

**STREETS OF  
HOPE**

**THE FALL AND RISE  
OF AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD**

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**SOUTH END PRESS**

**BOSTON, MA**

## BOOM AND BLIST

In the early twentieth century, the descendants of immigrants turned on the newest European immigrants in the area around Uphams Corner in Dorchester. In the words of a city profile, "With the coming of World War I, anti-immigrant feelings and the fear of everything foreign increased. With the influx of working class people moving into the triple-deckers [three-story, multifamily units], the disappearance of most vacant land, and the increase in immigrants, many of the older upper-middle class residents panicked in 1920, leaving for suburbs further to the south."

Still, the area around Uphams Corner, at the junction of five streetcar lines, flourished. The Strand Theatre opened in 1918 to wide acclaim as "New England's most beautiful theatre," featuring vaudeville performers and, later, first-run movies. During the 1920s, Cifino's Market (later Uphams Corner Market and Elm Farm) was the world's first and, for many years, largest supermarket.<sup>14</sup>

St. Patrick's Church has been part of the changing Dudley neighborhood for over 100 years. The present church, an elaborate brick edifice on the crest of the hill at Dudley and Magazine Streets, was dedicated in 1891. The St. Patrick's parish, the third parish in the archdiocese of Boston, was founded just outside Dudley in 1836 by Irish immigrants. When the original wooden church was constructed on Northampton Street, parishioners guarded it from attack by members of the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party. A special 1986 issue of St. Patrick's paper, *The Patriotic*, looked back on the history of the church and the Dudley neighborhood, calling it "a Rainbow of Catholic experience." The church "opened its doors sometimes widely, and sometimes with hesitance and caution to: the arrival and integration of Irish and Italian Catholics in 1920; the arrival and integration of Irish, Italian, and Black Catholics in the 1950s; the arrival and integration of Irish, Italian, Black and Hispanic Catholics in the 1960s; and the arrival and integration of Irish, Italian, Black, Hispanic, and Cape Verdean Catholics in the 1970s."<sup>15</sup>

Irish parishioner Tom Lyons recalled growing up in Dudley in the 1930s:

Gaslight cast flickering shadows along our street. Trolleys—we called them streetcars—clanged back and forth to Dudley Station and we drank our Cherry Coke, milkshakes or frappes at a drugstore fountain...

At the time of urban renewal, the South End was one of Boston's only multiracial, multiethnic neighborhoods. It was also its densest and poorest, with mostly pre-1900 housing, much of it needing renovation. The South End's location, a few minutes' walk from downtown, and rows of tree-shaded brownstones made it a potential gold mine of gentrification by the so-called "urban pioneers." As political scientist John Mollenkopf writes, "Though redlined in the 1950s, it did not take a real estate genius to see that with financing and rehabilitation loan funds, the South End's 'faded elegance' had tremendous market potential."<sup>46</sup>

Although a goal of the Boston General Plan quoted above was "a reversal of present trends towards increasing proportions of low-income groups and non-whites," city planners could not, in Mollenkopf's words, "acknowledge to those about to be displaced, or perhaps even to themselves, that they were engaged in highly regressive social engineering. Renewal entrepreneurs resolved this bind largely by denying it. Official agency plans systematically underestimated the likely displacement and overestimated housing alternatives for those displaced." They "thus made many promises which by their nature were bound to be broken."<sup>47</sup>

The BRA's original plan was modified in consultation with neighborhood institutions and homeowner associations in the South End Urban Renewal Committee. Residents in the Castle Square area, for example, won an increase in the number of low-income units to be constructed, with residents getting first priority. But neighborhood tensions rose as the BRA's demolition work outstripped its promises of relocation and affordable housing. The tension wasn't over whether to renew the South End, but how and for whom. Three new groups struggled to gain more community control: the South End Tenants Council, which spawned the Tenants Development Corporation to successfully rehabilitate housing; the Emergency Tenants Council, later called Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action); and an umbrella group, Community Assembly For a United South End (CAUSE), whose bylaws specified a membership of 60 percent tenants, mirroring the South End population.

Through a range of actions, including demonstrations and negotiations, these groups were able to win some important battles while losing the war against urban removal. On April 26, 1968, just a few weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., CAUSE members took over the BRA's South End site office and blocked Mayor Kevin

White from entering. One of CAUSE's leaders was educator and community organizer Mel King, a lifelong South End resident and future state representative and Boston mayoral candidate. King writes that two days later, he and other CAUSE members "approached the Fitz-Inn parking lot bounded by Dartmouth, Columbus and Yarmouth Streets, directly across from my house. The lot was the site of a choice parcel of land which had been earmarked for development by the BRA. Its sound, handsome brick row houses had been razed, and the lots paved for parking, until its resale value would net enough profit to suit its owner." One hundred families were dislocated. The site was a "symbol of all we have been fighting against for so long." The demonstrators blocked the site, and after 23 were arrested, community support grew and a spontaneous "Tent City" emerged.<sup>48</sup> After 20 more years of battles with city government, a mixed-income development was finally built on the site, with two-thirds of its units affordable to low- and moderate-income tenants. It is called Tent City.

The South End had become home for Boston's Latino community when Puerto Ricans began to settle there in the 1950s. After more than five years of struggle, the BRA, then led by Hale Champion, granted the Emergency Tenants Council the right to develop the 30-acre Parcel 19, where many Puerto Ricans lived. It was, says Mel King, "the first housing construction program in the nation to be developed and controlled by a community group on such a large scale."<sup>49</sup> In 1973, the Emergency Tenants Council, committed to moving beyond "building housing to building community," restructured itself as the tenant-controlled Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA). IBA developed Parcel 19 into Villa Victoria, a housing complex with a community plaza, commercial development and social services. Today, writes Mirren Uriarte of the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Villa Victoria is "the symbolic center of Boston's Latino community," but "the gentrification of the South End and the rise in the cost of housing" have made the larger South End neighborhood "inaccessible as a permanent setting place for Latinos."<sup>50</sup>

As BRA demolition went forward, abandonment and private market rehabilitation removed many more low-rent units from the housing stock. Between 1960 and 1980, an estimated 25,000 people relocated from the South End while 19,000 newcomers moved in, many of them White young professionals. Though still multiracial, by 1985 the South End was a microcosm of polarization with both gentrification

and deepening poverty, trendy restaurants and hunger and homelessness. The South End's median income (half earn below the median, half earn above it) was higher than the city's, but so was its unemployment rate, and one-third of all families in the South End lived in poverty. The lodging houses were supplanted by condominiums. At the start of South End urban renewal, the shells of South End row houses could be purchased for as little as \$5,000 while solid structures sold for about \$20,000. By 1979, the average property value had increased to \$110,000 and, in 1985, it was \$320,000, almost triple the city average.<sup>51</sup> Dudley resident Sophia McCarthy remembers when the South End was full of boarding houses where people with limited income could rent a decent room. "Now they have no place!... No wonder they have street people."

By the end of Ed Logue's tenure at the BRA, development projects involving about 3,223 acres of city land "had demolished 9,718 low-rent units while constructing only 3,504 new units, of which only 982 were federally subsidized. Some twenty-two-thousand low-income individuals were thus displaced... [Logue] also built the BRA from a staff of seventeen and a budget of \$250,000 into a 700-strong parallel government with an annual cash flow of \$25 million by the time he left in 1967."<sup>52</sup>

Mollenkopf observes that neighborhood activism of the 1960s and 1970s "ended large-scale clearance projects, drastically revised traditional planning practices by creating citizen review and participation procedures, and created a new policy emphasis on preservation and rehabilitation." However, "just as neighborhoods had won some influence over" urban development programs, "the Nixon administration began its onslaught against them... From 1973 to 1975, economic recession and Nixon's New Federalism pushed subsidized housing projects toward bankruptcy, halted the construction of additional projects, terminated urban renewal, and made it impossible for local agencies and officials to deliver on their promises."<sup>53</sup> Even if they wanted to.

Reagan's and Bush's New Federalism made Nixon's look like liberalism. Appropriations for HUD's subsidized housing programs dropped 81 percent, after adjusting for inflation, between fiscal years 1978 and 1991. By 1989, only one out of three of the 7.5 million renters with incomes below the official poverty line received a rental subsidy from any governmental housing program or lived in public housing. Meanwhile, there was a sharp increase in federal housing subsidies that primarily benefit middle- and upper-income families, namely mortgage

interest and property tax deductions. In fiscal year 1990, direct spending on federal low-income housing assistance programs totaled \$18.3 billion. More than four times as much was spent through the tax code in the form of homeowner deductions, amounting to some \$78.4 billion, disproportionately benefiting those with higher incomes.<sup>54</sup>

### **RIISING POVERTY IN THE "NEW BOSTON"**

Under urban renewal and other programs, the cities—drained of manufacturing jobs as corporations sought cheaper labor and land, lower taxes and greater government subsidies elsewhere—redeveloped their downtowns to serve the private and public service sector: finance, insurance, real estate (together abbreviated as FIRE, which was appropriate for the Dudley neighborhood), law, advertising, management consulting, hospitals, universities, etc. By 1985, only 8 percent of Boston's workers were employed in manufacturing and the majority worked in services.<sup>55</sup> The service economy is increasingly polarized between relatively few high-income earners and many earning low wages, often in dead-end jobs. So too, the cities are being polarized between affluent professionals and the poor employed, underemployed and unemployed.

In the words of a BRA report, "By 1985, Boston's downtown area had achieved a high degree of economic health and vitality." However, "the benefits of rejuvenation did not spread throughout the city. A premise of the 'New Boston' movement was that the benefits of private investment would flow to all of Boston. On the contrary, Boston in 1985, had persistent poverty, pockets of unemployment, and a serious shortage of decent, affordable housing units." The official poverty rate rose from 16 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1980; one out of every four families with children under 18 lived in poverty. In 1984, the White poverty rate was 13 percent, while 29 percent of Blacks, 40 percent of Asians and 50 percent of Latinos lived below the official poverty line. Many working poor had jobs paying too little to provide an adequate standard of living. "Unemployment and underemployment continued to plague willing and able adults," reported the BRA, "especially minorities and teenagers." Boston's overall official unemployment rate was 6 percent in 1980 and 1985, but the rate for people of color rose from 9 percent to 12 percent—four times higher than the White unemployment rate.

"Private investment flowed to commercial projects or to luxury rental condominium units and 'market rate' units that were beyond the means of much of Boston's population," the BRA report observed. "In too many instances, downtown investment, its new jobs, and its related pressure on a limited housing stock displaced neighborhood residents who could not keep up with rising rents." The result was deeper poverty and homelessness.<sup>56</sup> Boston's median monthly contract rent shot up 25 percent, after adjusting for inflation, between 1980 and 1985. It increased 47 percent in the South End, 50 percent in Mattapan and 15 percent in Roxbury.<sup>57</sup>

In 1985, Blacks represented 21 percent of the resident Boston workforce, but only 12 percent of professional, technical and managerial employees—with an average full-time weekly wage of \$359—and 34 percent of service workers, earning an average \$161; Latinos were 4 percent of professional, managerial and technical employees and 10 percent of service workers. Black-owned firms with paid employees accounted for less than 1 percent of the total business establishments in Boston and tended to be small, with 6 employees average per firm compared to the city average of 24 employees. There were only a handful of firms in such fields as finance, insurance, real estate and wholesale trade. As a BRA report explains, Black and other "minority-owned businesses have played key roles in residential development and small commercial projects in neighborhood commercial districts. However, the bulk of development in Boston has been large office, hotel and retail projects carried out by White-owned businesses."<sup>58</sup>

## REDLINING, BLOCKBUSTING AND LOAN-SHARKING

As urban renewal removed lower-income people from areas where the city was investing, continued disinvestment strangled the redlined neighborhoods where most people of color lived, or could move to. Redlining is the practice by which lenders and insurers brand certain neighborhoods as areas where they will not lend or supply insurance—or, more subtly, offer loans and insurance only at exorbitant premiums and interest rates. Redlining denies residents, however qualified, the mortgages, insurance, home-improvement and home-equity loans so essential for a secure home and retirement. College educations are often financed by the kind of home-equity loans absent

in redlined areas. Loans and insurance needed for the start-up, expansion and protection of local businesses are also denied.

As Charles Finn, the author of an important study of mortgage lending for the Boston Redevelopment Authority, puts it, "Banks, as an important source of capital, play a pivotal but often invisible role in determining whether a community will thrive or decline... Mortgage and construction lending decisions are often made based upon expectations about neighborhood growth or decline—expectations about risk. Thus, banks' expectations of neighborhood growth or decline often become reality—a 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' Without a steady flow of credit, neighborhoods deteriorate. Economic opportunities for residents of these neighborhoods are reduced, even during periods of economic growth. During periods of economic decline, disinvested neighborhoods suffer disproportionately."<sup>59</sup>

The Dudley area was affected not only by typical redlining, elaborated later, but by a reverse form of redlining through which, for a short period, mortgages *were* made available for Blacks, but only in specific areas of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan. The program was known as BBURG (Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group), a bank consortium created at city behest in 1963 to provide FHA-insured home ownership and rehabilitation loans in and around the Washington Park Urban Renewal Project. BBURG took on a new size and significance in 1968 when it opened a mortgage-processing office on Warren Street.

A 1979 BRA report observes, "[BBURG] loans to low income homeowners in the early 1970's, current bank requirements for FHA insured mortgages and unwillingness of banks to give conventional mortgages have adversely affected [the Dudley neighborhood] by discouraging middle income homeowners. Furthermore, the change in racial/ethnic composition, although gradual, has contributed to the perception of realtors and bankers that the Dudley neighborhood is not viable financially, thus further promoting disinvestment. The result of these attitudes has been the demise of a good portion of residential structures through abandonment."<sup>60</sup>

Authors Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon explain what happened under BBURG: "Under the guise of expanding homeownership opportunities for the city's black community, the heads of twenty-two Boston savings banks were complicit in establishing a carefully limited and well-defined inner-city district within which, and only within which, blacks could obtain the attractive, federally insured housing loans.... Incredibly, the area selected for heightened loan activity skirted

the predominantly Irish and Italian working-class neighborhoods and, less surprisingly, the suburbs where the bankers themselves lived. Falling exclusively within the B-BURG line, however, was almost the entirety of Boston's Jewish community, an unprofitable neighborhood for the city's bankers because so many of the residents had paid off their mortgages.<sup>61</sup>

In 1960, there were still about 7,500 Jews living in the neighborhood above Franklin Park later subject to Washington Park urban renewal and tens of thousands more in Dorchester and Mattapan. "By forcing blacks with homeownership aspirations to compete in a limited geographic area, the B-BURG bankers created an eruption of panic selling, blockbusting, street violence, and rage," write Levine and Harmon. In much of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, "more than fifty years of Jewish settlement were overturned during a two-year period from 1968 to 1970. Jews sold their homes to unscrupulous speculators for less than market value while blacks, eager to participate in the 'American Dream,' were forced to pay inflated prices."<sup>62</sup>

An anonymous realtor described for a real estate journal how blockbusting was used in the late 1960s. White fright was orchestrated into White flight and "whole areas went from white to black in a matter of months."

I first heard about blockbusting when I decided I wanted to buy and sell property in Dorchester...

We were told, you get the listings any way you can. It's pretty easy to do: just scare the hell out of them! And that's what we did.

We were not only making money, we were having fun doing what we were doing...we would try to outdo each other with the most outlandish threats that people would believe, and chuckle about them at the end of the day. Some of the milder things were: property values are going down, you're going to get a thousand dollars less next month than this. Market values really didn't decline that much. They did decline slightly, but the thousand dollars a month, or whatever figure you picked—that was something you pulled out of the air....

We weren't subtle about it. You'd say, how would you like it if they rape your daughter, and you've got a mulatto grandchild?...I even used it once on a son, the little boy would get raped. Whatever worked, I would try to use....

I had direct contact with people who were more blatant than I ever dreamed of being. There were instances of housebreaks that were arranged only to scare people out....I don't think anybody to this day is aware that anybody arranged this. Nobody was ever arrested for it, convicted of it, or anything else....

What we did back then, I don't really consider that bad. We hurt people who were asking to be hurt...It was their idea to run. We fueled the fire. In my own defense, I lived in Dorchester and sold the house next door to a black family, and then I lived there for the next five years. The black family left, though, after the white kids in the neighborhood got together and stoned their house night after night.<sup>63</sup>

FHA "windshield inspections" would hurt sellers by undervaluing good properties being bought by speculators and hurt buyers by overvaluing rundown properties. A 1971 survey found that 65 percent of the houses sold under the B-BURG program needed major repairs within two years of purchase. Negligence was compounded with corruption. The head FHA appraiser for Boston, Joseph Kenealy, was accused by the Justice Department in 1971 of having "blatantly engineered" appraisals to enrich himself and his family who were heavily involved in speculation through property and mortgage deals.<sup>64</sup>

For many Blacks, the American dream became a nightmare. As Levine and Harmon explain, "B-BURG buyers were far more likely to lose their homes through foreclosure and abandonment than to realize capital gains on their purchases. With little or no down payment, the new buyers enjoyed no equity. For those who had difficulty meeting mortgage and upkeep costs and who had no reserves to cover the needed repairs that inefficient or corrupt FHA appraisers had failed to report, it was often more prudent to walk away than to persevere." Later studies revealed that "more than one-half of all B-BURG purchasers would lose their homes by 1974. The effect on the city's black community would be devastating." The bankers, meanwhile, made money on mortgage-processing fees while passing on all the costs of foreclosure to the federal government.<sup>65</sup>

In the mid-1970s, Congress responded to the crisis of redlining and disinvestment with the 1975 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the 1976 Equal Credit Opportunity Act and the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act. As the Finn report for the BRA explains, "The ultimate effects of restricted credit availability on neighborhoods, it was generally agreed, are physical neighborhood decline, reduced housing values, crime, and reduced opportunities for socioeconomic mobility." The Community Reinvestment Act "emphasizes the continuing, affirmative obligation of federally-regulated banks to meet the credit needs of the communities in which they do business, including minority and low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. It does not ask banks to make risky loans. Rather, it requires fair banking practices."<sup>66</sup>

Practices remained unfair. Banks around the country continued discriminating and disinvesting while federal bank regulators rubber stamped their supposed compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act for more than two decades.<sup>67</sup> Between 1978 and 1988, banks closed 40 percent of their branch offices in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan while adding branches in White areas of Boston. A 1989 survey found that Boston's 12 largest lending institutions had five times more offices in White areas than in predominantly Black or Latino areas with the same total population.<sup>68</sup>

Fin's study for the BRA found that between 1981 and 1987, mortgage lending by banks in Boston neighborhoods—using city Neighborhood Statistical Areas—“demonstrates a pattern of marked racial disparity. Comparing neighborhoods with similar median family incomes, the ratio of mortgage loans per 1,000 housing units in white and minority neighborhoods was 2.9 to 1.” The lending gap increased to 3.4 to 1 when government-guaranteed mortgage loans were subtracted. The Neighborhood Statistical Areas with the lowest and second-lowest lending levels overall were Dudley/Brunswick-King (with 17 loans per 1,000 housing units) and Sav-Mor (25 loans per 1,000 units), which encompass a large section of the Dudley neighborhood.\* The citywide average was 70 loans per 1,000 units. The average number of loans in neighborhoods with a majority of people of color—including the former BBURG areas—was 35, while the average number of loans in White neighborhoods with comparable incomes was 102.<sup>69</sup>

The Finn study also found that “while banks appear to be reluctant to lend in minority neighborhoods, where housing is relatively affordable, they clearly participated in and facilitated the wave of condominium conversion that Boston experienced in the 1980's. In lower-income white neighborhoods bank mortgage capital has gone overwhelmingly to those neighborhoods with high levels of rental-to-condominium conversions—the city's gentrifying neighborhoods. Rental-to-condominium conversion has eroded Boston's affordable rental stock and displaced many families unable to afford a condominium unit.”<sup>70</sup> During the early 1980s, the market converted an average of “nearly 2,700 private apartments that were formerly affordable rentals, into over 2,700

\* The Finn study compared 60 Boston Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSAs). The Dudley/Brunswick-King NSA is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Magazine Street, the railroad tracks and Washington Street. The adjacent Sav-Mor NSA is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Dudley Street and Warren Street.

condos, dwarfing all assistance efforts to create more affordable housing.” In 1985, “there were 4,525 conversions, more than during the entire decade of the 1970s.”<sup>71</sup>

A 1991 Federal Reserve Board study, analyzing 1990 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data, found racial lending disparities around the country, with Blacks and Latinos rejected twice as often as White applicants, regardless of income. The Boston lending gap was 3 to 1. A crucial 1992 report by the Boston Federal Reserve that systematically controlled for the largest range of financial, employment and other lending variables confirmed the widespread bias that the banks had kept trying to rationalize away. The report (discussed more fully in Chapter Six) found that Blacks and Latinos “were two to three times as likely to be denied mortgage loans as whites. In fact, high-income minorities in Boston were more likely to be turned down than low-income whites.”<sup>72</sup>

Adding to the discriminatory picture, some of the same banks denying conventional mortgages and home-improvement loans in predominantly Black neighborhoods were colluding with contractor contractors who provided financing for repair work at sky high interest rates of 24, even 40 percent. Second mortgages were taken out with or without the homeowners' approval—using tactics such as hiding second mortgage agreements in a stack of contracts and loan documents or forging signatures—and the contractors then sold the loans to banks. To keep their homes, owners then had to pay the extortionist loans even when, as was often the case, the repair work was shoddy or never completed. Many lost their homes to foreclosure before the scam became a public scandal in 1991. Some of the banks benefiting from the loan-sharking cited their purchase of second mortgages in minority communities as evidence they were fulfilling the mandates of the Community Reinvestment Act.<sup>73</sup>

As for insurance redlining, a 1993 congressional hearing documented its continued role. “Insurance is the invisible key to economic advancement,” observed Rep. Joseph Kennedy, whose district includes a portion of Dudley. “The industry has used it to lock tight the door of economic opportunity for millions of consumers. The evidence presented to this Subcommittee clearly suggests a pattern of massive, nationwide discrimination against low-income and minority Americans.... The message that insurance companies are sending to low-income and minority consumers is crystal clear: you are irresponsible, you are dangerous, and you don't deserve insurance. Solely because

of the color of their skin, the size of their paycheck, and the address of their home, millions of Americans must pay more in premiums for less coverage, take their chances with shadowy unregulated and underfunded companies, or go without any insurance at all and face financial disaster as a daily fact of life."<sup>74</sup> Racist redlining and government irresponsibility has endangered inner city residents and communities.

## TRASHED AND BURNED

"Most of the problems of Roxbury today," Sam Warner wrote in 1962, "are not primarily housing problems, but the problems of urban society as a whole. The houses of Roxbury are but vestiges of an earlier, rapidly changing society which built to the measure of the moment and then left its remains for others to use as best they could."<sup>75</sup> As best they could in the face of redlining and other disinvestment and discrimination.

In the words of a BRA report, Roxbury, North Dorchester and Mattapan, "Boston's principal neighborhoods of concentration of minorities...experienced an exaggerated version of the city's era of throw-away housing, flowing from the population loss and the outflow of industry and jobs, 1950-1980, and an inequitable property tax system, in operation until 1983, with significantly higher effective tax rates for poorer neighborhoods. The result was large-scale housing abandonment and attrition."<sup>76</sup>

Arson is another factor. DSNi board member Bob Haas, formerly an engineer working for a Route 128 corporation, bought his home in the Uphams Corner area in 1970. He recalls what it was like to look across the railroad tracks deeper into the Dudley neighborhood and see houses burning: "They were burning down very quickly. You could go up after dinner onto the roof of this house and watch them burn down just any night you wanted to watch. And it was scary because the sparks would blow right over from these fires and we [feared] that sooner or later one of [our] houses would catch. But I was interested also in the underlying causes of this kind of thing. What could...make it so that so many houses had burned down so quickly when [so] many people needed housing?"

A 1985 report by the City of Boston Arson Prevention Commission outlined "three socio-economic matrixes for arson." The "Appreciating Matrix in which the value of property in an area is increasing in relation

to the incomes of traditional residents" corresponds to urban renewal/redevelopment areas. "This creates economic pressure for the dislocation of lower income residents. A classic example of this is the conversion of a rooming house to condominiums. A fire is of financial benefit to the developer under these circumstances because: 1) it drives out low-income residents without the cost of waiting for attrition and without the potential political resistance to mass evictions, 2) it does the work of gutting the building for rehabilitation, 3) insurance provides tax-free, interest-free financing for the rehabilitation of the structure."

In 1981, Roxbury's Highland Park neighborhood was dubbed "The Arson Capital of the Nation." Most of the fires, the Arson Commission notes, "were directly related to increased speculation due to the Southwest Corridor Project," the massive redevelopment project centered around the relocated mass transit Orange Line (which used to run through Dudley Station) and extending from the South End through Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. The Arson Commission says, "Many of the buildings that were burned were among the approximately 75 abandoned buildings that local residents attempted to save for low-income housing and community-based activities. When frightened residents, ignored then by Mayor [Kevin] White, appealed" to the state for assistance, they "learned that Highland Park's fire statistics were the highest in the Commonwealth."

"The second socio-economic matrix for arson is the Depreciating Matrix," explains the Arson Commission. "This is characterized by the long-term erosion of mortgage availability and the exodus of stable-income residents. This leads to a steady decline in property values and a sense of entrapment for the remaining residents. Often, depreciating areas reflect a sense of racial or class 'frontier' moving towards them. In these areas, arson is an easy solution to the problem of declining housing values and services." A solution, that is, for absentee landlords and residents and businesses willing and able to burn their way out of neighborhoods like Dudley.

The Arson Commission's third matrix is the "Tension Matrix," which is "characterized by sustained struggle between appreciating and depreciating forces. In these areas, long-term low- and moderate-income residents are impacted by declining housing values and services for them, while, at the same time, profits are made in housing speculation aimed at outside moderate- to high-income people. In this matrix, we find both 'rehabilitator' fires and 'selling to the insurance company' fires."<sup>77</sup>



Harrington's Market, Alice's Coffee Shop, Bill's Barbershop lined the block on Dudley St. across from the church. There were a fur shop and Kingsbury Press a few steps away toward Dudley Station.

Honen's Drugstore at the corner of Dunmore and Hampden Streets and Freedman's Drug Store at Blue Hill and Mt. Pleasant Aves. served as bookends for the church, and growing up in Roxbury we spent many days and nights, doing what kids nowadays call "hanging out" in front of them.

If there is one word, one thought that rises above all, as the mind drifts back, it's the feeling that in Roxbury, in St. Patrick's Parish, there was a lot of caring for us young people from parents, priests, nuns, friends and neighbors.<sup>16</sup>

St. Patrick's parishioner Margarita Sturniolo, an Italian American, moved to Dudley in January 1921 and taught school for 40 years. Her Irish American friend Sophia McCarthy, also a St. Patrick's parishioner, moved to the neighborhood in the 1920s. McCarthy's family owned a grocery store. Sturniolo and McCarthy, both stalwart neighborhood activists, remember a thriving neighborhood with shops of all kinds, homes with flower gardens and good schools. And they remember when the neighborhood was burned, figuratively and literally, beginning in the 1950s.

"I was afraid that my house would go up in smoke," Sturniolo recalls. Most of her old friends are gone now, she says. "They either die off or they move away." The population in the Dudley core area\* dropped by more than half between 1950 and 1980, when it leveled off. The 1990 core area population—based on a more precise census delineation of the neighborhood than that of earlier years—is 12,000. Dudley's White population plummeted after 1950, when it was 95 percent, to 79 percent in 1960, 45 percent in 1970 and 16 percent in 1980, including Whites of Hispanic origin. In 1990, the non-Hispanic White population was 7 percent.\*\*

During the 1940s and 1950s, the mechanization of southern agriculture and mining displaced millions of people from their liveli-

\* DSNi divides the neighborhood into core and secondary areas, as explained in Chapter Two (see earlier map). Because the smaller core area—with about half the Dudley population—is the primary focus of DSNi, census statistics refer to the core unless stated otherwise.

\*\*Based on available census data, Black and White population figures for 1950-1980 include a small but growing number of White and Black Hispanics. Figures for 1990 distinguish non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks from Latinos.

hoods. Large numbers of African Americans migrated from the segregated South to northeastern cities like Boston, where discrimination was also rampant. Boston's population of color rose from 3 percent in 1940 (when nearly one out of four Boston residents was foreign-born) to 9 percent in 1960 and 16 percent in 1970.<sup>17</sup> Roxbury's racial composition shifted from majority White to predominantly Black. Malcolm X lived in Roxbury in the 1940s and, in 1954, he helped found Temple 11 on Intervale Street in the Dudley neighborhood. Within the Dudley core area, the Black population rose from 5 percent in 1950 to 20 percent in 1960 and 53 percent in 1970, including Blacks of Hispanic and Cape Verdean origin. In 1990, the non-Hispanic Black population was 50 percent, including Cape Verdeans.

"Excluded from the suburban jobs and housing," writes Mel King in his study of Black community development in Boston, Blacks faced job segregation "reinforced by educational segregation," housing segregation and "gerrymandering of the Black population in such a way as to assure that they had no political voice. This systematic denial of jobs, housing, education and political representation by the Boston power structure came to full development in the creation of the 'ghetto,' for the image of the ghetto allowed the ruling elite to blame the Black community for what they had systematically imposed upon us."<sup>18</sup>

Latinos and Cape Verdean immigrants became a significant part of the Dudley population during the 1960s and 1970s. According to a 1981 report, about half the Latinos who moved into Dudley came directly from Puerto Rico. A significant number were displaced from Boston's South End, as discussed below.<sup>19</sup> Dudley's Latino population more than doubled from 12 percent in 1970 to 28 percent in 1980 and about 30 percent in 1990. Today, a majority of Dudley's Latino residents are of Puerto Rican origin, followed by Dominican, then Honduran, Guatemalan, Cuban and Mexican.

Cape Verde is an island nation off the coast of West Africa that won independence from Portugal in 1975. Cape Verdean immigrants first arrived in Massachusetts, in the port of New Bedford—south of Boston—in the late eighteenth century. Most Cape Verdeans are Catholic, and by the mid-1960s, writes the Reverend Pio Gottin, "the new influx of Cape Verdean immigrants was supplanting the earlier Italian and Irish immigrants" within Dudley's St. Patrick's parish. "St. Patrick's is today the center of the Cape Verdean Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Boston as well as a point of reference for all Cape

Verdeans in New England.<sup>20</sup> Today, Cape Verdeans make up an estimated 25 percent of Dudley's core area population.<sup>21</sup>

Business directories show 1950-era Dudley Street and Blue Hill Avenue to be lined with residences, businesses, municipal buildings, union halls and social clubs. By 1970, address after address is listed vacant. The number of private businesses on Dudley Street (from Warren Street to the railroad tracks) dropped from 129 in 1950 to 79 in 1960, 49 in 1970 and 26 in 1980. On Blue Hill Avenue (from Dudley to Quincy Streets) the number fell from 210 in 1950 to 150 in 1960, 74 in 1970 and 47 in 1980.<sup>22</sup> As of 1993, there were about 32 businesses on Dudley Street and 28 on Blue Hill Avenue. Many of the businesses—now owned by Blacks, Latinos and Cape Verdeans as well as Whites—are small groceries, restaurants and auto-related enterprises.

## SEGREGATED SUBURBANIZATION

White flight from Dudley and areas like it around the country was promoted by government policies that subsidized segregated suburbanization and disinvested in inner city communities. When Whites moved out, so did private and public investment in everything from schools and housing to business and street repair, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of disinvestment and decay wrongly blamed on newcomer people of color.

As the twentieth century began, industry left cities to set up mass assembly plants where manufacturers could pay lower taxes and land prices and avoid labor unions. Federal policies to encourage suburban growth were strengthened in the 1930s in an effort to jump start the economy out of depression. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was created in 1934 to provide guaranteed mortgages for new construction. The "G. I. Bill" of 1944 provided Veterans Administration (VA) loan guarantees to subsidize home mortgages for returning veterans, almost all in suburbia—where most new wartime industrial capacity was also located. The FHA and VA programs insured about one-third of all homes purchased in the 1950s. Federal transportation spending was targeted to highway construction, favoring suburbia and the auto industry at the expense of urban mass transit.

The FHA and the real estate industry promoted racial segregation as the key to neighborhood stability and housing values. A report prepared for the FHA in 1933 ranked 15 racial and ethnic groups according to the impact of their presence on property values—values

reflecting prejudice: English, Germans, Scotch, Irish and Scandinavians were classified as having the most favorable impact, "Negroes" and Mexicans the most detrimental.<sup>23</sup> In the FHA's 1938 *Underwriting Manual* for banks, one of the guidelines for loan officers read: "Areas surrounding a location are [to be] investigated to determine whether incompatible racial and social groups are present, for the purpose of making a prediction regarding the probability of the location being invaded by such groups... A change in social or racial occupancy generally contributes to instability and a decline in values."<sup>24</sup> Restrictive covenants were one means of stemming the "invasion."

"All through the 1930s and 1940s," explains political scientist Dennis Judd, "F.H.A. administrators advised and sometimes required developers of residential projects to draw up restrictive covenants against nonwhites as a condition of obtaining F.H.A.-insured financing. Since areas that were all black were considered even worse credit risks than mixed neighborhoods, the policy closed almost all African-Americans out of the federally insured market and excluded them from the new suburbs altogether."<sup>25</sup> One model restrictive covenant required that builders and lenders pledge that "no persons of any race other than [race to be inserted] shall use or occupy any building or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant."<sup>26</sup> The exception, needless to say, was not designed for hypothetical White servants of Black homeowners.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial covenants could not be enforced in the 1948 case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, but de facto segregation continued. "Between 1946 and 1959, less than 2 percent of all the housing financed with the assistance of federal mortgage insurance was made available to blacks," writes Judd. "In 1960, not a single African-American could be counted among the 82,000 residents of Long Island's Levittown [New York]. The situation was typical."<sup>27</sup>

A 1968 National Commission on Urban Problems deplored the "tacit agreement among all groups—lending institutions, fire insurance companies, and FHA"—to "redline" inner city neighborhoods, denying them credit and insurance. The commission reported that up until the summer of 1967, "FHA almost never insured mortgages on homes in slum districts, and did so very seldom in the 'gray areas' which surrounded them. Even middle-class residential districts in the central cities were suspect, since there was always the prospect that they, too, might 'turn' as Negroes and poor whites" moved in.<sup>28</sup>

The 1977 edition of *The Appraisal of Real Estate*, published by the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers, still included "prevailing nationalities, infiltration;" among the criteria for assessing neighborhoods Institute training materials provided this appraisal example: "The neighborhood is entirely Caucasian. It appears that there is no adverse effect by minority groups."<sup>29</sup>

As of 1989, Blacks accounted for only 7 percent of those living in the nation's suburbs, where real estate steering also reinforces segregation within suburbia. In 1991, 51 percent of Whites lived in the suburbs and only 26 percent in central cities. The majority of Blacks—56 percent—remained in central cities while only 27 percent lived in suburbs.<sup>30</sup> In 1960, per capita income was 5 percent higher in a sample of cities than in their surrounding suburbs. By 1987, suburban per capita income was 59 percent higher than in the cities.<sup>31</sup> Housing discrimination remains pervasive. According to a 1991 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report of fair housing testing audits in 25 U.S. cities, Blacks encounter discrimination more than half of the time.<sup>32</sup>

Segregated suburbanization took a toll on Boston and other cities as population and jobs moved away, leaving a weaker economy and tax base behind. In the 1950s, Route 128 around Boston became a suburban magnet for high-tech industries.<sup>33</sup> In 1929, Boston's per capita income exceeded that of the metropolitan area by over \$2,200. The trend reversed in 1959 and, by 1980, the metro area's per capita income was nearly \$1,500 greater (adjusting for inflation) than Boston's. "The City's economy lost much of its production capacity in textiles, leather, and food processing, and no substantial new manufacturing took its place," explains a Boston Redevelopment Authority report. "At the same time, much retail trade followed the population shifts to the suburbs" and the rise of shopping malls. The service industries, especially hospitals and universities, doubled their share of Boston's earned income to 29 percent. But there were not enough jobs and they often paid poorly.<sup>34</sup>

"As the wave of suburbanization...swept over the country," observes a city report, "Boston [was] sorely impacted, but Roxbury was devastated." Once an industrial center for food processing, apparel and leather goods, manufacturing employment in Roxbury dropped from over 20,000 jobs in 1947 to 4,000 jobs in 1981.<sup>35</sup> Many of Roxbury's manufacturing jobs are in the New Market Industrial Area, a portion of which is in Dudley. By 1980, Dudley's unemployment rate, then over

12 percent, was twice Boston's overall rate. The 2 to 1 ratio remained as Dudley's official unemployment rate topped 16 percent in 1990, not counting jobless people too discouraged to keep actively looking for work and those working part-time jobs only because they could not find full-time employment.

## URBAN RENEWAL, URBAN REMOVAL

In an effort to meet rising expenses, increase tax revenues—a problem exacerbated by cities' large portion of tax-exempt educational, religious and other institutions—and reverse urban decline, Boston and other cities responded with massive urban renewal projects. City planners bulldozed lower-income neighborhoods in desirable locations to make way for office and retail complexes, large public buildings such as Boston's Government Center, and upscale housing and hotels. While many Whites made new homes in subsidized suburbia, inner-city Blacks and Latinos, and low-income Whites, were hit by a wave of "slum clearance" urban renewal projects. Often, "slum clearance" meant the destruction of bustling racially mixed working-class neighborhoods and small businesses.

Instead of the "decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family," promised by the Housing Act of 1949, residents of low-income neighborhoods, including poor and elderly Whites, were often left with less housing, higher rents, fewer businesses and scarcer jobs than before. Segregation worsened as many displaced Whites moved to blue-collar suburbs. Displaced Blacks typically had no choice, because of housing and economic discrimination, but to move into ghetto neighborhoods and ghettoized public housing.

Urban renewal got a bad reputation early in Boston when the working-class West End neighborhood was demolished to make room, in part, for luxury housing overlooking the Charles River. The 47-acre West End was home to a diverse population of Italian American (the largest ethnic group), Jewish, Polish, Irish, Black and other residents. A newspaper columnist called the West End a vice-ridden slum and a cesspool, typifying the view of the urban renewers.<sup>36</sup> "By the summer of 1960," writes Herbert Gans in *The Urban Villagers*, chronicling West End community life, "only rubble remained where two years ago had lived more than 7,000 people."<sup>37</sup> When the rubble became "first-class" housing, shopping and office space, it was out of reach for the former West Enders who had lost homes, jobs, businesses and strong social

networks.<sup>38</sup> Where West Enders once lived, the Charles River Park complex advertises itself to commuters with the slogan: "If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home Now."

Under "New Boston" Mayor John Collins, Ed Logue became director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) in 1966 with the backing of a group of city power brokers known as "The Vault." Called The Vault because it met in the boardroom of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, the group formed in 1959 with some 16 members, including the chief officers of the four largest commercial banks, two largest retailers, two largest industrial firms, the leading law firm, the city's public utility and the third largest insurance company.<sup>39</sup>

The BRA, established in 1957, was responsible for urban renewal and planning activities in the city. Logue produced "The 90 Million Dollar Development Program for Boston." The BRA's 1965-1975 *General Plan for the City of Boston* stated that the policy of the Development Program is "to promote stability in the size of Boston's population while increasing the diversity of its composition so that it more nearly reflects the composition of the Region's population as a whole. This would, of course, entail a reversal of present trends towards increasing proportions of low-income groups and non-whites in the core City."<sup>40</sup> In 1970, Boston's population was 16 percent people of color, while the metropolitan area population—the program's "diversity" model—was only 6 percent.

Logue's BRA promised that neighborhoods would be rehabilitated with the input and without the displacement of existing residents. Mayor Collins asserted, "I would expect that neighborhood communities would have a key partnership role in the preparation and carrying out of renewal plans. I would call it planning *with* people instead of planning for people."<sup>41</sup> The problem, illustrated by Roxbury and South End urban renewal, is that the city wanted to plan *with* like-minded people, mainly middle-class homeowners, while planning displacement *for* low-income residents.

Roxbury's Washington Park Urban Renewal project received federal approval in 1963. Its boundaries were enlarged from 186 acres to 502 acres (bounded generally by Washington, Dudley, Warren and Seaver Streets) after a 1961 BRA study concluded that over half the residential homes in the original smaller area should be demolished. Since that was far above the clearance level seen as politically viable after the destruction of the West End, the Washington Park boundaries were extended southward to include sounder housing between Town-

send Street and Franklin Park, thus diluting the overall demolition percentage (to a still-high 35 percent) without reducing clearance in the original target area. The Washington Park area was 71 percent Black and 29 percent White in 1960. Poor Blacks were not invited to participate in Washington Park urban renewal planning. They were considered the "blighting influence" whose removal was part of the renewal process strongly supported by many middle-class Blacks. Numerous low-rent dwellings were eliminated without replacement. Of those displaced, 1,275 families and hundreds of individuals were eligible for public housing, but the only publicly aided housing included in the renewal area were 200 units for the elderly.<sup>42</sup>

Logue called Washington Park "the most successful of our renewal programs, and the one that caused the least grief."<sup>43</sup> A later report by the BRA and the Roxbury Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee commented, "the Urban Renewal process was a negative experience for the residents of Roxbury. The legacy left by Urban Renewal is the scars of vacant land, abandoned buildings, a fear of displacement and gentrification, and a fear of lack of control over the future of one's own community."<sup>44</sup>

When DSNi began in the 1980s, members often voiced the sentiment, "We don't want to be another South End." The South End Urban Renewal Plan was adopted in 1965. The South End was developed from 1850 to 1875 on partially filled land and, in the words of a city profile, "it was briefly a genteel enclave before attracting immigrant workers finding work nearby," beginning with the Irish. "By the turn of the century, the South End had become the largest lodging house district in the United States." It "gained a reputation as a haven for 'dens of vice'... In 1898, South End social worker Robert Woods coined the term 'the city wilderness' to describe the district. Although still containing a working class family population, most Bostonians associated the area with alcoholism, prostitution, and drug traffic." Continuing a historical pattern, the outsiders' stereotype of "vice-ridden slums" masked the vitality and diversity of multiracial working-class communities. "After its first 100 years," the South End profile continues, "the relative harmony in this neighborhood of gracious but decaying brick bowfronts and rowhouses was shattered by three powerful external forces: the construction of the Prudential Center on adjoining railyards, urban renewal, and an awakening of new interest in inner city neighborhoods."<sup>45</sup>

At the time of urban renewal, the South End was one of Boston's only multiracial, multiethnic neighborhoods. It was also its densest and poorest, with mostly pre-1900 housing, much of it needing renovation. The South End's location, a few minutes' walk from downtown, and rows of tree-shaded brownstones made it a potential gold mine of gentrification by the so-called "urban pioneers." As political scientist John Mollenkopf writes, "Though redlined in the 1950s, it did not take a real estate genius to see that with financing and rehabilitation loan funds, the South End's 'faded elegance' had tremendous market potential."<sup>46</sup>

Although a goal of the Boston General Plan quoted above was "a reversal of present trends towards increasing proportions of low-income groups and non-whites," city planners could not, in Mollenkopf's words, "acknowledge to those about to be displaced, or perhaps even to themselves, that they were engaged in highly regressive social engineering. Renewal entrepreneurs resolved this bind largely by denying it. Official agency plans systematically underestimated the likely displacement and overestimated housing alternatives for those displaced." They "thus made many promises which by their nature were bound to be broken."<sup>47</sup>

The BRA's original plan was modified in consultation with neighborhood institutions and homeowner associations in the South End Urban Renewal Committee. Residents in the Castle Square area, for example, won an increase in the number of low-income units to be constructed, with residents getting first priority. But neighborhood tensions rose as the BRA's demolition work outstripped its promises of relocation and affordable housing. The tension wasn't over whether to renew the South End, but how and for whom. Three new groups struggled to gain more community control: the South End Tenants Council, which spawned the Tenants Development Corporation to successfully rehabilitate housing; the Emergency Tenants Council, later called Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action); and an umbrella group, Community Assembly For a United South End (CAUSE), whose bylaws specified a membership of 60 percent tenants, mirroring the South End population.

Through a range of actions, including demonstrations and negotiations, these groups were able to win some important battles while losing the war against urban removal. On April 26, 1968, just a few weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., CAUSE members took over the BRA's South End site office and blocked Mayor Kevin

White from entering. One of CAUSE's leaders was educator and community organizer Mel King, a lifelong South End resident and future state representative and Boston mayoral candidate. King writes that two days later, he and other CAUSE members "approached the Fitz-Inn parking lot bounded by Dartmouth, Columbus and Yarmouth Streets, directly across from my house. The lot was the site of a choice parcel of land which had been earmarked for development by the BRA. Its sound, handsome brick row houses had been razed, and the lots paved for parking, until its resale value would net enough profit to suit its owner." One hundred families were dislocated. The site was a "symbol of all we have been fighting against for so long." The demonstrators blocked the site, and after 23 were arrested, community support grew and a spontaneous "Tent City" emerged.<sup>48</sup> After 20 more years of battles with city government, a mixed-income development was finally built on the site, with two-thirds of its units affordable to low- and moderate-income tenants. It is called Tent City.

The South End had become home for Boston's Latino community when Puerto Ricans began to settle there in the 1950s. After more than five years of struggle, the BRA, then led by Hale Champion, granted the Emergency Tenants Council the right to develop the 30-acre Parcel 19, where many Puerto Ricans lived. It was, says Mel King, "the first housing construction program in the nation to be developed and controlled by a community group on such a large scale."<sup>49</sup> In 1973, the Emergency Tenants Council, committed to moving beyond "building housing to building community," restructured itself as the tenant-controlled Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA). IBA developed Parcel 19 into Villa Victoria, a housing complex with a community plaza, commercial development and social services. Today, writes Mirren Uriarte of the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Villa Victoria is "the symbolic center of Boston's Latino community," but "the gentrification of the South End and the rise in the cost of housing" have made the larger South End neighborhood "inaccessible as a permanent setting place for Latinos."<sup>50</sup>

As BRA demolition went forward, abandonment and private market rehabilitation removed many more low-rent units from the housing stock. Between 1960 and 1980, an estimated 25,000 people relocated from the South End while 19,000 newcomers moved in, many of them White young professionals. Though still multiracial, by 1985 the South End was a microcosm of polarization with both gentrification

and deepening poverty, trendy restaurants and hunger and homelessness. The South End's median income (half earn below the median, half earn above it) was higher than the city's, but so was its unemployment rate, and one-third of all families in the South End lived in poverty. The lodging houses were supplanted by condominiums. At the start of South End urban renewal, the shells of South End row houses could be purchased for as little as \$5,000 while solid structures sold for about \$20,000. By 1979, the average property value had increased to \$110,000 and, in 1985, it was \$320,000, almost triple the city average.<sup>51</sup> Dudley resident Sophia McCarthy remembers when the South End was full of boarding houses where people with limited income could rent a decent room. "Now they have no place!... No wonder they have street people."

By the end of Ed Logue's tenure at the BRA, development projects involving about 3,223 acres of city land "had demolished 9,718 low-rent units while constructing only 3,504 new units, of which only 982 were federally subsidized. Some twenty-two-thousand low-income individuals were thus displaced... [Logue] also built the BRA from a staff of seventeen and a budget of \$250,000 into a 700-strong parallel government with an annual cash flow of \$25 million by the time he left in 1967."<sup>52</sup>

Mollenkopf observes that neighborhood activism of the 1960s and 1970s "ended large-scale clearance projects, drastically revised traditional planning practices by creating citizen review and participation procedures, and created a new policy emphasis on preservation and rehabilitation." However, "just as neighborhoods had won some influence over" urban development programs, "the Nixon administration began its onslaught against them... From 1973 to 1975, economic recession and Nixon's New Federalism pushed subsidized housing projects toward bankruptcy, halted the construction of additional projects, terminated urban renewal, and made it impossible for local agencies and officials to deliver on their promises."<sup>53</sup> Even if they wanted to.

Reagan's and Bush's New Federalism made Nixon's look like liberalism. Appropriations for HUD's subsidized housing programs dropped 81 percent, after adjusting for inflation, between fiscal years 1978 and 1991. By 1989, only one out of three of the 7.5 million renters with incomes below the official poverty line received a rental subsidy from any governmental housing program or lived in public housing. Meanwhile, there was a sharp increase in federal housing subsidies that primarily benefit middle- and upper-income families, namely mortgage

interest and property tax deductions. In fiscal year 1990, direct spending on federal low-income housing assistance programs totaled \$18.3 billion. More than four times as much was spent through the tax code in the form of homeowner deductions, amounting to some \$78.4 billion, disproportionately benefiting those with higher incomes.<sup>54</sup>

### RIISING POVERTY IN THE "NEW BOSTON"

Under urban renewal and other programs, the cities—drained of manufacturing jobs as corporations sought cheaper labor and land, lower taxes and greater government subsidies elsewhere—redeveloped their downtowns to serve the private and public service sector: finance, insurance, real estate (together abbreviated as FIRE, which was appropriate for the Dudley neighborhood), law, advertising, management consulting, hospitals, universities, etc. By 1985, only 8 percent of Boston's workers were employed in manufacturing and the majority worked in services.<sup>55</sup> The service economy is increasingly polarized between relatively few high-income earners and many earning low wages, often in dead-end jobs. So too, the cities are being polarized between affluent professionals and the poor employed, underemployed and unemployed.

In the words of a BRA report, "By 1985, Boston's downtown area had achieved a high degree of economic health and vitality." However, "the benefits of rejuvenation did not spread throughout the city. A premise of the 'New Boston' movement was that the benefits of private investment would flow to all of Boston. On the contrary, Boston in 1985, had persistent poverty, pockets of unemployment, and a serious shortage of decent, affordable housing units." The official poverty rate rose from 16 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1980; one out of every four families with children under 18 lived in poverty. In 1984, the White poverty rate was 13 percent, while 29 percent of Blacks, 40 percent of Asians and 50 percent of Latinos lived below the official poverty line. Many working poor had jobs paying too little to provide an adequate standard of living. "Unemployment and underemployment continued to plague willing and able adults," reported the BRA, "especially minorities and teenagers." Boston's overall official unemployment rate was 6 percent in 1980 and 1985, but the rate for people of color rose from 9 percent to 12 percent—four times higher than the White unemployment rate.

"Private investment flowed to commercial projects or to luxury rental condominium units and 'market rate' units that were beyond the means of much of Boston's population," the BRA report observed. "In too many instances, downtown investment, its new jobs, and its related pressure on a limited housing stock displaced neighborhood residents who could not keep up with rising rents." The result was deeper poverty and homelessness.<sup>56</sup> Boston's median monthly contract rent shot up 25 percent, after adjusting for inflation, between 1980 and 1985. It increased 47 percent in the South End, 50 percent in Mattapan and 15 percent in Roxbury.<sup>57</sup>

In 1985, Blacks represented 21 percent of the resident Boston workforce, but only 12 percent of professional, technical and managerial employees—with an average full-time weekly wage of \$359—and 34 percent of service workers, earning an average \$161; Latinos were 4 percent of professional, managerial and technical employees and 10 percent of service workers. Black-owned firms with paid employees accounted for less than 1 percent of the total business establishments in Boston and tended to be small, with 6 employees average per firm compared to the city average of 24 employees. There were only a handful of firms in such fields as finance, insurance, real estate and wholesale trade. As a BRA report explains, Black and other "minority-owned businesses have played key roles in residential development and small commercial projects in neighborhood commercial districts. However, the bulk of development in Boston has been large office, hotel and retail projects carried out by White-owned businesses."<sup>58</sup>

## REDLINING, BLOCKBUSTING AND LOAN-SHARKING

As urban renewal removed lower-income people from areas where the city was investing, continued disinvestment strangled the redlined neighborhoods where most people of color lived, or could move to. Redlining is the practice by which lenders and insurers brand certain neighborhoods as areas where they will not lend or supply insurance—or, more subtly, offer loans and insurance only at exorbitant premiums and interest rates. Redlining denies residents, however qualified, the mortgages, insurance, home-improvement and home-equity loans so essential for a secure home and retirement. College educations are often financed by the kind of home-equity loans absent

in redlined areas. Loans and insurance needed for the start-up, expansion and protection of local businesses are also denied.

As Charles Finn, the author of an important study of mortgage lending for the Boston Redevelopment Authority, puts it, "Banks, as an important source of capital, play a pivotal but often invisible role in determining whether a community will thrive or decline... Mortgage and construction lending decisions are often made based upon expectations about neighborhood growth or decline—expectations about risk. Thus, banks' expectations of neighborhood growth or decline often become reality—a 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' Without a steady flow of credit, neighborhoods deteriorate. Economic opportunities for residents of these neighborhoods are reduced, even during periods of economic growth. During periods of economic decline, disinvested neighborhoods suffer disproportionately."<sup>59</sup>

The Dudley area was affected not only by typical redlining, elaborated later, but by a reverse form of redlining through which, for a short period, mortgages *were* made available for Blacks, but only in specific areas of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan. The program was known as BBURG (Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group), a bank consortium created at city behest in 1963 to provide FHA-insured home ownership and rehabilitation loans in and around the Washington Park Urban Renewal Project. BBURG took on a new size and significance in 1968 when it opened a mortgage-processing office on Warren Street.

A 1979 BRA report observes, "[BBURG] loans to low income homeowners in the early 1970's, current bank requirements for FHA insured mortgages and unwillingness of banks to give conventional mortgages have adversely affected [the Dudley neighborhood] by discouraging middle income homeowners. Furthermore, the change in racial/ethnic composition, although gradual, has contributed to the perception of realtors and bankers that the Dudley neighborhood is not viable financially, thus further promoting disinvestment. The result of these attitudes has been the demise of a good portion of residential structures through abandonment."<sup>60</sup>

Authors Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon explain what happened under BBURG: "Under the guise of expanding homeownership opportunities for the city's black community, the heads of twenty-two Boston savings banks were complicit in establishing a carefully limited and well-defined inner-city district within which, and only within which, blacks could obtain the attractive, federally insured housing loans.... Incredibly, the area selected for heightened loan activity skirted

the predominantly Irish and Italian working-class neighborhoods and, less surprisingly, the suburbs where the bankers themselves lived. Falling exclusively within the B-BURG line, however, was almost the entirety of Boston's Jewish community, an unprofitable neighborhood for the city's bankers because so many of the residents had paid off their mortgages.<sup>61</sup>

In 1960, there were still about 7,500 Jews living in the neighborhood above Franklin Park later subject to Washington Park urban renewal and tens of thousands more in Dorchester and Mattapan. "By forcing blacks with homeownership aspirations to compete in a limited geographic area, the B-BURG bankers created an eruption of panic selling, blockbusting, street violence, and rage," write Levine and Harmon. In much of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, "more than fifty years of Jewish settlement were overturned during a two-year period from 1968 to 1970. Jews sold their homes to unscrupulous speculators for less than market value while blacks, eager to participate in the 'American Dream,' were forced to pay inflated prices."<sup>62</sup>

An anonymous realtor described for a real estate journal how blockbusting was used in the late 1960s. White fright was orchestrated into White flight and "whole areas went from white to black in a matter of months."

I first heard about blockbusting when I decided I wanted to buy and sell property in Dorchester...

We were told, you get the listings any way you can. It's pretty easy to do: just scare the hell out of them! And that's what we did.

We were not only making money, we were having fun doing what we were doing...we would try to outdo each other with the most outlandish threats that people would believe, and chuckle about them at the end of the day. Some of the milder things were: property values are going down, you're going to get a thousand dollars less next month than this. Market values really didn't decline that much. They did decline slightly, but the thousand dollars a month, or whatever figure you picked—that was something you pulled out of the air....

We weren't subtle about it. You'd say, how would you like it if they rape your daughter, and you've got a mulatto grandchild?...I even used it once on a son, the little boy would get raped. Whatever worked, I would try to use....

I had direct contact with people who were more blatant than I ever dreamed of being. There were instances of housebreaks that were arranged only to scare people out....I don't think anybody to this day is aware that anybody arranged this. Nobody was ever arrested for it, convicted of it, or anything else....

What we did back then, I don't really consider that bad. We hurt people who were asking to be hurt...It was their idea to run. We fueled the fire. In my own defense, I lived in Dorchester and sold the house next door to a black family, and then I lived there for the next five years. The black family left, though, after the white kids in the neighborhood got together and stoned their house night after night.<sup>63</sup>

FHA "windshield inspections" would hurt sellers by undervaluing good properties being bought by speculators and hurt buyers by overvaluing rundown properties. A 1971 survey found that 65 percent of the houses sold under the B-BURG program needed major repairs within two years of purchase. Negligence was compounded with corruption. The head FHA appraiser for Boston, Joseph Kenealy, was accused by the Justice Department in 1971 of having "blatantly engineered" appraisals to enrich himself and his family who were heavily involved in speculation through property and mortgage deals.<sup>64</sup>

For many Blacks, the American dream became a nightmare. As Levine and Harmon explain, "B-BURG buyers were far more likely to lose their homes through foreclosure and abandonment than to realize capital gains on their purchases. With little or no down payment, the new buyers enjoyed no equity. For those who had difficulty meeting mortgage and upkeep costs and who had no reserves to cover the needed repairs that inefficient or corrupt FHA appraisers had failed to report, it was often more prudent to walk away than to persevere." Later studies revealed that "more than one-half of all B-BURG purchasers would lose their homes by 1974. The effect on the city's black community would be devastating." The bankers, meanwhile, made money on mortgage-processing fees while passing on all the costs of foreclosure to the federal government.<sup>65</sup>

In the mid-1970s, Congress responded to the crisis of redlining and disinvestment with the 1975 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the 1976 Equal Credit Opportunity Act and the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act. As the Finn report for the BRA explains, "The ultimate effects of restricted credit availability on neighborhoods, it was generally agreed, are physical neighborhood decline, reduced housing values, crime, and reduced opportunities for socioeconomic mobility." The Community Reinvestment Act "emphasizes the continuing, affirmative obligation of federally-regulated banks to meet the credit needs of the communities in which they do business, including minority and low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. It does not ask banks to make risky loans. Rather, it requires fair banking practices."<sup>66</sup>



Practices remained unfair. Banks around the country continued discriminating and disinvesting while federal bank regulators rubber stamped their supposed compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act for more than two decades.<sup>67</sup> Between 1978 and 1988, banks closed 40 percent of their branch offices in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan while adding branches in White areas of Boston. A 1989 survey found that Boston's 12 largest lending institutions had five times more offices in White areas than in predominantly Black or Latino areas with the same total population.<sup>68</sup>

Fin's study for the BRA found that between 1981 and 1987, mortgage lending by banks in Boston neighborhoods—using city Neighborhood Statistical Areas—“demonstrates a pattern of marked racial disparity. Comparing neighborhoods with similar median family incomes, the ratio of mortgage loans per 1,000 housing units in white and minority neighborhoods was 2.9 to 1.” The lending gap increased to 3.4 to 1 when government-guaranteed mortgage loans were subtracted. The Neighborhood Statistical Areas with the lowest and second-lowest lending levels overall were Dudley/Brunswick-King (with 17 loans per 1,000 housing units) and Sav-Mor (25 loans per 1,000 units), which encompass a large section of the Dudley neighborhood.\* The citywide average was 70 loans per 1,000 units. The average number of loans in neighborhoods with a majority of people of color—including the former BBURG areas—was 35, while the average number of loans in White neighborhoods with comparable incomes was 102.<sup>69</sup>

The Finn study also found that “while banks appear to be reluctant to lend in minority neighborhoods, where housing is relatively affordable, they clearly participated in and facilitated the wave of condominium conversion that Boston experienced in the 1980's. In lower-income white neighborhoods bank mortgage capital has gone overwhelmingly to those neighborhoods with high levels of rental-to-condominium conversions—the city's gentrifying neighborhoods. Rental-to-condominium conversion has eroded Boston's affordable rental stock and displaced many families unable to afford a condominium unit.”<sup>70</sup> During the early 1980s, the market converted an average of “nearly 2,700 private apartments that were formerly affordable rentals, into over 2,700

\* The Finn study compared 60 Boston Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSAs). The Dudley/Brunswick-King NSA is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Magazine Street, the railroad tracks and Washington Street. The adjacent Sav-Mor NSA is bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Dudley Street and Warren Street.

condos, dwarfing all assistance efforts to create more affordable housing.” In 1985, “there were 4,525 conversions, more than during the entire decade of the 1970s.”<sup>71</sup>

A 1991 Federal Reserve Board study, analyzing 1990 Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data, found racial lending disparities around the country, with Blacks and Latinos rejected twice as often as White applicants, regardless of income. The Boston lending gap was 3 to 1. A crucial 1992 report by the Boston Federal Reserve that systematically controlled for the largest range of financial, employment and other lending variables confirmed the widespread bias that the banks had kept trying to rationalize away. The report (discussed more fully in Chapter Six) found that Blacks and Latinos “were two to three times as likely to be denied mortgage loans as whites. In fact, high-income minorities in Boston were more likely to be turned down than low-income whites.”<sup>72</sup>

Adding to the discriminatory picture, some of the same banks denying conventional mortgages and home-improvement loans in predominantly Black neighborhoods were colluding with contractor contractors who provided financing for repair work at sky high interest rates of 24, even 40 percent. Second mortgages were taken out with or without the homeowners' approval—using tactics such as hiding second mortgage agreements in a stack of contracts and loan documents or forging signatures—and the contractors then sold the loans to banks. To keep their homes, owners then had to pay the extortionist loans even when, as was often the case, the repair work was shoddy or never completed. Many lost their homes to foreclosure before the scam became a public scandal in 1991. Some of the banks benefiting from the loan-sharking cited their purchase of second mortgages in minority communities as evidence they were fulfilling the mandates of the Community Reinvestment Act.<sup>73</sup>

As for insurance redlining, a 1993 congressional hearing documented its continued role. “Insurance is the invisible key to economic advancement,” observed Rep. Joseph Kennedy, whose district includes a portion of Dudley. “The industry has used it to lock tight the door of economic opportunity for millions of consumers. The evidence presented to this Subcommittee clearly suggests a pattern of massive, nationwide discrimination against low-income and minority Americans.... The message that insurance companies are sending to low-income and minority consumers is crystal clear: you are irresponsible, you are dangerous, and you don't deserve insurance. Solely because

of the color of their skin, the size of their paycheck, and the address of their home, millions of Americans must pay more in premiums for less coverage, take their chances with shadowy unregulated and underfunded companies, or go without any insurance at all and face financial disaster as a daily fact of life."<sup>74</sup> Racist redlining and government irresponsibility has endangered inner city residents and communities.

## TRASHED AND BURNED

"Most of the problems of Roxbury today," Sam Warner wrote in 1962, "are not primarily housing problems, but the problems of urban society as a whole. The houses of Roxbury are but vestiges of an earlier, rapidly changing society which built to the measure of the moment and then left its remains for others to use as best they could."<sup>75</sup> As best they could in the face of redlining and other disinvestment and discrimination.

In the words of a BRA report, Roxbury, North Dorchester and Mattapan, "Boston's principal neighborhoods of concentration of minorities...experienced an exaggerated version of the city's era of throw-away housing, flowing from the population loss and the outflow of industry and jobs, 1950-1980, and an inequitable property tax system, in operation until 1983, with significantly higher effective tax rates for poorer neighborhoods. The result was large-scale housing abandonment and attrition."<sup>76</sup>

Arson is another factor. DSNi board member Bob Haas, formerly an engineer working for a Route 128 corporation, bought his home in the Uphams Corner area in 1970. He recalls what it was like to look across the railroad tracks deeper into the Dudley neighborhood and see houses burning: "They were burning down very quickly. You could go up after dinner onto the roof of this house and watch them burn down just any night you wanted to watch. And it was scary because the sparks would blow right over from these fires and we [feared] that sooner or later one of [our] houses would catch. But I was interested also in the underlying causes of this kind of thing. What could...make it so that so many houses had burned down so quickly when [so] many people needed housing?"

A 1985 report by the City of Boston Arson Prevention Commission outlined "three socio-economic matrixes for arson." The "Appreciating Matrix in which the value of property in an area is increasing in relation

to the incomes of traditional residents" corresponds to urban renewal/redevelopment areas. "This creates economic pressure for the dislocation of lower income residents. A classic example of this is the conversion of a rooming house to condominiums. A fire is of financial benefit to the developer under these circumstances because: 1) it drives out low-income residents without the cost of waiting for attrition and without the potential political resistance to mass evictions, 2) it does the work of gutting the building for rehabilitation, 3) insurance provides tax-free, interest-free financing for the rehabilitation of the structure."

In 1981, Roxbury's Highland Park neighborhood was dubbed "The Arson Capital of the Nation." Most of the fires, the Arson Commission notes, "were directly related to increased speculation due to the Southwest Corridor Project," the massive redevelopment project centered around the relocated mass transit Orange Line (which used to run through Dudley Station) and extending from the South End through Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. The Arson Commission says, "Many of the buildings that were burned were among the approximately 75 abandoned buildings that local residents attempted to save for low-income housing and community-based activities. When frightened residents, ignored then by Mayor [Kevin] White, appealed" to the state for assistance, they "learned that Highland Park's fire statistics were the highest in the Commonwealth."

"The second socio-economic matrix for arson is the Depreciating Matrix," explains the Arson Commission. "This is characterized by the long-term erosion of mortgage availability and the exodus of stable-income residents. This leads to a steady decline in property values and a sense of entrapment for the remaining residents. Often, depreciating areas reflect a sense of racial or class 'frontier' moving towards them. In these areas, arson is an easy solution to the problem of declining housing values and services." A solution, that is, for absentee landlords and residents and businesses willing and able to burn their way out of neighborhoods like Dudley.

The Arson Commission's third matrix is the "Tension Matrix," which is "characterized by sustained struggle between appreciating and depreciating forces. In these areas, long-term low- and moderate-income residents are impacted by declining housing values and services for them, while, at the same time, profits are made in housing speculation aimed at outside moderate- to high-income people. In this matrix, we find both 'rehabilitator' fires and 'selling to the insurance company' fires."<sup>77</sup>

A detailed BRA examination of the Dudley portion of the Dudley/Brunswick-King Neighborhood Statistical Area showed the devastation of housing in the area. In 1973, over 57 percent of the housing units in the center of the Dudley neighborhood required repairs in excess of \$1,000, an enormous sum for an area where well over a third of the families earned less than \$5,000 a year. Between 1947 and 1976, 2,200 housing units in 648 buildings were demolished, wiping out nearly half of the 1947 housing stock. Because of the relatively high taxes and the difficulty Dudley homeowners had in getting home-improvement financing for their aging houses and would-be owners had in getting mortgages, Dudley has seen a rise in abandonment, absentee-owned buildings and vacant lots.

As the BRA report explains it, "These absentee landlords have the financial capability to purchase properties with cash. A large number of these absentee landlords are real estate trusts whose trustees live outside of Boston. The majority of these absentee landlords have been receiving rents from their tenants without either bringing these properties up to the Housing Code or paying their taxes. Although there are presently few City owned buildings in the area there are many vacant parcels which belong to the City. By the time the City of Boston has been able to acquire these buildings through the lengthy foreclosure process only a badly vandalized, often burnt shell remains." The annual demolition rate rose from 6.9 structures during 1947-59, to 27.8 structures during 1960-69 and 40 structures per year during 1970-76. Between 1970 and 1975, 735 housing units were lost while new construction brought only 187 units (structures may have multiple units).

The result then was approximately 840 vacant lots covering 177 acres of land in the heart of the Dudley neighborhood. "Abandonment, if allowed to proceed unchecked," warned the BRA report, "can spread like cancer, taking whole city blocks."<sup>78</sup> The "cancer" continued to spread.

Dudley's weedy wasteland of vacant lots became a dumping ground for trash, a breeding ground for rats and a hiding place for criminal activity. "Often the most pervasive dumping has been done by City contractors," the BRA report stated. As the land once used for housing was allowed to become wasteland, so too were the parks and playgrounds. "There is a scarcity of adequate recreational facilities in terms of staff, programs, equipment and maintenance in the Dudley area," the report noted. Denison House, "which provided some after-

school programs for youth, burned down in the fall of 1975." The Mary Hannon Playground "is in shambles."<sup>79</sup>

### "THAT NEIGHBORHOOD DOESN'T MATTER"

Paul Bothwell bucked the White flight trend and moved to Dudley from the South End in 1976. He worked in the ministry of an evangelical Baptist church and became immersed in neighborhood affairs. The more involved he became, the more he saw that communities don't just deteriorate by themselves. "It's not something that's just sheer chance. It's not because people are stupid," says Bothwell. "This was really part of much, much larger forces that are at work and they may or may not be consciously malicious... This is the result of city policy, of other kinds of large-scale things that systematically cripple or dismember a community." Some neighborhoods are "fed." Others are bled.

Bothwell recalls what it was like to try to help people get bank loans when redlining was "in full force and explicit." The bankers would say, "Listen. Banks would be fools to invest money in that neighborhood to these kind of people... That's not what banks are for." Bothwell adds, "They didn't seem to have any huge guilt in saying that to us." He found it to be infuriating, demeaning and devastating.

Bothwell saw buildings burn and the land empty. He remembers the April 1976 four-alarm fire that destroyed four buildings on Dennis Street and damaged seven others on Stafford Street and Blue Hill Avenue. Arson was suspected in the abandoned building where the fire started.<sup>80</sup> Bothwell says, "The streets were just crawling with people saying, 'Hey! What in the world are we going to do now? Where are we going to go now?'"

Bothwell and a small group of residents began meeting together to address immediate problems, such as getting a quicker response from the Fire Department, and the longer-range problem of housing. They knew that residents couldn't do it alone and "began to shape proposals for what might be ways in which we, the community, could team up with the city." They focused on a triangle area bounded by Dudley, Blue Hill and West Cottage. "That's the farthest that any of us could even hope for or focus on... That area was becoming increasingly burned down and vacant... There was this desperate sense of 'How could we preserve what's still here?' And then later, 'How could we do something about renewing or rebuilding this vacant land?' Our initial

attempts to go to the city with some of these proposals were just laughed at.”

With the city, says Bothwell, “There was the sense of ‘17 years from now, you’re scheduled for urban renewal,’ which was going on in the South End at that time. They were always tearing things down... They never would take us seriously... We were trying... to figure out some way to build some sort of a land trust... that would place control of the land in the hands of community people... I think the city, either as a stall or whatever, said, ‘Listen. As long as you’re talking about land...’ They thought we were talking about gardening and that kind of stuff. They hooked us up with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to have somebody work on agricultural issues.” Fortunately, says Bothwell, the Agriculture Department contact “had a good head on him and a real vision for rebuilding communities and neighborhoods. He began to meet with us regularly [and] help us to formulate a plan.” He also provided small amounts of funding to facilitate the planning.

Bothwell and about ten others worked on the project for some two years. Every six months or so they’d have a community meeting at the Jesus Helps Church. The city, says Bothwell, moved from neglect to being “clearly and openly resistant to working with us.” The residents finally had a meeting with city officials to present their plans and propose a partnership. “This guy from the Department of Agriculture was with us... It was really doable, we thought. They listened and listened. Then they started to laugh—literally. They just laughed... One of them stood up and... he says, ‘This city don’t make partnerships with nobody! We don’t need partnerships! We don’t make partnerships! We do what we want to do and we’ll do it in our time!’ It was that up front.”

When people heard what happened at the next community meeting “they were just really in a rage,” says Bothwell. “Enough people had invested enough in this process at that point that they really owned it, they had some blood involved in it... Discouragement is understating it. There was a sense of fatalism, kind of like, ‘Hey, we should have known this all along... This is what this city is like.’ So that, I think, was quite a significant turning point, at least in mentality, for what was possible and what was not.”

Still, Bothwell and the others tried to enlist city support. “We said, ‘All right, okay. No partnership.’ We were really crawling on our knees. No partnership. Just help us out... They as much as said, ‘That neighborhood doesn’t matter to us. What’s going on there doesn’t matter.’”

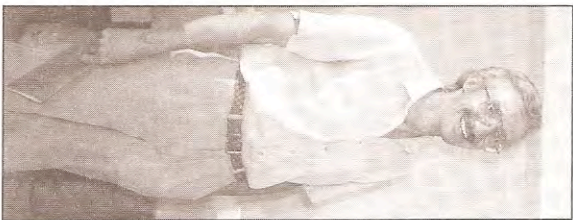
Blocked on the housing front, Bothwell and the others tried in desperation to turn some of the vacant land along Dennis Street into a big soccer field. They asked the city to close off part of Winthrop Street, which was “burned out, vacant, devastated, everybody dumping their trash there and everything else... The city stalled and hemmed and hawed and went round and round and sent people out to look and [said] they had to do some more studying on it. We’d push them and push them. Finally, the decision was no, they weren’t going to close the street because they don’t close streets for nobody. ‘If we start doing this for you, somebody else somewhere is going to want the street closed to make this or that! We’re going to have this city all chopped up into pieces because everybody wants streets closed!’ Nobody used the street. It’s covered with a thousand tons of sheet rock and metal and everything the trucks have dumped there, but they’re not going to close the street. And they wouldn’t let you do anything without it officially closing.” At that point, Bothwell’s group lost hope. “It was like this sense of having no allies. People were really powerless.”

A 1979 BRA report asserted, “The Dudley neighborhood is typical of many lower income areas in that City services are inadequate, in part, because of the lack of a well organized community.” The report continued, “Apathy seems pervasive among both residents and those responsible for street cleaning and garbage collecting. A cleanliness and hygiene campaign should be undertaken to raise neighborhood consciousness about trash and debris disposal stressing how residents, street cleaners and garbage collectors can all cooperate and contribute towards a better looking neighborhood.” In even more condescending fashion, the report encouraged the formation of neighborhood associations, saying, “In order to form such organizations members of these neighborhoods must be committed and willing to come to meetings as well as convince others to join.”<sup>81</sup>

It was the city, not residents, which had disinvested in the neighborhood and was unwilling to commit to its improvement. That would change in the 1980s with the creation of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.



Sophia McCarthy (l) and Margarita Sturniolo (r) taking a break during a DSNi community planning meeting at the Shirley-Eustis House, May 1989.



Paul Bothwell at the 1991 DSNi annual meeting.



Left: Jessie Farrier and Adalberto Teixeira (behind) at DSNi's salute to Gus Newport at the Strand Theatre, April 1992.  
Below: Newell Flather (l) and Nelson Merced (r) at the 1993 DSNi open house.



## CREATING THE DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

In 1981, students from Roxbury Community College (RCC), then located on Dudley Street near St. Patrick's Church, did a small survey of residents and students in the area around the college. Housing and arson were the top problems mentioned. "Poor street lighting, rats, lack of garbage collection, abandoned cars all add to the impression of an extremely depressed area, in which islands of freshly-painted, spruced up homes and apartment buildings may be found," the report observed. At the same time, residents and students described the neighborhood as friendly and warm. They "praised their community for its racial harmony and tolerance." There was a sense of "pride in the neighborhood, a determination to fight outside encroachment, arson & abandonment, and a determination to keep the area livable."

Among those quoted in the survey was a White woman on Shirley Street. She said, "Our family has seen it all happen. They tore down house after house. They talked about urban renewal and they built

those damn infill houses.\* We didn't see any renewal. We saw a catastrophe. But we stayed. And now there are new people—black people, Spanish [speaking], Portuguese [Cape Verdean]. You know what, I see them and I see my father and mother struggling, proud of their little house in this neighborhood. I have to say I like what I see of these other people."<sup>1</sup>

### SEARCHING FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Following the study, RCC participants organized a neighborhood meeting—interpretation was provided in Spanish and Portuguese—attended by many of the groups that would later be part of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, including La Alianza Hispana, Roxbury Multi-Service Center, St. Patrick's Church, Orchard Park Tenants Association, WAITT House and the Mt. Pleasant Neighborhood Association.<sup>2</sup> The meeting resulted in a loose "Dudley Neighborhood Coalition" that never really got off the ground. At that point, the coalition lacked both consensus and resources.

Among the coalition participants was La Alianza Hispana Director Nelson Merced, a Puerto Rican-born community activist who would later become the first Latino elected to the Massachusetts State Legislature. "I went to a few of those meetings," he recalls vaguely. "It was basically about crime issues and stuff like that, but it was very weak, and didn't really get going."

La Alianza Hispana, a multiservice agency, commissioned an in-depth study of Dudley by MIT graduate students in planning and architecture assisted by Professor Tunney Lee. The December 1981 report, *From the Ground Up*, was prepared by Total Studio, a class in environmental design. La Alianza Hispana wanted the report to help guide Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, a community development corporation it had newly established with the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation (HOPE). *From the Ground Up* emphasized the need to build on the strengths of community residents and agencies, organize residents around immediate needs and reclaim the vacant land as a "potential asset" by cleaning it up and putting the

\* Boarded-up boxy brick structures scattered around the neighborhood originally intended to fill in some vacant lots with public housing, but abandoned, half-finished after developers went bankrupt and funding dried up.

open space to use as urban gardens, parks and play areas. It suggested acquiring the land through a land trust for housing and other longer-term neighborhood development.<sup>3</sup>

In February 1984, La Alianza Hispana and Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation organized a "Community Search Conference" with the technical support of the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning. It was a strategic planning conference of "community stakeholders and activists." In a discussion of Dudley trends, Search Conference participants highlighted common themes: Dudley is "a neighborhood in flux," which "seems to function under a system of managed chaos." It is a community "under siege" by external forces and "on the defensive, protecting scarce human and physical resources from being coopted or lost altogether." Dudley is "fragmented," particularly among ethnic groups and within many families. It is "disfranchised," without meaningful access to the local political system and financial capital. Among the conference ideas for future action was that of a "Constitution for Development," whose elaboration would bring the community together around a shared vision, change its image as a high-risk investment area and establish community standards and priorities for housing, employment and other issues.<sup>4</sup>

In spring 1984, not long after the Community Search Conference, Nelson Merced was seeking funds to renovate the facilities of La Alianza Hispana, which is housed in the old police and fire stations on Dudley Street just across the street from St. Patrick's Church. Under Merced's leadership, La Alianza had become the largest Latino educational and social service agency in the Boston area. They couldn't let the building fall apart.

Along with the paint and plumbing, Merced wanted to replace the stained, threadbare carpet that he saw as a symbol of the down-trodden Dudley community. He approached the Boston-based Riley Foundation, one of the few local foundations to provide capital improvement grants for inner city organizations. Merced knew that Riley Foundation personnel got out into the community to visit grantees and he hoped to take the trustees and staff on a neighborhood tour and discuss ideas for improving the area.

### THE RILEY FOUNDATION

The Riley Foundation was founded in 1972 as a charitable trust from the estate of philanthropist Mabel Louise Riley, heir to a family

fortune made during New England's textile heyday. Although the Riley Foundation is able to make grants throughout Massachusetts, the trustees have focused their attention on the city of Boston with particular emphasis on its poorest neighborhoods, especially those that have struggled to nourish a multiracial community. Reflecting Mabel Louise Riley's dedication to children, the foundation has made improving the lives of children a theme that runs throughout its grant support in the areas of social services, community development, youth programs, education, the arts and the urban environment. Newell Flather, the foundation's administrator, believes that "Riley's ultimate mission for the Dudley Initiative, to improve the quality of life of the families living in the Dudley community, is...essentially a children's project."

The Riley Foundation is one of Massachusetts' larger private foundations—though modest by national standards—with grants totaling about \$1.5 million a year. People often think Riley is bigger than it is because its average grant size is twice that of Boston's larger foundations and it has a reputation as an innovative, risk-taking foundation. Indeed, as Riley Trustee Andrew Bailey emphasizes, Riley is careful not to overcommit its grant resources so that it can be in a financial position to respond to special needs and unusual opportunities. In the 1970s, for example, Riley took a lead role in responding to the racial violence challenging court-ordered school desegregation and in supporting efforts to improve public education. At the time the Riley Foundation visited La Alianza Hispana in 1984, it was actively looking for an innovative new project initiative to support.

Riley is governed by a board of three individual trustees and a representative of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, the foundation's financial manager. The three grantmaking trustees—Andrew Bailey, Douglas "Doad" Danner and Robert Holmes Jr.—are lawyers in the prestigious Boston law firm of Powers & Hall, established in 1897. Though traditionally conservative corporate lawyers in many respects, Bailey, Danner and Holmes have used their grantmaking power to improve opportunities for those most hurt by society's inequalities. Newell Flather has been the foundation's primary staff-person since its inception—first as an employee of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company and then as a principal in Grants Management Associates, an innovative company he and two colleagues, Ala Reid and Mary Phillips, started to provide grantmaking, administration and consulting services to foundations and individual donors. Flather's experience in Ghana as a member of the first group

#### CREATING THE DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE 41

of Peace Corps volunteers in 1961, his familiarity with the displacement of Black homeowners during Philadelphia urban renewal in 1969 and his role as a founding trustee of Oxfam-America, which works to end hunger and promote grassroots development in the Third World, helped solidify his commitment to racial and economic justice.

Unlike most charitable foundations, Riley's staff and trustees have a practice of making field visits to applicants and grantees. "Kicking the tires," trustee Andrew Bailey calls it.

#### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Early in the morning on April 12, 1984, trustee Doad Danner drove Newell Flather, Bob Holmes and Andrew Bailey to Roxbury, a short ride from Powers & Hall. They visited two other organizations before arriving at La Alianza Hispana at the intersection of Dudley Street and Blue Hill Avenue. Though the trustees had been in Dudley before, Bob Holmes recalls, "It's the first time that we really had a good look at it." On the way to La Alianza they recognized the name of a warehouse storing Powers & Hall files. Holmes didn't know then how familiar Dudley would become.

Nelson Merced gave the Riley visitors a tour of La Alianza, including the classroom space where worn, dirty carpeting covered the floor. Newell Flather can still recall how Merced explained why La Alianza needed funds for new carpeting. Among the many services the agency provided were adult English language classes. Merced's case, says Flather, was you can't help "bring people into the mainstream" if negative conditions make them "feel they're second-rate." He "felt that as a sign of respect for the people who were learning the language, a carpet would have significant symbolic value." As it turned out, the carpet became a jumping off point for a much larger initiative to bring respect to the people of Dudley and stop their treatment as second-class citizens by government and the private sector.

After touring La Alianza, Flather and the trustees met with Merced and Melvyn Colón, the director of Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation. Merced's presentation of agency plans and neighborhood conditions was reinforced by his references to a wall map and aerial photograph—blowups of those prepared during the La Alianza Hispana-MIT *From the Ground Up* project—which, in Flather's words, "graphically illustrated the story of disinvestment. The combination of Merced's easy style, obvious experience and well-articulated expres-

sions of concern were very convincing, and his determination to bring about change had a gripping effect on the gathering."

Over half the area around La Alianza was colored in gray. "What's all the gray?" Holmes asked. "Is that new housing?" On the contrary, Merced explained, that was vacant land, used as a dumping ground for abandoned cars and trash instead of needed housing. Melvyn Colón talked about Nuestra Comunidad's mission to develop affordable housing in Dudley. There was enough gray space to keep busy many community development corporations.

"I think we were all astonished at how much vacant land there was," says Holmes. "So, we suggested [Merced] take us around... You know, a picture is worth a thousand words." It was a picture of torched buildings and torched dreams.

Merced showed the Riley people a street that "looked like Beirut"—as if it had been bombed. He remembers the trustees commenting, "I can't believe this! In the middle of Boston, an area like this!" Holmes says he "knew the area had a lot of problems, but I didn't realize that it had been neglected as much as it had." He called it "negative space, a place defined by neglect."

In the taxi going back to Powers & Hall the trustees were upset. They were "bumping and bouncing" over the potholes, recalls Flather. "It was raining out. It was cold and gray... It was at that worst period after the snows have gone but spring has not yet come that we made that trip. Nothing in New England looks beautiful at that time of year. Dudley looked particularly sad."

Flather says the trustees felt, "Sure, they had made plenty of good grants, but they were not solving many real problems." The culture of grantmaking in Boston and around the country was to spread money around, a little bit here, a little bit there. Riley had bucked that culture somewhat by making its grants larger and fewer. Still, the staff and trustees wondered, "Are we really making a difference?" Riley had established itself before as a "leadership foundation" in school desegregation and urban environment. It provided ongoing "leadership and leverage," says Flather, through its willingness to "give the first boost of support to somebody," especially inner city organizations led by people of color.

"How could Riley consider itself a leadership foundation if there was a community like Dudley?" challenged Holmes on the way back from La Alianza. "What was the point of fixing in Alianza when the neighborhood was falling apart?"

Flather pointed out that Dudley was the most disadvantaged area in the city. "Why not see if we can't focus our money right there," Holmes suggested. The other trustees and Flather agreed.

At their grantmaking meeting the next day, the trustees approved a \$30,000 capital improvement grant for La Alianza Hispana, but, as a symbol of their intention to make a significant contribution to rebuilding the neighborhood, they earmarked no funds for replacing the worn carpet. As recorded in the minutes, "Discussion centered on the development of a one or two year plan for the Riley Foundation with the objective of focusing the Foundation's grant funds in one area of the City, or perhaps on one specific problem, in order to effect change." The trustees decided to consider that "if funds are to be focused in one place, the depressed area of Roxbury/Dorchester should be a high priority."

The trustees also suggested "providing long term support for an organization to free it from major financial concerns allowing leadership to concentrate on program building rather than fundraising."<sup>5</sup> They were thinking long-range and large-scale and they wanted a potential grantee to be able to operate that way.

Flather was authorized to study the appropriate area Riley should focus on and define the major problems and opportunities in that area. Three months later, Flather and research associate Nancy Condit presented their report, *The Dudley Initiative*, to the Riley trustees. Drawing on earlier studies such as *From the Ground Up*, they wrote, "Clearly Dudley is among the hardest hit areas in Boston.... Approximately 30% of the land in Dudley is vacant, excluding streets... The vacant land has a blighting effect. Business decline... has been accelerated by the population loss. The remaining population and the new immigrant population is characterized by low income, low education levels and high unemployment" (Italics in original.) "Housing," the report concluded, "is the greatest need and the most important priority facing Dudley."<sup>6</sup>

In preparing their report, Flather and Condit interviewed numerous people from nonprofit agencies, foundations, business and government. "Virtually all persons interviewed viewed the Riley initiative as bold, if not brave. While none was in any way negative, all indicated that... [it] would involve very high risk."<sup>7</sup>

Father Walter Waldron, who was based for 18 years in the South End, recalls talking to Flather within months after coming to St. Patrick's Church in February 1984. Flather "explained what the Riley Foundation



wanted to do, which basically was to put a good deal of their money into one project that would have a dramatic impact on the area" and leverage other funding and support. "I told him I thought it was a great idea if it could work." Waldron was among those who would help get DSNi going.

The Flather-Condit report provided the Riley trustees with a funding scenario for Dudley in which new grant outlays would reach \$2 million by mid-1989. That wasn't far off the mark, as it turned out. At the trustees' meeting on July 18, 1984, though La Alianza Hispana and Nuestra Comunidad were described as "the two top agencies through which Riley could work in the Dudley community," the "trustees agreed that the undertaking will require a lot of players, including the city, and would require total cooperation on the part of all Dudley agencies and a special emphasis on bringing all agencies and races to work together." Riley staff met further with Dudley area agencies to gauge their interest and "discuss the formation of a Riley/Dudley Advisory Board which may include a staff member from each agency."<sup>8</sup>

### DUDLEY ADVISORY GROUP

Nelson Merced began meeting with the leaders of other agencies to discuss the Riley Foundation's growing interest in the area. They included Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation Director Melvyn Colón; Ricardo Millett of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center (RMSC), a large agency providing a wide range of social services and community development programs for the Greater Roxbury community; Valerie Gregory from the Cape Verdean Community House (now defunct), the only organization then serving Cape Verdeans in Boston; Father Walter Waldron of St. Patrick's Church; and Sisters Pauline O'Leary and Mary Rogers from WAITT House (We're All In This Together), a small agency linked to the Sisters of Charity and St. Patrick's Church, emphasizing multicultural harmony and empowerment through adult education.

Merced recalls most people in the early meetings being "kind of skeptical, but open-minded. Remember, at this point, not many people thought of that vacant land as a resource. I mean, it wasn't until probably the end of that year that the attitudes towards the land switched from a liability...to an asset."

The Riley Foundation invited Dudley area organizations to a September 17 meeting at the Shirley-Eustus House, the historic governor's mansion just off Dudley Street. Surrounded by a low stone wall, the mansion with its large green lawn is a stark contrast to adjacent weedy vacant lots long used for illegal dumping. The Shirley-Eustus House was a symbol of how close the neighborhood was to the doors of power, yet how difficult it was to enter them.

To the Riley Foundation, the Shirley-Eustus House represented a resource for Dudley residents. The Foundation had helped restore the mansion with a \$25,000 grant in 1981 (it later helped restore the nearby historic Eliot Burying Ground where Governors Thomas and Joseph Dudley are entombed). When Riley was approached for another grant by the Shirley-Eustus House in 1982, one of the trustees responded, "We can't help you for your own sake. Our only grantmaking interest in the Shirley-Eustus House is its location in this neighborhood and what you can do for the people here." Riley's next grant did not come until 1992, when it gave the Shirley-Eustus House money to purchase adjacent vacant land to create a park open to the neighborhood. By then, the Riley Foundation had invested heavily in Dudley.

In planning the September 1984 meeting, Flather wanted to make sure that Riley would be viewed as neutral with regard to area agencies. Riley didn't want the initiative dominated by La Alianza Hispana or any other agency. The Shirley-Eustus House was considered neutral space. It had the convenience of a large meeting room, and the inconvenience of no heat. To chair the meeting, Flather decided to bring in a skilled outside facilitator on the advice of Janet Taylor, then executive director of the Associated Grantmakers of Massachusetts, and Ala Reid, who helped found Grants Management Associates. The facilitator was Bill Slobnik, director of the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC), a technical assistance agency that has received regular support from Riley and other local foundations. What began with a call from Flather to Slobnik to facilitate "just one meeting" became a long relationship between CTAC and the Dudley initiative.

Flather was aware, says Slobnik, that if he chaired the meeting the dynamic would have been one of "groups playing to a foundation." Merced provided an introduction to the meeting and Flather welcomed people on behalf of the Riley trustees. Then Flather made what Slobnik calls an important symbolic gesture—he "took himself away from the head table and sat in the outer area." Flather plays down the significance of that gesture. "Quite honestly, I feel more comfortable sitting back...in

my chair, so that's why I do it." The important point, Flather says, is that "the Riley trustees made it clear that they were there to listen and learn, and that was really the posture they took."

What followed was a wide-ranging discussion of the neighborhood's problems and priorities for action, including the need to acquire land, develop and rehabilitate housing, help tenants organize, provide job training, involve youth in the planning process, build a broad base of support and "conduct planning on development, services, resources, models and open space."<sup>9</sup>

Riley's involvement provided an obvious incentive for the participants to suspend skepticism, forge a consensus and act on it. As Merced observes, "There was a clear statement from the Riley Foundation and from its trustees that they were interested in doing something in a major way. They didn't know what it was, but they were willing to go through a process to find out." The participation of their officers was ample evidence of the seriousness of Riley's commitment. "So even though they hedged their bets so that just in case this whole thing fell apart they had an out...it was pretty much understood that they were going to give money. So it was in everybody's best interest...to make sure that happened."

The "Dudley Advisory Group"<sup>10</sup> moved quickly. From the first meeting on, there was an effort to rotate responsibility and, in particular, make sure the initiative was not seen as either "Latino dominated" or "Black dominated." As a continuing facilitator, Slotnik's methodology "was to give different people a chance to be on center stage, not only for ego purposes but to really have the leadership base of this group be as broad and as diverse as possible."

On October 15, 1984, with 22 people in attendance, the Dudley Advisory Group voted unanimously "to establish an organization" and set up an ad hoc governance committee to define its structure. The group also voted to define the organization's geographic area, based on task force recommendations.

Bob Holmes recalls, "There was a sense that this was a long shot, but we might be able to actually do something. Maybe not go all the way, but do something" more than had been done before. It was like "a venture capital deal," says Holmes. "You don't hit a home run every time, you don't expect to. You take a chance."

## BOUNDARIES

The drawing of geographic boundaries was a controversial matter that might have split a less committed group. It reflected the turf and race issues that often define—and undermine—neighborhood politics.

By some accounts, the methodology was poor when it came to approving the boundaries. The group proceeded by voting on the smallest geographic region proposed and then voted on additions to that region one by one, with the boundaries widening as long as there were majority votes in favor. Nelson Merced says, "There was a big motivation to try to focus in on the vacant land." He felt that making the boundaries too wide would be "watering down the resources that we had for the purpose of developing the vacant land." Melvyn Colón acknowledges that when it came to the region later called the "core" area, "There was a sense of advocating. This was the area that Nuestra and La Alianza had been working with, and knew a lot about in their studies." To some people it looked like a classic case of some agencies, in this case the Latino-run agencies, protecting their turf at the expense of others.

A key question was whether to draw one of the core area boundaries at Quincy Street. Though geographically logical, since Quincy was a major thorough street, it left out the office of Roxbury Multi-Service Center (RMSC), two blocks further south. Serving the Greater Roxbury area, RMSC's clientele is largely African American, though it provides multilingual services for Latinos and others, such as a rape crisis center. In 1970, RMSC leaders had created the autonomous La Alianza Hispana to better meet the needs of the area's growing Latino population. Though RMSC's service area includes all of Dudley, the physical exclusion of the office from the core area raised a perception of "Latino domination" that would linger.

Bill Slotnik recalls that RMSC's representatives to the Dudley Advisory Group, Ricardo Millett and Shelley Hoon, never made a big issue of RMSC's relationship to the boundaries. "I think they were legitimately there, as were many people, wanting to see something happen that could benefit the community. If they could be a help to it, that would be great. But they didn't see...the Riley cash register ringing in the background. So their approach was pretty much, 'If this is what somebody wants, we're not going to fight it.'" However, says Slotnik, "some other people there were very indignant about that and felt that

it was a real mistake and would be seen as a real slap to the Black community."

"It wasn't just the boundaries on the map," Ricardo Millett said later. "It was also the boundaries in our heads."<sup>11</sup> "It was a vote that was essentially mishandled," asserts Melvyn Colón. "I don't know how we came around to it, but finally we agreed that this was the area," with Quincy Street as one of the boundaries. And then Newell Flather proposed to accommodate wider boundaries by creating a "secondary area," extending, for example, to Grove Hall and Uphams Corner. Others questioned the idea, says Colón, but in deference to Riley they passed the proposal without much discussion. It was an atypical moment in Riley's ongoing relationship with DSNi. Especially after control passed from the agency-led Dudley Advisory Group to an elected, resident-majority board, Flather and the Riley trustees deferred to a DSNi process in which Riley was a key outside supporter, not a decision maker.

Flather explains that he recognized "the core area by itself was going to take an extraordinary effort and extraordinary resources. But I think I felt from the foundation's point of view that to leave out the secondary area left us" without sufficient geographical area, population or institutions. "It left out potential allies and resources...I was thinking from a funder's point of view that the larger area would serve as more of an attraction to other funders we were going to [need]. I thought it was important, while not getting carried away, that we be as inclusive as possible." The Riley Foundation saw "a potentially vibrant commercial district" in struggling Uphams Corner and had an interest in the historic Strand Theatre, Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation and other Uphams Corner nonprofits, some of which had been involved in the Dudley initiative from the beginning.

The Dudley Advisory Group approved the following definitions of the core and secondary areas, which guide DSNi today (see the map at the front of the book for boundaries):

1. The inner configuration will be the core area. As such, it will be the first priority for focusing efforts in physical development, business development and services.
2. The surrounding area will be incorporated into the overall planning for services and, through phasing, will be a secondary area of emphasis.<sup>12</sup>

## "ORGANIZATION OF ORGANIZATIONS"

The Dudley Advisory Group approved a governance structure on November 28 that was expected to last "for the period of time up to the point of there being a community consensus on an overall action plan for the core area. Then, the governance structure will be reviewed and reconsidered." The governance structure, it turned out, didn't make it past the first community-wide meeting.

The governance structure approved by the advisory group reflected their view of the emerging Dudley entity as, in Nelson Merced's words, an "organization of organizations." While there was recognition of the need for community support, the priority at that point was not participation by community residents, but building trust among the participating agencies and community activists. There was to be a 23-member governing board, "broadly representative of the community," with: 4 community members from the core area (Black, Cape Verdean, Hispanic, White); 5 nonprofit agencies from the health and human service fields; 2 other nonprofit organizations or groups; 2 representatives each from community development corporations, small businesses, the broader business community and religious community; 2 others determined by the board to enhance racial/ethnic/age/sex representation, skills or resources; and 1 official each from the city and state.

With boundaries and governance structure in hand, the advisory group turned its attention to the first community meeting. According to the Ad Hoc Community-Wide Meeting Committee, "This meeting will be geared to building on the consensus already achieved, to bringing more people in to where the process currently is."<sup>13</sup> It was assumed that the meeting, which would inform and sign up initial organization members, would be followed two weeks later by another community meeting to elect the board—a board that would overlap greatly with the advisory group.

As Merced explains it, "We were going to have a community-wide meeting to announce this coalition, and we were going to do wide... outreach to make sure people got there, and therefore we used a church because it was the biggest room we had in the community... We would then proceed to an election... That thing was scheduled like bang, bang, which was really optimistic. I mean, it just showed to a certain extent that everyone was sort of on the same wavelength. We're going to elect ourselves to this board, and then we'll bring in

some other community folks, so you don't need to spend that much time."

The advisory group unanimously approved the name; the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, on January 16, 1985. A month later, DSNI was the subject of a *Boston Globe* article titled, "Change is in the air along Dudley Street." RMSC Director Ricardo Millet was quoted saying, "If this works, I think we can prove that neighborhood-based planning is viable. So far as I'm concerned, it's already been successful in bringing people together to the table. We've transcended the barriers, both ethnic and language."<sup>14</sup>

### BRA DUDLEY SQUARE PLAN: RENEWED FEARS OF DISPLACEMENT

There was another kind of change in the air along Dudley Street as the Boston Redevelopment Authority's "Dudley Square Plan" was leaked to the press before DSNI's first community meeting. The city was so startled by the backlash to the plan that they tried to deny its existence, a moot point when copies of the draft were distributed around Boston. The BRA's "Strategy for Neighborhood Revitalization" centered around Dudley Station, Roxbury's primary commercial center. The BRA plan extended into DSNI's target area, from the Orchard Park public housing development to an envisioned Shirley-Eustis Park and Moreland Street Historical District.

"For a third of a century," the draft BRA plan began, "an ebb tide of negative factors—population loss, housing abandonment, uncoordinated government policies, private disinvestment, etc.—have combined to reduce Roxbury from a populous, thriving, industrial neighborhood integrated with the City economy, to an isolated shadow of its former self. In addition, race continued to be a significant factor limiting social access and economic opportunity. By 1980, the per capita income of the Dudley Square residents was one of the lowest in the nation, on a par with the poorest counties in Mississippi, or Indian Reservations of the West."

The BRA proposed a "New Town" strategy with a \$750 million complex of office towers, hotels, housing, historical parks and light manufacturing in the northern Dudley area. The plan called for building high-, moderate- and low-income housing—with "home ownership opportunities for families with incomes as low as \$20,000."<sup>15</sup> That wasn't

very low. Boston's median family income was only \$22,200 in 1984; in Roxbury, one out of two families earned under \$11,750.<sup>16</sup> Many saw the "New Town" strategy as the old "urban removal."

Income was far lower at the Orchard Park public housing development for which the BRA proposed "rehabilitation... under a co-op home ownership program for present tenants, and renovation of Dearborn School into condominiums and a community center." In 1984, the average per capita income in Boston Public Housing Authority (BHA) developments—housing many White families—was \$2,156. Orchard Park was then home to 600 Black and Latino families, most of them headed by women. A 1985 survey found that in Orchard Park and other BHA developments, most of the single mothers were involuntarily unemployed or underemployed—at part-time, low-wage jobs, for example—because they could not find adequate child care; another major factor was the lack of job training and placement assistance. As the survey report put it, the "findings contradict the often held image of low income people who have no interest in becoming self-sufficient or improving the lives of their children."<sup>17</sup>

The BRA plan would more likely lead to displacement of Orchard Park tenants than the child care, employment and fair wages supporting home ownership. "Everybody was suspicious of the BRA and the city," says Sarah Flint, then chair of the Orchard Park United Tenants Association (now known simply as the Orchard Park Tenants Association). "We had heard rumors that there was a plan... that totally wiped out Orchard Park and put condominiums. You know, these are our homes. We have been living there for years, and we were like, 'No, wait a minute. Hold on! We have to find out more about this.'" The tenant association began organizing intensively and, as seen later, Orchard Park subsequently developed a resident-led renewal plan.

The BRA's Dudley Square plan promised "citizen participation," but weakly defined it, for example, as public attendance at open meetings to discuss particular projects and the establishment of a "Planning and Development Advisory Committee." This non-resident-oriented committee would have "five members selected from governmental agencies, five members from organizations, and five members from businesses who have demonstrated special concern for the Dudley area." Though the BRA plan promised 12,000 jobs and affirmative action, it acknowledged that Roxbury residents—disproportionately unemployed—were at a disadvantage in terms of training, education and job experience.

The BRA admitted that its strategy "could lead to displacement of existing residents, the gentrification of existing single-family neighborhoods, and jobs for 'new' residents at the expense of current residents." It warned that "The paradox of increasing poverty amidst growing wealth, which has been characteristic of the City's economy for the past decade, could also occur in the Dudley Square area."

The BRA plan claimed, "Roxbury's era of throw-away housing and castaway land is over. Values of residential and nonresidential property are rising...Private market forces are moving with the new tide."<sup>18</sup>

Dudley residents wondered if they would be cast away with a new tide of speculation and gentrification. Some of them had been displaced by the previous tidal wave of South End urban renewal. The new Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative appeared more urgent than ever.

### **"WE DON'T SEE THE COMMUNITY HERE?": BRINGING THE NEIGHBORHOOD INTO THE DUDLEY STREET INITIATIVE**

Almost 200 people came to St. Patrick's Church on Saturday morning, February 23, 1985, for DSNI's first community-wide meeting. The hall resembled a makeshift mini United Nations. Cape Verdean and Spanish-speaking residents were given headphones through which they could listen to simultaneous translations.

Chosen for its central location and large meeting space, St. Patrick's continues to provide a home for many DSNI events. Seen with hindsight, however, the church architecture highlighted the gap between the agencies and residents at that first community meeting. "We set ourselves up," says Nelson Merced. Dudley Advisory Group members, "all these people in business suits," sat at a long table on a platform in front of the altar. What an image, comments Merced. "It was like the Last Supper!"

Bill Slotnik, who cochaired the meeting with Melvyn Colón, uses a similar analogy. "You look like the apostles up there with Christ in back of you. And you're all sitting there, and you're up higher than everybody, where they're used to seeing, you know, the representatives of God speak." Fortunately, residents didn't treat them that way.

After introductions, there was a review of the initiative's background and priorities. "In the next five years, Roxbury and North Dorchester will change," Merced told the meeting. "That confronts us with the three questions: Who will change the community? Who will benefit from this change? And how will this change come about?" The BRA's Dudley Square Plan was on a lot of minds. Stephen Johnson of the Greater Roxbury Development Corporation declared that the BRA's outreach to the community "has been insulting and offensive."<sup>19</sup>

Numerous issues were raised in the open discussion that followed, including: "the need to translate development issues into a form that is easily understood by the average citizen, the importance of developing jobs for neighborhood residents, the need to benefit all the racial groups involved in the area, the need for coordination relative to other Initiatives (e.g., the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority, discussed later), the importance of community residents being directly involved in the Initiative, the need to prevent what has happened in the South End from happening in the Dudley Street neighborhood, the need for the community to gain control of the land in order to stop outside developers from transforming the land in ways that would be unresponsive to the needs of the community."<sup>20</sup>

The pivotal moment in the meeting came after presentation of the governance structure and board nomination procedure. Some residents angrily challenged the legitimacy of the proposed board in which only a minority of seats (4 out of 23) were specifically designated for residents—though it was assumed by the organizers that some of the other slots would be filled by people who were also residents. To some residents, the new Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative looked like the failed efforts of the past that made false promises in the name of a community that wasn't really represented.

In Slotnik's words, "All hell broke loose" after Ricardo Millet finished the board presentation. "We don't see the community here!" was the common theme. The meeting's convenors began losing control. This was clearly not going to be a meeting that simply ratified a pre-existing consensus.

"Who the hell are you people and what do you want?" demanded Earl Coleman, a longtime neighborhood resident and hospital lab technician. "Who is Riley? Why should we trust you?"

Though not everyone was so skeptical, people were expressing real concern for their futures and for the neighborhood. The initiative, says Merced, "was perceived as a major undertaking—when you had

all the community organizations and executive directors sitting before you in front of the church with a major foundation." People worried, "Were they going to build skyscrapers and displace people? There was a lot of fear."

In his conception of an "organization of organizations" Merced recalls being "motivated by speed and expediency." He thought the organizations were sufficiently representative of the community. "It wasn't really until we got to that meeting that people told us, 'No, you guys are not representative of the community.' I think it was a surprise to everybody." It shouldn't have been such a surprise. Merced acknowledges, "We only represented very small sections of the community...I didn't have any illusion that Alianza was representative of the community because I always had a hard time trying to get clients to be part of the board, although we had people [whom] lived in the community on the board." At the DSNi meeting, "the issue of direct representation was brought to the floor by the community. I think the community was blaming the human service organizations for the conditions in which the community was in."

Earl Coleman, Fadliah Muhammad, Ché Madyun and other residents challenged the whole assumption that this was a neighborhood initiative. "How many of you people up there live in this neighborhood?" Madyun asked the panel. Slotnik remembers one person raising a hand. Others saw no hands go up. The anger built.

Ché Madyun was then a parent coordinator with METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), a desegregation program begun in the 1960s for Black children to attend school in the suburbs. She first heard about the Dudley initiative when her friend and supervisor at METCO, Qasim Abdul-Tawwab—who is married to DSNi activist Najwa Abdul-Tawwab—told her about the February 17 *Boston Globe* article on DSNi; he thought it would interest her since he knew she wanted better housing for her family. After reading the article, Madyun decided to "go check this out and see what they're doing. Because the thing that alarmed me when I read the article was I felt like we were going to have displacement like the South End...and I felt like I needed to stay involved so I would know what was going on." Madyun says she "wasn't extremely aware, but it was kind of obvious that they were building these things called condos...I knew they were expensive and they were putting people out. I knew that there were more homeless people on the street than there ever had been and I said, 'Well, who am I to be any different than these people?'"

What do you do, go wave your bachelor's degree and say, 'Hey, look, I've got a bachelor's degree—let me move in?'" She went to the meeting with feelings of both "hope and fear."

At the meeting, Madyun questioned how the initiative could be community-based if it was not resident-controlled. She also asked, "How can we nominate people to represent us when we don't know each other?...I don't know whether I should vote for them or not."

Fadliah Muhammad, a neighborhood resident active with the local American Muslim Mission, brought the meeting to a crossroads of continued confrontation or cooperation between agency representatives and residents. Instead of speaking from the floor microphone facing the initiative organizers at the table in front, Muhammad turned around and talked to the residents in the "audience." Slotnik remembers it as a "superb job of public speaking...It was clear that what she was doing was denying the legitimacy of these people...It was also saying that the people whose voices need to be heard are the 200 people who are in this room."

The organizers needed to stop the Us versus Them momentum from building. Bob Holmes thought that those saying the neighborhood was not represented were making sense. He decided to jump in. Here was a conservative blond-haired corporate lawyer in an expensive suit—who not only lived outside Dudley, he lived in affluent suburban Duxbury—speaking from the heart. Slotnik remembers him saying, "I want to tell you a little bit about who I am. I'm Bob Holmes...I'm not from this neighborhood...I probably know less about Roxbury and North Dorchester than anybody in the room...I work for a corporate law firm. I'm a trustee of the Riley Foundation. I'm probably what a lot of you think of when you think of the downtown interests. And if you want to turn this neighborhood around, it can't just be done by...the residents, and not with agencies." He told them that funders would want to see agency involvement. "They want to give money to somebody they know and have some relationship with. If you're going to make a difference in this neighborhood, the only way to do it is to have everybody work together...I don't know how to deal with the tension here, but if everybody isn't working together you can't accomplish it." Today, Holmes doesn't remember what he said. "No, it was happening real fast, and it's like catching a pass. I guess. You just do it!"

Holmes provided the breathing space for meeting participants to move down the road of cooperation. Fadliah Muhammad reiterated,

"We're talking about the community's role in this." Slotnick then proposed taking two straw polls to see how people felt on the issue of community control. There was overwhelming consensus that both the general membership and governing board "be modified so as to ensure that 51% or more" of their members be residents from the core or secondary areas.<sup>21</sup>

At that point DSNI clearly took the road to community control. A previously scheduled follow-up meeting was recast as an open meeting where the consensus for resident leadership would be translated into a new governing structure. The DSNI convenors made clear, says Holmes, "We want to go forward. We don't want to go back... Please come."

"Well, okay," thought Ché Madyun. "I'm going to come and put my input in there and see where this thing goes." She explains, "I've always told my children, if you don't like something, you just don't sit around and wait for somebody to do it for you. You can help to change it yourself."

Many other residents felt the same way. The openness and responsiveness demonstrated at the first community meeting remained constant sources of DSNI strength.

## NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: RESIDENT MAJORITY

A few nights later some 70 people, most of them residents, crowded into the governance structure committee meeting at La Alianza Hispana. Residents showed they were going to assume the responsibility for community control they had demanded at the St. Patrick's meeting.

At "the first meeting or two," Madyun remembers "people venting frustration at all the different [groups and programs] that have come in the neighborhood saying what they're going to do for us and then leaving with nothing done or things being worse, like the Model Cities program and some other ones." Longtime Dudley residents "had some serious history that they were expressing." They made clear that the future of Dudley would not be shaped without them.

For many African Americans, Madyun observes, there was an undercurrent of fear that given the strong founding roles played by La Alianza Hispana and Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation,

DSNI would benefit the Latino community at the expense of others. This undercurrent remained for quite some time, even after DSNI began expanding its membership and found that African Americans were joining in large numbers while Latino residents were underrepresented. African Americans urged each other to participate strongly in the meetings. Madyun found their participation mattered as she saw Nelson Merced, who chaired many of the meetings, "really try to address... the different fears and concerns that everybody had." He earned Madyun's respect because that "is something that I've never seen in any kind of leadership—I don't care whether they're White, Black, green, purple, yellow or orange. Usually people get in there and they just try to push their agenda, and that's it. So that helped me stay also. Because if I just thought this person was just going to try to push their agenda anyway, I don't know if I'd still be here today." Instead she saw cooperation.

The expanded governance committee voted to recommend a revised DSNI governing structure strengthening resident participation. In the new structure, the general membership included "(a) residents from the core and secondary areas, (b) organizations (religious, commercial, non-profit, neighborhood associations, community groups) within the core geographic area, (c) organizations in the secondary area that provide services to the core area—participation being from executives, board chairs or others having decision-making authority—and (d) at-large members (e.g., community leaders, resource people, et al.) designated by the Governing Board."

Instead of a 23-member governing board with only 4 designated community slots, there would be a 31-member board, with a resident majority—a minimum of 12 community members and 4 additional spots designated for residents. The multiracial, multiethnic character of DSNI was reaffirmed. Equal minimum representation was provided for the neighborhood's four major cultures—Black, Cape Verdean, Latino and White—rather than representation based simply numerically on Dudley's population.<sup>22</sup> Equal minimum representation was chosen to strengthen collective action and underscore the common stake of all people in rebuilding Dudley. The Riley Foundation, the dollars behind DSNI at this point, never sought a seat on the board and, in keeping with the spirit of community control, it never occurred to DSNI members to propose that they do.

The board structure presented then, which still governs DSNI, is as follows:

- 12 Community members (Black, Cape Verdean, Latino, White) from the core area
- 5 Nonprofit agencies from the Health and Human Service fields (first core area)
- 2 Community development corporations from the core area
- 2 Small businesses from the core area
- 2 Broader business community [members]
- 2 Religious community [members] from the core area
- 2 Other (determined by the Board, using criteria of racial/ethnic/age/sex representation, skills or resources)
- 2 Nonprofit organizations or groups from the secondary area
- 1 City official
- 1 State official

On March 7, DSNI held a second community-wide meeting at St. Patrick's Church which was even larger than the first. This time, Nelson Merced and the other meeting facilitators avoided the Us versus Them appearance of a raised podium and spoke from floor mikes. The appearance of a raised podium and spoke from floor mikes. The meeting debated two governing structures: the 31-member board recommended by the governance committee (and presented by resident Earl Coleman) and a 19-member board proposed by a small group of residents that would have limited the nonprofit agencies to one agency caucus slot and ensured a resident majority without enlarging the board. After extensive debate the 31-member board was strongly approved. Though some proponents of the smaller board dropped out of DSNI after that, others such as Ché Madyun ran for the new board.

## FIRST ELECTION

The governing board election took place on April 27 after weeks of intensive organizing and a "Meet the Candidates Night." Resident Gail Latimore participated in the effort to inform the neighborhood and encourage people to vote. "There was a lot of excitement," says Latimore. "Given that nothing like that had really happened in the community in a long, long time," she says, "the fact that we actually got people out I think was a major accomplishment."

The election was held at St. Patrick's during the day on Saturday to maximize turnout. With sunny spring weather, it was "the ideal day for an election," says CTAC's Bill Slotnik. To prevent any individual candidates or groups from swinging the election with people who had not yet participated in the DSNI process, voting eligibility was restricted to residents who had attended one of the large DSNI community meetings. Members could use various forms of identification to establish residency, including, for example, a driver's license, rent receipt, Medicare card and utility bill. More than 100 people voted.<sup>23</sup>

"There were master lists of who had been at the first two community meetings and therefore were allowed to vote," recalls Slotnik. "And there was this Cape Verdean couple that came in...[They] lived about a mile away from [St. Patrick's] and they didn't have a car...[The] woman insisted that she had been in the meeting, [but] she didn't show up on any of the charts...She was so insistent and yet the ruling had to be that she couldn't vote because her name didn't show up on something. At which point, after having walked a mile from her apartment to the church, she got up, left her husband there, walked home and walked back with her copy of a mailing DSNI had sent out, showing "she had to have been involved." Slotnik says that they checked the original community meeting sign-in sheets and found that "the husband's name had been written and then the woman's name had been written" and people preparing the master list "had seen that as one name, rather than two names." Seeing the woman affirm her right to vote, with "determination and no bitterness," strengthened Slotnik's "sense that there was a real potential to this community process here."

Before entering the voting area, DSNI members could study blowups of the ballot and seek further assistance from election personnel speaking different languages. The actual voting area was blocked off. Once people cast their ballots, including candidates, they had to leave the voting area. After the voting closed, every ballot was counted twice. Two of Slotnik's colleagues who had no connection to Dudley were paid to count the ballots so there would be no question regarding impartiality. If the counts for any slot were not identical, says Slotnik, "we recounted all the ballots again twice. Because the last thing you want in something like this is for somebody or an agency to lose by one or two votes," demand a recount and find inaccuracies. It would "call the whole thing into question."



During the ballot count, recalls Slotnik, Ché Madyun was sitting on the other side of the room, "being very patient, not pushy, just wanting to see what the results were." When the count was completed, "I said, 'Che, you got the second highest vote count'" in the heavily contested voting for one of the four slots designated for African Americans. She "perks up her eyes and she goes 'All right!' Then she just takes her bag, grabs her kids, and walks out. Doesn't say another word." This was another sign "that things were being done right," says Slotnik. "You had people revved up and...taking it very seriously who hadn't been involved before [DSNI], and who could see a role for themselves."

## THE BOARD TAKES CHARGE

DSNI's newly elected board met for the first time on May 6, 1985. The first board included early Dudley Advisory Group members such as Nelson Merced from La Alianza Hispana, Melvyn Colón from NUESTRA Comunidad Development Corporation, Shelley Hoon from Roxbury Multi-Service Center, Sister Pauline O'Leary from WAITT House and Father Walter Waldron from St. Patrick's Church. It included people who became involved during the first two community meetings, such as African Americans Ché Madyun, Fadilah Muhammad and Earl Coleman, who all successfully challenged DSNI to live up to its promise of community control; Tubal Padilla, a Puerto Rican activist who worked with the state Office for Children; Bob Haas from Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, a White resident of the secondary area in Uphams Corner; two Cape Verdean brothers, Manuel and Ulisses Gonçalves, both teachers; African American resident Lloyd Harding of the Roxbury Community Land Trust; Betty Brickley, a longtime White resident who lived on Dudley Street; Esteban Soto Jr., the son of the minister of a local Latino church; and Gail Latimore, an African American resident who later became head of planning for Action for Boston in Community Development (ABCD). Latimore's mother, Lessie Spann, also served on the DSNI board in later years.

The board decided to have two co-chairs, one from the community, the other from an agency. Fadilah Muhammad and Nelson Merced were elected. Members committed themselves to weekly board meetings until the end of June and then biweekly board meetings in addition to committee meetings (the full board presently meets monthly).

To address the issue of Riley Foundation support, the board decided to invite a representative from Riley to a meeting. Riley administrator Newell Flather attended the board meeting on June 3 and expressed Riley's commitment to the improvement of the community and readiness, if solid DSNI plans were developed, to "provide basic support to get the operation started; provide funds which can be leveraged; and provide a blocking back to bring contacts and serve as a marketing tool for the group."<sup>24</sup> At the DSNI board's request, Riley also arranged for one of its personnel, Lauress Wilkins, to provide DSNI with interim staff support.

Much of DSNI's work is done through committees open to general members as well as the board. By June 10, four committees were functioning: Nominations, Land Use, Planning and Communications. The latter three reported on their activities as follows:

*Land Use:* As its general goal, the Land Use Committee has determined to promote the development of all parcels of vacant lots in the Initiative's target area. The Committee will meet with a representative of the City to address three issues: 1) provision of manpower for cleanup of vacant lots; 2) appointment of residents to be responsible for maintenance of those lots; and 3) discussion of interim uses of the lots until permanent plans are in place. Also, the Committee is considering negotiating with the City for a property disposition policy which would address DSNI's land control concerns.

*Planning:* Preliminary plans for the Committee's activities include: 1) conducting a needs assessment (possibly through a survey designed and implemented by a consulting firm) in the community; and 2) designing and implementing a plan of action through which DSNI can address those community needs. [The Committee] emphasized the importance of continued input from community residents in the planning process.

*Communications:* The Committee has identified as its priority activities: 1) to provide timely and accurate information internally and externally; and 2) to provide transportation and other resources which would facilitate attendance at community meetings. The Committee hopes to help the Board to increase general membership, to work toward the enhancement of the image of the neighborhood, and to concretize the Board's credibility in the larger community.<sup>25</sup>

On July 27, the board had an all-day retreat facilitated by CTIAC to discuss operational issues and develop the goals of a comprehensive development plan. In a letter dated August 26, 1985, DSNI formally submitted a proposal to the Riley Foundation to fund the first six months of a staffed operation. The proposal specified the full-time positions of

project director, organizer (trilingual or bilingual) and secretary (bilingual). In October, the Riley Foundation provided DSNI with its first grant of \$70,000.

By then Newell Flather had spoken with numerous foundation audiences about DSNI. "People would say, 'This is wonderful. How much of your resources has it taken?'" A year and a half into the process, Flather could still reply, "It's the largest grant we never made." Until October 1985, Riley staff and trustees had invested a lot of time, energy and caring into the initiative, but no grant dollars. The relationship between Riley and DSNI, built on something more than money, was already unusual for a foundation and low-income neighborhood. It was built on growing trust and mutual respect as well as substantial resources over time. By mid-1989, Riley support for DSNI and other Dudley area grantees would surpass the \$2 million originally projected and keep on rising.

## HIRING STAFF

In the hiring of its first director DSNI reached another crossroads between agency domination or resident control. The two finalists for the position were both White males, but they had different backgrounds and organizing approaches.

Peter Medoff had grown up in the Boston area, but had worked primarily in New York City as a tenant organizer and in Hartford, Connecticut, as director of the Citizens Research Education Network, which provided research and organizing assistance to community groups. He combined a masters degree in urban planning with over five years of organizing experience. Medoff had his first interview with the full DSNI board at WAITT House on February 13, 1986. Board members sat in a circle and the agency representatives fired off most of the questions. With his background in organizing, Medoff emphasized the need for DSNI to be guided by a strategy of organizing the community. To create a plan and encourage investment without building a strong community, he argued, would only invite the type of speculation and displacement that residents were already worried about. Most of the residents listened quietly and Medoff didn't sense much enthusiasm. At that moment DSNI appeared to be driven by agency professionals.

The other candidate had worked as a consultant for Oficina Hispana, a social service agency in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of

Boston. He was far better known in Boston and had close ties with many social service agencies. A majority of the board—but not the two-thirds majority needed to hire—supported him after the first round of interviews, though some resident board members saw him as too close to the agencies. Medoff was supported mainly by residents on the board who saw him as an experienced advocate for community control. Since the board was split and some members felt they needed more information to make a final decision, a second round of interviews was scheduled for March 3. During Medoff's interview, where residents were still relatively quiet, some concern was raised about connections he had with some members of the Flynn administration from his previous work.

While Mayor Ray Flynn would prove responsive to DSNI, his administration was not generally seen as a friend to the Black community. Flynn, a former city councilor and state representative from the conservative White neighborhood of South Boston where he grew up, had in the 1970s angered many in the Black community with his opposition to school busing. In 1974, Judge Arthur Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had "knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation affecting all of the city's students, teachers and school facilities and [had] intentionally brought about and maintained a dual school system. Therefore, the entire school system of Boston is unconstitutionally segregated."<sup>26</sup> Busing was one of the remedies chosen to achieve desegregation in a city whose neighborhoods were heavily segregated. Boston was soon appearing on newscasts nationwide as court-ordered busing faced heated, sometimes violent opposition by White groups such as ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights).

In the 1983 mayoral election, Ray Flynn faced Mel King, the first Black candidate to win Boston's nonpartisan mayoral preliminary election and run as one of two finalists in the general election. A lifelong resident of the South End and a state representative from 1973 to 1982, King had a long history as a progressive activist for civil rights and economic justice—domestic and international. King led the fight in the Massachusetts Legislature to divest the state of investments in South Africa. During the mayoral campaign he promoted measures to link neighborhood economic development to downtown growth. King's campaign was rooted in the multiracial Boston Rainbow Coalition he led—predating Jesse Jackson's National Rainbow Coalition. Flynn, who campaigned as an economic populist promising to share downtown wealth with Boston's neighborhoods, was supported by many White

Progressive activists from such groups as the Massachusetts Tenants Organization and Massachusetts Fair Share even though he maintained his antibusing and antiabortion positions.

King's campaign boosted voter registration and turnout by people of color. He received 90 percent of the Black vote and carried Latino and Asian precincts. He also received 20 percent of the White vote. While this was a higher percentage of the White vote than Harold Washington received to win the Chicago mayoralty that year, a poll showed racism to still be a major factor in Boston: "One-third of the white voters interviewed would not vote for a black candidate under any circumstances, no matter how appealing the candidate's proposals happened to be."<sup>27</sup>

Some DSNi board members were concerned that Medoff would be swayed by his relationships with officials in the Flynn administration who were considered disrespectful of and unresponsive to the concerns of people of color and hostile to anyone they perceived as tied to Mel King. While Medoff's relationships with Flynn associates could open doors for the neighborhood, that access would be harmful if it were used to perpetuate the White "good old boys" network rather than empower people of color from the Dudley neighborhood.

Medoff convinced the board of his commitment not only to expanded community participation, but genuine community control. He began working on March 10, 1986 in shared office space at the back of Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation. Soon after, as if to confirm earlier suspicions, he received calls from city officials asking him about issues in Roxbury, even though others, especially people of color whom the administration seemed to ignore, were far more experienced and knowledgeable. Medoff responded by politely redirecting the callers to more appropriate sources while maintaining the relationships for the future. The challenge of balancing insider access with critical independence would be a continuing one for DSNi.

At the beginning of April, DSNi was awarded a Fair Housing Award by the city of Boston. It was a quick lesson in politics. DSNi had not done any housing work yet, had no real office and was just getting its staff in place. In fact, after calling DSNi to tell them about the award, Boston Fair Housing Commission staffer Cynthia Koebert asked for informational material about DSNi, since no one at the commission knew anything about it. The Flynn administration, it seemed, needed a Roxbury group to recognize that was not considered hostile. Again, DSNi would learn from this early experience and go on to build a

reputation as an independent group that could work with the city without being co-opted and realize, rather than sell out, its goals of community control.

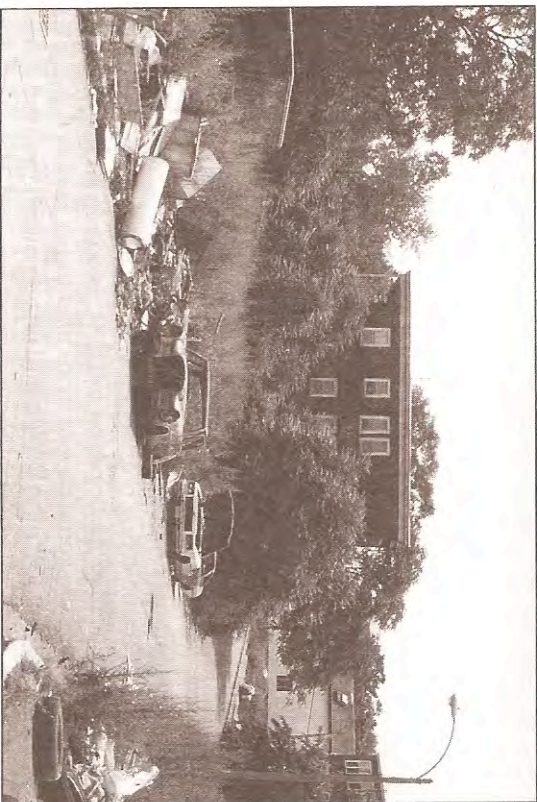
## PASSING THE BATON

As the staff began taking shape, DSNi went through some significant leadership changes. In February 1986, Nelson Merced, who had played so pivotal a role in creating DSNi and had been elected its first president, resigned from the board. He also left La Alianza Hispana and became deputy director for Policy and Planning in the city's Public Facilities Department. When Merced resigned, Melvyn Colón of Nuestra Comunidad became acting president. By then, Fadilah Muhammad had needed to reduce her participation in DSNi, and in April she dropped off the board so she could devote more time to her family.

In November 1986, the DSNi board unanimously approved a new slate of officers. Ché Madyun became president and Melvyn Colón became vice president. Colón continued to chair board meetings until the following fall, when Madyun, who had never chaired an organization before, felt ready to take on that role.

Madyun resisted being nominated as president. She insists she didn't know "anything about being a president. I really didn't know anything about what a board of a nonprofit organization was supposed to do—so why should I be president?" Colón, Medoff and many residents urged her to accept the nomination. Finally, Madyun agreed, thinking she would be a temporary "figurehead" president until new board elections. Far from being a figurehead, Madyun has been a dynamic leader who repeatedly won reelection. She enrolled in a two-year management program at Lesley College focusing on nonprofit organizations, with a particular interest in the arts. She also became an experienced public speaker, increasingly in demand as DSNi gained a national reputation. All while working at METCO and then the Strand Theatre, raising three children, being an active member of her mosque and, in 1992, doing "sweat equity" for her new cooperative home on Magnolia Street.

The transition from Colón to Madyun as president was symbolic of DSNi's shift from an agency-driven to resident-driven alliance. In the words of Orchard Park's Sarah Flint, when "Ché became president I said, 'Wow, it is going to be all right. It is really in the control of the community.'"



Illegal dumping and abandoned cars. View from Dennis Street looking down Winthrop Street, July 1986. Site of new DSNi homes (I) and community center (C).



1990 DSNi neighborhood cleanup.

## DON'T DUMP ON US: ORGANIZING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Organizing is the renewable energy that powers DSNi. As DSNi's first director, Peter Medoff advocated blending campaigns for immediate victories with a long-range, Think Big strategy. While short-term victories were essential, Medoff believed that DSNi's sustaining strength would come from the participatory process of creating a long-term vision for the neighborhood. Through organizing, DSNi would build up people's expectations of what is desirable and doable. With united community willpower behind it, DSNi could create the political will necessary to make the city a partner in implementing the Dudley neighborhood's bold development agenda. DSNi would not be afraid to use confrontation to achieve its objectives, nor would it be afraid to cooperate with people or institutions who didn't share the whole agenda. It recognized both the power of numbers and the importance of building personal relationships.

DSNi's first full-time community organizer was Andrea Nagel, whose family had moved to the United States from Chile when she was eight years old. Nagel had attended some DSNi meetings while working as a community outreach worker for Oficina Hispana in Jamaica Plain.

When the DSNI organizer job opened, she was ready to leave her social service position to "really get out into the community and address some of the root causes" of issues that concerned her. On her first day of work, April 14, 1986, Nagel went with Medoff and some board members to look for donated furniture and supplies for the new DSNI office that would be opening in May at 385 Dudley Street, a storefront owned by Nuestra Comunidad.

On April 16, DSNI held a community meeting at La Alianza Hispana attended by some 75 people. While the primary business on the agenda was finalizing DSNI's bylaws, the major focus of the meeting was the problem of arson. DSNI invited representatives of the Boston Arson Prevention Commission to speak. The commission's controversial 1985 report documenting a new wave of arson in the Dudley area had recently been made public. The arson rate was even higher than that earning Roxbury's Highland Park neighborhood the title "Arson Capital of the Nation" in 1981.

Focusing on the Sav-Mor neighborhood (bounded by Blue Hill Avenue, Dudley Street and Warren Street) in DSNI's secondary area, the Arson Commission reported, "Many of the buildings which have burned in this area [in 1985] were among the approximately 75 abandoned buildings which area residents would like to see developed by and for local, low-income residents. Other fires have occurred in buildings currently occupied by low-income tenants that appear destined for Condo Conversion."

"It is obvious," the commission bluntly stated, "that this increase in serious fires in the Sav-Mor area is directly related to the increased speculation due to the [BRA] Dudley Square Revitalization Plan." The Arson Commission characterized the area as fitting its "Tension Matrix," described earlier as a mix of both appreciating and depreciating forces.<sup>1</sup> As speculation increased, homeowners in the Dudley Station area reported "the almost daily receipts of slips under the door from realtors urging them to sell; in classic blockbusting fashion, some of these slips allude to the threat of an influx of Latinos in traditionally black neighborhoods."<sup>2</sup>

Mayor Flynn and Boston Redevelopment Authority officials criticized the Arson Commission report but, as City Councilor David Scodtras, chair of the council's arson committee, noted, Flynn himself wrote in a February 1984 *Boston Globe* op-ed, "redevelopment arson takes place in areas targeted for major improvements. Buildings which

do not fit into these plans, but might otherwise be saved for affordable housing, are often burned to facilitate land clearance."<sup>3</sup>

## KNOCKING ON NEIGHBORS' DOORS

The DSNI staff's first priority was getting to the streets, knocking on doors and looking for clear, winnable issues that could begin to build residents' sense of their own power. During April and May 1986, Nagel and Medoff knocked on hundreds of doors, talking to residents about their fears and hopes for the neighborhood. Beginning with lists of people who had attended DSNI meetings, they also approached local neighborhood associations such as the Mt. Pleasant Neighborhood Association.

Nagel recalls, "Folks were excited and wanted to know what was happening. I spent a lot of time at the beginning visiting people in their homes. There was so much history and a lot of people had been struggling in this neighborhood for so long... Their stories would go on and on and on. It was clear that people cared. Contrary to what was commonly thought, people certainly cared about where they lived and bettering their lives and their children's lives. And they not only cared, but they had already been doing things about it. In some cases, I came across veteran activists. After spending hours with them and learning about battles they had fought in the past, I knew they would be part of DSNI. I'm talking about people like Jessie Farrier, Margarita Sturmiolo, Sophia McCarthy and Mildred Daniels.\* They are pillars of strength in this neighborhood.

"I also came across people who were afraid and others who had lost hope altogether. I remember talking to people through their doors—yelling to hear each other or communicating through the peep hole... There were others who opened their doors and talked about how nothing they could do would make a difference. I remember making myself, 'How can I at least help to spark hope in this case? ... At times the negativity was really alarming. And it's because people had just lost hope or were very cynical about anything really changing. They had seen too much come down or had heard too many broken

\* DSNI member Mildred Daniels is the founder of the Mt. Pleasant Tot Lot and longtime active member of the Mt. Pleasant-Vine Neighborhood Association.

promises. So it was going to be up to DSNi to create the conditions for them to be part of something successful."

DSNI staff and members were able to reach some people who were very cynical at first. Paul Bothwell, whose earlier efforts to move city government into constructive action had left him discouraged, is a good example. "He was very negative and very unbelieving," says Nagel. "That's certainly the way I felt," says Bothwell, recalling how he reacted to DSNi with "a good deal of despair and cynicism." Bothwell changed his mind as he watched DSNi in action and began to get personally involved. "Little by little I had a sense of real wonder and hope. I just really began to...marvel that maybe communities can be empowered enough that something can change fundamentally." Bothwell became a strong resident activist on the Development Committee and was later elected to the DSNi board.

Common themes emerged from the door-knocking visits, which then guided the early organizing campaigns. "Everyone talked about the garbage, everyone talked about the crime and everyone talked about how the city treats people here," says Nagel. They complained about the illegal dumping on vacant lots and the city's dismal garbage collection and street cleaning. They talked about how the city gave poor neighborhoods like Dudley poor service. Tenants complained of bad building conditions and landlord neglect. In general, residents wanted the lots cleaned, abandoned cars towed, recreational areas maintained, more effective policing, better city services and enforcement of housing and health codes.

### "DON'T DUMP ON US"

Responding to resident priorities, DSNi planned an organizing campaign called "Don't Dump On Us." The immediate objectives were to clean up and fence off vacant lots in the Dudley area—there were more than 1,300—and enhance the neighborhood's image as well as its health and safety. The longer-range objective was to transform people's thinking—from seeing the lots as health-threatening eyesores to seeing them as potential spaces for homes, businesses, community services, parks and playgrounds. The "Don't Dump On Us" campaign was a unifying campaign, bringing together public housing tenants, homeowners and businesspeople in the common pursuit of making the neighborhood a better place in the present, while pointing to a vision for long-term revitalization. Originally planned as a short-term organ-

izing effort, "Don't Dump On Us" was an organizing priority for many years, targeting vacant lots, abandoned cars and the illegal trash transfer stations operating in the neighborhood.

"Don't Dump On Us" always meant more than simply eliminating physical trash. It meant stop trashing the community in every way. Dudley's reputation and its people had been dumped on for years—by media who largely ignored the neighborhood, except to portray it as a haven for drug dealing; by politicians who collected votes and taxes from the neighborhood, but provided little or no services; by banks who redlined and discriminated, denying people a fair opportunity to buy and maintain their homes and businesses. "Don't Dump On Us" meant stop blighting, disrespecting and shortchanging the community.

The "Don't Dump On Us" kickoff event was a community meeting and speakout attended by city officials. On the evening of Wednesday, June 18, 1986, DSNi's office was buzzing with activity and anticipation as the organization's first action-oriented community-wide meeting was about to take place. Leaflets had been dropped at hundreds of homes; follow-up phone calls had been made during the previous two nights; several city officials had been invited to attend and had confirmed; hundreds of "Don't Dump On Us" buttons had been produced in three languages; rides, child care, refreshments and translations had all been arranged to make the meeting as accessible as possible. Still, there were a lot of nervous DSNi staff and members wondering how many people would show up.

The event was a terrific success. Over 100 residents crowded the basement of St. Patrick's Church along with politicians such as then City Council President Bruce Bolling (Boston's first Black City Council president) and city officials from various departments. The meeting was an important first step in building the credibility of DSNi with city officials. They were clearly taken aback by the size and character of the crowd.

For an hour, one resident after another came to the microphone and gave graphic examples of garbage and debris—from old tires and refrigerators to rotten vegetables and sides of beef—being illegally dumped all over the neighborhood, with little being done to clean it up or prevent it from happening again. Della Jones, a Winthrop Street resident, declared, "The terrible thing that has happened to our house is that the mice have taken over." City officials stated that rats outnumbered humans three to one in the Dudley Street neighborhood.

Residents demanded that the dumping stop and the trash transfer stations be replaced by housing and jobs.

A city official slipped out quietly to call Mayor Flynn and inform him of what was happening. Toward the end of the meeting, a commotion was heard in the back of the hall. The mayor had suddenly arrived to address the crowd. Though not invited originally, Flynn decided to come in response to the size and dynamism of the meeting. For many residents, it was their first time in the same room with a mayor of their city. Flynn would return many times in the years ahead.

Flynn had run for mayor as the "neighborhood candidate" and had promised early in his first term—beginning in 1984—to clean up all the city's vacant lots. For Dudley, it was an empty promise until that community meeting. In his impromptu speech to DSNI, Flynn committed the city to "provide funds and any kind of help necessary" to clean the lots.

The local media, including three television stations, gave DSNI extensive coverage. "We are tired of being dumped on," the next day's *Boston Globe* quoted Orchard Park resident Joan Porter. "Who wants to live with rats? Who wants to live with filth? Who wants to live with disease? Dump some good things, if you're going to dump. Dump some money in the area."<sup>4</sup>

## CLEANING UP

A week later Mayor Flynn issued a press release appropriately titled "City Responds to Community." It began, "The Flynn Administration, working in concert with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, will be implementing a program," beginning with 61 of the worst "vacant lots that have been illegally dumped upon." The mayor committed the city to cleaning up the lots, erecting wooden poles and concrete barriers to keep dumpers out and fully prosecuting anyone dumping illegally (mainly that meant fining the dumpers and putting tax liens on private property used for dumping). Residents were encouraged to call the city's new 725-DUMP hotline to report illegal dumping. Flynn also pledged the city's material support for a neighborhood cleanup planned by DSNI.

The June 18 community meeting was one of DSNI's earliest lessons in power politics. Residents saw that by coming together in large numbers and demanding what they were rightfully entitled to, they could change their neighborhood for the better. The mayor

responded in both words and deeds. Residents' ability to achieve immediate action from a city government that had for so long not represented them laid the foundation for achieving longer-range, more difficult goals.

On Saturday, July 19, over 100 residents participated in the neighborhood cleanup under cloudy skies. The city contributed rakes, shovels and T-shirts just as they did for cleanups in other neighborhoods, but they also committed about 25 employees and heavy equipment such as front-end loaders and dump trucks. Mayor Flynn showed up to kick off the event, which received significant publicity. DSNI gave out balloons and refreshments at the Dudley and East Cottage gathering site and turned the cleanup into a minifestival.

Even as they contributed to cleaning up the lots, some employees of the city Public Works Department dumped some trash of their own in the form of racist stereotypes. After handing out 100 rakes and shovels to local residents, one of the city employees snidely remarked, "We won't be seeing those tools again." They weren't even planning to return at the end of the day to pick them up. But when they did return at 5 P.M., there were 96 rakes and shovels there to greet them and the astonishment was plain on their faces. The following Monday, three more tools were returned. And, as if to punctuate the point, a Cape Verdean woman arrived at DSNI's office on Tuesday with her adolescent son in hand. The boy held a rake with a broken handle. He apologized for breaking it and left it with the other tools.

As part of the "Don't Dump On Us" campaign, DSNI also began tackling the problem of abandoned cars which made parts of Dudley look like car wreckers' lots. Massachusetts has one of the nation's highest car theft rates. Car thieves stole cars from around the city, stripped them and dumped them in Dudley. Car owners dumped their cars there to collect insurance fraudulently or avoid paying wreckers' fees. As hundreds of abandoned, often burnt-out cars accumulated the city seemed to ignore them, but the residents would not.

DSNI began to gather lists of cars and demanded that the city tow them out of the neighborhood. At first the city was slow to respond. Residents in the Virginia-Monadnock Neighborhood Association in the Uphams Corner area stepped up their action. Association President Bob Haas recounted what they did in the first multilingual edition of DSNI's newsletter, published in fall 1986: "Residents saw an accumulation of 28 vehicles on their streets, 12 alone on a one-block stretch of Monadnock St. They made a computerized listing of the abandoned

cars and gave it to the police and other city officials. When still no cars were towed they went to the *Boston Globe*, which covered the problem on September 3 with photographs of the wrecks. Within two weeks 16 vehicles were removed." By late 1986, with Dudley residents pressing the city with lists of cars, tow trucks began spending more time in Dudley. Still the process was slow, and the next year DSNI became more creative—and more effective.

The 1987 mayoral campaign provided the opportunity for one of DSNI's most successful tactics. DSNI staff and members reasoned that having abandoned cars with RAY FLYNN FOR MAYOR bumper stickers plastered all over them would be a political embarrassment. They would remind everyone of Flynn's responsibility for the eyesores and prod the city into action. So that summer, a DSNI member called Flynn's campaign office in Roxbury posing as a campaign volunteer and asked for 200 bumper stickers. The campaign office was eager to oblige. During the next couple of nights the stickers were strategically placed on abandoned cars throughout the neighborhood. As predicted, within days all the cars miraculously disappeared. And abandoned car removal remained better after that.

## FRICITION

DSNI's neighborhood leadership was tested in August 1986 when ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), a national multi-issue organizing group, chose Dudley as one of its target neighborhoods. By the time ACORN first expanded into Massachusetts in 1980, it had already developed a reputation among progressive organizers and funders for not working in coalition with other organizations. In Boston it was seen as invading the turf of Massachusetts Fair Share.<sup>5</sup> By 1986, ACORN had created a nonprofit development arm and wanted the city of Boston to give it some land to develop. Since the city was moving slowly on this demand, ACORN decided to set up a "tent city," erecting a small village of tents on a city-owned vacant lot. Without even bothering to contact DSNI, ACORN chose a lot on Dudley Street in the heart of DSNI's core area.

DSNI members were angry not only because ACORN, seen as an outsider to the neighborhood, had focused on Dudley Street without first contacting DSNI, which had been so carefully structured to empower residents and break the pattern of outsider-agency domination. But also, DSNI (as discussed in Chapter Four) had successfully ne-

gotiated with the city to have it stop disposing of vacant land until the neighborhood was able to complete a comprehensive redevelopment plan and exercise community control. At the August 4 DSNI board meeting, board members expressed concern "about ACORN wanting to develop on Dudley Street without any experience and without being involved in the planning process."<sup>6</sup> After angry exchanges between ACORN and DSNI supporters, a scaled-down version of the event took place with little fanfare. The city of Boston kept its word to DSNI and refused to dispose of any city-owned vacant land before DSNI's comprehensive plan was created.

DSNI had other conflicts with ACORN. ACORN's organizing approach included a door-to-door canvas asking money for memberships. Several DSNI members reported that they were made to believe that ACORN canvassers were actually from DSNI.

More tension arose during DSNI's campaign to have a commuter rail line running through the neighborhood open a local station for easy access to downtown. The Midlands rail corridor was the eastern boundary of DSNI's core area, running adjacent to the Uphams Corner neighborhood. It was used by trains carrying suburban commuters into downtown Boston. But Dudley residents could only see the trains shoot by at high speed without ever stopping. With the elimination of Roxbury's elevated Orange Line, taken down in May 1986, the Dudley Street neighborhood was left with only limited bus service to downtown. Many in Dudley believed that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) didn't want the trains to stop in neighborhoods where people of color were in the majority because that would lessen ridership from the mostly White suburbs. In 1987, however, after a series of meetings with the MBTA, and with the strong backing of the city Transportation Department, transit officials agreed to open a station on Dudley Street as well as one in Mattapan. DSNI had done door-knocking and held several meetings on the issue. Just as a neighborhood victory was imminent, ACORN scheduled a couple of meetings of their own and proceeded to claim responsibility for the success in the local press. A year later, after failing to win resident support to be designated the developer of a lot in DSNI's secondary area, ACORN stopped their activities in Dudley.

Also during summer 1986, DSNI began having informal discussions with Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union about potential joint projects. Local 26 had a long history of progressive organizing transcending traditional workplace issues. Its



membership was composed primarily of people of color earning relatively low wages. Numerous Local 26 members lived in the Dudley area and some of them were members of DSNi, though they did not participate actively. Local 26 had identified housing as the number-one need of its members and decided to seek contributions for a housing fund from employers during its next contract negotiations. The union was also interested in using pension funds to develop affordable housing for its members and others in the Dudley neighborhood.

Since DSNi and Local 26 were two of the strongest multiracial organizing groups in Boston, with overlapping memberships, an alliance offered tremendous potential to effectively combine workplace and community agendas. DSNi could galvanize community support for the union's organizing drives and housing development plans and provide assistance in finding appropriate sites for development within the context of the DSNi neighborhood plan. For DSNi, Local 26 represented a potential resource of millions of dollars for housing development. Further, Local 26 offered to help Dudley residents fill job openings in unionized hotels. DSNi could provide a connection to the union for inactive Local 26 members who lived in the Dudley area, and Local 26 could help DSNi organize union members who lived in Dudley but were not yet DSNi members. To start, DSNi and Local 26 identified overlapping members and made presentations at each other's membership meetings. Plans were drawn up for a neighborhood job fair with representatives from local hotels. In November 1986, DSNi members joined in a series of actions against a local nonunion hotel, the Back Bay Hilton, to show broad-based community support for the Local 26 organizing drive.

The relationship soured as Local 26 began to implement its development agenda in the DSNi area—without adapting it to DSNi's comprehensive planning process and long-range timetable. The union had identified a large city-owned lot on Dacia Street for which it wanted to be a codeveloper with Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation. Local 26 saw the project as a necessary step to obtaining access to Hotel and Restaurant Employees International pension funds and building momentum for their upcoming battle to include an unprecendented housing benefit in hotel contracts. Local 26 would take care of much of the financing and organizing while Nuestra Comunidad would be responsible for project management and design. They needed to convince the neighborhood and the city to designate the team as developers of the site. The organizations were a mismatch. Local 26

was one of the most aggressive groups in Boston, famous for its rapid-fire, confrontational organizing tactics. Development is a notoriously slow process and Nuestra Comunidad was just putting together a track record; its first construction project, which took much longer to complete than originally proposed, met with considerable local criticism over the design of the houses.

DSNi decided not to sidetrack its own development agenda by playing a significant part in the Dacia project. As problems arose in the Dacia process, DSNi did not meet Local 26's expectation that it would play a cleanup role. To make matters worse, opposition to the Local 26-Nuestra Comunidad project was fueled by a small group of people who portrayed DSNi and Nuestra Comunidad as a Hispanic conspiracy to take over the neighborhood. The Dacia lot was eventually awarded to another team made up primarily of minority developers who had the backing of City Councilor Bruce Bolling, the representative for the district; unfortunately, their Dacia houses, completed in 1989, did not fulfill the design and quality commitments made to the community or the city. Though DSNi and Local 26 continued to explore avenues of cooperation over financing and developing housing and sometimes worked in coalition together with other groups—such as a later antiredlining campaign—the goal of a far-reaching alliance between a powerful union and community group died an early death.

In contrast to the rhetorical charges of Latino domination leveled by opponents of DSNi and Nuestra Comunidad, as DSNi's organizing picked up steam, Latino participation lagged behind their numbers in the Dudley population. Melvyn Colón, former DSNi president and Nuestra Comunidad director, says he purposely downplayed Latino organizing: "I didn't want [DSNi] to become perceived as a Latino agency so I sort of never focused on the need to organize within the Latino communities."

Over the years, DSNi tried and succeeded in increasing Latino involvement and leadership, but organizing among Latinos remained relatively difficult. The Latino population is even younger (with a median age of 22) and poorer than the larger Dudley population, with fewer homeowners and more vulnerable tenants. There are also tensions among Puerto Ricans, the largest Latino ethnic group in Dudley; Dominicans, the next largest; and Hondurans, Guatemalans and others. Mirren Uriarte, senior researcher at the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy of the University of Massachusetts-Boston, believes that the combination of

differing places of origin, the geographical dispersion of Latinos across the city, and severe financial conditions, has made organizing Latinos in Boston particularly difficult.<sup>7</sup>

"I think part of it is history," says DSNI board member Arnaldo Solis. "African Americans have been burned a lot here in this neighborhood, and they've been living in Roxbury for quite a while now, so they know the history, and what has been attempted before, and when they saw that this [DSNI] was going on, they saw it as an opportunity to finally do something... The Latino community is relatively young in Boston, and particularly so in Roxbury." Solis continues, "There is some tension between the Latino community and the Black community, and I think that tension has been created from the outside... [There] was the constant publicity about how rapidly the Latino community is growing, and how the Latino community will eventually surpass the African American community, and what that means in terms of political clout and economic [clout] as well... There are some politicians or some so-called leaders within the Hispanic [and African American] communities that are playing into that and are using it for their own interest." Others feel "that the Latino community should work together with the Black community because we share a lot of similar needs and, therefore, we are a stronger force together than separate." Working together, of course, is what DSNI stands for.

## CULTIVATING RESOURCES

In September 1986, DSNI held its first multicultural neighborhood festival at the Ralph Waldo Emerson Elementary School on Dudley Street. Though the event was sparsely attended by adults, several hundred children and teenagers participated in a variety of activities ranging from face painting to relay races and performances by local musical groups. The enthusiastic response from young people underscored the great need and potential for youth-centered activities in the neighborhood, a potential that DSNI would more fully develop in later years.

By fall 1986, DSNI was working intensively with five neighborhood associations it had helped create or strengthen. On Brook Avenue, for example, DSNI helped residents push the city Inspectional Services Department to tear down a house destroyed by fire. On Leyland and Julian Streets, DSNI organizers worked with residents to revitalize community gardens in cooperation with the Boston Natural Areas Fund,

which owned the gardens, and Boston Urban Gardeners. The Leyland Street garden gazebo had become a hangout for drug use and drinking, and the corner across the street, East Cottage and Dudley, was a major drug-dealing site—many of the buyers were Whites from around the city and suburbs, a subject addressed in Chapter Eight. DSNI worked with the Leyland Street Crime Watch to hold meetings with the police and other city officials, leading to a greater police presence at the corner and several arrests. The first meeting of the Woodville Area Neighborhood Association (WANA) focused on the "Don't Dump On Us" campaign, but many other issues soon emerged. For example, WANA members decided to improve safety at an accident-prone intersection, where they feared a child would be hit by a speeding car. They met with officials from the Department of Public Works and collected signatures in support of placing a stop sign at the intersection. Within months, a stop sign appeared. WANA's first president, Cynthia Lopes-Jefferson, was elected to the DSNI board, and many members became active participants in DSNI's neighborhood planning efforts.

On November 5, DSNI hosted a group of local foundations. It was the first significant attempt to bring foundations other than Riley into the process of revitalizing the neighborhood. The Riley Foundation deserved recognition for the dedicated work and resources they were putting into the project. On the other hand, DSNI and Riley personnel wanted the message to go out that the Riley Foundation could not be the sole support for DSNI. The Funders Day was sponsored by Associated Grantmakers of Massachusetts (AGM), an umbrella organization for local foundations, which had taken the unusual step months earlier to act as the fiscal conduit for Riley's first grant to DSNI because DSNI had not yet secured its own tax-exempt status. AGM invited its entire membership to tour Dudley and hear a presentation about DSNI activities. Following the presentation at La Alianza Hispana, the group of about 30 funders walked over to the Shirley-Eustis House, the governor's mansion-turned-museum, for a reception and informal discussion. The president of the museum regaled the group with a history of the house, portraying the time of its heyday as the good ol' days. The fact that the ancestors of many of the mansion's current neighbors would have been slaves at that time seemed lost on the museum president.

One of the goals of Funders Day was to address the concern of many DSNI agency members that DSNI would end up raising money for itself at the expense of other agencies in the neighborhood.