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# Development, Power and Movements: A Comparative Case Study of Communities and Empowerment

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# Development, Power and Movements: A Comparative Case Study of Communities and Empowerment

## Disciplines

Anthropology

DEVELOPMENT, POWER AND MOVEMENTS:

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITIES AND EMPOWERMENT

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

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In the effort to uncover how certain development strategies succeed, a comparative case study of two community development organizations is presented. Using ethnographic fieldwork, analyses of the Urban Nutrition Initiative and of a community-supported agricultural garden are used to describe the organizational underpinnings of development agencies through a public-policy framework. The relationships of power between advocates and clientele are discussed in the context of social service networks. Through participant observation and interviews, the paper demonstrates how power transitions in development schemes are the markers for social movements in communities. These movements are defined as indicators of successful strategies through the community empowerment model.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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Looking through the lens of a critical observer concerned with encroachment and entitlement in regards to development, it becomes clear that flexible methods for approaching and affecting disadvantaged communities must be advocated. Speaking through advocacy, anthropology occupies a uniquely pivotal position between the science of policy and the knowledge of theory. This “public-policy anthropology” uses traditional fieldwork that acts as a modus by which development strategies may be designed. My thesis will seek to understand the impact of power in terms of development, and the process by which power may become empowerment. Also discussed is the relationship between power transitions and social movements; to describe this power transition, a main case study and comparison case will be referenced. Using traditional ethnographic techniques and ethnologic analysis, I have underlined the theoretical framework with site evaluations from a policy-perspective. My research focuses on the status of organizations whose aims are to develop the communities in which they operate through social services.

For the purpose of this paper, power is understood as a concept of function rather than a definitive source. It is power relations with which community development is concerned, and, by the mechanism of power, social movement occurs. Conventionally, social movements have related to workers’ struggles for equal representation (Marx 216). In the past few decades, however, groups’ political and educational actions have been defined as such. It is within this broadening of the expression that I apply my usage—from Wallerstein’s observation that movements are “based on membership activity,”—and define social movements as the transition of imposed power by foreign advocates to empowerment by community members (Wallerstein

97). This definition dismisses the notion that movements are spatially or temporally fixed; the transition should not be thought of as a one-time event, but rather a continuation of reactions based on the motions set forth by advocates with the idea of development in mind. By description, a social movement cannot be static as it relies on the individuals who generate its power through their meaning and purpose.

To explore the idea of movements as shifting power relations, community development may seem like an obvious choice for case studies. My lack of both understanding and education on the subject had me arrive to this conclusion completely backwards. Interested in community development, I spent my summers working at different organizations whose general connection was the concept of community-based development. Although their missions were different and cultures dissimilar, the organizations shared a collective purpose. I found the term “community development” to be used in some fashion by each of the organizations, be it in literature, interviews or observation. To me, as an intern watching the organizations interact with their clients, the anthropological question of *why* seemed needless in the face of *how* the organizations worked above and within their respective communities. And so, to determine what development meant, I combined the fundamentals of how the phrase was employed. I took “development” to mean the positive growth or representation of an area in terms of economic, political, social, infrastructural and environmental conditions. In keeping with the theme of social betterment through community mobility, I believe using the terms as described by the people with whom I interacted is important for legitimacy. However, to set a theoretical foundation, the 1963 observation by Ward Goodenough of the beginning of a new profession in reformation—“or (development), to use the now fashionable term”—by groups either creating desired situations to suit themselves (landscaping) or changing themselves to accommodate circumstances

(organizing) is still the best explanation (Goodenough 15). In this comparison of case studies and examination of power transitioning, it became clear that both the mechanisms of landscaping and organizing are relevant and interrelated.

When searching for a clear definition of community, the answers I received were quite varied from global perspectives to precise geographic locations. Borrowing terms of location from Trouillot's *Global Transformations*, a community may be considered a locality by the individuals who define themselves as members. Communities determined by agencies to be in need of development are, thus, defined as locals (Trouillot 123).

My main case study research spanned the summers of 2003 and 2005, as well as the winter and spring of 2005. Although the organizations were quite different in both their missions and overall approaches to development, I chose the sites based on their uniqueness and my personal interest in them. In May of 2003, I was hired as a summer intern for the educational facility of a large international nonprofit organization headquartered in the southern US. Working at the largest of their three educational outreach ranches, I was immersed in not only a huge sub-organization whose fundraising goal was to teach visitors about its parent organization, but also into the southern culture of the "Bible Belt" region.

In the summer of 2005 I had the opportunity to volunteer with the Urban Nutrition Initiative (UNI) of West Philadelphia, thanks to the Penn Program for Public Service (PPPS) fellowship I was awarded that year. The PPPS award is a yearly program carried out by Penn's Center for Community Partnerships with the intention of immersing 20 recipients into a service-oriented research project by working with local community groups of their choice. UNI operates as a youth development program teaching students from elementary to high school about nutrition, health and well-being. They do this through integrated lessons in West Philadelphia



schools as well as a summer camp for students. As a summer volunteer, I worked in UNI's 'flagship' school, University City High School, where many of the original programs had started over ten years ago. Being a summer camp instructor, I taught nutrition lessons as well as helped to manage the student garden and farmer's market. The most multifaceted of case studies, UNI required intense participant observation to balance the simultaneous roles of educator, intern, counselor and researcher.

The success of a study of this kind is contingent upon the motivations backing it. My longtime interest in community relations stirred my early volunteer work and later my decisions regarding higher education and jobs. Before understanding these cases as a researcher, I appreciated the organizations both as a volunteer and an advocate. I have had the privilege of working with people whose dedication to either their community or outside causes, and in some cases both, was as remarkable to me as it was in my first volunteer experience as an adolescent.

It has always seemed to me that people will put more effort into a project that directly affects them, although marvelous exceptions do exist of those individuals who do it simply because they care. My study of anthropology has enabled me to format these very basic observations into something more concrete as I hope to convey, as well as helped me to understand how development strategies succeed. "I guess it means it works when the problems are fixed," replied a Philadelphia high school student when I asked him how UNI succeeded in his community. Alleviation of the problem is certainly a requisite for the accomplishment of any mission, but how it succeeds as a movement is quite different and requires close examination of the concepts that surround a strategy. To borrow Foucault's view of political struggles as conversions of power relations, it is my intention to portray the following case studies as I

witnessed them without resorting to universals of subjectivity, and with particular attention to the social dynamics that were shaped by the concepts of development (Rabinow et al. 6).

## **SECTION I**

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### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Through research and participant observation of successful development programs, it becomes clear that patterns exist within legitimate strategies. These often emerge in the relationship between communities and social service networks, the power base from which development strategies are directed. When the power to define objectives and to launch projects is shifted from the advocate practitioners of care to the people for whom they aim to benefit, communities are developed more successfully. The transcendence of power to empowerment is paramount to a legitimate and ultimately worthy community strategy of improvement for its members.

Community development is a multi-layered process. Most often, the initial influence of power comes from foreign advocates, and by utilizing the knowledge and resources of professionals, improvement of targeted communities can occur.

Development through community partnerships is not a new concept. International NGOs and aid agencies have understood the benefits of decentralized strategies that enable projects to become permanent solutions. Organizations dealing with impoverishment and world hunger such as Mercy Corps and Heifer International base their policies on teaching people how to carry out long-term solutions to their problems (Patterson 2). Both focus on training and education for their clients so they may be independent in their decisions and ultimately self-reliant in their progress. In fact, Heifer International uses a particularly appealing approach to solidifying their commitment to empowerment of the subaltern—called “passing on the gift,” the expression refers to when recipients of Heifer’s livestock aid program are able to provide another poor

family with the offspring of their donor animals (“A Living Chain of Giving”). This practice is considered essential to their purpose of helping to create sustainable communities through grassroots development.

Through examination of these large-scale development projects, successful models for partnerships between agency and clientele are visible. The stakeholder model is perhaps the most recognizable; by the agencies’ acknowledgment of multiple social positions and different ways of problem solving in their target areas, those on the periphery of society are more likely to be included in the policy process. In smaller scale situations, such as community-based projects like the educational ranch or UNI, the stakeholder model holds similar merits. However, like shareholders to a corporation, stakeholdership is inherently tied to the agency that offers the stakes. The framework, designed by the agency, runs the risk of being simplistic to a fault, with the stakeholder communities assumed to be homogenous and objective in their own decision making. Kim Fortun, an anthropologist who specializes in information technology and environmentalism, claims that “the stakeholder model can’t seem to tolerate much complexity.” By respecting citizens’ “frame of reference,” she says that a true partnership must take into account the “subjective, intuitive, and experimental” nature of social dynamics. This observation lends further credence to the empowerment model where a total shift, or movement, of power relations allows for natural adjustment to community leadership within a development scheme.

Through recommendations by charitable friends and family, I came to know an organization called the Ark of Hope Foundation whose mission it was to end hunger and poverty through what they called sustainable community solutions. Their history intrigued me—begun by Church of the Brethren members after World War II, Ark of Hope broke from their faith-based roots to be a nondenominational institution to help impoverished populations from a

cultural perspective. After speaking with past volunteers, I applied for an internship at their Arkansas educational ranch where groups came to learn about Ark's mission, worldwide hunger and poverty, and to take part in service learning projects. Because of Ark's sheer organizational magnitude and the scale of what they were trying to accomplish, I found it fascinating that they operated educational facilities which were financed by their marketing department. Upon reading their annual report, I discovered that unlike many charities who determined their accountability according to the amount of dollars spent on actual programs, Ark was more focused on results. Consistently listed by charity monitoring groups as highly reputable, Ark's was committed to building over 96% of their endowment with individual and group donations. Still supported primarily through church groups such as United Methodist and religious individuals, Ark chose not to accept government or corporate funding except for less than two percent of their management costs. Enticed by the organization and interested to see what an educational ranch was like, I traveled to Arkansas to spend the summer of 2003 living next to a camel named Raja.

An hour and a half drive from Little Rock, the town of Todd, Arkansas, was 300 people deep and six miles long. This figure, I was told matter-of-factly by a ranch hand, nearly doubled during the summer because of the ranch. From the airport, I'd been picked up by a man dressed as only people who chose their garments for how long they'll last do. In tow were his five little brown-haired daughters, clad in long cotton twill dresses that reminded me of Amish girls. As we drove down the private road to the ranch, a painted wooden sign greeted me: "Welcome to the Ark of Hope Ranch." Beneath in italics were words I'd only heard in church: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God,*" (Matthew 5:9).

I thought maybe I was in the wrong place. Soon though, a young woman about my age appeared and offered to take me for a tour of the ranch. Petite with a quick smile and thick glasses, Brandy had enough energy, to run the 1200 acre ranch by her self. Driving me around in a visitors golf cart, she pointed out the main buildings and areas: visitors center ("Er'body calls it the VC"), lodges, show-barn, maintenance shed (in reality a huge barn), and various classrooms and pavilions. It was professional-looking in a summer-camp way. I received a wave from every person we passed and an introduction from everyone within 20 feet of the road. I went on to enjoy southern hospitality for the next three months, although it took me more than a week to understand that when drivers waved to you, it didn't necessarily mean your lights were on.

Because of my cultural studies background, I was assigned to the education group, one of five main groups with which the thirty-plus college interns were placed. I spent my days developing and teaching curriculum about people, poverty and the environment. I quickly came to see that the Ranch was not a place to publicize the Foundation or to secure funding. Most of the groups who visited were long-time supporters and were there to have a good time and do some community service. This took any pressure off from solicitation and I was able to enjoy my position while conducting my thesis research. An organization with almost too many aspects to adequately study, the Ranch had several specialized programs. One that caught my attention early on was their community-supported agricultural (CSA) initiative, and by hanging around enough and offering to help with the weeding, I got to know just what a CSA garden was and how it impacted the community.

The Ark CSA was a garden consisting of eight acres of valley land and yielding enough produce to feed 110 local families throughout the year. The garden crew who ran it was unique from the other Ranch staff groups. Comprised of five interns, the leader was a young person

who was not a Ranch manager like the other crew leaders. Six foot three with a red beard down to his shoulders, Aaron looked like Paul Bunyan in the flesh. He explained community-supported agriculture as food produced for local people at fair prices. Todd was located in one of the poorest counties in Arkansas, the third poorest state in the nation, and the Ark CSA provided inexpensive, organic food for hundreds of low-income people (“United States and States: Median Household Income 2004”). Each week, a small truck was loaded with the produce and it was taken to one of the local Baptist churches for distribution. *Any leftovers?*, I wanted to know. Aaron was proud to say there were—the leftover produce was sold at a large farmers market on Fridays in downtown Little Rock. From the looks of the lush fields and abundant vegetables, it was easy to see how eight acres expertly cultivated—Aaron was a trained horticulturalist and his crew consisted of experienced gardeners—could yield so much food.

I wanted to know more about how community-supported agriculture developed a community. I could see the obvious nutrition benefits of cheap, healthy food, but could CSAs actually feed a neighborhood or, moreover, pull a community out from poverty? The question stayed with me until the fall of 2004 when I first volunteered with the Urban Nutrition Initiative to complete the service component to an academically-based community service (ABCS) course I took that semester. While working with 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Sayre Middle School, I caught a glimpse of the UNI garden program at University City High School (UCHS) and took the opportunity to volunteer there the following summer through the PPPS internship.

When studying the Ark CSA garden I held the role of researcher; this contrasted with my totally integrated identity as a UNI staff member while working at UCHS. I was given more access to the clientele and intra-organizational events, although these privileges significantly increased my level of responsibility to UNI. Located at 36<sup>th</sup> and Filbert Streets in West

Philadelphia, the high school possesses a relevant past involving Penn development and the community. According to long-time residents of West Philadelphia, UCHS was designed to be a secondary school for the children of Penn professors and only after protests by the community was it redirected as a public high school for West Philadelphia children. This history of what many people in the area call “Penntification” is a cause of town and gown resentment towards the university over the displacement of residents through the years (“The Black Bottom Community”). To address the crisis, the Center for Community Partnerships was founded in 1992 from the idea of assisting the public schools with the resources of higher education and Penn’s stated commitment “to focus its resources and energy on the revitalization of West Philadelphia” (“CCP History”).

Like its parent organization, UNI faces a similar task in the effort to heal the damage of Penn’s expansion over the last sixty years. During my ten-week work as a staffer, I helped to maintain the half-acre school garden as well as assisted with classroom instruction and projects. The program was run similar to a day camp with students who enrolled based on their merit in school and came Monday through Thursday to work in the garden and take part in a two hour class for which they were given academic credit. The theme for that summer was food justice and topics included urban gardens, corporate food systems and international politics. Our group was large with thirteen students, a UNI coordinator, two interns including myself, and a UCHS teacher. Students from the Youth Works Program, a federally-funded youth development group, maintain the garden year-round, thereby gaining solid work ethics and valuable horticultural skills. The produce from the garden is then sold at farmers’ markets in West Philadelphia and Rittenhouse Square—it is here where the students learn business skills and entrepreneurship by running the markets with a little help from teachers or UNI staff.



My first week as a staffer involved trainings and curriculum planning. Jo, the UNI coordinator with whom I would be working, introduced me to the other group members who included Aubrey, a Penn undergrad and year-round staffer, and Mr. Bruce Polson, a UCHS history teacher. The students ranged from 15 to 17 years of age and were all students at UCHS. Although I was not surprised that we had the most boys since the other classes focused on cooking, I found it interesting that we were not the largest group since our students split the proceeds from the sale of produce, thus earning more money than the cooking groups. Depending on their individual levels of participation with the markets, they split the profits of each week's sales. This gave the garden crew incentives to not only work hard growing food, but to be salespeople as well.

As a customer, I'd visited the Wednesday farmer's market on Penn's campus before and bought food from the UNI stand. It wasn't until I was part of the garden crew that I ventured to the big Saturday market, located on 37<sup>th</sup> and Powelton Streets in West Philadelphia. I was curious to see how the cool high school students acted around customers—I knew from invoices that the Saturday market was the most successful and that the students did everything from harvesting at seven a.m., price setting through market research, designing their displays, and representing UNI. Approaching the market, I was instantly impressed with the professional look of their stand. Row after row of fresh vegetables, all labeled and priced, were set against a backdrop of baskets, earthy cartons and bundled herbs. For a half acre garden, the space was used quite efficiently by rotating beds and continual fertilization from on-site compost piles. Displayed that day were several types of tomatoes, lettuces, greens, legumes, squash, fruits and four kinds of beans, as well as a dozen different herbs. As enticing as this spread looked, the students' mannerly approach was what I believe drew the customers. In class and outdoors, the

kids' behavior was like a roller coaster: many times very good, but enough times exhaustingly unruly. At the market, it was a different story. *Yes, ma'ams, no sirs and thank you, please come again*, were the words I heard. Gone were headphones and cellphones, and in place were smiles and offers to carry bags. When the kids saw me, they waved and suddenly I was back at the Ark ranch.

As I complimented them on an excellent presentation, it occurred to me that I should have expected this all along. Obviously people will behave better and go out of their way when the results directly affect them. The kids had everything to benefit from selling their produce and they knew exactly how to act in order to do it. The Urban Nutrition Initiative had taught them well, and it was becoming clear how an organization that had begun from a concern over the nation's obesity crisis could transition into a youth development scheme.

According to the Children's Nutrition Research Center, an estimated one in four children in the United States is at risk of becoming overweight which is measured by having a body mass index (BMI) in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile. Eleven percent of children are in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, making them overweight by BMI standards (Nicklas and Yang 9). However, UNI's main concern falls with the racial divide that overlaps obesity in America. Nationwide, 40.4% of African-American females between the ages of 12 to 19 years old are overweight, while 23.6% are obese. This contrasts sharply with the percentages of European-American females in the same age group whose overweight and obesity levels are about half of their African-American counterparts ("Childhood Obesity").

In West Philadelphia, the problem of childhood obesity is a serious threat to the mostly African-American population. University City High School is over 92% African-American with

88.5% of families qualifying as low-income (“School Profile: University City High School”). Penn anthropology professor and UNI founder, Dr. Francis Johnston, cites the results from the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, carried out in the early 1990’s, which evaluated 396 West Philadelphia females between the ages of five and fourteen and found 32.2% of the thirteen and fourteen year olds to be obese (Johnston 2005). These figures led to Dr. Johnston’s compelling needs assessment which became the chief element in UNI’s primary goal of increasing food access and security in the area (“UNI Programs”). How to supply low-income residents with affordable, healthy foods is a challenge, both economically and culturally. The city is plagued by what Dr. Johnston calls “a culture of obesity,” with staples such as cheesesteaks and Tastykakes®, and wildly popular events like the yearly Wing Bowl, the obesogenic crisis is one of the worst in the nation (Johnston 2004). According to Men’s Fitness magazine, Philadelphia is ranked second as the fattest city in the country for 2005 and third from last in people who run for exercise (“America’s Fattest City 2005”).

This growing public health crisis is what many UNI staffers say is the reason for the increasing influence on nutrition within recent health discourse. America’s departure from locally-grown food, even from what it was 20 years ago, is cause for concern in terms of both health and economics. The nearly perfect coordination of packaging, marketing and distribution by food corporations has infiltrated virtually every avenue of food consumption in the United States. As the co-director of the Urban Nutrition Initiative, Danny Gerber says that “no one knows where food comes from anymore. When people start pioneering work (like that of UNI’s), they start believing that it is a really great youth development strategy.”

Bushy-haired wearing an oxford button-down and sandals, Danny looks like any other anthropology undergraduate, despite having graduated from Penn in the 90’s. I spoke to him one

afternoon in his office at the UNI headquarters. Entry to the building is in an alley behind some stores and restaurants, and through a door that looks like a locker room entrance or possible storage space. Down a dark hallway, the door to the UNI offices was brightly decorated with handmade signs from the elementary school students. Like the quintessential nonprofit organization office, it was messy with old computers, hand-me-down chairs, motivational posters on the walls and a young, idealistic staff.

I wanted to speak to Danny about what I was noticing with the Initiative, how it seemed to me more of a movement these days with the students learning more than nutrition by taking leadership positions in the programs. My observations were showing that the experience UNI's youth gained by growing their own food was highly beneficial to their development as individuals and to their relationship to their community. I saw confidence building in my students as their knowledge of nutrition and health increased, along with their interpersonal and professional skills. Danny agreed that this was indeed happening and that it was a goal to eventually pass the reigns to members of the community. "In the long term, we're turning out a lot of kids who have gardening knowledge and it's possible that someday, they will be the community gardeners running the plots...I think that could prove to be a real impact on access."

I understood the present state of the Urban Nutrition Initiative to be development in practice. I recognized the model of empowerment being used by UNI as a mechanism for youth development; most importantly, I identified this case of youth development as a burgeoning social movement to community development in West Philadelphia. The transition of power relations was the hinge upon which the organization's accountability and legitimacy depended. For UNI as a university association, legitimizing their efforts of partnership with the marginalized West Philadelphia community is essential for success as a development strategy.

This process is understood by the organization's accountability which is gained by the increase of decision-making by community members.

In light of accountability, which is complicated in the nonprofit sector, many disputed models have been used to measure the results of service organizations. As a reaction to the classic model which relies on board members prohibiting the distribution of funds, alternative paradigms have gained popularity with nonprofits and more resemble the structures of businesses rather than that of traditional foundations. One reason for this shift in policy may be the possibility of greater inclusion these accountability-driven models offer. Evelyn Brody, professor at the Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Institute of Technology, credits the convoluted arrangement of relationships that exist between nonprofits, business, government and the public. By involving "a variety of stakeholders, each with its own needs and desires," problems of "standards and adherence to best practices" arise (Salamon 475). These dilemmas are no less familiar to community development agencies. And in the case of subsidiary groups working within the nonprofit framework, such issues can be the ultimate management challenge or an opportunity for powerful social relationships to form based on advocacy-inspired movements.

## **SECTION II**

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### **POWER AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

During one particularly long week of work at the Ark ranch, a visiting clergyman decided to say a few words at dinner where everyone—workers, volunteers and visitors—gathered daily to eat together. This man was the head of congregation from San Antonio and had brought his church youth group to take part in the service learning lessons offered by the ranch. Unlike most groups who were respectful and interested in Ark of Hope, this group's conduct left something to be desired. During a campout earlier that week, the kids had destroyed a Tibetan prayer pole that had been given to the ranch by Buddhist monks. They never apologized and their preacher did not think it a big deal—he was apparently more concerned with the women garden volunteers having unshaven legs. So when this man stood and asked to say a few words about the ranch, everyone held their breath. He started by describing his church's relationship with Ark of Hope, their financial contributions over the years and their dedication to Ark's mission. Having visited the ranch in the past, he was having a difficult time with how the ranch had changed, how it seemed to have strayed from its Christian roots and become a "hippie-land" (quoted) for college students. He did not understand some of the new initiatives—of which he did not specify—with communities that were decidedly not Christian. He ended his rant by saying that we—meaning the ranch workers and volunteers—were not upholding the Foundation's heritage and were all, therefore, "false prophets." As everyone in the room sat, stunned, the ranch's education manager stood and took the microphone from the preacher. This man—a former teacher—thanked the preacher for his comments and said, 'however, just to clarify, Ark is actually nonprofit.'

In Ark's effort to cast itself as a development agency that provided sustainable solutions, it was forced to alter its profile to legitimize the new programs. From being known as a Christian group that sent animals to poor people, it transitioned to an international NGO that provided solutions for communities. The general strategy behind each solution was simple and elegant: show people how to build their own economy so they can help themselves. Ark of Hope's entire mission revolves around power—the power it possesses to help a community and the power it enables the community so they become empowered to change their situations. Not always will everyone agree on how power shifts should occur—in Ark's case, they may have sacrificed some donors' checks to further their cause, but movements happen regardless of if we want them to and the best strategy is to guide the movement as suitably to one's cause as possible.

In terms of power, Foucault's metaphor of the concept of social justice is applicable to this process. He describes justice as a societal invention that is used "as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power" (Rabinow et al. 6). Fighting against political violence is, therefore, not adopted in the name of justice necessarily, but instead to alter power relations. Foucault believes we are constantly engaged in political struggles and must define how we are political, not if we choose to be. This post-structural approach is the framework upon which power transmission is built. Rather than mold a development theory around the social movement that was present during my fieldwork, I applied Foucault's concept of power relations in an effort to uncover the interactions instead of attempting to invent them through rigid constructs of functionality. When it comes to political violence, Foucault understands how critique can be used to reveal seemingly benign operations in the process of social altercation (Rabinow et al. 6).

UNI began with a class taught by Dr. Frank Johnston in 1991 regarding nutrition and body weight. The TA for the class, Penny Gordon-Larsen, now a professor of nutrition, and the undergraduate students began a project which involved doing height and weight measurements of children at Turner Middle School. Measurements of students' triceps to determine body fat percentages were also conducted along with dietary recalls. Four years later, an anthropology undergraduate student named Tamara Dubawitz expressed the feeling that Penn was using Turner as a research lab with the students being treated as subjects rather than participants in a problem-solving program.

During an interview with Danny Gerber, director of the Urban Nutrition Initiative, he elaborated on this program turning point:

“She (Tamara) didn’t really feel the kids were involved in problem-solving, which is kind of the under-pinnings of Ira (Harkavy’s) work at the center (CCP). We look at John Dewey as kind of our patron saint, and she didn’t see that happening and she was very concerned about the dynamic of Penn students going out and working with largely African-American, low-income students. You know, who’s choice was it that they were having their skin folds measured. She didn’t think that was an idea generated by Turner students, and it wasn’t.”<sup>1</sup>

Danny went on to say that others like him and Tamara took issue with Penn students teaching invasive nutrition classes and reinventing curriculum. He and the other undergraduates decided to restructure the program as more action-oriented with the goal being for Penn students

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<sup>1</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.



to help to empower Turner students: “The idea was, there’s a problem out here, what are we going to do to solve it?”<sup>2</sup>

UNI’s present philosophy became formulated around Dewey’s theory of inquiry, and the new curriculum centered on the idea that students will learn about nutrition by attempting to solve the problems of improving their own nutritional state (Gouinlock).

“We kind of approached it as a research question, but we were also trying to get the kids to ask questions. ‘How can we improve diets, what are the problems with the diets, what are the problems with the food in the neighborhood.’ We also thought about other issues that kids were concerned about.”<sup>3</sup>

A survey conducted in the middle school showed that the students were concerned about nutrition, violence and drugs. However, Danny admits their concern for nutrition may have been prompted by the nutrition classes they were receiving each week. A resulting peer education program was begun and the sixth graders at Turner decided to run an after-school fruit stand. The opportunity to fully implement Dewey’s philosophy presented itself, Danny said.

“It was an opportunity to research lumber yards and figure out how we build a fruit stand. Where does the fruit come from, where are some successful fruit markets in Philadelphia (were some of the questions we ask.) So we took them down to the Reading Terminal Market (and) a field trip to the Italian Market, and it became kind of a neighborhood exploration project. They learned about Italians in South Philly, the Reading railroad and Pennsylvania history. It was this nice, small integrated project that the kids then ordered lumber, figured out what they needed, designed a fruit stand, built

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<sup>2</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

the fruit stand, painted the fruit stand—it was a really crappy, rickety fruit stand, but it was completely thrown together by kids.”<sup>4</sup>

Danny describes the change in the nutrition program as being more grassroots and an important departure from the laboratory-approach by Penn students in the past. The Turner students’ ownership of the fruit stand project was a marked point in their transition from research subjects to participants in a social service program. UNI was beginning to take the form of a movement, and its direction was increasingly being decided by West Philadelphia youths.

With the success of the fruit stand, Penn students were inspired to continue their outreaches and began recruiting for more volunteers to provide service in other schools. The combination of the students from the Penn Program for Public Service Internship and year-round volunteers began what Danny calls “an innovated nutrition education program” that served as a more democratic approach to UNI’s objective.

“There’s a big debate about community-school partnerships—just because you’re partnered with the school, does it mean you’re partnered with the community? Many of the teachers are not from the community and there’s very limited participation of community members in the public schools. Just because the university is partnered with the school, I don’t necessarily think it is a community partnership.”<sup>5</sup>

Civic acceptance of and participation in a community objective is the challenge many agencies find themselves faced with when attempting to implement a development strategy. On the other hand, community members deal with the imposition of outside forces and motivations as the target for such development. Whatever the mechanism is that drives the development

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<sup>4</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

project, its power base must be carefully handled to remain inclusive and accountable. For the Ark of Hope Foundation's CSA garden, this base is firmly situated with the gardeners who singly run the program. What is provided to the garden's clients—the local community members—is decided by the gardeners—the non-local providers. In contrast, UNI's history is built from a concern over the imposition of Penn into West Philadelphia—stemming from both the original anthropology class's invasive research and the University's historical intrusion in the area—and their overall objective is to foster decision-making within their clients—the youth whom UNI aims to empower.

As a critique of Weber's structural definition of politics as an expression of strategic domination, Angus Stewart instead proposes viewing political processes as strategic actions and treats domination and power as “conceptual antonyms.” This dichotomy, he argues, allows for the “politics of empowerment” to be distinct from the “politics of domination,” (Stewart 6). By invoking this theory regarding power balances, I identify two types of power in regards to the relationship between community development and social movements. First, there exists imposed power that is based from outside forces upon targeted groups, for various objectives. Second, when, and if, this power is successfully transferred to the group to continue the objective(s), the imposed power becomes empowerment. This transfer is a social movement and may continue to change as development happens, needs shift, and objectives evolve.

This shift in power is paramount to the successful alleviation of a problem and builds upon Dewey's theory of inquiry by updating the problem-solving model to one of empowerment. Program goals are central in determining how power transitions will occur and, ultimately, how the project will succeed. In the case of Ark's CSA garden, the program goals were to provide local community members with affordable food. The term “community-supported agriculture”

implies community involvement, although in Ark's case, the clientele's level of involvement was limited to buying the produce. The real base of power from which the garden was directed came by way of the gardeners' motivation for earning profits from the weekly farmers market. Although undoubtedly the gardeners possessed good intentions in wanting to provide low-income residents with healthy food, the CSA supported them with surpluses to gain profit shares. In this way, the development intended by the program was stagnant and resembled that of a charitable welfare contribution by Ark to local residents. I use the word stagnant because unlike a social movement which transitions power, this particular CSA only transitioned the commodity of food to a wholesale market.

The Urban Nutrition Initiative, however, embodies the concept of social mobility. With their empowerment approach, they legitimize their imposition of programming through accountability of their actions. Like Stewart's view of politics as conscious actions, UNI's motivations lie in implementing projects that can transition power successfully to their clients.

The first UNI garden was begun in 1998 at Turner Middle School, followed by the garden at University City High School in 2000. Considered the flagship school, UCHS's garden has become a central fixture of UNI's holistic education of producing, preparing, selling and enjoying whole food.

"We see the garden as really central to all our work and an opportunity for kids to be involved with something really positive in their neighborhood. It's also a great way to expose kids to healthy food."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

He related to me a comment that was made by a woman who, after seeing the garden and its influence, stated that throughout her thirty years of working as a nutritionist it had never occurred to her that to understand why people chose certain foods, you must understand what types of foods are grown and the larger agricultural system. UNI places importance on teaching about food systems in the effort to engage young people in positively changing their own food systems. The peer-to-peer educational model upon which UNI is structured encourages the students to teach others about nutrition. In this way, Danny calls it “a young person’s movement to deal with an issue that is of critical importance to young people.”

“We hope that we’re learning as much from the young people and that we take their ideas into consideration as much as they learn from the folks at the university. We want to give a good opportunity for the kids to develop leadership (skills). We also view our overall goal is to advocate for the kids—kids need to be involved in coming up with the solution. You can’t just impose a solution on the kids. Here are some young people who are doing heroic work to improve nutrition (and) change their own diets, (while) trying to improve the diets of other people. Public health officials need to consult them when they’re considering a ban on something in the schools.”<sup>7</sup>

Danny goes on to say that a simplistic ban on unhealthy foods by adults upon young people is useless. The ideal is to have the students themselves organize to ban unhealthy foods in their community: “It would mean they’re fed up with (unhealthy food). They’re into drinking water, they’re into other things. I’m not sure you could merely impose legislation telling people what to eat. They need to experience it for themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal Interview. August 3, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal Interview. August 3, 2005.

He acknowledges that UNI and other organizations, perhaps the healthy food movement itself, will probably never have the advertising budget of McDonalds or Coca-Cola. A more valuable asset exists however—the young people themselves whose messages and time serves as direct contact with the community. UNI presents itself as being part of a larger movement that consists of consumers regaining control of their food systems from the corporate food industry.

“It’s not just in Philly, it’s not just UNI—it’s young people taking control of their food systems in different cities. They’re building local agricultural projects and community projects—California, Chicago, Hartford, St. Louis.”<sup>9</sup>

As an example of a development strategy, UNI is transitioning to a social movement due to the recent shifts of power from the middle-class advocates who began the program to the West Philadelphia youth who are now working as staff in the organization. As more community members become both stakeholders and providers, the chance for success grows exponentially. In UNI’s case, their mission has the opportunity to be spread more effectively by the community members who are now helping to manage the agency’s direction. Because community members have automatic legitimacy (in terms of status) with their fellow neighbors, they are equipped to integrate cultural considerations within an organization’s programs more effortlessly than an outside advocate.

As an organization, UNI is a program belonging to the University of Pennsylvania and managed by the Center for Community Partnerships. It runs like a stereotypical nonprofit group, complete with young idealistic staff members who, with the exception of individuals from the community, are middle-class advocates. During my placement, I heard my own thoughts voiced

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<sup>9</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

by others who regarded this setup as potentially alienating to the West Philadelphia community. Aubrey McCulley is a Penn undergraduate, majoring in anthropology, who has been working at UNI since her freshman year of college. As a work-study student, she has gained invaluable training in social policy and practical organization. Her current position includes managing the Saturday farmers' market and assisting the UCHS coordinator.

Aubrey and I spoke one afternoon outside of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Center on Penn's campus where UNI meetings were often held in the building's spacious conference room. I asked Aubrey about her impressions of the UNI staff and how she felt the West Philadelphia community perceived us. Aubrey's casual demeanor made interviewing her easy and so when her eyes grew serious at my question, I assumed that she had previously speculated on the topic.

"Well, when I first started, I thought, 'Wow, what a bunch of hippies'. I actually brought this to their attention at one of the staff meetings. Everyone laughed because, at the time, I probably looked the most hippish. They were all into organic food, some of them were macrobiotic eaters...some of them were even raw foodists, which I think is just bullshit. It's a liberal organization and they're into social activism. I think this kind of makes them out of touch with the community. They used to make food and teach recipes that no one had heard of and that were expensive (to make). When Flip (a UNI staff member and community member) came around, he started this thing called AHEAD<sup>10</sup> which dealt with using food that is accessible and affordable."<sup>11</sup>

By hiring within the community, the Urban Nutrition Initiative not only accounts for its goals of empowerment, it gains social perspective from its resident staff. This is vital to the

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<sup>10</sup> "AHEAH: Affordable, Health, Easy, Accessible, Delicious." Shopping Tutorial. The Urban Nutrition Initiative, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> McCulley, Aubrey. Personal interview. August 5, 2005.

success of the project as well as the nutrition social movement as a whole. Enhanced mobility of nutritional awareness can only increase the influence of nutrition within health discourse. Most importantly, however, is the inclusion of youths in youth development strategies. UNI's projects affect its young clients in ways not many other initiatives can. The experience that a young person has when growing their own food is one that cannot be recreated in another activity. It builds confidence while vastly increasing knowledge about nature and nutrition. The theory to practice method is so subtle that students do not feel as though they are being instructed at all; to them, it seems as though they have been shown how to accomplish a tangible result, a process that is sadly undervalued and overlooked in public education.

“In the long term, we're turning out a lot of kids who have gardening knowledge, and it's possible that someday they will be the community gardeners running the plots. There's a big concern in Philadelphia that we are not replacing our aging gardeners. Most tend to be senior citizens who grew up in the South and who, after retirement, went back to what they know best, which is gardening. They may not have enjoyed their agricultural jobs as children, but now that they are retired that's what they're doing. I feel like there's a hope that our young people will go back to gardening when they are older. I think that could prove to be a real impact on access.”<sup>12</sup>

Increased food access and security is a primary goal of the Urban Nutrition Initiative. How to supply low-income residents with affordable, healthy foods is a challenge, both logistically and economically. The after-school fruit stands, an enormous success, have been the guiding light for UNI's belief that if you provide the right food, the people will love it, says Aubrey.

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<sup>12</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.



“The Wednesday farmers market on 36<sup>th</sup> and Walnut was originally intended to sell the foods at the smaller gardens at the schools, but they don’t really produce enough. Now, the UCHS garden is the one that is providing for the Wednesday market as well. The problem is getting customers from the community to the farmers market. Most of the people are white, upper-middle class...who travel there and can afford to get local, organic food.”<sup>13</sup>

UNI is in the process of purchasing an EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) system for people who use food stamps. Such devices are used in farmers’ markets in California and will be necessary if UNI wants to continue increasing access to healthy foods for lower-income residents. The initial \$1,000 investment in the system and another large fee to connect it electronically has hampered the initiative, but Aubrey says UNI is going ahead with implementing EBT. Although some staff are doubtful that the system is viable for UNI’s market simply because of the small size of the stand, many agree that it would be beneficial for increasing the customer pool.

Another project in UNI’s access agenda is the highly anticipated “A Little Taste of Everything” mobile co-op, which was intended for launch at the beginning of the 2005 summer, but was delayed due to licensing issues, and is scheduled to operate in six locations throughout West Philadelphia. The idea is based on a project in Berkeley, California called the “People’s Grocery” whose mission it is to find creative solutions to the food needs of residents in West Oakland (“Healthy Food for Everyone!”). Originally, UNI students wanted a store front where they could sell their produce in West Philadelphia. This turned into a mobile food truck that would actually come to the people, thus increasing access and affordability. The kids did

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<sup>13</sup> McCulley, Aubrey. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

everything themselves, from applying for grants to purchasing and refurbishing the truck. Danny enthusiastically described the new project.

“I’m really proud of ‘A Little Taste of Everything’ because it is a really youth-driven project. The kids wrote all the grants and raised \$26,000 themselves. I got a letter from a lady at one foundation saying, ‘What is up with this proposal? I’ve heard good things about your work but this proposal is really sloppy.’ I called the woman and was like, ‘Yeah, if you’d read the cover letter, you would have seen that this was entirely written by sophomores and juniors and seniors at University City High School. You might not be familiar with the state of education in Philly schools, but it’s actually fairly impressive.’ And it was—there were misspellings, we edited it, but we left it how it was. I told the kids to use spell checker. They ended up getting funded by that foundation which I thought was great.”<sup>14</sup>

The fruit stands are by far the most accessible forms of healthy food that exist among UNI’s initiatives. The combination of the student-run business venture and the purchasing power of children who are able to make independent choices regarding their nutrition is a powerful youth development strategy. The empowerment is two-fold in this peer-to-peer outreach, and by remodeling children’s eating habits early on, the chances of nutritious longevity greatly increases.

“This is a really important model because I don’t think we can afford to have kids who spend the first eight years of their purchasing lives only buying junk food. After that, you’re hooked, you form bad habits, you consider junk food as a normal snack. Fruit isn’t even an option because it’s not available on a large scale.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August

The response to surveys by UNI regarding residents' eating habits are concerning. Many families purchase take-out food multiple times per week, some as many as 5-7 times. By teaching recipes that are affordable, healthy, easy and tasty, UNI hopes to change people's attitudes toward cooking.

"It's changing the perception that it's cheaper to get five burgers at McDonalds that are 99¢ each, or that it's cheaper to get take-out food because I don't have oil in my kitchen, I don't have the things that I need to prepare food. Buying the staples (such as olive oil) are initially expensive, but you only get them every month and a half. So making rice and beans and kale is cheaper per person in the long run."<sup>16</sup>

Teaching these practical lessons has a far reaching affect for many of the students. Based on surveys and follow-ups, UNI staff knows that students are using the recipes they learned in school at home. Some students are responsible for cooking their family's dinners, and Danny has received numerous calls from parents thanking the organization for the healthy recipes and for teaching their children how to prepare them. This positive influence of changing what foods people chose to buy may have a counter-affect on food accessibility: instead of providing foods with the hopes that residents will purchase them, community members are buying different foods that, in time, may affect the marketing demographics of what is available in West Philadelphia. By increasing the demand for healthy foods, the community gains more accountability by having a larger stake in its food system and UNI as an organization gains legitimacy in its avocation for nutritional change. The whole foods movement gains greater overall authority as the people for whom change is intended take ownership of their food systems.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 3, 2005.

“I feel like, if we want to revert back to local agriculture, it’s going to take more than some community gardens. On small scales, it works, but on a large scale, it would take a huge partnering between the government and farms and I feel like it would be a really big undertaking. At the same time, I see UNI making its way throughout the city and making an impact.”<sup>17</sup>

During the six week summer camp, the garden crew took a field trip to a well-known CSA garden in West Philadelphia called Aspen Farm. The garden is run by local community members, each with their own plot of land, and is managed by Mr. Hayward Ford, an avid gardener and community leader. Speaking with Mr. Ford, I learned of the garden’s history as a once-vacant lot that residents turned into a thriving half-acre garden in the 1970’s. Looking around, it was obvious Aspen Farm was cultivated by gardeners with many years of experience. Although the UCHS garden was impressive for high school students, this plot was chock full of several species of every vegetable I knew, including corn stalks, as well as numerous flower beds, a fish pond and picnic pavilion. An irrigation system, professional murals and expert fencing showed off the time and expertise the residents had invested into their garden.

The gardeners told me that students from area middle schools often helped out in the summers and weekends with the work and that they produced an abundance of crops, allowing Aspen Farm to donate to local families and organizations like MANNA, a food service agency for people living with AIDS, and PhilAbundance, a hunger-relief organization (“[MANNA] About Us” and “[PhilAbundance] About Us”).

Comparing Aspen’s structure with those of my case studies, immediate differences became apparent. Whereas the Ark CSA garden provides discounted produce for its clients, Aspen is run by its members and their donations to others come from the surpluses which are

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<sup>17</sup> McCulley, Aubrey. Personal interview. August 5, 2005.

grossed voluntarily, not from the desire to generate a profit. Furthermore, the community surrounding Aspen Farm, called Mill Creek, was significantly different than that of Todd, Arkansas. Although the median household income in West Philadelphia is \$16,157 as opposed to Todd's rate of \$29,596, Mill Creek looks richer, both aesthetically and socially. Despite the friendliness of the citizens, Todd had the look of a dilapidated town. Community members credit Aspen as their source of inspiration, and the garden's website describes the blocks of homes around the farm as "a well-cared for island surrounded by vacant lots, deteriorating buildings, and poorly-maintained public housing," ("Aspen Farm Community Garden"). Through its citizens' management over the garden, the power of Aspen Farm had empowered and mobilized the community to change their neighborhood for the better and utilize the garden as a community center.

The obvious parallels between Aspen and UNI are plentiful. Although UNI is a youth strategy and Aspen focuses on Mill Creek residents, their approaches to management and empowerment are highly similar. Aspen Farm serves as a blueprint for UNI in their determination in being a community-based organization by hiring more former youth workers from the public schools in staff and leadership positions. Although perhaps not part of UNI's direct mission, the organization wishes to work as collaboratively as possible in supporting more community-based solutions to food insecurity, especially in the development of farmers' markets that are free of large scale food purveyors. This decidedly more democratic approach to food selling is in UNI's interest, even if their stance is from a sideline perspective as their focus remains in youth development.

"The biggest question is: how do we make organic, local food affordable to poor people? Until there's an over-supply, you're not going to see the prices go down that

much. We need more supply and I think that UNI is pretty good at creating decentralized networks. We have a church out in Broomall who started a garden this year, and their service project is growing food and donating it to UNI. Our kids are then, in turn, selling it at cheap prices at our farmers' markets. I can imagine a decentralized network of 300 church gardens all over the suburbs of Philadelphia, all over the nation, kind of like the old-school victory gardens that will battle obesity and that will help take back our food system."<sup>18</sup>

When asked where he would like to see UNI go, Danny talks about using the current state of food systems to bolster interest in the organization's message. Applying the ultimate optimists' concept that when something is so bad it can only improve, UNI can use our nation's degraded nutritional condition to show how it may be improved by community gardens and youth education. By being more self-sufficient with funding and resources, UNI is in a position to advocate for and involve itself with community development and local garden initiatives. There is talk about creating more gardens and even healthy vending machines.

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<sup>18</sup> Gerber, Danny. Personal interview. August 5, 2005.

## CONCLUSION

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In my effort to understand how successful community development strategies work, I stumbled upon one of the ways social movements happen. Sometimes these types of events do not register with people, depending on how it affects them, and social movements go undetected by individuals who are, for the most part, uninvolved. It can be difficult to spot a movement if you are not looking for it; however, from seeing the utter dedication by those with whom I worked, I believe it may be more difficult to start a movement if you do not know where to begin. While conducting my fieldwork, I asked myself many questions to which even now, almost three years after I began this research, I still do not know. Likewise, I have much data that I did not add to this paper for other reasons, still—more time and more insight through experience will allow me to continue with the work.

Some questions that stick with me revolve around the structure of social movements. Although I believe I see how they can begin, I wonder how they are maintained. In her book, *Of Myths and Movements* about the Chipko social movement in India during the 1970's, Haripriya Rangan explores the conceptual framework of movements through memory and analysis of cultural landscapes. Her work chronicles not only Chipko, but the process by which movements transform through power struggles and reemerge as myths (Rangan 2000). To combine these theories with qualitative analysis methods—such as those which deal with linguistics—could be a worthwhile venture in progressing with this idea.

There lies in some people a desire to improve conditions, even if those conditions are not one's own. The various disciplines of social science have much to say in regards to outside intrusion, speaking for the subaltern and stepping in to cultural conflict. As a student of

anthropology, I am familiar with these concerns and share them with my predecessors. However, anthropology is one of the few social sciences where its scientists get to theorize, experiment and advocate—many times, all within the same research paper. This is why it possesses some of the greatest potential for bettering the human condition and why it is my favorite social science. I enjoyed my time immensely while studying these sites. As always, I took much more than I gave, this is always the case with community service it seems, but I walked away knowing I helped to some extent. Community development, as I witnessed it, was a jumble of events, people and goals, all so complex, even for one neighborhood or one agency.

The Ark of Hope Foundation is one of the most brilliant international hunger and poverty relief organizations in the world. Their educational ranches are beautifully adopted into their quiet fundraising method and I appreciate their independence from government sourcing. UNI, as a young organization, is rightly concerned with spreading out to fasten themselves and their mission to the culture and education of Philadelphia's youth. I believe the Ark ranch has taken the good ideas of community-supported agriculture and misapplied them through the best of intentions. Theirs is a charity, not a community-solution. In the spirit of their international projects where, undoubtedly, they produce achievements in sustainability and empowerment regularly, it would be in their best interests—in other words, the interests of the community—to revitalize the program and make their hometown just another one of the Ark's success stories.

Power is the key to all of these events. It is the driving force and agent of change in successful development schemes through the transitioning of power relations and as the action of social movement. In reference to social movement, I believe there are two specific types: social movement/mobility and social movements/mobilization. These are intrinsically related and can be easily confused, but a difference does exist. When speaking about social mobility, it is a more



present action that encompasses various events; the example here is the Urban Nutrition Initiative's progression from a university project to a community-based solution managed by residents of West Philadelphia. On the other hand, social mobilization may be defined as the effects of power transitions in communities. How UNI will change from its progress as a social movement and through its accomplishments as a community development program will be demonstrated through the social mobilization the organization manages to empower.

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