Democratic politicians. She argued that the members of this coalition were simply "not

into fighting politicians. They're just about mobilizing people to vote for Democrats."

Other organizers agreed.

Most of the indigenous institutions that anchored the Bailout Coalition operated

primarily in or near to the working class neighborhoods of south Minneapolis. These

neighborhoods were, not coincidentally, where many of the organization's leaders and

participants also lived and worked.

When I first encountered the coalition, they were holding their organizing

meetings in the office of an activist and progressive union local representing clerical

workers at the University of Minnesota. In addition to providing meeting space, the local

participated in the Bailout Coalition as a member organization and formally endorsed (to

my knowledge) every coalition event. Several of its key members, including the

president, attended and even planned and spoke at protests, press conferences and rallies.

At one point during my time with the coalition, the union even provided funding for a

Bailout Coalition-led trip to a Washington DC rally for jobs and economic justice.[4]

Later on, the Bailout Coalition moved their meetings to the basement of Walker

Community United Methodist Church. The church—known simply as "Walker" among

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[4] This trip was interrupted when, a week before the rally, FBI agents subpoenaed and
raided the homes of several Bailout Coalition members (Wallsten 2011). Also see chapter
5.

many local activists—doubled as a progressive community center in south Minneapolis. The Bailout Coalition and many other organizations met, rented offices, and stored materials in the church basement, including signs, banners, fliers, and so on.[5] Beyond the church, the coalition also held events—such as press conferences, rallies, and fundraisers—at member's homes and, as mentioned above, two foreclosed homes in south Minneapolis that they had occupied.

The Bailout Coalition also publicized their activities to supporters through progressive community news sources—such as KFAI, a local community radio station; *Southside Pride*, a community newspaper based in south Minneapolis; and *The UpTake*, a St. Paul-based online news organization geared toward citizen journalism—as well as *Fight Back*.

Like all advocacy organizations, the Bailout Coalition could not fully escape reliance on dominant institutions. They were, for example, the beneficiaries of grant money from the Headwaters Foundation for Justice (hereafter, Headwaters), a Minneapolis-based philanthropic foundation that distributes grants to "the people [i.e. nonprofit organizations] who fight injustice in your community."[6] Among liberal

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[5] Unfortunately, Walker suffered a massive fire in May 2012, resulting in a total loss of the building. Several local advocacy organizations that rented offices in the church basement lost most of their materials and archives, as well as their organizing spaces. In response, one of the organizers—a well-known member of an anti-police brutality organization in the Bailout Coalition—purchased a vacant community center in south Minneapolis. He then moved into the center and allowed displaced organizations—one of which was his—to rent its office and meeting space at rates they could afford. That he would go to such great lengths only further highlights the importance he and others in the Bailout Coalition placed on building and using indigenous institutions.

[6] http://www.headwatersfoundation.org/about.

foundations, Headwaters is relatively unique in its willingness to fund—in $5,000 and

$10,000 grants—all-volunteer and small-budget organizations that use civil disobedience

and other disruptive tactics. This fact explains why Bailout Coalition organizers would

rely on Headwaters while still criticizing "poverty pimps" who moderate their efforts to

attract foundation funding. Even Headwaters, however, has hosted staff and board

members who support neoliberal initiatives that many progressive advocates oppose.[7]

In addition to foundation support, the Bailout Coalition, like any political actor in

the Twin Cities, relied on the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*—the local newspaper of

record—to reach a broader audience. They also relied on local governmental bodies to

consolidate their efforts into legislative influence and victories. As with the Headwaters

Foundation, these institutions were, at times, willing to work with a broad array of

advocacy organizations. The Bailout Coalition received favorable coverage in the *Star

Tribune* (see chapter 4) and formed stable alliances with several local and state officials.

On the whole, however, local media and government had supported the racialized shift

toward neoliberalism (see chapter 2). And, as in any major city, they typically favored

advocates who showed more favor to dominant institutions.

Leadership

The Bailout Coalition's socialist leaders and organizers largely, though not

wholly, emerged out of Minneapolis' white working class. Of the seven organizers I

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[7] For example, Chris Stewart, the Forum Director for the Headwaters-directed African
American Leadership Forum (AALF), was a supporter charter school expansion during
his time on the Minneapolis Public Schools Board of Education. At times, he was also a
vicious opponent of the North Coalition. Also see chapter 5.

regularly spoke to and observed, five were white. One person was unemployed. The other

nine "got a paycheck"—more than once they reminded me that organizing was their real

"work"—in low(er) wage service sector jobs, such as administrative assistant, hospital

worker, and cook. Most of them had filed claims for unemployment insurance or some

type of social welfare assistance at some point in their lives.

Additionally, six of the seven organizers and leaders with whom I interacted were

women, a reflection of gendered political-economic divisions. Some connected to the

organization through the union local mentioned earlier. As a reminder, this local

represented clerical workers, a group that, in Minneapolis and the US, tends to include

large concentrations of women. Several other members and organizers—some of whom

also worked in predominantly female working class positions—came to the Bailout

Coalition through its antiwar and welfare rights member organizations. Both

organizations have featured a disproportionate number of women leaders.

Constituent Constructions

Building on the perspectives and institutions of the US socialist movement, the

Bailout Coalition organized their representational efforts around a construction of

common/class struggle. Steff, one of the organizers, articulated this construction during a

rally at the state capitol on April 16, 2012, the day before the tax filing deadline.

Speaking on behalf of the Bailout Coalition, which also organized the event, she stated to

the crowd that:

> [W]e are here to send a message that it is time to make the rich pay for the
> economic crisis that is still harming and devastating our communities. You know
> why they should pay for the crisis? Because they are responsible! The banks and
> their wealthy friends created it with financial Ponzi schemes, swindling working

people and sending the economy into a tailspin—all to their own benefit in terms of short term profit. When their scheme collapsed, they were [inaudible] to be bailed out with our tax dollars. They say they are too *big* to fail. Well we the people are too *important* to fail! […] We demand that Minnesota's wealthy pay more. We reject the notion that every time the [Minnesota] legislature meets, the debate is about cutting programs that serve the people of this state. We want economic justice and we want it now.

This legislative session, Republican politicians have ignored a tax bill that would raise taxes on corporations on the wealthy and have introduced a host of measures that attack people on public assistance, immigrants, and trade unions and public workers. […] They refused to hear a bill placing a moratorium on home foreclosures. […] Politicians are forcing schools to borrow money and therefore putting more money into the pockets of the banksters […] just to ensure that their rich friends don't have to pay more taxes.[8] […] You don't need accounting tricks and we don't need shifts to hide the budget crisis. We need a lot more taxes on the wealthy and their corporations to bring in revenue and support human needs and education.

Drawing on the logic of *common/class struggle*, Steff's statement located the poor and

working class in a zero-sum battle with elites over resources, authority, and life chances.

Whereas, according to this statement, banks were "swindling working people" and

getting "bailed out with our [the "people's"] tax dollars," the poor and working class

needed to "demand that Minnesota's wealthy pay more" in order to "support human

needs and education." Within this battle, the interests of the poor and working class—

including "people on public assistance, immigrants, and trade unions and public

workers"—are said to unite around taxing the rich. These common interests also,

according to Steff, had an adversarial relationship to local and state-level dominant

institutions. As she said, politicians in charge of these institutions "have introduced a host

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[8] During the 2011 legislative session, the state's Republican-controlled legislature and Democratic governor agreed to partly cover a $5 billion budget shortfall by delaying $700 million in payments to schools (Roper et al 2011). The provision was key in ending an impasse in budget negotiations that had resulted in a 20-day government shutdown. It also resulted in schools having to increase their borrowing.

of measures that attack" all of the Bailout Coalition's sub-constituencies and are "forcing

schools to borrow money […] just to ensure that their rich friends don't have to pay more

taxes."

Welfare Rights Committee

The Welfare Rights Committee is, in the words of a profile posted on the

Headwaters Foundation website:

> An all-volunteer group made up of and led by low income women and welfare
> recipients, many with disabilities. They address the systems of economic, racial
> and women's oppression that show themselves in the laws and policies that
> attack the economically and socially disadvantaged, often via the welfare
> system.[9]

The committee formed in 1991, right before public officials galvanized concerns about

"welfare dependency" and presidential candidate Bill Clinton promised to "end welfare

as we know it." This time was also not long before Minnesota's elected officials would

begin neoliberalizing poverty management by, for example, demolishing public housing

and reforming the state's welfare program for families with dependent children.

Throughout its history, the Welfare Right Committee has maintained a mostly

consistent focus, consonant with that of many progressive welfare rights organizations.

The committee's organizers and members aim, first, to stop budget cuts and disciplinary

reforms to Minnesota's social welfare programs, especially the Minnesota Family

Investment Program (MFIP, the state's TANF program). Second, they call on state

legislators to expand the poor's access to and control over social welfare assistance.

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[9] http://www.headwatersfoundation.org/node/797.

The Welfare Rights Committee's efforts on behalf of welfare recipients and the poor have centered primarily on the Minnesota State Legislature. In particular, they have focused on influencing the House and Senate Health and Human Services (HHS) committees, where legislators initially debate most legislation regarding Minnesota's social welfare programs.

During the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions—when I spent most of my time with the committee—the state Republican Party controlled the entire state legislature and, thus, the HHS committees. Chairs of these committees allowed a number of neoliberal welfare reforms to pass through. Examples included legislation that aimed to lower the state's lifetime TANF limit to three years; ban the use of state-issued electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards outside of Minnesota[10]; prevent people with recent drug felony charges from receiving public assistance; institute mandatory criminal background checks for recipients of public assistance; and require 60 days of residency to collect many welfare benefits. Critical observers dubbed much of this proposed legislation "Welfare Reform 2.0," marking the fact that it simply extended the neoliberal welfare reform agenda of the 1990s (Boyd 2012).

Welfare Rights Committee members were forced to spend most of their time opposing this conservative welfare legislation (versus fighting to introduce their own). They carried out their opposition by testifying at HHS committee hearings, staging protests and other press events at the state capitol, and organizing call-in campaigns to the state's Democratic governor, who they pressed to veto any legislation containing

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[10] EBT cards are the ATM cards that welfare recipients use to collect their cash benefits.

welfare budget cuts or disciplinary reforms. With the help of other progressive advocates and several supportive legislators, they prevented the most extreme "Welfare Reform 2.0" provisions from becoming law.

When they were not opposing conservative and neoliberal legislation, the Welfare Rights Committee focused primarily on advocating two types of reform legislation. One type, their "Raise the Grants" bills, aimed to radically increase cash payments to MFIP recipients. The other type of legislation sought to repeal welfare reform-era restrictions, such as the state's "family cap" policy.[11]

Committee organizers attempted to introduce both types of legislation at beginning of the Republican-controlled 2011 legislative session. But they quickly discovered that only one or two, if any, Democrats would willingly sponsor their bills. Even legislators who had previously introduced similar legislation were skittish. For example, according to committee members, Linda Berglin—a former HHS committee chair and longtime Democracy ally of progressive antipoverty advocates—feared that Republicans "would use them [their proposed legislation] as an opportunity to attack [state Democrats]." Another Democratic state senator—whose district included the state's highest concentration of welfare recipients—politely explained to Karen, a Welfare Rights Committee organizer, that the bills were not worth her time:

> Senator: You know, I looked into that [raising the cash gants] several years ago.
> Karen: Yeah, we read the bill you introduced. It was like two years ago.

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[11] "Family caps" deny payment increases to recipients of public assistance who have children while on public assistance.

Senator:	And raising payments for everyone by even $10 would add millions to the budget. […] And, you know, what's 10 extra dollars going to do for anyone really?
Karen:	But we're just trying to point out that the grant hasn't been raised since 1986. […]
Senator:	That doesn't matter when you're billions of dollars in the hole [referring to the state's budget shortfall]. I think the fact that the grant hasn't been raised should definitely be a part of the discussion. But we'd never see any action on it. Not even a hearing. […] At this point, I'm not sure how I feel about carrying bills for having a discussion versus going after bills that I really feel passionate about that I know can possibly get passed.[12]

In 2013—after Democrats took control of the entire state government—the

Welfare Rights Committee and other progressive advocates secured a repeal of the state's

family cap and a modest payment increase, $110 dollars a month, for MFIP recipients

living in non-subsidized housing (Konechne 2013). This increase was the first since

1986, when the cash grant for a family of two was set at $437 dollars a month—an almost

paltry sum in 2013.

Yet, even under Democratic rule, the Welfare Rights Committee had difficulties

finding authors to introduce their proposed legislation. According one organizer, an ally

in the state house—who herself was a former welfare recipient—declined on the grounds

that she "doesn't want to be a token welfare person" in the legislature. Another state

senator, who had previously worked with the Bailout Coalition, refused to sponsor the

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[12] The state senator went on to state that one of the bills she "really" felt "passionate about" would place new identification restrictions on the use of EBT cash cards. Such restrictions are ostensibly meant to protect welfare recipients from "big guys" (the senator's words) looking to rob them. However, in practice, they further hamper recipients' abilities to use their cards. Welfare Rights Committee members explained to the senator that many recipients who cannot easily leave their homes—such as single mothers with small children or people with disabilities—allow older children or friends to make EBT purchases on their behalf.

legislation on the grounds that doing so would be unbecoming of a party leadership role he recently attained. He thought that working too closely with the committee in his new role would anger some of the Democratic caucus. He told committee members, by their account, that "some people [that is, Democratic legislators] feel like they can't work with you" and that the committee took too "forceful" an approach to politics.

While I was volunteering for the Welfare Rights Committee, they also engaged in several more peripheral battles on behalf of the poor. Three of these battles stood out. First, in 2012, they mobilized against Mary Franson, a Republican state legislator who publicly analogized food stamp recipients to "animals" in a park who you "should not feed, as [they] may grow dependent" (Rupar 2012). The committee organized several protests outside her committee meetings and demanded her resignation. Second, Welfare Rights Committee organizers led the progressive opposition to state and local legislation that provided public funding for a new Vikings stadium in downtown Minneapolis (see chapter 5).

Finally, in addition to the foregoing efforts, the Welfare Rights Committee was also the Bailout Coalition's most important member organization. With the help of a handful of other organizations, the committee had spearheaded the coalition's founding. Throughout the financial crisis, at least four Welfare Rights Committee organizers doubled as organizers in the Bailout Coalition. Two or three of them were present at every Bailout Coalition organizing meeting. The committee appeared to be the only group with this many organizers in the coalition, granting them a disproportionate influence. Moreover, Welfare Rights Committee members were always key participants

in the Bailout Coalition's public events. Indeed, many of the coalition's public events were joint ventures with the committee. As one welfare rights member stated, "We basically are the Bailout." While she was exaggerating to an extent, the comment is indicative of the close ties between the two organizations.

Movement Background

Like the Bailout Coalition, the Welfare Rights Committee had firm roots in the US socialist movement. Multiple founders and leaders were also members of FRSO. These same members also worked with *Fight Back*, writing articles, providing photos and copyediting for the paper. *Fight Back* served as a mouthpiece for the Welfare Rights Committee, publishing extensive and favorable coverage of its public actions.

In contrast to the Bailout Coalition, the Welfare Rights Committee also had several active participants with ties to the black freedom and, sometimes, black feminist movements.[13] For example, two African American women who joined the committee during my fieldwork had also recently created an informal black women's organization called African American Women in Politics. Their primary activity was hosting "a progressive [online] talk radio show that provides political content that is inclusive of the African American female perspective."[14] Episodes of their radio show addressed the racial, class, and gendered dynamics of a wide range of topics, such as "Conservatism in

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[13] Though, at times, I was still surprised at organizers' lack of familiarity with social and economic justice efforts being led by black advocates in Minneapolis. One major example was the effort to protect and revive support for North Community High School, in north Minneapolis, which I also studied (see below).

[14] http://www.blogtalkradio.com/african-american-women-in-politics.

the DFL Party[15]," "It's Safe to Murder Blacks," and "Women, Work, and the Will to

Lead." Another African American woman—who, by the time I arrived, had organized in

the Welfare Rights Committee for almost ten years—was also an organizer in the

Minneapolis branch of Occupy the Hood. Additionally, the committee's eldest member,

also an African American woman, had worked with the original Black Panther Party.

Finally, multiple African American members either lived in or maintained

connections to the disproportionately black neighborhoods of north Minneapolis—where

many contemporary struggles for black freedom and racial justice were rooted.[16] For

example, during a 2011 meeting, multiple members brought up a Republican-sponsored

piece of legislation that sought to lower the age for being tried as an adult. Grace, one of

the group's black organizers who would work with Occupy the Hood, explained that

> It's targeted at people of color and the north side. […] Some of the north side
> politicians are trying to get the word out. So, just try and support their efforts.
> […] Sometimes, young boys have anger issues. […] I think about my own boys
> and I wouldn't want one of them going into jail with grown men who have done
> terrible, scary things when they're still kids.

The committee members with ties to the socialist and black freedom movements

did not always overlap. Of these two groups, the socialists tended to hold more important

roles in the organization. For example, they regularly chaired meetings and crafted the

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[15] The Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party is Minnesota's branch of the national
Democratic Party organization. See chapter 3.

[16] I should note that their exposure to the black freedom movement did not always lead to
support. Several women in the Welfare Rights Committee were critical, for example, of
north side pastors who maintained a negative view of welfare rights advocacy. According
to committee members, these pastors saw welfare, which primarily served women, as a
threat and barrier to the restoration of "strong" black families with male breadwinners.
Also see fn.3 in chapter 3.

committee's statements and testimonies. They also had the longest histories in the group. Indeed, all of the founding members still with the Welfare Rights Committee had socialist backgrounds.

That said, the separate groups were, by no means, competing factions. Each influenced the committee's representational efforts. FRSO members acknowledged and opposed the racial injustice and inequality surrounding welfare and poverty. They frequently criticized Republicans HHS committee members for aiming to justify neoliberal reforms with "racist attacks." Likewise, Welfare Rights Committee members with ties to black freedom struggles embraced the socialists' message of expanding welfare assistance and equality through radical redistribution. "Tax the rich" was in no way a divisive slogan in the group.

Finally, I should also note that, even though most Welfare Rights Committee members did not appear to have strong ties to the local women's movement, almost all of them agreed with the argument that "welfare is a women's issue" (Tillmon [1972] 2009). That is to say, they treated welfare receipt as both a gendered survival strategy *and* a way that dominant institutions regulated poor women's work and sexuality (cf. Abramowitz 1988).

Institutional Support

The Welfare Rights Committee's institutional support was mostly movement-based and indigenous and largely mirrored that of the Bailout Coalition. This similarity was unsurprising, given the prominence of socialist ties in both organizations and the close relationship between them. The committee met at Walker Church and stored many

of the Bailout Coalition's materials in the church office they rented. They also publicized through similar movement- and community-based media, such as *Fight Back* and *The Uptake*.

Also like the Bailout Coalition, the Welfare Rights Committee still necessarily relied marginally on dominant institutions. For example, committee organizers funded their all-volunteer operation for several consecutive years with a modest grant from the Headwaters Foundation's "Social Change Fund." They used this money to buys signs and other supplies, provide lunch and day care at organizing meetings, and cover the cost of transportation to meetings and events. Like any advocacy organization, they also depended on elected officials to convert their demands into legislative change and on the *Star Tribune* to grant them a broader reading audience.

Leadership

The Welfare Rights Committee's leaders and organizers were more diverse on both class and racial terms than those of the Bailout Coalition. Additionally, they were nearly all women.[17] This diversity stemmed primarily from two factors. First, the committee was strict about the fact that organizers and leaders must be current or past recipients of social welfare assistance, such as MFIP, unemployment insurance, SNAP/food stamps, SSI, and disability insurance.[18] Second, among the active members

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[17] Around 90 percent of welfare—that is, TANF and food stamp—recipients in the US are women. A disproportionate number of these women are women of color.

[18] For example, I, as somebody from a middle class background and having no direct experience with social welfare programs for the poor, would have never been authorized to chair meetings or speak on behalf of the committee at protests and press conferences. I was certainly welcomed and appreciated as a volunteer in the group and even received a

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who were not current welfare recipients, almost everyone worked in clerical positions or other working class and gender-segregated occupations.

The committee's three most experienced and influential leaders, all former welfare recipients, had been with the group since its founding. Each of them was also a member of the white working class group that led the Bailout Coalition. They had a hand in almost everything the group did—from chairing meetings and coordinating protests to speaking at rallies and meeting with legislators. To put it simply, without their leadership activities and accumulated organizing experiences, the Welfare Rights Committee could not have persisted.

Among the committee's other 10 to 15 active participants, most were current welfare recipients and around half were women of color, including African American and, to a lesser extent, Latina and American Indian women.[19] This group shared a significant amount of power in the organization with the three leaders mentioned above. Several of them regularly chaired or co-chaired the committee's organizing meetings and

"going away" cake and card at my last organizing meeting (just as any other regular participant in the committee would have). However, a leadership role simply would not have been appropriate. People who had participated in the committee for a much shorter time than me, but who had current or past experience with various social welfare programs, were invited to co-chair meetings and speak at events. This difference did not mean that I was excluded from shaping the group's efforts in other meaningful ways. For example, as I describe in the next chapter, at one point I drafted an op-ed about food stamp "fraud" on behalf of the entire committee.

[19] In the past, the Welfare Rights Committee had also worked closely with members of the Hmong community in Minneapolis. Like other people of color in Minneapolis and Minnesota, Hmong residents have experienced high rates of poverty and, because of this fact, relied more on different forms of social welfare (Vang 2013). Their relationship became very difficult to maintain once the public housing where many poor Hmong people lived was demolished as a result of the *Hollman* decisions (see chapter 2).

played prominent roles during public events. Grace, an African American woman living in south Minneapolis, was especially active. By the time I started coming around, she had been participating in the Welfare Rights Committee for about ten years. Of the 24 organizing meetings I attended, she chaired or co-chaired all but a handful. At the 27 public events I attended, she held a speaking role as, if not more, often than any other individual in the committee.

Constituent Constructions

As they actually made claims on behalf of the welfare poor, the Welfare Rights Committee drew on an intersectional and adversarial construction of *shared/community struggle*. That is not to say that the *common/class struggle* construction found in the Bailout Coalition was not prevalent as well. It was. In fact, virtually all of the statements and testimonies crafted by Welfare Rights Committee organizers made reference to the presence of a battle for resources between the rich and everybody else. The group had even sown and painted a truly humongous banner that demanded, in no uncertain terms, that the legislature must "Tax the Rich!" and "Stop the Cuts to Poor and Working People!" The Bailout Coalition frequently used this banner at events.

That said, Welfare Rights Committee members complicated the Bailout Coalition's appeals to unitary class solidarity, even as their own efforts were just as adversarial. Through their public exchanges with supporters and public officials, they underscored the community-specific and intersecting inequalities that neoliberal poverty management tended to ignore and/or exacerbate.

During the 2012 legislative session, one exchange in particular exemplified the Welfare Rights Committee's shift from *common/class struggle* to *shared/community struggle*. The exchange occurred between Ebony Harris, a committee member, and Mary Franson—a new Republican legislator who, less than a month later, would infamously compare food stamp recipients to wild animals (see above). Ebony was testifying in opposition to a bill that required police officers to search (low-income) arrestees' belongings for multiple active EBT cards.[20] Possessing more than one active card at a time, or possessing a stolen card, is against the law and considered welfare fraud. Implicitly, the law especially targeted poor men of color in north Minneapolis, the most policed group in the most policed and highest poverty area of the state.

Ebony argued that the legislation used stereotypes about a particularly vulnerable and racialized group of poor people—accused offenders—to criminalize the poor as a whole and to distract from more important poverty-related issues, such as the absence of living wage jobs:

> My name is Ebony Harris. I am a single mother of four kids in north Minneapolis. I'm a domestic abuse survivor as well. […] I look over this bill with the EBT multiple cards. First thing, this is the first time I have heard of anybody carrying multiple cards, because you can't. The way […] the county does things, you can only have one active card at a time. So I don't know who is carrying multiple cards or whatever. But I'm starting to think this a stereotype. This bill is very mean spirited to the poor and working class people like myself. Um, I am one of many people that's been laid off for the third time. And I have yet to hear anybody talk about livable wage jobs. […] This bill seems […] just like your criminalizing poor people. […] Why? Why are we criminalizing poor

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[20] Text of the legislation as well as links to video and audio recordings of the testimony below can be found on the Minnesota House of Representative online archive. See http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/bills/billnum.asp?Billnumber=HF1956&ls_year=87&session_year=2011&session_number=0.

people in Minnesota, when Minnesota was always known for being nice. And I'm beginning to think Minnesota Nice is a, let's just say, a myth.

In her response to this comment, Representative Franson reiterated that the bill was simply meant to regulate fraud and protect "taxpayer dollars." Ebony, in turn, pointed out that this argument misleadingly equated the category of "(respectable) tax payer" with the middle class and the stigma of "(potential) criminal" with the poor:

MF: Miss Ebony, […] I think that, um, what this bill is getting at is just the protection of the taxpayer dollars. Um, and right now you're saying that this is not an issue on people carrying multiple cards. So, if it's not an issue, and this bill passes, what changes?

EH: Well, what changes is just more, it's just more criminalizing and humiliation for people like me. You say something about tax dollars […]. Not once has anybody mentioned that working class people and poor people working for less than livable wages, they're taxpayers too. And it seems like that is what's getting lost in the conversation here.

Later in the exchange, Representative Franson made the same plea, this time prefaced by an attempt to situate herself as someone who can "empathize" with poor women. Ebony stuck to the points she had already made:

MF: […] Miss Ebony, I can empathize with the livable wage. I have a part time second job that pays 8.56 an hour. So I can empathize with the low wages here. Um, you know, the issue just…here is that we just are looking at protecting, um, you know you're not supposed to carry two active EBT cards. So, this is not an issue currently. […] Okay, so then passing this bill should not be an issue if it's not an issue already.

EH: No, it shouldn't. But however, for people that are even applying, it's a tedious process. And it's very humiliating. It's very stressful. It's demeaning. Period. And you talk about people that are taxpayers. Again, you're not thinking about people that are poor, that are working that are taxpayers too.

Over the course of her exchange with Representative Franson, Ebony articulated and defended poor people's interests through a construction of *shared/community struggle*. She emphasized, first, that the proposed legislation used a mostly nonexistent

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issue to distract from the disappearance of livable wage work—a shift that had perpetuated poverty in Minneapolis. In doing so, she showed how, despite the fact that the legislation mainly targeted low-income offenders in black communities—an especially disadvantaged and stigmatized subgroup of the poor—poor constituents as a whole had a clear adversarial relationship towards it (cf. Strolovitch 2007, 99-100).

When Franson encouraged "Miss Ebony" to unite with respectable (middle class) taxpayers against offenders targeted by the bill, Ebony refused. Instead, she emphasized that the legislation worsened the already "humiliating" and "demeaning" experiences heaped upon *poor* taxpayers. Even before this moment, Ebony had preemptively refused Franson's attempt to divide her interests—and the poor's interests as a whole—against the "criminal" poor. She did so by introducing herself as a "domestic abuse survivor" and "a single mother of four kids in north Minneapolis." These statements actually *underscored* rather than denied Ebony's gendered connection—as a representative and a poor constituent—to the racialized and criminalized community that the legislation targeted.

North Coalition

The North Coalition was an all-volunteer, community-based, and African American-led coalition that worked to bolster public education opportunities for poor students and families in north Minneapolis. The coalition formed in the summer of 2010 specifically to organize public support for North Community High School.

On October 12, 2010, the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) issued a proposal to "phase out," or close, North Community High School. North High,

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as the school is more commonly called, was and is one of the poorest and most disproportionately black schools in Minneapolis. It is also located, not coincidentally, in Near North, a segregated north Minneapolis neighborhood with similar income and racial demographics.

At the time the coalition formed, North High featured the most rapidly declining enrollment figures and the worst standardized test scores among public high schools in Minneapolis. From 2004 to 2010, North High's enrollment dropped from over 1100 students to under 275 (Minneapolis Public Schools 2010b). And in 2010, its percentage of students who met state "proficiency" standards in math and reading were 9.3 percent and 26.6 percent—compared to 30.5 percent and 54.8 percent for all high schools in the district.[21]

In all of the foregoing ways, North High appeared to embody the "failing" school construction undergirding the turn to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), high-stakes testing, school choice and other neoliberal education reforms. "Failing" schools—often characterized by high proportions of poor students of color and identified by their dwindling enrollment and low standardized-test scores—are accused of wasting resources, educating ineffectively, and, ultimately, lowering student achievement. Many elected officials argued that MPS could best serve poor students and students of color by closing these schools and expanding access to different forms of school choice, especially open enrollment programs and charter schools. However, by stressing school performance per se as the primary influence on poor students' educational outcomes,

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[21] http://rc.education.state.mn.us/proficiency

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these efforts have obfuscated the manifold inequalities that surround them (Lipman 2011).

On October 8, 2010, the superintendent of MPS announced and explained her proposal to close North High in a letter to the school's current families (Johnson 2010a). Her letter underlined North High students' low scholastic achievement. And, citing low test scores and declining enrollment, she framed the school itself as a primary cause of this low achievement:

> I know that this change will be painful. North has a rich history and a strong connection to the community. We value the efforts that families, alumni and individual community members have made to help increase enrollment and support North students. Despite many reform and recruitment efforts at North, enrollment and academic performance continue to decline. As far as I am concerned, we only have one option: we must do better.

In this passage, the superintendent constructed North High's prospective closure as a painful but necessary outcome—equivalent to paring back the weak branches of a dying tree.

The superintendent's apparent intention was to fix North High's apparent failure by replacing it with a new charter high school, Minneapolis College Prep (MCP), in north Minneapolis (Mitchell 2010).[22] Her intention comported with both NCLB recommendations and established trends in MPS—a district that had already closed several public schools and, following its official "strategic plan," authorized an

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[22] Minneapolis College Prep—now up and running—is managed by the Noble Network, a charter school network focused primarily on low-income students of color. The Noble Network is infamous for its strict disciplinary code. This code includes, most notably, the practice of fining students when they commit such minor infractions as "chewing gum" or "not looking a teacher in the eye." During the 2010-2011 school year, Noble schools collected over $185,000 in such fines from students and their families (Veva 2012).

increasing number of charter schools (Minneapolis Public Schools 2010a). Even before

the proposal to close North High was official, MPS had authorized MCP's charter. By

doing so, the district also raised suspicions that they had already hatched a backroom plan

to house MCP in the North High building. District employees heightened these

suspicions when they distributed MCP promotional materials at a community meeting

about the proposal to close North High.

The North Coalition formed and mobilized in direct response to the district's

attempted closure of North High. The group initially christened themselves the Save

North High Coalition. The coalition's members at the time included North High's

Alumni Association, the Friends of North Foundation (a nonprofit foundation that

provides fundraising and volunteer support for the school), the Public Education Justice

Alliance of Minnesota (PEJAM, a citywide group of socialist and student activists,

current and former teachers, parents, and interested city residents), Neighborhoods

Organizing for Change (NOC, a nonprofit community organization focused on issues of

racial and economic justice), a few parents and students, several community members,

and various citywide supporters, including me.

According to the North Coalition, the superintendent's proposal confused more

than clarified the challenges facing North High students. These students, they argued,

suffered not from a failing school but a district that had abandoned them, a trend

perpetuated by her proposal. As one collective statement contended, "The district would

rather throw out its most valuable assets than do the hard lifting to improve educational

outcomes for North's current students and students living on the north side." Another

statement argued that, "District policies have pushed down North's numbers and now the District is proposing to phase out public education in the center of Minneapolis's largest African American community."

North Coalition members reframed low test scores and declining enrollment as proof of MPS's abandonment. Low test scores, they argued, said more about the presence of unaddressed challenges facing North High students than school performance per se.[23] Similarly, they claimed in several press releases and public statements that the school's declining enrollment did not stem from its apparent failure but several MPS policy decisions:

> Minneapolis District officials have pointed toward declining enrollment at North High and district-wide as their reason for closing the school. Less than 270 students are now enrolled in North, but declining enrollment is a direct result of District neglect, under-funding and a privatizing of public schools. District policies have pushed down North's numbers and now the District is proposing to phase out public education in the center of Minneapolis's largest African American community.[24]

The two district policies they decried most often were the closing of North High's feeder schools and the elimination of its guaranteed-attendance, or "home," zone. Several North Coalition organizers also criticized the district's open enrollment and charter school programs—both of which drew motivated students and families away from north Minneapolis public schools while destabilizing access to public education and doing little to serve poor students of color as a whole. Some members even suggested that individual

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[23] Teasing out the effect of school performance on student achievement is notoriously difficult (Abernathy 2007). Even assuming the adequacy of standardized tests as measures of achievement and educational success, most analyses pay insufficient attention to context and shifting social relations.

[24] http://pejamn.blogspot.com/2010/10/press-release-save-north-high-coalition.html

district employees had actively discouraged enrollment at and support for North High.

Additionally, although nobody discussed this point in meetings, the foreclosure crisis

worsened the negative effects of all the foregoing policies on school enrollment by

displacing so many families in the north Minneapolis area (Allen 2011).

To oppose the superintendent's proposal, the North Coalition worked on two

fronts. First, the coalition's more politically connected organizers lobbied the

superintendent and school board members through phone calls and sit-down meetings.

This group primarily included the black male middle-class members of the Friends of

North Foundation as well as the president of the Alumni Association—though others also

met with district leadership. Because of their previous activity with the school and with

politics in north Minneapolis more generally, some of these men already had

relationships with MPS officials and the school board. For example, Brett—a Friends of

North member who I discuss more below—had become a well-known figure in north

Minneapolis politics through his previous work on Keith Ellison's successful

congressional campaigns and his past tenure as president of the local NAACP.

Second, several members organized protests before school board meetings. Four

PEJAM organizers—all of whom had backgrounds in labor, public education, and/or

socialist activism—took the lead in organizing these protests. As I describe in chapter 6,

many North Coalition members disagreed with PEJAM organizers about the nature of

poor students' interests. They nevertheless recognized that these organizers brought

valuable political experience to the coalition. Additionally, and perhaps more important,

some of the North Coalition's middle class leaders did not want to taint their lobbying

relationships with MPS officials and board members by too closely associating

themselves with a protest campaign. Thus, without much hesitation, they allowed PEJAM

to take the lead in organizing protests. The common demands of these protests, listed in

each flier and press release, were to:

1) Withdraw the proposal to close North High; instead re-invest and re-build North High
2) Re-establish a "home-zone" for North High to boost enrollment
3) In partnership with parents, teachers, and students, develop an aggressive, fully-funded plan to boost enrollment at North
4) Immediately open a dialogue with teachers, students, parents, and the community to create a community-based public school

PEJAM organizers also sometimes listed demands to "Reverse the decision to open two

'Minneapolis College Prep' charter high schools."

Less than a month after issuing her initial proposal, the superintendent capitulated

to the North Coalition. She withdrew her proposal to close North High and replaced it

with a new one. This new proposal requested permission to hire a consultant who would

lead district officials and "school and community stakeholders" in designing a "new"

North High that would "drive academic achievement" for students.

At a meeting attended by more than 200 North High supporters, the school board

approved the superintendent's amended proposal. Though it was a clear victory for the

Coalition, the board's decision did not so much resolve their concerns as force them to

shift focus. To save the school, they would now have to shape its redesign as a

community "stakeholder"—a shift acknowledged in their choice to rechristen themselves

the North High Community Coalition.

This new focus raised several important and already looming questions. If the recommendation to close North High rested on an inadequate "failing school" construction of poor students' interests, what alternative construction should they, as student and community representatives, bring to the redesign process (if, indeed, they should support it at all)? Which inequalities facing poor students did the "failing school" construction actually obfuscate? What should redesign efforts do to address these inequalities? Much of what I observed over several months in the North Coalition was their attempt to answer these questions.

Movement Background

The North Coalition was rooted heavily in a collage of community-based struggles for black freedom and racial equality in Minneapolis. Indeed, at least two member organizations were themselves part of this collage. For example, Neighborhoods Organizing for Change—which featured many staff members and board members from the former Minnesota ACORN—explicitly attached itself to the "fight for racial and economic justice"[25] and focused on cultivating interactions with low and moderate income black residents in Minneapolis. Additionally, although the Friends of North Foundation was not explicitly race-focused, the fact of its black leadership and predominantly black constituency created an immanent link between its efforts and the struggle for upward mobility among black north Minneapolis residents.

Beyond the North Coalition's member organizations, several of its individual members brought strong ties to the local black freedom movement. For example, two

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[25] http://www.mnnoc.org/about

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active members, Brett and Leola—both north Minneapolis residents and locally well-known black political figures—were former presidents of the Minneapolis NAACP. Moreover, Brett, who was also an active member in the Friends of North Foundation and a North High alumnus, led the Color the Vote coalition—"a non-partisan, multi-cultural voter outreach campaign […] to mobilize the ALANA (African, Latino, Asian & Native American) communities in Minnesota to VOTE!"[26]

At least two other North Coalition members—one of whom was also a well-known and longtime north Minneapolis resident—organized in the Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota (EJAM). EJAM was an nonprofit organization that engaged in efforts "centered on advocating for changes in policy that improve environmental health in low-income communities, communities of color, and Indigenous People" and working "with the Northside Minneapolis community to create opportunities and access to resources that can lead to localized sustainable economic growth that is environmentally sound and safe."[27] EJAM itself formed out of the Minneapolis Urban League and included members of organizations such as the NAACP, the Council on Black Minnesotans, and the Indigenous Women's Network—all of whom aligned themselves with the pursuit of racial equality in Minneapolis.

Several additional North Coalition volunteers and organizers also had ties to more radical sectors of the black freedom movement. Leola, mentioned above, had attempted

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[26] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Color-The-Vote/153784797974934?id=153784797974934&sk=info

[27] http://www.ejamn.org/?page_id=23

to link the local NAACP to this more radical sector during her presidential tenure. Under her leadership, the organization disrupted and took over school board meetings and generally adopted a more protest-oriented approach to the struggle for racial equality. Another coalition organizer, Mel, had served as a board member on the NAACP during Leola's tenure. He was also a former editor for the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*—a progressive and black-run newspaper in Minneapolis—and had participated in a number of protest-based racial justice struggles over several years. These struggles included, for example, the campaign to halt public housing demolition in the 1990s and, more recently, Occupy the Hood.

Socialist or socialist-leaning organizers were also active in the North Coalition, especially during its early and more protest-oriented days. The bulk of the socialist influence came through PEJAM, one of the coalition's founding organizations. PEJAM's own membership was somewhat diverse in its political views. But the organization's key supporters and leaders came mostly—though not wholly—from a national organization called Socialist Alternative. Even though Socialist Alternative organizers sometimes clashed with FRSO (the other major socialist faction discussed above), they similarly believed in "campaigning to build an independent, alternative party of workers and young people to fight for the interests of the millions, not the millionaires."[28] Another key leader in the organization was a former president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers.

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[28] http://socialistmn.tumblr.com/aboutus. While Socialist Alternative and FRSO espoused similar policy and political goals, they typically did not work with one another. The lack of cooperation, if not division, between the two organizations centered on differences of strategy and doctrine. These differences, stemming from their contrasting commitments

Institutional Support

Of the three organizations I worked with and studied, the North Coalition was, by far, the most reliant on dominant institutions. This is not to suggest that the coalition drew no support from indigenous movement- or community-based institutions. Initially, for instance, organizers held a number of meetings at Zion Baptist Church—a predominantly black north Minneapolis church whose pastor had supported the opposition to public housing demolition in the 1990s. Also earlier on, North Coalition organizers relied primarily on members of Socialist Alternative to perform basic administrative tasks, such as printing and handing out fliers, collecting petition signatures and contacting supporters about upcoming events. These same socialist members also provided logistical support for rallies, developing and leading chants, providing equipment, contacting media sources and performing other necessary tasks.

In addition, the North Coalition relied heavily on community-based news sources like the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* to publicize their efforts. As I stated above, one of the coalition's most committed members, Mel, was a former editor for the paper. He also wrote a regular column, in which he regularly addressed race and politics in Minneapolis. Additionally, the North Coalition worked closely with Steven, a reporter from *Insight News*, another black-run newspaper based in Minneapolis. Indeed, for all intents and purposes, Steven became a member of the North Coalition in his own right.[29]

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to Marxism-Leninism and Trotskyism, are not relevant to the story I tell in this dissertation.

[29] North Coalition leaders initially viewed Steven and *Insight News* with much more suspicion than the *Spokesman-Recorder*. The newspaper's publisher, Batala-Ra

Although the North Coalition drew some support from indigenous institutions, especially at first, it eventually developed an existential reliance on dominant institutions. To be more precise, the coalition developed an existential reliance on one dominant institution: Minneapolis Public Schools. At first, partly because the coalition was so protest-oriented and partly because PEJAM led these protests, they most treated MPS as an adversary. Indeed, when two MPS employees showed up to one of the North Coalition's community meeting after the district voted to "turnaround" the school, several attendees openly criticized them and questioned their presence. While several leaders made it clear that they were welcome, many members treated their presence as an invasion.

This relationship changed once the North Coalition's leadership decided to throw their full support to the redesign of North High. Rather than meet at a community church, they began meeting at North High itself. Rather than look to PEJAM for help organizing protests, they looked to MPS employees for help recruiting new students and designing a new curriculum. Rather than continuing to build and maintain their own base of community support, they contacted community members through MPS officials, who provided contact lists, mailed fliers, and helped make phone calls. Eventually, MPS even became one of the North Coalition's member organizations, with one of its employees regularly attending organizing meetings. All of these changes occurred over the course of a few short months.

McFarlane, was a board member for Minneapolis College Prep—the new charter school that most thought was slated to replace North High. She was also the daughter of Al McFarlane, the longtime president and editor-in-chief of *Insight News*.

For coalition leaders, the point of the foregoing moves was to establish a closer connection to the school and enhance their influence over the redesign process. However, by accepting the district-supported redesign process as the basis for their activity, they diminished the base of community-based and indigenous support that allowed them to exist as an autonomous political organization. Eventually, the district, as part of its plan, established a North High community advisory board as the primary vehicle through which community representatives and "stakeholders" could influence the redesign process. Several leaders in the North Coalition joined and participated on this advisory board. Those who did not found themselves trying to manage an organization in which a substantial part of the leadership was too occupied by their duties on the community advisory board to participate. Once the shift to the community advisory board occurred— something several North Coalition members opposed, especially those members from PEJAM—the coalition quickly declined and eventually stopped meeting.

Leadership

The leaders and organizers of the North Coalition were simultaneously more male, more black, and more middle-class than those of either the Bailout Coalition or the Welfare Rights Committee. The preponderance of male organizers was mostly a symptom of two facts. The first was that the leaders of each of the coalition's original member organizations were also male. The second was that, as far as I know, no specific efforts were made to cultivate a base of female membership and leadership in the organization (unlike, for example, in the Welfare Rights Committee).

While not all organizers and leaders in the North Coalition were black, the most influential ones were. Black members of the group chaired meetings, met with district officials, and spoke publicly on behalf of the coalition more often than other members. The presence of black leadership is hardly surprising, as the coalition's efforts centered on a predominantly black high school in a disproportionately black neighborhood. And, in fact, many leaders were also graduates of North High and residents of the surrounding north Minneapolis neighborhoods. Moreover, I should ntoe, the coalition engaged in few meaningful efforts to cultivate membership and leadership among other racialized minority groups in north Minneapolis, such as Hmong people.

The middle-class bias in the North Coalition's leadership is, like its male bias, attributable to two facts. The first fact is that the leaders of the coalition's most important member organization—the Friends of North Foundation—were middle-class homeowners, most of whom lived in north Minneapolis. The second fact is that the North Coalition put little effort into cultivating opportunities for leadership among the lower income and working class segments of North High's surrounding neighborhood. Most opportunities to participate in and lead the group required a surplus of resources and time that many poor people simply do not have. Leaders were expected, for example, to attend lengthy organizing meetings, build on-going partnerships with district officials, and spend several hours a week completing tasks for the group. Even the North Coalition's middle-class leaders sometimes expressed frustration at how much time they had to put into the organization.

Constituent Constructions

North Coalition members organized their representational efforts around appeals to *shared/community inclusion*. These appeals showed up in some of their earliest statements about their efforts in support of North High and its students. For example, early on, one of the coalition's member organizations issued a public report that stated the following:

> The bottom line is the school district has not transformed itself to be more accountable to the community. Leadership begins at the top. The academic program at North could not be transformed without accountability, support, and resources from the district. You cannot name one remarkable innovative 21st century thing the district has done at North in the last ten years. North High student's achievement scores are only symptoms. Students perform to expectations, much like everyone else. The district would rather throw out its most valuable assets than do the hard lifting to improve educational outcomes for North's current students and students living on the north side.

Drawing on a construction of *shared/community inclusion,* this statement located North High students' interests in an effort to make their school a high-performing, competitive, and community-centered choice. It depicted their marginalization as a product of barriers to high achievement stemming from an unequal distribution of support, resources, and overall accountability in the school district. And it suggested that these barriers intersect with and reflect a set of lower "expectations" imposed on the disproportionately black and low-income north side community where nearly all North High students live. Additionally, this statement, though calling for "transformation," painted a cooperative picture of the political relationship between poor students and dominant institutions. According to this picture, poor students' interests lie in efforts to enact "remarkable innovative 21st century" programs that raise their achievement in the neoliberal/NCLB regime of public education and prepare them to become more economically competitive.

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The coming chapters use an analysis of the Bailout Coalition, Welfare Rights Committee, and North Coalition to examine how, with what practical challenges, and to what effect antipoverty advocates—and advocates more generally—represent marginalized constituents in the post-civil rights United States. I look, specifically, at how they construct and legitimate themselves as democratic representatives (chapter 5), how they come to make choices that construct their constituents' interests in some ways more than others (chapter 6), and the political consequences of how they advance different constituent constructions in political and policy debates (chapter 7).

Chapter 5: Becoming Democratic Representatives

During the summer of 2011, elected officials in Minneapolis, Minnesota began debating proposals for the public financing of a new Minnesota Vikings football stadium. As in previous stadium debates, Vikings team ownership justified their request for public monies by promising economic growth, job creation, and a bolstering of the city's "big league" reputation (Delaney and Eckstein 2003). On the other side of these promises was a threat to move the team and all of its supposed social and economic benefits to Los Angeles, should an acceptable stadium deal fail to emerge.

Almost as soon as public financing for the Vikings stadium became an issue, members of the Minnesota Welfare Rights Committee began to organize against it. They pointed to the paltry levels of assistance offered to low-income welfare recipients, a disproportionate number of whom are women of color. And they reminded officials that "Our kids can't eat footballs!," calling on them to use "Money for human needs, not a rich man's stadium!" Organizers transcribed this demand onto signs and mobilized allies to voice it through a series of demonstrations at the state capitol and city hall, where much of the stadium debate occurred.

To combat the efforts of the Welfare Rights Committee and other groups, liberal stadium supporters put forth an "equity plan." This plan, devised in partnership with local labor and civil rights organizations, promised to secure a high number of stadium-related jobs for the poor and people of color in Minneapolis (Share 2012). The best, and majority, of these jobs would fall in the male-dominated occupation of construction.

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Accordingly, they would disproportionately benefit poor men of color rather than the poor women of color represented by the Welfare Rights Committee.

Wielding their "equity plan," stadium supporters, thus, constructed their own cross-racial poor constituency—one that stood in gendered opposition to welfare rights advocates. This opposition materialized at several public events. At times, poor and working class stadium supporters verbally harassed the women of the Welfare Rights Committee, castigating them as opponents of job growth, equity, and "hard work." These stadium supporters were clearly organized and coordinated, with many of them sporting similar constructions vests and hardhats. Most of them were men from a local job training program who themselves hoped to secure "respectable" stadium-related work. Vikings fanatics fed on their opposition, further dismissing the Welfare Rights Committee as a group of misguided, self-serving, and disrespectful outsiders who should "just go away." While such sentiments were far from universal, neither were they contested by the majority of officials involved in the stadium negotiations.

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Antipoverty advocates provide an invaluable, if all too small and uneven, source of democratic representation for the poor (Imig 1996; Schlozman 1984; Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010). Through their representational efforts, advocates construct strong accounts of poor constituents' interests and grant them a voice in political and policy debates (Swarts 2008). And, under the right conditions, they aid movement toward a more egalitarian social order (Lipsky 1970; Piven and Cloward 1977; Cress and Snow 2000).

That said, as the story preceding this chapter illustrates, the process by which antipoverty advocates actually assert themselves as democratic representatives is, in practice, not so straightforward. In opposing the public financing of stadiums, members of the Welfare Rights Committee faced serious challenges to their legitimacy. These challenges centered on the notion that their representational efforts were accountable not to actual poor constituents but, rather, a misguided ideology. They emerged from both predictable sources—such as Vikings fanatics and growth-oriented public officials—and sources that, under different circumstances, we might expect to support antipoverty coalitions—such as labor and civil rights organizations.

In this chapter, I ask: what, politically speaking, enables such challenges and how do antipoverty advocates—and advocates more generally—respond to them? One perspective suggests that antipoverty advocates are especially prone to crises of democratic legitimacy because many of them do in fact lack accountability to their constituents (Skocpol 1999; Reed 1986). Whereas, at least in theory, legislators achieve accountability through elections, advocates appoint themselves. Consequently, the argument goes, their legitimacy as democratic representatives is easily thrown into question. And they can only recover this diminished legitimacy by mobilizing a large constituent base that actively sanctions their representational efforts.[1]

A second perspective states that antipoverty advocates are vulnerable to legitimacy challenges because they construct the poor's interests in contentious ways

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[1] Alternative perspectives on how advocates and other self-appointed (versus electoral) representatives *should* establish their legitimacy can be found in Montenaro (2012) and Strolovitch (2007, 57-66).

(Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 1998, 109-11). Even the most accommodating advocates usually contest, in some way, dominant racialized and gendered underclass constructions of the poor—such as the "welfare queen" or the "irresponsible borrower." As a result, we are told, advocates almost always have more difficulty persuading audiences that their representational efforts are in fact accountable to the poor. To become more persuasive, they must focus on constructing the poor's interests in ways that, while remaining contentious, better "align" and "resonate" with dominant constructions (Snow and Benford 1988).

A third perspective tells us that antipoverty advocates are susceptible to attacks on their legitimacy because many of them lack experiential knowledge of poor constituents' concerns (Mansbridge 1999; Young 2000). They are, in other words, not impoverished themselves and, thus, lack a clear and defensible basis for claiming accountability to the poor and altering debates in their name. To establish such as basis, this argument suggests, advocates must find ways to include far more poor constituents in their ranks. That is to say, antipoverty advocacy must become an act of "descriptive" representation in which the poor come to speak for themselves.

These three perspectives, although compelling in their own ways, overlook how political actors themselves fashion the normative bases for claiming representational accountability and democratic legitimacy. A fourth perspective, rooted in long-standing debates about representative democracy, starts from precisely this point. More specifically, this perspective locates antipoverty advocates in struggles with other political actors that do not simply reflect but *decide* who among them can effectively

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claim accountability to constituents (Disch 2011; Saward 2006). It is, thus, the practical disadvantages that advocates face in these struggles that enable widespread challenges to their legitimacy. If they can maneuver around these disadvantages, this perspective tells us, they will fare better in securing recognition as democratic representatives.

The coming pages support and apply this fourth perspective. First, I unpack the struggle of advocates to claim accountability and legitimacy and examine the specific disadvantages this struggle entails for antipoverty advocates. Second, I explore, in more detail, the legitimacy challenges that disadvantaged antipoverty advocates are likely to encounter in this struggle. Third, I examine the tactics advocates use to negotiate their disadvantages and more effectively "prove," or establish, their legitimacy and accountability to the poor. These tactics include *magnifying* the appearance of supportive poor constituents; underlining *descriptive* characteristics that they hold in common with the poor; emphasizing a strong and principled *identification* with the poor; and *projecting* the presence of supportive poor constituents into the future. Finally, I assess whether or not advocates' tactical maneuvering actually secures them greater recognition as democratic representatives. I examine, in particular, if and how local government institutions and news media validate their claims to accountability and legitimacy.

Constituency Paradox and Mobilization

What, politically speaking, enables widespread challenges to antipoverty advocates' legitimacy as democratic representatives? My contention is that their vulnerability to these challenges stems, in large part, from the disadvantages they face as they struggle to claim and demonstrate their accountability to the poor.

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This struggle is structured by what Lisa Disch (2012) has called the "constituency paradox" of democratic representation. The paradox, Disch (2012, 600) explains, is the fact that "democratic representation must posit as a starting point constituencies and interests that can take shape only by its means." In other words, acts of democratic representation construct and help to call forth the very constituent interests that they treat as given. While Disch explores the normative implications of this paradox, I focus here on its practical consequence: to gain democratic legitimacy, representatives must somehow demonstrate their accountability to the constituent interests that they construct. They must, to put it differently, find ways to present and construct *themselves* to different audiences as legitimate representatives (Goffman 1959).

This challenge of the "constituency paradox" is, in some senses, the same one Richard Fenno (1977) identified several years ago in his seminal study of congressional representation. Fenno's study examined how legislators cultivate public perceptions of themselves as accountable and legitimate representatives. They do so, he argued, largely by returning to their home districts, where they perform and present themselves in ways meant to mobilize trust and support among constituents and, hence, bolster their legitimacy back in Washington.

Advocates and other non-electoral representatives focus their claims to democratic accountability and legitimacy not only on constituents—as in Fenno's path-breaking study—but on three broad types of audiences. The first audience is what E.E. Schattschneider ([1960] 1975, 2) called the "crowd"—that is, the audience observing the political conflicts in which advocates actually make their competing claims. This

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audience can include constituents, the general public, other advocates, the news media, public officials, and any number of other political by-standers. As Schattschneider observed, the crowd's response to each conflict determines that conflict's shape and outcome and, thus, which representational claims appear legitimate. It is an ever-present third party that can ensure a claim's success by rallying on its behalf or kill it simply by doing nothing. And it plays this role regardless of whether it intends to or not.

The second audience is the advocate her/himself. As much as any other group of political actors in the world, advocates are socially constructed, perpetually incomplete, and potentially divided subjects (Alcoff 1991-1992, 9-10). As such, they are not any more prewired to accept or internalize their own claims to democratic accountability than a random member of the crowd. They must find ways to make sense of and rationalize these claims to themselves, as if they too were bystanders whose support must be activated.

The third audience is the other political group(s) with whom advocates are actually in conflict. As the opposition, this audience is often the most explicit addressee of their claims. But, somewhat counterintuitively, they are also sometimes the least important audience, that is, the audience advocates are least concerned with persuading. Imagine, for example, a group of antipoverty advocates shouting their demands at an opposing group of conservative legislators. In this scenario, which I encountered several times during my fieldwork, most of the advocates do not necessarily expect or care that their claims to legitimacy persuade the legislators. They do, however, expect and care

that they persuade members of the crowd who can bolster their influence over the behavior of each legislator.

The traditional and dominant model through which each audience expects representatives to demonstrate their accountability is, as Fenno's (1977) work implied, a "promissory" one (Mansbridge 2003). Representatives bound by this promissory model are expected to "prove" their accountability to a constituency that preexists and actively sanctions demands—or "promises"—made on their behalf. To meet this expectation in practice, they must *mobilize* a large constituent base that they can claim plays such a sanctioning role.

Those we most uncritically accept as democratic representatives, elected officials, can always claim this type of accountability by pointing to the voters who mobilized to put them in office. Antipoverty advocates, on the other hand, purport to represent a non-electoral constituency that is characteristically *hard* to mobilize—even more so under the post-civil rights reign of neoliberal poverty management. People living in poverty, especially people of color, lack many of the social and material resources needed to mobilize *as* constituencies in official political and policymaking arenas (Cohen and Dawson 1993; Verba Schlozman and Brady 1995). In addition, many of them have disciplinary encounters with police officers, case managers, and other government bureaucrats that further discourage mobilization (Soss 2000; Bruch Ferree and Soss 2010; Weaver and Lerman 2010). These disadvantages significantly hinder the ability of antipoverty advocates to demonstrate and claim accountability within a promissory understanding of democratic representation.

Mobilization difficulties plagued the antipoverty advocates I accompanied in

Minneapolis. Of the three organizations I worked with, only the Welfare Rights

Committee consistently mobilized more than a few poor constituents to organizing

meetings and public events (this exception is explained below).[2] This pattern held even

for the North Coalition, which actually organized and met in the city's most

impoverished north side neighborhood. And it was only partly mitigated by outreach

efforts, such as petitioning outside "welfare offices" or door-knocking in class and race

segregated areas. On a consistent basis, such efforts mobilized, at best, one or two

potentially active constituents for every two hundred people encountered.[3]

As national trends predict, the people we contacted through outreach efforts

generally exhibited high levels of social marginalization. The very need for person-to-

person outreach was indicative of the diminished social supports for conventional

political mobilization among this group. Additionally, many of them reported a lack of

material resources needed to show up to meetings and/or public actions, such as a

predictable schedule, reliable transportation and, for parents of young children, affordable

day care. Of the individuals who expressed interest in our efforts despite the foregoing

barriers to participation, several could not provide a stable phone number and lacked

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[2] Core members and leaders of organizations were, most often, working and middle class people who either had experienced poverty in the past, held ideological commitments to poverty reduction, and/or connected to the organization through a broader advocacy network.

[3] This figure was reported by a long-time organizer who worked in both the Welfare Rights Committee and the Bailout Coalition. Since her incentive is clearly to exaggerate the efficacy of mobilization efforts, we can assume that, if anything, it is overstated.

reliable internet access. As a result, staying in contact was often very difficult. Each time, for example, that I "phone banked" petition signees from the Welfare Rights Committee's or Bailout Coalition's outreach efforts, more than a few of the numbers I called were no longer in service.

The demobilizing effect of the poor's disciplinary encounters with case managers, school district officials, and other government bureaucrats was also apparent. To be sure, partly because of these encounters, most people advocates spoke with were receptive to claims that the state legislature, the local school board, banks, and other dominant institutions "don't care" about their interests. However, experience also appeared to have taught many of them that these institutions are nearly incapable of performing better (cf. Soss 2000). Few of the people I interacted with during outreach efforts evinced a strong belief that, by mobilizing locally, they might improve their institutional representation— though, most issued strong moral support for such efforts.

As stated above, one organization, the Welfare Rights Committee, had marginal success mobilizing poor constituents behind their representational efforts. Many of these constituents were members of especially marginalized poor populations, namely, women of color and means-tested welfare recipients.

The Welfare Rights Committee's relative success at mobilizing poor constituents occurred not simply in spite of the racialized, gendered, and class-based disadvantages they faced but because of their efforts to confront them. They were, for example, the only group that deliberately provided their low-income members with some of the basic social and material resources needed for mobilization. All organizing meetings included a free

meal and, to accommodate single parents in particular, free day care. Likewise, organizers never planned future meetings and public actions without considering how the group would transport its members. The organization reimbursed its poorest members for the gas and public transportation costs they incurred while performing advocacy work.

Second, of all three organizations, the Welfare Rights Committee engaged in the most extensive outreach efforts. Through these efforts as well as organizing meetings, they actively combated the demobilizing "lessons" stemming from encounters with government bureaucrats. Without denying the enduring problems of the dominant regime of poverty management, they also provided evidence that, by mobilizing around the committee's representational efforts, poor constituents could secure beneficial reforms. For example, many fliers we distributed would, in addition to listing policy threats, also recount past policy victories under headings such as "When We Fight Back, We Win!" Likewise, in organizing meetings, seasoned organizers often shared stories with new members about how the group had successfully (in their opinion) "beat back attacks from Republicans" and "brought Democrats in line" (also see chapter 6). Having witnessed several "victories" myself, I can say that these stories, while not factually inaccurate, typically overemphasized the group's external efficacy to facilitate constituent mobilization (cf. Meyer 2006).

Even in the Welfare Rights Committee, however, patterns of mobilization evinced the same disadvantages faced by other organizations. For example, during my time with the committee, most new members became involved through their social or organizational connections with existing members rather than because of outreach efforts.

Additionally, relatively few members hailed from the disproportionately poor and black neighborhoods of north Minneapolis, a testament to difficulty of mobilizing in these neighborhoods. Overall, some of the most marginalized groups of low-income people, such as convicted felons or undocumented workers, appeared to be as absent in the Welfare Rights Committee as in any other group.

Challenges

Unable to effectively mobilize constituents and claim accountability as promissory representatives, antipoverty advocates found their legitimacy wide open to challenges. Political and policy elites, without major backlash from the public, often treated them as troublemakers, deviants and, generally, threats to civic and political life. Rather than represent poor constituents, the story goes, they *mis*represented them and corrupted the democratic process for the sake of their own misguided causes.

I observed and experienced such challenges several times in my fieldwork. A telling example occurred during one of the Welfare Rights Committee's actions at the state capitol. About fifteen members of the group, including myself, confronted a high-ranking Republican state senator during a press conference. The conference followed a round of budget negotiations with the state's governor. While the senator attempted to answer reporters' questions about the negotiations, some members of our group began chanting "Tax the rich!" We also questioned his support for cuts to public assistance programs and accused him of lying about what the effects of those cuts would be. Without hesitation, reporters and other bystanders gave us "a good scolding," in the words of Kristy, a Welfare Rights Committee organizer and cofounder. Rather than

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treating our efforts and questions (which were admittedly loaded[4]) as a legitimate part of

the policy debate, they almost uniformly told us to "be respectful" and "quiet while we're

having a press conference!" One of the senator's staffers went further and told Barb, the

advocate doing most of the shouting, to "shut the fuck up." Nobody within earshot

retaliated (though Barb certainly gave him an earful). But they did call the capitol police

to chase us off.

Later that day, when Kristy and I entered the press room to distribute printed

statements, reporters, once again, dismissed our efforts as misguided and illegitimate:

> We realize you guys are trying to get your point across. But when we're trying to
> have a press conference, it's entirely inappropriate to interrupt like that. […] You
> need to respect the process and the senator as he's trying to answer our questions.
> We don't get many chances to interact with them.

> You know, just an FYI, you guys can't do that. It's entirely disrespectful and
> inappropriate to interrupt a press conference like that. We're just trying to get a
> statement from them and ask them some questions. […] You may not like their
> answers. But you need to show them a little respect and let them speak.

These comments located the Welfare Rights Committee as small group of troublemakers

who spoil "the [democratic] process" (rather than enhance it) in order to push a narrow

"point" (rather than a broad constituent interest). If the group had mobilized hundreds of

supportive constituents rather than a few, reporters' dismissals might have yielded to

accounts of advocates clashing with legislators over how proposed budget cuts would

affect the poor.[5]

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[4] For example, "Why do you want poor and working people to suffer?"

[5] Indeed, within weeks, when labor unions and gay rights advocates, on separate
occasions, created similar scenes but with hundreds of constituents, reporters were much
less dismissive.

Even when antipoverty advocates "followed the rules" and mobilized substantial

non-constituent support, their inability to produce a large constituent base left them open

to challenges. The North Coalition, which never used disruptive tactics and typically

turned out one hundred or more people to major events, encountered such a challenge at a

November 2010 school board meeting.[6] By this point, the coalition had persuaded the

school district to pull its recommendation to close North High School. In its place, the

district superintendent proposed a plan to keep the school open and "redesign" it. Several

North Coalition organizers saw problems with the plan, especially its reticence about

specific reforms and the role the "community" would play in the redesign process.

Nevertheless, taking a cooperative stance that was typical of their efforts, coalition

organizers mobilized supporters to attend the meeting, call for specific reforms and,

ultimately, back the proposal (as an alternative to closing) (see chapters 4 and 6).

A number of these supporters were black and low-income families with direct

connections to the school and neighborhood. But many more supporters hailed from other

parts of the city. Of this latter group, several were members of the PEJAM—a

predominantly white and socialist education justice organization that had joined the

North Coalition at the start of the fall.

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[6] Placed against images of large national protests, one hundred people may seem
minimal. However, for advocacy efforts around local or even statewide issues, such
numbers constitute a substantial turnout. This is especially the case for inequality and
poverty-related issues, which have, since the civil rights-era, given rise to relatively little
mobilization in the US (Soss and Jacobs 2009).

During the meeting, one board member—Chris Stewart, an African American man who often presented himself as the "black" voice on the board—highlighted this fact and used it to call the coalition's democratic legitimacy into question[7]:

> This is what I want to say about "the community," alright. Some of you are the community. And some of you aren't. Some of you are people from other places that are pushing a socialist agenda and exploiting the community. And I want you to be aware of that. I want you to be aware of that. Some of you are coming from other parts of the city to attach *your* issue and *your* agenda to the *valid* agenda of the community. So, for those of you that *really* care about North High, welcome. I'm glad to see you at the table, and I'm happy that you're going to work on this. For the people that are coming with their worker's party agenda and what not, stop exploiting the community. That's all I'm gonna say about this.

This comment alluded to an actual tension in the North Coalition: whereas the socialist faction, most of which was not from the "community," wanted to link the North High battle to a broader movement against the privatization and marketization of education, other coalition supporters did not. But, rather than framing this tension as evidence of a legitimate debate about the "community's" interests in public education, he accused one side of "exploiting the community" and using the North Coalition as vehicle for manipulating its "valid agenda."

In the moment, the board member's remarks provoked several jeers, including some from poor constituents that he considered to be community members. As one would expect, then, the constituents who did mobilize in support of the North Coalition's representational efforts helped to mitigate his challenge. However, among the other board members and bystanders, he met little resistance.

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[7] Also see fn. 7 in chapter 4.

Perhaps the most damaging challenge to an advocate's democratic legitimacy,

especially in the current political climate, is to be labeled a terrorist. The label recasts

claims on behalf of the poor and other marginalized constituents as a cheap disguise for

efforts to coerce via non-state violence. In the fall of 2010, federal investigators publicly

placed this label on several members of the Bailout Coalition. Federal agents subpoenaed

these members and raided their homes, looking for evidence of "material support for

terrorism."[8] While the charges stemmed from suspicions regarding international peace

activism performed *outside* the Bailout Coalition, they nonetheless conferred a series of

legal difficulties and stigmas on some of the coalition's key organizers. Without a large

and mobilized constituent base to buttress the efforts of these organizers, the Bailout

Coalition's efforts came to virtual halt and did not pick up again for over a year.

Tactics

Seeing the mobilization difficulties and resulting legitimacy problems discussed

above, many scholars urge advocates to organize and build toward exceptional periods of

political and social instability. These exceptional periods, such as the Great Depression or

the "long 1960s," feature the breakdown of social control and, as a result, *increased*

opportunities for advocates to mobilize the poor and other marginalized groups (Piven

and Cloward 1977; Wolin 2010). While scholars' extant accounts of such moments and

their importance are on point, they leave us to wonder how advocates "get by" as

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[8] At the current time, no actual indictments, much less convictions, have resulted from the federal investigation. The organizers involved maintain that the activities for which they are being investigated—primarily, it seems, "fact-finding" trips to Colombia and Palestine—involved no attempts to offer direct "material support" to state-labeled terrorist organizations. For a brief overview of their case, see Wallsten (2011).

representatives and pursue egalitarian change during the "times-in-between" (Piven 2006).

The antipoverty advocates with whom I worked did so by relying, to varying degrees, on four tactics. Each tactic offered an alternative way to demonstrate their accountability and legitimacy in the face of challenges such as those discussed above (cf. De Certeau 1980). While the first tactic simulated the mobilization needed to accommodate a promissory understanding of democratic representation, the other three located advocates' legitimacy within alternative understandings (Mansbridge 2003).

Magnification

The first tactic was to *magnify* the appearance of supportive poor constituents beyond their actual mobilization. As stated above, constituent magnification, like mobilization, appeals to a promissory understand of accountability and democratic representation—that is, one in which constituents must appear to underlie and sanction demands made on their behalf.

This tactic required three simultaneous and complementary steps. The first step was for antipoverty advocates to maximize the visibility of constituents who had, in fact, mobilized in support of their efforts. Stella, a member of the North Coalition, reflected on this point several months after the Minneapolis school board meeting recounted above:

> Most of the people at those [board] meetings when we were protesting the
> closing of the school were not from the north side. So, I don't mean any offense
> to you all [pointing to two socialist organizers in the room]. But *they need to see*
> teachers, parents, students, and people from the neighborhood. [Emphasis added]

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Following the implicit advice of Stella, organizers increased poor constituents' visibility primarily by encouraging many of them to speak and testify—at press conferences, public hearings, and other similar events.

The second step towards magnification was for advocates to fashion constituent voices in ways that comport with their representational efforts. Sometimes this fashioning occurred directly. For example, in the Welfare Rights Committee, three or four key organizers had a hand in crafting most public statements associated with the group. Even in the case of constituent testimonies, an organizer usually helped to craft an initial draft. Additionally, writers often distributed public statements to the group for revisions, a process in which organizers were typically the most active participants.

On one occasion, I was both the principle and agent of this fashioning process. During an organizing meeting, Marissa, one of the Welfare Rights Committee's newer members and a welfare recipient, expressed frustration about a series of articles on food stamp "fraud" published in the local newspaper (Rao 2012a; Rao 2012b). I suggested that she and I collaborate on an op-ed offering a more "bottom up" perspective on the issue. After taking some notes about the points she wanted to make, I drafted the op-ed, penning it as a collective statement from an organization of "current and former welfare recipients" and fashioning it to comport with mine and Marissa's preferred construction of the issue (one that acknowledged efforts to "game" the food stamp program—such as trading food stamps for cash—and reframed them as survival strategies [versus "fraud"] [cf. Stack 1974]). Once Marissa signed off on the draft, I emailed it to the rest of the committee, at which point, Barb—the group's most vocal organizer—requested that I

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revise particular passages to better align them with a construction of the issue she and other organizers favored (one that simply denied the existence of "fraud" and emphasized the paltry levels of assistance available to the poor). As she stated, "I tried to maintain the points you were making in a different way […and] respond in *keeping with how we usually respond* to their BS on fraud" (emphasis added).

Outside of such direct interventions, advocates also fashioned constituent voices indirectly. They did so mainly by selecting as speakers only those constituents who were immersed enough in their organizations' claims to faithfully reproduce them. The emphasis placed on this selection process came out, for instance, in a discussion among North Coalition organizers. Their discussion centered on plans for an upcoming rally. Stephen, the coalition's primary socialist organizer, suggested that a lack of selectivity at the previous rally had created a problem: "Last time, we just had an open mic and people would just sort of come up and state their peace." The result, he recalled, was that some of the speeches were "really good" and that others were "really weird," or off-message. Other organizers suggested that, for the next rally, we contact a school parent who previously "spoke really well" and locate students and other constituents who "might be ready" to speak.

The third step towards magnification was to create an impression that visible and supportive constituents indexed a much broader base. Mobilized constituents created this impression through their public statements, which often and by design labeled their

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interests and experiences in terms of "we" rather than "I."[9] For example, Rosemary, a

poor woman working with the Bailout Coalition to "occupy" her foreclosed home,

situated her experience in this way: "There's a whole big picture. There's so many people

in the movement—Ann here she's fighting for her house. Leslie and her mother couldn't

be here. Linda's at work couldn't be here. We're all fighting to keep our property and

beyond us there's millions."

Organizers, in turn, managed such impressions, citing whatever evidence they

could to show that the "millions" of constituents were actually real. As one organizer

asserted in response to Rosemary's statement:

> Every single day there's a letter that comes in from somebody saying what do I
> do [about my foreclosure]? […] And we got to start doing like Rosemary says.
> Whenever Rosemary talks, Rosemary doesn't just say Rosemary but she says
> Rosemary, the Donna's, the Linda's the, you know, all of the other people that
> are being impacted. […] Here it is. Rosemary is in foreclosure but she's got other
> people that are in foreclosure over here supporting this fight. And Rosemary is
> going over to their homes and helping them. And, so, that's just the reality of the
> situation.

In sum, by maximizing the visibility of constituents, fashioning their voice, and

creating an impression that they index a broad base, antipoverty advocates magnified

what they could not mobilize. They demonstrated and claimed their accountability to a

constituency that sanctions and, in doing so, legitimizes their efforts.

At first blush, magnification appears manipulative and misleading in a way that

the tactics I discuss below will not. And, in fact, it is. However, as many advocates would

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[9] As Grace, a Welfare Rights Committee organizer and former welfare recipient, stated:
"They [another organization] always want it to be personal personal personal. And, I
mean, personal is okay. Nothing is wrong with that. But it's not just my family that's
suffering. It's 50,000 other families too."

rightly point out, their attempts at magnification should not be equated with those of more dominant actors, such as elected officials claiming "mandates" (Grossback Peterson and Stimson 2007). Whereas the latter often operate to manage democratic mobilization and dissent, the former aim to enhance it *in the face of* the mobilization difficulties described above.

Description

Antipoverty advocates' second and third tactics for "proving" their accountability displaced promissory understandings of democratic representation. Rather than trying to mobilize or magnify the appearance of a sanctioning constituency, each tactic suggested one whose collective concerns simply *align* with those of advocates. In the language of Hanna Pitkin (1967), advocates using these tactics claimed to "stand for" poor constituents.

The second tactic was, more specifically, for antipoverty advocates to highlight *descriptive* characteristics that they hold in common with the poor.[10] This tactic evokes a "surrogate" or "descriptive" understanding of representation, that is, one where

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[10] Most of the time, descriptive associations are clear enough to audiences. However, like all aspects of representative claims, they are open to interpretation (Saward 2006). For example, the Welfare Rights Committee somewhat unintentionally blurred the lines between who in their organization was and was not a welfare recipient. At public events, members consistently dressed alike—all wearing the same "Welfare Rights Committee" t-shirt—and, regardless of their personal status, used "we" when speaking about and for welfare recipients. The result, as stated by the director of another antipoverty organization, was that, "you know, with the welfare rights folks, sometimes it's hard to tell if they are actually on MFIP [Minnesota's TANF program], General Assistance, SSI [Supplemental Security Income], or whatever."

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advocates' accountability stems from their apparent experiential knowledge of
constituents' concerns (Mansbridge 1999; Mansbridge 2003).

Unsurprisingly, in my fieldwork, this tactic was most readily available to and used
by low-income advocates. While income is certainly not the only descriptive indicator of
poverty, it is easily the most accepted in political and policy debates (Sen 2006). Indeed,
the two are so associated with one another that, for all intents and purposes, advocates
who held this descriptive association could also present themselves as constituents. Their
efforts to "stand for," thus, typically helped to magnify constituent presence (see above)
as well as elevate their claims to experiential knowledge of the poor's concerns.

Grace, a Welfare Rights Committee organizer and low-income single mother,
often pursued these dual purposes in her public statements. The following passage is from
a testimony she delivered at a state legislative hearing. The testimony spoke in opposition
to a bill that placed new restrictions on how and where participants in the Minnesota
Family Investment Program (MFIP, the state's TANF program) could withdraw cash
from ATM's using their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards:

> The Welfare Rights Committee would like to state that this bill is not based in
> any common sense or fiscal responsibility. It is appears to be based on knee-jerk,
> ignorant bias and a desire to stigmatize the poor.
>
> First, we would like to address the provision that makes it illegal for MFIP
> families to withdraw *cash* from the *cash* portion of the MFIP grant—and in fact,
> appears to make it illegal for MFIP families to have any type of money at all in
> their pockets. How do you expect people to take care of business like paying bills
> such as lights, gas, water, trash and phone? Not every place we shop at takes the
> EBT card and that is why it is necessary for us to be able to pull cash out the
> teller machine.
>
> […] You can't pay a parking meter, buy postage stamps, do laundry, ride the bus,
> set up bank account or pay your medical co-pays without cash. Considering that

MFIP families are already living 60% below the poverty level and need to scramble every day for survival, this provision is not just ridiculous, it is cruel.

Next, the part of the bill that makes it illegal to withdraw MFIP benefits out of state. This puts burdens on families who are forced to leave Minnesota to attend funerals, sick relatives, visit family members in the military, hunt for jobs and all the other things we have to leave home for. It is a restriction on our constitutional right to travel from state to state.

[…] We are angry that this bill would even be considered. We see the hate-mongering in so called "news" reports in the media and the bumper stickers. This bill appears to come from there, since it doesn't come from a human or fiscally responsible standpoint.

Speaking as both a low-income woman and an advocate, Grace used assertions of "we" to link the Welfare Rights Committee's representational efforts ("The Welfare Rights Committee would like to state that this bill [lacks] common sense") to experiential knowledge of welfare recipients' concerns (e.g. "Not every place *we* shop at takes the EBT card") as well as the presence of a sanctioning poor constituency ("*We* are angry that this bill would even be considered").

Advocates without low-income status asserted other descriptive associations with the poor. These assertions often looked exactly like those based in income—that is, as assertions of "we" and shared group membership. Very few members of the North Coalition, for example, could claim the low-income status shared by nearly all of North High's current students and families. But a preponderance of them could and did emphasize their descriptive "community" associations with constituents—as alumni, residents of the surrounding neighborhood and/or, more implicitly, African Americans.

The emphasis placed on these associations crystallized during a brainstorming session regarding the North Coalition's mission statement. I proposed that the statement should convey "our relationship to the school, our relationship to the district, and our

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relationship to the [school's] community." In the ensuing discussion, Ramon, one of the coalition's key organizers, replied—to much agreement—that the coalition's "relationship to the community" is "easy": "We *are* the community." Of course, not everybody in the North Coalition, or even the room, fit common sense understandings of membership in the "North High community." But the group's leaders did. Of the four in the room, Ramon and two others were middle-class black residents of north Minneapolis. Two were North High alumni and one had been involved with the school as a substitute teacher and volunteer for several years. The one leader who was in a low-income situation had also lived and/or attended church in north Minneapolis for several years. The assertion that "We *are* the community" evoked each of these descriptive associations and claimed a relationship of accountability to the school's students and families based in collective experience and knowledge of their concerns.

Identification

Not all antipoverty advocates can effectively, or in good faith, claim to "stand for" the poor by way of descriptive associations. Many members of the organizations I worked with, such as myself, occupied much different social positions than the constituents to whom they claimed accountability.

These advocates, nonetheless, crafted alternative claims to "stand for" poor constituents that emphasized a strong and principled *identification*. This is the third tactic advocates used to construct their accountability and legitimacy. It evoked a "gyroscopic" or "internal" understanding of democratic representation (Mansbridge 2003). Accountability, in this understanding, rests on the presumption that advocates have

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somehow learned and internalized—that is, identified with—the concerns of their constituents.

Of all three organizations, the North Coalition had the highest number and proportion of members who necessarily relied on this tactic. This number included several socialists, current and former public school teachers, university students and professors, and people who were generally interested and invested in the protection of public education.

These members frequently emphasized their special, learned knowledge of constituent and "community" concerns. Robert—a south Minneapolis school teacher, former leader in the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, and key organizer in PEJAM—typified this emphasis in an op-ed published by the local newspaper (Panning-Miller 2010):

> I have worked with teachers, parents, students and community members of north Minneapolis who have simply said to the board, "Let us help you." Rather than perpetuating divisions and abandoning an entire community, the Minneapolis school board must keep North High open and work to rebuild it. The community stands ready to help.

Speaking as a member of the North Coalition, Robert suggested that, by having "worked with" various constituent groups and the broader North High School "community," he came to identify with their perspective on what the "school board must" do.

Other advocates—often those with established descriptive associations—worked to buttress claims to identification such as Robert's. During one of the North Coalition's planning sessions for a public meeting, a new member of the group from south

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Minneapolis explicitly raised the question of identification: "Now, I know that I'm not actually from the north side. But can I speak as a proxy for someone who can't come to the meeting, for those people who can't make it?" Without hesitation, several organizers, all north side residents, replied in succession:

> Sure you can do that. And, more than that, you can come to speak for yourself.
>
> We have a lot of supporters in southwest. I know that for a fact.
>
> I think we all know and operate with the presumption that what we're doing is bigger than this building [that is, North High School]. This is about public education and making sure kids get educated.

These comments reiterated the claim that coalition "supporters" learned and internalized "bigger" concerns with "public education and making sure kids get educated" held by—but not exclusive to—North High School's poor students and families.[11]

Projection

Antipoverty advocates' fourth tactic for asserting democratic legitimacy reached back to the notion that representatives must demonstrate accountability to a sanctioning constituency. But instead of attempting to mobilize or magnify the appearance of this constituency in the present, they *projected* it into the future. The tactic was, in other words, to forecast a supportive constituency that would emerge in response to their efforts. Advocates deploying this tactic replaced the dominant promissory understanding of democratic representation with one that was "anticipatory"—that is, one in which they

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[11] The speaker later clarified that her actual question was, quite literally, whether she could speak on behalf of a specific friend from north Minneapolis who could not make the meeting. That coalition members would so easily misinterpret the scope of her question reveals just how much salience they attached to issues of description and identification.

must anticipate and demonstrate accountability to emergent constituencies (Mansbridge 2003).

Projection operated in two steps. The first and more complicated step was for advocates to explain why the constituency to whom they claim accountability was emergent rather than already present. In short, what explains their suppression? Antipoverty advocates, in my fieldwork, typically articulated one of two types of explanations for constituent suppression.

The first and most important type emphasized institutionalized and systemic factors. Such explanations could and often did include references to the demobilizing effects of resource scarcity and disciplinary bureaucratic encounters that I discussed earlier. Welfare Rights Committee and Bailout Coalition organizers, in particular, highlighted the effects of resource scarcity. In the follow-up to poorly attended public actions, organizers would often suggest that the turnout was "actually quite good" given any number of factors that heightened the resource barriers to participation among the poor—such as bad weather, short notice, and a lack of drivers (for transportation).

All three organizations underlined poor constituents' disciplinary encounters with government bureaucrats as a source of demobilization and suppression. North Coalition organizers, for instance, went to great lengths to explain how school district officials had discouraged the participation of poor north Minneapolis residents in debates surrounding North High School. They publicized stories of district employees telling prospective students to avoid the school, demoralizing letters from the superintendent to the school's current families and, most importantly, a persistent disregard in the district's decision-

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making processes for the opinions of poor students and families. Mel, one of the

coalition's key organizers, unpacked this last point at a district-organized "community

meeting":

> I heard [a woman in the audience] talk about parents not showing up and people
> not taking part in the PTA. […] Imagine some poor person who works two jobs
> and can barely get home in time to make it to a PTA meeting. They bust their
> butt coming to meeting after meeting. And then the folks who wear […] business
> suits, they come out saying pretty much that 'we know better than you.' So after
> all the time we put in and all the ideas we thought out, it gets tossed out and we
> just go along the route [the school district] planned on going all along. So [to] the
> folks who like to beat up on parents—understand that this is why a lot of poor
> folks don't get involved. Okay, this is why they don't come to meetings. They
> don't come because they know that they'll pour their hearts out and some sharp
> looking cat in a suit will say 'no, this is the way we're gonna go.' And it's not
> right.

At times, antipoverty advocates also stressed institutionalized threats of repression

as a source of constituent suppression (cf. Boykoff 2006, 278-84). The Welfare Rights

Committee, at one point, organized a small campaign strictly to highlight the effects of

such threats. Their campaign arose in response to an incident that occurred at the

Minnesota State Capitol. A Republican committee chair had, in an attempt to stop

members of the organization from disrupting his hearings, publicly threatened them with

the presence of a "fully armed trooper." The chair's actions, organizers argued,

"intimidated" and discouraged their constituents from participating. As Barb, a welfare

rights organizer introduced earlier, stated:

> The thing is, we know we're not intimidated because we're not victims and we
> know how to speak out against the attacks regardless of what they do. But the
> point is who else was in that room? Who might be stopped from stepping up? It's
> the use of intimidation tactics that's the issue.

Antipoverty advocates' second type of explanation for constituent suppression

emphasized subjective factors—namely, different forms of "false," or diminished,

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consciousness. Perhaps because subjective explanations hold potentially conservative implications—poor constituents are responsible for their own suppression—advocates articulated them only sparingly.[12]

Advocates offering this type of explanation most often pointed to the demobilizing effects of an apparent "passive" or "victimized" consciousness among the poor (cf. Lewis 1966; Mead 1992). For instance, in a heated debate about why the Welfare Rights Committee did not effectively mobilize more (black) people from north Minneapolis, Jen—a longtime member of the organization and a black north side resident herself—stated that "the problem is that people need to stand up and fight back, but our people don't do that." Carmella, another longtime member, affirmed the spirit of Jen's comment, suggesting that north side residents are "are being victimized and won't stand up for themselves." While nobody explicitly mentioned race, references to "our people," the north side, and passivity were clearly race-coded, mirroring constructions of the poor as a victimized "underclass" (Reed 1999a).

Antipoverty advocates also suggested, at times, that a "reactionary" consciousness suppressed the supportive mobilization of poor constituents. Organizers in the Bailout Coalition and the Welfare Rights Committee leaned on this argument to account for poor people who mobilized in opposition to their efforts (such as the low-income men who opposed the Welfare Rights Committee in the story that opens this chapter). Lou, an

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[12] Moreover, I should note, while consciousness certainly plays a role in shaping political behavior, the idea that demobilization and suppression stem from "false" forms of consciousness has not held up to empirical and theoretical scrutiny (Gaventa 1980; Soss 2000; Walsh 2012).

organizer in the Bailout Coalition, described these "reactionaries" as people who say "I actually deserve [public assistance, work opportunities, and other government benefits]" but do not like the idea of being associated with "those other people" who "abuse" the system.

Having explained the suppression of supportive poor constituents, the second and more straightforward step of projection was for antipoverty advocates to proclaim a coming wave of constituent mobilization. This wave would, the story goes, bring their emergent constituency to a state of full presence, vindicating their representational efforts and undermining those of their political opponents. As Linden, a Welfare Rights Committee organizer, stated in a legislative testimony:

> If you [legislators] think that bashing on the poor will make you more popular with regular working people, think again. The times are changing. If you don't know what is going on, you really have not been paying attention. People in this state and all around this country are fed up. We are fed up with the way we are being treated. We are fed up with politicians protecting the corporate elites and the 1 percent while you slash away at the few programs left to help poor and working families.
>
> The days when you could walk around raising the specter of the welfare family as public enemy number one, and lie about how much money goes to welfare, and lie about how much money you save by risking children and women's lives, those days are over.

Likewise, Bailout Coalition organizers often returned to declarations that "this [anti-foreclosure/economic justice] movement is going to continue to grow and grow" and "build with the passage of time"; and North Coalition organizers leaned on the impression that students and families were getting "fed up."

Interactions

As one might guess, advocates did not necessarily deploy the foregoing tactics as carefully and independently as I have presented them. Their efforts to construct and establish themselves as legitimate representatives structured multiple interactions between tactics.

These interactions typically took one of two forms. In the first, advocates turned to particular tactics in ways that *bolstered* and *supported* their use of others. Through these supportive interactions, they worked to build broader and more multidimensional claims to accountability and legitimacy. For example, they often used their apparent descriptive connections with the poor—where they existed—as a way to also help magnify the appearance of an active and sanctioning constituency. This type of interaction can be seen in one of the quotes cited above, where Grace from the Welfare Rights Committee makes her organization's case against a piece of conservative welfare legislation. In the quote, she highlights her status as a descriptive representative and then uses that status to speak for and magnify a broader "we" who sanctions, in a promissory mode, the claims of the Welfare Rights Committee.

Second, advocates also used particular tactics to *contest* those used by competing political actors. By fashioning these contentious interactions, they defended their legitimacy against many public officials who aimed to challenge and silence them as democratic representatives. For example, they sometimes fostered and claimed identification with poor constituents as a way to undermine the claims of public officials with descriptive connections to these constituents. Many advocates in the North Coalition who hailed from outside the recognized North High "community" used identification in

precisely this way. As I recounted above, one member of the Minneapolis school board castigated these advocates as outsiders who were "exploiting the [North High] community" and, to present himself as the more authentic representative, underlined his racially descriptive connection to this high poverty "community." To protect their legitimacy, North Coalition organizers allowed the advocates in question to assert themselves as representatives who directly identify with the "community" and, thus, transcended the board member's role as a racially descriptive representative. However, I should note, organizers did not allow them to use identity claims in ways that would undermine descriptive connections between other North Coalition members and the "community"—connections that were *residential* as well as racial.

Validation

By deploying the foregoing tactics, antipoverty advocates responded to challenges from opponents and constructed themselves as democratic representatives. But whether or not their claims achieved validation in dominant political and policy debates—whether the tactics actually worked—is a different question.

Existing scholarship suggests that advocacy organizations can, at least sometimes, gain meaningful recognition as democratic representatives in dominant institutions (Weldon 2011). But it is equally clear that particular organizations will fare differently, depending on, for example, their media savvy and the political-economic context (Rohlinger 2002; Ron and Cohen-Blankshtain 2011).

Given the enduring disadvantages that antipoverty advocates face, we might expect their claims to accountability to receive very little validation. Nevertheless, my

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own observations indicate that, in at least two ways, they can provisionally maneuver their way into dominant institutions and discourses as democratic representatives.

First, antipoverty advocates achieved validation in official government discourse. They did so by iterating and integrating their claims to accountability in the built spaces that buttressed this discourse, such as the state capitol, city hall, and the school district office (cf. Yanow 2006). As one Bailout Coalition organizer explained to legislative allies, regarding the question of where they would host an informal "people's hearing," "We definitely want it at the [state] capitol." She continued, explaining that doing so would mark the hearing more as an "official" and legitimate legislative proceeding than as an easily dismissed protest event.

Much of the time, antipoverty advocates could occupy the spaces of official government discourse simply by attending hearings, community meetings, and other events where they could capitalize on the relative openness of state and local government (cf. Berry 2010). The public testimonies quoted at different points in this chapter were all a part of this process.

Other times, however, public officials aggressively policed the spaces of official government discourse in order to, once again, challenge antipoverty advocates' democratic legitimacy. For example, in the case of the "people's hearing" mentioned above, the Bailout Coalition's legislative allies did, in fact, schedule a hearing room at the state capitol. But when the hearing started, organizers learned that the Republican legislative majority had turned off the room's built-in recording devices, diminishing the ties between this space and the official discourse. Similarly, in other cases discussed

throughout this chapter, officials used their privilege in the spaces of official government discourse to accuse advocates of "exploiting the community" and threaten them with "fully armed troopers." These cases ensured that advocates' successes in validating their claims to democratic legitimacy would remain provisional.

Outside of the official record, antipoverty advocates also leaned heavily on mainstream news media for validation. As many scholars have found, media discourse plays a significant role in conferring and/or denying democratic legitimacy to advocacy organizations (Gitlin 1980; Rohlinger 2002; Weldon 2011, 142-46). The *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the local paper of record, was most significant in this regard for the antipoverty advocates with whom I worked.

Getting coverage in the *Star Tribune* at all was a challenge for antipoverty advocates, especially given the lack of salience that often surrounds poverty as an issue (Metropolitan Council 2010). Even when staff writers for the paper provided coverage, they sometimes dismissed rather than validated advocates' claims. One article, for example, framed the Welfare Rights Committee's efforts in the state legislature as "misguided" "noise" and "hot air," far removed from the poor constituents to whom they claimed accountability (Grow 1995). Another article suggested that the North Coalition's claims were, in fact, largely out of step with north Minneapolis families, who, according to the reporter, had "lost confidence in the school" and saw it as "the smelly kid in gym class" that everybody wants to avoid (Mitchell 2011a).

More often, newspaper articles mentioning antipoverty advocates did, in fact, validate their claims to accountability and legitimacy. Articles on the North Coalition, for

example, validated their appeals to descriptive association. They quoted key coalition organizers as members of the North High School "community" who can speak to its "needs." And they cited public officials acknowledging that "the North High group [that is, the North Coalition] has valid concerns" for the community (Mitchell 2011b). Coverage of the Welfare Rights Committee tended to grant them a legitimacy grounded not only in descriptive associations with poor constituents but also their attempts to magnify the presence of these constituents. One article, for example, juxtaposed a quotation in which an organizer described herself and the organization as group of poor constituents ("We see a bunch of legislators tinkering with our lives") with a magnifying account of how they had "packed" a legislative "hearing" (Hopfensperger 1994). Finally, the Bailout Coalition also achieved validation in the news media. Citing particular victims of foreclosure with whom the coalition worked, multiple articles framed them as "advocates for" a broad constituency "fighting" against foreclosure (magnification) and as experts who have sufficiently internalized this constituency's concerns to "negotiate" with banks on their behalf (identification) (Simmons 2009).

In addition to the foregoing articles, the *Star Tribune* also—albeit, *very* infrequently—published op-ed pieces in which antipoverty advocates directly asserted their tactical claims (Panning-Miller 2010; Konechne and Molina 1996). Moreover, a handful of community newspapers provided validation in more circumscribed neighborhood-level contexts (e.g. Felien 2009; DeFranco 2012; Hallman 2011).

Antipoverty advocates generated much of the foregoing newspaper coverage simply by organizing newsworthy events. But they also took other steps to pressure

reporters and fashion stories in line with their claims (cf. Rohlinger 2002). For example, Welfare Rights Committee and Bailout Coalition organizers consistently planned press conferences, issued press statements, and "rounded up" sympathetic reporters for their public actions. The North Coalition, for their part, pressured school district officials to play the role of "political mediators" and cajole the media on their behalf (Amenta 2006).

A number of antipoverty advocates bypassed reporters and staff writers altogether and validated themselves by working for community newspapers. For example, Mel, the North Coalition organizer quoted earlier, had served as editor for the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, one of the two major African American community newspapers in Minneapolis. He also published a regular column in the paper that often discussed racial and economic justice issues. Likewise, Kim, an organizer with both the Welfare Rights Committee and the Bailout Coalition, had written for *Southside Pride*, a community newspaper rooted in south Minneapolis.

I do not want to overstate my point. Modern newspapers must sell themselves and appeal to a broad customer base. As a result, the baseline tendency of reporters is to ignore or dismiss the efforts of small groups of antipoverty advocates, regardless of how relevant their message may be (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). But, by creating news, pressuring reporters, utilizing existing connections, and reporting on themselves, advocates could and did move the news media off of this baseline. On the whole, the evidence suggests that antipoverty advocates can, in practice and on a provisional basis, secure public recognition as democratic representatives.

Conclusion

Antipoverty advocacy organizations provide a valuable source of democratic representation for the poor. As US cities and states continue to deal with the fallout of the most recent financial crisis, the potential contribution of these organizations will be even more valuable. It was, after all, the failure to adequately represent the poor that did as much as anything else to shape the crisis and its negative effects (Forrest 2013).

However, antipoverty advocates can rarely if ever take their status as democratic representatives for granted. Most of them, as they attempt to construct and assert poor constituents' interests, regularly confront legitimacy challenges.

Their vulnerability to such challenges stems, in large part, from disadvantages they encounter vis-à-vis the "constituency paradox" of democratic representation: that "democratic representation must posit as a starting point constituencies and interests that can take shape only by its means" (Disch 2012, 600). To mitigate these challenges and demonstrate accountability, advocates lean on some combination of four tactics. Each tactic is designed to either accommodate dominant promissory understandings of democratic representation in the absence of mass mobilization (magnification) or replace these understandings with others that advocates can more easily sustain (description, identification, and projection). By using these tactics, advocates can, at least provisionally, secure legitimacy as democratic representatives of the poor and other marginalized groups.

Some worry that, by grounding their claims to democratic legitimacy in magnification, description, identification, and projection *rather than* mobilization,

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antipoverty advocates might ultimately become their own source of demobilization. In other words, they might take the constraints of their political context for granted and, by doing so, reinforce them. Or, alternatively, they might resort to mobilizing only the most accessible and least marginalized poor constituents. Both of these outcomes are problematic. In the first, advocates reproduce the very practical disadvantages that expose them to legitimacy challenges in the first place (Reed 1999a). In the second, they contribute to patterns of secondary marginalization among their constituents and likely limit the scope of their representational efforts (Cohen 1999). That said, as my analysis suggests, without buttressing the pursuit of mobilization with a range of additional tactics, advocates risk losing their status as democratic representatives altogether, an equally problematic outcome.

For their part, all of the advocates in this study appeared to hold genuine commitments to retaining mass mobilization as a key facet of their efforts on behalf of the poor—albeit, some practiced this commitment more effectively and equitably than others. As one organizer in the North Coalition liked to say, "The world is decided by people who show up." A key part of advocacy, as he saw it, was to provide a space for all sorts of constituents to "show up," that is, to mobilize around and shape constructions of their interests. Yet, save for an extended period of political and social instability, antipoverty advocates will have to continue balancing their commitment to mobilization with the exigencies of becoming democratic representatives.

Chapter 6: Making Decisions, Constructing Interests

On November 9, 2010, the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools

withdrew and replaced her proposal to "phase out," or close, North Community High

School. Her decision frustrated several local officials who, like her, had maligned the

school as a "failure" or "underperformer" due to its declining enrollment and

standardized test scores (benchmarks of school performance in the era of NCLB).[1] But

she made it, nevertheless, in response to heavy pressure from the North High Community

Coalition (then known as the Save North High Coalition).

The North Coalition had, to the superintendent's chagrin, mobilized a heated and

citywide opposition to her initial proposal. This opposition effectively and rightly argued

that closing North High would only encourage and compound the public "abandonment"

of poor students in north Minneapolis (see chapter 4). Because of expanded school choice

and high-stakes testing, these students had already lost the support of many neighbors and

suffered the closure of several public schools.[2]

As a compromise and an alternative to closure, the superintendent's replacement

proposal outlined a school "turnaround" effort. It requested permission to hire an external

consultant who would lead district officials and "community stakeholders" (most notably,

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[1] In 2007, Don Samuels, the City Council representative of North High's ward, exclaimed a desire to "burn North High School down!" Though inflammatory and extreme, his statement differed from official sentiments more in degree than in kind (Collins 2007; Coleman 2010).

[2] This is not to mention how the fallout of the Great Recession and neoliberal initiatives beyond high-stakes testing and school choice, such as public housing demolition, also hurt north Minneapolis schools and students (Goetz 2003; Allen 2011).

the North Coalition) in designing a "new" North High. Like most NCLB-era turnaround

proposals, its primary objective was to make this new school "viable" within the district's

existing neoliberal regime of standardized testing and school choice. The proposal aimed,

in its own words, for North High to "drive academic achievement" on tests and better

compete for enrollment alongside the other school choices available to north Minneapolis

students.[3] At a meeting attended by more than 200 North High supporters, the school

board approved this proposal.

North Coalition organizers celebrated the board's decision as a partial victory. But

they also faced a contentious choice: whether they should, as student representatives,

embrace or resist the district's "turnaround" plan. In making this choice, they raised two

concerns. The first was that the plan, as outlined, declared broad support for North High

without clarifying what this declaration meant in terms of concrete resources. In fact, at

first, the superintendent and school board members explicitly placed the burden to

provide resources on the school's "community" and supporters. The superintendent stated

that "We need people on the other side of the table [that is, "the community"] to do work

everyday [to "turnaround" North High] because we don't have the funds. We don't have

the resources" (as if the school's students, families, and supporters had plentiful

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[3] While all Minneapolis students had access to a certain level of school choice, poor students in north Minneapolis had the most. Like all students they could "request" and receive transportation (or bus fare) to public schools in their "attendance zone," "citywide programs" located at public schools throughout Minneapolis, and multiple alternative and charter schools. But, in addition, they could request and receive transportation to Southwest High School (a public school located in the wealthier Fulton neighborhood of southwest Minneapolis) and public schools in several suburban districts.

resources). Hearing statements like these, some organizers feared that district officials were still planning to abandon the school.

The second concern stemmed from a provision regarding North High's 2011-2012 freshman class, its last pre-"turnaround" class. The provision required the school to recruit and enroll at least 125 students in this class as a condition for keeping it (the preceding freshman class, by comparison had less than fifty students). Board members defended this proposal by stating that North High would eventually need at least 100 to 125 students in every class to be considered cost-effective and "viable."[4] Many people worried that, if they did not meet the goal of recruiting 125 students, the loss of the incoming class would reiterate perceptions that North High was closing and, thereby, increase its *actual* likelihood of closing.[5]

While North Coalition organizers agreed on these concerns, they divided over how serious they were and, in turn, whether to embrace the district's plan. This division, which was already brewing before the board's decision, came to a head in their preparations for a community meeting on November 19. It arose, in particular, through disagreements about how to frame and announce this upcoming meeting to their public listserv.

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[4] This standard is contingent on funding and political debates about how many students belong in classrooms.

[5] Initially, the superintendent sought to deny the 2011-2012 class outright, citing studies that suggest school "turnarounds" work better when there is a year break between the "old" and "new" schools. The North Coalition opposed this proposal. School board members introduced the requirement of recruiting 125 students as a compromise that would, they hoped, placate this opposition.

Just over two days before the meeting, Stephen—a younger, experienced, and white socialist from a working class neighborhood in south Minneapolis and an active organizer in PEJAM—noticed that the group's leaders had yet to circulate a meeting announcement. Fearing that waiting longer to do so would diminish attendance, he bypassed leaders and sent one himself. In his announcement, he offered the following message:

> Last Tuesday the community campaign to stop the closure of North High School won a partial victory when the Minneapolis Board of Education voted 4 to 3 to keep North High open another year if the community could recruit 125 9th graders to the school by March. While this is a far cry from what the community was demanding, it shows that when we organize, we have real power. It also provides a new window of opportunity to continue to organize to save our school![6]

With these statements, Stephen insinuated that North High supporters should resist the district's "turnaround" plan and demand a firmer commitment to the school—that is, one free of qualifications related to enrollment or, he would later add, standardized test scores. The board and district's actions, he argued, were still a "far cry" from "community" demands and student interests.

While a vocal minority supported Stephen's message—including both citywide allies and avowed members of the north Minneapolis "community"—others took exception to it. Chief among them was Jamal, a black middle class homeowner in north Minneapolis who had graduated from North High in the nineties. He was also one of the

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[6] This first statement in this passage was, strictly speaking, false. According to the approved proposal, North High would remain open not "if" but regardless of whether "125 9th graders" enrolled. Stephen was stoking concerns, discussed above, that the school would face continued stigmatization and likely close without a 2011-2012 freshman class.

North Coalition's founding members, a participant in the Friends of North Foundation, a frequent chair at organizing meetings, and, most importantly, one of the coalition's leaders and spokespersons.

Jamal explained his displeasure with Stephen's message in a reply over the organizers' listserv:

> I'm not in agreeance [sic] with the messaging here. It's [the board's decision is] not a "far cry" from what we asked for. It [Stephen's "messaging"] has a tone that may keep people on a defensive blame game versus moving forward. Before anyone sends out anything else on the behalf of the group please send to the [other] organizers first. If we aren't on the same page it is going to be difficult organizing more people behind a cause.

For Jamal, the North Coalition's best choice was, without a doubt, to embrace the district's plan. They should, as "community stakeholders," address challenges that lower the test performance and enrollment of north Minneapolis students at North High (and, thus, the school's "viability"). Doing otherwise would only encourage a childish "blame game" and prevent the coalition from truly "moving forward" on these students' behalf.

In smaller meetings, without Jamal and his supporters, Stephen continued to defend his opposition to the district's plan. However, in this negotiating context—an email exchange before the entire coalition—he could not forcefully assert his stance and expect to be taken seriously. As he stated in an earlier conversation, "we [the organizers opposed to the "privatization of education"] just don't have the organic connection to the neighborhood and the school that someone like [Jamal] does." If division between the two camps erupted, "more people in the room would be willing to stand up and defend [Jamal]."

Taking this context into account, Stephen penned a rejoinder email that clarified his message but ultimately capitulated to Jamal's embrace of the district's plan. He stressed the abovementioned concerns that "The Board's decision of making North's future contingent on recruiting 125 […] creates a very uphill battle for us […] with no formal commitment of resources or support from the District"; and that "we should be very clear that […] in the very possible event that we are not able to recruit 125, we do not accept that it is legit for them to close the school down." However, he also granted that "of course we should go all-out trying to" recruit 125 students (thus, leaving much less energy for demanding more and firmer commitments from board members and district officials). And he circulated an amended announcement framing the district's plan as a "tall hurdle for our community campaign to overcome" (rather than, as before, a "far cry" from "community" demands).

As the community meeting came and went, the foregoing division persisted. Jamal and his supporters continued to emphasize consolidating their "partial victory" by "moving forward" in partnership with the district. Within weeks, they had dedicated nearly all of the North Coalition's efforts toward recruiting new students and advising the implementation of the "turnaround" plan. Stephen and others continued to (mostly) accept these efforts while stressing their additional concerns and doubts. Unsurprisingly, their presence and support began to dwindle as opportunities for more dissident action evaporated.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

As the story above illustrates, advocates' representational efforts are, at heart, a series of unavoidable, contentious, and collective choices: Should we accept this compromise? What should this announcement say? Which demands should we make? How should we frame these demands? And so on.

These choices are, in turn, the vehicle through which they construct constituents' interests. Each choice endorses a particular agenda or set of actions and, in doing so, sends a message about where these interests lie (Schattschneider 1960; Schneider and Ingram 1993; Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007; Disch 2012). For example, by choosing to embrace the district's "turnaround" plan, Jamal and other members of the North Coalition located poor students' interests in community-advised efforts to make their neighborhood schools "viable"—that is, higher performing, better attended, and cost-efficient. As advocates make more and more of these choices, the messages they send accumulate and cohere around constructions of their constituents' interests.

For contemporary antipoverty advocates, tactical decisions about how to represent and, as a consequence, construct constituent interests are especially fraught. Since the 1970s, neoliberal poverty initiatives such as school choice, welfare reform, and poverty deconcentration have suffused advocates' decisions with two contradictions (Goetz 2003; Lipman 2011; Soss Fording and Schram 2011). First, these initiatives aim to create equality by better incorporating the poor into dominant society but have—due to a misguided obsession with market competition and behavioral deficiency—reinforced their social marginality. Second, these initiatives aim to address racial and/or racialized differences among the poor but have, at best—and for the same reason—only

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reconfigured these differences (and their ties to other social distinctions, such as gender and housing tenure). Both contradictions follow the same formula: pursuing societal incorporation and equality in ways that perpetuate poverty and intersecting inequalities (Handler 2004). School choice programs, for example, aim to expand the poor's access to quality education and close racial and class "achievement gaps." But, in practice, they tend to disrupt and stratify educational access and perpetuate inequalities in achievement (Schneider et al 1997; Lipman 2011; Ravitch 2011).

Because of such contradictions, antipoverty advocates have few *prima facie* indicators of which representational choices will deposit the "right" or "best" constructions of the poor's interests. Should their decisions champion reforms to neoliberal initiatives that might better address institutional barriers to incorporation? Or should they locate the poor's interests in new initiatives that transform dominant institutions and directly reorder the distribution of resources, authority, and life chances in society? Should they make choices that underscore racial and other concrete social differences among the poor, even when dominant institutions tend to cast these differences as evidence of behavioral deficiency? Or should they try to suppress consideration of these differences?

How, then, do antipoverty advocates make their representational choices and come to effectively construct poor constituents' interests in some ways more than others? One general perspective suggest that advocates and other representatives make these choices by weighing some set of intrinsic and extrinsic—that is, subjective and objective—*motives* (Mansbridge 2003; Rehfeld 2009). Whereas the latter reflect a set of

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embodied political concerns (such as those stemming from commitment to a cause or tradition), the former reflect strategic incentives (such as those related to the need to attract resources and supporters). Antipoverty advocates, this perspective suggests, attach varying levels of importance to different motives and make choices that fit these levels.[7] Accordingly, we should treat their constructions of poor constituents' interests as by-product of what motivates them as a group.

Advocates themselves often attempt to explain and legitimate their tactical decisions by appealing to different motives. For example, in the story above, Jamal argued that the importance of "moving forward" drove his and, more generally, the North Coalition's support for district officials' "turnaround" efforts. He attributed this motive to both intrinsic and extrinsic sources. Intrinsically, he suggested, it satisfied a commitment to pursuing a mature politics that avoids the "defensive blame game." And, extrinsically, as long as organizers were all "on the same page," it provided a strategically beneficial framework for "organizing" supporters to get "behind" their "cause."

While illuminating in many ways, a motivation-based perspective bypasses the most important aspect of advocates' decision-making process: the collective—that is, intersubjective—*negotiations* through which they actually debate, articulate, and clarify their tactical and representational choices. An alternative perspective suggests that advocates make their decisions not by weighing motives but by participating in these negotiations with one another (Eliasoph 1998; Saward 2006). As they negotiate, this

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[7] Many studies of political representation have developed far more nuanced and interesting versions of this perspective than the generic one I have presented here (e.g. Arnold 1990; Tarrow 1998; Canon 1999; Weldon 2011).

perspective argues, leaders and other influential members evoke and police different assumptions about the underlying purpose of the group's efforts.[8] It is, in turn, these assumptions, rather than pre-existing motives, that shape and constrain advocates' choices and attendant appeals to different constituent constructions. Practically speaking, members must invoke or subordinate themselves to such assumptions if they wish to shape, defend, or criticize the choices of the group. For example, in the exchange between Stephen and Jamal, Stephen ultimately submitted to the assumed importance of "moving forward" because, by his own account, he had to in order to retain his influence over the North Coalition's negotiations and representational choices.[9]

To be clear, a negotiation-based perspective does not argue that advocates' motives are irrelevant. It *does* argue, however, that salient motives do not naturally exist, intrinsically or extrinsically. Rather, advocates' negotiations mediate and reinforce presumptions about what should and should not motivate their collective choices (Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Strolovitch 2007). So, if the idea of "moving forward" appeared to consistently motivate the North Coalition's choices, then, according to a negotiation-based perspective, it was because organizers like Jamal had effectively privileged it through negotiations.

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[8] As I describe below, these assumptions constitute what others have called each negotiation's "footing" (Goffman 1981; Eliasoph 1998).

[9] Many advocates, I should note, do not negotiate as purposefully and consciously as Stephen.

The rest of this chapter applies this second perspective. It examines, in more detail, the constitutive link between antipoverty advocates' collective negotiations, representational and tactical choices, and constituent constructions.

Organizing Meetings

I advance my analysis in this chapter by examining the organizing meetings and internal communications of the North Coalition and the Welfare Rights Committee. The core members of each organization used these meetings and emails to share updates and announcements, discuss messaging and tactics, and plan future actions. They were, in short, the spaces where advocates most regularly negotiated with one another and made choices relating to their efforts on behalf of the poor.

Traces of their collective negotiations also emerged in other settings. For example, the diffuse assumptions and motives that their negotiations elevated and/or suppressed often presented themselves in less routinized "backstage" settings, such as side conversations (cf. Mansbridge 1980; Eliasoph 1998). Likewise, the constituent constructions that emerged out of their negotiations and choices were typically evident in more routinized "front stage" settings, such as legislative hearings and protests (see chapter 7; cf. Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998).

But it was in organizing meetings and other internal communications where advocates' negotiations took their most elaborate form, channeling diffuse "backstage" concerns into "front stage" representational efforts. Even seemingly innocuous or ordinary parts of organizing meetings evinced the contours of ongoing negotiations. Take, for example, the act of sharing announcements, something that happened in most

meetings I attended. Advocates often used these announcements to encourage group attendance at upcoming events—such as a protest, a talk, or a vote in the state legislature—where particular constructions might play a large role. Or, in contrast, they sometimes avoided announcing events they supported, *if* these events were associated with constructions of the poor that their negotiations seemed to dismiss. Stephen, for example, rarely announced socialist-organized events, where adversarial constructions would predominate, in North Coalition meetings. In different negotiating contexts, he was not so hesitant.

Negotiations

Collective negotiations among the advocates I worked with and studied had two mutually constitutive features. First, was their political "footing" (Goffman 1981). Nina Eliasoph (1998, 21) offers an apt description of Goffman's concept, which she also calls "political manners" or "etiquette":

> Are there stairs here? loose gravel? ice? To walk we have to assess the footing. Talking is the same: are we talking to make conversation? to accomplish a task? to show off? The footing draws on that "inexhaustible reservoir" of "common knowledge" on which participants rely for interpreting each other's conversations, which members intuitively understand to be giving meaning to the interaction.

The political footing is, in short, a more formal name for the assumed collective purpose and logic of engagement that advocates, especially leaders and organizers, establish/police in and through their negotiations.

The second feature of these negotiations was their proclivity or aversion toward choices rooted in different types of constituent constructions. As I discussed in chapters 1 and 3, the advocates I studied drew on a repertoire of four types (see figure 6.1). The first

type, *common/class inclusion*, locates poor constituents' interests in efforts to expand their aggregate economic competitiveness and societal incorporation through reforms to dominant neoliberal institutions. The second type, *shared/community inclusion*, emphasizes removing the intersecting barriers to incorporation that affect differentiated and often especially marginalized poor communities. Given the high poverty in segregated and predominantly non-white neighborhoods, advocates using this construction most often identified distinct poor communities in terms of race and geography. But they have also pointed to housing tenure, gender, criminal record, and other social distinctions. The third type, *common/class struggle*, focuses on efforts to transform neoliberal institutional arrangements and directly redistribute resources, authority, and life chances to the poor. Finally, the fourth type, *shared/community struggle*, also locates the poor's interests in efforts to transform dominant neoliberal institutions. But it does so with an eye toward how intersecting inequalities shape and differentiate the relationship of these institutions to distinct poor communities.

These four types vary along two key dimensions (see chapter 1). The first dimension specifies whether they articulate the solidarity underlying these interests as unitary (that is, based in some *common* marginalized position or identity) or intersectional (that is, based in *shared* but also differentiable and distinct relationships to neoliberalism and other sources of marginalization). Whereas proponents of *common/class struggle* and *inclusion* tend to articulate a unity characteristic of the former, proponents of *shared/community struggle* and *inclusion* tend to address patterns of differentiation between poor constituents that suggest the latter.

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The second dimension captures whether each construction articulates the poor's relationship to the dominant neoliberal institutions as adversarial or cooperative. In other words, constituent constructions convey whether policymakers must transform or simply reform and extend these institutions to accommodate the poor's interests. Proponents of *common/class* and *shared/community struggle* suggest an adversarial relationship by rejecting the neoliberal logic of dominant institutions and calling for the reordering of society. In contrast, proponents of *common/class* and *shared/community inclusion* call for reforms that foster greater access to dominant society and take the neoliberal logic of dominant institutions for granted, implying a more cooperative relationship.

Figure 6.1
Antipoverty Advocacy and Constituent Constructions
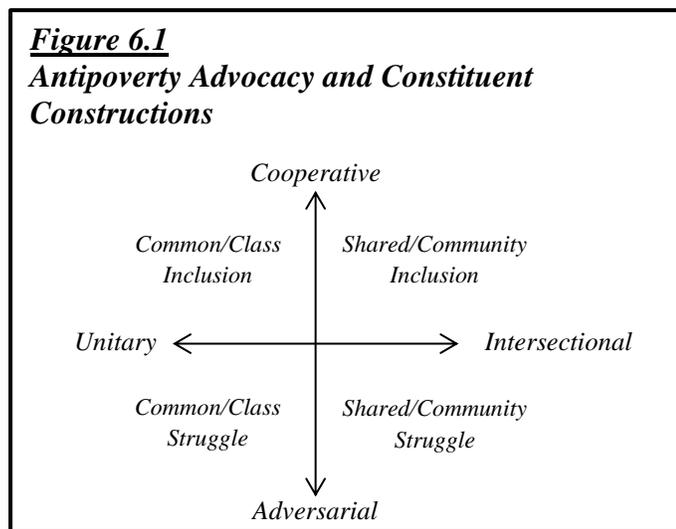
The following sections examine the collective negotiations and representational choices of the North Coalition and the Welfare Rights Committee in terms of their political footing and resulting tendencies to favor particular constituent constructions over others.

"Being Positive" and "Moving Forward" with the North Coalition

In the North Coalition, collective negotiations and choices cohered around a

presumed need to "move forward" with a "positive" attitude about North High's future.

Organizers evoked and defended this footing through several email announcements.

These announcements magnified even the smallest accomplishments and affirmed the

idea that, with enough "positive energy," the coalition's efforts absolutely *would* benefit

north Minneapolis students:

> [A] rare but yet substantial opportunity to mend, balance, and excel is amongst us.
>
> We have committees ready to take on their charge, A game-plan will be set and we *will* recruit 125 [students] to attend North in 2011.
>
> We are all a community, designated to serve the same purpose, to create a refreshing and positive image and perception for North High.
>
> Today was great!!! There was a ton of positive energy and great information given and shared with our community today. I just want to thank all that put in the work to make this event [a "community potluck"] a success. Without each and every one of you we would not be as far as we are and we will need that energy moving forward […].

As the coming paragraphs will show, the emphasis in these statements on being

"positive" and "moving forward" meant something much more specific than cultivating a

hopeful disposition—something most advocates do (Gamson and Meyer 1996). It meant

forming a "partnership" between school district officials and the North High

"community." And it meant emphasizing what can be done *through* that partnership to

reform district management of North High and benefit north Minneapolis students.

The North Coalition's "positive" footing was evident from my earliest

observations of their organizing meetings. One meeting, in particular, revealed its

significance. This meeting, held in November 2010, followed the week in which the

school board decided to redesign and "turnaround" (rather than close) North High. Its purpose was to decide how the North Coalition should respond to the board's decision and frame their "next steps."

Jamal—the group leader introduced above—led the way in establishing positivity and "moving forward" as the primary motives for making these choices. Acting as meeting chair, he opened the meeting by simply asking, "What is our unified message" regarding the district's plan for North High? Before others could answer, he responded with his "personal opinion" "that all messaging should be positive." The school board's decision was, he admitted, "not perfect," in the sense that it did not clarify the district's long-term commitment to North High. Nevertheless, he emphasized that "we're in a unique position to move the school forward." Here, he referred specifically to the opportunity to make North High a "viable" choice in "partnership" with the district and other "community stakeholders." For Jamal, "moving forward [with this opportunity] in a positive light" would do the most to benefit north Minneapolis students.[10]

Most of the other twenty or so meeting participants agreed with or at least acquiesced to Jamal's opinion. This group included the other members of the Friends of North High (the organization partially led by Jamal that constituted an influential part of the coalition's core membership) and the executive directors of two of the other three primary member organizations.

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[10] Jamal's statements exemplified a broader discourse centered on the "power of positive-thinking." As a mid-level employee at an international corporation and the holder of a business degree, Jamal was active in discursive communities where positive-thinking discourse had gained a strong foothold (Ehrenreich 2009).

Jamal and his supporters offered two reasons why "being positive" and "moving forward" was better than, as one person put it, "do[ing] the political thing"—that is, "pressuring" the school district and public officials with critical attention. The first reason, suggested by Jamal, was that critical and dissident efforts lack maturity. He acknowledged that the North Coalition would, at times, need to "apply pressure for accountability." However, he emphasized, the group should send this message "behind the scenes" rather than through public pressure and criticism. "We can spin it [our message]," he summarized, "in a way that's not like [shaking his fist and speaking with a nasally voice] 'oh, look at us down here.'" That is to say, for Jamal, radical public criticism offered only a childish distraction from "the work we have in front of us"— namely, "putting forward something viable" in partnership with the district and the "community." He affirmed this thought in a later email to the group, where he compared district officials and advocates publicly battling each other to "immature adolescents."

A handful of meeting participants—in particular, Dan, a local racial and economic justice organizer, and Mary, an African American studies professor at a local college— offered a different and more compelling reason for "being positive." "We can't pitch storming the district and the capitol to parents," Dan said, not because it is politically immature but because it is politically marginalizing. He affirmed that the North Coalition should not simply accept "the next round of gimmicks and initiatives" or "the latest fad" from district officials. Nonetheless, he argued, maintaining a thoroughly dissident stance against district officials and calling for institutional transformation would require a mass mobilization in which many north Minneapolis students and families were unable and/or

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unprepared to participate.[11] As representatives, Mary said, "We have to start with people where they're at." 'Where they're at,' Dan continued, is looking to find a good school for their kids. Consequently, the North Coalition's best course of action was to consolidate its "partial victory" and emphasize what *can* be done by to build a good school by cultivating "strong ties" and "partnership" between the North High, the district, and the "community."

The North Coalition's political footing precluded, most obviously, choices rooted in adversarial constructions of poor students' interests (*common/class* and *shared/community struggle*). These constructions would have underscored systemic problems with the district's neoliberal regime of open enrollment and standardized testing; called for sustained public criticism of this regime; and suggested that, without institutional transformation, North High students faced the strong possibility of a *negative* future.

That is not to say that North Coalition members never attempted to link their negotiations and tactical choices to adversarial constructions. A vocal minority of socialists (including Stephen), skeptical neighborhood residents, and a handful of other participants struggled to give adversarial appeals a more "positive" valence. 'Of course,' this minority suggested, the district's redesign process provides "a real opportunity" to benefit North High and north Minneapolis, one that deserves a "positive vision" and "lots

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[11] As I summarized in chapter 5, post-civil rights shifts in poverty management—such as the elimination of welfare entitlements, the reduction of community development, and the expansion of policing and incarceration—have further diminished the already low political resources and capabilities of many of these students and families.

of excitement." But, they continued, being positive and moving forward should not mean placing "false trust" in district officials who had almost "orphaned" the school and continued to malign it as a "failure." Stephen declared that "We can't be bound by the district['s]" emphasis on performance and enrollment (that is, "viability"), the same criteria it regularly used to *justify* school closures in north Minneapolis. The North Coalition must, he continued, "define our own criteria for success" and build a "positive" redesign campaign around those—even if these criteria suggest the need for hard-to-win institutional transformations.

A different approach, used by the same group, attempted to make room for adversarial constructions simply by stressing the limits of "being positive" and "moving forward" under a neoliberal regime of public education. For example, in an email to coalition organizers on the North High "Community Advisory Board"—a district-run board tasked with advising North High's "turnaround"—I stated the following:

> Based on what I've heard, ISA [the 'external consultant' hired to direct the redesign of North High] will institute reforms that address issues confronting "individual" students at North (this much was emphasized in their info session on April 19). That's great; they should do that. But we should also press upon ISA that most issues affecting education at North High are not "individual," but collective and extend far beyond the walls of North High (at least in my humble opinion). It's not that individual students have health issues; it's that North High's students, as a collective, are less likely than other collectives to have access to quality health care and a healthy environment. It's not that individual students are bored or have trouble getting interested in "high expectations" and "academic excellence"; it's that North High's students, as a collective, are more likely to see first-hand that the "American Dream" hasn't been set aside for everyone and, consequently, lose interest in pursuing it. […] [P]lease do not let ISA mistake the collective injustices created by broad socioeconomic inequality for "individual" issues. Otherwise, they will likely spread false hope about what their efforts to address "individual" students can reasonably accomplish. North High supporters need to remain aware that a "redesign" can never substitute for the political mobilization and policy changes needed to create an equitable public education system.

Regardless of how members crafted them, the foregoing adversarial appeals

mostly failed to resonate. Even adversarial messages that acknowledged the importance

of "being positive" cultivated doubts about what doing so would accomplish: What if

North High cannot "turnaround" according to the district's plan? What if district officials

will not or cannot commit necessary administrative support and resources to the school?

What if the "turnaround" works—raising test scores and enrollment—but nevertheless

fails to raise the life chances of poor students in north Minneapolis? When, at one point,

some of these doubts began to overtake email discussions, leaders treated them as a

nuisance rather than a cause for reflective deliberation. Jamal, for example, circulated an

email commanding other organizers to "keep the listserv emails to action items."[12]

In extreme cases, attempts to align the coalition's choices with adversarial

constructions provoked strong reprimands from group leaders. For example, in a separate

incident from the one recorded at this chapter's outset, Jamal berated Stephen for sending

an email that criticized the coalition's choice to partner with district officials. Stephen, in

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[12] I should note that I actually penned this email for Jamal. In a previous meeting, several people reported that excessive deliberation over the North Coalition organizers' listserv was leading some members to miss crucial messages—about, for example, meeting times and action items. For this reason, those of us at the meeting decided to limit open-ended discussions on the listserv. However, a number of us agreed to this decision only *under the assumption* that we would maintain another forum—such as a message board—where discussions could continue. As part of the group's decision, I agreed to write an email, to be sent by Jamal, that would set ground rules for using the organizers' listserv. But nobody followed up with the second step of building and maintaining another forum. From that moment on, open-ended and critical deliberations about the coalition's efforts were, to a much greater extent, relegated to "backstage" spaces.

criticizing the choice, located students' interests in the pursuit of a *common/class*

struggle:

> I wonder how much longer the partnership model of working with the District
> will continue to serve this cause [to benefit north Minneapolis students],
> particularly if partnership comes at the expense of a campaign to relentlessly
> expose and protest the District, to demand real public statements of commitment
> to North, including a clear budget plan, infusion of resources, attractive
> programs, etc.

Without reproaching Stephen by name, Jamal wrote the following response:

> As a member of this group and in charge of sending communications, I want
> to address an issue that is creating more havoc than good. Using language that
> disrespects anyone including the district is not appropriate. It's divisive, does not
> accomplish anything nor does it get us anywhere.
>
> […] We do not want to squash the opinions of individuals in this group, but as a
> coalition working to improve the lives and education of this community, we must
> speak with one voice. The North High Community Coalition voice is one of
> collaboration [with the school district] and positive movement for change. […]
>
> If you aren't with the positive movement this coalition has created, there are
> other opportunities for you get involved in the community.

The emphasis on "positive movement" in Jamal's email lent far more authority to

decisions rooted in cooperative constructions of poor students' interests, especially those

centered on *shared/community inclusion*. Both *common/class* and *shared/community*

inclusion located students' interests in efforts to make North High a "viable" public

choice. Consequently, both met the primary requirement of "being positive": they

encouraged a cooperative "partnership" with district officials and support for their

"turnaround" plan. On the other hand, only a construction of *shared/community inclusion*

appealed to the other requirement, that this "partnership" should acknowledge and

address specific challenges facing poor students in the "community." As one north

Minneapolis resident said, the district must "define […] programs that are uniquely

matched to the [north Minneapolis] community" and "attract students from around the city who would benefit from those programs."

This appeal to *shared/community inclusion* suggested that North High students were primarily challenged by intersecting and community-specific barriers to high achievement—such as needs for greater mentorship, parental involvement, housing stability, and a healthy learning environment. Thus, "positive" redesign efforts should respond accordingly, engaging students' communities, identifying lingering barriers through this engagement, and implementing a suitable program to raise their academic performance. Early program suggestions from North Coalition members included, for example, offering more mentorship opportunities, providing on-site housing services, and "greening" the classroom and curriculum.

Importantly, I should note, North Coalition members limited the intersectional logic underlying their appeals to *shared/community inclusion* in at least one significant way. Despite the fact that north Minneapolis is home to many resettled and low-income Hmong families (see chapter 2), negotiations in meetings paid little attention to the language barriers and other barriers facing students and parents from these families (Barajas et al 2012). Though, at different moments, individual members did raise a need to "reach out" more to members of this "community."

At times, a number of North Coalition members—mostly neighborhood residents—did attempt to link "being positive" to a construction of *common/class inclusion*. This group stressed, more specifically, the importance of *rebranding* and *marketing* North High as a "good," or respectable, school choice. One member of this

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group—a north Minneapolis resident and staff member at MPS headquarters—argued that "We [the North Coalition and the district] need to package the *positive* things [happening in the school] right now." Doing so, others suggested, would get "our customers" (that is, students and teachers) "excited" about the school and raise performance. It would also, they suggested, create "incentives" for talented students, experienced teachers, local businesses, and neighborhood and city residents from many social backgrounds to join and support them.

This *common/class inclusion* construction implied that the primary issue facing North High students and the "turnaround" effort was the "failing" school label itself (that is, rather than the intersecting barriers that the label obscures—as in the *shared/community inclusion* construction).[13] The label, many coalition members suggested, discouraged students, drove away support, and prevented North High from effectively competing with middle-class schools under the NCLB regime. In response, they argued, redesign efforts should implement a targeted and "positive" marketing strategy around the school.[14] The redesign, one member asserted, must "figure out who

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[13] Under this *common/class inclusion* construction, advocates cast the poor students of North High as what Schneider and Ingram (1993) call "dependents." Schneider and Ingram (1993, 336) describe dependents as groups that are "considered to be politically weak, but […] carry generally positive constructions." In this case, advocates constructed poor students as dependents who are being pushed around because of "failing" school stereotypes that are no fault of their own and have no tie to their actual situation.

[14] Sanford Schram refers to this phenomenon—of replacing stigmatizing labels with normalizing ones—as the "politics of euphemisms." As he argues, "Isolated acts of renaming […] are unlikely to help promote political change if they are not tied to interrogations of the structures that serve as the interpretive context for making sense of new terms. This is especially the case when renamings take the form of euphemisms

our customers are and advertise to them, saying 'North [High] is exactly what you need.'"

Appeals to *common/class inclusion* did, at different moments, receive widespread support from the North Coalition's leaders and members. During one meeting, for example, several members expressed desires to produce a commercial that would spread a "positive" image of North High. In a different meeting, many members issued support for starting an "I chose North" campaign—note the emphasis on *choice*—in which current students and alumni would record *YouTube* videos explaining their decision to attend North High.

Later on, in a meeting of the school district's Community Advisory Board for the redesign of North High, several coalition members appealed to *common/class inclusion* in a discussion about how to revise North High's curriculum. More specifically, they evaluated several proposed curricular changes based on whether these changes would be "marketable" and "attractive" to students and other observers. Several people openly considered different ideas solely on the basis of how they "would sell"—in effect, positioning curricular decisions primarily as opportunities to brand the school. For example, Davis, a key member of the coalition and a North High alumnus, suggested that we make our decision simply by asking "what's the one thing this school can offer that no other school can?" Another meeting participant—a former MPS school board member and North Coalition supporter—used concerns about image and marketability to

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designed to make what is described appear to be consonant with the existing order" (Schram 1995, 21).

completely displace the discussion of curriculum, stating that "We need to look at our current strengths are and ask how we can give that more visibility."

Ultimately, the North Coalition's decisions mitigated the foregoing appeals to *common/class inclusion* in favor of "moving forward" under the terms of *shared/community inclusion*. The idea of producing a North High commercial, for instance, was nixed. Several organizers argued that it would waste time and resources that might be used to engage more directly with interested community members. Dan, the organizer introduced above, argued that "I think maybe a better use of the money would be to just hire a staff person to make calls [to community residents and prospective students] for 20 hours a week." While his suggestion was never implemented, it raised doubts that effectively killed the commercial idea. The "I chose North" campaign also faltered, producing only a handful of videos.[15] While North Coalition organizers supported the campaign's positivity, they spent the bulk of their time planning more engaged events such as a "community potluck" at the school and an overnight gathering for neighborhood students at the local YMCA. Finally, in the Community Advisory Board's discussion of curriculum, several coalition members eventually squelched the obsession with marketability in favor of one focused on substance and the community-specific barriers to achievement facing poor students in north Minneapolis. For example, Mary, the college professor mentioned above, exhorted everyone in the meeting to "be real about the community we're working in. We need something that's going to give

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[15] See http://www.youtube.com/user/ichosenorth?feature=watch.

these kids a leg up." Jamal, who was also in the meeting, and others—even those who had focused so much on branding—agreed.

Through the collective negotiations, the North Coalition had decided that the best way to represent North High students and, as Jamal described several months earlier, "move forward in a positive light" was not simply to market a positive image (*common/class inclusion*). And it certainly was not to, as Dan had put it, "pitch storming the district and the capitol to parents" (*common/class* or *shared/community struggle*). Instead, the coalition suggested, North High students' best interests laid in district-coordinated efforts to, in Mary's words, engage the "community we're working in" and "give these kids a leg up" against the multiple and intersecting barriers they face as members of that community (*shared/community inclusion*).

"Fighting Back" with the Welfare Rights Committee

In sharp contrast to the North Coalition, the Welfare Rights Committee structured their negotiations around the need to "fight back" against "oppression"—a political footing that Stephen and many others in the North Coalition surely would have preferred. The committee's fliers and recruitment materials persistently evoked this footing, declaring a need to "Beat Back the Republican Attack," "Fight Back," "Stand Strong," and say "Enough is Enough!"

As with "being positive," "fighting back" meant much more to the Welfare Rights Committee than the obvious. It meant more, in other words, than simply being contentious—again, something most advocates do at some point (Tarrow 1998). For committee members, as I will show, "fighting back" meant articulating a struggle

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between dissident communities of welfare recipients and the political and economic elites who benefit from and support neoliberal poverty management. Moreover, it meant underscoring benefits for poor constituents that could only come by winning that struggle in the name of a more radically egalitarian and democratic welfare state.

As schooled advocates, Welfare Rights Committee organizers were careful to enforce their focus on "fighting back" through explicitly stated and written principles. A statement about "What we stand for," which the committee distributed to prospective members at their annual "Celebration," laid out their footing succinctly:

> WRC is opposed to welfare cuts. There is not a kinder gentler way to cut welfare. Welfare is what many of us need to survive, and already it's not enough. We cannot compromise with people's lives. Welfare Rights are Human Rights!
>
> WRC works to put out the big picture: What we all really need are living wage jobs, affordable housing, free education, and childcare, and healthcare. This society needs to recognize raising children as valuable work. Until these things are in place for everyone there will be a need for welfare.
>
> We see the current attacks on welfare as racist, sexist, anti-poor, and anti-immigrant. We are committed to fighting all these systems of oppression.

Preceding these principles was a summary statement, bolded and underlined, declaring that "We are a group of low-income people fighting so poor families can survive, not just for now but for the future." Organizers cultivated an overall sense that "fighting" means battling against anyone and everyone who accepts "attacks on welfare," even those attacks that take a "kinder gentler" form. To do otherwise would be to "compromise with people's lives" and accept several racialized and gendered "systems of oppression."

At the start of organizing meetings, Welfare Rights Committee organizers often affirmed the group's emphasis on "fighting back" through the act of sharing introductions. During these introductions, the chair called on each meeting attendee to

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"Just say your name and what it is that brought you here or, if you've been here awhile, say why you keep coming back." At times, members would use introductions as an opportunity to crack jokes, such as, "I keep coming back because this is the only group that will take me." Others might mention social benefits of the committee, remarking, for example, that it has "cool people." But, by and large, introductions were a time to underscore the importance of "beating back the attacks" from elected officials who control and benefit from the existing regime of poverty management. Some of the following comments were typical explanations for "why I keep coming back":

> I think the easiest way to put it is just to say that, these politicians, they know that what they're trying to do is eventually going to kill people. And we expose that. […] We point out the big stuff so that they can't get away with the small stuff.

> I'm also against the Republicans. But I also am out there to get on the Democrats too. Because, while the Republicans are doing all their stuff, they are just sitting there not doing anything to stop it. Then they all say that they have to hold back until they can get regain "power" in the elections, at which point they will… [sarcastically] continue to do nothing? […] What it is is that they [politicians] just want to force us to work for the most meager wages possible, or even work for free—i.e. workfare.

> I keep coming back because this group is awesome. We don't just sit here and talk about things, you know. We actually go out there and take actions to change things. […] We're the only group that speaks up on behalf of poor women and families. And we're the only ones that are out there pushing legislation for poor people that actually takes care of what we need. […] If we didn't do the stuff we do, then some really horrible things would become law.

> We really are one of the few voices that consistently speaks truth to power about these issues. And it's because we have no conflict of interest. We're not a nonprofit. We're a group of volunteers, women and men. We're all either currently on welfare or have had to use welfare in the past.

These introductions regularly reminded everyone that the Welfare Rights Committee is an organization that "fights back." Moreover, they clearly associated this fight with a choice to "expose" and "take actions" against elected officials who support

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"workfare" and other neoliberal initiatives. These initiatives, as most committee members understood them, do not "actually take care of what we [the poor] need" and can "eventually […] kill people" if taken to the extreme.

Through the foregoing introductions, organizers created opportunities for both newer and current members to affirm each other's commitments to "fighting back." Members provided affirmation not only through their own introductions but also through their responses to those of others. The most critical statements about bad politicians and oppressive policies—including those quoted above—often received applause, smiles, and exclamations of "Yes!" and "Alright!" Statements that went off-script or, in any case, did not so thoroughly celebrate "fighting back" evoked less praise. For new and existing members alike, these contrasting responses created a subtle social pressure to buy into the group's political footing. Indeed, after several months with the Welfare Rights Committee, I realized that I had unconsciously altered my own introductions in order to emphasize the "fight back" and gain approval.

Through introductions, Welfare Rights Committee members also offered two related reasons why "fighting back" was a better choice than, say, 'moving forward' in cooperation and 'partnership' with elected and public officials. The first reason is suggested in the last statement quoted above, which came from Barb, a white working class mother and one of the Welfare Rights Committee's founding and most influential members. Barb suggested that efforts to partner with officials would only result in a politically harmful "conflict of interest." The "conflict" she referred to was—in the words of the other quoted introductions—between the interest of "poor women and families" in

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meeting their needs and the interest of elected officials and the wealthy in making the

poor "work for the most meager wages possible." According to Barb, organizations that

do not "fight back" against elites become mired in this conflict and, thus, lose their ability

to "speak truth to power." On multiple occasions, she and others explained that members

of organizations that do not "fight back" "just sit around talking about" (versus resisting)

systemic problems with workfare and other neoliberal initiatives.[16] To prove their point,

Barb and the other committee organizers often raised the specter of nonprofit social

service organizations or, as they sometimes called them, "poverty pimps." These

"poverty pimps," they argued, gained the support of elected officials and liberal

foundations but did so at the expense of capitulating to a neoliberal and harmful status

quo (cf. Reed 2000; Arena 2012).

The committee's second reason to "fight back" was to highlight what many of

them called the "big picture." Karen, another founding and influential member, put the

point directly in one of the introductions quoted above: "We point out the big stuff so

they can't get away with the small stuff." The "big stuff"—as clarified in their official

statement on "What we stand for"—was that many women need welfare because they do

not have access to "living wage jobs, affordable housing, free education, and childcare,

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[16] This distinction between "taking action" against systemic problems and "just sitting around talking" about those problems was pervasive in the Welfare Rights Committee. One time, without thinking, I mentioned in a small organizing discussion that "Usually, when I have any sort of idea in any part of my life, it usually kind of is just in the air awhile before I pick it up." What I received next was more or less a lecture on the importance of quick and direct action: "Well, we're pretty much the opposite." "Yeah, we jump on things." "Our group is one that is very oriented towards action. We have an idea. Then right away we're working on making it happen."

and healthcare," and because society does not "recognize raising children as valuable work." Compromising at all with politicians who would cut or reduce access to welfare simply denies this "big picture" of gendered and racialized inequality and poverty. The bogeyman here was, again, liberal nonprofit organizations, many of which only worked to secure poverty reduction within the purview of neoliberal "welfare reform."

Just as the North Coalition's focus on "moving forward in a positive light" suppressed adversarial constructions, the Welfare Rights Committee's focus on "fighting back" left little room for choices linked to cooperative constructions. However, in contrast to the North Coalition, the committee experienced far less internal dissent on this matter. Most of the time, members did not even consider making decisions geared toward cooperative constructions of poor constituents' interests.

At least two organizational features help to explain this silence. First, unlike the North Coalition, which had newly formed in response to a threatened school closure, the Welfare Rights Committee was an older organization. By the time I met the group, they had already existed for almost twenty years. Over this period, the committee's representational efforts had become incredibly routinized. Very few, if any, situations arose in which organizers did not already have a protocol for how to respond and "fight back." In comparison, during the early days of the North Coalition, almost every situation felt new, creating a lot more uncertainty and room for debate.

Second, as I stated at the outset of this section, the Welfare Rights Committee's entire public image and outreach effort was so heavily imbued with their "fight back" footing that people who disagreed with it would only rarely show up at a meeting. The

North Coalition, on the other hand, initially opened itself up to anybody who opposed the closing of North High, a group that was politically diverse and not always interested in "being positive."

In the few instances where cooperative appeals emerged, meeting attendees drew clear and certain lines between these appeals and the need to "fight back." During an August 2011 meeting, for example, a debate arose about how the group should "fight" against Barack Obama. President Obama had, in a recent debate over the federal government's debt limit, shown an openness to Republican demands for neoliberal reforms to Medicare and other entitlement programs. Although he did not actually concede Republic demands per se, he agreed to support a so-called budget "super-committee" that would consider them and, in all likelihood, support cutting assistance to the poor.[17]

Several meeting attendees came out strongly in favor of, as Karen put it, "going after Obama […] for protecting the rich." Barb likened Obama's actions to Bill Clinton's decision to enact welfare reform in cooperation with a Republican-controlled Congress:

> It all stems back to welfare reform. You know, it took a Democrat to get welfare reform passed. Because if it had been some Republican up there trying to do it, people would've been screaming and yelling. But because it was a Democrat, people didn't react back as much. […] And the thing now is they're going to go after the entitlements. And, again, it's taking a Democrat to get it done so that people won't oppose it as strongly. If it was a Republican in office, they would be going crazy on the other side.

I supported and extended her stance:

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[17] This "super committee," as we now know, failed to reach any budget compromises and allowed the enactment of the much-maligned 2013 budget sequestration. Many of the sequester budget cuts negatively affected programs that aid the poor (Lowrey 2013).

There's a lot of people who will try to say, oh you know Obama had to compromise because he was being strategic. He wants to get re-elected. But the thing is, this wasn't even in his electoral interest. Saving entitlements was supposed to be the Democrats' issue going into the next round of elections. […] But, with this, they gave the issue away. So, the only conclusion you can come to is that this is what he actually wants. I mean, Obama may not be proposing something as extreme as they [Republican legislators] are. But it follows the same logic. It's all about cutting services.

But not everybody was immediately convinced that the Welfare Rights Committee should openly and aggressively criticize the president. One skeptic was Cheryl, a working class black woman who often attended meetings. Cheryl argued that "[W]e need him [Obama] to stay in because it's only going to get worse if there's a Republican in there." Margaret, also black and the eldest member of the committee, made a similar case:

I think we need to support Obama. He may not be perfect but he's a lot better than whoever they'll put in there. And he's dealing with a lot of attacks from the right. They're trying to bring him down. I think we can't let that happen.

Without being too specific, Cheryl and Margaret's comments located poor constituents' interests in efforts to secure somewhat better neoliberal reforms under an Obama presidency. Interestingly, outside of this instance, Margaret never placed herself in favor of a cooperative construction, and Cheryl only did so rarely. While neither mentioned race specifically, everybody assumed and accepted that racial concerns were, in fact, the explanation for this exception (see, for example, Grace's response below). This reading of Margaret and Cheryl's comments suggests that they encouraged a cooperative-leaning choice because they feared that overly critical efforts might accidentally feed the racist backlash against Obama and the civil rights movement. This backlash, where successful, stood to hurt not only the president but—through the erosion

of voting rights protections and other policy shifts—members of black communities as well. It was, thus, partly a concern about how racism intersected with the experiences of many women on welfare that drove their concerns (*shared/community inclusion*).

Organizers in the room replied by reaffirming the need to "fight back" against a neoliberal Obama presidency. Barb stated that:

> I mean, I agree with David. Obama is getting attacked. But I think that the deal they struck is exactly what they all wanted, Republicans and Democrats. […] It's like I always say, they're either on our side or they're not. I don't care if it's a Republican. If they're on our side, then great, we'll support them. But if they're not on our side, we're going to call them out and hold them accountable.

Grace, another one of the committee's most influential members and the chair of this particular meeting, also contrasted Margaret and Cheryl's cooperative turn with the need to "fight back." Additionally, and crucially, she explicitly did so in a way that acknowledged the racialized concerns that apparently informed their turn:

> And, just to be clear, it's not because of his race. It's not because he's black. What we are attacking is his policies. I'm glad we have our first black president. Hallelujah. It's about time, right? But with his policies, everything is going to hell. My friends are being raided and attacked by the FBI and it's going to hell. People are losing their health care and having their services cut and it's all going to hell. People are being kicked out of their homes and its *going—to—hell*. We have to go after him on those policy issues.

Before any more debate could occur, Grace moved us on to a discussion about outreach efforts. Without hesitation, she suggested we prepare a new flier for these efforts that reflected the committee's displeasure with Obama. While neither Cheryl nor Margaret appeared to have changed their minds, they did not raise their voices or show any outward displeasure with how the conversation resolved. Everybody else likewise acquiesced to the idea that we would publicly criticize the Obama presidency. Once in a great while, a similar case might arise, in which one or two members showed favor

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toward *shared* or *common inclusion*. In all cases, organizers and other active members would politely transition away from this construction in the name of "fighting back." Other members present would acquiesce, even if they privately disagreed.[18]

While halting the emergence of cooperative constructions, the Welfare Rights Committee's political footing also fostered a clear penchant for adversarial constructions, especially *shared/community struggle*. *Common/class struggle* also clearly resonated with the committee's choices to "fight back." But it provided no consideration of the "multiple systems of oppression," mentioned in their "What we stand for" statement. Only *shared/community struggle* situated the fight on an uneven terrain in which these "multiple systems" differentiated poor constituents' experiences under neoliberalism.

Common/class struggle was by no means entirely absent. In my time with the Welfare Rights Committee, organizers frequently turned to this construction as they confronted a Republican-controlled state legislature seemingly bent on balancing the state budget by dismantling social welfare assistance.[19] It was, in this context, very easy for committee members to reduce the interests of welfare recipients to a matter of "taxing the rich" and "stopping cuts." Indeed, as I shared in chapter 4, they even created a gigantic

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[18] In one case, this smooth and polite transition did not occur. A new member insisted on defending and advocating her cooperative stance before the meeting could move on. The result was easily the most intense disagreement I witnessed in a Welfare Rights Committee meeting. Upon realizing that her appeals fundamentally contradicted the committee's entrenched commitment to "fighting back," that member eventually left the room and, to my knowledge, never attended another meeting.

[19] For instance, see the example of magnification I recounted in chapter 5 that involved myself and Barb. In this example, Barb asked me to revise the draft of an op-ed in order to fit (what amounted to) a more unitary take on the relationship of poor constituents to accusations of food stamp "fraud."

banner that said as much in large bold letters—"TAX the RICH | STOP the CUTS to POOR and WORKING People." This banner was used frequently by the Bailout Coalition and often received attention for the conspicuous presence it created at the state capitol.

Furthermore, organizers crafted several press statements in which they wielded *common/class struggle* to situate the poor's common interest against further welfare cuts. One press statement, for example, summed up their opposition to Republican welfare proposals like this:

> While we have paid for the budget deficits with our blood, the wealthiest in Minnesota have not paid even one dime. In fact they have gotten richer and richer at the expense of poor and working Minnesotans. […] The fact is, if the rich paid their share of taxes we would not even be in a budget deficit. We feel the rich should actually PAY BACK the wealth they have gained at our expense.

At no point in this press statement did the committee suggest that compensating the "expense" paid by "poor and working Minnesotans" might require more than opposing cuts and taxing the rich. While this turn to *common/class struggle* may have made strategic sense at the time, it nevertheless blocked consideration of the racialized and gendered inequalities that surrounded Minnesota's welfare recipients and differentiated the overall distribution of resources between the rich and the poor. These included, for example, inequalities in policing and incarceration and access to living wage employment (see chapter 2).

Despite their turns to *common/class struggle*, Welfare Rights Committee organizers ultimately, when pressed, policed "fighting back" in ways that favored a vision of *shared/community struggle*. This proclivity became apparent during their

collective negotiations about how to oppose disciplinary reforms to the state's welfare system. Conservative Republicans frequently introduced these reforms—which did not call for spending cuts per se—as a way to eliminate "fraud" and make sure the welfare system worked for those who "really need it." For example, not too long after I started working with the committee, Republicans proposed a new restriction limiting the amount of cash that recipients could withdraw from ATMs using their state-issued EBT cards. Bill sponsors argued—based on a mix of anecdotal media reporting and underclass myths—that large numbers of recipients had been using their cash assistance to buy alcohol and illegal drugs, both of which were prohibited purchases under the state's EBT guidelines.

Cheryl, who I introduced above, often responded to this and other similar proposals through a lens of *common/class struggle*—which, again, located welfare recipients' and poor constituents' interests primarily in efforts to "tax the rich" and "stop the cuts." Leaning on this construction, she argued that the committee should not concern itself with opposing bills that discipline illegal drug users and other recipients engaged in criminalized activities. Aggressively siding against these bills, she suggested, might actually harm the poor's common interest in redistributing wealth by supporting thieves and cheats. As she said in one meeting, "I see people selling food stamps and getting high. […] I work and bust my hump every day. […] I care about folks on welfare but…" She affirmed this thought again in another meeting several weeks later: "I don't want to not get paid because people are out using EBT cards illegally. They're taking my money."

Any time Cheryl made these sorts of comments—revealing the limits of a strict *common/class struggle* construction—organizers responded and clarified the importance of "fighting back" under the terms of *shared/community struggle*. They used two types of comments to do so. First, they rejected the notion of a common interest and reestablished the committee's commitment to constructing class solidarity across racialized and gendered lines of respectability and deviance. For example, Karen responded to Cheryl's comments about drug users in particular by asserting that "Lots of rich folks are addicted and gaming the system too. An addict is an addict. […] One of our principles is that we don't attack our [poor and working class] brothers and sisters. That's just a principle we follow." Drawing on one of the committee's stated principles, Karen clearly rejected the notion that poor constituents have a common and unitary interest that somehow excludes low-income drug addicts or other stigmatized and criminalized groups. They are "brothers and sisters" in various poor communities and, thus, included in the struggle for equality.

The second type of comment gestured toward the intersecting inequalities actually facing particularly stigmatized and disadvantaged poor constituents, such as, in this case, drug addicts. By making these comments, organizers completed the turn away from *common/class struggle* and towards *shared/community struggle*. Kristy—another longtime organizer in the committee—made this move during a discussion about why the group opposed proposals to drug-test welfare recipients:

> Even if they [welfare recipients] don't pass the [drug] test, there's a lot of reasons people start using. If you're in a crisis and the proper mechanisms aren't working [moves her hands around her head], what's someone gonna do? So, if someone is an addict, then they should definitely get treatment. […] But this whole thing just

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> shows that they [elected officials] don't care at all about actually helping people
> out or addressing any real problems. Because, you know, if you just cut
> somebody off, what are they supposed to do?

In these comments Kristy pointed out what should be an obvious fact: disciplining

welfare recipients for 'bad behavior'—as Cheryl may have wanted—does nothing to

address the inequalities and problems that actually made them poor in the first place. In

fact, it compounds these inequalities and problems, creating another form of

intersectional disadvantage for a specific segment of poor constituents.

Through their collective negotiations, the Welfare Rights Committee decided that

the best way to represent poor constituents and "fight back" was not simply to oppose the

wealthy and demand more assistance (*common/class struggle*)—even though they clearly

dedicated much effort to these goals. And it absolutely was not to cooperate with elected

officials in support of a "kinder gentler" version of neoliberal poverty management that

will "compromise with people's lives" (*common/class* and *shared/community inclusion*).

Instead, the poor's best interests laid in dissident efforts to, as organizers said, "put out

the big picture" about what they need and dismantle the intersecting "systems of

oppression" affecting them in their communities (*shared/community struggle*).

Conclusion

This chapter started by asking: How do groups of antipoverty advocates make

decisions and, thus, come to construct poor constituents' interests in some ways more

than others? The answer, I have shown, is that they make them through collective

negotiations (and not, as many conventional accounts suggest, by weighing a set of

intrinsic and extrinsic motives). More specifically, as they compete to shape the terms of

these negotiations, leaders evoke and police assumptions about the purpose of their representational efforts—that is, their political "footing." In turn, members appeal to these assumptions as they support, criticize, and shape the tactical choices, and underlying constituent constructions, their organizations are making.

Two related implications about advocacy and political representation follow from this argument, one theoretical and one practical. The theoretical implication is that scholars must do more to rethink *causal*, not just constitutive, explanations for advocates' representational decisions. Most existing causal explanations assume that decisions are made through the weighing of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Thus, they tend to focus on factors that affect variation in the presence and intensity these motives. Two sets of causal explanations, in particular, have predominated in the study of advocacy organizations.[20]

One set points to the influence of structural opportunities (Meyer 2004). These causal explanations suggest that advocates' structural contexts augment or impede their strategic opportunities and, thus, extrinsic motives to make decisions that advance different constituent constructions. Scholars using this type of explanation have demonstrated the importance of factors such as elite political (in)stability and vulnerability (Tarrow 1998), broader movement trajectories (Minkoff 1997), and the availability of potential allies (Schneider 1997).

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[20] In separating these two sets out, I do not mean to imply that they are mutually exclusive.

A second set of causal explanations focuses on behavioral factors. According to these explanations, advocates possess behavioral characteristics that alter their subjective commitments and, thus, intrinsic motivation to decide one way or another on matters relevant to their constituent constructions. For example, scholars have debated whether and how advocates' collective identities impact their decisions (Gamson 1991; Gitlin 1995). Other scholars have highlighted the causal importance of behavioral characteristics such as values and ideological beliefs (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000, 621).

Both structural and behavioral explanations have, no doubt, expanded our knowledge of causal factors underlying advocates' choices as representatives. However, if these decisions are rooted more in collective negotiations than discrete motives, a different type of causal explanation becomes necessary. Rather than focus on structural forces *surrounding* and behavioral forces *within* advocates, this alternative explanation must emphasize the organizational relations *between* them (Bentley 1908; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). By organizational relations, I mean the ties that advocates cultivate in their organizations that, in turn, shape how they relate to one another.

Causal explanations centered on these relations suggest that they influence what advocates can and cannot easily presume about their collective purpose. That is to say, organizational relations, or ties, directly shape the "footing" of the negotiations through which advocates make decisions and construct constituent interests (Eliasoph 1998).[21]

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[21] The explanatory role I attribute to organizational relations is, thus, one of constitutive causality (Wedeen 2002; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). These relations influence tactical and representational decisions not by exerting an independent and mechanical

For example, one such explanation states that when advocates maintain inclusive and democratic ties to organizational members, they enable less hierarchical negotiations with political "footings" that favor intersectional constructions (Kurtz 2002). In addition to membership ties, others have illustrated how institutional ties (Kurtz 2002; Cohen 1999) and movement ties (Kim 1999; Nadasen 2004; Strolovitch 2007) influence collective negotiations, tactical decisions, and constituent constructions.

A relational causal explanation for advocates' representative decisions would enliven current theoretical debates in at least two ways. First, such an explanation would do more to illuminate what advocates actually *do* in constructing their constituents' interests. It centers, as I have already said, on understanding the collective negotiations through which advocates make their decisions and build/draw on constituent constructions. Taken on their own, structural and behavioral explanations tend to place these negotiations in an analytical "black box." In doing so, they foster one of two untested assumptions. One says that collective negotiations are simply a conduit for "deeper" structural and behavioral factors. The other says that, while they may carry some sort of influence, this influence is mostly fleeting and insignificant. As this chapter has helped to demonstrate, neither of these assumptions holds.

The second advantage of a relational explanation is that it also promises to more fully explicate the influence of structural and behavioral forces (McAdam 2003). It offers a chance to explore how advocates' organizational relations and collective negotiations

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force—as in positivist versions of causality—but by embedding and constructing the negotiations through which these decisions are made.

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channel and/or resist the influence of various strategic incentives and subjective

commitments. Many studies already push structural and behavioral analyses of

advocates' choices in this direction (e.g. Gamson and Meyer 1996; Whittier 1997; Sewell

2005; Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010). Future causal theorizing should build on their

collective insights as well as those of scholars who focus more thoroughly on

organizational relations.

The second implication of this chapter's findings is, as I stated above, practical

and related to the theoretical point just made. It is that advocates who wish to change the

decision-making patterns of their organizations must do more than simply "speak up" or

persistently voice their concerns within existing negotiations. Nearly every advocacy

organization is nominally open to the expression of dissenting opinions during, for

example, organizing meetings. Members in each organization I studied were invited to

share their ideas and opinions on agenda items. The Welfare Rights Committee even had

a rule for meetings that said "if someone has been relatively quiet, they get priority in

talking."[22] However, depending on the political "footing" that structures negotiations and

choices in these meetings, participants sometimes found their ideas summarily brushed

aside (cf. Eliasoph 1998). For example, Stephen, in the North Coalition, frequently found

himself in this position. Regardless of how carefully he defended his preferred decisions

and worded his adversarial appeals, he could easily be dismissed for not "being positive."

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[22] Radical feminists cultivated and popularized meeting rules like this one with the
explicit intention of making room for perspectives that male-dominated organizations on
the left tended to silence (Echols 1989).

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The key to changing an organization's decisions and constituent constructions is, thus, to alter the terms of the negotiations through which voice is achieved—to change the political footing. The task of changing a footing is itself daunting and complicated. More often than not, it will involve some combination of shaping who is involved in the negotiation, who has control over the negotiation, and the considerations participants bring to the negotiation. These features are themselves very sticky.

If the discussion above about causal explanations is correct, then the battle to alter negotiations and, in turn, decisions and constructions must be won at the level of organizational relations. Dissenters must ask questions such as: Which members have the strongest ties to this organization? Why? Which practices would strengthen ties to members and supporters with different perspectives? They must also ask, as I did in chapter 3, about the movement, institutional, and leadership ties that buttress the organization and set the stage for its negotiations. Whether they come about intentionally or not, it is changes to these organizational features—and not the sheer voice and will of a motivated individual—that can lead advocacy organizations toward different and perhaps better choices and constructions of marginalized constituents' interests.

Chapter 7: Facing the Paradox of Difference

In the fall of 2009, the anti-foreclosure movement in Minneapolis was building steam, due in no small way to the efforts of the Minnesota Coalition for a People's Bailout. Not only had the Bailout Coalition galvanized the foreclosure debate in a major way, occupying foreclosed homes and pushing foreclosure moratorium legislation at the Minnesota State Capitol. They had fought to place the experiences of poor and working class foreclosure survivors at the center of this debate. Their efforts stood in stark contrast to those of elected officials, most of whom presumed to address foreclosures simply through financial counseling, moderate loan modifications, and consumer protection—all neoliberal and market-centered (rather than egalitarian) policy initiatives.

In order to build grassroots support for their efforts, the Bailout Coalition held multiple community forums. One such forum took place at a local Urban League branch in north Minneapolis—the city's highest poverty area, where, by far, the most foreclosures were occurring. Several speakers introduced the Bailout Coalition and overviewed their efforts on behalf of poor and working class people affected by foreclosures and evictions. In the process, they also shared multiple stories about mobilizing with specific homeowners and solicited support for the foreclosure moratorium legislation they supported. Finally, they opened the floor for discussion. During this discussion, a particularly challenging comment came from Jeff, a white resident of the neighborhood who had been active on housing issues and was opposed to stopping foreclosures with either occupations or a moratorium:

> In my neighborhood, we've got a lot of houses right now sitting vacant, nobody
> in them. We've got an absentee owner and the only thing […] that's gonna get

that house, aside from forcible takeovers and squatting—which my neighborhood has officially passed a motion, we do not support that. […] The only thing that's gonna get that house out of that status and into a good owner occupant or a good landlord and good tenants is a foreclosure. And […] I can take you over to the area right behind Kemps. You all know what I'm talking about with all the rampant drug dealing that happens at a couple of the houses right there. You know what, if those houses were foreclosed on and those drug dealers, those prostitutes were out of our neighborhood because of a foreclosure, nobody would shed a tear on that block [audience member: That's right]. And, if there's a moratorium that blocks those things from happening, that freezes, that puts my neighborhood into something that's stagnant that doesn't allow things to get better, then that's not something that I can support. That's not something that my neighbors are gonna support.

This message was one I had heard before from white and middle-class residents of north Minneapolis. It framed foreclosure and eviction not simply as the *loss* of housing stability but also as a potentially *helpful* policy instrument for deconcentration poverty in north Minneapolis (see chapter 2).[104] Furthermore, and not coincidentally, it reflected and fed a long-standing tendency to construct poor constituents in high poverty and disproportionately black neighborhoods as members of an irresponsible urban underclass.

Jeff—at least in my observations—supported many efforts to assist the poor and was a member of at least one community group that performed foreclosure prevention work. But, in clarifying the challenges surrounding foreclosures, he emphasized drug-dealing and prostitution, treating their presence as proof of behavioral and gendered deficiencies among the disproportionately black and low-income residents of north Minneapolis. Prefaced by this account of underclass pathology, a foreclosure moratorium looked like a perverse policy solution that aided respectable poor constituents at the risk

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[104] In a different exchange, another white resident of north Minneapolis told me that "You could actually say the foreclosure crisis helped us out" and improved the neighborhood by "clear[ing] out" the "riff raff."

of reinforcing the social ills associated with concentrated poverty, such as financial

irresponsibility, licentiousness, and criminality. Jeff predicted that a moratorium would

put a "freeze" on efforts to address these ills and, in turn, harm the "good owner

occupant," the "good tenants," and the "good landlord" that the Bailout Coalition claimed

to represent.

Deb, one of the Bailout Coalition organizers, responded to Jeff's critique of their

moratorium legislation, leading to the following exchange:

> Deb: […] [T]he moratorium on home foreclosures was not for investment
> properties, it's for "owner-occupied"…It wasn't on…

> Jeff: I can take you to some owner-occupied problem properties if you want to
> see them. We can sit there and watch the drug dealers come and go.

> Deb: Our issue is there's a housing crisis. People are suffering and that's what
> we're gonna take care of. The big issue is the big issue—of housing
> crisis, our families that are being thrown into the street. [Audience
> member: When I live next to a house where drugs are being dealt openly,
> that's a big issue for me.]

If Jeff's comments above affirmed underclass constructions of the poor and the neoliberal

logic of poverty deconcentration, this exchange revealed a key dilemma facing advocates

fighting against these trends. Deb addressed Jeff's account of poverty and housing

instability by implicitly reassuring meeting attendees that moratorium legislation would

not, in fact, protect the "drug dealers" and "prostitutes" presumed to live on "investment

properties" with absentee owners. She argued that, on the contrary, a well-designed

foreclosure moratorium would only protect a respectable and unified class of poor

constituents—that is, Jeff's "good owner occupant" and "good tenant." In doing so,

however, she unintentionally and paradoxically obscured the experiences of many poor

people living in owner-absentee houses who are, in fact, not "drug dealers" or

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"prostitutes." Moreover, it also obscured those of many *actual* low-income drug and sex workers—whose lives, as Deb and many other antipoverty advocates well know, are not reducible to tangles of underclass pathology.

Consequently, even with Deb's reassurances, Jeff was able to reassert that a foreclosure moratorium would incubate underclass pathology in the high poverty neighborhoods of north Minneapolis. Moreover, he was able to establish his authenticity and legitimacy and mark Deb as a radical outsider by demonstrating his greater first-hand knowledge of north side neighborhoods ("I can take you to some owner-occupied problem properties if you want to see them"). Without an alternative account of Jeff's distinction between the "drug dealer" and "prostitute" and the "good" resident, Deb could only reiterate to community residents and potential supporters that the foreclosure crisis was a "big issue."

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In the US, public officials have, by any reasonable account, failed to adequately represent the interests of marginalized constituencies, such as the poor, women and people of color (Smith 1997). This failure has persisted throughout the post-civil rights era despite partially successful efforts to better incorporate marginalized constituencies into dominant institutions. On the one hand, greater social and political incorporation has made the stratum of public officials more diverse. And new marginalized members of this stratum have, at times, brought increased attention to the inequalities facing their constituencies (Naples 1998; Swers 2002; Keiser et al 2002; Tate 2003). But even with this attention, public officials have still, as a whole, left many inequalities unaddressed

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(Frymer 1999; Reed 1999a; Hawkesworth 2003; Spade 2011). Moreover, they have ratified a neoliberal regime of governance that perpetuates these inequalities by expanding the sphere of market competition (Harvey 2005; Soss Hacker and Mettler 2007; Cohen 2012).

Against this post-civil rights backdrop, advocacy organizations have operated as a key source of compensatory political representation for marginalized constituencies (Strolovitch 2007; Berry 1977; Minkoff 1995). Extending various movements for social and economic justice and working in locales across the US, advocates have aimed to resist the inegalitarian biases of elected officials and compensate for these officials' failures as representatives. Despite these aims, however, they have often found themselves unintentionally helping to reproduce such biases and, by extension, the intersecting inequalities that affect many of their marginalized constituents (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; Ernst 2010).

This chapter explains how this fundamental contradiction comes to pass. That is, it explains how, despite aiming to improve the political representation of marginalized constituencies, advocates have often reinforced biases that work against them. My explanation centers, as has the rest of this dissertation, on how and with what consequences advocates construct the constituent interests they claim to represent. I underscore how, in using different types of constructions, they face a broader *paradox of difference* that looms over post-civil rights advocacy. The paradox is, more specifically, that advocates can neither suppress nor underscore differences that surround their constituents without encountering significant political dilemmas. I examine, in particular,

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dilemmas related to respectability, otherness, moderation, and radicalism. And I show

how advocates' constituent constructions transform the paradox of difference into these

specific dilemmas—each of which threatens to derail the egalitarian thrust of their

representational efforts and help reproduce the biases they oppose.

To advance the foregoing claims, I examine and compare two of the three

antipoverty advocacy organizations discussed in previous chapters: the Bailout Coalition

and the North Coalition. Drawing on extensive field research and secondary sources

regarding these organizations' public actions, I show: how, when confronted with the

paradox of difference, each organization constructed the interests of poor constituents;

how their constituent constructions evoked contrasting dilemmas of political

representation; and how these dilemmas facilitated the reproduction of public officials'

inegalitarian biases. I conclude by summarizing my findings and discussing their

implications for understanding advocacy on behalf of marginalized constituencies.

Beyond Responsiveness

Perhaps the most popular explanation for slippage between the political aims and

consequences of post-civil rights advocacy points to the influence of diminished

responsiveness (Pitkin 1967, 232-33; see chapter 1). Advocates, according to this

explanation, redress elected officials' inegalitarian biases mainly by responding to the

collective concerns of marginalized constituencies (Berry 1977; Berry 1999). When they

do not do so, the argument goes, they foster silences that allow such biases to flourish and

dominate political and policy debates.

This explanation, while illuminating in some ways, has two problems. The first problem is that advocacy organizations *do*, for the most part, acknowledge and respond to the aggregate concerns of their constituents (Berry 1999; Strolovitch 2007, 97-98). Consequently, and contrary to expectations, responsiveness appears to coexist quite peacefully with the fundamental contradiction of post-civil rights advocacy.

The second problem explains this peaceful coexistence. It is that marginalized constituents' concerns do not necessarily oppose dominant and inegalitarian biases in the US representative system. Evidence suggests, for example, that their level of concern about inequalities affecting the most marginalized members of their groups—such as poor women of color, the incarcerated, or transgendered people—is, on average, much lower than it is for challenges affecting the most privileged members of their groups (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). Thus, responsiveness to their concerns can actually drive *support for* rather than resistance to elected officials' biases.

Constructing Difference

An alternative explanation for the fundamental contradiction of post-civil rights advocacy centers on its *symbolic* effects (see chapter 1). As many democratic theorists, intersectionality scholars, and critical political economists have shown, advocates' representational efforts do not simply respond to constituent concerns. They also help to articulate and call forth the interests that apparently underlie these concerns (Cohen 1999;

Schram 2002; Saward 2006; Strolovitch 2007; Disch 2012). That is to say, they construct, disseminate, and defend competing accounts of their constituents' interests.[105]

According to a constructivist explanation, advocates' representational efforts redress inegalitarian biases—neoliberal or otherwise—by constructing their constituents' interests in ways that underscore the inequalities they face. Correspondingly, when their constituent constructions obfuscate these inequalities, they foster the reproduction of public officials' biases.

Virtually every advocacy organization aims to do the former. However, according to proponents of a constructivist explanation, an imminent paradox threatens to derail this aim. The paradox stems from the fact that advocates must address latent social and economic *differences* surrounding the constituencies they construct (Minow 1990; Young 1990; Cohen 1999; Duggan 2003). These differences are of two types: those that differentiate their constituents from dominant society and those that cross-cut and differentiate the constituency itself.[106] When advocates attempt to suppress or transcend these differences—depicting constituent interests as more "universal" (that is, moderate and respectable)—they risk obscuring particular inequalities that they might otherwise illuminate. But when they underscore and articulate various differences, they risk

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[105] For example, these scholars would emphasize that an organization representing welfare recipients does not simply respond or not respond to welfare recipients' concerns. It also mobilizes an account of what their interests are by sending messages about their position(s) in society (Ernst 2010).

[106] These types are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, racialized differences can both cross-cut a constituency such as the poor and divide certain members of that constituency from dominant society.

fomenting divisions and stigmas that undermine support for their efforts. In both scenarios, there is a potential to incubate the biases of elected officials.

Two historical shifts in the post-civil rights era have exacerbated the paradox of difference (Cohen 1999; Reed 1999a). First, many marginalized individuals have achieved greater incorporation into governmental bodies and other dominant institutions, tapping sources of influence and resources from which they were previously excluded.[107] As a consequence, they have also secured a much greater stake in the maintenance of these institutions. Because this stake exists, advocates are even more likely to alienate potential supporters when they highlight inequalities that differentiate their constituents from dominant society and suggest the need for institutional transformation. At the same time, neoliberal reforms have reinforced these differences and, thus, made institutional transformation even more central to the pursuit of egalitarian social change.

The second shift is the growth of inequalities within marginalized constituencies. Several relatively privileged members of these constituencies—those who exhibit "normal" behavior and have more skills and resources—have achieved upward mobility through the incorporation referenced above. They have benefitted, for example, from employment and leadership opportunities opened up by the enforcement of civil rights and antidiscrimination laws. Such opportunities have been far less prevalent and meaningful for the most disadvantaged members of marginalized constituencies—those

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[107] This is not to say that they have achieved the same privileges as members of dominant groups, or have even come close to doing so. One would be hard-pressed, for example, to call former welfare recipients who now work as welfare case managers privileged. That said, their increased presence in dominant institutions of poverty management constitutes an important moment of incorporation for the poor (Soss Fording and Schram 2011).

who exhibit stigmatized behavior and have relatively few marketable skills and resources. Indeed, partly due to various neoliberal initiatives, many of these members have seen their life chances diminish even further since the 1970s. The result is a situation in which the intersecting inequalities that cross-cut their constituents are even more pronounced and, for advocates, important to acknowledge. But advocacy efforts that acknowledge these intersections can also be even more problematic, as they highlight groups who are increasingly stigmatized and ostracized as societal losers.

Confronting the Paradox

To properly explain the contradiction between the political aims and consequences of post-civil rights advocacy, scholars and other observers must answer two questions. The first is how, in constructing and representing constituent interests, contemporary advocates have negotiated the foregoing paradox of difference. And the second is how their attempts have faltered and fostered the reproduction of elected officials' inegalitarian biases.

Among careful observers who have addressed the first question, two major responses stand out—both of which have received attention in prior chapters. One response focuses on how they construct the social solidarity underlying their constituents' interests and, in turn, address the latent differences between them (Strolovitch 2007; Schwartz 2009). Advocates using unitary constructions of solidarity, centered as they are on articulating common interests, tend to suppress these differences. In the case on which this dissertation focuses—poverty politics—this suppression often occurs through appeals

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to *common/class struggle* or *inclusion*, that is, the notion that the poor are united by their common membership in a marginalized class (Wilson 1987; Skocpol 1991).

On the other hand, advocates using intersectional constructions of solidarity tend to underscore intersecting inequalities and relevant differences between constituents. They locate constituents' interests within a field of shared and sometimes differentiated relationships to various sources of marginalization (Collins [1990] 2000; Cohen 1997). And they "identify the interests and well-being of [the most] disadvantaged [constituent] subgroups" with those of the overall constituency (Strolovitch 2007, 63). In the case of poverty politics, advocates often highlight differences and inequalities among the poor through appeals to what I have called *shared/community struggle* or *inclusion* (Naples 1998). Poverty's class dynamics, according to these appeals, are intersected or compounded by inequalities that disproportionately and differently affect specific poor communities, especially racialized communities.

The second response to the question of how advocates negotiate the paradox of difference focuses on how they construct the political relationship between their constituents' interests and dominant neoliberal institutions. Advocates' constructions of this political relationship reveal, more specifically, how they articulate differences between their constituents and the society organized and defended by dominant institutions (Edelman 1977). Advocates who construct adversarial political relations tend to underscore these differences, suggesting that policymakers must transform dominant institutions in order to properly address the inequalities facing their constituents (Piven 1981; Piven 2006). Antipoverty advocates, more specifically, often underscore

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adversarial differences between the poor and dominant society through appeals to *common/class* and *shared/community struggle*. These appeals locate the poor's interests in efforts to transform dominant neoliberal institutions and seize resources and authority from the ruling class (Piven and Cloward 1977; Schram 2002).

In contrast, advocates constructing cooperative political relations tend to downplay differentiation between the interests of marginalized constituencies and those of dominant society. Instead, they implore public officials to expand marginalized constituents' participation in and access to this society, suggesting that the inequalities they face are not so distinct from those that its institutions already address (or are capable of addressing). When marginalization persists alongside aggressive incorporation efforts, they respond by suggesting the need for further moderate reforms to these efforts and/or blaming individual differences and deficiencies. In poverty politics, the cooperative turn typically takes the form of appeals to *common/class* or *shared/community inclusion*. These constructions call on policymakers to remove institutional barriers that currently prevent the poor from becoming economically competitive and accessing the benefits of market participation.

On the whole, then, scholarship about how advocates negotiate the paradox of difference has tended to focus on the two foregoing dimensions: social solidarity and political relationships. Building on this scholarship, I argue that advocates' representational efforts and attempts to negotiate the paradox of difference vary simultaneously and separately along both dimensions. Thus, the proper theoretical

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depiction is something like the two dimensional space in figure 1.1 and reproduced in figure 7.1.

In the analysis below, I show how the distinct logics of solidarity and political relations flowing from advocates' constituent constructions also evoke distinct dilemmas of representation—namely, dilemmas of respectability, otherness, radicalism, and moderation (see figure 7.1 and descriptions below). I find that these dilemmas a) pivot on how constituent constructions suppress and/or underscore differences surrounding and between marginalized constituents and b) directly shape and constrain the potential for advocates to bolster movement away from neoliberalism and toward an egalitarian social order.

This leads to the second question introduced above, how the constitutive process I just laid out—representational efforts shape constituent constructions which themselves evoke dilemmas of difference that shape and constrain the pursuit of egalitarian social change—helps to reproduce elected officials' biases. The answer lies in how, despite advocates' best efforts, each dilemma fosters political and policy debates that potentially ignore important inequalities facing marginalized constituents. The paragraphs below specify, in more detail, these theorized links between constituent constructions, dilemmas of difference, and inegalitarian bias.

Unitary constructions (*common struggle* and *inclusion*) reshape the paradox of difference into dilemmas of *respectability* (Higginbotham 1993; Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). To boost mainstream appeal, advocates deploying such constructions often focus attention on the experiences of their most privileged members—who most resemble

"respectable" (married, home-owning, educated, gainfully employed, etc.) members of society—and equate them with those of their entire constituency. With this emphasis on respectability, they risk obscuring the intersecting inequalities that differentiate their most marginalized and stigmatized members and, as a result, affirming public officials' inegalitarian biases.

Intersectional constructions (*shared struggle* and *inclusion*), by underscoring these intersecting inequalities, lead to dilemmas of *otherness* (Minow 1990). Advocates using them offer more diversified accounts of their constituents' interests. But they also run the risk that public officials might use the stigmatized differences they highlight to recast their constituents as dysfunctional 'others.' The result in this scenario would, again, be an obfuscation of the full range of inequalities that actually face their constituents and a reproduction of public officials' biases.
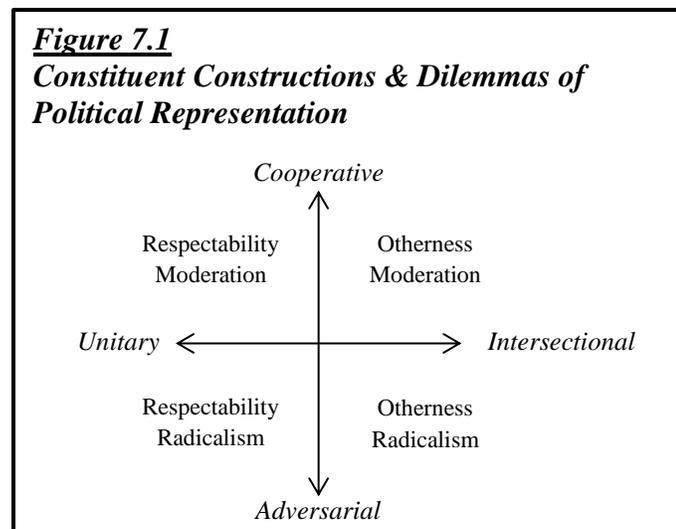
Figure 7.1
Constituent Constructions & Dilemmas of Political Representation

Cooperative

Respectability   Otherness
Moderation   Moderation

Unitary ← → *Intersectional*

Respectability   Otherness
Radicalism   Radicalism

Adversarial

Cooperative constructions (*common* and *shared inclusion*) generate dilemmas of *moderation* (Schram 2002). Advocates drawing on such constructions demand moderate

and more politically feasible reforms. But they do so at the risk of obscuring differences

between the inequalities facing their constituents and those dominant neoliberal

institutions are equipped to address. Finally, adversarial constructions (*common* and

shared struggle) lead to dilemmas of *radicalism*. By using these constructions and calling

for full-stop egalitarian transformations of dominant institutions, advocates help to clarify

divisions between marginalized constituents and dominant society. Yet, precisely because

they radically oppose dominant institutions and the privileged social positions that these

institutions reinforce, they find few entry points in prevailing debates. They risk

appearing unreasonable and/or inane to those who take the given terms of these debates

for granted. The result, again, is the reproduction of inegalitarian biases.

Advocates, in short, find themselves in a constant battle to face and negotiate the

paradox of difference underlying their efforts on behalf of marginalized interests.

Regardless of which constituent constructions they use, they raise and confront dilemmas

that threaten to mitigate the pursuit of justice and equality in the post-civil rights United

States.

Antipoverty Advocacy and the Paradox of Racial Difference

Perhaps no case is better suited for unpacking the claims outlined above than that

of *antipoverty* advocacy. The political terrain surrounding antipoverty advocacy

exemplifies at least two of the historical shifts discussed above that affect all post-civil

rights efforts on behalf of marginalized constituencies.

First, as I clarified in chapters 1 and 2, since the 1970s, elected officials' efforts

on behalf of the poor have ushered in an increasingly neoliberal regime of poverty

management. This regime draws on initiatives that, in theory, serve the poor's interests by further exposing them to market competition over basic goods—such as work, education, and housing—and disciplining their active participation in this competition. However, by ignoring the inequalities that infuse market competition, these initiatives have actually exacerbated the poor's marginalization. Poverty deconcentration, in particular, has crystallized the shift toward and marginalizing effects of neoliberal poverty management in Minneapolis and other urban and suburban areas, where most of the poor live (see chapter 2).

Second, public officials have, through their efforts to neoliberalize poverty management, heightened the paradox of difference surrounding the poor. Formally speaking, neoliberal poverty management treats all poor constituents the same and aims to mitigate the unequal distribution of opportunities between them and privileged members of society. But in reality, it perpetuates and fosters racialized challenges that both divide the poor's overall experiences from those of dominant society and exacerbate differences among the poor themselves (Schram 2005). Initiatives such as welfare reform, school choice, and poverty deconcentration have ignored and/or entrenched, for example, the racial and gendered stratification of wages, work barriers, educational achievement, and housing instability—all issues that contribute to and racialize poverty (Goetz 2003; Soss Fording and Schram 2011; Lipman 2011). As I demonstrated in chapter 2, this link between neoliberal poverty management and racialized poverty has been especially strong in Minneapolis. If advocates fail to acknowledge and contextualize

the resulting differences, they run a high risk of reinforcing the inegalitarian biases they wish to correct (Schram 2002; Ernst 2010).

That said, neoliberal poverty management also institutionalizes problematic underclass constructions—such as the "welfare queen" and the "irresponsible borrower"—that justify the racialized differences it perpetuates. These constructions wrongly attribute racial inequalities surrounding the poor to behavioral and most often gendered deficiencies, such as welfare dependency or criminality (Reed 1999a; Sparks 2003). Thus, antipoverty advocates who would underscore differences surrounding the poor and use them to directly attack various social and economic inequalities face significant roadblocks. As advocates themselves often say, discussions of racial difference raise stigmas that are potentially "toxic" or "corrosive" to their efforts.

Dilemmas of Political Representation

The duration of this chapter compares how and with what consequences two of the organizations I studied negotiated the paradox of difference associated with neoliberal poverty management. I compare, in particular, the efforts of the Bailout Coalition and the North Coalition, showing how they differently constructed poor constituents' interests and, in doing so, transformed the paradox of difference into contrasting sets of political dilemmas. First, I describe how the Bailout Coalition constructed low-income people experiencing foreclosure and housing instability as an adversarial and unitary constituency engaged in *common/class struggle*; and I show how their efforts, while beneficial in ways, shaped the broader paradox of difference into dilemmas of respectability and radicalism. Second, I contrast the Bailout Coalition with the North

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Coalition. I describe how the members of the North Coalition constructed poor students as an intersectional and cooperative constituency battling for *shared/community inclusion*. And I argue that, while their efforts effectively avoided the dilemmas encountered by the Bailout Coalition, they did not escape the broader paradox of difference. Rather, they transformed it into a different set of problematic dilemmas.

The overall picture, then, becomes one in which advocacy organizations retain an ability to shape how they encounter and experience the paradox of difference. But it is an ability that is always already capable of reproducing as well as resisting the biases many of them vocally oppose.

The Bailout Coalition and Anti-Foreclosure Advocacy

Formed in the midst of the most recent financial crisis, the Bailout Coalition brought together a wide array of member organizations. This array included a welfare rights group, antiwar organizations, an immigrant right coalition, a union local, and a handful of other organizations. While the Bailout Coalition was broadly concerned with the effects of the financial crisis, they mobilized on behalf of the poor mainly in the area of foreclosures. And in this issue area, they worked primarily on two fronts (see chapter 4). First and foremost, they engaged in direct action. They used protest, occupation, and civil disobedience to delay and stop foreclosure-related evictions among the poor. Second, the Bailout Coalition lobbied the Minnesota state legislature to enact a moratorium on home foreclosures and evictions of renters from foreclosed properties.

Across these two fronts, the coalition's mission and vision for a "people's bailout" was consistent. They demanded that creditors modify existing mortgages on

affordable terms; that public officials and law enforcement temporarily halt foreclosure-related evictions; and that public officials and courts use existing laws to hold creditors accountable for fraudulent lending practices.

As with other poverty-related issues, the emergence and fallout of the foreclosure crisis in Minneapolis was (extremely) racially unequal (see chapter 2). The city's northwestern and southern neighborhoods—that is, the areas with the highest concentrations of poverty and people of color—were, unsurprisingly, the areas where foreclosures had the greatest impact. This stratification was especially visible in the northwest neighborhoods, where the highest concentration of African Americans live. In between July 2006 and June 2008, the foreclosure rate in northwest Minneapolis was 12.2%, compared to 1.8% for the rest of the city (Allen 2011). These percentages include rental units, suggesting that, contrary to the focus of the news media and many activists, the wave of foreclosures did not only or even predominantly affect homeowners. Analysis suggests that the majority of foreclosed housing units in Minneapolis were actually renter-occupied.

Local public officials responded to this crisis mainly by expanding financial counseling efforts, relying on the federal governments' loan modification programs, and pursuing greater consumer protection (Crump 2008). The common thread among these initiatives was their persistent neoliberal focus on issues affecting individual-level market competitiveness—such as personal financial mismanagement or violation of individual consumer rights. According to policymakers, these were the main issues plaguing "responsible homeowners" (and sometimes renters).

This institutional response was helpful in some respects. Certainly, it led to some

people receiving necessary aid. However, it left out and stigmatized as "irresponsible" a

large, disproportionately black and low-income group of residents, many of whom were

also renters. This is the group whose foreclosure experiences were more significantly

rooted in long-term and unequal access to prime credit, living wage employment, and

affordable housing—that is, inequalities that no amount of financial counseling,

consumer protection, or incentive-based loan modification can effectively address.

In attempting to contest public officials' biased and neoliberal response to the

foreclosure crisis, the Bailout Coalition deployed what I characterize as a unitary and

adversarial construction of *common struggle*. This construction was, more specifically,

one of *common/class struggle*, through which advocates cast the poor as an embattled

class with common interests in transformative and egalitarian efforts to directly

redistribute resources and authority in society. As I show below, it suppressed

consideration of racialized differences among their constituents but underscored an

overall differentiation between the interests of these constituents and those of dominant

society.

The logic and dimensions of a *common/class struggle* emerged clearly in the

Bailout Coalition's public statements regarding the foreclosure and financial crisis. One

petition in particular, which also served as their founding mission statement, captured this

construction. Coalition organizers circulated the statement in the fall of 2009, and it read

as follows:

> Left to their own devices, Governor [Tim] Pawlenty, along with a host of
> politicians in the legislature, will enact legislation that serves the self-serving

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> interests of corporations and the wealthy. They will attack public employees.
> They will try to scapegoat immigrants and the poor. And, they will try to push
> the burden of the crisis onto our backs.

At the time, virtually all antipoverty advocates agreed that, if "Left to their own devices," the governor and the state legislature would craft an unjust and unequal response to the crisis. In response, many of them turned to cooperative constructions of the poor's interests. This group collaborated with state politicians in support of consumer protection, financial counseling, and other moderate reforms. These reforms, as I discussed above, aimed to address barriers facing the poor and other groups without fundamentally altering the neoliberal character of dominant institutions in Minnesota and other states.

The Bailout Coalition's statement, in contrast, used worries about state politicians' "devices" to preface the unitary and *adversarial* aspects of their representational efforts. First, it located poor constituents within a single undivided class of all economically marginalized people. More specifically, it treated their economic marginalization as an expression of the greater distributional "burden" they must carry relative to the wealthy. And, in turn, it framed this "burden" as a lowest common denominator that logically unites the poor among themselves and with other marginalized groups in the coalition, such as public employees and immigrants (cf. Strolovitch 2007, 201-03).

Second, this statement painted a clear adversarial picture in which relieving the economic "burden" of the poor would require a transformation of dominant neoliberal institutions. It located the poor in a zero-sum battle with the "self-serving" wealthy over resources. And it suggested that, without enacting policies such as a foreclosure

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moratorium that override neoliberal institutions of poverty management and directly redistribute these goods to poor homeowners and tenants, the wealthy will continue to "scapegoat" them. That is to say, class inequalities facing the majority of poor constituents would go unaddressed and they would remain differentiated from and marginalized in relation to dominant society.

By using a construction of *common/class struggle* to represent the poor and negotiate the paradox of difference, the Bailout Coalition made headway on two fronts. First, they dismissed stigmatizing and racialized constructions that located poor constituents' interests in efforts to overcome their "financial irresponsibility" and behavioral deficiencies. Media coverage about the foreclosure survivors with whom the Bailout Coalition worked rarely if ever contained information that would suggest the importance of such deficiencies. Instead, this coverage often focused on different ways that poor and working class people—primarily women—experiencing foreclosure had been exploited by banks and subprime lenders (Simmons 2009; Diaz 2010).

Second and simultaneously, the Bailout Coalition laid the basis for broad opposition to foreclosure-related evictions. They successfully slowed or stopped the evictions of multiple poor and working class women homeowners. And they mobilized many city residents and several legislators in support of their calls for a broad moratorium on foreclosures and foreclosure-related evictions in the state.

All that said, however, the coalition also evoked dilemmas of respectability and radicalism. The dilemma of respectability stemmed from the fact that organizers, in constructing poor foreclosure survivors as a unitary class, often depicted this class

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through "deserving" images. These images were of long-time "responsible" homeowners, renters, and community members with stable employment histories. They depicted a constituency whose experiences with housing instability were, thus, not chronic and whose foreclosures mostly stemmed from relatively recent and/or more temporary problems, such as a sudden and recession-related loss of income and the rise of subprime lending. And they are what allowed Bailout Coalition organizers to downplay the association of foreclosure with behavioral deficiencies.

However, respectable and unitary constituent constructions also risked obscuring starker inequalities facing the coalition's most marginalized constituents. This group included, for example, renters with more tenuous or less celebrated community ties, checkered work histories, and chronically unstable housing histories in which they have struggled to make mortgage and/or rent payments—all characteristics that neoliberal practices in the US tend to racialize and stigmatize. Contrary to "responsible homeowners," this group's exposure to foreclosure-related eviction stemmed not simply from temporary recession-related problems and inequalities but rather a longstanding shortage of decent affordable housing. Their diminished access to livable wages, the absence of prime credit and other development resources in their neighborhoods, and the pursuit of poverty deconcentration perpetuated affordable housing shortages and confined many of them to substandard segments of the housing market. Subprime lending and the Great Recession stemmed from and exacerbated these and other racialized inequalities. But they did not create them. Anti-foreclosure efforts risk obfuscating such challenges and reproducing dominant biases when, in the process of demonstrating unity and

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respectability, they construct their constituents primarily as "respectable" homeowners and tenants facing a sudden crisis.

The contours of Bailout Coalition's dilemma of respectability emerged in an informational video produced by one of its organizational allies. The video centers on an interview with five women whose homes had been foreclosed, most of whom had worked with the coalition and three of whom were African American. The only time you hear the interviewer speak in the twelve minute video, she says the following:

> It sounds that, um, many of you are working women or had a job but were working for years and years and years. And, you know, the stereotype out there is that, oh why don't they just get a job and pay off their mortgage. Well, first of all, we are working, number one. And number two, if we're not working, we were working but our economy went down and now it's difficult to find a job.

As the interviewer states, many political actors have spread a racialized and gendered stigma that says poor women experiencing foreclosure—and other socioeconomic problems—are simply too dependent. They should, the stigma suggests, "just get a job." By showing women who have been "working for years and years and years" and whose unemployment is related to a temporary economic downturn, the video evaded this stigma and instead located its subjects within the ranks of responsible homeowners and renters.

The problem with this construction is that many poor women and men of color— especially black men and women and especially in Minneapolis—have, in fact, experienced foreclosure-related evictions and other housing problems partly as a result of chronic joblessness or work instability. For various reasons—including incarceration, discrimination, market segmentation, and so on—these constituents have *not* consistently

worked as wage earners "for years and years and years" only to be set back by a sudden

economic downturn (Wilson 1997). This work instability has, in turn, confined many of

them to segments of the housing market where foreclosure-related evictions and other

causes of housing instability are more likely to occur. The fact that all of the interviewees

were women made it especially easy to overlook how low labor participation and high

incarceration rates among black men in Minnesota have intersected with and shaped

access to affordable housing and the fallout of the foreclosure crisis (Sentencing Project

2004).

The interviewer—a highly, and rightly, respected social justice advocate from the

area—was surely familiar with these inequalities, as were all of the anti-foreclosure

organizers I met. But, in attempting to build a unitary construction of their constituents'

interests, they deemphasized them. They instead rested their representational efforts on

images of respectable "working women" and capitulated, albeit unintentionally, to

racialized stigmas that suggest work instability stems from behavioral deficiency.

Moreover, because these images were, at least in the video, multiracial, their efforts

potentially granted legitimacy to the idea that such stigmas are, in fact, colorblind.[108]

Their efforts to negotiate the paradox of difference, thus, facilitated a partial and

unintentional reproduction of the inegalitarian biases that they opposed.[109]

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[108] Rose Ernst (2010, 53-55) refers to this phenomenon—of resisting racialized stigmas
with multiracial/multicultural images that include "respectable" people of color—as
"cosmetic colorblindness."

[109] The Bailout Coalition's attempt to unite poor constituents around demands for a
foreclosure moratorium itself evoked the dilemma of respectability. First, struggles for
moratorium legislation are often centered on temporarily halting the foreclosures of

As other scholars have shown, dilemmas of respectability are partly immanent to representational efforts centered on labeling and addressing the negative effects of (apparently) sudden economic crises (Edelman 1977; Strolovitch 2013). For advocates, these efforts promise to facilitate rapid egalitarian change. They articulate broad societal emergencies and call on dominant institutions to redress these emergencies through quick and expansive relief, some of which will undoubtedly reach members of marginalized constituencies. But, in practice, these types of efforts—whether adversarial or cooperative—tend to obscure the intersecting inequalities that affect the *most* marginalized and stigmatized members of society. Rather than construing events like economic recessions as manifestations of the "normal," unequal and neoliberal order, they often cast them as *deviations* from this order. In the latter case, advocates only bring attention to the short-term or recent inequalities arising from these apparent deviations, which often also happen to be the inequalities facing their least marginalized and most "respectable" constituents.

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homeowners—a group more easily depicted as respectable pillars of their communities. Thus, these struggles tend to ignore the struggles of poor, and often more marginalized and stigmatized, renters. Second, even moratorium legislation that would, like the Bailout Coalition's, also halt renter evictions still treats the foreclosure crisis as the manifestation of *temporary* challenges, such as recession-related job loss. Again, it is often the more "deserving" constituents for whom these problems are central. For many of the most marginalized poor constituents, it is long-term challenges that, in the first place, made them vulnerable to the machinations of the subprime market. Foremost among these challenges are lack of access to prime credit, living wages, and quality affordable housing. A foreclosure moratorium is definitely a worthy demand. But, when used as a unifying centerpiece, it risks obscuring other equally important—and perhaps *more* important—demands, such as those for more affordable housing restoration and development (in both rental and homeowner-occupied properties).

Bailout Coalition organizers, as I stated above, also encountered a dilemma of radicalism, stemming from their adversarial construction of the poor's relationship to dominant neoliberal institutions. To help underscore this relationship, they made extensive use of radical actions—namely, home occupation—and demands—namely, for a foreclosure moratorium. The radicalism of their efforts allowed them to highlight inequalities facing poor and working class homeowners that dominant neoliberal institutions had not effectively addressed, such as those related to diminished earnings and unreasonably high mortgage payments. They demonstrated that efforts to foster financial discipline and cooperation on the housing market—namely, loan modification, financial counseling, and consumer protections—were not working. And they showed why directly redistributing resources and authority on the housing market would do more to minimize foreclosure-related evictions in Minneapolis.

But, as with respectability, radicalism had a downside. To the extent that the Bailout Coalition's adversarial constructions became attached to radical demands, they and their supporters found few consequential points of entry in prevailing policy debates about foreclosures. As I suggested above and described in chapter 4, they *did* achieve substantial recognition in these debates. Members of the media, city residents and, especially, state legislators from the Twin Cities region bolstered this recognition.

During the 2009, 2010, and 2012 state legislative sessions, legislators worked with Bailout Coalition organizers, their supporters, and local media to introduce, publicize, and lobby for legislation that would place a moratorium on foreclosure-related evictions. In 2009 and 2010, when Democrats controlled the Minnesota State Legislature,

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this legislation received formal hearings in the House of Representatives' Housing Policy and Finance committee, which Karen Clark—a frequent Bailout Coalition ally and bill cosponsor—chaired. In 2010, the legislation actually passed out of this committee. Even in 2012, when Republicans controlled the legislature, Clark and other Democratic allies organized a press conference and an unofficial "people's hearing" in the State Office Building, where the Minnesota House of Representatives conducts its committee meetings.

The Bailout Coalition had a much more difficult time converting their participation in policy debates into concrete legislative influence. For many "mainstream" elected officials, demands that appeared to undermine dominant financial interests and/or destabilize markets were simply non-starters. For example, Joe Atkins—a multi-term Democratic chair of the Committee on Commerce in the Minnesota House— responded to the efforts of organizations like the Bailout Coalition by stating that the "banks are getting a bad rap." Atkins consistently blocked consideration of the Bailout Coalition-supported foreclosure moratorium in his committee because he thought legislators should "see what the market can do on its own" (Sandin 2007; Serres 2009).

Bailout Coalition organizers and their legislative supporters responded by arguing that their proposed moratorium legislation was, though redistributive, actually in the long-term interests of lenders as well as poor homeowners and tenants. During an informational hearing at the state capitol, Linden, an organizer in the Bailout Coalition, listed the "common sense" (versus radical) reasons why moratorium legislation should be passed:

Number one is it keeps people in their home to give them time to work out a deal with the bank. […] People need time to work something out when the conditions change and they need to refinance. […] So, obviously that protects people from being homeless.

Number two it protects neighborhoods. Houses are standing empty for months and years at a time. Those houses are a blight on neighborhoods. The houses get trashed. There's undesirable things that happen there. It drives property values down, lowers the tax base. It's just crazy to have these houses go empty.

And finally, even though, um, I don't have sympathy with the banks, it actually protects the banks investments. Because instead of people giving up and not paying, instead of an empty house declining in value and ready for the wrecking bill, under this bill people have to pay a portion of their income to keep it up. They have to stay in their home keep the home maintained plus keep paying. So, that protects the investments protects the banks and hopefully protects the whole neighborhood, as people get a chance to work out a mortgage that actually will work and keep them in their homes and save our neighborhoods. So, those are just a few of the *common sense* reasons why this is just a *common sense* bill. [emphasis added]

Progressive Democratic legislators affirmed the Bailout Coalition's attempts to align their constructions of class struggle with "common sense." For example, two years later, in an informal "people's hearing" at the state capitol, State Senator Scott Dibble—a strong supporter—emphasized that "it [the moratorium legislation] is actually on its face an extremely reasonable proposal." He continued, saying that

You know, sometimes you wonder if you should actually negotiate with yourself and put out kind of the best [i.e. most moderate] language, or try to reach for the stars […]. […] I think what we've done though, which is laudable and defensible, is we negotiated with ourselves. We came up with what I think is an *extremely* reasonable proposal that could be, in fact, passed in this form without further compromise and watering down, because it takes into consideration all the stakeholders in this process. It protects communities. It protects homeowners and tenants. And it protects lending institutions as well.

Beyond appeals to reasonableness and common sense, the fact that the Bailout Coalition constructed their constituents as a respectable class also potentially broadened their appeal. After all, class struggle and institutional transformation may be justified if they

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are on behalf of "responsible homeowners" (and sometimes tenants). During hearings, legislators were often quick to show moral support for and affirm the respectability of homeowners and foreclosure survivors testifying before them. They referred to these testifiers as "representatives" "anchors" and "pillars" of "the community."

All that said, the radicalism inherent in the Bailout Coalition's adversarial stance still showed through. Regardless of whether a foreclosure moratorium was in the long-term interests of banks, in the short-term, it would seize at least some control of the housing market away from them. Not only did Bailout Coalition organizers not hide this fact, they used it to mobilize and rally grassroots supporters *outside* the state legislature—in protests, home occupations, and press conferences. They declared over and over that "the banks must pay for their crisis," a far cry from the "common sense" espoused inside the state legislature.

Consequently, despite their valiant efforts, the Bailout Coalition could not convince more than a core group of legislative supporters that their proposals were, in fact, reasonable. Even members of this core group stated in strategy meetings that the moratorium legislation was "mainly a mobilizing tool" and, for all its reasonableness, not worth a ton of legislative effort.

None of this is to say that the Bailout Coalition should have suppressed the radicalism associated with their *common/class struggle* construction of the poor's interests. Without it, their efforts would have resonated more as empty rhetoric than meaningful construction. But, while clarifying the differences and adversarial relationship between the poor and dominant society, their radicalism also made it harder

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for them to appear reasonable to Republican and, more importantly, liberal Democratic policymakers.

The North Coalition and Public Education Justice

One might look at the experience of the Bailout Coalition and say, why not just do the opposite? If the coalition's efforts transformed the paradox of difference into such troubling dilemmas, why not represent and construct poor constituents' interests as intersectional and cooperative, rather than adversarial and unitary? The North Coalition did follow such a strategy, setting up a helpful comparison.

The North Coalition, as a reminder, formed in order to stop the closing of North Community High School, a public high school in north Minneapolis (see chapter 4). On October 12, 2010, the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) had issued a proposal to "phase out," or close, North Community High School—perhaps the most publicly maligned failing school in the city ("[B]urn North High School down!" City Councilman Don Samuels once exclaimed [Collins 2007]). North High, as it is more commonly called, was and is one of the poorest and most disproportionately black schools in Minneapolis. And it is located, not coincidentally, in Near North, a segregated north Minneapolis neighborhood with similar income and racial demographics.

The superintendent, in explaining her proposal, underlined the low scholastic achievement of North High students and framed the school itself as a primary cause. Citing below average standardized test scores and dwindling enrollment, she claimed that it was incorrigibly "challenged" and in "decline" (Johnson 2010a; Johnson 2010b)— labels more easily applied to schools with predominantly low-income and racial minority

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students. Her understood intention was to fix North High's apparent failure by opening a new (and already authorized) charter school, Minneapolis College Prep. This intention comported with both the neoliberal edicts of NCLB and established trends in MPS, a district that had already closed several public schools and, following its "strategic plan," authorized an increasing number of charter schools (Minneapolis Public Schools 2010a).

The North Coalition rejected the "failing" label placed on North High and demanded a reinvestment in efforts to raise educational quality and outcomes for the school's students. After extensive lobbying and demonstrating by the coalition, the superintendent, less than a month after issuing her initial proposal, withdrew it and introduced a new one. This new proposal requested permission to hire a consultant who would lead district officials and school and community stakeholders in designing a "new" North High that would "drive academic achievement" for students. At a meeting attended by more than 200 school supporters, the school board granted her request.

As the implementation of North High's "redesign" moved forward, North Coalition organizers represented the school's predominantly poor student body through an intersectional and cooperative construction of *shared inclusion*. This construction centered, more specifically, on the importance of *shared/community inclusion* and engagement (see chapter 6). In other words, the North Coalition located the poor's interests in efforts to redress intersecting barriers to incorporation that affect them as members of different communities, each of which has and shares a relationship to poverty. The poor students and families of North High, for them, constituted one such community.

As with the Bailout Coalition, the broad contours of the North Coalition's representational efforts came through in their official statements. For example, one of the coalition's member organizations issued a public report that stated the following:

> The bottom line is the school district has not transformed itself to be more accountable to the community. Leadership begins at the top. The academic program at North could not be transformed without accountability, support, and resources from the district. You cannot name one remarkable innovative 21st century thing the district has done at North in the last ten years. North High student's achievement scores are only symptoms. Students perform to expectations, much like everyone else. The district would rather throw out its most valuable assets than do the hard lifting to improve educational outcomes for North's current students and students living on the north side.

This statement evoked both dimensions of the North Coalition's efforts. First, it located their poor constituents as members of an intersectionally marginalized community. More specifically, it depicted their marginalization as symptomatic of an unequal distribution of support, resources, and overall accountability from the school district. And it treated this unequal distribution as a factor that intersects with and reflects a set of lower "expectations" imposed on the disproportionately black and low-income north side community. The end result, the argument goes, is that the specific challenges facing poor students in this community are not met.

Second, this statement, though appealing to the idea of "transformation," painted a cooperative picture of the political relationship between poor constituents and dominant institutions. According to this picture, improving the North High School's performance would require an effort to better incorporate poor students into the neoliberal/NCLB regime of public education and raise their achievement (on standardized tests). More specifically, rather than locating the north side community in a fight to transform overarching institutions, it pointed more narrowly to bad district leaders who haven't

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done the "hard lifting" to effectively manage the school and address the intersecting, community-specific barriers facing its students. And it suggests that good leaders could better address these barriers by implementing "remarkable innovative 21st century" programs. Such programs would be designed to raise student achievement within the current regime and make North High a high-performing school choice for north Minneapolis families.

North Coalition organizers gained district backing for their *shared/community inclusion* construction of poor students' interests in several key ways. First, they added MPS as a member of the North Coalition. This addition symbolized and formalized a growing engagement and cooperation between themselves as community and student representatives and the district as the manager of the school. Second, on January 29, 2011, they hosted a community potluck at North High. At this potluck, community members were invited to "re-vision" the school, identifying the types of "school culture," curriculum, community support, leadership, and faculty and staff that they thought would support "student excellence." The superintendent and multiple school board members also accepted invitations to attend. Third, the North Coalition helped several community members—including many from its own ranks—secure spots on district-controlled redesign advisory committees. One was a hiring committee formed to advise the interview and selection process for the consultant who would lead North High's redesign. Another was a community advisory board formed to advise the redesign process itself. In cooperation with the North Coalition, the district assembled both committees as a way to identify and incorporate students' needs into the redesign.

In practice, the North Coalition, like the Bailout Coalition, accomplished much through their efforts. First, they recast North High's low performance as an expression of district abandonment rather than school "failure" per se. A number of community supporters as well as local journalists eventually adopted this view. As one journalist stated in the title of a *Star Tribune* op-ed, "North High isn't dying a natural death" (Coleman 2010). Second, they organized and led significant community support for district efforts to "redesign" and strengthen North High (versus close it). In the fall of 2012, the "new" North High—officially, the North Community High School Academy of Arts and Communications—accepted its first freshman class. Although the North Coalition had stopped meeting more than a year before then, the school and its ongoing development were a testament to their important efforts.

In successfully implementing their strategy, the North Coalition also avoided the dilemmas faced by the Bailout Coalition. First, they opened up the possibility for discussing the kinds of racialized and community-specific inequalities suppressed within the Bailout Coalition's appeals to unity and respectability, such as those related to low performance and low expectations among the school's predominantly black student body. District officials actually invited participation from North High's racialized community to better identify students' needs, something they had failed to do in the recent past. Furthermore, as I summarized above, community members participated in events cosponsored by the North Coalition and MPS and received significant representation on multiple advisory committees. Redesign efforts also included a community survey and multiple focus groups, both of which aimed to uncover community members'

understandings of North High and its students' needs. Perhaps most importantly, the final design draft for the new North High called and planned for increased, more personal, and more efficacious interactions between parents and teachers.

Second, also unlike the Bailout Coalition, members of the North Coalition found many key public officials—including the MPS superintendent—willing to support the goals of *shared/community inclusion* (albeit, not without significant wrangling and pressure). This construction, while cultivating a more intersectional discussion of poor students' interests, also comported with MPS's strategic plan and mission—that is, raising student performance on high-stakes tests and improving school choice. As a result, the superintendent could more easily direct district resources, information, and personnel toward meeting the demands it informed, such as greater individualized student mentorship and expanded community outreach. For example, early in the redesign process, district officials used student contact lists, personnel, and office supplies to advertise and support the North Coalition's community events. And, later on, despite a diminishing and tight budget—the result of the recent recession, a district-wide decline in enrollment, and state legislative decisions—the superintendent set aside more than $150,000 to hire the consulting firm that would lead North High's "redesign." This firm, the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), was a strong proponent of community engagement and strengthening the performance of "failing" schools within the neoliberal framework of NCLB.[110] On the whole and throughout the redesign process, district

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[110] As the ISA mission states, the organization "partners with schools and districts to transform public high schools so that students who are traditionally underserved and

personnel remained committed to what the North Coalition started (although, again, not without the use of continued pressure from organizers).

That said, in constructing the poor as intersectional and cooperative, the North Coalition did not resolve the paradox of difference so much as they transformed it into a different set of problematic dilemmas. The first was a dilemma of otherness and stigmatization. By publicizing the racialized problems of low expectations and low performance facing students in the school, they partly fed opponents who suggested that a public school filled with low-income African American students is simply too dysfunctional for the district to manage and must be replaced by a charter school. Indeed, multiple school board members defended their preference for closing public schools in north Minneapolis by explicitly citing such problems. Moreover, they claimed the mantle of social and racial justice for themselves in doing so. As one board member stated, in justifying his vote to close Cityview, a North High "feeder" school that was also placed on the chopping block in fall 2010:

> Well, so, when people say, listen, it's a form of love to do this or that—it's also form of love to say we can't continue to do this anymore. […] I just know that…one out of four [students] are making reading scores. One out of five in math. And fewer than half are making one year's growth.[111] That's what I know, okay. I wish we had other measures that we were allowed [to use]. But that's what we've got. […] This absolutely is a social justice issue. *I think it's a social justice issue that fewer than one-half are making one year's growth*. […] *Racial justice? Absolutely*. We're talking about kids of color here, by and large. And this *is* about the kids. […] I don't see how I can't vote for tonight's recommendation [to close the school]. [emphasis added]

underperforming graduate prepared for success in college." See http://www.studentachievement.org/about-isa/.

[111] The board member repeated these numbers at least three more times during his comments.

Some supporters of North High's redesign also inadvertently fed discourses that attributed inequalities facing poor students of color to dysfunction. Most important among them was ISA, the consulting firm hired to lead the redesign. In its public presentations and promotional materials, ISA championed the idea of addressing students' needs by "building" "strong, long-term relationships"—between students, teachers, advisors, and parents.[112] Building strong relationships is, of course, an idea so ill-defined and well-intentioned that it cannot be criticized per se. However, when articulated in relation to a school like North High, it affirms an enduring yet oft-refuted, racialized, and stigmatizing thesis that says poor people's problems—including low student achievement—stem from the lack of functioning social ties in their neighborhoods (rather than from, for example, marginalization and lack of resources). Fortunately, the "new" North High's final design document shifted away from this idea somewhat, placing more emphasis on well-documented institutionalized barriers.

The second dilemma was one of moderation. More specifically, in linking their constituents' needs only to the reform of district management, the North Coalition encouraged a "redesign" process that obfuscated the broad, inequality-producing arrangements transcending particular school districts' efforts. The actions that they could consider through this process were definitely helpful in ways. The district could create new or more exciting academic programs, coach teachers to raise performance

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[112] http://www.studentachievement.org/approach/the-seven-principles/#building.

expectations, and build more meaningful employment connections between the school and local businesses.

However, by moderating and locating poor students' interests within the district's mission, the North Coalition also opened up opportunities for co-optation. District officials were able to claim broad support for North High students while, in practice, only emphasizing issues already deemed central to their mission and to raising test scores. As one might expect, these issues were, most often, those not requiring a substantial and direct redistribution of resources or authority. For example, at one community advisory board meeting, a district official circulated a "vision template" for the design that failed to consider housing instability, environmental racism, health disparities, or any distributional issues shown to affect student needs and success. Similar issues went unaddressed in ISA's model for school reform and, with the exception of student health care, the final design draft for the new North High. Higher on the docket were non-distributional issues such as "social-emotional supports," "safety," and "skill development." These issues are important and related to the inequalities poor students face. But, by many accounts, they are not the whole picture.

Relative to the Bailout Coalition, then, the North Coalition differently constructed poor constituents along the two dimensions highlighted in Figure 7.1. And, in doing so, they meaningfully reoriented the paradox of difference. But they did not resolve this paradox. Rather, they transformed it into a different set of dilemmas, both of which threatened to limit their contributions to egalitarian change and help reproduce public officials' inegalitarian biases.

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Conclusion

I opened this chapter with a clear problem: How, in the post-civil rights era, do advocates' efforts on behalf of marginalized constituencies come to reinforce the same inegalitarian biases they aim to redress? The answer, I have argued, stems from the paradox of difference that structures and surrounds their efforts. I conceptualized the range of constituent constructions they use to confront this paradox in terms of two dimensions: how they articulate the social solidarity that undergirds their constituents' interests; and how they relate these interests to dominant institutions. And I showed that each type of constituent construction transforms the broader paradox of difference into a set of provisional dilemmas that threaten to undermine advocates' contributions to egalitarian social change.

Lest this account sound overly deterministic or pessimistic, I should close by gesturing toward its limits. There are at least three. First, as I illustrated above, advocates can secure certain provisional accomplishments, even as they encounter dilemmas that proscribe these accomplishments. Dilemmas and all, neither the Bailout Coalition nor the North Coalition could be considered failures. Because of the former and their allies, multiple foreclosures were either stopped or delayed. And, in the presence of their efforts, it became more difficult to discuss the foreclosure crisis in Minneapolis without raising concerns about inequality and social and economic justice. Because of the latter, North High remains open today and has received an increased level of attention and support from MPS and the school's surrounding community. And the "failing" stigma no longer (totally) dominates the school's public image (e.g. KARE 11 Staff 2013).

Second, the fact that all post-civil rights advocacy efforts encounter dilemmas of difference and representation does not mean that all such efforts are equally compelling. That is, there are good reasons to believe that some constituent constructions place advocacy on a better footing and, thus, that some dilemmas are preferable (see chapter 8). Many scholars have argued, for example, that adversarial and intersectional constructions are—despite the dilemmas of radicalism and otherness—preferable to cooperative and unitary constructions. The former, they argue, at least recognize and publicize difference as something that needs to be addressed (Schram 2002; Strolovitch 2007). In other words, they foster representational efforts that acknowledge the source of their dilemmas and, thus, make these dilemmas more visible and subject to negotiation.

Third, in some times and some places, advocacy efforts can and do partially overcome dilemmas structured by the paradox of difference. For example, in its best moments, the welfare rights movement of the late 1960s effectively addressed and transcended the dilemma of otherness that often plagues efforts to mobilize and represent poor women of color (Nadasen 2005). As Frances Piven and Richard Cloward (1977) pointed out several years ago, advocacy and social movement organizations cannot, on their own, create such moments. But they can do their best to take advantage of them.

On the whole, however, advocates will continue to deal with the challenge of representing the socially marginal and battling neoliberalism under the paradox of difference. And while this paradox does not, by any means, render their efforts futile, it does introduce significant political risks of which advocates must, and often do, remain cognizant.

Chapter 8: Challenges and Lessons

For the foreseeable future, advocacy organizations will continue to be an important vehicle for the political representation of marginalized groups. The preceding chapters examined the broadly relevant challenges that these organizations face as they organize and carry out their representational efforts in the post-civil rights United States. Focusing on the efforts of three antipoverty organizations in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I clarified in particular the symbolic dimensions of these challenges and explored how, with what practical difficulties, and to what consequence advocates attempted to resolve them.

The challenges I outlined are interrelated and three-fold. First, and most fundamental, is the challenge to construct oneself and/or one's organization as a legitimate representative. As I described in chapter 4, this challenge emerges out of what Lisa Disch (2012) calls the "constituency paradox" of democratic representation—the fact that, in modern democracies, organized political actors construct and help to call forth the very constituent interests they claim to represent. Because of this paradox, claims to democratic accountability and legitimacy—as much as interests themselves— necessarily become political constructs. All aspiring representatives (not just advocates) must struggle among and against one another to somehow establish and "prove" these claims. If they cannot meet this challenge, their chances of influencing dominant political discourse and advancing egalitarian social change sharply diminish.

For advocacy organizations and other political actors representing non-electoral and marginalized constituencies, this challenge is often especially daunting. Their

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difficulties stem from the fact that, within dominant understandings of democratic representation, representatives are expected to mobilize a large constituent base that appears to actively sanction their efforts (Mansbridge 2003; Mansbridge 2009). Elected officials—who only exist by virtue of voter mobilization—and organizations representing privileged and politically engaged constituencies can frequently, if not always easily, meet this expectation.

Advocacy organizations, on the other hand, represent constituencies that are often hard to mobilize—due to stigmas, resource scarcity, and other factors that diminish political participation. Antipoverty organizations confront a particularly extreme version of this problem, as they represent one of the *most* demobilized constituencies in the US. The neoliberalization of poverty management has only made matters worse by reinforcing stigmas and resource scarcities that suppress participation among the poor (Soss Fording and Schram 2011; Wacquant 2009).

Chapter 4 showed that advocacy organizations have at least four tactics, in addition to mobilization, at their disposal to meet the foregoing challenge. They can magnify the presence of the constituents they do mobilize, emphasize descriptive and experiential connections to their constituents, demonstrate a principled identification with their constituents, and/or project the presence of a mobilized and supportive constituency into the future. The organizations I worked with and studied used all four tactics, sometimes separately and sometimes in combination. And by doing so, they achieved at least some measure of democratic legitimacy in an otherwise difficult political and social context.

The second challenge facing advocacy organizations is to effectively and clearly construct their constituents' interests. This challenge is heightened by the fact that advocates must, as they craft and disseminate constituent constructions, make a series of contentious tactical choices. And these choices—about, for example, compromises, alliances, and messaging—send potentially competing messages about where constituents' interests lie. To build clear and effective campaigns, advocacy organizations must somehow manage internal contention and align their representative decisions around strong—that is, well-articulated and consistent—constructions.

As with the first challenge, advocates representing marginalized constituencies are more likely to have difficulties with this challenge than other political actors. The reason is that, in the post-civil rights era, the political terrain underlying their representational choices has become especially knotty (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). More specifically, the neoliberal management of social marginality has injected a fundamental contradiction into their collective debates. On the one hand, neoliberal initiatives such as school choice and poverty deconcentration aim to expand the societal incorporation of marginalized groups and, in doing so, create more equal outcomes in society. These initiatives are, in other words, formally committed to goals that many progressive advocates also hold dear. On the other hand, in practice, these same initiatives often perpetuate the intersecting patterns of inequality and stigmatization that produce marginalization in US society.

Under these conditions, advocates receive fewer clear signals regarding which choices and constructions best serve their efforts on behalf of marginalized interests.

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Because so many neoliberal initiatives are cloaked in formal commitments to equality, cooperative constructions that locate marginalized interests in efforts to reform and improve these initiatives often appear worthwhile. However, any serious examination of neoliberalism's effects also reveals a plausible case for turning to adversarial constructions. Likewise, because neoliberalism in the US plays on stigmas surrounding marginalized groups, unitary constructions that displace these stigmas with images of unity, commonality, and respectability are potentially very attractive. Then again, intersectional constructions help to highlight intersecting inequalities and differences between marginalized constituents that stigmas tend to obscure.

In chapter 5, I showed how, amid such political murkiness, advocates manage their decisions and construct the interests of their constituents. Central to this process are the collective negotiations in which they articulate and defend their choices to one another. Through these negotiations, leader and organizers in each organization I studied established a political "footing"—that is, an assumed collective purpose and logic of political engagement (Goffman 1981; Eliasoph 1998)—that arranged their choices around specific constituent constructions. For example, the North Coalition developed a footing centered on "being positive" and "moving forward" that tended to align their decisions with an intersectional and cooperative construction of *shared/community inclusion*.

The third challenge I identified is for advocates to negotiate a paradox of difference that looms over most contemporary efforts on behalf of marginalized groups (Minow 1990; Young 1990). The paradox is that advocates, as representatives, can

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neither hide nor highlight differences surrounding marginalized constituents without encountering significant political dilemmas. It applies both to differences that divide their constituents from dominant society and to those that cross-cut and differentiate the constituency itself. On the one hand, if advocates attempt to suppress or transcend these differences, they run the risk of obscuring important inequalities that they might otherwise illuminate. On the other hand, if they highlight and address various differences, they risk fomenting divisions and stigmas that potentially derail their efforts. Either way, advocates must somehow deal with difference and confront the foregoing paradox.

This challenge has, like the other two, become an even greater source of difficulty during the post-civil rights era (Cohen 1999; Reed 1999a; Strolovitch 2007). Two post-civil rights shifts, in particular, have exacerbated the paradox of difference. First, because of the greater political incorporation wrought by civil rights-era victories, many members of marginalized groups now benefit from and have acquired a direct stake in protecting dominant institutions. They have done so even as these same institutions have enacted a harmful neoliberal transformation to the management of social marginality. Advocates, thus, face an especially sharp paradox of difference: if they highlight differences between marginalized constituents and dominant society, tying the pursuit of egalitarian change to demands for institutional transformation, they risk alienating constituents who benefit from dominant institutions as they are. But if they obscure those differences in the name of achieving moderate "common sense" reforms, they lose important opportunities to publicize clear systemic problems with dominant institutions.

The second shift is the growing inequality and differentiation within marginalized constituencies. While, during the post-civil rights era, relatively privileged members of these constituencies have benefitted from the incorporation described above, relatively disadvantaged and stigmatized members have experienced deepening marginalization. For advocates, the paradox of difference again intensifies. If they want to address the full array of challenges facing their constituents, they clearly need to address growing inequalities between these constituents. But in order to address these intersecting inequalities, they must often highlight members of their constituencies who are increasingly stigmatized.

Even more so than the other two challenges, this third challenge contains no obvious solution. Regardless of what advocates do, the paradox of difference has the potential to undermine their contributions to egalitarian social change and help reproduce the problematic inegalitarian biases of many public officials. Advocates can, however, actively shape and manage the form this paradox takes by drawing on different types of constituent constructions.

As I demonstrated in chapter 6, each possible dimension of these constructions—unitary, intersectional, cooperative, and adversarial—converts the broader paradox of difference into a more specific political dilemma. Unitary constructions shape the paradox into a dilemma of respectability. Advocates using these constructions equate the experiences of their most privileged and "respectable" constituents with those of their entire constituency and, in doing so, risk obscuring somewhat different inequalities facing their most marginalized and stigmatized members. Intersectional constructions

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underscore these differences among their constituents and, consequently, evoke a dilemma of otherness. They offer more inclusive accounts of their constituents' interests, but risk that opponents might use the differences they highlight to recast their constituents as dysfunctional 'others.'

Cooperative constructions convert the paradox of difference into a dilemma of moderation. Advocates using them call for moderate and politically feasible reforms. Consequently, they risk of obscuring differences between the inequalities facing their constituents and those that even reformed neoliberal institutions can actually address. Finally, as adversarial constructions interact with the paradox of difference, they give rise to a dilemma of radicalism. They clarify differences obscured under cooperative constructions and enliven demands for a radical and egalitarian transformation of dominant institutions. However, precisely because of their radicalism, advocates using these constructions often appear unreasonable within prevailing policy debates. This perception occurs not only among their opponents in these debates but also potential elite supporters.

Despite the foregoing dilemmas and the broader paradox from which they stem, many advocacy organizations still secure provisional victories in their quest for equality. Each antipoverty organization that I studied was able to achieve some set of goals while still dealing with the problems introduced by various dilemmas. Likewise, as I discuss below, there is reason to believe that some constituent constructions—namely, intersectional and adversarial constructions—and their attendant dilemmas are, in many contexts, more preferable than others.

Lessons and Strategy

An inevitable and justifiable question almost always arises in response to analyses of political organization and social marginality: what is to be done? In this case, how, in the post-civil rights era, should advocates negotiate the challenges summarized above? How should they and other political actors construct and represent marginalized interests?

As cliché as it sounds, my response to this question must begin by acknowledging that I am *not* an experienced organizer. I am, therefore, ill-equipped to offer strategic advice to specific advocacy organizations faced with particular choices about their representational efforts. In any case, as I will argue below, these particular choices cannot—or at least should not—be resolved through grand, schematic, and idealist discussions, such as those found in some scholarly manuscripts and sectarian "unity statements." They are best worked out in practice and through collective action.

I am also, however, unsatisfied with the idea of an analysis of political representation and advocacy that simply refuses to participate in debates about strategy. Rather than aid efforts on behalf of marginalized groups, this refusal would leave me to meander through minimally helpful and politically evasive discussions about 'encouraging critical reflection' and 'better understanding.'[1] As Marx ([1843] 1978, 13) taught us, an effective and "[ruthless] criticism must not be afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be." 'Not being afraid,' in my case, must surely

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[1] Although, as a caution against "problem-driven research" that proceeds without serious critical reflection and understanding, see Norton (2004).

include at least *some* willingness to link my findings to strategic and potentially confrontational debates about how to best advocate on behalf of marginalized interests.

Accordingly, my response to the question of 'what is to be done' is neither to overprescribe strategic advice nor to retreat from strategic discussion altogether. Rather, I will respond and close this dissertation by drawing three strategic *lessons* out of my analysis. These lessons do not inform *what* advocates should do as representatives as much as *how* they should do it. Each highlights a broadly relevant consideration that, if taken seriously, would provide for more theoretically-informed and, hopefully, egalitarian efforts on behalf of marginalized constituents.

The first and most general lesson is that the interests of marginalized constituents are not self-evident or given. They are, in fact, contestable constructions. That is to say, advocacy organizations and other political actors shape their presence by illuminating certain aspects of marginalized constituents' experiences and obscuring others. This lesson may sound hackneyed in a world where advocates already have heated debates about how to "frame" themselves and their demands. However, it pushes the boundaries of these debates in at least two crucial ways.

First, whereas advocates and academics often treat frames as tools for representatives to express and defend preexisting interests, constituent constructions bring those interests—and, by extension, the representatives themselves—into being. They articulate them and give them voice in political arenas where they would otherwise

exist differently or not exist at all.[2] Allusions to framing, thus, often obfuscate the weight and scope of what advocates' representational efforts actually do. If advocacy organizations are not careful, they can, without notice or consideration of the potential consequences, change both the marginalized interests they claim to represent and their own role as representatives (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010).

Second, whereas advocates and academics often reduce frames to matters of public speech, the symbolic side of political representation extends much further—though public speech is certainly a major part of it. Advocates' constructions of themselves and their constituents permeate, as I have shown, most of the practices that they use to organize themselves, make decisions, and act publicly.

This first lesson underscores a key dimension on which advocacy organizations can and should evaluate each aspect of their efforts. Decisions about, for example, where and when to host meetings, how to reach out to new members, and how to frame demands affect not only how advocates pursue their immediate material goals. These decisions communicate and reinforce assumptions about who advocates' constituents are: on whose behalf do they think they are succeeding or failing? Who do they think they are mobilizing to attend meetings and public actions? To whom do they think they are reaching out? Whose demands do they think they are framing? If advocates make decisions, craft their legitimacy, and confront dilemmas of difference without debating these symbolic questions in concrete terms—that is, without saying something more than

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[2] In this sense, my discussion of constituent constructions and political representation harkens back to Goffman's (1974) original discussion of frame analysis. Also see fn. 2 in chapter 1.

"we represent the community/people/99 percent/etc."—they risk exerting themselves on behalf of a marginalized interest that differs from the one they wanted to represent.

A contrast between the Bailout Coalition and the Welfare Rights Committee is instructive on this point. Through their efforts to oppose foreclosures, Bailout Coalition organizers often appeared as if they *wanted* to represent their constituents on intersectional terms. For example, they designed and advocated for a foreclosure moratorium bill that specifically highlighted foreclosure-related challenges facing *tenants* as well as homeowners. By attaching themselves to this legislation, they showed a willingness to address potentially stigmatized but significant differences between groups of poor people affected by the foreclosure crisis—one of the hallmarks of an intersectional constituent construction. But they effectively suppressed this intersectional turn by presenting foreclosure survivors through a unitary lens that leaned on the experiences of "responsible" homeowners.

Welfare Rights Committee organizers, many of whom worked in the Bailout Coalition, also clearly aimed to construct welfare recipients' and poor constituents' interests on intersectional terms. However, in contrast to the coalition, the committee consistently produced these terms through many of their decisions and actions. Women in the committee not only supported (or opposed) policies that addressed (or worsened) the intersecting inequalities many of them face. They did so in ways that directly highlighted their and others' different relationships to poverty and often dismantled (versus side-stepped) the discourses that opponents used to stigmatize these differences. Several members of the Welfare Rights Committee openly discussed and defended, for example,

their work as single mothers during the testimonies before committees in the state legislature. Through these and other actions, they ensured that the intersectional constituency they wanted to represent was, in fact, the one they constructed.

The second lesson to emerge from my analysis is that not all constructions of marginalized constituents' interests are equally compelling. Some are downright bad, lending support to policy efforts that obscure and/or exacerbate challenges and inequalities facing these constituents. For example, as many scholars and activists have shown, underclass constructions of the poor have little, if anything, beneficial to offer to the pursuit of egalitarian social change.

Like the first lesson, this one may sound obvious. When acting as representatives, advocates are always already committed to the notion that some accounts of their constituents' interests are better than others. After all, without these commitments, they would have no reason to advocate. That said, this second lesson points to a particular *basis* on which advocates should form their commitments to different constituent constructions.

Many, though not all, advocates in my study at least implicitly based their commitments on the idea that particular constructions provided either more *authentic* or more *accurate* accounts of their constituents' interests than others. The belief that some constituent constructions are more authentic—that is, grounded in some pre-political source of legitimacy—than others is, for at least practical purposes, false. As I showed in chapter 5, advocates' forge the legitimacy of their efforts *in* and *through* political conflict with other groups. Moreover, as I showed in chapter 6, the constituent constructions that

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they deploy *as* legitimate are the product of *intra*group political conflict, in which

organizers compete over and *police* the terms of their collective negotiations and

decision-making processes. Any claim to authenticity is, in short, much more an effect of

advocates' representational efforts than a valid justification for them (Reed 1999a).

The idea, on the other hand, that some constructions provide more accurate

accounts of constituents' interests is a valid one. To be sure, in a multidimensional and

ever-changing social world, nobody can wholly and uncontestably define even their own

best interests. However, as John Gaventa (1980) demonstrated in his seminal study of

power, careful observers can identify empirically *inaccurate* constructions and accounts

of marginalized interests. Several studies have shown, for instance, that the underclass

constructions mentioned above paint an inaccurate, if not totally false, picture of the

challenges facing the poor and other marginalized groups. On the flip side, many other

analyses have shown that intersectional and adversarial constructions of *shared struggle*

consistently provide the *least* inaccurate—which is not to say True—account of

marginalized interests (e.g. Crenshaw 1991; Collins [1990] 2000).

The major problem with using empirical accuracy as a basis for committing to

different constituent constructions is that, in the pursuit of equality, it does not always

count for much. As I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, it is political struggles

that determine whether and how advocates can influence public and policy discourses

(Stone 2002). In line with this point, advocates should, I argue, base their representational

commitments on whether or not they maximize their ability to extend political struggles

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for equality—not necessarily on whether they are the most accurate (and definitely not on whether they appear to be the most authentic) (Schram 2002).

Oftentimes, the empirical accuracy and political effectiveness of constituent constructions are coterminous, perhaps rendering this point moot. For example, underclass constructions and other demonstrably inaccurate depictions of marginalized interests also generally have the most harmful political consequences (Reed 1999a). Likewise, constructions of *shared struggle*, precisely because of their greater accuracy, stand to bring the most clarity to discussions of how public policy can foster equality.

In my own work, the Bailout Coalition combated housing instability with a unitary and adversarial construction of *common/class struggle* that was both less accurate and, I argue, less politically effective than an intersectional and adversarial construction of *shared struggle* might have been. The former construction focused public attention primarily on "respectable" poor and working class people whose housing problems stemmed from relatively recent or short-term challenges—such as a temporary loss of income or, for homeowners, a sudden decline in home value. The latter construction would have also highlighted longer-term challenges—such as the disappearance of living wage work and affordable housing—that have disproportionately produced housing instability among Minneapolis' most disadvantaged poor communities. By doing so, this construction would not only have more accurately depicted the intersecting inequalities affecting poor and working class Minneapolitans. It also would have allowed the Bailout Coalition to appeal to and potentially mobilize a much broader base of constituents. This hypothetical base certainly would have included more stigmatized groups—such as

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chronically unemployed and/or previously incarcerated tenants—thereby, evoking a dilemma of otherness. But the Bailout Coalition would have confronted this dilemma during a time of general social instability, in which liberal Twin Cities' residents may have been more willing to overlook (albeit, not dismantle) stigmas inscribed on poor communities (cf. Goetz 2003, 109-111).

All that said, the empirical accuracy and political effectiveness of different constituent constructions do, in fact, sometimes diverge. The North Coalition's efforts, in particular, clarified this point for me. Coalition organizers consistently drew on an intersectional and cooperative construction of *shared/community inclusion* that was, empirically speaking, less than desirable. This construction located poor students' interests in efforts to redesign and "turnaround" their "failing" schools. These redesigned schools would, the story goes, engage and address poor students' unmet, intersecting, and community-specific needs—such as "wrap around" social services and more parental engagement—raise their academic performance, and provide them with some measure of upward mobility. As many scholars and journalists have shown, the cooperative and neoliberal logic that underlies this construction of poor students' interests is unacceptably inaccurate. It obscures the well-documented fact that poor students' educational difficulties stem much more from the inequalities that *surround* them and their schools than the apparent failures of the schools themselves (even if it is true that redesigned schools might better address some of those inequalities).

Politically speaking, however, the North Coalition's appeals to *shared/community inclusion* proved most effective, given their practical context. In this context: district

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officials showed willingness, with enough neighborhood support, to redesign (versus

close) North High School; students and many others in their constituent base lacked

political resources and capabilities for sustained protest[3]; and appeals to "community"

already permeated the rhetoric of school supporters and district officials. Because of the

district's flexibility and the low likelihood of sustained protest, representational efforts

rooted in more adversarial appeals to *common* or *shared struggle* likely would have

fizzled. Additionally, given the prominence of community rhetoric among both district

officials *and* supporters, efforts rooted in *common struggle* or *inclusion*—which, in this

case, tended to rely on different types of class rhetoric—also would have faced practical

difficulties. *Shared/community inclusion*, on the other hand, took hold of community

rhetoric, did not demand a practically unsupportable protest campaign, and capitalized on

the district's willingness to deliver more resources and support to North High and its poor

students. Consequently, the North Coalition's turn toward this construction was—despite

its glaring empirical inaccuracies—politically prudent. With it, they cajoled the district

into keeping North High open and using more resources to address the intersecting

barriers facing its students. Perhaps more important, while the North Coalition's

representational efforts did not generate a transformative demand for the elimination of

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[3] In other contexts, where teachers unions work with advocates to subsidize resources for sustained protest among constituents, this limitation is less formidable. For example, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators in the Chicago Teachers Union has organized with community-based advocacy groups to provide political resources to poor students and their parents. And, by doing so, the caucus has created more possibilities for the kinds of sustained protest needed to develop and deploy adversarial constructions. See Uetricht (2014).

neoliberal education, they extended the struggle for this elimination and for greater

educational equality.[4]

The third lesson, which builds on the second, has two sides. The first side is that, while not all approaches to representing and constructing marginalized interests are equally compelling, neither is any one approach universally ideal. Because of the dilemmas that flow from the paradox of difference, advocates' efforts—regardless of how they construct their constituencies—always have the potential to both advance and hinder the pursuit of equality. As the foregoing comparison between the Bailout Coalition and the North Coalition suggests, whether they accomplish one or the other is more a product of their ability to simultaneously adapt to and challenge their political environment than their adherence to a grand or ideal scheme (McCammon 2012).

However, the other side of this lesson is that, although no approach to constructing and representing marginalized interests is universally ideal, there is good reason to believe that constructions of *shared struggle* are the *most* politically useful in the *most* post-civil rights contexts. This broad usefulness stems from three sources. First, by acknowledging the differences that both surround and cross-cut marginalized

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[4] For another example of the divergence between empirical accuracy and political effectiveness, see Corey Shdaimah, Roland Stahl, and Sanford Schram's (2011, 163-65) account of why they and their allies pursued affordable housing by demanding home repair funding for Philadelphia's poor homeowners. On the one hand, by emphasizing home repair, they knowingly and partly capitulated to a "homeownership ideology" that inaccurately links the poor's interests to asset building. On the other hand, in their particular context—a city with an exceptionally large number of aging, low-income, and owner-occupied homes—home repair was, despite its potentially inaccurate and cooperative logic, a politically useful demand that aided the long-term struggle for affordable housing and equality.

constituencies, these constructions promise to put the broadest possible array of inequalities into play (Piven 1981; Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). Second, because they appeal to shared sources of marginalization (versus common identities or social positions), they also promise to inform coalitions for equality that are larger and more adaptable (Cohen 1997; Beltrán 2010; Hancock 2011).

Finally, *shared struggle* cultivates a greater awareness of the dilemmas of difference that threaten advocates' representational efforts. Like all constituent constructions, those of *shared struggle* evoke these dilemmas. But, in contrast to unitary and cooperative constructions, they typically do so in ways that illuminate rather than obscure their existence *as* dilemmas and their roots in issues of difference. For example, whereas many advocates drawing on unitary constructions only see respectability as a boon to their efforts, advocates drawing on *shared struggle* could hardly miss the threats of otherness that arise when they underscore the differentiation within their constituencies. Similarly, whereas many advocates drawing on cooperative constructions see their moderation primarily as a tool to "get things done," most drawing on *shared struggle* are all too aware of how their radicalism diminishes their intelligibility within high-stakes policy debates.

The upshot of this final lesson is that, although transformative appeals to *shared struggle* are not practically ideal or possible in every context, advocates should always keep watch for chances to build towards them. Moreover, they should prepare themselves and their organizations to recognize and take advantage of these chances when they come. This recommendation is made in the spirit of what Sanford Schram (2002)—

building on the work of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward—calls "radical incrementalism." Radical incrementalism says that progressive advocates should maximize short-term gains in ways that lay a long-term foundation for pursuing more radically egalitarian social change.

Fortunately, many scholarly and engaged observers have already specified radical incrementalist practices that advocates can—and, in some cases, already do—use to link their existing representational efforts to possibilities for *shared struggle*. Dara Strolovitch (2007), for example, has identified "affirmative advocacy," a set of practices that many advocates use to cultivate intersectional accounts of solidarity that inform *shared struggle*. Some of the practices she highlights include: using organizational mandates to clarify the importance of inequalities facing intersectionally disadvantaged constituents; cultivating a willingness to evolve in response to emerging or previously unaddressed inequalities; and emphasizing and elucidating organizational commitments to intersectional solidarity and social justice. Other scholars have highlighted similar "multi-identity practices" (Kurtz 2002) and practices of "deep political solidarity" (Hancock 2011). Another group of scholars has specified practices that many advocates use to cultivate awareness of the adversarial political relationships illuminated through *shared struggle*. These scholars have focused, for example, on more dissident practices such as "coalitional consciousness-building" (Keating 2005) and "grassroots fundraising" (Guilloud and Cordery 2007).

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Every day, advocates in the US meet, organize, and act collectively on behalf of marginalized constituencies. As they represent these constituents' interests, they confront many challenges—most of which stem from situational factors that they cannot control and none of which are totally resolvable. My modest hope is that the preceding pages and chapters have further clarified the contours of these challenges and the range of ways that advocates respond to them. My greater hope is that, in offering these clarifications, I have aided the effort to build a more effective response to the colossal and long-term problems of representation, social marginalization, and inequality that plague US democracy.

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Appendix: Research Design and Fieldwork

The symbolic processes linking advocacy, political representation, marginalization, and neoliberalism that this dissertation examines do not occur in general, whether in relation to the poor or any other marginalized constituency. They emerge unevenly among specific organizations and across different locales. Thus, to explore them properly, one must study and collaborate with particular actors and organizations in a particular place (Flyvberg 2006; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). To do so, I conducted extensive fieldwork among three antipoverty organizations in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Placing Minneapolis

In at least two ways, Minneapolis served as an especially useful location for exploring the representational challenges facing antipoverty advocates and advocacy organizations more generally. First, the city features an active polity and a wide variety of antipoverty and progressive advocacy organizations (e.g. Goetz 2003; Sidney 2003). Socialist organizations, community organizations, labor unions, legal advocates, environmental justice organizations, women's organizations, and many others work, in different ways and at different times, to improve the political representation of marginalized constituencies. Consequently, I had little difficulty finding groups of advocates whose efforts varied along the typological dimensions outlined in several chapters and attaining the analytical leverage needed to unpack my claims.

Second, despite sometimes being perceived simply as a progressive and "livable" city (Schmickle 2010; Smith 2011), Minneapolis actually exemplifies, in key ways, the

intersection of race, marginalization, and neoliberalism that faces antipoverty advocates in the post-civil rights United States (see chapter 2).

In Minneapolis, as in many US cities, this intersection has mapped closely onto patterns of residential segregation (Massey and Denton 1993). Many people of color find themselves living in a few contiguous neighborhoods—mostly northwest of downtown and in the near southern section of the city (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997, 42). These neighborhoods exhibit the highest poverty rates, lowest incomes, highest unemployment and underemployment, greatest food insecurity, highest housing instability, most policing, and so on (Institute on Race and Poverty 1997; Goetz 2003; Allen 2011). They are also the most exposed to the marginalizing effects of poverty deconcentration, school choice, and other neoliberal initiatives. Consequently, even relative to the average US city and metro area, the racial stratification of poverty and poverty-related challenges in Minneapolis is quite extreme—especially between white residents and residents who are black, American Indian, Latino, and Hmong.

In addition to featuring extreme racial stratification, stigmatizing and racialized and gendered constructions of poor constituents have also persisted and proliferated in post-civil rights Minneapolis. This proliferation occurred, not coincidentally, during a time when the city and region's non-white population rapidly increased. The census data in Table A.1 illustrate this rapid change in the racial demographics of Minneapolis. In just 30 years, the white share of the city population dropped by over 30 percent. And the presence of Black, Asian, and Latino populations grew substantially.

Table A.1
Racial Demographics in Minneapolis

Percent:	1970	1980	1990	2000	Change
White	93.7	87.7	77.5	62.5	-31.2
Black	4.4	7.7	12.9	17.9	+13.5
Asian	0.7	1.4	4.3	6.1	+5.4
Latino	0.9	1.3	2.0	7.6	+6.7

Source: Sidney (2003), Table 4.1; Bureau of the Census, 2000, 1990, 1980, 1970.

The sudden shift in the city's racial composition brought heightened visibility to the disproportionate poverty and marginality among its people of color. As local observers have noted, news media captured and directed this visibility through stories of drug-related violence perpetrated by racial minorities, especially young black men ("Body Count" 1995; Goetz 2003). The public responded to this framing accordingly, exhibiting heightened fears of crime in the city. From 1987 to 1993, the number of residents in the Twin Cities region who listed crime as the "single most important problem facing the Twin Cities" skyrocketed from just over ten percent to over sixty percent (Metropolitan Council 2010, 11). Public officials, far from simply responding to stigmatizing and racialized constructions of the poor, pursued neoliberal initiatives that drew on and reproduced them. Many officials, for example, supported school choice reforms that cast public schools in poor, disproportionately nonwhite neighborhoods as dysfunctional "failures" pulled down by apathetic teachers, rambunctious boys, sexually promiscuous girls, and dependent parents. Lost in this turn to school choice was the need to explore institutionalized and intersecting inequalities facing these schools and their students, such as those related to food insecurity, housing instability and language.

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Comparing Organizations

The three organizations I studied—the Bailout Coalition, the Welfare Rights Committee, and the North Coalition—addressed a broad array of poverty-related issues in post-civil rights Minneapolis, including the quality of public education in low income and predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods, welfare policy, regressive taxation and government spending, and foreclosure-related evictions. I do not claim, however, that they are wholly representative of antipoverty advocacy in the United States, or even in Minneapolis.[1] Advocacy efforts on behalf of the poor, or any marginalized constituency, draw on a wide array of ideas and practices, only some of which come to the surface in a single in-depth study.

In choosing which organizations to study, I pursued what ethnographer Mitchell Duneier (2011) calls an "inconvenience sample." Just like the label suggests, such as sample requires scholars to seek out those research subjects who are most inconvenient for their analyses—that is, the people who are most likely to see themselves as misrepresented or caricatured.

The justification for an inconvenience sample stems from the fact that, when scholars conduct in-depth and interpretive fieldwork, constructing a random sample of cases is neither possible nor appropriate (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). In light of this fact, we require an alternative "best practice" for maximizing the truthfulness of their arguments. The inconvenience sample provides one such practice. More specifically, by

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[1] However, they are not wholly unrepresentative either. Several advocates in the organizations I studied collaborate with other advocates around the US who likely operate in similar ways.

pursuing and studying inconvenient cases, researchers can increase the likelihood of detecting and correcting the most systematic errors or gaps in their arguments.

In my own study, I started out by working with the Bailout Coalition, primarily in the context of their anti-foreclosure efforts. At the time, I was mostly focused on exploring the possibilities and challenges of representing the poor through adversarial and cooperative constructions. However, my analysis was plagued by the fact that, as a whole, the Bailout Coalition tended to suppress consideration of racial difference and other types of difference that often intersect the class experiences of the poor and working class. If I had only focused on the Bailout Coalition, I would have failed to appreciate how their participation in this suppression shaped their efforts and the challenges they faced. Moreover, advocacy organizations that more actively try to avoid this suppression could have said my analysis caricatured or ignored the challenges that *they* face. Consequently, I sought out and studied two such organizations—the Welfare Rights Committee and the North Coalition—bringing inconvenient cases into my sample and forcing an extension of my argument.

When all was said and done, each organization's efforts contrasted with those of the others in theoretically relevant ways, covering a broad range of the strategies and tactics available to post-civil rights advocates. Contrasts emerged, in particular, on the two dimensions introduced in chapters 1 and 3. One dimension was how they constructed the social solidarity that defines the poor as a constituency with coherent interests (Strolovitch 2007; Ernst 2010). The Welfare Rights Committee (as seen in the opening paragraphs) and the North Coalition tended to construct an intersectional solidarity—that

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is, one characterized by shared interests that are intersecting and linked *but* sometimes

distinct along, for example, lines of race and gender. The Bailout Coalition, on the other

hand, mostly associated the poor with a unitary solidarity characterized by the presence

of undifferentiated and common interests.

The second dimension on which they contrasted was how advocates related poor

constituents' interests to dominant—in this case, neoliberal—institutions of poverty

management (Edelman 1977; Schram 2002). Whereas the Welfare Rights Committee and

Bailout Coalition constructed this relationship as an adversarial one—calling on public

officials to transform poverty management—the North Coalition constructed it in a more

cooperative manner—calling for piecemeal reforms designed to better incorporate poor

students into dominant society. Because of the foregoing contrasts, we can suppose that

commonalities in the types of challenges facing all three organizations reflect broad

dynamics of representing the poor and other marginalized constituencies rather than the

particular consequences of their strategic choices.

Navigating the Field

To actually study and compare the Bailout Coalition, the Welfare Rights

Committee, and the North Coalition, I accompanied their members and leaders to several

organizing meetings and public events and participated in numerous informal

conversations. Table A.2 reports the number of meetings and events I attended with each

of the three organizations. Organizing meetings typically lasted anywhere from one and a

half to three hours. And public events lasted anywhere from an hour (for example,

protests and press conferences) to several hours (for example, legislative hearings and

public meetings).

Table A.2 Fieldwork in Three Organizations			
	Welfare Rights Committee	*Bailout Coalition*	*North Coalition*
Organizing Meetings	24	11	25
Public Events	27	18	17

I gathered observational "data" from these meetings and public actions by

drawing on a mix of traditional participant observation and what João Costa Vargas calls

"observant participation." Vargas (2008, 175-76), reflecting on his own fieldwork with

the Los Angeles-based Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA), defines the two methods

as follows:

> While *participant observation* traditionally puts the emphasis on observation, *observant participation* refers to active participation in the organized group, such that observation becomes an appendage of the main activity. Indeed, that is how my days were spent: after hours of numerous activities in the [CAPA] office, at night I would write down notes about the day's events and reflect on how they affected and were inflected by the strategies that we were utilizing to combat Black people's oppression. The field notes had at least a double function. Whereas they obviously served to record details about office routine […], they were also a means to reflect on the effectiveness, transformation, reformulation, and application of everyday interventions to reverse Black oppression.

Where possible and respectful, I leaned toward the participant observation side of

Vargas' distinction. As a participant observer, I used participation to put myself in the

role of a witness, creating detailed jottings or audio recordings while in the field. For

example, in many organizing meetings, I spent most of my time writing rather than

providing substantive input on agenda items, as a typical participant might. This approach

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to fieldwork held several methodological benefits. I was able to: maintain a critical

distance between myself and each organization, creating increased space for reflection

and theorizing; mark myself as a researcher, cultivating a general transparency about the

reasons for my presence; and collect more detailed observations, ensuring a richer

analysis.

That said, in at least two ways, my fieldwork could not have existed without

regular use of observant participation. First, by putting down my notepad or audio

recorder and contributing to each organization's efforts, I cultivated a relationship of trust

between myself as a researcher participant and the other members of each organization.

The menial tasks I performed—such as holding banners, contacting supporters, and

engaging in community outreach—were, in this sense, quite meaningful.

On this point, an organizer in the Welfare Rights Committee described how, in

the past, the committee had required students and academics wanting to observe the

group to "give our members [many of whom lack reliable transportation] rides to

meetings." I supported her inclination, arguing that:

> Something about this kind of work is inherently exploitative. […] I am using
> what I observe to write a dissertation and get a job. […] [B]asically, the
> organization gets very little in return. So, you should require people to contribute
> something if they are going to study the group.[2]

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[2] Vargas (2008, 175) explains his own relationship with CAPA in similar terms:

> [U]nless your allegiance was beyond doubt, you would neither gain the trust of
> CAPA activists nor be able to circulate unencumbered in the building. So forget
> being a graduate student in anthropology trying to do participant observation.
> You were an activist first and, circumstances permitting, an observer second.

Looking back, I now realize that my comments in this conversation were somewhat narrow-minded and naïve. Observant participation is not always possible or appropriate as an approach to fieldwork.[3] Nor is it the only way to make a democratic contribution and mitigate the exploitative tendency of much social science research. That said, my experiences showed me that its trust- and relationship-building role *can* be vital when studying politically contentious and/or marginalized groups.

Beyond building trust, observant participation also deepened my experiences in each organization and, by doing so, helped guide my analyses. Observant participation, in other words, often helped me understand *what* to observe. For example, it is only by helping to author public messages in two of the organizations that I began to understand some of the tactics they all used to legitimate their efforts—the topic of chapter 5. Likewise, by participating in each organization's collective negotiations, I began to encounter and uncover the assumptions underlying these negotiations—the topic of chapter 6.

After most observation periods—regardless of how participatory they were—I spent several hours transforming my records and experiences into extensive field notes. Over the course of my study, I created around one thousand pages of typed or written field notes.

To enhance the analysis emerging out of my systematic observations, I also collected many material artifacts, such as posters, press releases, listserv discussions,

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[3] Consider, for example, ethnographic work on organized racism (Blee 2002) or civil conflict (Wood 2006).

movement-produced news articles, fliers and second-hand video footage. These artifacts served two vital functions. First, they allowed me to corroborate and refine my analyses with material evidence that I usually had little to no hand in producing. The result was, I think and hope, an increase in the accuracy of my illustrations and cogency of my claims. Second, material artifacts often clued me into additional dynamics I might explore as I continued to observe organizing meetings and public events. They broadened my exposure to the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes divergent practices through which each organization crafted their representational efforts (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 84-89).

Note on Confidentiality

Much of the information about the organizations and advocates discussed in this study is a matter of public record. This information includes, for example, the names and collective opinions of each organization and the content of statements made during protests and other public events. The parts of my analysis that draw on public information about organizations and advocates make no attempt to protect their confidentiality. Advocates and advocacy organizations, in fact, *want* attribution for the statements they have publicly made and defended.

I also, of course, gathered information from advocates in contexts where they had a reasonable expectation of privacy and confidentiality. This information includes, for example, the content of statements made during organizing meetings and personal details shared during informal conversations. In the parts of my analysis where I draw on private

information, I employ pseudonyms and omit certain details in order to conceal individual advocates' identities.

Note on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the groups of people I worked with and studied as "antipoverty advocates," by which I mean, political actors who advocate on behalf of constituencies that are predominant if not entirely poor.

While I am confident that this description adequately characterizes the "antipoverty advocates" in my study, not all of them would embrace the label. For example, many members of the Bailout Coalition and the Welfare Rights Committee referred to themselves only as "antipoverty *activists*" and typically regarded "antipoverty *advocates*" as people who work for professional staff-led nonprofit organizations. On a different note, several members of the North Coalition would not have called themselves "*antipoverty* advocates" per se. This group tended to see themselves more centrally as "*community* advocates," even if it just so happened that their constituency, North High students, was almost entirely poor. Although my analysis does not tackle these types of labeling concerns per se, it does, on multiple occasions, unpack the underlying issues that they reveal—namely, resistance to professionalized and foundation-funded politics and the use of appeals to "community."

Ultimately, I retained the "antipoverty advocate" label in my writing in order to clarify the links between my analysis and academic debates about antipoverty advocacy organizations and advocacy organizations more generally. These debates very clearly

speak to the efforts of "antipoverty activists" and "community advocates" as well as

"antipoverty advocates."