of a single character on his or her quest for the American Dream. Buell calls these “up-from fictions,” and sees their archetype in Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography, that story of successful self-invention. In novels, however, the journey is rarely so straightforward—whether it is the louche career of Augie in Saul Bellow’s The Adventures of Augie March, or the painful education of the nameless narrator in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man.

The most famous example, however, and one of the first titles to come to mind whenever the Great American Novel is mentioned, is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby. Gatsby, who remains a cipher even as he transforms himself into a prince of Long Island society, is the antithesis of Franklin, who made a self by making his fortune. “To read Gatsby as a symbol of the great American dreamer, then,” Buell writes, “is to read the dream itself as already sealed and gone, locked somewhere in the remote inaccessible past.” But of course, if the American Dream weren’t still alive, somewhere in our culture and our minds, it wouldn’t be necessary for the novelists to keep writing Great American Novels. And Buell’s erudite study convinces us that the death of the GAN, despite all predictions, is not coming anytime soon.

Adam Kirsch ’97, a contributing editor of this magazine, is a poet and the author most recently of Why Trilling Matters (Yale University Press).

**ALUMNI**

**Dudley’s Square Deal**

An alumnus seeks a fragile balance in financing community development.

**T**HIS JANUARY a long-defunct bus garage on a weedy 8.5-acre lot in Roxbury, one of Boston’s poorest neighborhoods, is slated to be demolished. Then Bartlett Yard will become Bartlett Place. Plans for the $140-million development project call for 323 mixed-income housing units (including some slated for the elderly and artists), a grocery store, and offices, along with a public plaza.

The site is a short walk from Roxbury’s main commercial district, Dudley Square, and is expected to play a major role in the area’s much-debated, slowly emerging revitalization. The City of Boston is integral to the pending renewal, as is Boston Community Capital (BCC), based in the square. “Bartlett Yard was a polluted site, with bus fumes, and where repair work was being done in the garages, so you have a lot of paint and oil and gasoline—not a great environmental asset to have in the middle of a neighborhood,” says DeWitt “Dick” Jones ’79, M.C.R.P. ’82, the executive vice president of BCC, which is funding a portion of Bartlett Place. “The private developers were not chomping at the bit to do anything with it.”

In stepped one of BCC’s clients, the nonprofit Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, which bought the property and is leading the

In Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood, DeWitt Jones visits the defunct bus garage at Bartlett Yard, which became an urban public-art space before its scheduled early-2014 demolition. Art festival organizers and the property’s owners invited well-known graffiti artists to paint dozens of murals on the walls of the garage buildings last spring. Such “Bartlett Yard Events” drew crowds and helped raise awareness of long-awaited community revitalization efforts. The local nonprofit Nuestra Comunidad, which plans to transform the site into mixed-income housing and commercial space dubbed Bartlett Place, is preserving only the murals that were painted on canvases. It has pledged to continue running artistic and cultural events, as well as farmers’ markets and other community gatherings, at a public plaza integral to Bartlett Place.
Development of Bartlett Place. (Nuestra is, coincidentally, led by another alumnus, David Price ’77; see “Striving For ‘A Real Mix of People,”’ page 73.) “You needed an organization like Nuestra,” Jones explains, “to do something that is appropriate and balances Dudley’s needs—making housing affordable for the people who are here and want to stay, and making something attractive that also brings in new residents and creates more positive momentum around change.”

Roxbury has a rich Colonial history, and was later home to waves of European immigrants. It is now predominantly African American, but Dudley Square has a vibrant mix of Brazilians, Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, and West Indians, all of whom shop at Tropical Foods, an international grocery. That mix, along with newcomers like artists and Square office workers, is also seen at the Haley House Bakery, a cozy café down the street that is run by a soup kitchen and staffed by people who “face significant barriers to employment.” On the other side of the square, though, both the three-year-old police station and the nearby library, Jones notes, look like attractive fortresses. Roxbury has had a reputation as a high-crime zone where economic opportunity is largely absent.

In 1998, to directly support and spur confidence in community rebuilding efforts, BCC moved into the second floor of Palladio Hall in the heart of the square. It is a grand 1870s Italian Renaissance-style structure left over from the neighborhood’s heyday. “When we got here,” Jones reports, “we were told we were the first tenant to move above the ground-floor commercial space in Dudley Square in two decades.” BCC helped finance extensive renovations (much of BCC’s space was once a ballroom), completed by Nuestra, which owns and also works out of the building. Elsewhere around the square, BCC has invested in daycare centers, health clinics, affordable housing, and a community assisted-living facility that took over a vacant elementary school.

Reflecting on BCC’s presence in Dudley Square—just one of the firm’s projects—Jones says, “If you rely on government subsidies or grants, and do not have financial returns, the work you do can is severely limited by scale, and it’s very hard to try anything new.” If he didn’t foresee delving into finance, Jones has always wanted to work for social change. As an undergraduate, he concentrated in government and remember reading an article on bank redlining that led him to study capital markets to try to identify what factors created economically healthy communities. He then earned a master’s degree in city and regional planning from the Kennedy School. (His mother, Megan Jones, who had worked in state politics, was earning her M.P.A. around the same time.)

After graduation, he became the executive director of an advocacy organization, the Massachusetts Urban Reinvestment Advisory Group Inc. (MURAG), where he had also been an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer. There, he met others working on economic development, including those in the midst of forming the Boston Community Loan Fund. They hired him to build the organization from scratch: Jones recalls running it from his attic, starting with $3,500 loaned to a day-care center, tenants’ group, and women’s shelter. Since then, the community-development financial institution has invested more than $900 million in New England and around the country in support of its mission: “Building healthy communities where low-income people live and work.”

BCC’s loan fund now lists more than a hundred investors, ranging from larger institutions—such as Harvard, regional and national banks, and charitable foundations—to church groups, small nonprofits, and individuals. They lend money to BCC and get it back at fixed interest rates ranging from 0 to 4.5 percent, like investing in bonds. BCC then lends that money to borrowers at higher rates to cover the returns as well its own costs. The enterprise requires a precise balancing of monetary interests in the name of social justice. “We absolutely are not against making money, being profitable, and turning down projects and loans that are not likely to be successful,” Jones reports, but neither is the organization “scouring low-income communities for great money-making opportunities, or even medium ones.” A separate venture-capital unit, which offers higher returns, was an early backer of Zipcar, and has since invested in 22 other start-ups (not all as successful as the innovative car-sharing company), as well as other more established firms.

More recently, BCC has launched a mortgage-buyback initiative and two projects to improve energy efficiency. The SUN (Stabilizing Urban Neighborhoods) Foreclosure Prevention Program, which has focused on Massachusetts, but is being expanded across the country, uses investor financing to buy at-risk homes from banks at slightly below the market value and then resell them to the original owners at carefully underwritten, affordable mortgage rates. “Our customers,” Jones explains, “typically have been foreclosed upon but not yet evicted, want to stay in their homes, and have the income to support a ‘right-sized’ mortgage—at the current market value—but they are significantly under water and cannot pay the inflated housing and mortgage values.” The real market value—the best price a bank could get selling the property after foreclosure—is based on what local incomes can support, he adds, which is often “50 percent of what the peak prices were.”

BCC makes the mortgages from a combination of funds it has borrowed from investors, lenders, and banks. “We repay the principal on the loans to us when the mortgages are repaid or by establishing a secondary market,” he adds, as BCC recently did with a $35-million transaction with East Boston Savings Bank. To date, according to Jones, SUN has helped more than 425 households avoid eviction by decreasing their total mortgage payments by $30 million, typically by reducing principal amounts that cut total monthly payments by about 40 percent over the life of the loan.

During the last six years, Jones has moved away from direct involvement in affordable housing to develop and lead BCC’s environmental projects, work he takes personally. “We had been looking at how we could adopt the Kyoto Treaty at home,” explains Jones. He lives in Jamaica Plain, which abuts Roxbury, with his wife, Victoria Bok, M.P.P. ’87, a consultant on public housing and community engagement in climate change (and the daughter of former University president Derek Bok) and their teenage sons, Cameron and Nicholas. They turned off lights more often, bought a highly efficient boiler, fixed leaks in their chimney, exchanged their minivan for a Prius, and pledged to drive less. They...
also had the house scrutinized for air leaks, then filled them with insulating foam.

“On the heating side now, we are more comfortable and warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer,” he says, “so we don’t even use air conditioning.” All told, they cut their household carbon footprint by 50 percent, earning the City of Boston’s Green Residential Award in 2008. A year later Mayor Thomas Menino appointed Jones to the Renew Boston Advisory Committee, which oversees the city’s energy-efficiency programs.

Although clearly global in nature, environmental and energy issues deeply affect local, poor communities. In urban development, Jones states, “Climate change will drive everything in the future.” He leads BCC’s Solar Energy Advantage, which owns and installs photovoltaic solar panels on low-income housing, and other organizations in its portfolio, and is one of the largest nonutility owners of solar photovoltaic systems in Massachusetts. The 12,000 panels now in use have so far generated more than 9.6 million kilowatt hours, equivalent to the annual energy needed to power 500 homes. In short, Jones says, BCC lessens the environmental impact of its own buildings while saving a projected $3.4 million in “fixed-price, below-market electricity” costs to its customers over the life of the panels.

As important, he adds, is how the program integrates low-income communities into the green economy, often seen as a rich person’s luxury. “When you start to look at the high cost of hospital emergency-room visits due to asthma in low-income households, where there is mold in the walls and old carpeting and bad air quality in the homes” in addition to neighborhood pollution, Jones notes, “you see the relationship between personal health, home health, environmental health, and the economy.”

Founded in 2009 by BCC, New Ecology, and MIT alumnus and entrepreneur Barun Singh, WegoWise has developed tools that offer online, visual, automated utility-use tracking for property owners and managers. The company uses inexpensive cloud-computing infrastructure to download information from utilities’ websites, explains Jones, without relying on physical meters (the so-called smart grid, or hardware). WegoWise has so far created a database of more than 13,200 buildings, located across the country, though primarily in Massachusetts, New York, and California. It is the largest of its kind in the United States, he notes: “and a great use for big data.” BCC has invested nearly $3 million in WegoWise and plans to expand the company’s reach.

While at BCC, Jones has also worked on economic development in many other roles. He is a founding member of the Opportunity Finance Network; a former board member and treasurer of the Center for Women and Enterprise; and a current trustee at Boston Day and Evening Academy, a charter high school in Roxbury that serves nontraditional students.

As he guided a recent walk around Dudley Square, it’s clear that he sees a community in transition. Already under way is another vital development: the city’s long-promised $115-million redevelopment that includes turning the stately Ferdinand Building (at one time a prominent department store, it has stood empty for three decades) into the rechristened Dudley Municipal Center. The Boston Public Schools administrative staff, some 450 em-

**Aloian Award Winners**

**Seniors** Kathryn Walsh of Adams House and Roland Yang of Kirkland House received the Harvard Alumni Association’s (HAA) annual David ’49 and Mimi Aloian Memorial Scholarships at the October meeting of the HAA’s board of directors. The $2,000 unrestricted awards, named for the master and co-master of Quincy House in the 1980s (David Aloian was also HAA executive director), recognizes exemplary leadership in enhancing quality of life in the Houses.

Walsh, of Westbrook, Maine, co-chairs the Adams House Committee; she has helped create “Neighborhood Block Parties” with Quincy and Lowell Houses, renovate communal space, run social events that incorporate public service, and write scripts for Housing Day, when freshmen tour their future home.

Yang, of Villanova, Pennsylvania, is leading a project to create a digital file of historic House images, which he plans to disseminate, and serves on the advisory committee for “Conversations with Kirkland,” a series of talks by notable guests. He also participates at the French, Spanish, and newly created Chinese language tables.

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746
Striving for “A Real Mix of People”

In the 1980s, David Price ’77 lived in the Upham’s Corner section of Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood. “It was down and out back then,” he reports, “vacant businesses, boarded-up buildings, empty lots, and a lot of crime.” To see what could be done to effect change, he volunteered as a community organizer and served on the board of the Dorchester Bay Community Development Corporation. Around the same time, he adds, the city government and others were also trying to address the blight by renovating buildings, especially along the main drag, Columbia Road.

As work progressed, Price saw “a transformation around the corner from my home. When you begin to see people out walking around and you are not feeling as concerned about your own safety, that changes the whole quality of life in the neighborhood.” Urban real-estate development, he realized, offered a meaningful and exciting use for a law degree.

He graduated from Boston College Law School in 1991, worked in support of affordable housing, and soon became director of real estate and general counsel for the nonprofit Madison Park Development Corporation. Founded in 1966, Madison Park is based in and focuses its work on Roxbury, and is one of the nation’s first community-based nonprofit organizations to create affordable housing. “When urban renewal came in to Roxbury, it created a lot of vacant lots and big parcels,” Price explains. “Madison Park has many of the bigger developments in and around Dudley Square.”

In 2008, he was hired to lead Nuestra Comunidad, an affordable-housing organization launched in 1981 that is also based in Roxbury’s Dudley Square, but extends its work to nearby Dorchester and Mattapan. (Founded by a group of Puerto Rican neighbors, Nuestra has expanded to include the full range of cultures and ethnicities in Roxbury, which has an African-American majority and many Cape Verdean and Caribbean immigrants.) Nuestra’s $2.3-million operating budget is funded, in thirds, by fees from its properties, contracts with government agencies for housing services, and philanthropic donations.

The organization owns and operates 800 rental apartments, has built and sold 150 homes for first-time buyers, and runs a large foreclosure-prevention program. “We try to help people not get subprime loans, to make sure they have a safe mortgage,” Price says. During an eight-hour class on home financing, Nuestra identifies reasonable terms and advises people to avoid double-digit ARM’s, and teaches lessons in budgeting, credit lines and ratings, how to build down payments, and offers a list of safe lenders. For those already at risk, Nuestra offers foreclosure counseling, bailout strategies, and other resources to help keep people in their homes; it also refers some foreclosure clients to Boston Community Capital’s Stabilizing Urban Neighborhoods program (see above). BCC also lends money to some of Nuestra’s real-estate projects, including Bartlett Place as well as Palladio Hall in Dudley Square, where both organizations are based.

Nuestra owns the land on which Bartlett Place will rise, and is preparing to build there in four phases during the next eight years. Although Price is realistic about urban areas’ cycles of death and rebirth, he sees the new project as instrumental in Dudley Square’s revitalization. “The square is definitely on the up cycle. It’s poised on the brink of major development and opportunities,” he asserts. “The downside could be displacement, gentrification. The big role for us is to plan development so that is mitigated, so that local people can participate as Roxbury takes off in terms of home values—and that’s going to happen here, just as it did in the South End—over the next 20 years.” Already, prices are edging up in Fort Hill, the section adjacent to what will be Bartlett Place, he says, which is why Nuestra and others are also integrating “space for middle-income and low-income people to buy homes and stay here over the long term—so we end up with a real mix of people.”

Bartlett Place will have a public plaza, where Nuestra plans to help run arts festivals, concerts, skateboarding contests, food trucks, and farmers’ markets. Some food trucks already rotate through Dudley Square. The most popular one is also the oldest, M&M Ribs. “It was the first food truck, before you ever had the term ‘food trucks,’ an original that’s been in Roxbury for 20 years,” says Price. “I grew up in North Carolina, so M&M barbecue is just good home cooking to me.”

—N.P.B.