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no.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

Urban Transformations:

Youth Organizing in Boston,
New York City, Philadelphia,
and Washington D.C.

ABOUT THE FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) is a collective of national, regional and local grantmakers and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social transformation. Our mission is to cultivate resources for young people taking action to build healthy and equitable communities. We bridge funders and organizers to support youth organizing and its commitment to systemic change and social justice. Since its inception, the FCYO has been focused on increasing the philanthropic, intellectual and social capital necessary to strengthen and grow youth organizing.

The main goals of the FCYO are to:

- Increase the level of funding directed towards youth organizing groups;
- Support youth organizing groups to develop stable and sustainable organizations; and
- Increase the awareness and understanding of youth organizing among funders and community organizations.

ABOUT THE OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Occasional Papers Series is edited and published by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and conceived and developed in close partnership with a Committee of funders, intermediaries and youth organizing practitioners. The Committee for this paper included:

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Urban Transformations:

Youth Organizing in Boston,
New York City, Philadelphia,
and Washington D.C.

BY KOHEI ISHIHARA

no. 09

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SERIES PREFACE

There are young people all over this country who have made a choice. They have chosen to be engaged in fighting for a vision of society that promises justice, equity, health and opportunity. These youth are part of a vibrant and growing field and community called youth organizing. They work to transform education, the juvenile justice system, policies that destroy the environment; to improve the quality of life for low income communities; and to protect the rights of those most marginalized. The FCYO started the Occasional Papers Series (OPS) to promote learning and dialogue with funders, community groups, and other interested parties about youth organizing. The first installment, Papers 1 through 4, provide foundational discussions about youth organizing and its connection to youth development. The second and third installments explore youth organizing in various regional contexts in an effort to deepen our understanding and continue to spark ongoing conversation.

Youth organizing is not a trend; young people have always been at the forefront of social justice movements. The youth organizing groups that emerged in the 1990s are innovative and shaped by the context of their times, but they continue to build on the legacy of movements of the past. These organizations are changing policy, transforming communities and developing a new generation of leadership critical to the sustainability of social justice work in this country.

Yet funding for these organizations has not kept pace with their diversity and levels of growth. This is particularly true in the Northeast, the region that houses the largest number of youth organizing groups in the United States. In this final installment of the regional papers of the OPS, *Urban Transformations: Youth Organizing in Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.*, Kohei Ishihara examines the rise of youth organizing in four metropolitan areas of the Northeast. Like the other OPS papers, this paper is the product of many minds and was developed by planning bodies representing a mix of local practitioner, intermediary and foundation perspectives. In this collaborative spirit, we hope that this paper becomes an interactive platform for further dialogue, reflection, healthy debate and action.

We mentioned above that many young people have made a choice. As adults, we also have a choice to make. We can decide not to take youth organizing seriously and lament the apathy, consumerism and criminalization of young people that we see in the media. Or we can support them to do the work that is transforming this nation, one community at a time - because we believe that our future is tied to their leadership.

Nicole Burrowes
Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing

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INTRODUCTION: YOUTH ORGANIZING IN THE NORTHEAST

Pedestrian-filled streets, famous historical and cultural monuments, sophisticated politicking, mature financial markets and unparalleled ethnic and cultural diversity—these are some of the images conjured by cities in the Northeast region of the United States.¹ Today, even in the wake of 30 to 40 years of industrial flight, the Northeast remains a financial powerhouse and yields \$2.5 trillion in economic activity. The Northeast is also the world’s densest urban region; a staggering 60 million people, or 20 percent of the total U.S. population, live on what comprises just five percent of the country’s land mass. In light of such distinctions, Geographer Jean Gottmann dubs the region the world’s only “megalopolis.”

Yet the Northeast’s concentration of wealth and power has in many ways exacerbated social inequity and contributed to some of the worst racial segregation and poverty rates in the nation. Recently, it also has been stage to the September 11th tragedy, a public reminder of the region’s symbolic weight in the global arena and a prelude to the ongoing War on Terrorism’s aggressive surveillance and security measures. Against this backdrop, many leaders and organizations in the Northeast, as elsewhere in the country, emerged to groom the leadership of young people to challenge the social and economic injustices they witnessed in their communities and schools. These young people are fighting the uneven distribution of power and resources governing their lives. They seek quality education, healthy and safe environments, affordable housing, immigrant rights and economic, racial and gender justice. For instance:

- In 2005 in **Boston**, the Boston-area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP) chose to address the minority achievement gap by focusing on the lack of guidance counselor support in schools. After months of public actions and negotiations, BYOP signed an agreement with Boston Public Schools to use a *Maximum Achievement Plan* as a “best practice” tool for setting high expect-

¹ While the Northeast region is variably defined from Maine to as far as Maryland or Virginia, this paper focuses on four metropolitan areas: Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Thus, its use of “Northeast” generally relies on research about these four metropolitan areas.

tations of students early in their school careers and providing students with the necessary guidance and support to meet those expectations.

- In **New York City**, young people from Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ) extensively surveyed their community to find that one of its primary concerns was the lack of open green space in their Bronx River neighborhood. Since 1996, YMPJ's campaign work has led to the creation of 14 to 15 acres of new park land, two community-designed parks and new community facilities; the renovation of existing park land; and the restoration of approximately 30 acres of brownfield property to community use.
- In 2001 in **Philadelphia**, youth of the Philadelphia Student Union and Youth United for Change banded together to lead an intergenerational campaign that prevented Edison, Inc., the nation's largest for-profit agency involved in privatizing public schools, from taking control of the city's public high schools. In 2005, the groups successfully organized to restructure large failing high schools in the city into theme-based small schools.
- In **Washington, D.C.**, in 2006, youth organized to reverse decades of neglect in their public school buildings; through a multi-pronged campaign, members of the Youth Education Alliance worked with the Full Funding Coalition to win legislation dedicating \$2 to 3 billion for school modernization.

Many of these organizations' leaders came of age in the 1990s and 2000s. They are young people of color, grew up in low-income communities, and developed a political analysis forged by the combined insult of poverty, neglect and violence. These young leaders carry forth a vision and legacy in many ways borne of the social justice movements of the 1960s and young people's leadership in those movements, with several notable twists:

- Connection to formal community-based, non-profit organizations;
- Development of leadership and political consciousness in vibrant immigrant communities;
- Political and self-expression through hip hop, spoken word and other artistic forms;
- The use of new media and technology in organizing; and
- Development of a political analysis that cuts across-and unites-diverse issues and constituent identities.

This report examines the development and state of a “field” of youth organizing in the four metropolitan areas of the Northeast with the greatest number of youth organizing groups: Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, DC.² It begins by describing the socio-political context for the emergence of youth organizing in the region during the early-to-mid 1990s. Section II specifically characterizes the cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., and the events and issues prompting the rise of youth organizing in each city. Section III explores some key characteristics and challenges currently defining youth organizing in the Northeast. Section IV examines the funding landscape for youth organizing in the region and concludes with recommendations for funders.³

² Youth organizing is a strategy that 1) embraces the community organizing principle that a population directly affected by an issue should work collectively to define the change they envision, and 2) focuses on training and developing a next generation of thoughtful, analytical and critical leaders to build and sustain social justice work. For a fuller discussion of the definition of youth organizing, see LISTEN, Inc., “An Emerging Model for Working with Youth: Community Organizing + Youth Development = Youth Organizing,” Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (2003). Many people, particularly those in the foundation, academic and capacity-building sectors, refer to a body of work with similar goals and components as a “field” and have thus described their work as “field-building.” Whether a “field,” or alternatively a “movement,” exists is a subject of debate in youth organizing work.

³ This paper is based on focus groups with youth organizers in each metropolitan area, surveys by 32 youth organizing groups, interviews with foundations and practitioners, and a broad literature review. Its methodology was developed by the Northeast Occasional Paper Planning Committee.

THE MID-1990S AND THE RISE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING IN THE NORTHEAST

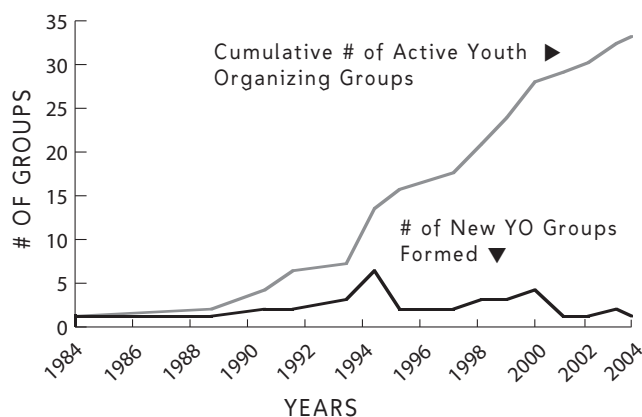
Most youth organizing groups surveyed for this study were created during the mid-1990s, with a peak birth of five organizations in 1995. A second wave of new groups emerged between 1999 and 2001, followed by the formation of a new group each year afterwards. While many reasons explain these decisive turning points, the socio-economic and political landscape of the mid-1990s and decades prior are a telling context.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, poor and working-class urban communities across the nation experienced policies of “disinvestment.” City governments withdrew public resources and shut down public services and programs, including local police and fire stations and after-school programs. Manufacturing industries relocated to the suburbs, moved down South or contracted work away to other countries. As housing prices skyrocketed, so did joblessness, homelessness and overall poverty rates.

By the early 1990s, the country had sunk into an economic recession and by the mid-1990s, cities across the Northeast suffered endemic failures in fiscal management. The fiscal crisis took its toll on public services, including youth services and public

education; some cities, including New York and Philadelphia, began experimenting with expanded private sector involvement in the development and management of public schools. At the same time, cities sought to raise revenues by creating tax incentives for high-end businesses—restaurants, corporations, stadiums and hotels—to move into and “revitalize” inner-city neighborhoods. Gentrification and rising costs of living forced many low-income families and youth to relocate, thus changing the face of some neighborhoods. Meanwhile,

RISE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS IN THE NORTHEAST: 1984-2005



roll-backs in the civil rights and affirmative action gains of the 1960s and 1970s further eroded the personal, social and economic integrity of urban communities.

The late twentieth century also saw the national ascent of conservative right-wing politics coincide with the onset of the crack-cocaine era and AIDS epidemic in Northeastern cities. The federal government intensified its “War on Drugs” and “get tough on crime” initiatives, including mandatory minimum sentencing laws that resulted in longer prison terms for many minor and non-violent offenses. Between 1980 and 2002, the number of incarcerated people quadrupled, the prison industry boomed, and the United States earned the distinction of having the largest documented prison system in the world. Most affected and overrepresented were communities of color.

Youth bore the brunt of these new policies and became the scapegoat for many social problems, particularly violence. A 1996 Newsweek headline story, “Superpredators Arrive,” proposed that these “vicious” youth be put behind bars. Cultural conservatives leveraged both political parties in an attack against hip hop and other forms of youth culture. And the War on Drugs generated a series of local and state laws that negatively impacted youth, including:

- “Three strike” policies, which lengthened sentences for repeat felons;
- “Zero tolerance” policies in schools, which intended to punish serious misconduct but has led to mass suspensions, expulsions and arrests of youth for minor offenses and “typical” adolescent behavior;
- Increased prosecution of youth as adults; and
- The formation of gang databases and anti-gang injunctions to heavily track and confine young people’s movements and identities.

Even though juvenile violent crime declined by 30 percent between 1994 and 1998, juvenile incarceration rose sharply. Most devastatingly, all 50 states adopted laws that allowed juveniles to be tried as adults.

By the early 1990s, the identifier “youth” emerged as a strong political identity. Attacked as a group, youth chose to fight back as a group.

INSPIRATIONS

The national consolidation of right-wing power and its attendant policymaking bred feelings of desperation and isolation among youth and communities of color and served as the essential context for a new wave of youth activism and organizing in the Northeast in the 1990s. Youth hungered to create something that was powerful, was both their own and rooted in history, and surpassed basic service provision and youth development to challenge the underlying causes of injustices they faced. By the early 1990s, the identifier

“youth” emerged as a strong political identity. Attacked as a group, youth chose to fight back as a group.

At first, youth who grew up during the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes referred to as the “Hip Hop Generation” and “Generation X,” found no strong, mass-based social justice movement to join. Looking to the past, they found inspiration in the anti-war, feminist, civil rights, Black and Puerto Rican liberation and union movements of the 1960s, and the leadership assumed by young people in those movements. But those mass-based civil and human rights struggles that defined generations before seemed to have faded and in some cases appeared fractured by racism, repression and differences in political ideology.

Whether linked symbolically or directly through family members and mentors, youth also found inspiration in local activism that took place during the 1970s, including: work by the Young Lords to set up community health clinics and food drives in the Puerto Rican communities of Philadelphia; efforts to reclaim education in public schools and college campuses, such as in Washington, D.C. where students at Eastern High organized for an African-American-oriented curriculum and started their own school; and the rudiments of the gay and lesbian movement, including the Stonewall Riots in New York and the Mattachine Society in Washington, D.C. Youth organizers also identified with international movements, including the Latin American and South African solidarity struggles of the 1980s.

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, the outlines of a new youth politics emerged nationally. As elsewhere in the country, young people in Northeastern cities began forming new organizations; the organizations sought to convert popular discontent and hope into efforts primarily aimed at challenging policies that led to increased incarceration, truancy and police brutality against youth of color. Young people grew to recognize a connection between these juvenile justice issues and the declining public educational system, as well as inequitable community development practices, such as corporate sprawl and environmental racism. In time, young grassroots leaders emerged at the forefront of multiple sectors of social justice work, particularly education reform. They diversified the work with the varying dimensions of their identities: new immigrant, woman of color, young worker and gay, lesbian and transgendered. Immigration, in particular, changed the demographics of cities and consequently, the face of social justice work. Eric Tang, a former youth organizer with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (CAAAV) in New York, observed, “It was often the post-1965 generation of immigrant youth, who went to college and became socially and culturally assimilated, who developed the politics and skills to develop many of

these strongly managed youth organizing projects.” Thus, youth organizing projects created in the 1990s looked both increasingly diverse, formalized and were markedly different from political youth leadership of the past.

Other influences that further ignited a youth organizing boom include:

- The ever-spreading use of the Internet, video documentation and other technology, allowing organizers to hit the media, expose their work and reach young people in new ways;
- The growth of the youth development field, which transformed many youth organizations and their framework for service delivery;
- The rise of politically-driven cultural movements, especially hip hop, which helped excite, connect and raise social consciousness among youth; and
- A sustained period of economic growth during the 1990s that enlarged foundation funding and made support for youth organizing more readily available.

THE KEY ISSUES IN THE NORTHEAST

The political shifts that led to increased profiling, policing and punishment in communities of color galvanized the formation of youth organizing groups. Other key national issues that have directly shaped youth and their communities in the Northeast include:

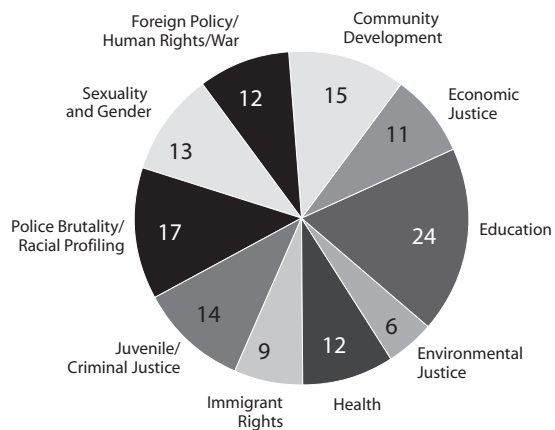
- The Illegal Immigrant and Refugee and Individual Responsibility Act of 1996, which prompted massive deportations for legal permanent residents convicted of crimes;
- The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996, which required tens of thousands of women to “earn” welfare through low-paying jobs and imposed strict penalties for noncompliance, ultimately pushing thousands of families off of welfare rolls;
- The War on Iraq, “War on Terror” and spin-off policies such as the Patriot Act of 2001, which exposed many American youth of this generation to their first war and infringement of basic constitutional rights; and
- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which under the banner of increasing school accountability, mandated the expansion of high-stakes testing; tied funding to schools’ overall academic achievement; created new opportunities for the involvement of for-profit educational service providers in schools; and required schools to provide student information to military recruiters.

In response to these policies and trends, youth organizing groups in the Northeast work on a variety of issues and most address multiple issues simultaneously. Overall across the region:

- 78 percent of groups surveyed have worked on public education reform—the most popular programmatic area of youth organizing groups in the Northeast;
- 63 percent have focused on community development, from campaigns to build youth recreation centers to challenging gentrification in low-income communities; and
- 53 percent have organized against police brutality and racial profiling.

Groups have also organized around criminal justice (44 percent), sexuality and gender (41 percent) and anti-war work (38 percent). By city, the most popular focus was police brutality and racial profiling issues in New York (73 percent of the youth organizing groups surveyed in the city); juvenile and criminal justice in Washington, D.C. (71 percent); education in Philadelphia (100 percent); and health in Boston (67 percent).

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED BY NUMBER OF NORTHEAST YO GROUPS⁴



⁴ Because groups may work on multiple issues, each of the 32 groups surveyed for this study may be reflected more than once in the chart.

THE EAST COAST STORY: A METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

BOSTON

Boston has a long history of racial segregation and inequity, as well as a rich legacy of student activism. In 1962, the Northern Student Movement, an ally of the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the South, worked in Boston's inner-city neighborhoods to launch after-school and vocational programs, and coordinate "freedom choirs" and demonstrations, including a major protest at a post-office building in solidarity with the civil rights struggle in Selma, Alabama. By 1970, when the city's black population reached 104,000, young people had formed Black Student Unions in almost every public school to challenge segregation and discrimination generally, and to end lingering practices of corporal punishment and dress codes specifically. Student activists also advocated for more college counselors and a curriculum that valued and included African American history and culture.

In 1974, Boston captured the nation's attention in its fight against racial segregation, with a ruling by the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts that segregation in Boston Public Schools was unconstitutional. The decision echoed *Brown v. Board*'s holding that separate was inherently unequal and was met with resistance from White communities. Race riots erupted in South Boston and nine black students at South Boston High School were injured when angry White students and adults shattered the windows on their buses. After the ruling, many white families enrolled their children in private schools or moved to surrounding suburbs, often in chase of industry and jobs. Today, Boston Public Schools are over 90 percent youth of color.

Immigration has been one major force diversifying the city's population. Boston is the second largest port of entry for immigrants on the East Coast, following only New York City. Tens of thousands of immigrants from Central and South America, the West Indies, Brazil and Southeast Asia have forged new communities in Boston. Today, approximately 26 percent of the city's total population is foreign-born and 51 percent is Latino, African American or Asian American, making Boston a majority people-of-color city.

YOUTH VIOLENCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING IN BOSTON

A steady pace of youth empowerment work and organizing in Boston fed a boom in both government and private funding for youth development and youth service programs.

While Boston's color line dramatically shifted during the 1970s and 1980s, government resources earmarked for youth also began to dwindle, particularly in education and public health. The declining resources, coupled with rising violence, drug abuse and the spread of AIDS in Boston's poorest neighborhoods activated a wave of organizing.

Local communities, including parents, students and ministers, banded together to hold elected officials accountable for supporting young people in the city. Some communities established powerful youth organizations and community centers. For instance, the Youth Workers Alliance (YWA) formed in 1989 to convene "youth workers," young people working in various sectors, many directly with youth affected by violence. YWA members shared resources in promoting professional development and fighting for living wages for young workers.

A steady pace of youth empowerment work and organizing in Boston fed a boom in both government and private funding for youth development and youth service programs. By the 1990s, Boston was host to nationally recognized programs, such as City Year and YouthBuild, and hundreds of health clinics, employment programs and community centers serving young people throughout the city's 14 neighborhoods. The strengthening of a "profession" of youth work brought many organizations to adequate funding levels, established infrastructures for stronger administration and management, and infused youth work with a degree of legitimacy in Boston.

But "professionalization" of youth work also compromised the more free-spirited, organic and spontaneous nature that characterized the birth of youth activism and community work. Many youth became alienated and frustrated as they witnessed their call to "save the lives of youth" broken into piecemeal, issue-specific programming. "Instead of having an open-mic, orchestrating a gang truce or doing a direct action on the welfare office," explained Najma Nazyat, a long-time activist and current executive director of Boston-area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP), youth work became compartmentalized into "service learning projects, health clinics, education projects or prevention programs."

During the 1990s, federal funding grew more conservative, as zero tolerance policies favored prevention and service learning projects over youth programs emphasizing activism

and social justice. “It was as if everything we had fought for, all the programs and resources, were no longer in our control,” recalled Terry Marshall, who formerly worked with United Youth of Boston (UYB) to develop the writing skills of urban youth.

In a second wave of activism, frustrated youth began to form new organizations to address the contradictions they saw within the youth service and development sector. A dozen youth of color, including Marshall, assumed leadership over the then adult-led UYB; they eventually published the largest youth newspaper in the Northeast. Other youth joined The City School, a group founded in 1995 to develop the leadership of youth concerned with social justice through civic education.

In 1996, pastors affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation hired the first staff person to run BYOP. At a time of increased youth violence, BYOP pointed to the city’s lack of recreational spaces for young people and fought to reopen an ice skating rink for youth. Later in 1998, BYOP successfully campaigned to extend the hours during which students could use their public transportation passes, a policy affecting 19,000 young people in Boston. In 2003, BYOP helped to restore funding that Boston had slashed for hundreds of summer jobs designated for young people. In 1999, youth at the Hyde Square Task Force (HSTF), founded in 1991 by community members seeking to improve their quality of life, mobilized hundreds of their peers in a series of rallies against Boston Redevelopment Agency’s proposed siting of a K-Mart on several acres of vacant land in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. Calling attention to the lack of resources for youth alongside escalating youth violence, HSTF helped to forge a consensus among politicians and developers, and pushed through a plan that instead called for a youth and community center, small-scale retail businesses and several hundred units of affordable housing. The youth-driven campaign transformed and shifted the organizational focus of HSTF towards youth organizing.

On the cultural front, youth created forums in which young people could connect politics to their personal culture, experience and artistic talent. Productions such as open-mic events, poetry readings and hip hop shows in the late 1990s by groups like Critical Breakdown, attracted thousands of organizers, artists, activists and disconnected youth from around the city. The events not only connected youth across different organizations, but also helped organizers reach more youth and raise general public consciousness about important social justice issues.

Youth organizing also developed at local colleges and high schools. For example, one group of high school and college youth turned their late-night study sessions on community organizing theory and practice into the Nia Project, meaning

“purpose” in Swahili. The Nia Project eventually opened four chapters and developed programs to build “youth leadership through building community.” High school and college students also collaborated in founding Boston-based Students Organizing for Unity and Liberation (SOUL) to raise young people’s political consciousness through networking and meeting with other youth organizing groups across the country.

CONTESTING THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Youth violence consistently dropped throughout the 1990s, so much that the decrease was dubbed the “Boston Miracle.” The reasons for this drop are complex and debatable. Some have postulated that heightened law enforcement curbed crime and violence. Others attribute this decrease to youth services, employment and a decade’s hard work by Boston’s youth organizations, and therefore, tout the city as a model for combating youth homicides and gang-related crimes. In 2005 through several focus groups, youth with Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP) found a direct correlation from 2000 to 2005 between decreased funding for youth programs and summer jobs and increased violence in the city. In 2000, Boston dedicated \$8.61 million to 5,572 summer jobs through the Boston Youth Fund. But by 2004, that level had dropped to just \$3.6 million and only 2,556 jobs.

At a recent hearing in February 2006, youth organizers from many Boston youth groups including UYB, YWA and REEP, challenged Mayor Thomas Menino to tune into young people’s experiences when implementing measures to decrease youth violence. “The increases in violence affect us the most, but no one has asked us for any input,” pointed out Amilton Pires, a 17-year old organizer with REEP. Youth organizers have helped to shift the focus of policymaking away from control and confinement towards development. “While everyone was saying ‘more police on the streets’ and ‘stop rap music,’” said Jodi Sugerma-Brozan, program director of REEP, “we brought over 200 youth together to reframe the issue around ‘more programs, less lock-ups.’” REEP has planned to deliver 1,000 post-cards to the Mayor asking for a permanent \$5 million budget line item for summer jobs for youth. Reflect and Strengthen, a young woman’s organization located in Dorchester, MA, has similarly recently begun to challenge high arrest and detention rates of youth through its coalition work. Member Elizabeth Pabon asserted, “Our ultimate agenda is to decrease the incarceration rates of youth of color by strategically holding our juvenile detention systems accountable and organizing youth organizations to become alternatives to detention sites.”

NEW YORK CITY

“While everyone was saying 'more police on the streets' and 'stop rap music,' we brought over 200 youth together to reframe the issue around 'more programs, less lock-ups.’”

Much like Boston, New York City experienced dramatic demographic shifts throughout the second half of the twentieth century and became a majority people of color city by the 1980s. Here too, immigration facilitated much of this shift. By 2000, New York City’s foreign-born population peaked at a record high of 2.87 million, or 36 percent of the city, with the heaviest representation from the Dominican Republic, China and Caribbean-basin countries such as Jamaica and Guyana.

Despite its diversity, New York City has the highest segregation rates in the nation between black and white communities, and is second only to Philadelphia in segregation rates between Latino and white communities. Segregation has also defined New York’s public school system, the largest in the country with over a million students. In a 2006 article, education expert Jonathan Kozol

reported, “New York State is the most segregated state for black and Latino children in America: seven out of eight black and Latino kids here go to segregated schools. The majority of them go to schools where no more than two to four percent of the children are white.” Kozol and others note that schools’ overall quality and performance too often reflect their racial makeup, with predominantly student of color schools being the most under-resourced and overcrowded.

New York City also has the distinction of being a law-and-order town. With his election in 1994, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a former federal prosecutor, sought to radically transform the city from the nation’s capital for street crime and drugs into one of the world’s safest cities. Promising a renaissance, Giuliani aggressively policed so-called “quality-of-life” crimes to keep streets cleaner and safer, and granted police and prosecutors wider latitude to punish petty offenses, such as panhandling, public urination, blocking sidewalks, graffiti and homelessness. The state also adopted some of the harshest juvenile sentencing laws in the nation.

THE RISE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING AS AN ANTI-VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

For young people of color from the city's most economically depressed neighborhoods, the Guilani administration's "quality of life" policing strategies exacerbated the distrust between the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the city's poorest residents. Officers routinely employed the practice of racial profiling in random "stop and frisks" of young men of color; more often than not, such frisks yielded nothing. More recently, visible incidents of police violence in the 1990s and a surge of heavy policing in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks have intensified this hostile climate, especially for youth and immigrant communities. A youth organizer at CAAAV noted, "There is no security... we face racial profiling on a daily basis." In October 2006, several outraged police officers revealed in a story that made the New York Daily News's front page that their precinct captain ordered them to stop and frisk all black men at a Brooklyn subway station.

One of the first projects to respond to systemic violence and self-identify as "youth organizing" was Youth Force. Kim McGillicuddy, who founded Youth Force in 1994 and currently leads the Youth Justice Coalition in Los Angeles, said that in the first half of the 1990s "the war on drugs led to the routine practice of racial profiling and roundups of young people of color." Youth Force, now defunct, led a campaign inside a juvenile correctional facility in the South Bronx to expand and improve its social and educational services and adopt a policy on respecting all religions.

In 1999, the shooting and death of Amadou Diallo, a young African immigrant, touched off over a year of protest against police brutality under the Giuliani administration⁵. At the core of these protests were youth organizing groups seeking to challenge police misconduct. "After the Diallo incident," recalled Kamau Karl Franklin, a board member of a community organizing group in Central Brooklyn called the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), "the everyday illegal arrests and harassments led to bigger explosions in the community and there was a resurgence of youth organizing." Monami Maulik, a co-founder of a Queens-based immigrant rights group called Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM)⁶, agreed that the Diallo shooting was "such an intense time for young people in the city...where you could just feel the anger and you could feel the action."

⁵ The innocent and unarmed Diallo was shot 41 times as he stood in the vestibule of his South Bronx apartment building. A jury found the four officers involved in the shooting innocent of all charges.

⁶ Desi is a term that can refer to people or things of South Asian origin.

Between 1995 and 2000, over 20 youth organizing groups emerged in New York City. The groups reflect the multiplicity and diversity characterizing the field nationally, from a focus on environmental justice, education reform and juvenile justice, to queer, immigrant and women of color organizing.

Over the last ten years, youth organizing groups such as Youth Force, CAAAV, Sista II Sista and El Puente⁷ have joined various coalitions to demand greater police accountability. They have worked with allies such as MXGM, National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights and Student Liberation Action Movement. Many of the groups worked with particular subpopulations of youth to broaden understandings of violence. For instance, working with young woman, Sista II Sista infused policy accountability work with a gender analysis, challenging widespread assumptions that systemic violence strictly affects men of color and calling attention to the distinct ways in which law enforcement and the justice system shape the lives of young women. Other youth organizing groups underscored how aggressive policing efforts have pushed queer and transgendered youth from public spaces. For example, the Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE) mobilized hundreds of youth to attend Community Board meetings and won a three-hour curfew extension at the Christopher Street Pier, a long-time popular hang-out for queer youth in the West Village. They also helped to pass resolutions allowing mobile medical services to access the pier without purchasing \$25,000 parking permits, and extending hours for public bathroom access and affordable food vendors on the pier.

CONNECTING THE DOTS: SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE, EDUCATION AND IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

During the Guiliani administration, the city negotiated with the Board of Education to assume control over school safety functions. Though city public schools had long maintained relationships with local precincts, the new agreement placed police officers and NYPD trained school safety agents directly inside schools. Shortly after becoming mayor, Michael Bloomberg used new powers granted to him when the New York State Legislature imposed mayoral control on the city schools in 2002 to expand police presence in schools. Bloomberg's creation of "Impact Schools" to crack down on soft offenses, such as graffiti and truancy, introduced metal detectors, "holding cells" and "sweep rooms" to campuses, along with 150 armed NYPD officers in 12 high schools. Altercations that had previously resulted in students being sent to

⁷ El Puente was one of the first organizations in NYC to engage in youth organizing. Founded in 1982, El Puente dedicates itself to building youth leadership for "peace and justice."

Altercations that had previously resulted in students being sent to the principal's office now became prosecutable crimes for which youth were handcuffed and sent to local police precincts.

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At the same time, the Bloomberg administration invested significant resources in the most sweeping transformation of secondary education in the city's history. It opened hundreds of new theme-based small high schools, and created new schools specifically focused on the needs of older students who lacked sufficient credits to graduate. Though laudable in their goals, these reforms were introduced with minimal community participation or outreach, and in some cases, exacerbated overcrowding and safety problems on large campuses.

Within this context of centralized power, youth organizing groups saw an increasing need to collaborate in order to influence the direction of reforms. "Power became centralized," said youth organizer Mustafa Sullivan of Sistas and Brothas United, "and it made sense to start inter-district coalition building." In 2004, three youth organizations—Youth On the Move, Sistas and Brothas United and the Youth Project of Make the Road By Walking—joined with researchers at the Institute for Education and Social Policy of New York University to establish the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) and develop a four-prong reform agenda for improving the city's high schools. UYC aims to expand student voice and improve college access and safety strategies in local high schools. "We realized that we had a common agenda and had a large target—the NYC Department of Education," said UYC coordinator Amy Cohen. Since its founding, UYC expanded its members to include Future of Tomorrow in Brooklyn, and created a network called the UYC Student Union to involve more youth from schools and youth development programs in its campaigns. UYC also worked with New York University to form the Youth Organizing Institute, an annual program that introduces youth organizers to education policy issues.

During this same time, immigrant rights organizations began to address the threat that heightened policing in schools posed to immigrant youth. DRUM launched their "Education Not Deportation" campaign in 2004. "We did a survey and found out that young South Asians were being harassed in school and their immigration status was being collected," said Lisa Bhungalia, former coordinator of the campaign. DRUM youth met with various Department of Education and City Council officials to present their research findings regarding police harassment of undocumented and immigrant students in the school system.

In 2002, youth organizing groups successfully campaigned to remove \$53 million earmarked for the construction of new juvenile detention facilities from the city's budget.

Finally, juvenile justice organizations took notice of a clear school-to-prison pipeline. The Prison Moratorium Project (PMP) worked to expose differential spending for public education versus for prisons. In 2002, PMP and other youth organizing groups successfully campaigned to remove \$53 million earmarked for the construction of new juvenile detention facilities from the city's budget. "We feared the accelerated channeling of students into the prison system," said PMP director Kyung Jee Rhee. In 2005, they created the PMP Academy, an educational program for youth to learn organizing skills and conduct research about school safety policies. As connections solidified across work in criminal justice, education and immigrant rights, groups have built other coalitions. These include the Third World Within, launched in 1999 to connect local racial justice organizing to global justice and anti-war organizing, and the Peoples Justice 2000 coalition, which mobilized 15,000 people to protest the acquittal of the NYPD officers who shot Diallo, and later organized against the overwhelming presence of armed NYPD officers in the city's public schools.

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia is the fifth largest city in the United States and second largest city on the East Coast. During WWII, its size and industrial capacity made "Philly" into a strategic city for wartime production. Its manufacturing jobs in the defense industry and war-induced labor shortage attracted African Americans escaping both the depressed economies and Jim Crow discrimination of the South. However, many moved only to encounter more housing and employment discrimination, as well as violence from unwelcoming white neighbors and police officers. Thus, many black migrants referred to Philadelphia as "Up South" where unspoken rules, boundaries and social affiliations perpetuated racial segregation.

Forced to fight for equal opportunities and carve out their own spaces of belonging, African Americans developed a strong network of churches, civil rights organizations and businesses by the 1940s. Civil rights activists convinced the Mayor and City Council to enact the nation's first municipal fair employment practices laws in 1951. In 1960, 400 black ministers led a successful community-wide consumer boycott against private employers who failed to ensure equal employment opportunities for black workers. Black-initiated job training programs and black-owned for-

profit ventures led President Nixon to herald Philadelphia as a model of “black capitalism.”

Shortly after WWII, the city experienced dramatic changes in its racial landscape. Many white people moved out of the city, by way of a growing state highway system, to newly developed suburbs. “White flight” climaxed after race riots broke out in North Philadelphia in 1964, and accelerated after city-wide riots erupted in 1968 in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Rapid de-industrialization prompted further flight. From the 1960s to 1980s, African Americans, who were mostly employed by manufacturing companies that were relocating to suburbs and overseas, suffered massive job losses.

Immigration over the past few decades has contested Philly’s reputation as a “black and white” city. In the 1970s, the city’s Puerto Rican population grew to over 40,000 and now has the third largest concentration of Puerto Ricans on the United States mainland (after New York and Chicago). The arrival of immigrants from India, China, Jamaica and Eastern Europe, and political refugees from Central America and Southeast Asia, offset population decline caused by mass exodus to the suburbs. As immigrants moved into black neighborhoods, one resulting dynamic was rising ethnic tension amidst competition for jobs, housing and public space.

Despite the growing diversity, segregation intensified throughout the 1990s. Ninety-five percent of blacks and 88 percent of Latinos in the Philadelphia area live in the region’s core. Suburban sprawl and white flight continued. In the 1990s, 180,000 white people left the city, and the black population grew by 22,000.

Immigration over the past few decades has contested Philly's reputation as a “black and white” city.

The School District of Philadelphia reflects much of the city’s racial disparities and conflicts. The district is the nation’s seventh largest, numbering over 185,000 students. In 2004, black students made up 65 percent of the district’s population, Latino and white students were each nearly 15 percent, and Asian American students comprised just over five percent. Of the district’s schools, 107 are 90 percent black, 12 are 70 percent Latino, and six are more than 70 percent white. The predominantly non-white schools are under-funded, overcrowded and have a higher turnover rate of teachers and administrators than predominantly white schools.

EDUCATION REFORM AND THE RISE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING

Youth involvement in Philadelphia's education reform efforts dates back to 1967 when high school students from across the city organized a school "walk-out" to protest the lack of black history courses and black administrators in their schools. But it wasn't until the formation of non-profit youth organizing groups in the 1990s that administrators and city council members were forced to listen more seriously to the city's youth.

Two organizations in particular, Youth United for Change (YUC), formed in 1991, and Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), formed in 1995, responded to young people's concerns about public education, including school privatization. In 2001, the state took control over Philadelphia's public schools from a severely under-funded district, as problems such as dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of guidance counselors persisted. The state's school reform strategy was to privatize Philadelphia's high schools by contracting with Edison, Inc., the nation's largest for-profit agency involved in privatizing public education. Fearing the city's abandonment of its students, youth from PSU and YUC staged a walk-out, mobilized thousands of youth at the state capital, and continued weekly protests through 2001. On December 21, 2001, the mounting pressure convinced then Governor Mark Schweiker to back down. Although some schools were privatized, the central administration and most of the schools remained under public control.

As their experience grew, youth organizers built a broad base of diverse supporters and partners. PSU and YUC youth sat at the helm of the Philadelphians United to Support Public Schools coalition, and transformed the campaign into an intergenerational movement. The privatization struggle also broke new ground with labor unions. "While the schools have given up their relationships with the unions," said YUC executive director Andi Perez, "we have been able to find common ground." The unions have provided workshops on labor organizing for the youth, and "our youth challenge them with their own views on tactics and strategy," explained Perez. "All of a sudden there is this powerful exchange of ideas and recognition of our power."

While their work against privatization suddenly thrust YUC and PSU into the spotlight in 2001, both organizations had made incremental progress over a number of years. For instance, YUC's first campaign in 1994 resulted in the Philadelphia City Council adopting a new requirement that all students complete college preparatory, rather than general, math and science courses. Since that campaign, YUC

formed student chapters in five high schools, and won campaigns to improve school building conditions, create multi-cultural curricula, increase access and preparation for college, and adopt alternative disciplinary policies.

We questioned why shootings in suburban schools, like at Columbine, triggered the addition of counselors and support services, while our schools respond by putting in metal detectors and more cops.

PSU had likewise been hard at work questioning the overall priorities of the school district. “We learned that the city was cutting junior varsity sports and arts and music programs,” noted PSU founder Eric Braxton. At the same time, the district was devoting resources to surveillance and security. Braxton remembered, “We questioned why shootings in suburban schools, like at Columbine, triggered the addition of counselors and support services, while our schools respond by putting in metal detectors and more cops.” In 1996, PSU organized 2,000 students to walk out of school and march to the mayor’s office to demand a reallocation of \$15 million back to education funding. In 2003, PSU launched a local campaign at Bartram High School, which provided one guidance counselor for every 1,200 students. As a result of PSU’s organizing, the district doubled the number of guidance counselors in all schools, and ten high schools created Student Success Centers to offer college preparation, counseling and other support services.

Nevertheless, both PSU and YUC are questioning the depth and breadth of their impact on the school system, beyond particular schools and in the face of regressive policy decisions. As one organizer put it, “every year the district would take something [we won in a campaign] away from us.” Both organizations have reevaluated organizing strategies in education reform, and believe the very structure of the public education system needs radical restructuring. Now, they are involved in the creation and design of new “small schools.” Ultimately, said Braxton, “this is about community ownership and involvement in our schools.” These efforts to rebuild schools from scratch, rather than overhaul a broken system, have provided new opportunities for the community to engage in a process of reclaiming and redefining education.

While youth organizing in Philadelphia heavily revolves around public education, a new group called CommunitY Organizing Collective (CYOC) emerged in 2003 to work with Asian immigrant youth, most of whom are recent Chinese immigrants and whose families live in overcrowded apartments and work for little pay under poor conditions. Responding to a spate of violence between black customers and Chinese restaurant workers, CYOC began conducting educational workshops to increase understanding and build solidarity between the two communities. CYOC also

supported the anti-privatization work in education, and began working to counter military recruitment drives in high schools. More recently, it played a significant leadership role in immigrant rights work that swept the nation in 2006.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A two-hour drive south from Philadelphia reaches Interstate-495, the “beltway” that encircles Washington, D.C. and the inner suburbs of Maryland and Virginia. The highway inspires the phrase “inside the beltway,” which refers to the nation’s headquarters for governmental branches, administrative agencies, lobbying, politicking and all of its associated power. Unlike other cities in the Northeast, Washington D.C. has a tiny industrial base. The area’s largest employer is the federal government (over 350,000 jobs); the second largest is D.C. local government.

In the post-emancipation era, Washington D.C. became a popular destination for many African Americans migrating from the South in search of job opportunities and a better quality of life. The city’s introduction of the nation’s first public housing complex in the 1930s made it an affordable option for relocation. When the federal government approved the beltway’s construction in 1955, Washington became even more accessible and its population reached a historic high of 850,000 residents. By 1960, it had the largest concentration of African Americans in the nation.

As in other cities, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. triggered urban riots in the District and consequent white flight. The migration continued as crime, poverty and insufficient public school funding lowered the city’s quality of life throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Middle-class African Americans also moved to the suburbs, so that within 40 years the District’s total population had shrunk by 250,000 people. Meanwhile, immigration into Washington peaked in the 1980s with a large influx of El Salvadorian and Vietnamese refugees escaping war and persecution. The 1990s and 2000s continued to see a growing population of immigrants, primarily from South and Central America, the Caribbean and Ethiopia. The city now has the largest concentration of Ethiopians living outside of Ethiopia.

The beltway has enabled a sizeable professional class to maintain day jobs in the city, while living and paying taxes in the suburbs; 437,000 non-residents work in Washington. Accordingly, “the people who control D.C. don’t live here,” said Natalie Avery, a co-founder of Youth Action Research Group (YARG), one of the District’s first youth organizing groups. In 1997, Congress prohibited the city from taxing commuters, exacerbating the city’s growing budget deficit.

In addition to the presence of national and international governmental agencies, the district is a hub of political think-tanks and public interest groups that overwhelmingly concentrate on national or international issues. The presence and focus of these agencies and organizations make power in Washington feel top-down and distant. “Washington, D.C. has always felt like a city that has ignored its local residents,” said Avery.

Deprived of power both *de jure* and *de facto*, local residents have worked for decades to achieve direct representation and governance. Although Congress has rejected many bills for “home rule,” residents won the right to elect their own City Council and Mayor in the 1970s. Still, all legislation before City Council must receive Congress’s stamp of approval before becoming law; moreover, the district has no voting representation in Congress. When the city faced a budget deficit of over \$700 million, Congress created a Control Board to take over the city’s day-to-day operations. The Control Board was disbanded after the city regained financial stability, but city residents and leaders live under the memory and threat of another takeover.

Former District Mayor Marion Barry served as a particular symbol of the movement for home rule. Though a subject of controversy who was imprisoned for drug use, Barry was celebrated for his activism and commitment to protecting the civil rights of African Americans, youth and other marginalized groups. In 1979, for example, Barry helped pass the District Youth Employment Act, which guaranteed summer jobs for all city youth regardless of their economic status.

As in other Northeastern metropolitan cities, disinvestment policies and the decline of social services in low-income neighborhoods deeply affected youth and their families in the District throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Some neighborhoods were completely gentrified, as the city sought to attract a professional workforce through the development of high-priced and tax-subsidized condominiums. AIDS also claimed the lives of thousands and landed Washington the title of the city with the highest infection rate in the nation. With the spread of crack and drug turf wars, the District gained further notoriety as the “murder capital of the world” in 1993.

THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING

Youth were at the forefront of the home rule movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and sporadically attempted to engage in local politics. For example, in 1968, youth led a large walk-out to demand that public schools offer a black studies curriculum. Meanwhile, many Washington youth joined the underground go-go and

punk music movements of the 1980s and 1990s to express their outrage. In particular, go-go originated in Washington out of a post-riot black consciousness, and cultivated in youth a sense of power and hope, pride in their local roots and protest against the city's lack of representation of its people.

Organizers and youth felt a pressing need to develop an alternative structure outside of the city's bureaucracy to cultivate youth leadership and political engagement.

When youth organizing of the late 1990s arrived in the city, youth-focused organizations primarily consisted of traditional service providers and youth development organizations, and received a majority of their funding from the city. Organizers and youth felt a pressing need to develop an alternative structure outside of the city's bureaucracy to cultivate youth leadership and political engagement.

One of the first groups to emerge was the Young Women's Project (YWP), founded in 1992 to build the leadership and organizing skills of young women. Recently, YWP successfully campaigned for a sexual harassment policy to be added to the District's Non-Discrimination Code. In 1997, a group of students staged a massive walk-out and "read in" when their school closed down for two weeks. Winning respect and admiration from activists across the city, the students formalized their efforts into the Youth Action

Research Group (YARG). Facilitating Leadership in Youth (FLY) formed in 1999 to work with youth living in the Southeast neighborhoods of Washington. And in 2001, the Youth Education Alliance (YEA) and Justice for D.C. Youth Coalition (JDYC) formed to address issues in public education and juvenile justice, respectively. That same year, a group of youth and health experts started Different Avenues to address the needs of young sex workers.

COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION AND JUVENILE JUSTICE ORGANIZING

Collaboration between youth organizing groups in Washington has been common. In 2003, YEA, YARG and YWP organized a student walkout and rally that involved hundreds of students and drew major press coverage. Not only had a high turnover rate of six superintendents in five years left many schools in disarray, the mayor had slashed \$90 million from the education budget. "Literally, no money was spent on infrastructure of D.C. high schools from 1980 to 1998," said Jonathan Stith, youth organizer for YEA. YEA worked with hundreds of students to develop a nine-point platform for education reform, with clean, modern schools and strong guidance counseling supports at the top of the list.

YEA, YARG and YWP have worked to turn the spotlight on education reform through the Full Funding Coalition, a coalition of parents, students, teachers, school workers and others organizing for a high quality, well-funded public school system in Washington. “What happened was phenomenal,” explained Ann Caton, lead organizer of YEA. “We were able to change and control the public discourse.” YEA worked with Inside Edition to conduct an undercover investigation of bathroom conditions in local public high schools and staged a rally at the siting of a new baseball stadium being built with \$383 million of tax-payers’ money. “If the city can finance a baseball stadium, why can’t they fix our schools?” asked Stith. Students came out victorious when the City Council passed the School Modernization Financing Act in March, 2006, dedicating \$2 to 3 billion for improving and renovating schools.

Aggressive policing and profiling by city police, as well as harsh punitive measures in schools, have also generated a strong response from youth organizing groups in a city where 100 percent of juvenile inmates are youth of color. In 2004, JDYC launched the “Stop the War on Young People” campaign to close the Oakhill detention facility, a place notorious for being overcrowded and dilapidated, lacking rehabilitation programs, and being the subject of a 19-year old class action lawsuit. Upon touring the facility, one JDYC youth organizer testified to City Council that

Aggressive policing and profiling by city police, as well as harsh punitive measures in schools, have also generated a strong response from youth organizing groups in a city where 100 percent of juvenile inmates are youth of color.

“Oak Hill is not suitable for an animal, let alone a human.” In light of anti-youth legislation and inertia in the lawsuit, “we declared that the city was in a ‘war against young people,’” said Johonna McCants, an organizer with the JDYC. Three City Council hearings, several open mics and 1000 post-cards later in November 2004, the coalition convinced City Council to pass the Juvenile Justice Omnibus Bus Bill. The Bill mandated closure of Oakhill detention facility within five years.

FLY co-founder James Pearlstein attributes the high level of collaboration in Washington D.C. to LISTEN, Inc., a national youth organizing intermediary that set up headquarters in the District in 1998. LISTEN, now no longer active, provided technical assistance, networking support, education and theoretical grounding for the emerging field of youth organizing. Organizers in D.C. have continued to support each other through a local chapter of Building Leadership, Organizing Communities (BLOC), a national network of young activists committed to social justice that LISTEN helped incubate and start.

EAST COAST ELEMENTS: YOUTH ORGANIZING CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES

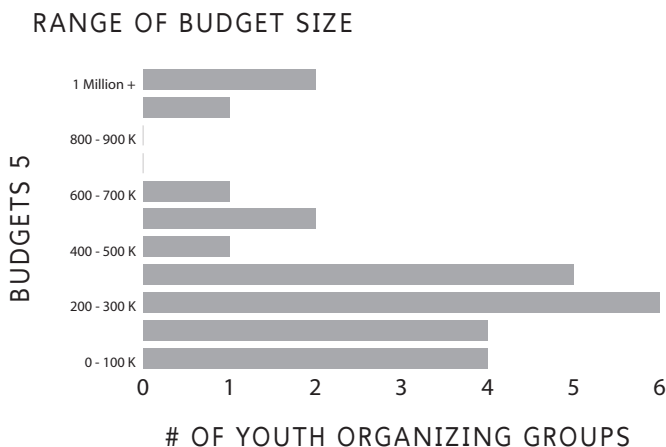
The Northeast is more densely concentrated and connected than any other region in the country. Across the Northeast corridor, commuter rails, buses, subways and highways make inter-state and intra-city travel easier than any other place in the nation. This transportation network has allowed strong pedestrian and street cultures to flourish and, along with black migration and post-1965 immigration patterns, has contributed to vast diversity within cities. The Northeast is also the birthplace of hip hop and other cultural forms that empowered youth and raised political consciousness, and home to the majority of foundations that support youth organizing work. Such characteristics create a unique stage for youth organizing in the Northeast, and have influenced their character and development.

SIZE & CAPACITY

No longer in a nascent stage of development, youth organizing groups in the Northeast average an age of ten years old, and face common questions about

sustainability, funding, leadership transitions and effective evaluation. Despite the challenges, increased inter- and intra-city networking has facilitated sharing of strategies and resources, and benefited new groups especially, enabling them to mature more quickly and earlier on.

The annual budgets for youth organizing groups range from \$50,000 to \$2,140,000, and average \$416,000. Most youth organizing groups operate on annual budgets of approximately



\$200,000 to \$300,000. Their median budget size is \$295,000. On average, youth organizing groups have four full-time staff. While one organization has as many as 18 staff members, four organizations report having no full-time staff at all. Sixty-six percent of those surveyed have a formal membership structure, with an average of 57 members.

HIP HOP, MEDIA & THE VALUE OF YOUTH CULTURE

Many youth organizers argue that hip hop-borne in the Bronx borough of New York City-and its rapidly expanding popularity across the Northeast was fundamental to the formation of an empowering, defiant culture that resonated with youth of color especially. As poverty, racism, and neglect in urban cities took from youth both opportunities and self-definition, youth found in hip-hop a chance to reclaim and envision the culture, spaces and images that had been wrestled from their control.

Since its inception, hip hop has also been used widely across the Northeast as a tool for raising political consciousness and connecting young people. Mixed DJ-ing, MC-ing, graffiti-writing and break dancing became interactive stages for engaging young people and projecting a youth-focused political analysis. Organizations have used hip hop in many different ways. For example, New York City's MXGM organizes an annual hip hop concert called Black August to raise awareness about issues facing political prisoners and black communities generally. Boston saw an explosion of black poetry events in 1995, and the formation of Urban Griot and Critical Breakdown, two open-mic venues for youth to perform hip hop, poetry and spoken-word. "But it wasn't just art for art's sake," explained youth organizer Terry Marshall. "It was a space for youth to talk about social change, talk about what was really going on in our lives, and educate youth about different struggles." Other organizations, such as Boston's Hip Hop Media Lab, use hip-hop as an ongoing part of their programs, writing lyrics and producing CDs to educate their peers. Yet others, like YMPJ in New York, have integrated hip-hop into weekly recruitment and political education programs connected to their organizing work. Sista II Sista has involved young women in DJ-ing, graffiti art and break dancing to draw attendance to protests about violence against young women, and build a culture and community through which young women may express themselves in powerful ways. Many organizers see hip hop as a necessary tool for organizing young people of this generation. "Hip hop is the soundtrack of our lives," says youth organizer Loira Limbal, who directs Reel X, a social justice and creative filmmaking space for young people in the Southwest Bronx of New York.

Hip hop is the
soundtrack of our lives.”

Limbal, like other organizers, regards video technology as a tool that builds young people’s skills, elevates their voices and stories, and raises public consciousness about social justice. In an age of increasingly consolidated media, many youth organizing groups are creating their own alternatives. YEA in Washington, DC, YUC in Philadelphia, Reflect and Strengthen in Dorchester, and UPROSE in NYC, are a few examples of the many youth organizing groups that have used video technology to highlight issues facing young people, as well as their own work. Groups like YARG in Washington, D.C. and Radio Rootz in New York have also helped young people to develop radio programs with similar goals in mind.

BUILDING REGIONAL POWER: YOUTH NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIONS

When the phenomenon of youth organizing captured the attention of the philanthropic sector, many youth organizing groups did not initially identify as part of a cohesive youth organizing “field” or “movement.” Even now, many define themselves as both youth and according to other attributes of their constituency, such as race and ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. “Youth just happen to be our constituents,” clarifies Bran Frenner of FIERCE, “but they are also homeless, queer, transgender and poor.”

Some broadly view themselves as social justice organizers who value the power and intelligence of youth. Chhaya Chhoum, director of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities’s Youth Leadership Program, says that organizing youth is “especially important in immigrant and refugee communities.” She explains further, “Southeast Asian youth are the cultural bridge for our parents. We inherit a legacy of war and invasion, and we carry that voice, passion and fire.”

Some groups continue to resist the identifier “youth organizing” altogether. They stress that youth have always been at the forefront of social justice movements, and a term like “youth organizing” artificially separates their struggles from other social change efforts. Lisa Bhungalia, formerly with DRUM, says, “Because youth cut across all sections of society—youth are immigrants, youth are workers, youth are students, youth are parents—when you mobilize youth, you are essentially mobilizing all sectors of society.”

Instead of coalescing as “youth,” many organizations have crossed city lines and come together around issue-based agendas. For example, informal collaboration in education reform has happened among Boston-area Youth Organizing Project in

Boston, member groups of the Urban Youth Collaborative in New York City, Philadelphia Student Union and Youth United for Change in Philadelphia, and Youth Education Alliance in Washington, D.C. Groups in Philadelphia and New York, in particular, have exchanged lessons and strategies on designing and implementing small schools, as well as establishing student support centers at high schools. Another example is the Eastern Regional Organizing Caucus (EROC) of the Community Justice Network for Youth, which has united youth organizing groups across the Northeast around juvenile justice issues.

Thus, while a decade ago youth organizing groups worked mostly in isolation from one another, today a remarkable 94 percent of organizations report being connected to youth organizing groups based in other cities. These connections have often been built through national conferences, regional gatherings and organizational exchanges supported by foundations. Further aided by the Internet and other technology, increased communication and networking have generated an avalanche of shared resources and campaign strategies, and facilitated sharing, learning and collective problem-solving.

Thus, while informal and formal collaborations are strong and active on city levels, working together on a regional level has typically taken the form of ad-hoc communication, unofficial and loosely structured networks and periodic organizational exchanges. Thus, a unified and organized youth movement in the Northeast is not the

current reality, but the prospects and potential for greater collaboration have grown exponentially in recent years. “It is a dream of many of us to create a unified Northeast region,” says Elizabeth Pabon, a member of Reflect and Strengthen in Boston.

Although not the focus of this study, strong youth organizing groups exist in smaller Northeastern cities as well. For instance, organizations like the United Teen Equality Center in Lowell, Massachusetts, the Providence Youth Student Movement in Rhode Island and the Baltimore Algebra Project in Maryland also have the potential to join a regional movement.

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CHALLENGES FOR EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED GROUPS

Emerging youth organizations (ages one through five) frequently find themselves in a stage characterized by continuous change. Founders of the groups often were young people who were inspired to create social change with their peers, not necessarily to manage and administer non-profit organizations. Directors are frequently the first and only staff person, and balance multiple roles such as executive director, book-keeper, fundraiser and program director. These challenges are amplified for young directors with fewer years of professional experience. Emerging groups also confront greater doubt and concern from potential funders about a youth organization's ability to manage funds. Also, as youth groups formalize their non-profit structures, their organizational capacity may fail to match the growing responsibilities of fundraising, marketing, documentation and evaluation.

Despite the challenges of growth and sustainability, the majority of youth organizing groups in the Northeast have moved from an emerging to an established stage. New challenges have arisen. While characterized by risk-taking and innovation in their early years, established organizations often struggle with increased or excessive organizational controls and bureaucracy and a feeling of stagnation. Many of these organizations undergo new experiences, such as their first staff lay-off. One of the most striking challenges for established groups is the transition of staff leadership. The young people who started these organizations when they were 18, 19 or 20 years old are now heading into their early to mid-thirties. While some staff opt to leave and make room for new youth leaders, others must leave in search of greater financial security or other career development opportunities. Staff transitions, particularly of executive directors, often create an urgency to address other organizational needs, including:

- A strategic development process and plan, which can prove challenging given stretched resources and over-worked staff;
- Re-examination of the organization's vision, purpose, values and activities;
- Alternative fundraising strategies focused on sustaining long-term organizational goals and activities.

One key difficulty for both emerging and established organizations is balancing community organizing work and individual youth development and services. A fundamental part of youth organizers' work is the holistic development of young people; without dealing with the day-to-day struggles of young people's lives, organizers simply cannot engage young people in organizing on larger community-wide concerns. This balancing act proves challenging when staff already carry multiple responsibilities. Many youth organizing groups have developed partnerships with service organizations, or their own service arms, to help meet their members' needs.

THE LANDSCAPE OF FUNDING

A study by the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing estimates that in 2004, youth organizing grants amounted to \$15.5 million, or 1.15 percent of total funding by foundations surveyed.⁸ Approximately 35 percent of those grants went to groups in the Northeast, which has more youth organizing groups than any other region in the country. The bulk of these were committed to New York City, which also has the largest number of groups in the region.

The Northeast, and particularly New York City, is also home to the largest concentration of philanthropic organizations in the nation, giving local groups a certain level of access and privilege. However, the mere presence of foundations in the Northeast does not mean their priority is to fund there. Most of the foundations that support youth organizing make grants nationwide.

While the number of foundations that give support to youth organizing has grown, funding has not kept pace with the evolving needs and increasing number of groups. To sustain their work, youth organizations in the Northeast have had to tap into wide-ranging program areas, including education reform, criminal and juvenile justice, environmental justice, civil and human rights and youth services and development.

ADVOCACY ON THE FUNDING LEVEL

Recognizing the surge in youth activism in the mid-1990s, program officers in the foundation world began to meet and discuss this nascent “field” of youth organizing. In 1997, seven foundations organized a briefing in New York City that drew a crowd of 75 colleagues to explore the potential of youth organizing. Several planning sessions later, the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing was launched in 2000 to strengthen and increase support for youth organizing work nationwide.

Many foundations across the country, and particularly in the Northeast, have

⁸ The survey includes foundations that have supported youth organizing projects, either through an explicit youth organizing and leadership development focus, or through issue-based portfolios such as education, community development or environmental justice.

The Merck Family Fund's shift in grantmaking to target youth organizing reflected the trustees' interest in funding innovative models of working with youth and preference for supporting projects that address the root causes of problems.

since shifted their funding portfolios to include and emphasize youth organizing. For example, the Surdna Foundation had been funding “emotional learning” in elementary schools and service-based learning in high schools. In light of new scholarship on positive youth development and the changing discourse on relationships between youth development, community and systemic injustices, “It didn’t make sense anymore,” said Jee Kim, program officer at the Surdna Foundation. “You can’t just give people skills when they are going through life-threatening issues.” By 2000, the Surdna Foundation revised its guidelines to focus more specifically on youth organizing and invest in long-term relationships with key youth organizing groups to strengthen their overall capacity and impact.

Likewise in Boston in the mid to late 1990s, the Merck Family Fund refined its youth-related grantmaking from a general youth development portfolio to one specifically targeting youth organizing. This shift reflected the trustees’ interest in funding innovative models of working with youth and drew on the Fund’s preference for supporting projects that address the root causes of problems. “Trustees were sold on youth organizing, because it had the most bang for their buck,” explained Meg Coward, former program officer at the Fund.

Regionally, funders have collaborated to improve and increase support for youth organizing—sharing knowledge and resources, as well as planning briefings, conferences and other gatherings. In 2003, one such gathering attended by eight funders and 20 youth organizing groups led to the development of the New York City Opportunities Fund, a pool of funding that supports youth organizing groups in the New York Metropolitan Area. The Fund supports unmet technical assistance needs and collaboration among youth organizing groups to address issues of sustainability concerning organizing groups and foundations alike.

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

1. Make larger general support grants for emerging youth organizing groups. A large percentage of youth organizing groups in the Northeast are “emerging” and operate on budgets less than \$200,000. Youth organizing groups with smaller budgets find themselves struggling to access larger sources of funding. Receiving and administering small grants from several different funding sources puts a strain on smaller organizations.
2. Support more “established” youth organizing groups, as they explore ways to create more sustainable, long-term programs and infrastructures, and also provide critical supports to emerging groups.
3. Support Northeastern regional gatherings that bring youth organizers together around a focused agenda. In particular, support gatherings on education reform, juvenile justice, environmental justice, immigrant rights and queer organizing.
4. Build relationships with youth organizers and incorporate them in the funding process. When programs officers have stayed closely connected to youth organizers and their work, clearer lines of communication and ultimately better funding strategies emerge.
5. Advocate for youth organizing support by showing its power and impact on youth, communities, public policy and reform efforts, and its necessity in developing leadership to address problems that likely will require generations to fix. Include them in a broad range of literature, conferences and workshops, and other formal and informal discussions.
6. Continue to fund youth organizing efforts through both issue-based and identity-focused grantmaking streams. Youth organizing spans a wide range of social change work and is not an isolated, niche field.
7. Support youth organizing in the Northeast as a strategy for greater regional and national impact.

CONCLUSION

Youth organizing groups in the Northeast are at a crossroads; they are firmly maintaining a local focus, while demonstrating an increased capacity and willingness to build regional connections. In partnership with others, they have compelled cities to consider a more positive vision for its youth and, in a sense, their overall future. The message has been clear: support and invest in youth through public education, positive leadership development and employment, not through mass arrests and detentions on streets and in schools. As this report demonstrates, youth organizing groups work on issues that affect whole communities and have had numerous policy wins. At the same time, groups are developing a critical pipeline of thoughtful, innovative and strategic leaders for social justice movements to draw upon. Thus, youth organizing is a critical strategy for long-term community impact and transformation.

The promise of youth organizing lies not only in results, but also in methodology. Youth organizing groups regularly look to history for inspiration, while inventing new spaces for young people's personal expression and political action. They are learning to manage healthy, sustainable organizations, while building a movement that supersedes that infrastructure. And they are fashioning a strong political identity as "youth" that compliments the other, diverse dimensions of their personhood, as well as a political analysis that links poverty, violence and discrimination to their experiences in public education and community development. Said Autumn Marie Griffin of *Sistas on the Rise* in New York, "Youth organizing is a continuation of our story, history, herstory of young people fighting for justice..."

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565 Boylston Street, 5th floor
Boston, MA 02116
www.byop.org/
- Hyde Square Task Force
375 Centre Street
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
www.hydesquare.org/
- Project Hip Hop
2201 Washington Street,
Suite 200
Boston, MA 02119
www.projecthiphop.org/

Reflect and Strengthen
Freedom House,
14 Crawford Street
Dorchester, MA 02122
www.reflectandstrengthen.org

United Teen Equality Center
106 Merrimack Street
Lowell, MA 01852
www.utec-lowell.org/

ACE: Roxbury
Environmental
Empowerment Project
2181 Washington Street,
Boston, MA 02119
www.ace-ej.org/

Hip Hop Media Lab
[www.myspace.com/hiphop-
medialab](http://www.myspace.com/hiphop-medialab)

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www.thecityschool.org/

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Empowerment, Inc.
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Boston, MA 02118
www.teenempowerment.org/

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www.actionace.org/

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www.nomoreprisons.org/
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www.sistasontherise.org/

Youth Ministries for
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Bronx, NY 10472
www.geocities.com/ympj_ny/

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Brooklyn, NY, 11217-1607
www.alp.org/

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Bushwick, Brooklyn, NY
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www.maketheroad.org/

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Brooklyn, NY 11237
www.sistaaisista.org/

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Organization of Sunset Park
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www.uprose.org/

Youth on the Move
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Bronx NY 10459
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m.html](http://www.mothersonthemove.org/yo
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www.fierceny.org/

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Brooklyn, NY 11217
[www.brothermalcolm.net/200
2/mxgm.html](http://www.brothermalcolm.net/200
2/mxgm.html)

Sistas and Brothas United
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103 East 196th Street
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Philadelphia Student Union
1315 Spruce St.
Philadelphia, PA 19107
www.phillystudentunion.org/

Youth United for Change
1910 N. Front Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122
yuc.home.mindspring.com/

CYOC: Community
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1213 Race Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
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Youth Education Alliance
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liance.org/](http://www.youtheducational-
liance.org/)

Facilitating Leadership in
Youth
1300 Good Hope Road, SE
Washington, D.C. 20020
www.flyouth.org/

Young Women's Project
1328 Florida Avenue,
NW Suite 2000
Washington, DC 20009
[www.youngwomensproject.or
g/](http://www.youngwomensproject.or
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Youth Action Research
Group
Center for Social Justice
Research, Teaching and
Service,
Georgetown University
Poulton Hall Suite 130
1421 37th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20057
[socialjustice.georgetown.edu/
research/yarg/](http://socialjustice.georgetown.edu/
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Different Avenues
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Washington, DC 20011
www.differentavenues.org/

Justice 4 D.C. Youth!
Coalition!
1901 9th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
www.jdcy.org/

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