

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Foreclosure Crisis AND THE Role OF Community Organizing IN A U.S. Latino Community

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how a predominantly Latino and low-income community organized in response to a wave of foreclosures threatening to destroy their community. The social, cultural and economic infrastructure of U.S. urban Latino communities has been considerably weakened as a result of the recent and continuing foreclosure crisis. Latino “neighborhoods have sustained comprehensive and lasting damage,” according to some observers (Ricks, 2009, p. 1). In addition to a reduction in property values and loss of homes, neighborhood consequences of spatial concentrations of foreclosures resulted in an aggravation of problems like overcrowding and decline in public safety. The spatial concentration in the location of foreclosures has adverse effects on the social and economic well-being of Black and Latino neighborhoods (Li & Morrow Jones, 2010). Small businesses and microenterprises in low-income and working-class communities have been closed as a result of foreclosures and loss of disposable income within those communities. Because tax revenues are reduced due to loss of business and homes, it means government services have also been impacted adversely.

The pace and numbers of foreclosures in Latino communities have produced adverse effects on spousal relationships and children’s relationships with each other, weakened extended family and social networks and many times have resulted in decline in access to medical care, according to a sobering report published in

2010 by the National Council of La Raza (Bowdler, Quercia, & Smith, 2010). The physician and urban scholar, Mindy T. Fullilove (2001), described how the era of urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s negatively impacts Black health conditions today. Massive numbers of foreclosures that are concentrated in urban areas are having similar disruptive effects on urban communities today.

The story of one small grassroots organization, Arlington Community Trabajando (ACT), shows the importance of political activism and community organizing as response to the foreclosure crisis wrought by corporate de-regulation and excesses. ACT works in a neighborhood with the highest number and rates of foreclosure petitions in the entire state of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Foreclosure Monitor, 2009). While this small Latina-run organization has not worked alone, it has played a significant role in organizing the community in its neighborhood; its work offers important lessons for similar communities in other parts of the nation. The author utilized agency documents and participant observations for this study and served as a strategic and organizational volunteer to ACT for more than five years. While retained by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Community and Enterprise Development Center, based at Northern Essex Community College (2005–2008), the author also provided technical assistance and capacity-building services to other Latino and grassroots organizations in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in the area of neighborhood revitalization and economic development.

ACT's mission is to empower residents with community development initiatives and activities such as affordable housing, foreclosure prevention, first-time home-buyer education, family financial literacy and business and youth development.¹ It is the belief of the leadership of this organization, including its executive director, Ana Luna, and its board, that ant foreclosure activities will not be successful unless planned and pursued in ways that strengthen the social and economic fabric of the neighborhood, and this happens most effectively through community organizing. ACT has a small staff of three or sometimes four individuals, depending on the state of its budget, along with a dedicated cadre of community volunteers. Since its founding, this organization has provided a range of financial literacy workshops for low-income families. In addition, the organization has sponsored and organized youth services and summer employment and has worked with numerous small businesses and microenterprises in the development of business plans.

ACT's ant foreclosure work is integrated with these kinds of activities and is driven by community mobilization and raising the quality of civic engagement and participation on the part of residents. ACT emerged as an early leader in the struggle against the high number of foreclosures in the city. Over the last three years, it has worked with hundreds of individuals and families in the area of foreclosure prevention, credit counseling and financial literacy. Since 2007, ACT has prevented more than 150 foreclosures by directly negotiating with lenders and helping to modify loans. The organization has been involved with a broad range of community actors,

including faith-based leaders and public health agencies, and has also worked with local businesses.

Unfolding Foreclosure Crisis

Corporate-driven policy preferences leading to deregulation of the banking and financial sectors opened the door to massive predatory lending in Latino and Black communities (Bowdler, 2005; Calhoun & Bailey, 2005). The deregulatory context included adoption of laws like the Financial Institutions Reform, Recover, and Enforcement Act (1989) and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act (1999). Both laws were aimed at weakening the regulatory power of the Glass-Steagall Act (1933) under Roosevelt's New Deal, a law that prohibited the merging of commercial, insurance, investment and savings institutions.² Under a deregulated housing market, low-income and communities of color easily became prey for financial manipulation and voracious lending on the part of nonconventional financial institutions that had minimal state and federal oversight.³

As a result of deregulation and predatory lending, the loss of Latino-owned homes within a space of a few years is striking in many U.S. cities. Working-class communities, but especially Latino and Black communities of color, have been devastated by the loss of thousands of homes due to the inability to maintain mortgage payments, usually after high-priced loans began to trigger higher adjustments in mortgage interest rates. Janet Murguia, president of the National Council of La Raza, noted that, "An estimated 1.3 million Latino families will lose their homes to foreclosure between 2009 and 2012" (Bowdler et al., 2010, p. ii). Zip codes in Massachusetts with the highest proportion of African American and Latino families have been hit particularly hard with foreclosure petitions, the first step toward home loss (Massachusetts Foreclosure Monitor, 2009, p. 5). Researchers for the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston identified several causes for the recent wave of foreclosures, including the fall in housing prices, job losses and increases in interest rates (Reade, 2007).⁴ But, they add that it is likely that "Blacks and Hispanics [have received] a disproportionately high share of higher-cost loans" (Reade, 2007, p. 17).

Rick Cohen, a journalist for the *NonProfit Quarterly* magazine, argues that the crisis reflected structural racism. It was partially a consequence of active targeting of low-income Black and Latino communities for predatory and unjustified higher-cost loans (Cohen, 2008).⁵ The Center for Responsible Lending reported that Blacks and Latinos were easy targets for subprime lending and mortgage manipulation: "High levels of segregation create a natural market for subprime lending and cause riskier mortgages, and thus foreclosures, to accumulate disproportionately in racially segregated cities' minority neighborhoods. By definition, segregation creates minority-dominant neighborhoods, which, given the legacy of

redlining and institutional discrimination, continue to be underserved by mainstream financial institutions” (Rugh and Massey, 2010, p. 632).

ACT and the Foreclosure Crisis in Lawrence, Massachusetts

ACT is located in the city of Lawrence with a population of 76,377 in 2010.⁶ In the Arlington neighborhood, a community within Lawrence where ACT focuses its work, more than 80% of the residents are Latino/a. Almost three quarters of the residents five years and older in this neighborhood, or 73.1% compared to 8.8% for the entire state, speak Spanish at home as their primary language. The neighborhood is relatively small (10,637 persons in 2009) and very low income, where the per capita income in 2009 was \$11,770, compared to the state’s per capita income of \$32,738. More than half of the 3,499 households in this neighborhood had incomes of less than \$25,000, compared to 19.5% of all households in Massachusetts at this same income level.⁷

Over several years, this city and its poorest neighborhood were targeted as lush for economic exploitation through predatory lending and questionable profit-making on the part of financial and real estate interests. Real estate activity became especially intense after 2003 and 2004. Since 2003, the overall city had the third-highest subprime lending activity in the entire state, with 318 subprime loans representing 19.3% of total loans/mortgages made (2,985). This was a similar case for other predominantly Black and Latino urban neighborhoods, also hit with disproportionately high levels of shaky and unaccountable mortgage arrangements. Subprime mortgage lending was targeted to communities of color regardless of the income levels of Black and Latino applicants for home loans. Blacks and Latinos received considerably higher proportions of subprime loans when compared to Whites in comparable categories (Rugh & Massey, 2010, p. 631).

The Arlington neighborhood represented 13.4% of the city’s total population in 2006 but 35% of all foreclosure petitions in this same year. Residents faced numerous “opportunities” from lenders and brokers to cut quick deals in order to become homeowners. Luna described one case where a particular broker “used God a lot in his advertising” in order to emotionally and ethnically manipulate potential homeowners to sign highly fallible mortgages.⁸ At a November 2007 meeting, the author was told by administrators of Lawrence’s Housing Authority that even residents in public housing, a sector with the lowest of household or family incomes, were being presented with “opportunities” to become homeowners. By 2008, Lawrence had the state’s highest proportion of housing units affected by foreclosure petition activity at 48.9 housing units per 1,000, according to a highly respected housing organization, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership. The statewide figure for this same time period was 12.0 housing units per 1,000 (Massachusetts Foreclosure Monitor, 2009, p. 4). One small area in this neighborhood registered 63.7 housing units affected per 1,000, by far the largest ratio in the entire state of Massachusetts.

The effects of the high numbers and spatial concentration of foreclosures threatened the well-being and very existence of this neighborhood. The bunching of foreclosures has displaced many families in the Arlington community. According to observers, some of these families returned to the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico; others simply relocated to live with relatives or friends, contributing to overcrowded housing. The foreclosure crisis has also resulted in a major reduction in wealth assets in terms of the savings held by working-class residents. A key economic sector in this neighborhood included hundreds of local and small businesses and microenterprises. These businesses, many with five employees or less, include beauty salons, barber shops, general contractors, furniture stores, convenience stores, dry cleaning and laundry facilities, clothing stores, grocery stores, auto repair shops and restaurants—collectively, a critical economic and employment base for the neighborhood. In addition to increases in vandalism, city services for the neighborhood were threatened to be reduced drastically. In 2007 and 2008, school closings and firefighter and police layoffs were discussed as a way of balancing the city's budget, a situation created partially by foreclosures and a drop in real estate taxes collected by the city.⁹

This neighborhood's situation is reflected nationally in other urban Latino communities. The Pew Research Center conducted an analysis and found that Latino households were more adversely affected by the mortgage industry crisis than those of White homeowners: "The bursting of the housing market bubble in 2006 and the recession that followed from late 2007 to mid-2009 took a far greater toll on the wealth of minorities than whites. From 2005 to 2009, inflation-adjusted median wealth fell by 66% among Hispanic households and 53% among black households, compared with just 16% among white households" ("Twenty-to-one: Wealth gaps," 2011, p. 1). The report noted the following:

The net worth of Hispanic households decreased from \$18,359 in 2005 to \$6,325 in 2009. The percentage drop—66%—was the largest among all groups. Hispanics derived nearly two-thirds of their net worth in 2005 from home equity and are more likely to reside in areas where the housing meltdown was concentrated. Thus, the housing downturn had a deep impact on them. ("Twenty-to-one: Wealth gaps," 2011, p. 5)

Small business owners in this neighborhood rely heavily on the availability of disposable income on the part of local residents. One long-time beauty salon owner, for instance, attributed her decline in business not only to the bad economy but also to clients who are struggling to make ends meet as a result of the massive waves of foreclosures. Regarding this development, Luna (2010) noted that, "many clients are going to the salon less often and have also decreased the number and types of services they pay for." These are very small and localized businesses that must count on the expenditures of local residents who, whether homeowners or renters, have some degree of housing

stability. According to Luna, many of these small businesses have closed as a result of the foreclosure crisis. One subsector of these businesses includes home-based child care centers, which represented an important support for working families who did not have access to bigger or more expensive facilities. These home-based centers, like other microenterprises, represented a significant employment base for residents. In 2010, the staff at ACT counted numerous child care providers closing their home-based businesses as a result of foreclosures. One of ACT's organizers, Anabelle Roldan, noted that child care providers experienced a major decline in service demand as foreclosures increased, which was due to clients' unemployment status and the fact that as unemployed parents, they were home taking care of their children.

ACT Responds with Community Organizing

Luna and other members of ACT continually highlight the importance of community building and mobilization as a critical part of an effective neighborhood-saving strategy. ACT has approached community organizing as an effort to help build a sense of bonding and collaboration among low-income and working-class residents and also as a way to organize social and political mobilization as a mechanism to respond to neighborhood problems and challenges. Under this framework, ACT focuses on small businesses as part of ant foreclosure efforts in these kinds of neighborhoods. Luna (2010) observed the following:

Strategies such as civic involvement and technical assistance for businesses are key when rebuilding these affected communities. These strategies not only help re-engage community members to improve our neighborhoods, but also help support local businesses that may be struggling to continue. Once businesses are stabilized, their focus turns to helping the community and improving the services they provide.

There are several "big picture" tools utilized by ACT in pursuing community organizing: facilitating cultural empowerment, expanding civic discourse about spatial inequalities, participating and supporting coalitions and building community equity.

Facilitating Cultural Empowerment

ACT seeks to respect the cultures of residents as a key part of community organizing. All the activities planned by ACT are conducted in bilingual settings, and there is emphasis on recruiting and training residents to assist with workshops and activities. One of the most effective organizing tools utilized by ACT and its board is its annual Christmas toy drive. Beginning in 2007, ACT started to solicit donations and contributions from businesses, primarily

to sponsor a free toy giveaway each Christmas season. These events were first held at a place called Rita Hall, but due to the hundreds of families that have come to participate in this initiative, the annual event was moved to a larger gymnasium at a local Catholic high school. The event has grown significantly over the past five years, from hundreds of individuals to close to a thousand. In 2012, the event drew approximately 1,100 people and children who received free toys. Many families attending the event are impoverished, and the opportunity to receive toys for children is most appreciated. As important, the event brings neighborhood residents together in an environment that is culturally comfortable and generates a sense of bonding.

This is also evident at another annual event utilized to mobilize residents. “National Night Out,” a national anticrime, pro-neighborhood initiative, takes place the first Tuesday of every August. This event allows residents and local business leaders to participate in a host of street activities. ACT is a major organizer of this event and mobilizes youth to encourage residents to participate. ACT uses this event to present youth leaders with opportunities to practice newly learned community organizing and fund-raising skills.

Expanding Civic Discourse about Homeownership

ACT has triggered and expanded civic discourse about the meaning of homeownership as a neighborhood resource and not just along an individual dimension. In other words, homeowners and renters have similar interests in preserving the neighborhood and working together on a range of issues. This can be difficult, since both sectors have seemingly different economic interests. But residents are encouraged to understand the “big picture,” as sociologist C. W. Mills once explained, and see their immediate economic interests as part of a broader network affected by political and economic decisions.¹⁰ This requires that they understand the “scalar” politics and private and public decision making that created the housing crisis in the first place (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2010; Fraser, Lepofsky, Kick, & Williams, 2003). ACT has sought to do this through popular education workshops and neighborhood forums. It has also utilized a local radio program, *La voz del pueblo*, where related issues are discussed and listeners have an opportunity to ask a range of questions. Cable episodes have been sponsored by ACT not just to provide technical assistance information to residents but also as a platform for discussion of broad public policy issues. Through utilizing these popular mediums, as well as organizing numerous community meetings, ACT has provided information and talks to impress on residents that it is not just homes that are in jeopardy but the entire neighborhood, including businesses, nonprofit organizations and the very health of children and families.

Participating and Supporting Coalitions

ACT has worked with other organizations in order to encourage community coalitions to respond to foreclosures as a community-wide issue. An example of this kind of work includes ACT's leadership in triggering one of the first coalitions aimed at the foreclosure crisis engulfing the city. Even before foreclosures were on the radar screen of some public and civic officials, ACT and community development practitioner Mayte Rivera, then director of the Community and Enterprise Development Center, a HUD Community Outreach Partnership Center, helped spearhead a coalition of organizations in 2007, which included Neighborhood Legal Services, International Institute of Greater Lawrence, AMEDAL (Asociación de Ministros Evangelicos del Area Lawrence), Merrimack Valley Project, Office of Planning and Community Development, Lawrence Community Works, Bread and Roses Housing (a community land trust) and local business and religious leaders.

The broad aim of this coalition was to develop collaborative strategies aimed at immediately minimizing foreclosures and loss of homes. One action on the part of ACT involved community mobilization to petition the Lawrence City Council to pass a resolution on March 12, 2007, declaring the Arlington neighborhood a "foreclosure watch zone" for a period of five years. ACT and its supporters believed that passage of even an essentially symbolic resolution would be useful for planning and developing ant foreclosure strategies that should be "community-wide" and based on strengthening the social and economic networks and assets of this neighborhood, as well as helping individual homeowners. This may have been the first instance in which the city council officially considered the growing deleterious effects of foreclosures in Lawrence.

As stated earlier, the resolution did not carry any resources or enforcement capacity but was a significant acknowledgment that the problem of foreclosure was a neighborhood, and citywide, issue. ACT and its supporters, including Bread and Roses Housing, the Lawrence Housing Authority and various religious and business leaders, believed that such a designation could facilitate community outreach and future funding to prevent foreclosures. One of the early elected officials supporting the resolution, former city council member Nilka Alvarez-Rodriguez, also hoped that such a resolution could emerge as a civic engagement strategy for other cities in Massachusetts.

With planning and support from Rivera and the Community and Enterprise Development Center, a legislative breakfast to highlight concerns about the growing foreclosure crisis in Lawrence and other places was held. Along with a visit to Lawrence from then Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts, in which he lauded the work of Luna and others, these efforts helped lay the foundation for the state's adoption of a new law in November 2007 designed to prevent future foreclosures: Chapter 206 of the Acts of 2007: An Act Protecting and Preserving Home Ownership. Under this legislation, Massachusetts now provides

some limited funding for a range of anti-foreclosure activities throughout the state. These include a mandatory waiting period (90 days) before banks can file a foreclosure in order to provide time for a homeowner to renegotiate a back-due mortgage. There is now a prohibition imposed on mortgage lenders from making a subprime variable or adjustable rate mortgage loan to a first-time home loan borrower unless the borrower affirmatively opts in writing for the variable or adjustable rate mortgage loan and receives certification from a nonprofit housing counselor; There are new tenant protections, including one that establishes that the lease for a tenant whose rental payment is subsidized under state or federal law shall not be affected by a foreclosure sale. While many organizations have contributed to these legislative accomplishments, ACT was one of the earliest to mobilize residents around effective ant foreclosure policy responses.

Building Community Equity

ACT links civic awareness and community building as a key component of financial literacy. Familiarity with checking and savings accounts is certainly important for families in low-income neighborhoods. At the same time, however, there should be a focus on helping residents understand how their quality of life is being compromised by financial decision making at political and economic levels to which they may have little direct access. This is critical because, as noted by Lydia Lowe and Doug Brugge in their 2007 case study of the Chinese Progressive Association in Boston, the raising of civic awareness about invisible political and economic decision making can possibly move to some “immediate improvements in the community as well as to alter the terms of public debate and raise popular consciousness toward building a longer-term social change movement” (p. 46). Information that makes individuals aware of how they can be exploited by real estate companies, check-cashing outlets or credit card companies is vital in low-income urban communities in order to prepare and buffer residents from the kind of economic exploitation that helped create the foreclosure crisis in the first place. Broader approaches to financial literacy, which go beyond simply what an individual or family can do to balance its own checkbook, can elevate the discourse about how a community and neighborhood can be economically exploited and also show how a community can use its fiscal and financial assets and resources to expand economic opportunities for residents.

ACT takes this latter approach by working with individuals and families but also helping small neighborhood businesses and microenterprises learn more about the accumulation of wealth. One workshop in 2008, for example, brought a small group of business representatives together and exposed them to the market characteristics of the neighborhood that they were not aware of, for instance, the amount of disposable income, the particular consumer expenditure patterns and the aggregated accumulated wealth of residents. The purpose was not only to enhance the capacity

of these businesses but also to show how linked the well-being of their business is to that of the neighborhood. Financial literacy workshops have been organized for residents and businesses, reaching more than a hundred residents and families. These workshops have triggered a few efforts on the part of residents to investigate and implement ideas for local business development and entrepreneurship. The latter have been provided with additional workshops focusing on the development of business plans, credit and debt management, understanding of local regulations and opportunities to network with larger enterprises.

More recently, ACT entered into a collaborative project with a housing developer, HOPE Companies, and another grassroots organization, the Lawrence Youth Team, and with *Youth Build*, they collaborated to build a small number of affordable housing units where families and youth would be linked to a range of human services.¹¹ Under this venture, ACT will also be working with the Lawrence Youth Team to provide job training placement opportunities for young adults in construction. The four housing units will be affordable to area residents who will be connected to a network of supportive services to ensure that they understand how to hold and grow with the property. Given the number of abandoned housing units in Lawrence, ACT hopes that while small in scope, this emerges as a model for other organizations to work collaboratively on cooperative homeownership.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the foreclosure crisis in the United States has destroyed homes and neighborhoods. National responses on the part of the U.S. government have been limited in that the framing of the foreclosure crisis is presented and treated as a problem for individuals and families rather than entire communities. The federal government has committed approximately \$6 billion under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (February 2009) and the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008's "Neighborhood Stabilization Program" to assist local and state governments in responding to the significant jumps in foreclosed and abandoned properties. The Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan adopted by the U.S. Congress in February 2009 addresses, in part, concerns of holders of subprime loans, and the decline in property values, where mortgages and equity are lower than the market value of the home.¹²

These are significant policy efforts, to be sure. But low-income and working-class residents in places wrecked by foreclosures require much more focus on understanding the "big picture" and knowing how to mobilize collectively on behalf of the well-being of their neighborhoods. This is noted by urban planner Alan Mallach (2009):

The wave of home mortgage foreclosures that began in 2006 continues to surge, greatly destabilizing neighborhoods, towns and cities across the United States. Without robust, carefully-targeted federal policies to mitigate the community-level impacts of foreclosures, local and state efforts will invariably fall far short of what is needed. (p. 2)

Mallach further observed, “Since the mortgage crisis erupted in 2006, the federal government has played only a limited role in attempting to mitigate its effects on families and communities” (p. 3). A similar emphasis is made by the Latino Policy Forum: “Helping those harmed by this crisis, whether by foreclosure, eviction, or depreciation in property value, requires a comprehensive understanding of the roots of this crisis.... Policies and community initiatives should address the potential increases in overcrowding and homelessness amongst Latinos” (Feliciano & Hernandez, 2008, p. 16).

Grassroots organizations like ACT, although small, are key for community-building strategies. More broadly, sociologist Susan Ostrander (2013) highlighted the critical importance of smaller nonprofit organizations as a support for shared governance in a democracy. She examined a “voluntary association convened in summer 1998 with the specific aim of establishing a public process for future development of the 145-acre flat piece of land directly bordering the city of Boston...” (p. 51). This case study indicates that community-based nonprofit organizations are an important piece for efficacious democracy and representation but also that this sector works parallel to the state, especially when the state does not represent interests of more vulnerable or less powerful groups. This reflects part of the role played by ACT in Lawrence.

At least two observations or lessons emerge for Latino leadership at the local level based on the work of ACT. First, strategic responses to the foreclosure crisis must be based on strengthening the social, economic and cultural fabric of communities. The community, in a sense, must be the unit of analysis in terms of evaluating ideas in this area. Second, Latino urban and grassroots organizations must work to elevate and mobilize the voices of people and families affected adversely by corporate-driven policies on local land. Doing this helps guarantee that the strategies and policy changes advocated will be comprehensive and equitable.

We should be reminded that ACT’s community organizing and related actions represent a tradition of activism reflected in earlier struggles on the part of Latino working-class communities in the United States. These lessons, part of a tradition of community organizing in Latino urban history, are not new. As a result of community-building and mobilization, for instance, Latinos in Boston were able to establish *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción*, the first resident-owned Puerto Rican cooperative housing establishment in the nation, to ensure the availability of affordable housing in the South End neighborhood (Small, 2004). In the 1960s and 1970s, community building and street protests in New York City were utilized to eliminate or reduce toxic environmental conditions in mostly Puerto Rican neighborhoods and to ensure that disenfranchised parents could provide input regarding the education of

their children (Gandy, 2002; Jennings & Chapman, 1998). And, earlier than these examples, in Los Angeles circa 1930s and 1940s, Latinos pursued community and labor organizing to ensure improvement in working conditions, which benefited all workers (Sanchez, 1993).

A final thought about ACT and community organizing. I believe that struggle and conflict between powerful corporate interests and local communities over the ownership, control and utilization of urban land is one of the most important political issues today.¹³ An example of such a struggle is being played out in many low-income and working-class communities seeking to preserve homes and neighborhoods in the face of the current foreclosure crisis, although this is being played out as well in conflict regarding strategies for local economic development.

Some scholars have proposed that community building and organizing are limited in their capacity as a tool to effectively challenge corporate power or rectify its excesses in these areas. In short, powerful interests can exploit community building to expand the globalization of cities, making them more attractive to capital and corporate elites. Fraser et al. (2003) noted, ironically perhaps, “the basic foundation of the community-building field function to mitigate the responsibility of extra-neighborhood, public and private institutions whose (in)action has played a major role in the creation of de-valored neighborhoods” (p. 421). There certainly is some validity to this concern in that relatively powerless residents are pitted against much more powerful and wealthy interests. And the former can succumb to divide and conquer strategies, as we have seen in many instances.

At the same time, however, grassroots organizations like ACT are providing examples of how low-income and working-class residents can try to take some control of their communities’ space and resist disempowering developments that point to a loss of social and economic well-being. Community organizing is not a panacea, but it can help lay a foundation for residents to understand why and how they, and their homes and urban spaces, are being targeted for economic exploitation. This is not a universal remedy, of course. But ACT’s community organizing is critical, nevertheless, as an example of struggle and resistance, and some victories—for low-income and working-class communities in other places seeking to protect their communities against the excesses of corporate power and agendas.

NOTES

1. See the graduate thesis by Amy E. Kuykendall, “Assessment of Latino/a Community-Based Organizations: The Case of Arlington Community Trabajando, Inc., in Lawrence, Ma,” Tufts University, Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning Department, (2012), for a case study of the ACT organization.

2. See Financial Institutions Reform, Recover, and Enforcement Act 1989: FIRREA. Pub. L. 101-73. 103 Stat. 183 (August 9, 1989); Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act, 1999: Pub. L. 106-102, 113 Stat. 1338.
3. See Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States, *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report*, The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission (2011, January).
4. A potential explanation for the dramatic increase in foreclosures is the high level of unemployment in some places. At least one national study, however, disputes this suggestion. By reviewing historical trends in the relationship between unemployment and foreclosures, the study found that, "the connection between unemployment and foreclosures has been weak. During previous periods of high unemployment, while delinquency levels did rise, foreclosure numbers remained essentially flat" (Bocian, Li, & Ernst, 2010, p. 14).
5. Predatory lending can include a range of nefarious practices, including charging higher interest rates without relationship to credit worthiness and targeting communities of color and the elderly with deceptive and high-pressure marketing of mortgages and loan packages (see Squires, 2003).
6. U.S. Census (2010).
7. See <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states>
8. K. Cooper interview for *New England Ethnic News*, A. Luna, personal communication, November 12, 2007.
9. Email correspondence, Anabelle Roldan, March 30, 2013.
10. C. W. Mills (1959).
11. Press Release, September 18, 2012: "ACT and Charles HOPE Companies announce a collaboration to provide new affordable housing for Lawrence, job training for youth."
12. See Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan, Executive Summary, THE WHITE HOUSE, Washington (February 18, 2009).
13. See James Jennings and Julia Jordan S. Zachery's *Urban Spaces: Planning and Struggles for Land and Community* (Boston: Lexington Books, 2009).

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