

— EDITED TRANSCRIPT —



HUDSON INSTITUTE'S
BRADLEY CENTER
FOR PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIC RENEWAL
presents

ADVOCACY NONPROFITS All Hat and No Cattle?

Friday, October 6, 2006 • 12:00—2:00 p.m.

The Betsy and Walter Stern Conference Center • Hudson Institute, 1015 15th St., N.W., Ste. 600

Non-profit advocacy groups often claim that they are rooted in and speak for otherwise neglected constituencies in national public policy debates. But two authors have recently challenged this claim. In *Activism, Inc.*, Columbia University sociologist **DANA FISHER** argues that many groups on the left prefer to do their grassroots organizing “on the cheap,” by outsourcing it to young, exploited canvassers-for-hire. She contrasts this with organizing on the right, where grassroots activism tends to be anchored in local religious and community organizations.* In an article in *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, **CYNTHIA GIBSON** draws on her survey research to raise “serious questions regarding the legitimacy of the ‘representing the under-represented’” argument often made by national nonprofit advocacy organizations.** Both authors, in other words, suggest that many nonprofit advocacy organizations are all abstract talk and no grassroots action, or as the late Texas Governor Ann Richards once put it, “all hat and no cattle.” On October 6, 2006, Fisher and Gibson discussed this question with a Bradley Center audience, along with **ARNIE GRAF** of the Industrial Areas Foundation and **FRANK CANNON**, campaign director for Gary Bauer for President in 2000, and now at Capital City Partners, which specializes in building and maintaining active grassroots, community-based coalitions for its clients.. The Bradley Center’s own **WILLIAM SCHAMBRA** served as the discussion’s moderator.

*Further information on *Activism, Inc.* can be found online at http://www.sup.org/book.cgi?book_id=5217. See also commentary on the book in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* at <http://chronicle.com/free/v53/i04/04a01401.htm>.

**Gibson’s article, “In Whose Interest: Do National Nonprofit Advocacy Groups Represent the Under-Represented?” can be found in the most recent issue of *Nonprofit Quarterly*, Summer 2006.

PROGRAM

11:45 a.m. Registration, lunch buffet
12:00 p.m. Welcome and panel discussion
12:45 Question-and-answer session
2:00 Adjournment

THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING AND EDITED BY KRISTA SHAFFER. To request further information on this event or the Bradley Center, please contact Hudson Institute at (202) 974-2424 or e-mail Krista Shaffer at krista@hudson.org.



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Panelist Biographies

Frank Cannon is a principal of Capital City Partners, a Washington, D.C. public affairs firm. He has extensive experience in helping to direct some of the nation's largest and most influential political action committees, building effective broad-based grassroots coalitions, and bringing issues to national prominence. He has worked on building coalitions to assist victims of human trafficking and for parental rights, human rights in China and the president's faith-based initiative. Cannon was a consultant to Fund for a Conservative Majority; deputy director of then-Congressman Jack Kemp's Campaign for Prosperity; and co-founder and treasurer of Campaign for Working Families, which provides resources to pro-family candidates for federal and state offices. Cannon has also had a hand in two presidential campaigns; in the 1988 cycle, he was director of administration for Jack Kemp for President, and during the 2000 cycle, he served as campaign manager for Gary Bauer's presidential bid. In addition to his public-sector work, Cannon co-founded an economic and political forecasting firm, Lehrman Bell Mueller Cannon.

Dana R. Fisher is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Columbia University. Her research focuses on political decision making and the role of non-state actors in decision-making processes at multiple scales. She has published extensively on issues related to civil society, activism, protest, and environmental policy-making. Her most recent book, *Activism, Inc: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns is Strangling Progressive Politics in America*, was published by Stanford University Press in 2006. Further information about Fisher's work can be found online at www.columbia.edu/~drf2004.

Cynthia Gibson is an independent consultant specializing in public policy research and analysis, program development, strategic planning, marketing and communications for numerous national nonprofits and foundations. Previously, she served as a program officer at Carnegie Corporation of New York in the area of Strengthening U.S. Democracy, overseeing two subprograms in Strengthening the Nonprofit and Philanthropic Sector and Youth Civic Engagement. She is the author of two publications—*From Inspiration to Participation: Strategies for Youth Civic Engagement* and (with Peter Levine) *The Civic Mission of Schools*—that have become standards for the field and the basis of a national advocacy campaign and federal legislation for better school-based civic education. Gibson is a member of the adjunct faculty at New School's Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy, a senior fellow at Tufts University, and the author of numerous publications on behalf of nonprofits and foundations.

Arnie Graf is on the national staff of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). He started his organizing in the early 1960s during the time of the civil rights movement and worked with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Buffalo, New York. After two years in Sierra Leone with the Peace Corps, Graf returned home to New York City to teach in the public schools. By 1971, he was ready to organize full time and found his way to the IAF. He has organized broad-based citizen organizations in many parts of the country, including San Antonio and Baltimore and has put together the beginnings of many efforts for the IAF in Memphis, Washington, DC, and Charlotte, North Carolina. In Baltimore, BUILD conceived of and passed the first living wage law in the country. A number of the organizations that Graf has developed have started housing development corporations and have built homes that enabled working income people to become first time homeowners.

PROCEEDINGS

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I'm Bill Schambra, and on behalf of Krista Shaffer and myself, I welcome you to this panel sponsored by the Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal entitled, "Advocacy Nonprofits: All Hat and No Cattle?" If you're here from the National Cattlemen's Association, I should warn you that you're likely to be disappointed by today's discussion.

America's nonprofit sector has long prided itself on its peculiar connection to the American democratic tradition. Within civic associations or advocacy groups, citizens – especially citizens who are otherwise at the margins of society – come together, deliberate about mutual concerns, and lay out a plan of common action, or at least, so the time-honored story goes.

Even today's massive, complex, and sophisticated nonprofits, including organizations of such wealth and power as to put corporations and governments to shame, find it advantageous from time to time to recur to this humble, born-in-a-log-cabin version of the sector's origins and purposes. Indeed, the rootedness of the nonprofit sector in democratic civic engagement may be the key to its high status in American life. As Tufts University professor Jeff Berry puts it, "Nonprofits are universally admired. No one speaks of the dangers of too much nonprofit influence in the political system. More lobbying by nonprofits would increase the representation of the disadvantaged and dispossessed, those who are poor, and those who are forgotten." (See *A Voice for Nonprofits*, Brookings Institution Press, August 2003).

However, a couple of scholars recently have raised some question about this automatic identification of advocacy nonprofits and the interests of the disadvantaged and dispossessed.

In her new book, *Activism, Inc.*, Columbia University sociologist Dana Fisher takes an in-depth look at one organization, which she calls "the People's Project." It runs massive canvassing operations of young men and women we encounter on the sidewalks wondering if we have a moment to talk about the environment, for instance. These activities are, as she notes, one of the most important gateways into progressive political involvement for young people today. In a recent article in the *Nonprofit Quarterly* – and we're pleased to have the editor thereof, Ruth McCambridge, with us today – Cindy Gibson, senior fellow at Tufts University, reports results of a substantial survey of national nonprofit advocacy organizations which claim to speak for the otherwise neglected.

What did these two analysts discover? Are we likely to come away from their work with the same sense of assurance that nonprofit groups and advocacy organizations represent the underrepresented? That's what we're about to find out in today's panel. We're honored to have with us today the two aforementioned authors, Dana Fisher and Cindy Gibson. I should mention that in addition to her article in the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, Cindy recently completed a splendid study for the Case Foundation examining the prospects for increased civic engagement in American life, entitled *Citizens at the Center*. You'll find that study available in your packets today (and online at http://www.casefoundation.org/spotlight/civic_engagement/summary.)

We also have with us two seasoned practitioners of the art of community organizing, who so to speak are likely to know a democratically rooted nonprofit when they see one. From the legendary Industrial Areas Foundation, the IAF, we have Arnie Graf. And from a career of political and community organizing among conservative and religious groups we have Frank Cannon, of Capital City Partners.

Let's begin with Dana Fisher.

DANA FISHER: I just have a few short statements to make, to give you a bit of background on the book and some information about its major findings – because it has only been out for a very short time. I also have a few comments regarding grassroots activism, grassroots democracy in America. Hopefully what I have to say will help foment discussion later on.

The main point of the book is that activism has been outsourced on the Left. As a result of that, there are two main, unintended consequences. The first, which I think is probably more relevant for today's conversation, is that the members of national groups that have outsourced their campaigns have become less connected to those groups, which are purporting to represent them. Such national groups have little to no actual contact with their members, besides cashing a check and besides perhaps phone calls asking for further donations. And in some cases, the information that the members receive from canvassers who are recruiting their support is insufficient – and in some cases even incorrect. Many different types of national groups are researching and exploring a number of opportunities right now to use the internet, through some sort of “e-activism” or “e-advocacy,” as some people are calling it, to try to reach out more effectively to members. But at this point, many advocacy groups don't really contact or communicate with their members in a meaningful way.

The second unintended consequence – one that I would say takes up a lot more of the discussion in the book, and is perhaps more significant, I think – is the way that outsourcing activism is affecting the young people who are working as what many people call the footsoldiers of these campaigns. These are idealistic young people who have chosen to spend their summers going door-to-door. Sometimes they work for a full year, but the majority of canvassing takes place in the summer. They stand on the street recruiting support, or they go door-to-door, knocking on people's doors at dinnertime, asking them to support progressive organizations. And many of these young people – the majority of these young people – are being burned out and turned off to politics more broadly by the experiences they're having. These young people represent the next generation of potential progressive leaders, and that's really dangerous for democracy.

Outsourcing activism isn't inherently bad, and outsourcing politics isn't inherently bad. It's a successful model for raising money and recruiting members, and as Cynthia may mention, it has become one of the main ways to continually support professionalized advocacy groups that work here in Washington, DC. The difficult problem is that outsourcing politics may be doing more harm than good. The more and more there is distance between the members and the organizations that are representing them as well as the young people who are doing the actual work, the harder it is going to be to keep them involved in politics.

Now, I'd like to mention a few things about the study and how it was conducted. The study began as a research project in 2003; I was studying one of the largest canvassing organizations in the United States. I did a national sample of all of their offices around the country, looking at one office in each region in the United States. I spent a week in each of their offices interviewing every canvasser who had finished his or her training, and any canvasser who was willing to participate. In the end, I talked to 115 canvassers across the country. The mean age was twenty-two. 65 percent of them were enrolled in college at the time of the interview. And in response to the last question – Do you plan to do this again next summer? – an overwhelming number of them said, Yes, I'd like to – if I'm not in Nepal trekking or working on math so that I can do better on the MCATs. However, in a follow-up study I did in 2004, a year after the canvassers' experience of the process of being canvassers, I found that most of them had decided that they no longer had any interest in participating as canvassers. Many of them had no interest in being involved in politics more broadly. Only twelve people were still working with the organization, and only a small few – four or less – were still working in politics in any way. That was the part that was most surprising to me. Many of them recounted very damaging stories for themselves about the experiences they had and the ways that they felt used as replaceable cogs within a progressive political system that didn't work for them, and they felt uncomfortable being asked to recruit members and recruit funds, reciting scripts that had been given to them verbatim, as they were told they had to do.

In the end, in thinking about the implications of the book, and in talking to many people in politics as well as to my students about this, I couldn't help but come to see the phenomenon as a challenge to democracy in America. I have an op-ed piece coming out in the *Christian Science Monitor* called "Grassroot Rot: A Challenge to Democracy in America," which talks about how this strategy that I studied on the Left is so very different from the strategy that is being used on the Right. I write in the book about the Republican strategy of 2004, which a recent *TIME* magazine piece, in the run up to the upcoming midterm elections, calls the "seventy-two-hour strategy." There's a very significant difference between bringing right-leaning friends and neighbors together to work on campaigns that are connected to the federated system from the ground up and a system that is very centralized and the information and communication flows down to the grassroots but doesn't travel back up. I talk a lot about that in some of my more recent work.

In the end, this process and this strategy that I studied has been used and employed by the Democratic Party as well to raise funds and recruit new members to the party, and it is being brought out at the same time that there's a homogenization and a concentration of this style and method of grassroots outreach. And so while the Democrats continue to reach out to a large number of people, their relatively rootless grassroots strategies have significant effects on the young people who represent the future of progressive politics in the United States as well as the outcomes of elections at all levels of government – so, not just the national, but also the local. Without doing the hard work of developing a strong and sustainable Democratic base that is connected together, progressive politics will continue to lag around the country and Democrats will continue to struggle with their campaigns, which require more money and more labor to get the word out than their Republican counterparts.

And regardless of progressive gains or losses in November, what I think is more significant here is that there is a lopsidedness in true grassroots connections across the political spectrum that is posing a significant challenge to democracy in America. And I'll end by saying what many people say, and to a large degree I think it's true: If you want your politics to be done right, you're going to have to do it yourself.

Thank you.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: I'll try to make this as fast as I can – I'm from New York, so I talk fast, and that helps me.

It's a very complicated issue, as Dana points out. There's a lot in the study that I did, so I want to make sure that I get to everything completely.

Before I talk about the study that I did, I want to mention someone who Bill (Schambra) mentioned – Jeffrey Berry. He is a terrific scholar on these issues, and was the inspiration for my own work in this area; several years ago, I was given a paper written by Jeff Berry which was the precursor to one of his books called *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups* (Brookings Institution Press, 1999), of which, if you haven't read it, you should get a copy. It's very informative about this topic.

(Editor's note: Jeffrey Berry was a panelist for a July 19, 2005 Bradley Center discussion entitled "When Nonprofits Attack: Nonprofit Organizations as Political Advocates," the transcript of which can be found on the Bradley Center web page at <http://pcr.hudson.org>.)

It's worth going over Berry's paper quickly, because it was a great study: In his paper, I saw Berry doing one of the first studies I'd ever seen quantitatively looking at the influence of what he called "citizen groups" but what I'm calling "national nonprofit advocacy groups" on the congressional policy agenda. He looked at the congressional policy agenda for one year during each of three time periods, 1963, 1979, and 1991, and then he compared it with the rise during the same time period of what we're calling national nonprofit advocacy groups, the DC-based big groups we're considering. The first time period, 1963, saw very little activity in this area – in the rise of these groups. By 1979, however, there had been an explosion in the number of these groups – mostly progressive leaning. By 1991, the third time period that he looked at, there were many conservative groups of that ilk as well.

Berry looked at congressional hearings, looking at these groups, and found that prior to 1963, before these groups came about, most of the issues brought before Congress were what Berry called "materialistic" in nature. This is based on Ronald Inglehart's notion of post-materialism and materialism – and basically, the theory is that as cultures get more affluent and educated, they become much more interested in what he calls "post-materialist" issues. Those issues are quality-of-life issues and issues more of concern to wealthy, educated people, as opposed to materialistic issues such as food, jobs, housing, which are of interest to arguably underrepresented groups. Materialistic issues are lower on what Maslow called the "hierarchy of needs." So Berry looked at that, and he found that these issues before 1963 were materialistic in nature. By 1991, however, he found that two-thirds of the issues brought before the

congressional agenda on hearings were what he called “post-materialist.” It was a dramatic shift. And he linked that to the growth of what he called “professional advocacy groups” based in DC.

I thought that had a ring of truth to it. I had worked in these groups for twenty years, and at the time had anecdotal feelings about that. But it certainly seemed clear to me that most of the groups I had been working with – well-intentioned groups – were doing issues that were not necessarily of concern to the underrepresented that they were supposedly formed to represent in the late 1970s. So I looked at the question of whether these groups continued to function as a venue for the unrepresented to make their voices heard – which is, again, what they were founded to do – or whether these groups had shifted their agendas in ways that reflected their growing financial solvency and dependency on “checkbook members” – people who are not really integrated into the organizations’ activities.

How do you measure that? It’s a very difficult thing. There is not a lot of literature on this. There are only a handful of studies that have been done on this. It takes a lot of money and time. So I tried to look at proxy measures. I looked at things like whom groups see as their members. What is the primary criterion to be a member of these groups – money, for example, or participation in activities? I looked at groups to see whom they’re representing – that is, whom *they say* they’re representing. Who are their constituents? Are there differences in how they see constituents versus members? How do they get the bulk of their funding – from dues, or foundations and wealthy donors? Who makes decisions about what the organization does – the members, the trustees, or the professional staff? Is their agenda materialist or post-materialist in nature?

To get at this, I mailed and e-mailed a survey to 836 national nonprofit advocacy groups. Identifying those organizations was a huge challenge, because as many of you in the nonprofit sector know, there is no standard categorization system for nonprofit organizations – and identifying advocacy groups is even trickier, because most nonprofits don’t say they do advocacy. Getting this list together – the population for the study – took a year of culling and looking at things by hand. I used four criteria to define these organizations: (1) operation at the national level, (2) a focus on policy, legislative, or cause-oriented activities and goals, (3) open membership – citizens can join regardless of what they do for a living, and (4) 501(c)(3) status. I did look at organizations that have both 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(3) status, but I did not look at organizations that only had 501(c)(4) status – that’s a whole different area. Also, I did not delineate between liberal and conservative groups – both groups were included in this study. I wish I had. That’s a whole other area. If somebody wants to do that with this database, I think it would be a great thing to look at. But I just didn’t have enough money or time to look into that myself.

I got 368 surveys back – a 44 percent response rate – and a random sample of non-respondents to the survey found absolutely no differences between respondents and non-respondents; for this, we used a set of variables on the IRS Form 990 database that the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCSS) houses.

So what did I find? I found probably what most of you would assume – but it’s good to have data to substantiate it. 40 percent of the respondents to the survey saw themselves as membership groups. The majority of those – 75 percent – saw “contributing money” to be the primary

requirement to be a member. Only 16 percent said that participating in the organization's activities was the primary requirement for membership.

Second, the majority of funding – no surprise here – comes from foundation grants and major donors rather than membership dues or other venues through which ordinary people or grassroots citizens could participate.

Third, there is a high level of professionalization within these organizations. They cede nearly every organizational function, from determining what they do to fundraising to representing the organization publicly to staff or administrators.

Fourth, the activities in which they are engaged – we asked organizations to indicate all of the activities in which they are engaged – revealed a penchant for insider-sophisticated strategies, as you can guess. They engaged in media campaigns, lobbying, testifying, and producing policy analyses rather than strategies that engage the larger public. In fact, when they were asked to select the one activity that organizations found most important to meeting their goals, the majority said it was producing and disseminating policy-related materials to influential groups such as policy-makers and the media. The most infrequently cited activities were what you'd suspect – canvassing, civil disobedience, rallies, encouraging constituents to appear in the media, letter-writing campaigns, and the sort of “outsider” strategies, if you will.

An interesting finding, to me, about this research is the distinction that emerged that I haven't seen in the literature: These groups did make a distinction between members and constituents. Among the organizations that saw themselves as membership groups, almost half said that donors, contributors, and professionals were their primary membership. Only 14 percent of the organizations that see themselves as membership organizations said that underrepresented groups were their members. And we gave them a list of underrepresented groups they could choose from – from low-income people to youth to women to the disabled. When they were asked who their primary constituents were, however, the responses flipped very neatly. Nearly half of them saw their constituents to be members of underrepresented groups. And only a very small percentage thought of their donors and contributors as their constituents.

Whether they saw them as members or constituents, though, it was clear that neither of those groups had much to say about what those organizations did, because 80 percent of them did not ever survey their members or constituents to see who these people were or what they cared about. But the question remains, does that mean that these groups are not capable of or effective in representing the underrepresented?

That requires a more objective analysis of what their agendas are. Are their agendas post-materialist or materialist? There aren't a lot of scales out there to measure those concepts. There are a few very small, four-item scales that look at cultural values, but not issues. So I crafted a rudimentary one myself made up of a list of about fifty issues that organizations could be involved, and whether or not they were materialist or post-materialist, recognizing that some issues can be both – abortion, for instance. Abortion can be a materialist issue for poor women seeking access to services, but it can be a post-materialist issue, arguably, if it's a rights issue. We asked the organizations in the survey to pick all of the issues they were interested in and then

to choose one that they saw as their primary focus. The goal of this was to compare whether organizations were materialist or post-materialist with that whole range of variables I just described – how many professional staff they had, whether they did surveys – to see if there were any relationships between them. That proved to be a little more difficult. I don't know how many of you are interested in methodology, but I want to talk a little bit about the factor analysis because it was an interesting finding. Before we did all of this, we did a factor analysis of all of the issues on the chart I did – the fifty issues – to see if they really fell into those categories, “materialist” and “post-materialist.” And it was very interesting. Berry and Inglehart were onto something. We found that the issues that you suspect are materialist all fell very neatly under that rubric. Factor analysis is when you just merge everything and they fall out into categories, you hope. The materialist issues were things like economic security, hunger, employment, poverty – the things you would suspect. The post-materialist construct did not fall out neatly; it fell out across nine individual categories. I won't go into what those were, but they were what you would suspect – the First Amendment, the environment, gun control, things like that. My first thought was that this is a construct that needs to be fooled with a little bit more; we need to do some more work on this. But my second thought was something that echoed in my mind that I'd heard some people talk about: It may reflect some of these groups' shift over time to single issues, rather than building issues and moving big agendas, which used to be the case – in the 1960s and 1970s. Now, it has become more like niche marketing, to satisfy peoples' interests and their donors and get more money. I don't know that; that's a testable hypothesis.

I have some data on whether these groups are post-materialist or materialist, and related to what, some inconclusive things. There are a couple of interesting findings that I won't go into. I think they're noted in the article in the *Nonprofit Quarterly* (“In Whose Interest: Do National Nonprofit Advocacy Groups Represent the Under-Represented?” Summer 2006). But I wanted to conclude by saying a couple of things that this study didn't cover that I think deserve a lot of attention – besides looking at the whole issue of what is materialist and what is post-materialist and using that as an objective way to look at what these groups do and whom they're representing.

I think more work needs to be done to look at community organizing and community groups and to see if these same results apply. I suspect that they do not. Jeff Berry also did another study with 1,700 groups that were mostly small nonprofits and he came to very different conclusions. So I think some work can be done to look at that and compare them.

The biggest question, piggy-backing on Dana's comments, is, is it a threat to democracy if the underrepresented are not having a voice in some of these processes? There is a lot of debate about that, and some people say, no, it isn't – it's actually opening up democracy because whether you see it in materialist or post-materialist concerns, there is an increase in interest among people even if they just write a check to get involved in this kind of issue stuff, and it's politics, and they think it's all good. But the bigger question for me is, is it important that underrepresented groups are represented in these process? If these national advocacy groups are arguably, let's say, representing underrepresented groups and doing it well, and they have the financial means to do that, what is the value-added of underrepresented groups being a part of that? It's a serious question – one that I don't know the answer to. I would love to be able to

prove that there is that value, because as we move away from this at the national level, it's going to become more incumbent on those who care about it to try to find evidence for it.

ARNIE GRAF: When Bill (Schambra) called me, I wasn't sure I was the right person to be a part of this, because although the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which I work for on the national staff, is a national organization, all of its work is done locally. So we don't do any national lobbying; we're not engaged with the national Democratic or Republican Party; and we're not, therefore, really reflected in either Dana's book or the article that Cynthia did. And on the four criteria Cynthia laid out about these national organizations, we don't fulfill any of them. So I told Bill, I'll be happy to come and talk about what we do and how we understand the development of a constituency, and he said that'd be fine. So I'll take a few minutes and do that. And I don't have a lot of critique in terms of national organizations and doing canvassing or not doing canvassing because I'm not all that aware – only anecdotally, not in my work. But I can talk about what I think is the development of real constituencies through the work that we do.

The IAF, as some of you may know, was founded in 1940 by Saul Alinsky – about whom Sandy (Horwitt), who is here, wrote a great biography, *Let Them Call Me Rebel* (Knopf, 1989). He died in 1972, and the group of us that were there decided to reorganize the IAF and build it through not neighborhood groups but local institutions, mainly congregations and synagogues, and mosques, now. Some local unions and neighborhood groups, but mainly, our work since 1973 has been through congregations. And we wrote a paper called “Organizing for Family and Congregation” in 1978. We beat Falwell to the family thing, but we just weren't out there fast enough.

Since that time, we have built fifty-six broadly based organizations in twenty-two states and the District of Columbia, five in the United Kingdom, and two in Germany, and on and off we've done work in South Africa. There are five people that make up the executive team of the IAF, and I am one of those people.

There are a couple of assumptions about organizing, as I understand it – I title it, “Organizing: Slow and Respectful Work,” which was taken from a book by Dr. Payne, who wrote a book on the Mississippi civil rights effort; he was a professor at Duke University. Because I think of it as slow and respectful work. First, we try to organize people around the whole person. I can't tell you how many times over the thirty-five years I've had great arguments in conversations with unions about not looking at a person as a worker. After all, I'm a worker. You look at the whole person. Therefore, I look at citizenship in terms of what full citizenship means. Voting is an act of citizenship – it's not citizenship. I argue with our leaders that if all you do is vote, you're not that much of a citizen. Not that you shouldn't vote. But you should be part of shaping and involved in your community.

We believe in what Bernard Curic (ph), the British social critic, called the “affirmative individual.” Translated into religious language, that means we are all made in the image and likeness of God, meaning that we all have Godhead in us – we all have something in us that's reflective of God, and that most people, given the right circumstances, will make the right decisions for themselves.

We believe in relating. We're not much on – I take a lot of heat from friends like Sue Chinn, who is here, about e-mails and all. I did learn to e-mail last year. My son calls me a technological Neanderthal man, but I'm getting there. We believe in the individual meeting. A forty-five-minute to sixty-minute encounter, one person to one person. Uncluttered. No television, no instant messaging. One person sitting down with one person. And when I'm working with an organizer, I require them to do twenty to twenty-five of these individual meetings a week, and I try to put that on myself as well.

We believe in what we call the iron rule: Never do for somebody what they can do for themselves. That doesn't mean you don't help them train and develop. But you don't do for somebody, because you're taking away their capacity, and you're taking away their dignity and their own ability to develop.

We believe in institutions. People isolated don't do very well socially, politically, or any other kind of way. And we're a firm believer in institutions. We've a firm believer in congregations and unions and PTAs and neighborhood associations and tenant associations. A large part, we believe, of the problem that we're facing in our country is a lack of voluntary associations and mediating institutions, and we need a whole new crop of new ones. And some of us are working on that – in our local communities, not nationally, but in the particular, where people live.

We believe in the universality of change. In constant disorganizing and reorganizing. Not just for the sake of doing that. Saul had a reputation of just agitating for the sake of agitating. Not just disrupting for the sake of disrupting. That wasn't what he was about. But you need to do that because if you're in a relationship with people, you realize that the reality that they live in, the reality that we all live in, is constantly changing. So the synagogue that operates in 2006 off of a model of 1970 doesn't work. The public school system that was build off of the 1940s model is not working in 2006. And so things need to be disorganized and reorganized.

And lastly, we work in the civic sector, not against the market sector, and not against the political sector. Where people who we care about are going to create the most change is in the civic sector. And both the political sector and market sector are important, but need to have people in the civic sector have enough power to be able to negotiate with it and to hold them accountable.

So, those are some assumptions.

The process of organizing for us is not e-mailing or various meet-ups or whatever it is, it's the individual meeting. And that's a forty-five to sixty-minute encounter, face to face, where you're looking to both share your story or some of your stories, and to learn the story of another person. All of us have had a series of founding and refounding experiences in our lives, things which have marked us. I was a Jewish person who went into the Peace Corps and lived for two years with the Order of the Holy Ghost – and that was a marking experience for me. I didn't know who the Holy Ghost was. I was concerned about this man who said he was a holy ghost. It wasn't being in a small village in Africa for two years that concerned me; it was this guy who thought he was a holy ghost. But forty years later, we're still friends. When he comes in from Ireland, my mother cooks him kreplach soup, and they have a good time.

You are trying to understand who this person is – their drives, their dreams, their story. You're not going for their anxieties, their insecurities, their weaknesses, and their deficits – which I find that some organizing does, and they try to build it out of a kind of victimhood. That's not the way to go about it. You're looking for their talent – what have they done, and with whom have they done it? – so you can measure what they have been trying. Or if they haven't been trying, why haven't they been trying? And if they have been, to whom are they related? Are they willing to translate and act on their private aspirations and/or concerns in the public arena?

You agitate people to lead, to act. Not to rely on experts or politicians. I don't have anything against politicians or experts, but people have to become their own experts in a certain kind of way – we use experts. There's not anything wrong with that. But not for people to rely on them.

That's what the individual meeting is, and we do hundreds of these. We try to get leaders to do them. We try to insist that the organizers do them. And out of these individual meetings we have small house meetings. So if I have done eight or ten of these individual meetings, we bring them together. Small group meetings. That's where the eight or ten begin to relate to each other, share each other's stories, and get to know each other across – sometimes across race, across class, across religion. We have house meetings where you have three Muslims, three Jews, two Catholics, a Protestant, and a couple of atheists. That's an interesting meeting!

They begin talking about certain things which they have generally in common. In this house meeting, where you're trying to facilitate this process, people begin talking about what's important to them, and you begin finding out and figuring out amongst the group who is willing to act on those things, or are they just talking. A lot of people complain about the Washington, DC, public school system; that's an easy target. Who is willing to get in there and do something about it?

Two last things, to wrap up: Off the bat, we do a lot of training and teaching on the arts of organizing. How to confront and when to confront – not for the sake of confronting. You confront to get into relationships; you don't confront to get out of relationships. A lot of times, when you don't have power you have to confront – otherwise you're not recognized. And that's the first piece in organizing. The first issue is always recognition.

How to negotiate. The idea isn't just to stay polarized, it's to negotiate. In democracy, you try to figure out the different interests.

How to build a constituency. A lot of people are spokespeople, but they're not leaders. A leader is a person who has a following they can deliver. We have a leader in Brooklyn, a wonderful man named Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood. He says that a person who says he is leader without a following is just a person who is out for walk. Now, we have a lot of people walking around in our communities who say they are speaking for "the community" and you realize they are speaking for themselves. They're not speaking for anybody. And we have a lot of talk-show people, who go on on both sides of the aisle.

We bring scholars in for the leaders to negotiate with. We get money sometimes from foundations or Johns Hopkins and we get people interacting and reading theologians,

economists, and political scientists. And they interact and you have great conversations. It has nothing to do with the level of a person's education. I would say that many of the people with whom we work maybe have a high-school education, but they appreciate the fact that someone cares enough about them to give them a book and to have them work on the book and then interact with the scholar.

And lastly and most importantly, how to act in the public arena – at the city council; at the chamber of commerce; at the union hall; with the city council persons; with state legislators; whomever. Action is the lifeblood of a community organization. I think it was Saul Alinsky or Ed Chambers, the director of the IAF, who said that action is like oxygen to the blood system. People have to act on their values; they have to act on what they believe in.

And after every action, we evaluate. We stay there for half an hour after what we've done at city hall or the state legislature or when somebody comes to one of the congregations where we're meeting or the Greater Baltimore Committee or wherever we are, and we go through an evaluation. What did we learn? Did we accomplish what we set out to accomplish? What are some of the political universals that we understand took place here? Why did we succeed? Why did we fail? What happened in here?

We do that process over and over again. I think it's the way you build an informed constituency, a powerful organization, and really act on people being full citizens.

Thank you.

FRANK CANNON: I'm not a social scientist or activist per se. What I do is work with groups that want to be effective in the political arena and help them in their grassroots organizing. I think that what I can offer here today is some general observation on the article and the book and things that might give it a context or raise some questions that I'm not quite the right person to answer, I don't think, but that I think ought to be raised in terms of this.

One of things that strikes me first about this is the secular changes that have occurred between 1960 and 2006, in terms of issue mix, for the overall American people. And this goes right to the point of materialism vs. post-materialism. In 1960, the single biggest variable you could use to determine a person's political activity was their economic status – how much money they had and where they stood in the economic hierarchy. In 2006, it's church participation, if you're going to pick one variable and then predict where they vote. That indicates, I believe, a movement from materialism to post-materialism in terms of Dr. Gibson's article.

But doesn't that mean that the organizations that are coming into being or currently exist have different idea of what "underrepresented" means? There is a premise here that "underrepresented" means for organizations people of color, poor people, and there are many organizations that state that to be their starting premise. But there are a lot of other organizations on the right – and I know Cynthia's study has both right and left – who came into being because they believe that certain other parts of the population were severely underrepresented: parents, human rights advocates (supported by organizations on both the left and right), faith-based

providers, etc. These are people who don't comport with purely a 1960s definition of "underrepresented."

The definition of "underrepresented" hasn't moved; therefore, when you go back and look at it in relation to materialism vs. post-materialism, you see a kind of disconnect. I'm not a social scientist, so I don't know the quantification of it, but I'd offer that at least one of the explanations for that is that certain organizations began *without* a sense that those were the underrepresented groups they were going out to serve. Their sense was that there were other groups within society whose sheer numbers gave them majority status, but whose political representation in terms of how much they were getting done in Congress was disproportionately small. By that standard, you can take majorities and look at them as underrepresented – and a number of groups have begun to do that. You can do a simple, mathematical analysis of what happens to traditional marriage, for example, from the right as it goes through state activity. In state legislatures, the issue of traditional marriage gets an average of 68-70 percent of votes at the state level. At the national level, it gets 48 percent in the Senate and 55 percent – there's a disparity, an underrepresentation. And groups have been organized to represent different constituencies, and this has moved into the nonprofit arena and all forms of social organizing.

One of the implications of this, when you go to Professor Fisher's work, is the idea that who you are organizing has shifted very, very much from, say, a 1960s canvasser to a 2006 canvasser both on the right and on the left. A 1960s canvasser could go into union halls *and* look at the whole of the person – I'm not suggesting that they were only looking at the economic reality, but that was the primary idea when you're talking about dealing with materialist questions. If you're dividing between materialist and non-materialist or you're looking at canvassing, why has the canvassing become more of a need on the left? Why has it become more of a question of finding out who on the streets of DC are the environmentalists. It's because when you were dealing materialist questions, it was easier to figure out, because people lived in neighborhoods and they belonged to unions and that was an easier question. The question was harder for the right. It has now shifted to where the mediating institutions, the churches and the civic organizations, are existing more on the right in terms of being an organizing principle, particularly for politics.

I want to say one thing about this: We have to be clear about the difference between politics and advocacy, in my opinion. Churches are great institutions for organizing politics, and they're bad institutions for organizing advocacy. The reason for that – and I see this on a lot of issues on the right – is that an election is a finite event. It occurs and there is an assumption of general participation in that event at a certain point in time. And you can go ahead and communicate to them. Advocacy requires action at points in time that are not put on the calendar and are not seen by people as being naturally on the calendar. Therefore, the trend to go ahead and find individual people who care about the environment, let's say, and be able to alert them and to be able to know that they are ready and mobilizable is an important function if what you care about is environmental legislation. And therefore you need to not think of it only as the movement creating a progressive agenda. You need to be able to move specifically on sub-issues of that agenda. I find myself in a weird position of defending the Left here!

On the right, it's very hard to go back to the churches and the intermediary institutions and get them to act even on issues that find of huge importance. I'll give you the most recent example:

There are many, well-organized religious denominations that believe that the most critical vote was the vote on the constitutional amendment on same-sex marriage. This was true of the Catholic Bishops Conference. It was true of the leadership of the Latter Day Saints. This was true of the Southern Baptist Convention. And it was true of many evangelical mega-churches. The activity and advocacy for that was paltry. It was horrendous. Why? Because they do not exist in a coordinated way. There isn't the communication and interlocking relationships that the human rights campaign has with the environmental groups, at least in terms of shared policy goals and acting on those policy goals. So I think that you have to make a distinction between the various efficacies of advocacy for a political outcome and for an individual congressional outcome.

In general, the point that I want to make is that there has been a shift, in my experience, from progressives to conservatives using more of the kind of tactics that Arnie (Graft) indicated – the one-on-one meeting. All of our work is done in one-on-one meetings. There is a shift towards going to intermediating organizations and helping to build up intermediary organizations for conservative practices. But part of what has to be done is observing the fundamental landscape shift among the electorate, the people whose needs are to be represented. It has changed dramatically from 1960 to 2006. I don't think we can assume that the people who are being served by organizations and advocacy groups are the same in 1960 as they are in 2006. If Dr. Gibson does further work on this, I'd be interested to know whether one of the definitions can be whether those groups believe their mission was post-materialist to begin with, or whether they believe it was materialist to begin with. I think what you'd find is, many of those groups now understand their mission, the people they represent, to be people concerned by post-materialist issues. And therefore, the fact that they're not working on materialist ends is not a betrayal of or a difference between two constituencies, or donors and constituents, but exemplifies the fact that a lot of groups are now organized on those post-materialist lines, and their constituencies have the same goals. They just aren't underrepresented as understood thirty-five years ago.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: As I suspected, Arnie's perspective and Frank's perspective remind us how difficult it is to do genuine democratic organizing, how extraordinarily time consuming and challenging it is. It's much easier to claim to be an advocacy organization than it is to do the serious business of organizing. And this is valid for the Left and well as the Right. As much as Dana's book admires the mighty rightwing grassroots machine, I suspect that Frank, having worked with that mighty machine, probably has a somewhat more skeptical view of its mightiness and efficiency.

Would you all like to address points among yourselves?

CYNTHIA GIBSON: I'd just like to say that that's a great point. There are certain large swaths of the population that do not feel that their voices have much meaning in Washington. I would argue that probably most people feel that way at this point, which is the other paper.

This was based on a sort of Maslowian hierarchy of fundamental needs, which is very traditional. I think what you're suggesting, Frank (Cannon), is that we should look at their values as well – that their values are not being represented, and that there are people – absolutely – in this country, many years ago, who felt that – on the right – their views were not being represented

well in Washington. I would argue, though, that a lot of people who are still using the 1960s definition of “poor, low-income people” – and I even included “women” in this, and young people – are conservative and actually have different values but nevertheless their needs are not being addressed. They’re arguably the people who really need the biggest voice in Washington, and need some representation, and need a venue through which to make those needs heard – and they’re not getting it.

FRANK CANNON: I think I understand the distinction you’re making between needs and values, but one of the points of the progression is that as you move up that scale, your needs change. There are groups that are being organized by people not along economic lines, but because they’re at a different point along that scale. And to decide whether those groups are being faithful to their advocacy role or not – you may conclude that they are not representing the needs of the people at the bottom of the scale, but they were organized by people higher up the scale with a different set of needs. And that may be a problem or that may be a function of the fact that progress is being made in the society. Those are arguments you could make, but I don’t think the simple fact that they don’t address basic needs means that they’re somehow failing their primary constituents.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: I think they are failing if they *say* they are doing that. They don’t do it. That’s what I’m interested in. There are lots of organizations that are formed with a post-materialist function; that was certainly Jeff (Berry)’s point. And that’s great. And as I said at the end of my remarks, there is something to be said – a lot of people feel that it’s a great thing for democracy. It encourages participation among a whole different group of people. But I’m interested in those organizations that purport to represent poor people and, when you look at their agendas, clearly do not.

FRANK CANNON: I agree completely. I think that they way to do that is to look at that slice of the groups and see what the correlation is there.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: Absolutely.

DANA FISHER: If I could just add in here: I think that Frank is speaking to a whole bunch of work that has been done on identity politics that doesn’t really fit or buy into the post-materialist values hypothesis. Frank’s example of the environmental movement or the gay rights movement certainly fit more appropriately into identity politics, and a lot of people who talk about identity politics and how their issue cuts across materialist-post-materialist values. It’s just a question of how much you can take post-materialist values and swing with it, because a lot of people would say that folks who are voting based upon their religious ideologies are not particularly post-materialist at all. They would say they’re more traditionalist. I think Inglehart would say that, certainly. It’s worth thinking about. And particularly, if you’re interested in the identity-politics types of groups, maybe think about branching out in the ways you look at the factors.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: Absolutely.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: As we turn to our question-and-answer period, I promised the first question and a slightly lengthier comment to Heather Booth, who is with us today. Heather is the

founder of one of the other great community organizing groups in the country, the Midwest Academy, and also Citizen Action – you’re one of the founders of that. So, Heather, please.

HEATHER BOOTH: I’d like to address a particular aspect, the role of the canvass, within a whole context we have now that Bob Putnam described as “bowling alone,” or the general decline of public activities designed to take coordinated and collective action for social impact. In this context especially, for people concerned about building small “d” democracy, it’s interesting that Dr. Fisher, Dr. Gibson, and other observers, in other articles, are criticizing canvassing and other trends that are so far removed from “bowling alone.” Why are they worried that every night, there are hundreds of people knocking on doors in communities across the country, and talking to other people about issues that are important to their lives – issues like the energy crisis, clean water, and human rights – cutting across materialist and non-materialist areas?

In the discussion this afternoon and in other articles recently, we have been told we should worry – and some of these have taken from some of the articles that are contributing to the debate. We should be worried for the following reasons:

1. Canvassers are paid. They’re not paid princely salaries, which some of the authors say is a problem. But they are paid – which some of the authors say is a problem.
2. They often work for national canvassing programs, not the organizations themselves, and Dr. Fisher compares this to corporate outsourcing.
3. Many of the canvassers conclude that this kind of work is not for them, although lots of people leave lots of jobs – organizers, teachers, even sociologists.
4. She suggests that the widespread use of canvassing weakens progressive organizations. Now, I imagine that not everyone here is as concerned as I am about strengthening progressive organizations. I do think that this is an important concern. And I think that canvassing is good for progressive organizations, good for our civic life, and really good for democracy.

Advocacy organizations need to recruit members and raise funds, and community canvassing is one of the most effective ways to do it. It builds membership, raises money, and helps develop leaders and activists – especially amongst the canvassers, but also at least to a small number of those who are canvassed. Canvassers make contact with people who will join, contribute to, and very often participate in progressive organizations for years to come. That’s how organizations have been built all around the country. And literally hundreds of leaders of citizens groups and even elected officials have started out as canvassers or people who were canvassed.

In fact, canvassing is a small “d” democracy way to organize. It involves people talking to other people about public issues and asking them to take action. Its operation, mission, and priorities are set by the organization, and it’s not something a large donor can give or take away. And it can raise money that can be used for political purposes because it’s based upon small contributions, and so its not in the pocket of some special interest.

And if you look at the other alternatives, on the one side there are things like direct mail and robo-calls that also may be useful, but canvassing involves human interaction, and in this era of bowling alone, it's part of a solution, not a problem. Clearly it's not the only solution, and it may not be the best one. Certainly more intimate contact is better. The IAF, neighbor-to-neighbor programs, programs that Dr. Cannon argued for, and congressional work are very impressive, but it's not an either-or approach, depending on what you're trying to achieve.

Canvassing roots progressive organizations in main-street America. We hear what people are saying on their doorsteps, so that we can respond to it. Canvassing gives people a sense that they matter. It alerts them to issues and holds elected officials accountable on those issues. It lets them know that the public is watching and is concerned; it's an antiseptic, like sunlight, shining on what the elected officials and administrators and corporate citizens are doing.

So how do concerned people as we have on the panel, well-informed observers, get the idea that canvassing is just a business, that it's similar to outsourcing and is weakening progressive organizations? First of all, there are a variety of approaches to canvassing. Some progressive organizations conduct their own canvasses while others pool resources in a national canvassing operation like the one Dr. Fisher studied. But there are other canvass operations, and while they're all different, they do have some things in common. The canvassers all believe in progressive causes. To succeed in the canvass, you really need to be committed to the issues and the people. It's not that they're hired hands who canvass for lower prices one day and then higher energy prices the next day. Most of them live in the areas where they work.

And the work is hard, so some people decide that it's not for them. But not before they've spent a few weeks, perhaps a summer, talking to people about public issues. It's not a bad experience to look back on, whatever they do with the rest of their lives. And when you reflect on the numbers who have made working in the canvass their career, many of whom never dreamed of an activist life before the canvass, sticking with it often for decades, it's an impressive story to tell.

Now, the canvass isn't perfect. There is great room for improvement, and it's constantly involving. We need to improve all of our operations, and certainly, connections with people – say, through congregations or organizing in the community directly – are more effective than canvassing for in-depth relationship building. It may not reach the same number of people, or the same kinds of people, but it is a remarkable tool. Those committed canvassers are in the service of democracy. So I appreciated the chance now to speak to it, and to recognize their work, and to support and thank them for what they do.

DANA FISHER: Thank you very much for your comments, Heather. Let me respond and clarify a little bit. First and foremost, I've made very clear in the book and all my writing that my work is based on fundraising canvassing. There are many other types of canvassing. I give a history of canvassing in the beginning of the book. And these other types of canvassing are run in many different ways; there are many different strategies of canvassing – certainly, I'm not speaking to all of that. I'm focused on fundraising canvassing, which has, in many ways, become the big business of the Left. And it's very important, here, to think about how this business of the Left has become consolidated by national organizations wherein a young person who comes into the

office will on one day be given a T-shirt for one organization canvassing on one issue – maybe the environment – and on the next day they’ll be canvassing for the human rights campaign. That is a very different strategy than a canvasser who is working directly for an organization, going out in a community, from the community, working on a day-to-day level.

Most of the canvassers in the fundraising canvass I studied were not locally born and from the area they were canvassing. In fact, the organization relies on this tactic of “geoflexibility” for its directors. They fly people around to the places where they’re needed most. So most of the canvass directors whom I studied did not know where their closest grocery store was at the beginning of the summer, nor did they have time to do laundry – and when I asked them if they were able to get involved in any local organizations, they said that they barely had time even to sleep, let alone work locally on anything. So this geoflexibility certainly increases the distance between the organizations that this group is trying to raise funds for and the members who are being recruited – because you have a lot of people who don’t even know the areas when they’re canvassing them.

There’s the question here about how much human interaction is taking place in this type of fundraising canvass. Fundraising canvasses focus to a large degree on a specific pitch that is recited verbatim, and the pitch changes slightly depending on the organization the canvasser is working for at that given moment. It’s about fundraising for the tertiary organizations about which scholars such as Theda Skocpol as well as Bob Putnam have spoken. These groups are about raising funds to support professional organizations – professional advocates – in Washington, DC, but sometimes in state-level governments as well, so that they can actually do the work of advocacy.

And there’s the question of how much these types of canvassers can hold actual elected officials accountable, as you said. Certainly, there are canvassers who do hold elected officials accountable. And the canvass is a wonderful tool for that. But the type of canvassing I studied is not effective for doing that because many of the canvassers themselves do not have the opportunity to learn who the elected officials are in the areas they’re canvassing, let alone what their positions are.

I should just give a little more background here: The average life of a canvasser in this type of organization is two and a half to three weeks. More than 50 percent of the people do not even finish their training days. So these happen to be young people who are interested in progressive politics, who in most cases get very little experience doing progressive politics before they decide that it’s just not for them.

In the national sample of canvassers that I studied – they worked on behalf of numerous organizations in the summer of 2003, when I was studying them – I asked them all if they’d be willing to work for the organizations on whose behalf they were raising funds and recruiting members. And they all said, yes, they would love to. Then I went to the national organizations in Washington and spoke with people there and asked them how many people who were former canvassers were actually working for the organizations – who had been able to move up the channels into the national organization. Only one organization could think of anybody. And that is the big point about these young people and the opportunities as potentially an activist training

ground and the experience of canvassing – at least, the type of canvassing that I studied. I think it's worth noting that while it has the potential to be this wonderful training ground, this wonderful *entrée* into politics on the left, it doesn't seem to work that way.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I know, Arnie (Graf) and Frank (Cannon), you didn't address the question of canvassing, but one can't fail to be struck by the contrast between the fairly quick and temporary encounter that canvassing is, and what you, Arnie, in particular describe as dealing with the whole person. Something in the contrast between those two methods goes to this heart of democratic organization, Tocqueville's understanding of the art of association. Would you care to make a comment, either of you, to address this issue of canvassing in particular?

ARNIE GRAF: I think it depends on what you're trying to accomplish. I wouldn't say that canvassing just ought to be thrown out. I don't think that would make a lot of sense. From our perspective, as to what we do – and we're not at the national level – it's less employed, and we don't employ it for fundraising. But it's not that we don't, at times, go out into the community and try to engage people block by block – and that's not where we're able to knock on someone's door and have a one-hour conversation. But when we find people with interest, we do try to go back and have that one-hour conversation.

As Heather said, there are lots of variations of this. And it depends upon what you're doing and how you utilize it. But in our work, and from my looking at forty years of working with predominately low- and moderate-income communities, the greatest problem – and I don't know the rights work all that well, and it's ongoing groundwork. I know it anecdotally. I saw it in Ohio and I thought it was really impressive. If you want to compare their work in Ohio compared to the canvassing that came in, I think that says a lot.

A lot of the situation is the lack of voluntary, mediating institutions – and that can't be rebuilt through canvassing. So from what we try to do, we canvass to add to what we're trying to do. But to try to figure out how to build the new school or the new congregation or the new settlement house or the new ministry that is going to be done around the ex-felon, the new church that's going to figure out how you organize around 12,000 people coming out of jail into three ZIP codes in Baltimore every year, that's not going to be done strictly through canvassing. But there is going to be a canvassing component to it, because they're not in an institution, and how you go find them is not going to be through the pastor calling them together.

You can go into lot of congregations, and the number of people who are into NA and AA is much larger than the number of people there on Sunday. That's the church, except that a lot of the church isn't seeing it right now. And so, where's the new seminary? Those are the things that we look at.

FRANK CANNON: I'm not an expert in this, but it strikes me that there are three different categories. There is fundraising; there is advocacy; and there is political turnout. And we're kind of lumping those three together, and I think that's a little bit of a mistake. On the right, fundraising is generally much more impersonal than canvassing. Direct mail has been the traditional means of raising money on the right. It's losing power because direct mail is, in some ways, robbing old people who have some disposable income, have some interest. Your direct

mail donor tends to be much more elderly than average. They move more to business techniques like micro-targeting, to where you can look for constituents who have a passion for interests not so much by going out and meeting them individually, but rather they're doing what business do: Use an intersecting piece of information to be able to graft a hierarchy of probability that somebody is interested in participating financially in something, and then going to be able to do that. And that's used politically.

I think the area of advocacy has the most to learn about translating what natural assets are – mediating institutions that have concerns about issues – and making them effective advocates on particular issues. A lot of it is a general distrust that a lot of conservative religious organizations in particular have about the political process. They just don't want to participate.

And the last thing is: Politically, I think that is where this shift, where political canvassing is more needed by the Left, I think because the mediating institutions that used to exist on the left are gone. But it has to be the kind of canvassing that integrates people into relationships that make them want to act. I think the Right has done a better job in terms of that for purposes of politics. So I think it's a somewhat mixed bag, when you look at it, because I think you need to distinguish between those three different areas.

DANA FISHER: I'm not sure that I buy this claim that there are no mediating institutions on the left at the local level. I think that there has been some really interesting new research done about the types of mediating institutions. There is the weird (inaudible) movement that is being pushed by some of the left-leaning blogs. There are a bunch of civic groups that do environmental stewardship, broadly defined, in urban centers around the country. There are people who are working on schools and education locally. That all exists. The problem, I think, is that they're not really connected together and plugged into any type of national network that gives these local left-leaning groups the opportunity to plug into progressive politics on the left at the national level.

FRANK CANNON: I think the difference, though, is that the mediating institutions used to be nonpolitical. That is, a church by itself isn't organized for a political purpose. A union isn't organized for a political purpose, necessarily – a limited purpose. And I think what happens is, as you move to values-oriented issues, religion is a very powerful way in which groups can organize, and the more atheistic or agnostic the country becomes as a whole, the progressive movement doesn't have that center in churches, which was one of the big mediating institutions for progressivism in the civil rights movement and in other places. I think that shift is real, and I don't think it's easily replaced by people who are only getting together for a political issue.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: I just have a brief comment. Just to clarify, I was actually using canvassing as a variable to show that it was a venue for underrepresented groups to participate, and actually, I'm not a critic of it at all. I had another comment, though, that relates to the other paper.

Canvassing is a tactic, and can be very effective, just as volunteering and community service and voting – they're all, as Arnie (Graf) said, examples of citizenship. Canvassing and all these tactics are usually directed to do something, whether it's to build up progressive organizations or

to build up party strength. And I sense, just from working on this other paper – interviewing lots of people and looking at some of the data about where Americans are, there is a sense among most Americans of a huge disconnect between their institutions and their political leaders. They're hungry for something that goes beyond tactics and one-shot issues. They do want to build a civic life of their communities, as Robert Putnam and other people have suggested is the case.

And so the larger question for me is not what canvassing is for, or fundraising advocacy in politics, although I think that's certainly true and it's a great point. The larger question for me is, how do you use these to build a civic ethos and healthy civic life and communities? I've come to the conclusion that that comes from really difficult public deliberation among people who don't necessarily agree with one another. It comes from the opportunity to do that kind of work, and a space where they're not asked to plug into a sort of predetermined agenda or a tactic or strategy. It's important that they actually feel that they have a place, a mediating institution like the church used to be, and that is addressed in this as well, to talk about these things.

A lot of the work that I have done reflects that, and I really think that's the way the country is going. I think both sides of the ideological spectrum need to take note of that and pay attention to it and provide those opportunities for public work to people of all stripes to think it through and decide if they want to do canvassing and they want to do service. It's up to them to decide. It's really giving them power, which is extremely tough to do, I think.

FRANK CANNON: I would echo that 100 percent. The work we're currently doing is on human trafficking, which is neither a right nor a left issue. There are people who are religiously motivated to do it, people who are progressive, and people who are involved in women's rights who are involved in it. What we found is that in almost every city, they existed as atomized, separate organizations and were duplicating resources or not coordinating resources. When we brought them together and sat them in a room, we had nine hundred groups in seventeen cities sign up – and these are people who are using their resources. Almost none of the groups are organized to find trafficking victims. But what they do is – you were describing it as part of their citizenship or part of their civic responsibility, part of their greater mission. And what you're doing is borrowing their networks for another civic purpose. And there is a tremendous desire, and they see it as a nonpolitical civic purpose to participate. And it has been overwhelming how much they've done that, and one of the things that struck me about conservative government – you know, Republican-led government – is that they don't value this. They don't value, even for the purposes of their own message, the idea of going out and doing it in a way that engages the civic-minded nature of people to integrate it with their strategy.

One of the things that was striking to me, sitting here, is that there is a sense on the progressive side that civic responsibility and progressive politics have some identity. There is a growing realization on the right that that is also true from our perspective – or could be true from our perspective. But it is undervalued as a method. It's not seen. And I think that people who are motivated by their best instincts, where you deal with the whole person, is something that is undervalued on the right. And I think it's something that, if that were to begin to change, could allow people to do work on issues of joint concern.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: I noticed that we have some folks who didn't sign up in advance, some younger people who are associated with the group that Dana Fisher wrote about, the so-called "People's Project." And I'd love to have one of them, if they're interested in commenting or reacting to the discussion we've had so far. I don't know who you are – I apologize. Yes –

DAVID LIPOWICZ: I work for the Fund for Public Interest Research (online at <http://www.ffpir.org>), which is the group known as the "People's Project" in Dana's work. There are many points I could make; I'll just start with a basic one, and that is to challenge Dana's assertion that only one person who started working for the fund as a canvasser has now gone on to work for the groups that we canvass for. In fact, that is remarkably not true.

DANA FISHER: I said the national groups, just to clarify.

DAVID LIPOWICZ: Yes. If you'd like, I can tell you three people just off the top of my head for the Sierra Club, one for Greenpeace, a former leader for the Human Rights Campaign, and then dozens for the state PIRGs who started as canvassers and are now in leadership positions within these organizations.

DANA FISHER: How many of them were in the fellows' program versus being actual, on-the-ground, real, live canvassers?

DAVID LIPOWICZ: Sure – I can definitely answer that as well. In terms of real-life canvassers... (Editor's note: Lipowicz gives the names and affiliations of the people he alludes to above.)

DANA FISHER: Starting when? Well, given that you are listing and identifying individuals, I think that it's important to understand their full stories. My cohort was from 2003, when the canvass was run as an outsource model, whereas there were many people working in progressive politics and politics more broadly today who did start out as canvassers prior to this outsourcing, and I think that's a very important point.

DAVID LIPOWICZ: (Continues to give names and some start dates – "several years ago," "probably around 2000," and "in the mid 1990s.") That's just a sampling of some of the many dozens of folks who now work for partner groups. In addition – I'm just going to refer to a list here – our alumni are currently working in over four hundred organizations, foundations, and government offices including – I'll just give some of the "A's": AARP, ACLU of Northern California, ACORN, the Advocacy Institute, Advocates for Youth, AFL-CIO, Alaska Coalition.

We don't really put a premium on necessarily having canvassers go to work with the groups that we run canvasses for. The idea would be that they stay in the progressive movement, for sure, and then go work with any of the hundreds of good organizations out there doing good work. So the first point I wanted to make is that it's not true that there's only one person who started working for the Fund who is now working at the groups that we run canvasses for.

The next question, basically, is – well, a big part of the book is centered around the idea of outsourcing, yet the main subject of your book, the group that I work for, the Fund for Public

Interest Research, does about 75 percent of its fundraising and canvassing for the state PIRGs and the state environment groups, all of which are part of the same umbrella organization as the Fund, so that's not outsourcing. So, again, 75 percent of our canvassing is for in-house groups. In fact, the Fund, at this point, only has two outside partners, the Sierra Club and the Human Rights Campaign.

I have two questions stemming from that. One, Dr. Fisher, who don't you write in your book that we do 75 percent of our canvassing for our own groups? And two, what evidence do you have to support the notion that the members the Fund signs up for our outside partners, the Sierra Club and the Human Rights Campaign, are any less valuable, politically and financially, to these organizations than those whom we sign up for our own groups, the state PIRGs and the state environment groups?

DANA FISHER: I think it's worth noting, and certainly there are many people who have come through the canvass over the years who continue to be involved in progressive politics. The point of my study was to do a strategic, rigorous study. I used a stratified, random sample of cohort from one summer. Thousands of people canvassed in 2003, and I can tell you based on my sample, which is based on statistical modeling and expected to be normally distributed and therefore representative of the universe of canvassers during that summer. That gives you the outcome from one year. And that's worth noting here, because certainly, if we go back through the list and through the different iterations of the canvass, things have changed a lot. Things have changed a lot in canvassing – for example, Greenpeace no longer works with the Fund. They run their own canvass today because they have recognized some of the weaknesses and challenges to this type of outsource modeling. So I think that's worth noting.

But it is always possible, anecdotally, to pull out specific names of people and talk about where they ended up. The point here was to do a model where we could actually get a sense of one year, one cohort, and find out where they went. I'm hoping to be able to follow up at the fifth year point – five years after this cohort canvassed – to see what has happened to them since. I think that would be a wonderful opportunity to resolve some of these remaining questions. I was only able to talk to them in 2004, one year later. That's not very much.

And yes, it's true that there are now only two partners working with the Fund, but I think that part of that is because Grassroots Campaigns, an offshoot of the Fund for Public Interest Research, was founded and now works for numerous partners, doing the same type of canvassing – the outsource model – to raise funds and recruit members. And so it might be worth aggregating those together, because it is the same model.

DAVID LIPOWICZ: I have a follow-up point I'd like to make. Dana, I'd like to point out that your book is based in part on research that we gave you permission to do to write a report for the CIRCLE Foundation. In your report for the CIRCLE Foundation, you wrote that almost 100 percent of the people you interviewed told you that canvassing had given them a chance to participate in the political process on a regular basis, not just during elections; that they intended to stay in politics; and that most of them followed through. Within the following year, 95 percent had written or telephoned an editor or public official or had signed a petition about an issue that concerned them; 79 percent had attended a public meeting; 77 percent had voted in a national or

state election; and 72 percent had participated in a protest or boycott. Again, this is your own data. I would like an analysis of how that compares to the civic engagement of young people who do not participate in the summer canvass.

DANA FISHER: The data that were included in the original report with the CIRCLE Foundation – that was the preliminary report for the project – were data based upon the 2003 data. I then followed up with the canvassers a year later. So the data that you’re talking about here were the people who came through the door who were canvassers in the summer of 2003. And yes, they were increasingly and impressively engaged in civic affairs – more so than a national sample. In 2004, when I followed up with them after a year, they were not. That was my point.

MARK ROSENMAN: I’m from the Union Institute and University. I have an observation and then a question. First, going back to your reference, Cynthia, to Jeff Berry’s time sequence observation about setting the congressional agenda. My suspicion, although I haven’t begun to inquire about it, is that changes in influence in the congressional agenda from the 1960s out has more to do with changes in campaign finance and reform than with the presence of advocacy groups in Washington. And without an inquiry into that, I would be less sanguine about attributing power to national advocacy groups.

Secondly, picking up on your final point, which is a question about whether or not national advocacy groups have ever in effect claimed to represent the constituency, not their membership, and then moved away somehow from representing people, I want to probe a little bit there and inquire into it. I think we may be conflating two things, here. One is, organizations that are working in an area of concern, representing “underrepresented people” – using a term that only Arnie (Graf), I think, referenced – folks without appreciable power, working on issues for folks who do not have sufficient power or equal power in the political process, but are not in effect organizations that are constituency based. They work in an area. They are not organizations made up of constituent groups. They don’t have local affiliates, for example. So it’s not as if they had lost that over time. Noting that they are operating without that, they’re not really anti-democratic. It’s not that they lost that; they never really had it. I have a question about whether or not there are organizations that you think have in effect moved away from it somehow. Are there groups that have lost it? Or are these groups that have never really had it?

And the final point I want to make is about materialist-post-materialist, which is: We are at a point, as I understand the data, of the greatest inequity in the distribution of wealth at any time in our history. Poverty has grown. This last year, it stayed relatively constant. The middle class is losing ground. So I would think that it is not quite time to have a celebration of moving beyond the need for a materialist agenda. Is it that these groups have moved away or lost a democratic agenda?

CYNTHIA GIBSON: I think that those are great points. You’re piggy-backing on what Frank talked about. In the best of all worlds, it would have been great to have a really rigorous measure of an agenda and how it has changed over time. And I say that in the dissertation. If someone could come up with a greater and more rigorous measure of this, and look at organizations’ shifts over time – how their agendas shift – that would be fabulous. You would get that kind of data that I think is really important.

As far as Jeff's study, I think you're absolutely right. There are a lot of factors that could have influenced that shift, and he acknowledges that. What intrigued me about him is that he was one of the very first people I ever saw who tried to look more rigorously at advocacy. Everyone talks about advocacy – you always hear people say, “You can't study advocacy! You can't prove it. You can't link it to influence.” I don't believe that. I think you can actually crack that. And if somebody really tried – and they should try – and ask what influence the groups really have, and is it really benefiting underrepresented groups that need that voice? That was my bias, sort of, coming in.

What I saw in my own personal experience and what Jeff highlights in this larger book, there has been a shift. These largely DC-based organizations – and because they're DC-based, they're not in communities; they're dislocated – have become disenfranchised from the disenfranchised! It's more anecdotal and it's more of a bias of mine – I have to be honest with you. If I had more money and time, I would definitely look at how these agendas shift over time.

MARK ROSENMAN: I don't understand how they got disengaged. It seems to me like issues are being fought perhaps in a more technocratic way.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: Absolutely.

MARK ROSENMAN: And I think that legislation has become more technocratic, and battles are being framed in more technocratic ways.

CYNTHIA GIBSON: Right – and that's one of the indicators of more professionalization, Berry and others would argue. Now, you're asking an interesting question to me, if I'm hearing it right. I was toying with this, but it's really complicated: Do you value this as part of the democratic process – that is, do these groups give people a voice in the process, and is that a value unto itself, or do you value that these groups win on issues whether or not people are involved – that's the question. And I'm not sure how you break that out, but I came to sort of the same dichotomy. If you do think that it's important for underrepresented groups to be part of the process for democracy, what is their value-added, then, if these groups are very effective at championing, right? So that's my question and probably yours as well.

MARK ROSENMAN: One more quick question. Absolutely, people need to be involved, but is it the advocacy's job to organize folks to do it, or is it --

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: It's Arnie (Graf)'s job!

(Laughter.)

CYNTHIA GIBSON: That's the other paper! I'm arguing that. (Laughter.)

FRANK CANNON: It's fascinating to me – your question implies that materialist concerns should be of more concern to voters. But they're not! The voters themselves – the middle class that is further apart – are looking to these more individualized issues and saying, we care about

that. And I think that it's a democratic response. It's hard to go ahead and say, we're going to be organizing around somebody is concerned about – I'm not saying that there shouldn't be concern for a range of issues. But I think that in a purely democratic sense, people's issue mix – even people that you think should be, based on their economic situation – involves something else as their main political need they have.

WILLIAM TREANOR, Youth Today: I'm kind of enjoying watching Professor Fisher getting thrashed around up there, because it is very confirming. She was bold enough to actually examine the workings of one of these sacred cow national organizations. Now, I don't want to get into too much of this, but this is what I do for a living. I look at these groups, and let me tell you, 50 percent of them are phonies. Let me give you two examples. Nancy Reagan's Just Say No Clubs – 5,000 clubs across the country. When I reported about them, they were down to twelve clubs. Then they went out of business. Marian Wright Edelman started Stand for Children, which claimed hundreds of affiliates all over the place. The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* did a nice story on it. When I went back to their list and checked with these different towns, it turned out that they had about five affiliates. I could go on and on. All you have to do is look on the tax returns. Membership income. Publications income. And now the technology is coming into play that will tell you the number of hits they get on their web site and how many downloads there are of these documents that the government and the foundation world push tens of millions of dollars into every year. From my point of view, it's a mostly over-educated, upper-middle-class jobs program that constitutes all of this stuff. I don't see a lot of the rubber hitting the road on a lot of these issues that I cover in the children and youth field.

ARNIE GRAF: I want to say something really quick, because time is short. I think basic organizing starts, back to our founder – and this gets to the question that is being raised about, you know, another way of maybe saying “post-materialist” or what people actually care about – you organize around people's interests. You organize around their self-interest, but self-interest broadly understood. “Self inter-esse.” Self between being. And there are a couple of things that make up self interest. One is self-preservation and the things required for self-preservation – maybe you might call these materialist kinds of things – security, job, income. The other is our drive for recognition and meaning. Viktor Frankl talked about it in *Man's Search for Meaning*. And I think that's what Frank is getting at.

In all of those individual meetings we do and in the time we spend, 60 to 70 percent of which is with fairly low-income people, those people are not always talking about the immediate things that are on top of them as you would expect. Those things aren't far from their minds; if you're making \$12,000 a year, materialist things are not far from your thoughts. But that doesn't define them. And a lot of organizing goes, I find, at just those kinds of things. In our better organizations – not all of our organizations are great – people are engaged. Why are people who are making \$18,000 and \$20,000 a year volunteering twelve and fourteen hours a week to be part of our organization? Because it is providing some sort of meaning; it's acting on their faith. They're growing. They're developing. Why are these people who have two jobs showing up on a Saturday to engage a scholar about thoughts and ideas about things?

So, it's really about meeting people around their self-interest, broadly understood, and not defining them because they're "low income," and assuming that they must just care about this or that.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: One of the things I've always kept to in these sessions is ending them promptly at 2:00 – which it is, unfortunately. We could go on for a while. If you'd like to come up and talk to the folks on the panel, they'd welcome the conversation. But meanwhile, let's thank our panelists.

-END-