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The resources and expert knowledge of a university can be employed in "activist research" in the community.

COMMUNITY SERVICE WITHIN THE URBAN UNIVERSITY
A Case Study
with a Political Message

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The question of who benefits from the knowledge produced by social scientists is as relevant today as it was in the mid-sixties. At that time, numerous statements were made by prominent social scientists endorsing the partisan use of knowledge and the promotion of social change designed to reduce inequality (for example, see Becker, 1967; Gouldner, 1968). Additionally, many disciplines within the social sciences experienced surges of self-conscious examination, and organized movements within professional associations to develop a more critical posture toward the existing distribution of wealth and income. Scholars accused their colleagues of being handmaidens of established interests and power groups in society (Horowitz, 1963; Nicolaus, 1968). While debate and controversy over the partisan uses of knowledge raised questions about how social science research can actually assist the working and lower classes, very few academics moved beyond rhetorical argu-

ment. That is, they did not actually produce knowledge that working- and lower-class groups and organizations could apply to further their own political and economic interests.

The purpose of this article is to suggest ways in which the academic community, especially urban universities, can directly influence inequities in access to knowledge and information that is politically useful to organizations and agencies serving working- and lower-class populations. The data for the article are drawn primarily from the practical experiences encountered by the authors while attempting to develop an information referral and data management system for tenants' rights organizations serving urban Texas. Having been involved in community and neighborhood organizing for several years, the authors established both political and professional relationships with the groups described in this article. Our relationship with both the local and statewide tenants' unions involved a direct interface between working- and lower-class clients and the university community. The data presented in the article describe the practical and political problems encountered when university professors attempt to use their knowledge and resources for political purposes.

Two assumptions were connected with our efforts, both of which are related to the general question of who benefits from social science research. One is that community groups, like any organization in modern society, can maximize their efficiency with greater access to information. With this information, they can relate more effectively to both the public and the private sectors, as well as to the constituency they are attempting to serve. The second assumption is that the knowledge and technical skills housed within the university community are essentially public property; as such, they should be at the disposal of the *public,* of which groups and organizations serving the urban poor make up an important component. While this article suffers from all the problems of a case study format, we nonetheless think our experiences are typical of the problems encountered when academicians try to blend traditional scholastic values with activist research.

THE POLITICAL USES
OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

Information is a critically important commodity in city government. It contributes to the growth and diversification of city services, municipal innovation and change, and political stabilty. Information is produced by numerous agencies and departments within city hall, and is an essential component of municipal efficiency and cohesion. What is of particular interest in this article are data and information systems developed by the several agencies and departments within city government. Like most other commodities produced by the public sector, the data and information systems developed by municipal government are not readily available to organizations serving working- and lower-class populations. Because there are inequities in access to the knowledge and data produced by the public sector, the monopolization of information can also be used as a mechanism of class domination.

Radical social scientists argue that wealthy class interests influence the flow of information to the public sector in several ways. In a direct manner, the wealthy attempt to influence public policy by staffing government positions with individuals sympathetic to their interests, by extensive lobbying activities, and by dominating and monitoring the flow of ideas and information available to public agencies and committees. Domhoff (1970) maintains that elite universities, major foundations, and upper-class "think tanks" dominate the transmission of ideas and knowledge upon which the several branches and levels of government make key decisions. At the municipal level, the local elite typically established the ideological parameters defining the limits of community and neighborhood reform programs. Local bankers, developers, and real estate brokers are usually enlisted to oversee revitalization or redevelopment schemes. Public monies are usually spent in a way that benefits local financial and real estate interests. City managers typically avoid implementing or endorsing social programs that may be inconsistent with the ideological

persuasions of the local business community. In comparison to working- and lower-class groups, the wealthy also have much greater access to the information produced by city government.

Colleges and universities often play a key role in stratifying the information produced by and available to the public sector. As Szymanski (1978: 248-249) observes, despite the fact that about 40% of the approximately 2000 institutions of higher education in America are owned by the state,

> a handfull of elite institutions set the academic standards and tone for the rest. Twenty-five universities grant 75 percent of all Ph.D.'s in the United States. Ten receive 38 percent of all federal funds. In many academic fields members of the top ten departments write over 50 percent of all the articles appearing in each field's major professional journals. Foundation grants are also concentrated in several leading institutions (in economics and business ten universities and research institutions received 78 percent of all Ford Foundation grants from 1951 to 1965).

The relationship among the monopolization of information, social class interests, and higher education is described in detail by Horowtiz (1969), Ridgeway (1968), and Smith (1971). Generally, they argue that knowledge and information produced by the universities are at the disposal of large corporations and the wealthy elements of society. Ideas that may further the interests of working-class groups and organizations are often not produced by universities at all or are left unrewarded and unrecognized by the university incentive system. While urban universities have the potential to serve as information and data referral systems for working-class community groups, they seldom do so.

Because of the simple lack of information about municipal and public affairs, community groups in urban areas usually operate at minimal efficiency and are seriously handicapped in dealing with the myriad departments that constitute city hall. As Mills (1951) argues, information and data processing in most large organizations, including municipal government, have become highly centralized, hierarchial, and mechanized.

This centralization prompts "newer divisions of labor" (Miller, 1951: 195), adds to an organization's complexity, and maximizes the possibility that control of information can be used as a mechanism of social domination. Community groups attempting to increase the delivery of urban services to a low-income neighborhood, to secure a larger share of federal funds for their constituency, or to strengthen code enforcement in their areas are often outmaneuvered by conservative public officials who cleverly administer bureaucratic rules and regulation. Groups may be shuffled between departments. Various department heads may claim that they have no authority to act, and refer the group to another agency or organization. Groups may learn too late that they have failed to meet deadlines related to a funding cycle, or are informed they have based their program or request on inaccurate data, information, or procedures. Meeting times associated with critical public forums may not be publicized widely. Most community groups do not have adequate resources to develop sophisticated data-retrieval systems or communication networks that would allow them to exploit systematically the flow of relevant public information. As a result, their activities often are easy to circumvent or dissipate by public officials interested in preserving the status quo.

Community and neighborhood organizations seeking to protect the consumer rights of tenants are especially vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of local government. They often find themselves at odds with local real estate and developer interests, as well as with the major financial institutions supporting new construction. Additionally, they must rely upon the various departments within city hall for code enforcement, inspection, habitability, and ordinance compliance. Further, most federal housing assistance programs are locally administered. Therefore, community groups are not only vulnerable to local political manipulation, but also must turn to city government for assistance and support. This dependency increases their susceptibility to domination. These problems are especially germane to tenants' rights organizations.

TENANTS' RIGHTS,
ACCESS TO MUNICIPAL INFORMATION,
AND THE URBAN HOUSING CRISIS

One of the most important developments in the urban real estate and construction industry is the increasing proportion of people who live in apartments. We are increasingly becoming a society of renters rather than owners of residential property. This development is associated with two major trends in the American economy. First, it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure mortgage financing for single-family, residential property. In 1972, scholars of urban life estimated that new housing was beyond the financial reach of two-thirds of American families (Hartman, 1972). This situation has become even more strained in recent months with the announcement of significant increases in the prime lending rates, and the spiraling inflation associated with home fuel, insurance, and property tax rates. Further, when the housing market is severely strained and rents are not controlled, tenants are placed in a position in which they can be exploited easily by their landlords. Second, in American society the ownership of housing, like other forms of wealth, is concentrated in the hands of very few people (Edwards et al., 1975; Kolko, 1968). This observation applies not only to corporate stock, business, and professions, but also to most forms of real estate. It is estimated that approximately 50% of residential dwellings in the United States are owned by the richest 20% of American families (Edwards et al., 1975).

These larger economic trends have specific and tangible manifestations at the municipal and neighborhood levels. As with most problems created by economic hard times, however, the most severe burdens are shouldered by residents of low-income neighborhoods and by the programs designed to deliver assistance to these families and individuals. Specifically, low-income neighborhoods are characterized by a high proportion of renters as well as a high proportion of vacant residential properties owned by absentee landlords (Sternlieb et al., 1980; Sternlieb, 1973). Low-income individuals do not

qualify for conventional mortgages, and absentee landlords typically maintain residential property at a level just below or right at code standards (Rose, 1973). Consumer abuse on the part of absentee landlords has produced a number of tenants' rights organizations around the nation (Atlas and Dreier, 1980). These organizations are designed to convince absentee landlords to keep their rental property in better condition or to lobby for legislation designed to protect the consumer rights of renters. Additionally, these groups attempt to increase the efficiency of building inspection departments within city government. This is accomplished by more effective reporting of code violations within occupied apartment dwellings and by attempting to transform renters into a cohesive and powerful interest group capable of articulating common needs.

Besides issues connected with consumer abuse, the proliferation of renters in urban areas has created additional problems for groups interested in tenants' rights. As explained by Atlas and Dreier (1980: 13):

> Tenant organizations have historically been difficult to sustain because of the transient nature of tenancy or because tenants viewed themselves as being on a new station toward home ownership.

Because of the transient nature of tenancy, it is often difficult to maintain and update accurate records that identify both tenants and owners of rental property in low-income neighborhoods. It is also hard to identify those who own vacant residential property. Vacant properties create special problems for low-income neighborhoods—health, sanitation, and crime. Rapid turnover of rental or vacant property ownership is often produced by speculators spurring zoning changes or anticipating an infusion of federal housing money. By the time property transfers are recorded, code enforcement activities on specific dwelling units must be refocused and re-called. This is expensive and inefficient, and is usually beyond the resources available to community groups. Similar problems exist with vacant dwelling units.

An additional trouble spot for groups attempting to influence code and ordinance enforcement and monitor urban housing policy is related to the absence of knowledge about the extent of property holdings by specific landlords. Often a single landlord owns several units in different neighborhoods, but under different names or business titles. Code enforcement activities are obviously more effective when community organizations have access to accurate records describing the extent of rental units owned by a single landlord.

In the area of housing program delivery, related problems exist. In most major cities, Community Development Block Grant funds, or other public monies, are spent in specifically selected target neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are characterized by high levels of absentee owners and a deteriorated housing stock. More often than not, a significant amount of funds acquired for housing programs are spent in the area of housing renovation and residential redevelopment. A practical problem nearly always encountered by community groups attempting to monitor revitalization efforts, however, is an absence of specific information about patterns of ownership within target neighborhoods. While those responsible for implementing housing programs within city hall can determine the extent of absentee ownership in selected census tracts, community groups do not have easy access to the same information sources. For example, most real estate brokers and construction firms have secured printed data from city hall identifying the names and addresses of owners of residential property. This is indeed a valuable source of data for builders, developers, and speculators interested in cornering the housing market in an area slated for publicly assisted renovation. At the same time, however, community groups often lack even the most rudimentary statistical knowledge about the basic facts of neighborhood economic life. While these data are a matter of "public record," community groups simply do not have the resources necessary to fund research staffs or purchase computer time.

A similar problem is found in HUD's Section 8 rental program. This program provides rental supplements to participating landlords. Providing that the rental unit meets HUD standards, federal money is used to subsidize rental payments so that eligible families can secure dwelling accommodations at fair market values. Interestingly, HUD officials often complain that while both the funds and the demand are present, the supply of available landlords is absent. HUD officials often claim they are faced with the somewhat embarrassing problem of knowing that while many urban neighborhoods consist of 70% renters, administrators cannot easily develop access to smaller landlords. Major landlords seem to have developed information systems leading them to federal subsidy programs. Families owning one or two additional dwellings, however, often know nothing of the rental subsidy programs, and sometimes find themselves without tenants. Tenants' rights groups often contend that smaller property holders are more sensitive to tenants' rights and make more reasonable landlords. However, local housing authorities, tenants organizations, and families owning second dwelling units do not appear to have the time or resources to establish a working relationship.

In attempting to deal with these problems, tenants' rights groups face numerous practical barriers. These barriers prevent successful organizing and negatively affect the organization's delivery capabilities. Usually they have just enough money to pay the costs associated with office rental and phone expenses. Staffing is minimal. Since they often serve low-income populations, their clients are typically not in a position to help defray the costs generated from the services that tenants' unions provide.

Tenants' rights organizations in Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, and Houston are characterized by all these problems. At the most elementary level, despite the fact that approximately 50% of the residents of these cities are renters, it is extremely difficult for the local tenants' unions to organize without deploying

individuals, door to door, in neighborhoods with high concentrations of renters. If people are deployed door to door in an effort to identify households occupied by renters, the resource drain on the organization is considerable—no one would be available to answer phone calls or to attend the numerous meetings necessary to publicize the organization's activities. An agency or group attempting to organize tenants must be able to maximize its contact with potential clients in order to develop an adequate support base and ultimately transform this base into a cohesive political force.

Further, adequate data on landlords are often not available. While some landlords have achieved local notoriety for their abusive consumer practices, or are extremely visible because of their lobbying activities against stricter local code enforcement statutes or habitability ordinances, other owners are more skilled at maintaining a low profile. As already mentioned, some landlords conceal individual ownership through the use of several different names. One major landlord in the predominantly Black community of Southside Fort Worth, for example, lists properties under no less than four different corporate or company titles. In order for a tenants' union to exercise any leverage in the code enforcement process or upon the landlord directly, it is obvious that they must secure the identities of individual landlords.

A TECHNOLOGICAL SCHEME
TO MAXIMIZE CONTACT WITH TENANTS

Probably the best sources of data pertinent to the problems just out lined are the property tax records collected by municipal and county agencies. Because municipalities depend on the accuracy of these records for revenue purposes, they are usually up to date and are maintained with a high degree of efficiency. Additionally, most major urban areas have computerized these records. Consequently, they can be adapted to

conform to the analytical requirements associated with the contemporary social science technology available to the university community. All large urban areas maintain property tax records that include: (1) physical location of the property, (2) mailing address of owner, (3) platte and block location of the property, (4) assessed value of land and improvements, (5) varied descriptions of the physical structures found on the land, and (6) data differentiating single-family residential from commercial or multiple-family dwellings. These data are often stored on several different tapes and are in no particular sequence. All cases, however, are identified by a common tax account number. Therefore, cases can be matched if data are stored on several tapes. Most important, property tax records are a matter of public record and must be made available to organizations or individuals at a cost not to exceed the expense of reproduction.

The purpose of the project reported in this article was to develop a data processing module and an information-retrieval system with the ability to provide information and statistical analysis to tenants unions. The data generated were used for political organizing. That is, the information would be used to launch a mail campaign to contact all tenants in the city. More generally stated, we were attempting to supplement traditional community organizing tactics through the use of computer technology. Because space is limited, only a brief technical description of the program will be presented. The system was designed to analyze the property-ownership patterns of an urban area in general, and some specific neighborhoods in particular. The system has the capability to identify the names of absentee owners and the addresses of their rental or vacant properties. It also has the ability to interface with the Census Geographical Base/DIME system for the examination of appropriate census geographic codes, so that further analysis for any specific neighborhood can be facilitated. Since the GBF/DIME contains proper geodetic coordinates (latitude/longitude), this module can also be interfaced with a computer

mapping program (such as EASYMAP) to provide visual graphic presentation of findings on a computer printer.[1] The underlying purpose of developing such a module was to provide university technology and resources to a group whose explicit purpose was to organize urban tenants into a cohesive and powerful force in city politics.[2]

The system designed for the construction of the absentee-ownership module followed a logical and structured procedure. The system uses two sets of computerized property tax records as input data. One tape contains records of the city's tax master file, which includes the tax account number of each property, the name and address of the property owner, the legal description of the property, the current and previous values for land and improvements, and a series of tax-related codes. The other tape file contains the tax account number and the physical address of the property. The tax master file has to be processed in order to select records of real property only. The tape file that was created and the physical address file are then sorted respectively into the same sequential order by tax account number. The special program package for street standardization, ZIPSTAN, is then utilized for error correction and format standardization (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974). The two data files, along with the corrected addresses, are merged by using the tax account number as the match key. The merged data file is then processed by a series of matching operations. The entire procedure is illustrated in the system flowchart shown in Figure 1.

Generally, then, numerous data analysis packages and data modification programs were tailored for the specific needs of tenants' unions. Overall, the system is composed of a blend of programs designed for different uses, but was easily adaptable for the needs of tenant organizers. The analytical possibilities and uses associated with the system are numerous. Once the files were created, the raw data were analyzed by the SPSS standard statistical package. More specifically, the authors provided the tenant organization with a complete list of

addresses denoting all tenant-occupied residential dwellings. These addresses were generated by the university computer and printed on mailing labels. Subsequently, about 40,000 brochures describing services provided by the tenants' union were mailed to appropriate households in the city. These data were also dumped in the aggregate, and in specific geographic units referenced by census tract, block, platte number, or zip code. Second, a master list of all landlords was generated for the entire city and made available to the tenants' union. This information is now being used to influence code enforcement activities, and to estimate the magnitude of holdings by specific landlords. While data are not yet available, it is the hope of the tenants' union to increase membership, and thereby revenues, as a result of the mass mailing. Records are being kept to determine which areas of the city have the greatest response to the mail-out.

In addition to the output just described, there are numerous other uses for the data. Owners of vacant residential property in low-income neighborhoods can be identified. These lists have been made available and have proved useful to a local community development corporation attempting to restore the existing housing supply in low-income neighborhoods. Owners have been contacted and option-to-buy contracts have been negotiated or outright purchase agreements have been executed. Additionally, while we have not implemented this approach, small owners of residential rental properties in low-income areas can be identified and referred to the local housing authority responsible for administering the Section 8 rental program. Such a list could be used to generate a pool of rental units to compete with major landlords, who often develop a parasitic attachment to federally sponsored housing programs. We have discussed the idea with the executive director of the local housing authority, but have not had the time or resources to launch such a scheme.

In addition to the uses just described, the computer has other possibilities. Through the development of a comprehensive list
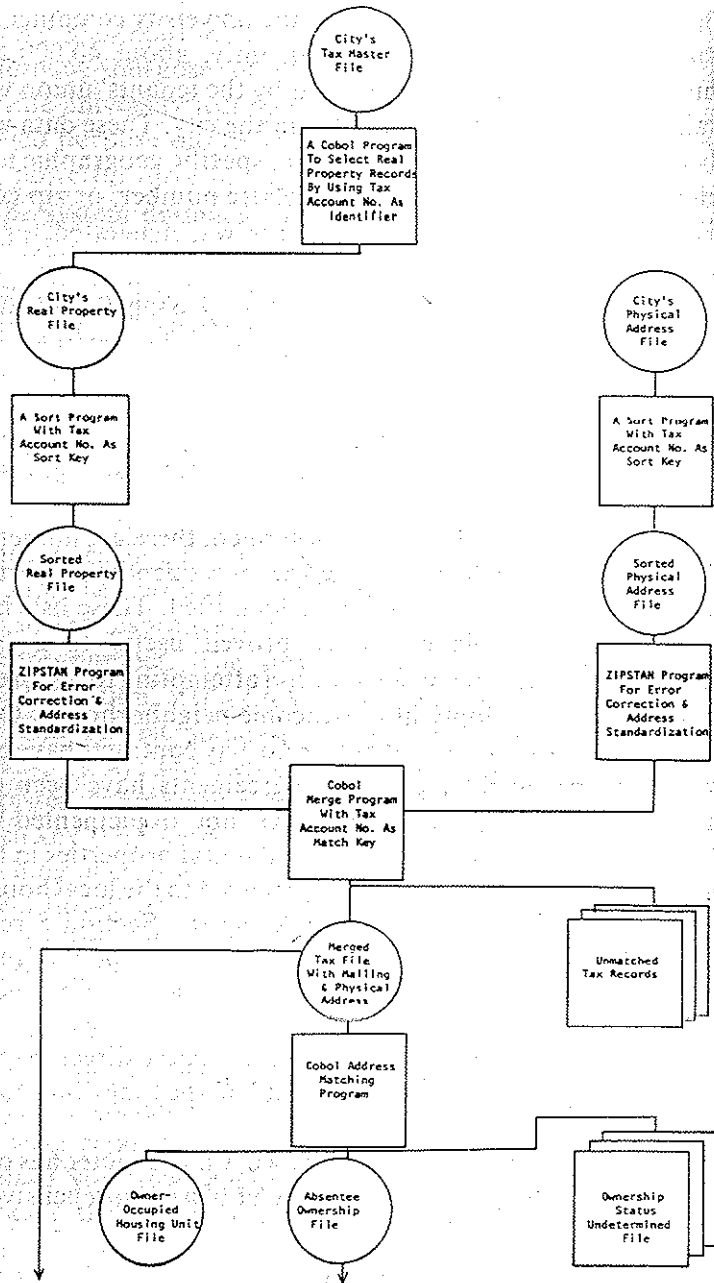
Figure 1: Flowchart Describing the Creation of Absentee-Owners and Rental Housing Units File
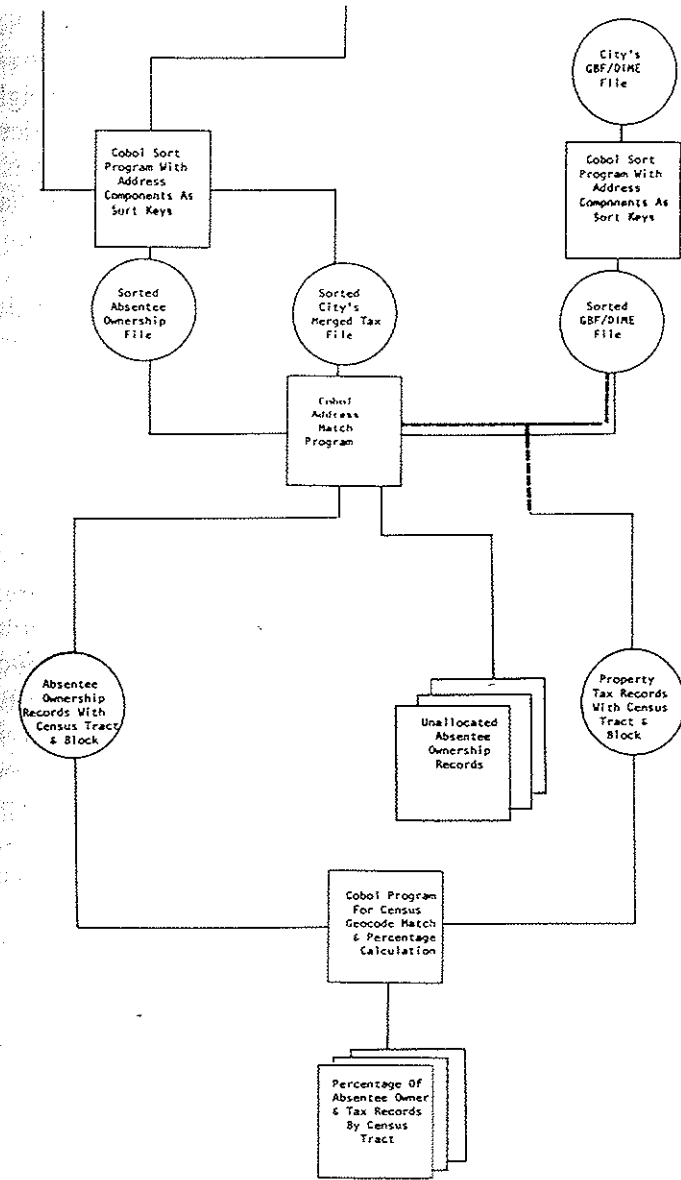
Figure 1 (Continued)

denoting the owners of property in low-income areas of a city, potential speculation can also be detected. This implies, of course, that the tax files must be updated periodically to record property transfers. Fringe areas in a low-income neighborhood, areas bordering on industrial or warehouse districts, are often the targets of speculators or developers who hasten a neighborhood's decline. By keeping close tabs on the financial transactions associated with these properties, community groups can anticipate potential changes in land-use zoning and mobilize community action accordingly. More generally, the data can be used in a way that makes neighborhood planning a more realistic political possibility.

ACTIVIST RESEARCH
AND UNIVERSITY CONSTRAINTS:
THE POLITICAL TIGHTROPE

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how academicians can use their knowledge in a manner that benefits community groups. While the case study described in this article focused upon tenants' rights issues and the urban housing crisis, the research by-products are applicable to numerous other situations: (1) patterns of mortgage lending, (2) municipal expenditures and social service delivery, (3) school finance, (4) police and fire protection, (5) code enforcement and violations, and so on. All these data are useful to community and neighborhood groups, as well as to legal service organizations that may be assisting them. Further, all this information is a matter of public record, is usually stored on computer tape, and must be made available to organizations at a fee not to exceed the costs of reproduction.

A major assumption underlying our activities was that municipal information and data, like other public commodities, are highly concentrated and differentially available to working-class individuals and groups. It was further assumed

that the monopolization of municipal information is a mechanism of social control and class domination. As Lowry (1972: 438) maintains, social control in the modern age

> has become more a matter of one's ability to persuade others to accept various decisions and plans. Manipulation and persuasion depend upon knowledge and information. Thus, what one knows and does not know determines who has power and how that power can be utilized.

The information system described in this article will certainly not alleviate the numerous problems encountered by community and neighborhood organizations, and is obviously not a "technological fix" or "cure" for the difficult task of organizing tenants. It does, however, have the potential to reduce inequities in the availability of municipal data, thereby reducing a group's susceptibility to manipulation and uninformed persuasion on the part of city officials. One by-product of more equitable access to information, then, is the partial dissipation of secrecy as a mechanism of class domination.

A critical element of the information referral system developed is the fact that the data processing hardware is owned by the university. While university hardware is a public resource, it is not typically available to working- and lower-class community groups. University computer technology and time, hardware, and the analytical skills possessed by university employees were made available to the tenants' union through the personal acts of the authors. Our actions embodied several political premises that deserve further elaboration and discussion.

First, individual social scientists who participate in this type of activity run the risk of creating serious rifts among the university, municipal government, and the more conservative elements of a city's private sector. The business community, landlords and developers in particular, might exert pressure on the university administration to curtail the use of state

resources (computer time, equipment, and so on) for activities similar to those described. Clearly, the business community and numerous other university components and administrators define service to working- and lower-class groups as illegitimate in that it is designed to bring about "social change." This strains relations between the university and the community, and has the potential to jeopardize activities to which university administrators typically assign high priority—alumni giving, support for athletic programs, internship and job placement, and the like. If university activities become politicized, a department's fiscal stability can be threatened by hostile state and local legislators. Pressure can be exerted by making it known to administrators that support for expansion in one sector of a university will come about only if the political activities of the "deviant" department or unit are curtailed.

There is no simple way to deal with these issues. However, some practical strategies and techniques deserve mention. In our own case, personal time expenditures were officially justified under the category of *community service*. Most universities define service to the community as a legitimate activity, even though it is typically not rewarded or encouraged in the same proportions as is publishing. Obviously, through the production of this article, it was possible to combine both activities. The trade-offs involved for others, however, must be determined by the incentive systems of individual departments and by the university's position on the need to demonstrate more traditional academic products for purposes of tenure, promotion, and financial reward. It is our opinion, however, that the professional trade-off between *community service* and *publishing* is a false issue. Neighborhood political experiences are as theoretically relevant a data base as are more traditional kinds of scholastic exercises. The data and observations gleaned from community service experiences can be converted into meaningful articles, monographs, and books as readily as can more orthodox kinds of raw data gathered by more traditional techniques.

A more difficult area to deal with is the development of acceptable justifications for use of public resources such as computer hardware, supplies, and release time. Typically, the private sector can purchase university services on a contract basis. Computer time and salary are usually included on the contract budget, and departments benefit financially from release time by using salary savings to purchase less expensive, part-time instructors. Of course, these options are not usually available to most community groups; so most departments have few incentives to deliver services to them. While purchasing university services through a contract partially legitimates the controversial activities for the university administration, the procedure simply serves to emphasize the relationship among wealth, access to information, and university elitism. Nonetheless, if university personnel serving working-class interests can secure outside financial assistance for activities similar to those described in this article, many of the problems associated with the political uses of university resources can be circumvented partially.

In our own case, it was possible to acquire a small grant from the Campaign for Human Development in the amount of $2000. These funds covered computer time, the purchase of tapes, and the printing of brochures at the university print shop. While both the university computing center and the print shop had some reservations about doing the work, they had no legitimate reason to refuse. Had the funds not been available, however, difficulties would probably have been encountered. A slightly different way of handling the computer problem is to define service to community groups as *academic, unfunded research*. This option, however, commits one to the demonstration of traditional academic productivity (articles, papers, and so on) in order to maintain credibility within the university community.

A more straightforward way of handling these delicate political problems is to approach the university administration directly and make clear the intentions of the research undertak-

ing. In certain kinds of settings, this option might be the most effective way to handle a potentially controversial situation. Especially in urban areas where the university has not developed a strong record of service to minority or low-income neighborhoods, administrators will often agree to approve the use of computer and other university resources for projects such as those described herein. The likelihood of generating such an outcome is enhanced with letters and phone calls supporting the activity from political leaders in working- and lower-class neighborhoods. While we have not adopted this approach, it is clear that activist research under such conditions potentially could become highly politicized. Nonetheless, in cities where class and racial changes are taking place, most administrators realize that continued growth and expansion of the university depends upon increasing minority and working-class enrollment. From this vantage point, some conservative administrators will grant approval of potentially controversial research activities if student recruitment is a possible by-product. Obviously, such an outcome depends solely on how controversial the research is likely to become.

The second major problem associated with research and professional activities similar to those described in this article is that of potentially strained relations with city government. This problem has two key elements. First, individual academicians who might be inclined to engage in activist research are typically drawn from departments that rely on municipal officials and structures for student placement, collegiality, and mutual support. Activities such as those described herein can possibly jeopardize these relationships. Those departments we have in mind include sociology, urban affairs, public administration, political science, and social work. Second, one should consider the possibility that city agencies and officials may respond negatively to the community groups being assited by the university. Bad relations between the city and the community may worsen, and the university may be held responsible.

In our own case, the cities we have dealt with have not been quick to release property tax records. In two cases, letters from legal service lawyers had to be forwarded to appropriate city officials before the tapes were acquired. The letters reminded the officials that the property tax files were covered under the Freedom of Information Act and were public property. Fortunately, further controversy did not ensue. There is no easy cure for this situation once it has developed. The best way of avoiding the problem, however, is to maintain a very low profile and avoid public exposure. But if controversy develops, it is obvious that the low profile strategy is irrelevant. Simply stated, there are risks involved in activist research. The risks may be personal, professional, and departmental. Further, there is no foolproof blueprint for avoiding the risks.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that all these observations are designed to illustrate the problems associated with activist research. Our case study focused on an ongoing attempt to level the stratified nature of access to public information. The dynamics of public secrecy have been affected significantly by the Freedom of Information Act (Galnoor, 1979; Tefft, 1979). Nonetheless, community groups representing working- and lower-class neighborhoods do not have the technology or resources necessary to develop access or to utilize municipal data sets effectively. Because data storage is becoming increasingly mechanized, only sophisticated and well-financed organizations can utilize public information systems efficiently. Mechanization simply contributes to the monopolization of knowledge and increases the likelihood that it will be used as a mechanism of social domination. Urban universities and intellectuals can contribute to the leveling of inequities in access to public information by sharing their technology and skills with community and neighborhood organizations. By increasing these organizations' access to information, their political strength may be increased, thereby influencing the delivery of services and amenities to working- and lower-class neighborhoods.

NOTES

1. For an introduction to the development, contents, and capabilities of the DIME system, see U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970).

EASYMAP is a computer program designed by the Bureau of the Census as an inexpensive and easy means of producing choropleth (shaded area) maps from a geographic reference file. It was written in FORTRAN IV and requires 72k bytes of core (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979).

2. The module developed consists of seven computer programs and incorporates ZIPSTAN, a special program package developed by the Bureau of the Census for street format standardization. These programs are written in 1974 ANS I COBOL language and implemented in an IBM370/155 OS/VS system. The amount of core storage needed to run the module is dependent on the volume of data required. However 200k bytes of storage will be sufficient for a medium-scale city (about 400,000 population). The module is operated via a batch mode. However, direct access can be arranged so that an interactive mode of data retrieval and updating would be possible. It is obvious, then, that the computer hardware owned by the university must be utilized in the delivery and development of this service. Without university hardware, the information delivery system could not be developed. Further information describing the program developed can be obtained from the authors.

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