It was a blustery, typically cold November day in Chicago, but Kay Frances felt not even a chill as she rapidly walked toward the flag-filled esplanade of Grant Park that late Tuesday afternoon. Her old friend Ellis Frazier, who had worked for almost a year on the Obama campaign as a field marshal in Pennsylvania, had garnered a pass for her to the Obama rally on election night. The excitement coursing through her kept the cold at bay as she headed toward the southwest corner where they were to meet. Clutching the red-and-blue pass in her gloveless hand so as not to lose sight of it, she hurried through security, as happily indifferent to their careful scrutiny as the hundreds of other smiling people around her. She felt like she was at the biggest football game of her life, with the home team already ahead. She quickly blocked that thought, not wanting to jinx what every news report and her own hard work in Ohio the previous week had been telling her: A Black man with the most liberal voting record in the U.S. Senate is going to be elected president of the United States of America!

Winding her way southward, she soon spotted her friend, one of the many younger Black people grinning from ear to ear as they stood within the widest array of races, ages, and occupations she had ever seen. As he had promised her, Ellis managed to stand out because of the (Continued)
eight-foot-high banner he carried. "YES WE CAN!" was in bold red letters, with a line through "CAN!" and a handwritten "DID!" replacing it. Kay smiled warmly to herself as she approached her old friend. Ever the grassroots radical, Ellis had added "Power to the People!" as well, underlining "People" three times for emphasis.

"Hey, white girl, what are you doin’ here?" he playfully bantered as they hugged each other tightly. "Oops, I mean ‘woman,’ of course," he grinned sheepishly.

"What’s a nearly middle-aged white woman like me doing here? Hangin’ out, just like a brother like you!" Their smiles never left their faces. "I hear something might be happening tonight. Not that a tired ol’ rad like you would notice." Kay remembered how they’d both grown comfortable with each other only after some serious work on race and gender back in their community practice class at social work school. That had once seemed a long time ago, but not tonight.

"Hey, I’m not tired right now, believe me!" He smiled again, looking out at the crowd for a second. "Amazing how things change, isn’t it? Little more than a year ago and I was fighting for our last dollar to keep our parent organizing campaign afloat. You were e-mailing me about how the latest state regulations on your homeless service contracts were driving you up the wall. To me, most funders were going through the motions, looking for the latest hot item instead of caring about the issues, if you know what I mean. Everybody frustrated and tired, ‘same ol’ same ol’.’" He spread his arms wide, a look of wonder crossing his face. "And now this!"

"Isn’t it wonderful?" she agreed. She paused as she gingerly touched his arm for a second. "And it’s so great that we get to share this together. Years ago, in that first macro course, we wanted to kill each other. I hated you and all your politically correct organizer jargon about fighting for social justice and ending oppression." She began to laugh. "And you couldn’t stand all my talk about helping people and the long, honorable tradition of service of the social work profession."

"Hey, some of that talk still drives me crazy." He paused for only a second. "And you helped me see that some p.c. organizers couldn’t care less about how they treated people. And, yeah, social justice and social work can go hand in hand."

Kay grabbed his arm, more firmly now. "And it’s because of you that I see issues of oppression aren’t add-ons to our work, they’re in the middle of everything we do, including every agency I’ve worked for."

"Gee," Ellis replied with just a wisp of irony. "An organizer who grew to care about helping people and a social worker who fights oppression through her agency. Who woulda’ thunk?"

Kay looked around at the swelling thousands who were pouring into Grant Park as they spoke. "Well, the truth is, I was able to think about that a lot sooner than I could believe that this could have happened in my lifetime." She tapped him on his chest with her fist. "And don’t tell me you thought it would!"

"Not exactly. Being a biracial Black Latino, the last thing I ever thought was something like this. I still can’t completely wrap my head around the fact that it’s happened. I guess it’s like those old books on organizing about civil rights and the ‘30s labor movement. You know, two women trained to be organizers by the Alabama NAACP and the Highlander Center in
The focus of the intervention: As the case study vignette implies, one of the core distinctions to macro practice, whether one is a grassroots organizer or social work administrator, is the focus of intervention for macro practitioners. The assessments they make are different from those of professionals who work with small groups or individuals. Individual and small-group interventions are defined as either clinical/case management or clinical/mutual aid group interventions. Netting, Kettner, and McMurtry (2008) focus on organizations, communities, and policy, while Rothman, Tropman, and Erlich (2000) substitute “small groups” for “policy” as the arenas in which macro practitioners work. Others prefer the policy arena as the primary focus, arguing that communities and organizations fit within the larger domain of policy analysis and legislative action (Gilbert & Terrell, 2002; Jansson, 2004; Karger & Stoesz, 2001). As such, all of these definitions in some way equate macro practice with collective, large-scale intervention.

The practitioner roles of the intervention: These interventions are as distinctive as the roles assigned to those who undertake them, and as such are as old as social work itself. Social welfare history books and policy texts are replete with 19th-century descriptions of friendly visitors working with downtrodden individuals (the predecessors of caseworkers and clinical social workers who work with individual clients); settlement house workers providing language and hygiene classes for the immigrants crowding into Northern cities from Europe...
(the forebears of group workers engaged in today’s mutual aid/support groups); and labor/suffrage activists fighting for labor rights and the rights of freed slaves and women to vote (the forerunners to community organizers working to end environmental racism, parents’ rights in schools, and child welfare, etc. (Fisher, 1994; Jansson, 2004; Trattner, 1998).

Over time, as populations in need grew in size and interventions expanded their scope, those who ran these more expanded programs began to define themselves as another kind of macro practitioner, the social work administrator (Bonner, 2002). These social welfare administrators were the predecessors to today’s social work agency managers and leaders (Blau & Abramovitz, 2007; Jansson, 2004).

Macro practice assessments of their interventions: As important as these distinctions are in defining the focus of intervention and the ensuing roles that either macro or micro practitioners play, they still do not provide a conceptual understanding beyond the obvious: working with lots of people requires a different kind of activity than working with only one or a few. The more pertinent analytical distinction between macro- and micro-practice interventions is through the type of assessments different practitioners undertake. For the micro practitioner, it is the bio-psycho-social assessment of the individual (Mattaini & Lowery, 2007; Saleebey, 2008). But what would a bio-psycho-social assessment for a community look like? What variables fit in that broader kind of assessment?

In the case study vignette above, Kay and Ellis made reference to two assessments: the one they undertook together in graduate school as part of their macro practice class and Kay’s reference to Obama’s assessment of the whole country. Are these the same kinds of assessments, differing only in the size and the breadth of what a potential presidential candidate was diagnosing versus what two young graduate students were? Of course not.

A Case Example of Macro Practice Level-One Assessments: The Rediscovery of Homelessness

That two social work students and a presidential candidate were engaged in different kinds of assessments is obvious: running for president of the United States requires answering different questions than does helping a community agency decide whether to expand services either for the homebound elderly or for at-risk youth. But I would argue that skilled macro practitioners need to understand both what Obama sought to answer and what Kay and Ellis investigated 15 years ago, for each adds critical information that the other needs to be fully effective.

Based on the assessments undertaken, we can understand this more easily by examining how and why the focus of intervention regarding the homeless has changed over the years.

• In the early 1970s, when I was a young organizer starting out in New York City, there seemed to be neither homeless people nor homeless advocates. There were, of course, “Bowery bums,” those chronic alcoholics living on the seedy streets south of Houston Street, but they had nothing to do with macro practice or organizing. Most of them were
attended to by religious folks, not social workers, and especially not community practitioners, who were busy fighting against poverty, for an end to the Vietnam War, and to expand open admissions in public universities (Fisher, 1994).

- A few years later a new group began to show up on streets north of Houston Street. While the alcoholics had been mostly men, these people seemed to be mostly women, and for some reason they carried large bags of apparel and other items with them. Often talking to themselves and sometimes not very clean, they began to be seen by a few social workers from nearby settlement houses or mental health clinics, especially on the West Side of Manhattan. Macro practitioners were fighting the cuts caused by the “city crisis” (Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992; Tabb, 1992) as well as for expanded welfare rights, an end to poverty, and for youth employment. Those “bag ladies,” while deserving of care, were somebody else’s issue.

- By the late ’70s into the early ’80s, larger and larger numbers of people, including families, were now living on streets all over the city. As South of Houston was increasingly gentrified, more and more of the former Bowery residents joined the numbers of old women found in northern sections of the city. Advocates for the homeless, as they were now called, organized large demonstrations and began class action lawsuits demanding that the homeless have a right to shelter. Macro practice through community organizing and advocacy was the primary homeless intervention of the day (Baxter & Hopper, 1981; Fabricant, 1985).

- Twenty-five years later, New York City settled a class action suit with legal advocates while continuing to support an array of homeless shelter providers in their joint efforts to diminish the size of the homeless population. Homeless advocates, now organized in long-standing coalitions at the city, state, and national levels with their own funding streams, continue to mobilize for both better services, more affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and an expansion of shelter clients’ rights. Macro and micro practitioners can be found throughout the homeless services system.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTION**

What is the Level-One assessment of the issue your organizing campaign or agency is working under? How has it changed from 20 years ago?

**THE LEVEL-ONE ASSESSMENT OF MACRO PRACTICE: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK FOR DESIRED COMMUNITY OR ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVENTIONS**

This brief history of how people assessed and intervened around homelessness in New York City underscores two critical issues that macro practitioners must weigh as they make other judgments in their practice about what to do.
First, while social work macro practitioners rarely intervene directly in large-scale economic matters, the people with whom they work and the choices of service intervention or direct action undertaken are greatly affected by such factors. The chronic alcoholics of the 1950s through the early 1970s were contained and (made invisible) by living within one of the least attractive neighborhoods of Manhattan: South of Houston, or, as we call it today, Soho. In 2010, Soho is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in all of New York, with one-bedroom apartments still selling for more than a million dollars. In 1970, a single cot in a flophouse cost one of these men a quarter for the night. Kept invisible through an undesirable location not well known to the larger public, their problems were easily perceived as of their own making. Only as the economic engine of gentrification and expensive cooperative housing development began to displace their flophouses and make their presence less desirable uptown did others begin to notice them as part of a growing social problem that came to be known as homelessness.

**Understanding the Political Economic Calculus**

The bag ladies had been similarly displaced as gentrification overtook the West Side of New York City as well, forcing these poor, older women (many of whom had been deinstitutionalized from mental hospitals a few years earlier) out of their single-room-occupancy hotels (SROs) and into the streets (Baxter & Hopper, 1981). Their increasing visibility on the streets of Manhattan signaled not only an increase in social need but also shifts in economic relationships as once-cheap housing was redeveloped into luxury apartments.

Equally important, that developers were able to raze large apartment buildings filled with poor people also required a new political calculus between these economic actors and political leaders. After all, there had been zoning laws and regulations on the books that precluded wholesale evictions of destitute people. That calculus found expression in an amendment to old housing laws from the 1950s, popularly known as J-51 legislation. The J-51 amendment allowed developers and landlords to empty their buildings if they were completely renovating them for condominium and cooperative conversion (McKee, 2008). Partial renovation on individual apartments or in small buildings continued to provide modest tax abatements as in the past. The impact of this amendment was to speed up the process of full-scale rehab, leading to larger and larger numbers of poor people evicted into the streets (Baxter & Hopper, 1981).

How could housing developers be given such a legislative gift by politicians in what was perceived to be one of the most politically progressive cities in the United States? The simple answer might be greed: Politicians got bought off by developers’ contributions. This is accurate as far as it goes; housing developers in New York City have always been huge contributors to major politicians’ coffers (Conason, 2008; Tabb, 1992). However, for macro practitioners to be effective over the long term, especially given the massive change underway that is reconfiguring today’s political and economic equations, we need to dig more deeply in order to understand the underlying reasons for both this “developers’ amendment” and the eventual creation of the largest homeless shelter system in the nation.
In the early-to-mid 1970s, the politics of New York City remained highly progressive. At the same time, the city’s fiscal situation was growing weaker and weaker as the national economy entered its most serious recession since the 1940s. (Sale, 1975; Tabb, 1992). Forced to pay more and more funds to outstanding debt obligations, the city’s revenues were in trouble. Given this financial squeeze, housing developers’ promises to convert low-tax SROs and flophouses to high-tax cooperatives shifted the political equation to make the amendment feasible. In short, the economic value of the increased tax revenues for the financially strapped city reconstructed and expanded the authority of economic actors to act, even if it meant the eviction of thousands of people into the ranks of those who became known, seemingly overnight, as the homeless.

The long-term pull toward progressive reform of New York City was being pushed powerfully aside by economic need and political support for the open ascension of housing developers and their financial backers as far more central to the city’s revitalization than the progressive reformers, trade unionists, New Dealers, and community activists of the past (Conason, 2008; Fisher, 1994; Reisch & Andrews, 2001; Tabb, 1992).

Not that homeless advocates lacked the strategic capacity to fight back. By using the city’s historic reputation for progressive reform and the powerful, visible evidence of countless numbers of poor people suffering on its streets, homeless advocates successfully countered some of the developers’ prerogatives for economic growth with the right to shelter for the city’s most vulnerable citizens. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, homeless advocates were untiring as they campaigned for guaranteed shelter, an expansion in low-income housing, and services (Fabricant, 1985). As mentioned in the last item in the case example above, by the mid-1980s, besides winning the right to shelter, many advocates moved from organizing against homelessness to managing the largest homeless shelter system in America.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTION**

In what ways have the macro practice roles surrounding your issues changed over the last 20 years?

**THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BALANCE OF POWER FRAMES A MACRO PRACTITIONER’S LEVEL-TWO COMMUNITY ASSESSMENTS**

While successful in limiting rampant development’s impact on the most vulnerable, by the early 1980s, homeless activists, as well as other macro practitioners, were confronted with the daunting reality that their voice in the political and economic discourse of the city had been greatly changed. As the Reagan years went on, it had become clear in New York and every other American city that those who financed and owned luxury housing developments
would be more central to the discourse on what is acceptable in the mix of economic development and social welfare expenditure for the next 25 years in ways than progressive actors had been in the 1960s. Thus, for example, it is no accident that between 1960 and 1980, the level of social welfare expenditure grew 110%, the federal tax system (critical to state revenue expansion) had a corporate tax rate of 53%, the poverty rate in the nation decreased to 10.1%, and the ratio of wealth between the top 10% and the bottom 10% was 8:1. Between 1980 and 2000, expenditure on social welfare dropped 30%, the corporate tax rate was cut to 18%, the level of poverty rose to 15.1%, and the wealth ratio between the top and bottom tenths grew to 18:1 (Jansson, 2004; Klein, 2007; Krugman, 2003, 2009c; Phillips, 2003, 2008).1

1 As Princeton economist Paul Krugman noted in 2003,

income inequality has now returned to the levels of the 1920s. . . . The thirteen thousand richest families had almost as much income as earned by the twenty million poorest households. . . . (Furthermore) the number of Americans with million dollar incomes doubled from 1995–1999, while the percentage of their income that went to federal taxes dropped by 11 per cent. (p.20)

As he noted,

this increase in economic wealth for the very rich and increased misery for the poorest of the poor has been matched by the political assault on social welfare programs that goes to the heart of the modern welfare state. To briefly highlight those programs, the New Deal of the 1930s inaugurated old-age insurance (now called Social Security), unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation, and a variety of public initiatives to alleviate poverty, its hallmark being aid to families with dependent children (AFDC). Based on a convergence of militant industrial trade unions and reform-minded capitalism in the 1930s, these programs were joined in the 1960s by important civil rights-led initiatives. Responding to generations of racist and sexist policies, that legislation included Medicaid, Medicare, community-based antipoverty initiatives, and affirmative action programs.

These are the programs that have been under attack since the Reagan Administration. (p.89)

This attack reached its fulcrum under a Democratic presidency, that of Bill Clinton, and the passage of the 1996 Personal Opportunity and Work Responsibility Act, which replaced AFDC. A mix of fiscal and social policies, this sweeping legislation limited aid to 60 months in a person’s lifetime; required work activities; prohibited legal immigrants from receiving Food Stamps and Social Security Insurance (SSI); required teen parents to live at home or under adult supervision; and limited Food Stamps for able-bodied, single, unemployed adults to three months every three years. Furthermore, this shift in federal policy had been matched by the states’ reversal on welfare expenditures as well. Between 1970 and 1996, for example, New York City had decreased its welfare benefits by 48%, Tennessee by 58%, and Texas by 68%.

These radical shifts in social policy did not occur because of the United States’ relative expansiveness in welfare expenditures. By 1995—when the push for this federal rollback began to build up steam from the Gingrich-led assault inside Congress—U.S. public social expenditures represented about 17.1% of the gross national product, the lowest among 10 comparable industrial nations and a little more than half the other nations’ average level.
This long historic example of New York City’s housing development, homelessness, and shelter creation could be applied in any other American community over the last three decades. Its delineation clarifies one of the central distinctions between macro practitioners and others. This initial, level-one stage of a macro practitioner’s assessment includes attention to these kinds of political and economic dynamics that frame the ensuing choices that agencies, community leaders, and others make on their strategic options for change and/or service enhancement.

Thus, a macro practitioner begins her or his unique set of tasks through an examination of the dominant political and economic balance of power of our larger society that frames the contours to “what is.” In turn, this level-one framework of what is politically and economically outlines the overall contours to the day-to-day work of all social workers, whether they are organizers, clinicians, or managers, that are created out of the level-two community assessments that are the focus of the next chapter.

Undertaking this political economic assessment is critical to a macro practitioner’s strategic effectiveness because it helps him or her choose the correct interventions for the time and place in which he or she is working. This is why judging tactical choices from one period of history to another can be so difficult. That in 2008 macro practitioners can be found working with the homeless on supportive housing programs while their 1960s counterparts, fighting the war on poverty, paid little attention to those men on the Bowery neither makes the latter uncaring nor the former less committed to social change. The mix of economic factors and political calculations that shaped the focus of each of their interventions was profoundly different.

**HISTORY MOVES: OPENING MACRO PRACTICE TO A NEW CALCULUS**

It was this kind of level-one political and economic appraisal that Kay Frances at the beginning of the chapter was referring to regarding Barack Obama’s “community needs assessment of the whole country.” As he traveled the country in 2006–2007, the calls for his presidential candidacy from the heartland of America led him to assess his opportunities differently than he had before. The heartfelt cries for him to step forward from White middle Americans caused him to reflect that the calculus of what is possible in electoral politics in the United States was shifting dramatically throughout the country. Calculus, after all, is concerned with the “laws of changes attending a slight alteration in the form of the function” (Merriam-Webster’s Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 1979).

Obama sensed more than a slight alteration that spoke to changes underway in America’s political economic calculus. As every reader of this text knows, the Iraqis debacle that was fought on false claims (Clark, 2005; Isikoff & Corn, 2007), the violation of standards regarding torture that diminished this country’s standing in the world (Sands, 2008), the failure of the Bush administration to respond either adequately or humanely to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina that embarrassed Americans (Cooper & Block, 2007),
and the unfolding corruption of both Bush appointees and key Republican political leaders (Klein, 2002; McClellan, 2009) all combined to redefine for the first time in generations a different assessment of what was and wasn’t acceptable in political discourse and the type of political leadership the nation desired (Connolly, 1993). Obama, perhaps before anyone else, began to see that what could be possible had begun to change inside the dominant equation of what made up American political life. By 2008, the authority behind the political part of the discourse on “what is” was beginning to change.

Then, as Barack Obama’s unlikely candidacy grew, an economic earthquake opened up across America. While events continue to unfold with a rapidity that makes up-to-the-moment descriptions of the crisis problematic here, what can be outlined are the underlying systemic issues at play that are dramatically altering the economic part of the calculus in level-one political and economic discourse.

Beneath the home foreclosures, Wall Street firm closings, Big Three auto bailouts and bankruptcies, and credit crises lies an epochal failure of how our economic system operates and the rules that have governed that system’s operations. This is a stunning turnaround. After almost 30 years of hegemonic dominance in deciding how the world would operate on financial matters, the totality of conservative leaders’ economic and social failures have left a gaping hole in people’s assumptions about “what is” that has not been popularly witnessed since the 1930s. As Michael Lewis and David Einhorn wrote in early 2009,

[Americans] have been viewed by the wider world with mistrust and suspicion on other matters, but on the subject of money even our harshest critics have been inclined to believe we knew what we were doing. . . . This is one reason that the collapse of our financial system has inspired not merely national but a global crisis of confidence. (p. 9)

The 2008–2010 financial crisis is different from other economic downturns of the past 40 years. For example, the city crisis of the 1970s that was the backdrop to the emergence of homelessness cited above came about through the city’s overreliance on short-term bonds to pay for social service and public infrastructure expansion that came due without adequate revenues. The ensuing regulations by the state to correct this fiscal problem were overseen by financial managers from the same firms that in 2009 have collapsed. While a serious problem in New York and other northeastern cities in the 1970s, the problems were relegated to a few municipalities, especially those with long histories of progressive taxation, expansive social services, and public sector unionism. Perceived as spendthrifts, these urban actors would be part of the conservative agenda’s justification for anti-state regulation and anti-welfare state intervention that dominated the Reagan years and beyond (Phillips, 2003, 2008; Sale, 1975).

Unlike the city crisis of the ’70s, the financial crisis of 2008–2010 is not relegated to what fiscal conservatives would then characterize as a few socially progressive bad apples of the northeast. As nationwide systemic problems, they extend beyond the “blame game”
of individuals, as complicit as many of them may be (Krugman, 2009a). As economists have noted, they include the following:

- Our financial system required all sorts of important people to sacrifice our collective long-term interests for short-term gain. . . . The pressure to do this in today’s financial markets is immense. Obviously, the greater the market pressure to excel in the short term, the greater the need for pressure from outside the market to consider long-term. But that’s the problem: there is no longer any serious pressure from outside the market . . . the tyranny of the short term has extended itself with frightening ease into the entities that were meant to discipline . . . Wall Street. (Lewis & Einhorn, 2009, p. 9)

- Those regulators created out of the New Deal to watch over investment decisions of banks and other investors in our marketplace no longer provided the balanced oversight required of them under law (Krugman, 2003). Indeed, the true scandal of the Madoff Ponzi scheme, whereby investors worldwide lost more than $65 billion, was that informed whistleblowers had attempted for years to alert the Securities and Exchange Commission to his firm’s illegal maneuvering, only to be blocked again and again. As financial writers Lewis and Einhorn (2009) wrote, “Created to protect investors from financial predators, (by 2008) the commission had somehow evolved into a mechanism for protecting financial predators with political clout from investors” (p. 9).

- The conservative state’s approach to ending the crisis in 2008 devolved into six different strategies for seven different bailouts (Lewis & Einhorn, 2009). It’s quite a list. Among the action items are these:
  - Bear Stearns was allowed to be sold to JP Morgan for rates below bankruptcy filings, while Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, the government-sponsored housing investors, were nationalized.
  - Venerable Lehman Brothers collapsed; a week later, the giant insurer AIG was given enormous government loans to stay afloat.

The inconsistency of these efforts, joined to the minimal oversight demands these loans and bailout funds required (no demand to invest funds in cities or to stop foreclosures on working people’s homes, no limit to bonuses), in combination placed the government’s economic minions in far lessened authority to act without discretion.

The presidents of the Big Three auto companies (GM, Ford, and Chrysler) traveled by individual jets to Washington to beg for bailout money for their failing companies. Arriving with neither a corrective management plan nor an explanation on their stunningly wasteful travel arrangements, these former titans of the American economy were initially scorned and forced to return to the Capitol to make their requests again
Only the threat of two million workers across America losing their jobs (from auto and associated industries) managed to win the bailout package of $4.5 billion. That GM and Chrysler have now gone through bankruptcy has further eroded their overall authority as economic and political actors. Obama’s unprecedented election in 2008 and the rise of the populist Tea Party movement both speak to the vacuum created by the diminished authority of late-20th-century economic actors and their political allies.

There will be new tax plans, calls for structural reform (from both the right and the left), and other seismic shifts in our economic and political landscape that will transcend what has been discussed above over the coming years. What matters here for macro practitioners is the shift in Level-One assessments underway regarding the political and economic calculus of:

- what is and isn’t acceptable for the state to do
- who are society’s most credible actors in moving our nation to a stable and sustainable system once again
- who is deserving of state intervention . . . both regulatory (to protect the community from harm) and redistributive (to help lift up those deserving of that lift)

Just as the ‘70s’ financial crisis and political demands of the day reconfigured the political and economic discourse in ways that ushered in the Age of Reagan for three decades, so now does the Obama presidency signal that this discourse is about to be rewritten in new and exciting ways unseen in the United States for more than 40 years. The combination of political miscalculation, malfeasance, and dishonesty of the Bush administration, coupled with the systemic failures of the economic system and its leaders, has created an opportunity of enormous magnitude for progressive social interventions unseen since the 1960s. That said, the fiscal crises that nonprofit agencies now face because of the loss of tax revenues (Banjo & Kalita, 2010) is a cause for concern that will require more, not less, activism from anyone committed to a robust nonprofit sector in American society. Likewise, the Tea Party activists of 2010 give pause to the depth of this opportunity. Nevertheless, as troubling as those signs are, the opportunity for genuine progressive reform remains brighter than it has been for decades.

While concluding this chapter on such a cautiously optimistic note, I nevertheless need to warn macro practitioners about the work ahead. The first assumption under which this book and its predecessor have been written needs to be reiterated here: The dominant contours of a historical period in which macro practice is carried out are a reflection not only of the status quo but also of the level of struggle between the contending forces in society. For just as conservative presidents of the last 30 years were unable to undo some central progressive legislation of the 1930s and 1960s, there is no guarantee that the conservative gains since Reagan will disappear through a new president’s fiat, either. Poverty was not discussed in the 2008 election; immigrants confront enormous legal, social, and economic barriers;
anti-LGBT legislation was passed with the support of many who voted for Obama; and the social and financial dynamics of what it means to be fully integrated into a global world are all issues still at hand that macro practitioners will confront in the years ahead. What was written more than 25 years ago remains apt today as well, even as today’s times augur possible opportunity:

The impact of the international economic crisis on social workers’ lives is not about to go away by merely leaving it out of our analysis or by making a list of priorities for a just society tacked on to the end of our work. Some of these concrete problems are: high competition for entry-level jobs with non–social workers; dilution of skill areas; the substitution of accountability measures (paper work) for clinical services. All of these are problems addressed by social workers every day, some opting for increased professional rivalries, others searching for joint coalition and collaborative work. With all that’s going on in the field, it seems all the more mandatory that practice frameworks, if they are to begin meeting social workers’ real needs, must move away from the safety of generalization to the more tumultuous, risky world of concrete experience. After all, that’s where social workers are and what they deal with. The task is a great one, and this work certainly won’t attempt all of it. But the era of social welfare we are entering, as the above economic analysis suggests, is going to be dramatically demanding: everything, including the nature of practice and the structure of social services, is open to challenge and to change. At the same time, its outcome is not predetermined by either present statistics or current power relationships. If this were true, in the 1930s working people—including social workers—would have accepted bread lines and poverty, and in the 1960s Rosa Parks and her children would still be riding at the back of the bus. The shape of events is determined by people, all of us, and by our willingness to understand and to seek to change the world for the better. (Burghardt, 1982, p. 21)

Where the above analysis proved wanting was in its assumed expectation that “everything . . . is open to challenge and to change,” at least as far as progressive change was concerned. The challenge and change of the next 25 years were met by conservative forces more than up to the demands they set for remaking our society. They, not social welfare activists, read the temper of the times in a way that we did not (Whalen & Flacks, 2002).

We need not make that mistake again if we stay attuned to the dynamics at play within Level-One assessments. As of this writing, once again cuts are being demanded of social welfare and educational programs: 48 states are slashing budgets and programs affecting the young and old, the poor, and the disabled (Krugman, 2009c). But is it like 1982? Income caps are being set on some executive pay, redistributive taxes from the wealthy to the poor are being recommended by corporate leaders (Krugman, 2009b), and
debates in Washington center on whether infrastructure or spending on education and social welfare is the better stimulus for economic growth (Krugman, 2009b).

The agency cuts taking place in California and Michigan in 2009 may seem all too familiar, but the political economic discourse in which they are now taking place has not had currency in American life since the 1930s. Such arguments speak to the shifts in authority—and in organizing possibilities—that have not been present in this nation for a long, long time. Responding to the cuts in the short run will inevitably be painful; interpreting and acting on how later budgetary decisions of political and economic leaders unfold is an opportunity any macro practitioner must seize.

Living and working within this remarkable period of American history that the early 21st century has become, we therefore need to unite our consistent hope for what can be with a constant vigilance on what actually is and is not happening in our neighborhoods and communities. Only through such efforts can the calculus of change underway come to benefit those most in need. For that to occur, in Chapter 2 we turn to what macro practitioners often do best: Level-Two community assessments.

THE COMMUNITY TOOLBOX

The Community Toolbox has a number of sections that readers can look at that break down models of how organizing can build community capacity. A good place to start is with their first major section on their model for change as well as how to look for other tools, many of which will be referred to in later chapters. See http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1001.htm.

The Community Toolbox’s Model for Change

Section 1. A Community Tool Box Overview and Gateway to the Tools

Section 2. Some Ways of Doing the Work of Community Change and Improvement: An Overview

Section 3. Our Model of Practice: Building Capacity for Community and System Change

Section 4. Troubleshooting Guide: Common Problems in Community Work and How to Address Them

Section 5. Our Evaluation Model: Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Section 6. Some Core Principles, Assumptions, and Values to Guide the Work
Some Other Models for Promoting Community Health and Development

Section 1. Developing a Logic Model or Theory of Change
Section 2. PRECEDE/PROCEED
Section 3. Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities
Section 4. Asset Development
Section 5. PATCH (Planned Approach to Community Health)
Section 6. Institute of Medicine’s Community Health Development Process (CHIP)
Section 7. Ten Essential Public Health Services
Section 8. Communities That Care
Section 9. Community Readiness
Section 10. The Strategic Prevention Framework
Section 11. Health Impact Assessment
Section 12. PAHO Guide for Documenting Health Promotion Initiatives
Section 13. MAPP: Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships
REFERENCES


Chapter 1  The Distinctive Framework of Macro Practice I  


