If you want to know how ordinary Americans accomplish extraordinary things—build affordable homes, create effective schools, win living wages—then the story and the strategy reside in this remarkable book. Going Public is at once pragmatic and profound.

—Samuel G. Freedman

MICHAEL GECAN
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For a week or so, public officials rushed to do the right thing for the wrong reason. We didn’t even have time to consider what was going on. We just wanted to do something.

For the commissioners, it was a week of excitement and adrenaline. They were in the spotlight, dealing with high-profile cases, and they were loving it. But for the precinct commander, it was a week of stress and anxiety. He was trying to keep the Politicians out of the way, and he was struggling to maintain his authority.

In the end, the Politicians got their way. The commissioners were forced to take the fall. The precinct commander was promoted to Chief. The Politicians were deliriously happy.

Chutzpah Helps

CHAPTER 6

Chutzpah Helps
We lived and worked in those cities—particularly in the
Northeast and Midwest—places that continued to burn, shrink,
and decline. Or we sat in traffic in the surrounding suburbs, which
sprawled further and further into the countryside. We watched
president after president offer slogans—points of
light, volunteerism crusades, new markets initiatives, so-called
faith-based solutions—to the families and individuals caught in
dynamics that went far beyond the block busting and panic
peddling of the sixties.

This was neighborhood busting, city busting, and region busting—
on a scale and at a cost that could not have been imagined.
Going Public sustain their families and raise their kids, invest their savings and improve their homes, participate in their local schools and hold political figures accountable, lead, argue, cooperate, content, be fuller members of society, be better and sharper citizens. Day in and day out, year in and year out, we moved among an army of fit and loyal Americans—rarely called to serve, often injured by the society they still pledged their allegiances to.

Then there was a third reality. We didn’t need government to come up with creative solutions to the challenges of the critical mass class. The leaders of that class—working through our organizations and others—already had or in part. In Baltimore, beginning in 1994, our local TAF organizations launched the nation’s first living wage campaign. The effort focused on wages paid by bus companies, janitorial firms, and security companies hired by the city. These companies were paid their workers minimum wages with no benefits and often for less than the national average. We knew that we could create significant impact in the cities and towns of the United States through public action and social movement alone.

The othersolution authored by the IAF was visible on the streets of East Brooklyn and the South Bronx, Baltimore and West Philadelphia. More than four thousand new Nehemiah homes—single family, owner occupied, and affordable—stood on blocks that had burned, crumbled, and nearly disappeared. Children played in the new backyards. Neighbors sat on stoops. One single woman, no more than five feet tall, in her fifties, a native of Trinidad, talked about taking a walk—unthinkable. The soft slap of her shoes on the new sidewalk was the sound of victory.

So we went to the candidates, the leaders and the workers saw no reason to do anything less. We went to the candidates and asked them to consider a living wage standard for all companies that benefited in any way from government contracts or subsidies—everyone from defense contractors to religious home health care groups. We define competition to religious groups, everyone.

Instead of an agreement to meet with a top team of our leaders, we heard talk about “faith-based solutions” and “faith-based initiatives.” By this, they did not mean modest increases in wages or a national minimum wage, only “that which communities, neighborhoods, and faith-based initiatives” could do, although they had a national minimum wage with no benefits and often for less than the national average. Our response was an agreement on the part of IAF organizations to build homes that those earning twenty-five thousand dollars a year could afford. No, they focused on the role that religious organizations play in providing social services. And they competed organizations in providing social services. And they competed...
going public chutzpah helps deliver social services. there was nothing new or different about this. what we did object to was the implication that chronic national problems could somehow be solved by the good works of a few church organizations. we grew suspicious of candidates who soaked their speeches in religious rhetoric and whose seemed to substitute personal piety for public works.

we rejected the tag—faith-based—that the candidates wished to impose on us, just as we resisted the alternatives used by mayor koch. and we wanted to have an opportunity to speak directly with then governor bush and then vice president gore about these important matters of city-building, of nation-building, and of the appropriate use of public sector power.

you might think that candidates interested in the work of faith-based groups would be eager to meet with one of the largest and most effective organizers of local religious institutions in the nation. that was not our experience. we wrote, called, and spoke with many aides. but the candidates would not meet. one very senior aide could not believe that we would not accept him as a substitute for the candidate. "you must not know how important i am," he said to sr. kathy maire. "the fact that i am willing to meet is unprecedented." unprecedented or not, we refused. and we set off to try to engage the candidates directly.

our first attempt was on a january day in wilmington. the delaware republican party announced a luncheon for the presidential candidates at the hotel du pont. tickets were available, so we reserved two tables, eight seats, for the pleasure of hearing george w. bush and perhaps being able to ask a question in the brief period that would follow his remarks.

we decided to claim those reserved seats, if possible. we were also a part of our organization's campaign, faith-based power. the delaware republicans were listening, saw our name on the reservation list, and invited religious leaders from all across the political spectrum—bishops, priests, rabbi, leaders of faith-based organizations, and religious leaders from all across the political spectrum. we reserved two tables, eight seats, for the pleasure of hearing george w. bush and perhaps being able to ask a question in the brief period that would follow his remarks. we reserved two tables, eight seats, for the pleasure of hearing george w. bush and perhaps being able to ask a question in the brief period that would follow his remarks.

early that morning, 12 january, a fax arrived at our philadelphia office from the delaware republicans. they had overbooked the luncheon and that table reserved in my name and iaf's name had been canceled. they apologized for the inconvenience.

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Going Public

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Marvin Callooway was assisting me today. Marvin, like Martin, is about forty, the father of three, a product of a single mother and a tough housing project in the South Bronx. He worked as a carper-
ter before beginning a career in organizing.

Our leaders may have been a little older, a little greasier, but on the...
Regarding: Perhaps answered. Made to feel that what we wanted to
aggressive, radical, even dangerous. We would have been stopped.
and maybe they manage we would have seen as forward.
and why did they allow us past their security and cop's for the first young age
past that year, past the security and cop's for the New York blocks. It was right in front of the headquarter.
the scene were the words do not enter. If we had tried to push
the security did not allow us to come in. And physics in
Now the press releases have named or some. And physics in

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In the spacious, sunlit room of the Madison Avenue home, we sat around the table, discussing the next steps in our plan to bring attention to the issues of housing and the urgent need for affordable housing. The room was filled with the buzz of conversation, as we debated the best strategies for our campaign.

Dr. Martin Trammell, the head of our organization, spoke passionately about the importance of community involvement in the fight for affordable housing. "We cannot do this alone," he said. "We need the support of our city, our state, and our nation to make a real difference in the lives of those who are struggling to find a place to call home.

The Carribean woman studied the sign, which read:

The Caribbean woman held a bouquet and asked what was happening. I described to her our six-month effort to meet with the Democratic candidate about the issues lettered on the thirty-foot-wide canvass sign attached to the side of the first floor of the Nehemiah home now located on Madison Avenue. We had contacted Senator Schumer and Tony Coelho (who had just resigned for health reasons) and his replacement, William Daley. We had received panicked calls just this week from the candidate's staff and senior people at the Democratic National Committee. Would we call off the action? Sure, we said, if we get a thirty-minute meeting with the candidate. But the candidate was busy, they whined. So we said, planning this Saturday action in New York.

The woman wished me well and boarded her bus. I remained at my station, watching the workmen complete the setup, imagining the hundreds of activists across the region boarding their buses, napping in vans, and catching early trains to participate in the actions scheduled to start at noon. As I joined some of our leaders for a press conference outside the home, the Carribean woman asked if she could call "From the Wharf to the Village." I told her to call "From the Village to the Wharf." She thanked me for the tip.

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Going Public was about two million. "The look out the back window, up Madison Avenue, was unprecedented and priceless. Most of the leaders who toured the home and gathered their friends were poor and working poor. Perhaps hundred of theirown—in the South Bronx, Brooklyn, or Baltimore. Perhaps another hundred had other, larger homes of theirown, in suburban Maryland or Long Island, in Center City Philadelphia or Brooklyn Heights. But the vast majority, there maining six hundred or so, could not yet afford a home of their own. Many were immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, and Haiti. Some were still undocumented. They had dressed their kids and descended south Philadelphia. They had dreamed their dreams of paradise, a home in low houses in West Philadelphia, a home in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a home in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The mood was electric, and the air was thick with possibilities, both real and imagined."
Going Public

Chutzpah Helps

The impact of a better wage on one's life. She communicated, just by being who she was, to the majority of those in the crowd—felllow parents, fellow workers, fellow strugglers—whohad similar lives, similar pressures, similar worries, and similar limitations.

And yet, there was Pat Aiston, on the porch, on the stage, speaking to the crowd. People listened even more intently to her than to some of the other more polished and more experienced speakers. You could almost read in people's eyes, "That person is just like me." And if you looked a little deeper, you could sense the beginning of a realization, "Maybe, someday, I could do what she is doing."

The next speaker was Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood—the individual in the IAFeast Coast area who is best known. He was dressed this afternoon in a dark blue minister's shirt, without a collar, and dark slacks. He had spent his entire public life in pulpits, in front of microphones, engaging crowds, and was not at all uncomfortable on the porch of a house in the middle of Madison Avenue.

He scanned the crowd for a moment, then somberly said, "I have an important announcement to make." He paused. "We have learned where Al Gore is today."

Another pause. Someone shouts, "Where?" Reverend Youngblood addressed the man who called out. "Al Gore is in Palm Harbor, Florida, giving a speech on Progress and Prosperity."

The audience groaned, laughed.

Then Reverend Youngblood, fifty-two years old, a native of New Orleans, and a pastor of one of the most remarkable congregations in America, which he calls the "Church Unusual," looked up at the buildings on Madison Avenue.

"We are standing in the middle of a great city."

"We are standing in the middle of the headquarters of a once-great party..."
Then I realized that the digital divide had something to do with computers and the Internet. Then I saw photographs of the candidates in Silicon Valley, raising millions in contributions for their campaigns. Then I began to understand the issue of the digital divide a whole lot better. The digital divide is the space between how much money Gore raises and how much money Bush raises from the new Internet millionaires.

We're gathered here today to talk about the equity divide. It's the equity divide that threatens our families. It's the fact that even HUD admits that the housing situation is worsening—that more than five million American families pay half of their income for inadequate housing, that the number of Americans paying more and more for less and less has increased by 12 percent during this boom period, and that the housing crisis is worsening.

It's the equity divide that undermines our communities. It's the fact that many of us are working two and three jobs just to make ends meet. It's the equity divide that makes our communities. It's the equity divide that we want Gore and Bush to talk about.

Like the campaign offices, politics too is a world of empty promises, of vacuous platitudes. We're faced with a choice. We can either say, 'Politics is supposed to be a conversation about the issues of our time' and then go on to endlessly repeat the same old tired clichés and soundbites, or we can say, 'Politics is supposed to be a conversation about the issues of our time' and then go on to endlessly repeat the same old tired clichés and soundbites.

While the candidates competed with one another to give the

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Going Public

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...And economic prospects banned drugs and physical or emotional abuse. Sometimes called the Shadow Convention, Section 917 was familiar territory—political turmoil and meaning—were playing around

Philip D. Zurbuchen, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Illustration: How would we compete with the attention outside the Re-

But we had no choice. Cameras of Company

Finally, how would we compete with the attention outside the Re-

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The decibel level rose again, and the public were roaring back to

life.

That was the feel of Madison Avenue on that brilliant Saturday

afternoon. A different tone, a different tenor, prevailed for about

five minutes—abrief Sabbath. Then Fr. Marty finished his prayer.

Reverend Haberer adjourned the meeting at

The crowd cheered.

...But if we had lost television camera to the mermaids of Coney

Island, how would we compete with the attractions outside the Re-

Public.
The Philadelphia police department has become a focal point for national news coverage, attracting attention from reporters and the public alike. Ceci Schickel, the leader of Philadelphia Interfaith Action, has come up with a solution. Two weeks before the start of the convention, she contacted Francis X. Clines of the New York Times and invited him to meet with a team of Philadelphia leaders. An experienced and savvy reporter for the Times, Clines was not prepared for the fifty acres of vacant lots and sinking homes of North Philadelphia.

Clines walked the streets with Reverend Kermit Newkirk, the pastor of the one institution that remained standing in the emptiness—the Harold O. Davis Baptist Church. As they toured this urban ghost town, Clines said that the area was worse than anything he had seen before. His finest story appeared on page one of the national edition of the Times, with dramatic photos. It began:

Sparing the approaching Republican Convention a civic eyesore, bulldozers are moving in on the last of the 957 sinking homes of the Logan Triangle, a stricken working-class swath of North Philadelphia that has festered for more than a decade.

The nation's collapse into its own unstable landscape is stark evidence that the vaunted Philadelphia Renaissance that is attracting the Republican conventioneers is at least a tale of two cities: the glittering downtown of new hotels and trendy restaurants, and frayed old working-class neighborhoods five miles to the north.

Advocates for assorted causes will be arriving... but only Logan-Philadelphia offers a vivid on-site experience of Philadelphia politics, poverty, and promise.

This story appeared on page one of the national edition of the New York Times, capturing the attention of the nation. This is the story of North Philadelphia, a city in disarray, and the leaders who are working to bring it back to life.

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One Logan—this Logan—is bad enough. But our nation is dotted with Logan. There's another one across the river. It's called Camden. There's one just twenty-five miles to the south of Baltimore, of Washington, of Atlanta, of Buffalo. You name the older city or county, and you will find a version of Logan.

We got nothing wrong.

Now, we know better than many when things are wrong.

We pressed forward through the remainder of the election season.

We know better than many when things are right.

But we never did meet with either of the two major candidates.