



# Finding Common Ground

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**Morton Coleman:**

**My Life as a Mediator in Neighborhoods,  
Communities, Government, and Politics**



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Foreword by

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University of Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

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## FOREWORD

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We have known Moe Coleman for 30 and 50 years, respectively, and we are honored to write a brief foreword to this reflective work that recounts important civic events in Moe's life and those events in the City of Pittsburgh's history that bear the mark of his insightful ideas. In his calm and discerning way, Moe helped to shape many of these events, both as a participant and as an advisor, counselor, and teacher. As foundation executives, we were lucky to have worked with him in each of these roles. Moe changed the way we and many others approached our work, established new networks for us, and pointed out how to work with neighborhoods in new and truly innovative ways.

Moe's reflections covering 60 years describe important intersections and critical turning points in the history and transformation of this region—and not from the vantage point of a passive observer. Key issues six decades ago that were in the way of progress are still with us today, just in different form.

Moe's recollections help us to understand better how a previous generation found common ground on many of these challenges and provide insights on how the work could continue. Policy changes result from many factors and almost always involve compromise reached by people with disparate points of view. Moe's writing shows a master at work, not self-appointed, but one who was sought out to convene, moderate, and inform. His convenings were characterized by good data analysis and a decorum of respectful dialogue. His gift for synthesizing and summarizing complicated data sets is as relevant today as it was in the 1960s, when he worked in the office of Pittsburgh Mayor Joe Barr.

Moe's contributions to our community cannot be overstated. From his earliest days as a youth worker in the Hill District in the 1950s, he witnessed the impact of urban renewal on families, and for the next 50 years, as a social worker; professor; and advisor to elected officials and community, civic, and business leaders, he fostered communication

across race and class lines to support hiring among underrepresented groups; union membership; fair housing; and access to quality and equal education, health care, and human services. The telling of his story from his days as a civil rights worker to his days with the Institute of Politics provides a unique window into Pittsburgh's culture with an intimate understanding of what it was like to live, work, and play in the Pittsburgh region set in the context of the social, economic, and political events that shaped our region and Moe Coleman.

*Finding Common Ground* is not a long read, but it should not be a quick one. It is deep with historical insight and anecdotal detail. While it covers a period of more than half a century, its content is as much a civic blueprint for future direction as it is an affectionate array of reflections on the past. It embodies our wish to nourish present and future generations of our region with the knowledge of the past through the memory of a great man and the inheritance of a great example.

And it is designed to educate future leaders about their leadership responsibilities as citizens; engage students in understanding how government functions; and empower young citizens and others to make positive, lasting contributions to the civic and political health of our communities, commonwealth, and nation.

Recognizing and honoring the legacy of Moe Coleman will set a standard for service, encourage a sustained commitment to civic participation, and inspire others to make service a central part of their lives.

**Henry S. Beukema**  
Executive Director  
McCune Foundation

**Philip Hallen**  
President Emeritus  
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# CHAPTER 1

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## **Introduction: Reflections from the Middle**

The last half century has been a period of vast, intense social change. Civil rights movements have changed how groups relate to each other, public policy has changed what we expect from our government, technology has transformed how we communicate and obtain information, and various trends have caused our urban centers to experience decades of gradual decline (followed by recent, encouraging signs of reinvigoration).

In the last 60 years, I can see clearly the cumulative impact of change. My daily life experience is enormously different from that of my grandparents, and my children and grandchildren's world is already far different from mine. Yet, at the same time, in this powerfully turbulent environment, I see signs of stability, too. I have been a student or faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh for a good portion of the last 62 years. I have been married to the same woman for more than 60 years. I live 10 minutes away from where I grew up, and I have friends dating back to elementary school.

The communities where I have worked also have undergone a mixture of change and stability. In my personal life, the aspects of stability have equipped me to react and adapt to change. In disadvantaged communities, stability often has been fleeting, creating greater tension in how the community reacts to new situations, resists unwanted forms of change, or maintains viability in the midst of change.

The chance to teach and shape the trajectories of hundreds of gifted students as a university professor has been immensely rewarding, but the aspects of my career that may be of public interest involve my interaction with various communities in times of change. These experiences can be arranged in four chapters of my life:

1. My work as a community organizer at two Pittsburgh settlement houses amidst upheaval due to urban development and major changes in the racial makeup of the neighborhoods I served (approximately 1954–61)
2. My involvement in neighborhood development issues, first at the Kingsley settlement house and the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning (1959–64) and then through my interaction with community development organizations and as a consultant to Henry Ford II in Detroit, Mich.
3. My time as an aide to Pittsburgh Mayor Joseph Barr (1964–69)—years dominated by Great Society programs, the civil rights movement, desegregation, and Vietnam War protests
4. My attempts at community consensus building, first as executive of the Hartford Process in Hartford, Conn., (1977–1980), and then at the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics, which I founded in 1989 and with which I remain active as director emeritus

While some of the basic tenets of my youth seem less certain as I grow older, I believe that the core values of my professional life have remained consistent over these 60 years. One important issue was the focus of my attention: how to find common ground and help communities resolve contentious issues. Repeatedly, I found myself negotiating conflicts between competing values: new development versus community integrity, comprehensive planning versus local decision making, justice for underrepresented populations versus opportunity for struggling working-class Whites, or Republican versus Democratic political leaders. And repeatedly I chose to submerge my own strong political and social views in order to play a credible, neutral mediating role, because, in most cases, I saw that role going unfilled. I believe that the need for such mediating influences is even greater today, as our political environment has become increasingly polarized, with both conservative and liberal perspectives becoming hardened by the echo chambers of ideologically skewed media outlets.



My adoption of a mediating role rests on one crucial premise: that compromise is needed in some circumstances. I am not referring to moral compromise. I recognize that some issues—slavery, abortion, and civil rights, for example—do not lend themselves to compromise because of their perceived moral content and the lack of common ground between combatants. This is why these issues strain our democracy to an extent that budget debates do not. Rather, by “compromise,” I refer here to negotiated settlements, usually over distribution of material resources or political influence, among competing entities in the public sphere.

A strategy of making public decisions through consensus and compromise offers the potential for strengthening communities by expressing respect for differences and by enabling all groups to feel that their concerns have been heard and (at least in part) addressed. But this strategy has weaknesses as well. Calling for a compromise among various groups implies that each participating group has some valid claim for resources or something useful to offer, an implication that is not necessarily always true. Moreover, as James Madison implicitly recognized in the *Federalist Papers* and as Robert Dahl articulated more rigorously in *Who Governs?*, the results of compromise are not, in any inherent sense, fair; on the contrary, they are skewed in favor of the group with the greatest influence, resources, or intensity of commitment.

Nevertheless, on major issues of broad public concern, there is rarely a better alternative than compromise. Disputes can be resolved in one of three ways: one group overwhelms the other (e.g., by force), one group leaves the playing field (e.g., by relocating), or the groups work out a deal. Much of my professional activity has been dedicated to achieving consensus and mutually acceptable resolutions of public issues—and to ensuring that all stakeholders are represented at the table, because if voices are silenced in the process, the final outcome is not likely to take everyone’s concerns into account.

Throughout the chapters that follow, the theme of creating safe places for dialogue and compromise recurs often. To add both color and breadth of insight to the narrative, I have not limited my storytelling to my direct personal experiences. Rather, I also have interviewed more than 20 people whose lives were intertwined with mine and have interwoven parts of their stories with my story. I offer policy observations at the close of each chapter and concluding reflections in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

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### **Charitable Islands in a Time of Change: Settlement Houses in 1950s Pittsburgh**

I always had a liberal ideology and was a strong believer in civil rights, but in reality, I had hardly any firsthand knowledge of poverty or of the African American community. Growing up in Pittsburgh in the '40s and early '50s, I was living in a de facto and, in some cases, a de jure segregated city. The contrast was great, as the country had just finished fighting a war to preserve democracy with a segregated military. I attended the Pittsburgh Public Schools from kindergarten through the 12th grade, and I never had an African American teacher or administrator. I then attended the University of Pittsburgh for four years and never had an African American teacher or administrator. Neither the Pitt basketball team nor the football team had African American players until Jimmy Joe Robinson and Herb Douglas, both of whom were amazing athletes. (Reverend Robinson and I are close friends, and I have a deep admiration for his courage, commitment, and accomplishments in achieving social justice.)

When I went shopping with my mother in the five downtown department stores, there were no African American clerks. The public sector also was segregated. For instance, Allegheny County had one swimming pool known as “the Inkwell” that was only for Blacks. The Pittsburgh city pools were only for Whites, and later became the subject of great controversy. These are only a few examples of a segregated city.

My isolation from the African American community ended when I was hired as a community organizer at the Anna B. Heldman settlement in the Hill District, where my firsthand knowledge of the African American community began.

Historically, the Hill District was a classic melting pot, with Jewish, Italian, and Syrian immigrants as well as African Americans who had relocated from the South; my own father had settled in the Hill upon immigrating to Pittsburgh in 1913. However, upon arriving at the Heldman settlement in 1954, I found myself at a facility that was adjusting to significant change due to urban redevelopment and the neighborhood's changing racial composition.

### **From White to Black**

The Heldman House was an evolving descendant of the settlement house movement, which began in the 1880s. Drawing on a British model, settlement houses in the United States brought socially concerned members of the middle and upper classes to live in poor, urban neighborhoods, often populated by recent immigrants with limited English skills. Hull House in Chicago, opened by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889, was the most famous of the approximately 400 settlement houses founded in the late 1800s and early 1900s, primarily in northeastern and midwestern U.S. cities. These houses typically provided child care, educational, artistic, and recreational programs; in addition, the houses' administrators and staff actually resided in the neighborhood, seeking to befriend the poor and understand their plight, not simply to offer them charity. Many of them became ardent promoters of social reform.

Initially, both the benefactors and the beneficiaries of the settlement houses were overwhelmingly Caucasian. The houses responded in varying ways to the in-migration of African Americans: Some sold their buildings and moved out, some became integrated, and some resisted integration. By the 1950s, few staff members still lived in settlement houses, which had largely turned into—or were on their way to being replaced by—community centers.

Founded by a Jewish women's organization as the Columbian Council School in 1895 and renamed the Irene Kaufmann Settlement

in 1909, this house had served a Jewish clientele for more than 50 years. But after World War II, Jewish families began to migrate to neighborhoods further east of downtown, and African Americans moved into the Hill. Census data show that the White population in the vicinity of the Kaufmann Settlement plummeted from 7,619 in 1950 to 2,185, or less than 10 percent of the total neighborhood population, in 1960.

By the early 1950s, as African American lawyer and civil rights advocate Wendell Freeland recalled, a committee report concluded that Jewish philanthropic organizations should shift their focus to the eastern neighborhoods, where many Jewish families were moving. Freeland was recruited as president of a new, predominantly Black board, initially a subsidiary to the Irene Kaufmann board, that would take over operation of the settlement house.

“Bringing Negroes onto that board was not an easy thing,” Freeland said. “There were many instances of resentment against the Kaufmann Settlement because of its racial policies.” The recreational facilities of this exquisitely constructed five-story structure, which included a large gymnasium and an Olympic-size pool with a mosaic tile floor, had long been off limits to African Americans.

According to Freeland, Jewish leaders called for another name change to ensure that funds going to the settlement house would no longer be perceived as benefiting the Jewish community. To remake the house’s image, Freeland and his board selected a new name, honoring Anna Heldman, known as the “Angel on the Hill” for her service as a Kaufmann Settlement nurse for 38 years until her death in 1940. During this period, Freeland also oversaw a turnover in staff, as African Americans worked alongside a remaining contingent of Jewish professionals, all directed by Sidney Lindenberg. The hiring of African American staff members who knew the community, such as basketball star Erwin Stewart as recreation director, helped to persuade local Blacks that the house had become a safe place for them.

One of the first African American hires was social worker Anne Jones, who arrived at Heldman in the early 1950s and said that she learned only later that “they took me because I came so cheap.” Jones recalled that the center had an amazing array of community activities, including music, dance, crafts, child care, a well-baby clinic, a boxing gym, one of the first interracial theater groups in the city, and one of the first interracial summer programs. Jones added that her boss, Heldman social services director Liz Bulluck, “insisted that we get to know the families” of the youths they served.

Both racial and functional changes were still in process when I arrived at Heldman in 1956. While the staff at Heldman was uniformly excellent, Jones, who would later become the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work’s first director of undergraduate studies, was one of the most capable social workers I have ever met. She had an amazing ability to relate to the membership, and her obvious love of books motivated young people in the Hill to use the public library and become better readers. I personally benefited from her skill in defusing tense situations. In one such instance, when I tried to enforce Heldman House etiquette by asking a young man to remove his hat at a dance, he drew a knife. Happily, Jones was there to intervene and promptly calmed him down.

### **An Oasis on a Disrupted Hill**

The complex, evolving, multiethnic dynamics of the Hill were further disrupted when city government pushed through a plan to raze the lower Hill District to make room for the Civic Arena and accompanying developments. The resulting removal of housing (some substandard) displaced hundreds of poor families, many of whom crowded into what was left of the Hill. The Heldman House became a welcoming oasis for confused young people like Samuel Howze, who (after changing his name to Sala Udin) would become a fighter for desegregation in the South and, later, a prominent

Pittsburgh civil rights leader and city council member. Here's how Udin remembered those days:

We lived in the Hill District from 1943 [when Udin was born] to 1953 and then, when we were displaced by the development making way for the Civic Arena, we moved up into the public housing projects. Each of the projects had a basement apartment set aside as a recreation center for the kids in that project community. The staff at the recreation center took groups of us down to the "Ikes" [the popular nickname of the Irene Kaufmann Settlement], which was like the granddaddy of the neighborhood recreation centers. They introduced us to the staff and got us involved in programs at the house.

The programs I remember most were the after-school education programs. Somehow they knew what our homework was supposed to be, and they made sure that we had done it. We were not allowed to participate in any of the play activities until our homework was done. After homework, we were allowed to get involved in recreational activities. Probably the most important activity I got involved in there was a neighborhood fraternity called Alpha Nu Omega, where we learned appropriate behavior through community service and other social activities. I also went to dances there as part of learning how to socialize.

I had been dislocated from the only place I knew as home, and the "Ikes" was a way of resettling me in a new community. It was a safe house, and neighborhood feuds were left at the door. Anyone from any neighborhood was welcome and treated well. The workers were just outstanding. They weren't just staff; they were surrogate parents. They would tell us, "You're not in the street now; you're in the Ikes, and you will carry yourself appropriately." They knew us by name and knew our families.

The building was huge. I had never seen anything that big. There was nothing so imposing in the Hill District. Sure, we could look downtown and see those buildings, but this was like a downtown building in the neighborhood, with the big columns holding it up and the gigantic doors so you knew you were walking into someplace really impressive.

### **Not an Easy Job**

Like Jones, I too encountered Bulluck's high standards as I commenced my new responsibilities as a community organizer at Heldman. We were expected not only to work with both children and adults but also to make home visits and be visible in the community. We started at mid-morning and worked until 9 or 10 p.m., plus weekends.

I also faced some mild resentment, as some African Americans wondered why a White man had been tapped for this community organizing position while limited opportunities were available for African Americans, but Bulluck wanted to retain a diverse staff. The holdovers from the Kaufmann staff included Joseph "Ziggy" Kahn, a former boxer and 14th Ward (Squirrel Hill) Democratic Committee chairperson who ran the gym program, and music director Anna Perlow. Although Pittsburgh was a highly segregated city, the sharp racial polarization that would typify the late 1960s had not yet materialized; for example, the Heldman House operated a high-quality interracial preschool.

The Heldman had beautiful facilities—and it didn't need tight security to keep them beautiful. The game room, with mahogany paneling, leather chairs, and high-quality pool tables, was open to teenagers every night with minimal supervision, and vandalism never once occurred. The young people respected the quality of the place and treated it as if it was their own. Alcohol was occasionally a problem, and numbers games were prevalent—I can remember hearing older women at Heldman House's sewing classes talk about their "dream books" that promised insights on what number to play—but drugs and guns were not.



## Playing It Safe

The Heldman house played an important role in enabling the Hill District to pass through racial change without volatility. Staff from the Kaufmann Settlement stayed at Heldman and worked willingly with the new clientele, overcoming the settlement house's segregated history and providing a "safe house" that permitted a radically changing community to be absorbed and welcomed without much tension. Caucasian merchants stayed on the Hill, too, fruitfully and profitably serving an African American clientele for 15 years until the race riots of 1968.

But the impulse for social reform that had typified the first generation of the settlement house movement had disappeared. Jones still remembered, almost 60 years later, a distinct organizational aloofness with regard to the development decisions that would demolish the lower Hill: "I think our leadership did not want to be in opposition to the people who were pushing change. I remember one worker being angry, feeling we should be much more involved and knowledgeable about what was going on." Jones herself would become active in civil rights issues but as an individual citizen, not on the Heldman House's behalf. The house did permit activist organizations such as the Hill District People's Forum, a group with liberal tendencies, to meet in the building but did not identify ideologically with any of them.

One likely reason for the political aloofness was a sense of powerlessness to affect the decisions made by civic leaders, then still almost all White males. Freeland's comments about the difficulty of funding Heldman's budget after Jewish philanthropy shifted elsewhere are illustrative: "It was hard to get money. Maybe one Negro was on the board of the Community Chest [the predecessor to the United Way]. The White community was this large protoplasm, and as I would swing my fist at it, trying to make progress, I would just be swallowed up by it. That was the story of so many efforts by Negroes in this community."

As a service organization, however, Heldman continued to reflect the distinction between settlement houses and social service centers. “We still had a settlement house theory,” Freeland affirmed. “People come and you help them at every level. They become part of your group, not just people to be given a service and then sent back out.” The multiplicity of services to people of all age groups helped to make Heldman and its patrons feel like an extended family rather than simply a service agency and a client base.

But times were changing. They had changed dramatically by 1965, when Jonathan Zimmer came to Pittsburgh as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer and was assigned to live at Heldman. “I felt fortunate to be in this magnificent building,” Zimmer explained. “They took me to the fifth floor, which was set up as a dormitory, and the whole floor was available. I was able to set up an apartment and live in three rooms. I then met Ruth Bowler [later Ruth Richardson], who was the executive at that time; she lived on the fourth floor with her son, Billy. I helped to tutor him, and he eventually graduated from an Ivy League school.”

However, the heyday of the settlement houses (which on the Hill included the Soho, Kay Boys’ Club, the YMCA, and Heldman) had passed. Pittsburgh’s Health and Welfare Planning Association, which heavily influenced philanthropy in the city, had already recommended phasing out the settlement houses in favor of government-run recreation and service programs. Heldman merged with the Soho settlement house and Kay Boys’ Club to become Hill House Association, which tore down the beautiful Heldman building and replaced it with a community center.

“I felt bad about them tearing down a building, but it was very expensive to maintain,” Jones said. Zimmer, who would go on to be executive director of ACTION-Housing Inc., Pittsburgh’s leading nonprofit provider of low-income housing, for a quarter century, was less convinced that the demolition was necessary:

All through my career, I saw decisions like that made in an inappropriate way by people who didn't really understand the community. Al Johnson, a photographer on Centre Avenue, fought tirelessly to renew the Heldman center and make it what it had been for all those decades previously. That to me would have been the right decision. You saw this community that was so hard pressed, but with vitality, and this marvelous building with everything that community needed. Al was right and that [Health and Welfare Planning Association] planning report was wrong. Perhaps it was economically unfeasible, but if you really get behind an idea in Pittsburgh, you can do it, and that building could still have been serving the needs of the Hill. I have seen that over and over again where decisions are made: When outsiders do studies and economic analysis to figure out what is right for a community, they often miss the boat.

### **Kingsley: The Races Clash**

While working at Heldman I entered the University of Pittsburgh master's program in social work. My internship took me to another settlement house, Kingsley in East Liberty, where I remained on staff after graduating. In terms of race relations, my move from Heldman to Kingsley was like jumping from a blender into a barbecue. The predominantly Italian neighborhood was generally hostile to the arrival of African Americans, and Kingsley's highly elite board was reluctant to serve them.

Kingsley had opened in 1893 to serve immigrants in Pittsburgh's dirty, warehouse-laden Strip District. In 1900, it received a Hill District mansion from Henry Clay Frick, but in 1923, as the lower Hill was becoming increasingly African American, Kingsley sold the house and moved to East Liberty. Now the organization was once again seeing the neighborhood around it change color. Blacks represented 31 percent

of the surrounding population in 1950, 44 percent in 1960, and 66 percent in 1970. From 1950 to 1970, the White population in the census tracts around Kingsley would fall by almost two-thirds, from 10,383 to 3,575.

Ralph Proctor, who grew up nearby, recalled that Kingsley “had a very bad reputation among Black people. There were stories about Blacks trying to use the place and being beaten up. We stayed away from there.” I knew Kingsley’s reputation, too. I remember taking a team of African American youths from Heldman to a basketball game at Kingsley in the mid-1950s and warning them before the trip, “We have three choices. We can lose the game, win and stay for a fight, or win and get out of there in a hurry.” The youths chose to show admirable self-restraint, as they won the game and exited promptly thereafter.

But by the time I arrived at Kingsley, a courageous executive director named Robert Haas had persuaded his board to open up the organization to African Americans. Thus the same shift was now happening as had occurred at Heldman, though more slowly and with much less accommodation by local Whites. As a community organizer, I had the unenviable task of bringing the races together.

Dave Epperson, who would go on to become one of Pitt’s first African American deans as the head of the School of Social Work, was a graduate student intern at Kingsley at the time, and I was his field instructor. He described his experience aptly: “There were very strong lines of demarcation between the Italians and the African Americans. My job was to see if I could bring the [Italian and Black] communities together. It was impossible. What Moe did for me was to put me in situations where I could not be successful.” In spite of (or perhaps because of) this, we remained close friends throughout our lives.

We did make some progress. Kingsley’s summer camp remained segregated, but several African Americans joined the staff, among whom former Boston Celtics basketball player Chuck Cooper—the first African American drafted by the National Basketball Association—

was the most prominent. His stardom and personality endeared him even to the Italians. But, as Epperson put it, “Do you have to be an NBA star to get along?”

Working as a community organizer at Kingsley was a very interesting role that prepared me extremely well for my future in city politics. Kingsley had become a sort of liaison between the community and city government, identifying local issues and funneling them to the people who could solve them—which, in the Democratic machine government of Mayor David Lawrence, meant the ward bosses. I spent much of my time meeting with churches, schools, and individual residents in the neighborhood, finding out their concerns in such areas as street maintenance, police patrols, and recreation. After achieving a general consensus of views on an issue, I would take these community requests to the city and county governments.

Where local controversies broke out, I tended to try to find common ground among the contesting groups. For example, a senior citizen public housing project on Larimer Avenue aroused the typical concerns about lower-income people coming into the neighborhood; the Italians were doubly concerned that the project might attract poor Blacks. Kingsley sought to give the community a stronger voice in project decisions, to the housing authority’s notable discomfort.

Kingsley steered clear of one of the neighborhood’s toughest racial battle: the effort to integrate swimming pools led by Black Presbyterian pastor LeRoy Patrick. Yet we did form an interracial committee to examine community issues. Epperson and I met with Patrick and other African American leaders in an effort to change their perception of Kingsley as a racially segregated place; we also visited with Italian church and business leaders.

I did not attempt to tinker with Kingsley’s participation in the 12th Ward electoral machine. Kingsley was the voting place for two districts. Each election day, I saw the machine turn out voters, including those with disabilities who needed a ride to the polls, in great numbers. Some quantities of money and occasionally alcohol

changed hands, after which the recipients went behind the curtain to vote. Anyone who spent longer in the voting booth than would have been necessary to pull the straight-ticket Democratic lever was questioned upon coming out.

In contrast to Heldman House's hands-off stance, Kingsley was deeply involved with redevelopment planning when it came to East Liberty in the late 1950s. Especially after the rancor that had surrounded redevelopment decisions in the Hill, planners paid careful attention to the 1954 federal housing law's community participation requirements. Urban planners at the time had a view that city development should consist primarily of high-rise buildings surrounded by green space, and they largely ignored what local residents thought; the new law was forcing them to listen. We arranged block meetings with the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of Pittsburgh staff; I recall Al Jacobs, more comfortable with community dialogues than most planners, sitting on the floor in a Buddha-like pose and listening to residents for hours.

Meanwhile, the URA contracted with Kingsley to manage community participation in the Negley Avenue area of East Liberty, which was slated for restoration, not redevelopment. We took an architect door to door through the neighborhood, providing homeowners with suggestions on how they could improve their properties and offering help in accessing funds to those who showed interest.

Inside its walls, Kingsley was running an impressive array of cradle-to-grave programming. Along with a strong professional staff, Kingsley had an army of volunteers because it had become a preferred community service location—almost a rite of passage—for upper-income suburban women, who made substantial time commitments. Integration of Kingsley's adolescent programs came with difficulty, but by 1961 its summer camp was integrated.

Kingsley was still humming in 1962, when graduate student Guy Tumolo served there as a part-time community developer. Tumolo,

who would go on to a long career in county government, created the Larimer Avenue Business Association under Kingsley's umbrella. This association's main goal, as documented in the 1963 monthly newsletters still in Tumolo's files, was to restore two-way traffic on Larimer Avenue; the city had made it one way inbound to funnel traffic speedily into East Liberty, thereby inadvertently endangering Larimer's businesses. (The advocacy effort was successful, and Larimer Avenue was two way again by July 1963.)

Tumolo recalled seeing lots of activities taking place at Kingsley, organized by recreation director Angelo Carrabba. "They all listened to Angie, even the street gangs," Tumolo said. Young women and adults came in for sewing and cooking classes, a Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra trombonist taught music lessons, and a highly skilled artist offered painting and design classes. Kingsley's neighborhood council was still active, too, but by then it was fighting an uphill battle; as Tumolo noted, "Some of the new arrivals in the neighborhood were not as respectful of property and people as the folks on the council." While Kingsley was fully integrated by then, other, more threatening issues had emerged: abandoned houses and drug activity. The neighborhood's vitality was under siege, and within a few years, many of its residents moved out.

Kingsley's integration experience was intense and briefly successful but short lived. Like so many inner-city neighborhoods, the Larimer Avenue section of East Liberty did not remain racially balanced for long. The Italians moved on to Penn Hills and other areas, leaving an increasingly African American neighborhood behind them.

### **Decline and Revival: The Kingsley Sequel**

Kingsley's grand building was eventually doomed by deferred maintenance. In the mid-1970s, with estimates of up to \$1 million needed to bring the building up to code, the board decided to sell it.

As of 1978, Kingsley still operated a summer camp, but its community programs were gone; in fact, the organization's office had moved to a medical building where children were not permitted.

Even though an African American, Jim Henry, had served as executive director after Haas, Kingsley had still not put charges of segregation to rest. In 1978, Proctor recalled, a White friend called him to say he had been offered the executive post at Kingsley. When Proctor tried to congratulate him, the friend interrupted to say that he was declining the offer, adding, "People have told me that if I bring my White ass out there, they are going to kick it, because Kingsley didn't try to find a Black for the job and people were not going to stand for anyone White unless they addressed that issue."

When the friend encouraged Proctor to pursue the job, his first reaction was: "No way; I would not want to ruin my reputation." But eventually other Black friends persuaded him to apply. Their rationale was that an application from someone as qualified as Proctor would reveal whether Kingsley's board was open to having an activist Black at the helm. Proctor gave a relaxed and outspoken interview, as he had no intention of taking the job anyhow. After a second interview and an attractive contract offer, he recalled, "With much regret and sadness, I accepted." He would stay for 19 years.

According to Proctor, Kingsley's board remained reluctant to become engaged with the local community again, but he found a creative way to acquire a facility. When the URA tried to sell a building in East Liberty, Proctor pleaded Kingsley's case and talked the URA down from the appraised price of \$165,000 to \$40,000. Then, without disclosing the handshake agreement, he described the building to his board and asked for authorization to purchase it if the price came down to \$50,000. The board agreed—and soon it owned a building. Kingsley would operate out of this location, restoring its former community presence and recreational programs, until it constructed its present facility in the late 1990s.



## **Policy Implications of the Settlement Houses**

People today are concerned about the idea of place—about enabling residents to feel connected to their neighborhood or community. The settlement houses fulfilled this purpose wonderfully. They provided cradle-to-grave services that brought people from all walks of life through their doors. As a result, going to the settlement house was not a stigma; if you went there for help, you didn't stick out.

Is the settlement house concept still viable today? It can be. The Sarah Heinz House on Pittsburgh's North Side and the revived Kingsley Association in East Liberty are successfully applying a similar model, with a menu of community and recreational activities. But many factors make the task more difficult today. Technology has transformed interpersonal relationships; young people today are using Twitter or texting instead of meeting their friends at the rec center. The evolution of neighborhood violence from street fighting to gun battles, with gangs or drug dealers battling over territory and market share, makes it almost impossible for neighborhood centers to be safe houses, as Heldman and Kingsley were in the 1950s. The Hill and East Liberty back then certainly had underworld criminal activity, such as numbers games, but it was generally carried out in an orderly fashion, without violence. Today, we have a fragmented underworld, with internal competition for control of the drug trade, which often results in violent disputes.

In the Hill District of the 1950s, everyone walked to school and then walked to Heldman; today, greater mobility has undermined the neighborhood's central role in daily life. But I remain convinced that programs that start working with youths at an early age and continue to serve them as they grow, providing compassionate adults as benevolent authority figures other than parents and police, can protect these youths effectively from the worst elements of the street. I see the Manchester Youth Development Center, with its associated charter school, as a good example.

The story of Heldman's and Kingsley's transitional years also points to an often-overlooked consequence of desegregation. When the African American community was congregated in certain neighborhoods, it had Black professionals—doctors, lawyers, journalists—living there. Sure, as Udin observed, there was some tension between the wealthier Blacks from Sugar Top and the lower-income Blacks a few blocks away, but there were still positive Black role models within the immediate area. Desegregation, while it moved us much closer to being an equal opportunity society, also caused many better-off African Americans (and members of White ethnic groups, too) to move to more economically homogeneous communities. Their relocation weakened the institutional structure of lower-income neighborhoods and removed many of the role models.

Matt Hawkins, an African American who is writing his PhD dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh on this time period, has eloquently described how the lower-income Black community left behind in this shift became radicalized, taking an “oppositional stance” toward mainstream institutions and culture—and even toward those Blacks who had advanced within it. Hawkins has written, “The notion that the Black community could benefit from Black professionals who could successfully navigate through mainstream institutions and services was replaced with suspicion that such professionals had ‘sold out’ and were ‘acting White.’” As a result, serious academic and professional pursuits became not just unpopular among some lower-income Blacks, but evidence of betrayal of one's own race. That challenge persists today.

Thanks to desegregation, our social differences today are more class driven and less race driven than they were 60 years ago. But racism is still a viral force that permeates our society, and the young Black male remains particularly at risk for violence, low levels of education achievement, and unemployment. Hence the continued importance of the local “safe houses” that the settlements once provided: alternatives that offer attractive cultural and recreational options to young people while also encouraging them to live responsibly and get their schoolwork done.

## CHAPTER 3

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### **The Challenges of Neighborhood and Community Development**

I became a neighborhood organizer by accident. When I was working at the Anna Heldman settlement house, the Hill District was turned upside down by traumatic change that community members, especially African Americans, felt powerless to resist or affect: specifically, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) project on the Lower Hill, which resulted in the displacement and relocation of approximately 1,300 families. The Heldman staff felt that we should go door to door and try to organize neighborhood residents so that they could address community problems with a stronger, more unified voice.

Beginning with that episode and continuing throughout my career, I began to see neighborhood organizations as a way to build local consensus, to help local residents become attached to their communities, and to give communities a public voice. In many cases, especially in the battles over urban development during the 1950s and 1960s, these organizations provided a means of fighting back against the power and insensitivity of some urban planners.

Over the 60 years since my first community organizing experience, I have sat through hundreds of neighborhood meetings. Many of them took place in churches, causing me to live an ecumenical life. I sat in bars, in living rooms, on porches, in restaurants, and in child care centers (squeezing into chairs built for 5-year-olds). I often was the only White face in all-Black meetings or the sole voice of underrepresented groups' concerns in all-White meetings.

My own role in neighborhood development has been as varied as the settings. In some groups, I was a member, friend, or active supporter; at other times, when I was representing the City of Pittsburgh or was associated with an urban development plan that the community didn't like, I was seen as the antagonist and as a partner in oppression.

After 60 years of seeing public investments revive some communities and weaken others, I am still reluctant to declare myself an expert on what works in neighborhood development. I don't believe that there is a cookie-cutter process that promises success. So much depends on personalities, unique circumstances, and changing cultural patterns that, in my opinion, it is very hard to define best practices or determine what can be replicated from a series of idiosyncratic events.

In this chapter, I highlight the insights of several colleagues in whose work I have had the privilege of participating and who I consider to be distinguished experts in their respective specialties. I then offer a few pertinent recollections from my consulting experience as an urban affairs advisor to Henry Ford II.

### **Engagement in East Liberty**

Urban redevelopment in the Hill District took place with little regard for what neighborhood residents thought. It was the product of a philosophy that believed in protecting downtowns by creating a buffer area around them, even through displacing residents against their will.

In contrast, when I moved to the Kingsley House in East Liberty in 1960, I became involved in a more collaborative situation, as the city actively sought to engage community members in decision making. We at Kingsley would organize small groups of interested residents, block by block, and then Al Jacobs of the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association (the planning arm of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development) and Bob Pease of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of Pittsburgh would sit down with them to discuss plans and get community input. I prepared *East Liberty Tribune* columns for Bob Haas, Kingsley's executive director, on what neighborhood development meant and why residents should get involved with the process.

Racial tensions emanating from the arrival of African Americans in a formerly Italian neighborhood made my work more difficult.

But, on the other hand, the federal Housing Act of 1954 made my work easier, because it changed the nature of urban renewal planning and investment. Now, instead of just tearing down and replacing run-down structures, the federal government also was supporting two other alternatives: rehabilitation and preservation. Thus, for every property within the East Liberty development zone, there were now three options. In addition, one portion of the housing act (known as Point 7) required community-based citizen participation in urban renewal planning.

In part to fulfill this citizen participation requirement and to educate local residents about their options, the URA awarded Kingsley a contract to work directly with local homeowners. An architect and I went to community meetings and told residents about the funding and architectural services that would be available to them if they wanted to improve their homes.

Shortly thereafter, the URA offered me a full-time position. But I wanted to become involved in a more comprehensive approach to regional development rather than focusing purely on the renewal and redevelopment of physical structures. So, instead, I joined the city planning department, which was seeking to develop a long-term strategic vision for Pittsburgh's neighborhoods by analyzing demographics and migration patterns. My primary task was to expand community participation in this process of identifying how the city would help to shape the future of each neighborhood and build a "safety net" (or relocation program) for displaced persons.

Traditionally, the Democratic Party ward chairs had been the liaisons between neighborhoods and the mayor's office; now, nonpartisan organizations were competing for that function. Much of a big-city mayor's political strength relies on citizens' belief that their city is run well—which generally means that their garbage is picked up, their streets are paved, the police are responsive, and traffic moves efficiently.

## Confrontation or Collaboration?

I have already mentioned that sometimes the best way to unify a community is by identifying a common enemy. Confrontation was certainly the core of the organizing style of Saul Alinsky, a nationally known Chicago organizer who authored the book *Rules for Radicals*; he mobilized people by getting them mad at the establishment. That approach can work very well if you have a specific, short-term advocacy goal, such as preventing a building project or getting better garbage pickup in your neighborhood. It is less effective, however, if your goals require creating healthy collaborative relationships—say, with the banks that provide loans to business startups or with government agencies offering redevelopment grants.

I always saw myself as a link between a local neighborhood's demands and the resources available to that community in government or the business community. Alinsky would have called me a sellout, not an organizer. He would not have chosen the path of friendly collaboration with sources of power, because he knew that opposing the powerful is difficult when you need their money. In contrast, I always felt it was better not to start a fight if you could get the resources you needed without fighting.

Ironically, considering that neighborhood organizing in Pittsburgh generally adopted a more dialogue-oriented style than Alinsky's approach in Chicago, the man who became "Mr. Community Organizing" in Pittsburgh came from Chicago: Jim Cunningham, who would later become one of my most treasured colleagues at Pitt's School of Social Work.

Cunningham began his organizing career in 1951 with Independent Voters of Illinois (IVI), a nonprofit organization formed to give neighborhood entities a stronger voice in political decision making in Chicago and its suburbs. After five years in that position, he became the executive at an IVI member organization, the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, on Chicago's South Side.

There, he directly confronted Alinsky as the city's biggest urban renewal plan unfolded in Hyde Park. Cunningham felt that the expensive apartments proposed for Hyde Park would strengthen the neighborhood; Alinsky attacked him for abandoning the poor, arguing that the influx of high-rent properties would have a gentrifying effect and would displace lower-income residents. Eventually, the warring parties reached a compromise that included the construction of new public housing in Hyde Park to balance the anticipated impact of the upscale residences. Despite the clash, Cunningham was an admirer as well as a critic of Alinsky's work and would speak favorably of it in his first book, *The Resurgent Neighborhood* (1965).

In 1959 Cunningham was offered a community organizer position with ACTION-Housing, Inc., in Pittsburgh. "I had eight children and I needed more money," Cunningham recalled, "but my main reason for leaving Chicago at that time was that IVI had challenged the mayor [Richard J. Daley, who won his second term in 1959] and lost, and so I felt my future in Chicago was not very bright."

Cunningham pioneered the grassroots mobilization of neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, using ACTION-Housing's connections with the Ford Foundation to get grant money for organizing work in struggling communities within the city. He summarized his philosophy in a 2011 interview:

It was a version of the old democratic idea of America—that if people would unite in their own little area, they would be powerful in obtaining resources from government and foundations. I viewed America as a society where business was overly exerting power, and I felt that if you had powerful collections of neighborhood organizations—people who had reasons to take good care of their homes, raise their families there, and be stable rather than moving around all the time—this could be one of the good counterforces to business. Collectively, people could do a lot on their own in these small groups.

Cunningham was responsible for persuading the Ford Foundation to choose Pittsburgh as one of its six “Gray Area” program cities. The foundation supported the establishment of community action organizations in three Pittsburgh neighborhoods: Hazelwood, Homewood, and Perry Hilltop. (I still remember the two dog bites I suffered while helping to build community participation in these communities.) These Ford Foundation efforts were a precursor of the community action provisions contained in the centerpiece of the Great Society war on urban poverty, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (which will be discussed in the next chapter). At a time when city planners across the United States were trying to tear down traditional neighborhoods and rebuild them to look like suburbs, Cunningham promoted the view that neighborhoods themselves should be able to determine how they will function without fear of being undercut by large-scale forces.

### **Successes and Bruises**

Some of Pittsburgh’s most vibrant neighborhoods today were shaped by the neighborhood organizing activity of the 1960s. On Pittsburgh’s North Side, the URA wanted to tear down aging homes in the Manchester neighborhood and replace them with suburban-style housing or public housing communities. The Manchester Community Council fought back by teaming with historic preservation advocates and convinced the URA to fund restoration rather than razing. Ultimately, the community achieved recognition of the Manchester Historic District, the only such designation in a lower-income section of Pittsburgh, and thereby protected not only hundreds of examples of classic architecture but also the community’s sense of place.

Since then, other neighborhood organizations have had significant successes. The South Side has transformed land once occupied by steel mills into attractive middle-class housing and retail areas;



in fact, the plethora of trendy bars drawing revelers to Carson Street each weekend suggests that perhaps South Side revitalization has been too successful. More recently, communities like Bloomfield, Lawrenceville, Friendship, and Greenfield have been shifting toward a younger demographic thanks to local initiatives in housing upkeep and the influx of a diverse variety of retail businesses. In these communities and others, the unpredictable nature of cultural dynamics is finally starting to turn in favor of urban renewal. In the auto-crazed 1950s, the American dream was a spacious suburban home with a two-car garage; now, more modest footprints, cultural diversity, and closeness to downtown are “in.” Would any of this have been possible without the never-give-up efforts of community organization leaders during 50 years of slow, gradual, but seemingly irreversible urban decline?

Some of the most feisty local activism of the 1960s took place in Oakland, a neighborhood dominated by the University of Pittsburgh and several major hospitals. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Pitt, Carlow College, and the hospitals were purchasing surrounding properties to accommodate expansion, causing considerable community disruption and animosity.

Sandra Phillips, now executive director of Peoples Oakland in Pittsburgh and then a student in urban planning at Pitt’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, also was a student in my community organization class. She became deeply involved in these battles, helping to mobilize the Oakland community to push back against these large institutions. In one of the biggest fights, citizens mobilized to fight a Pitt master plan that would have put five new University buildings in the vicinity of Forbes Field, the Pittsburgh Pirates’ home until Three Rivers Stadium opened in 1970. “They put together a plan to buy up Oakland [Avenue] and [South] Bouquet Street,” Phillips said, “and were scaring people by saying the state would take their houses away [if the residents didn’t sell the homes to the University]. We lost the fight to save Forbes Field, but we

blocked three of the five buildings.” (The two that gained approval are now Pitt’s law school building and Wesley W. Posvar Hall; the latter building still displays Forbes Field’s home plate at its time-honored location, under glass, as a reminder of what once stood there.)

The community also banded together to oppose a 1,700-car garage proposed by the University Health System (now known as the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center or UPMC) for the corner of Terrace and Darragh streets. “Early on, I learned that you could kill a big development with technicalities,” Phillips observed. In this case, the main technicality was that part of the parcel was zoned as residential; in addition, community advocates presented data projecting severe traffic congestion if the garage was built. Pittsburgh City Council rejected the zoning change by an 8–1 vote. Similarly, a Pitt proposal to build a dormitory on the site of the Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School was defeated due to zoning objections.

“We loved beating the institutions because they were so aggressive,” Phillips explained. “We were well organized and they didn’t like that at all. We would never be equals, but we could level the playing field with a base of popular support so that we could have a conversation. Out of this bruising set of fights came a recognition that we should set up a forum representing Oakland as a whole and get the institutions to look out for what was best for all of us.”

Having found that they could not beat Oakland citizens consistently in the political arena, the institutions came to the bargaining table and joined in forming Oakland Directions, Inc. David Bergholz of the Allegheny Conference, Phillips, and I recommended rules of engagement for a hybrid organization that would balance the needs of the residents and the institutions. The bylaws of this nonprofit umbrella organization stipulated that community groups would hold half of the board seats, while representatives of Oakland’s universities and hospitals, other commercial interests, the City of Pittsburgh, the city parking authority, and the Port Authority of Allegheny County transit service would occupy the others. The years of hostility between

big institutions and neighborhood interests had sparked energetic local participation; Phillips recalled that 25 separate block clubs were functioning in Oakland during the 1970s, feeding information into the planning process.

Oakland Directions sponsored a community-wide process in 1977–79 that established clear boundaries separating residential, retail, and institutional land uses, with mutual agreement that these boundaries would not be violated. The Oakland Planning and Development Corporation (OPDC) was established in 1980 to oversee future community planning decisions and carry out strategic real estate development; Phillips would serve as OPDC’s executive director for its first 10 years.

### **Heinz’s Big Investment**

The 1980s were the heyday of development activities in Pittsburgh, and H.J. “Jack” Heinz II was at the center of them. Henry S. “Hank” Beukema, now executive director of the McCune Foundation, was a Heinz Endowments program officer at that time and recalls his boss’ strategic role.

Heinz’s interest in community development began with the renovation of a declining theater into Heinz Hall, home of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. During that endeavor, he became deeply concerned about the deteriorating, seedy blocks on Penn and Liberty Avenues nearby. “There were people on the street at night,” Beukema recalled, “but not the kind who would be coming into Heinz Hall.”

In 1976, Heinz formed 601 Liberty Inc. for the express purpose of buying up downtown property. Three years later, he and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development funded a study of the Penn-Liberty corridor that established the blueprint for further investments. In 1984, Heinz’s discussions with Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguiri led to the formation of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, which over the subsequent quarter century transformed

a red-light district into the attractive Cultural District, with six performance venues, galleries, public art, and numerous restaurants.

These efforts to remake downtown sparked a broader interest in neighborhood development. In fall 1980, Heinz asked his foundation staff to spend the next six months creating a neighborhood development strategy. According to Beukema, Heinz's instruction was "not to develop the program ourselves but to talk to people who knew what they were doing already and then come back with a proposal."

Beukema consulted with a group of people involved in neighborhoods (myself included) and, with Heinz's blessing, began offering grants to Pittsburgh community development corporations. The initial recipients, christened the "Fortunate Five" by a Pittsburgh newspaper reporter, included two mentioned previously in this chapter (Manchester Community Council and OPDC) plus the North Side Civic Development Corporation, East Liberty Development Inc., and Homewood-Brushton Regional Development Corporation.

### **Real Challenges in Real Estate**

Neighborhood development requires a much broader range of expertise than community organizing. A community organizer brings people together, builds consensus, and engages in advocacy; a neighborhood organization seeks solutions to complex problems like economic revitalization, housing, and health care. The task of these community organizations became even more complex as the Ford Foundation, which provided grants to each of the Fortunate Five groups in Pittsburgh, encouraged them not just to assist with other entities' development activities but to become owners and developers of real estate themselves.

These demands led to the formation of the first intermediary designed to help Pittsburgh's neighborhood organizations do their job: the Community Technical Assistance Center (CTAC), which I served as its first board chair. CTAC's first executive director, David Feehan,

had come to McKeesport as an AmeriCorps VISTA-funded community organizer in 1968, helping public housing tenants to fight racial discrimination and advocating for reform in the city's district court. He moved on to Minneapolis, directing a Model Cities program there and later providing consulting and communication assistance for a dozen Model Cities locations around the country. After Feehan returned to Pittsburgh for graduate study, Bergholz of the Allegheny Conference recruited him to organize a similar technical assistance program here, which became established as CTAC in 1980. Feehan and I both believe that some of the new community development corporations (or CDCs) formed around this time would never have gotten off the ground without CTAC's support.

One of CTAC's fledgling clients was East Liberty Development Inc. (ELDI), which persuaded Feehan to become its executive director in 1982. East Liberty offers a particularly interesting case study of nonprofit neighborhood development organizations' efforts to follow the Ford Foundation mandate and become directly involved in real estate management.

East Liberty today is another resurgent community, featuring a Home Depot where a Sears once was, a Target on Penn Avenue, and the upscale Bakery Square development full of high-tech tenants like Google. In 1982, it was not so attractive. East Liberty's core business district was already losing market share in the mid-1960s, when the URA tried to save it by turning Penn Avenue into a pedestrian mall surrounded by a ring road and parking lots. By the time the project was completed, many small shops had closed or been demolished, East Liberty had a reputation as a high-poverty area, and the remaining businesses were on life support.

Feehan recalled that, when first offered the ELDI job by board chair and Mellon Bank manager David Thomas, "I was a bit reticent because, as I said to him, I didn't know much about real estate. He said I would learn." Feehan and his board both felt that it would be more efficient for community organizations like ELDI to focus

on recruiting businesses than on actually buying and rehabilitating buildings, but they submitted to the Ford Foundation's preference.

ELDI's first purchase of real estate was a vacant 14,000-square-foot building, formerly a low-budget hotel. "It didn't look like a difficult project," Feehan said. "We had people take a preliminary look and they said that, except for the floors not being level, it wouldn't be too difficult." As it turned out, rehabilitation took more than two years.

ELDI then set its sights on an eyesore-filled block across the street from the majestic East Liberty Presbyterian Church. The owners were offering several buildings for \$1.5 million; Feehan was overjoyed to negotiate them down to a \$770,000 sale price but soon found that he had not gotten such a great bargain:

We hadn't owned the buildings more than a few months when I got a call at 3 a.m. on a Sunday from the fire department, saying that the sprinkler system had gone off in one of them. There was no fire, but the roof had so many leaks that water had gotten into the fourth-floor ceiling and rotted out the plaster, which had collapsed and brought down the sprinkler system with it. By Monday morning, we had chunks of plaster smashing onto people's desks at the welfare department offices on the first floor. The staff couldn't get in, and their offices were soaked. By 11 that morning, they were picketing ELDI's office and calling us slumlords.

ELDI also tried to create the approximate equivalent of an outlet mall in East Liberty. It couldn't attract the standard factory outlets because of competition from nearby department stores, but a consultant thought there could be a market for secondhand and discontinued housewares. ELDI got loans from the state and from Mellon Bank and opened a glass, crystal, and china resale shop, hiring welfare recipients to work under an experienced retail manager. "We did well

for a few months,” Feehan said, “and then found that many of the people who bought things were doing so out of their social conscience. Once that group was exhausted, we did not do as well. The store lasted for a little over a year and ran out of cash. Fortunately the state loan was forgivable, but Mellon’s was not. The lessons learned were valuable—and expensive.”

Despite those early difficulties, ELDI persevered. It rehabilitated the block across from the East Liberty Presbyterian Church in conjunction with a real estate consulting firm from Philadelphia, and preserved the last of East Liberty’s classic theaters, the Regent Theatre (constructed in 1914 and now known as the Kelly Strayhorn Theater). Finding that major commercial real-estate brokers were too busy making money in the suburbs to spend time in East Liberty, Feehan and one of his staff members got their own brokerage licenses and formed a for-profit partnership with a small real-estate firm, bringing more than a dozen tenants into the neighborhood. ELDI also repopulated the largely vacant Penn Avenue South corridor with small shops.

### **The Pittsburgh Partnership**

A second community development intermediary alongside CTAC was born in 1989. At this time, the Heinz Endowments and Mellon Bank Foundation were heavily invested in supporting the Fortunate Five plus CDCs in Pittsburgh’s South Side and Hill District. After meeting with a Ford Foundation program manager who was interested in funding intermediary organizations, Beukema brought together Bergholz, Paul Brophy of the URA, and me to develop a proposal.

Beukema was receptive to the idea for personal reasons as well. Up to this point, while the Allegheny Conference had participated in proposal review and served as a pass-through for funds, Beukema and his grant-making colleagues had sought to remain directly involved with the neighborhood organizations, but their availability

was becoming stretched too thin. With the Ford Foundation's backing and additional support from the Heinz Endowments, Mellon Bank Foundation, and Pittsburgh National Bank, the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development (PPND) came into existence and hired OPDC's Sandra Phillips as its first director.

The idea behind PPND, Beukema stated, was that "we could do more collectively than by our individual grant programs, so we basically wholesaled our resources to the intermediary and let it be the retailer."

Phillips shared some recollections from her time at PPND:

We had a strong board of powerful people who represented the four legs of the table: business, banking, foundations, and community [including government]. We did real estate and we funded community organizations. We decided not to have the community organizations on the PPND board because of the conflict of interest. We tried to be the first money in (for planning and site development) and the last in, filling the gap to make the project go. We also put money into the first Crawford-Roberts apartments [in the Hill District] and into housing on the North Side.

Things were not always peaceful. I found out that a couple of the community organizations were really screwing up with their money. We ended up setting up a formal workout program with audits and helping them pay back taxes.

In retrospect, Beukema described the effort as moderately successful, as PPND built community consensus behind projects and attracted like-minded investors to pool their resources. The intermediary provided administrative support to CDCs as well as some technical assistance. "We knew we did not have enough money to arrest deterioration and disinvestment totally," Beukema said, "but we attempted to pick signature projects that would show investors that they could make money here." Some of the projects had to be



refinanced when projected growth in property values failed to materialize. On the other hand, some investments have had lasting impact, such as the revitalization and spin-off impact that resulted from helping Home Depot to occupy the former Sears site in East Liberty.

Beukema compared PPND's longer-term experience to timber harvesting: "The second-growth forest is not always as good." Succession issues arose as CDC directors and foundation staff left and city administrations changed. "If I were to create an intermediary today," he observed, "I would probably put a sunset provision on it, because often the external environment changes so much that just making incremental adjustments to the organization doesn't get you where you need to be."

### **We Have to Get Along**

I always viewed my community involvement as complementary to my university teaching role, and I served on numerous nonprofit boards. As vice president of ACTION-Housing, I had ample opportunity to observe how internal division within a community's leadership can sabotage progress. I also had the pleasure of working with Jonathan Zimmer, and then later Larry Swanson, who has served on ACTION-Housing's staff for more than 25 years and as its executive director since 2005.

ACTION-Housing wants to spend its energy creating high-quality affordable housing, not engaging in local political battles. So it tends to invest its resources where it can find a strong, respected local partner who will not be undermined by opposition. As a positive example of such an entity, Swanson pointed to the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), which partnered with ACTION-Housing to turn a former Catholic school building into senior housing with a health center on the ground floor. "BGC is one of the most stable CDCs in Pittsburgh," Swanson said. "They understand the needs and the market in their community—in this case, they understood the need

for independent living for elderly people whose older homes were falling apart. They used their community connections to mobilize public support, which helped to get approval from the city and URA.”

On the other hand, there is Braddock, one of Allegheny County’s most forlorn municipalities, where ACTION-Housing inherited several properties. “There have always been multiple dueling organizations there,” Swanson said. “When one organization proposes something, the other one opposes it, and a fight for resources begins. This is the dynamic that destroys communities. Braddock does not have a strong community organization that is truly well grounded in the community.”

In between those two extremes is Homewood, where ACTION-Housing navigated community conflict to complete a senior housing project. “The local conflicts consumed so much energy,” Swanson stated. “I am willing to take on conflict in order to serve what I consider a critical need, such as housing for people who are HIV positive. But being wedged between two community groups is not my fight.”

Swanson identified several key factors in building unified community support. Sometimes time is the only healer—the feuding parties need time to realize that, if they continue fighting, they and their community will lose. Sometimes a respected leader can bridge the gap, as Swanson saw city council member and school board president Jake Millions do in the Hill District. For would-be developers, transparency, full disclosure of plans, and willingness to work with public officials are essential. And a credible legal threat—such as when the proposed development is clearly permitted under existing zoning—helps, too. “It’s magical how the risk of being sued provides local officials with a good excuse to vote for something,” Swanson laughed.

Ellen Kight, who was regional director of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (formerly the Department of Community Affairs) for more than 20 years, noted the frequency of turf battles between elected officials and community organizations. “We tried to invest in both groups and bring them

together,” Kight said of her work in directing state funding. “Local government officials felt they were challenged [by the CDCs], that it was an adversarial relationship. Today, some of that feeling is still there, but it has largely gone away.” Kight found that young, idealistic community activists sometimes fostered the conflict by not understanding local government processes and making unrealistic demands.

Kight’s experience at the Department of Community and Economic Development showed, she said, that strong community engagement and a clear community-wide plan are essential for success. “We’d be approached by three or four different groups in a municipality, with no agreement as to what the top priorities were,” she said. “They were duplicating efforts and had not thought strategically. Once we were able to incentivize local cooperation, we could then invest in projects that would make a difference in the community.”

Such cooperation also is crucial, Kight said, because effective community development must be relatively comprehensive; one community need, such as better housing, can seldom be resolved without addressing interrelated issues like health services, public safety, and business development.

### **Henry Ford II’s Good Intentions**

In the late 1960s Henry Ford II was looking for outside advice on how he, as one of America’s most prominent business leaders, could make a difference in Detroit and other troubled cities. He figured that, because Pittsburgh had remained a relatively safe city while Detroit was ravaged by race riots, maybe someone from Pittsburgh could help Detroit. Michael Sviridoff, a Ford Foundation vice president, contacted Cunningham, who had joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, where I was teaching part time. Cunningham said that he was too busy to add an ongoing consulting responsibility but recommended that Ford hire me. As a result, for

several years, I traveled to Detroit once a week. One of my roles was to offer suggestions on how Ford could support New Detroit, an organization formed to develop unified responses to the city's problems. I don't know how much I influenced Ford's decisions, but Booton Herndon's 1969 biography of the Ford family, *Ford: An Unconventional Biography of the Men and Their Times*, reported the following on my role:

To get some idea of how to deal with [the New Detroit Committee], Ford asked the advice of an expert. "I've been called in by a lot of industrialists," Morton Coleman of Pittsburgh, an unusual combination of idealistic social worker and practical politician, told me, "but I found Ford a new breed. Most people have skimmed through a report or two and talked with somebody a little bit, but Ford had read all the reports and was thoroughly familiar with the situation. For the first time I could skip my preliminary lecture and start even. I was a little wary of this great industrialist at first, but in a couple of minutes he demonstrated a frankness and honesty which put me at ease. No pomposity, no sham. In working with Ford I've found that he studies the issues thoroughly, becomes knowledgeable, then acts quickly, decisively, almost impulsively. This man is providing leadership for Detroit."<sup>1</sup>

Although I think my role in Ford's decision processes was marginal at best, it is possible that I indirectly influenced the construction of Detroit's best-known landmark, the Renaissance Center. The story of this building begins in Dearborn, where Ford's impact illustrated the unintended costs that sometimes come with good intentions.

When Ford's grandfather built Ford Motor Company's world headquarters in Dearborn in the mid-1920s, he bought 2,300 acres of land around the headquarters as a buffer. The property, which became known as Fairlane, was probably the largest contiguous,

privately owned piece of urban real estate in the nation. In 1969, the company created Ford Motor Land Development Corporation (now Ford Land) for the purpose of developing this property.

Bill Schoen, manager of urban affairs at Ford Motor Company, and I proposed that Ford develop Fairlane as James Rouse was developing Columbia, Md.—as a planned community that could intelligently link its commercial, industrial, and residential areas. We envisioned building a racially integrated community that could become a model for America while also delivering profits for the company.

This vision, however, faced many obstacles, one of which was Orville Hubbard. Hubbard, Dearborn's mayor since 1942, was an outspoken segregationist and ran the city of 90,000 people in such a way as to keep Blacks out; when he left office in 1978, only about 20 African Americans lived there. As a result, the Ford Motor Land Development Corporation decided that establishing a mixed residential community in Fairlane was impractical. Instead, it proceeded to pursue maximum economic return by constructing office buildings, a grand shopping center, luxury condominiums, and a light industry park. This enticed numerous Detroit businesses to relocate to Fairlane, thereby contributing further to the city's decline.

Because Fairlane's impact seemed incompatible with Henry Ford II's commitment to rebuilding urban centers—especially Detroit—Schoen and I argued that it was important for Ford Motor to make a commitment to downtown Detroit. In 1971, Ford and a group of Detroit financiers and business professionals commissioned a study through Detroit Renaissance, a nonprofit revitalization entity. According to Joe T. Darden, Richard Child Hill, June Thomas, and Richard Thomas' book *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*, Ford and his colleagues envisioned “a Detroit answer to Chicago's waterfront.” Their search for a project of huge significance to change the image of downtown Detroit and counter the attractiveness of suburban developments like Fairlane resulted in the Ford Motor

Land Development Corporation purchasing 50 acres of downtown property, on which the Renaissance Center—an interconnected set of seven skyscrapers, including the tallest hotel-only building in the world at that time—would be built.

As principal architect Ford hired John Portman, known for “city within a city” total-living environments like the Peachtree Center in Atlanta and the Embarcadero Center in San Francisco. His execution of the project effectively walled off the Renaissance Center from the rest of Detroit, limiting its spillover impact on the surrounding area. In terms of economic activity, its initial big splash faded into unsatisfactory performance. Constructed at a cost of about \$500 million, the center was sold to General Motors in 1996 for just \$76 million.

### **Neighborhood Advocacy Today**

Nowadays, we are more likely to communicate (by e-mail or Facebook) with someone across the globe who shares our professional or leisure interests than with our neighbor across the fence. Is neighborhood-based advocacy still relevant?

I think so. While in some aspects of contemporary society (notably, the prevalence of online shopping and big-box retailers) efficiency has long trumped local intimacy and personal connection, in many other areas—crime prevention, transportation infrastructure, accessible health care, housing, parks and recreation—our interests and those of the people living immediately around us substantially coincide. Thus, compelling reasons remain for organizing communities, on a geographic basis, to speak with one voice, especially (as Jim Cunningham noted) when the community could be impacted by other, politically influential forces.

As James Madison established in the Federalist Papers, power unchecked becomes tyranny. Representative democracy works only when everyone concerned about a decision is represented.

Neighborhood organizing is all about giving a voice to people who otherwise might not have a seat at the table.

Community members themselves often fail to recognize the importance of this voice. During the Model Cities years, neighborhoods were entitled to elect their own representatives to local boards that would make development decisions; turnout for these elections was typically around 4 percent. But giving neighborhoods a voice is important because of the long-term impact on citizen attitudes and community cohesion—just ask the people who did not have a voice when the Hill District was dismantled in the late 1950s.

While the importance of a neighborhood voice is generally acknowledged, I don't think we know how to maximize meaningful representation of a neighborhood. We tried the elective process in Model Cities, and there wasn't enough interest to make it legitimate. Only in a time of community crisis do enough people care about decisions to outweigh the other demands that affect their lives.

Sometimes a respected organization can emerge as the de facto spokesperson for a community. But in modest communities with few pathways to status or power, offer a position with some significance and there is likely to be ongoing competition. Even in Bloomfield, where Swanson and others have respected the work of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, there is an alternative community group.

Because leaders of neighborhood organizations are not formally elected, it often is hard to define who they represent or to whom they are accountable. Renters, whose interests may be very different from those of property owners, tend not to have a voice in such organizations. But town meetings are seldom well attended, and making decisions by community referendum would be chaotic. Given the alternatives available, neighborhood organizations appear to remain the best tool to hold communities together and give all citizens a chance to be heard on local matters. Whether we look at community organizing primarily as a means of bringing disparate groups together for the

common good (as Mike Eichler, whose work is referenced in the next chapter, has done) or as a way to confront power (as Alinsky did), neighborhood organizations remain potentially valuable as mediating institutions that connect the average citizen with the allocation of public and private resources.





People gather in honor of the 23rd Anniversary of the Irene Kaufmann Settlement in January 1918. The building is decorated with flags of the allies.



Women and children on the steps of the Irene Kaufmann Settlement in 1919.



Pictured in 1935, Anna Heldman, the director of the personal services department for the Irene Kaufmann Settlement, initiated numerous health programs that eventually became city services, including a visiting nurses service, a prenatal nursing service, Better Baby clinics, and the medical inspections in Pittsburgh's schools.



A children's class in painting, one of the many diversions offered at the Irene Kaufmann center, in a 1950 photo by Esther Bubley.



A 1960s-era photo of a line of girls practicing a dance routine beneath the basketball hoop at the Kingsley Association.



A 1960s-era photo of a young woman applying glaze to her clay sculpture while her instructor looks on at the Kingsley Association.





Looking west on Fifth Avenue at Diamond Street in 1956. The reconstruction of the Lower Hill began in 1955 with \$17 million in federal grants. This project encompassed 100 acres, 1,300 buildings, 413 businesses, and 8,000 residents (a majority of them African-Americans), who were displaced in an attempt to extend the revitalization of the adjacent Golden Triangle.



Policewoman directs traffic for school children at Watt Street and Bedford Avenue in 1951.



Looking east on Wylie Avenue from Logan Street in 1956. During the 20th century the older ethnic and Jewish population moved away and the Hill District became known as the Harlem of Pittsburgh, a place where the best jazz could be heard. Urban renewal in the 1950s removed virtually all of the Lower Hill.



Buildings being razed in the Lower Hill District as part of Pittsburgh's renaissance and urban renewal programs, January 2, 1957.



Buildings being torn down in the Lower Hill District as part of Pittsburgh's renaissance and urban renewal programs. The city skyline is visible in the background. January 2, 1957.



Members of a musical group sponsored by the Kingsley House, ca. 1950–60.



Kingsley League Baseball Team with Pie Treynor in 1954. As of July 23, 1954, they had seven wins and no losses. The photo is credited to a "Miss Chips."





Chester White, Milan Burry, Marion Giesey, Mrs. Allen, and Robert S. Haas posing on the occasion of the Kingsley Association's 75th year in operation in 1968.



Marchers are flanked by police officers as they pass Washington Plaza on Centre Avenue, making their way to Downtown and the Point on April 7, 1968, during the march on the MLK Jr. National Day of Mourning.



The enormity of the crowd and the police presence is clearly visible in this view on April 7, 1968, during the march on the MLK Jr. National Day of Mourning. Among the throng is Nick Flourney, who can be seen in the middle of the crowd, facing the camera.



People stand near Washington Plaza watching the armed police officers form a barricade across Centre Avenue on April 7, 1968, during the march on the MLK Jr. National Day of Mourning.



A helicopter makes its descent near the Civic Arena as it returns from monitoring the actions taking place three days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

# No Rest for the Weary!



An April 15, 1968, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* editorial cartoon by Cy Hungerford, illustrating discontent with Pittsburgh Public Safety Director David Craig and fears about continued racial unrest.



Moe Coleman in the early 1970s.

# SUNDAY MAGAZINE

Section G

Pick the name of a Pittsburgher, any Pittsburgher, and play the "Six Degrees of Separation" game.

## THE

Perhaps you'll want to begin with the people you see in the center of this page -- Sophie Masloff,

# PITTSBURGH

Bill Strickland, Tom Murphy, Teresa Heinz or Rick Santorum. Then see how easy it is to connect

# CONNECTION

any one of them to the common denominator, the fellow who one friend calls "a road map for people."

## STORY, PAGE G-11

Meet Mortan "Moe" Coleman ... or perhaps you already know him.

**INSIDE:**

**Arts & Entertainment:**  
Stars of 'Pushing Daisies' let their hair go long out  
Page G-3

**Books:**  
Historical novelist has a distinctly Pittsburgh flavor  
Page G-4

**Stylewise:**  
Downtown mother can dress up the house, too  
Page G-12

**Teach:**  
Olive oil has a special place in his heart, and on his back  
Page G-14

An weathered copy of an April 25, 1999, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* Sunday Magazine section cover story on Moe Coleman and the depth and breadth of his Pittsburgh connections.

# COVER STORY

BY JIM HAMILTON

## Moe knows Pittsburgh

Covering Pittsburgh for *Rolling Stone*

**Cyril Weisk,** Allegheny County auditor  
**Mike Swartz,** Allegheny County commissioner  
**James Brown,** Allegheny district attorney  
**David Ross,** Allegheny County Council  
**Steve Deitz,** former mayor of the city  
**Jameson County manager**  
**Ray Finner,** U.S. District Court  
**U.S. Sen. Bill Cartwright,** U.S. Congress  
**George Weisk,** professor and CEO, PPG  
**John DeLoach,** executive secretary of  
**Robert Moe,** about 300  
**Don Walker,** Secretary, Allegheny Publishers  
**Michael Weisk,** Allegheny County  
**Donald C. Carson,** Allegheny County  
**Paul L. Hunsinger,** County Executive  
**Billy Stone,** mayor of Homestead

**Walter "Woe" Costello,** former  
mayor of the city  
**John P. DeLoach,** executive secretary of  
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**Don Walker,** Secretary, Allegheny Publishers  
**Michael Weisk,** Allegheny County  
**Donald C. Carson,** Allegheny County  
**Paul L. Hunsinger,** County Executive  
**Billy Stone,** mayor of Homestead

By Don DeLoach

On a rainy October 10th day in the city of Pittsburgh, I was sitting in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel, waiting for a taxi to take me to the airport. I was waiting for a taxi to take me to the airport. I was waiting for a taxi to take me to the airport.

It was a quiet day in the city. The weather was overcast and the streets were empty.

A group of people had gathered in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel. They were waiting for a taxi to take them to the airport. They were waiting for a taxi to take them to the airport.



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**David Ross,** Allegheny County Council  
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Marie Hamblett, deputy director, finance, for the Institute of Politics; Kathy McCauley, independent consultant and frequent contributor to Institute; and Moe Coleman on the Institute's regional bus tour, 1999.





Moe Coleman; Kevin Jenkins, vice president, public policy and civic leadership, The Pittsburgh Foundation; and Gerri Kay, former member of the Institute's Board of Fellows, at the 2008 Elected Officials Retreat.



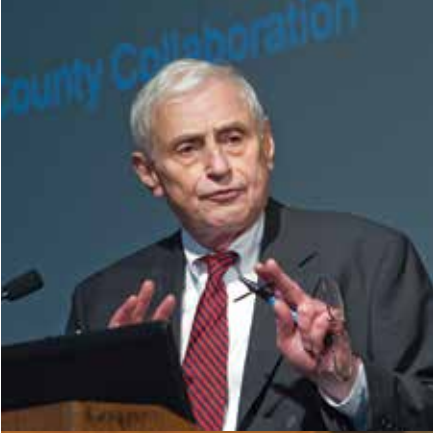
Moe Coleman at the 2006 retreat where he received the Institute's inaugural Coleman Award for civic leadership, pictured with his wife, Greta, and then Pitt Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg.



Moe Coleman at the 2011 Elected Officials Retreat.



Moe Coleman and Institute of Politics Director Terry Miller at the December 2013 event launching the Institute's publication *A Master Legislator at Work: H. John Heinz III and the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging*, at the Senator John Heinz History Center.



Moe Coleman at Institute of Politics events.



Moe Coleman in 2014.



## CHAPTER 4

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### **At the Center of '60s Strife: My Years in Government**

Through the 1950s, I was primarily a neighborhood organizer; during the 1960s, I moved, rather unintentionally, into Pittsburgh city government. It all started when I became captivated by John F. Kennedy.

Although my interest in political campaigns dated back to high school, I was simply an opinionated nonparticipant until 1960, when Kennedy's presidential candidacy motivated me to become an active campaigner for the first time. I find it hard to articulate, more than 50 years later, what attracted me to campaign for him. I was not strongly committed to his political views, but I felt a strong personal identification with his youthful image, his style, and his presence. He represented generational change, the young men of the World War II era rising to power.

My friend Gerson Green and I coordinated Kennedy campaign activities for Pittsburgh's 14th Ward (Squirrel Hill). In most wards at that time, the Democratic Party apparatus coordinated campaign work through the ward chair, but a few independent Democratic clubs with the capacity to mobilize their own volunteers ran their own operations. We had our own office, precinct maps, and phone bank. I found the experience of contacting voters, distributing literature, and posting signs to help elect a young Democratic president quite exhilarating, and we impressed the local politicians by accurately predicting the percentage of votes that Kennedy would win in the 14th Ward.

In 1960, I was still working at Kingsley House. My duties included going through the neighborhood and explaining to residents the resources available to help them with home rehabilitation. Kingsley had a contract with the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to be the rehabilitation program's ambassadors in East Liberty.



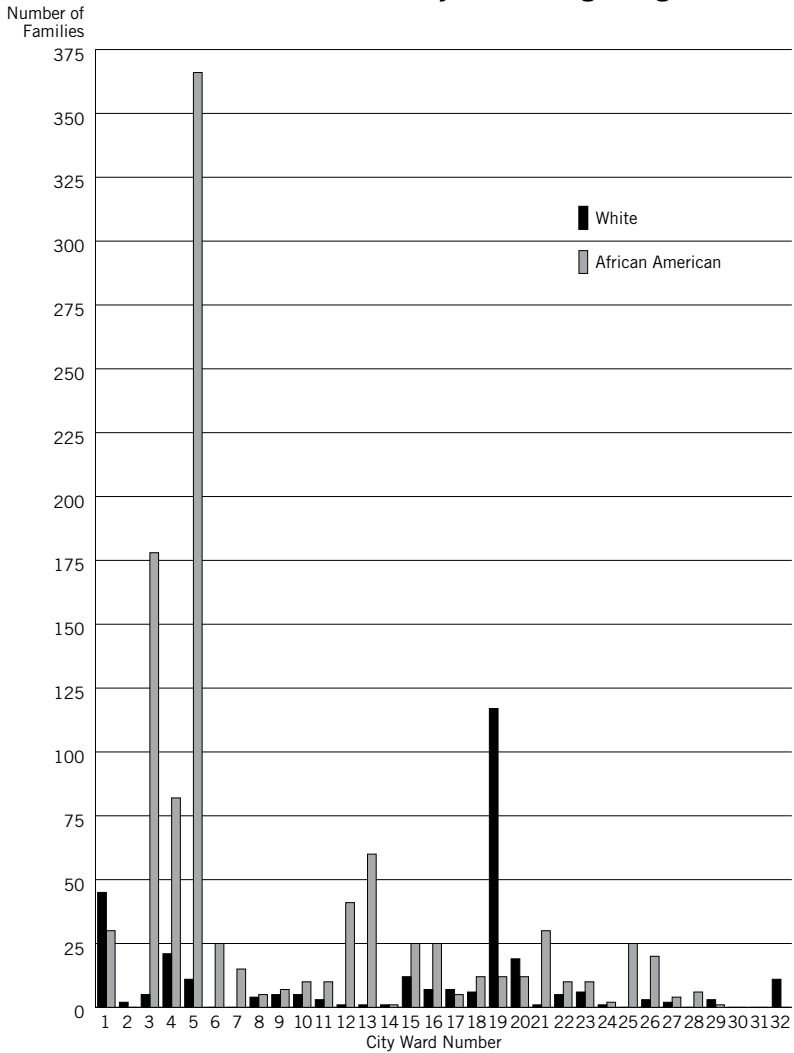
URA director Bob Pease and his staff came to see our work and were favorably impressed, to the extent that Pease offered me a job at the URA. But, as mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, I turned it down for a more innovative opportunity. Calvin “Cal” Hamilton had just become director of Pittsburgh’s Department of City Planning, which had installed its first computer system and was poised to undertake serious, comprehensive urban planning. Hamilton offered me a position as senior social planner. I thought that trying to understand the human consequences of urban development was an important role that appealed to my social work background, so I chose the city job.

My specific responsibilities were to interpret how urban renewal was affecting families and neighborhoods and to create a more humane strategy for assisting those relocated due to public-sector development activities. We focused on increasing the representation of affected areas in decision-making processes and on developing procedures that would be sensitive to the needs of those displaced. I assembled the Social Planning Advisory Committee, including business, labor, academic, and neighborhood leaders and chaired by *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* publisher William Block, that would review the department’s work and recommend policy changes related to planning and development. As the accompanying charts demonstrate, we thoroughly documented the migration patterns of displaced Hill District residents and the resulting demographic changes in the city. (See chart on page 69.)

Working at City Planning removed me from campaigning, because the department received federal funds and its employees were therefore governed by the Hatch Act’s prohibition against partisan political activity. But I was still interested enough in politics that Green and I attended the county Democratic Party’s annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in 1963. I remember seeing Aldo Colautti, executive assistant to Mayor Joseph Barr, and city solicitor David Craig there. I don’t believe I had known them previously. Colautti was pleasantly



## Relocation of White and African American Families from the Lower Hill District to other City of Pittsburgh Neighborhoods



These charts show data from maps that I created for the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and its Social Planning Advisory Committee in 1962, and show how movement of residents displaced by urban development in the Lower Hill furthered patterns of racial segregation. The maps document that White families relocated primarily to neighborhoods south of the Monongahela River, such as Beechview, while African Americans moved into sections of the Upper Hill that were already predominantly Black.

surprised to discover that someone from City Planning cared about politics.

Shortly thereafter I received a phone call from Colautti. He was looking for someone to coordinate the employment training activities now available under the federal Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962. I accepted his offer and joined the mayor's staff in spring 1964.

### **Plenty of Challenges**

I arrived at an exciting and challenging time. In the mid-1960s, the mayor's office was at the vortex of numerous local and national forces that were reshaping Pittsburgh and significantly changing the role and responsibility of city government. We were dealing with:

- the civil rights movement's demands for equity and opportunity for underrepresented populations, expressed through marches, picketing, and mass meetings, many of which targeted the mayor's office;
- major riots in Los Angeles, Newark, and Detroit, which left the mayor's staff constantly fearful that a local incident might trigger a similarly violent reaction in Pittsburgh;
- major expansion of the federal financial resources offered to U.S. cities;
- initial seeds of decline in steel and other manufacturing industries, then the core economic driver of the Pittsburgh region;
- growing tension between the classic Democratic political machine and the professional staff of city government, as the influence of technical specialists began to overshadow that of ward chairs; and
- evolving, tense relations between the mayor's office and City Council, and between city and county government.

The mayor himself was overshadowed at times. His predecessor, David Lawrence (Pittsburgh's mayor from 1946 through 1958 and then Pennsylvania governor from 1959 to 1963), remained a dominant figure in local policymaking. Barr, who had been elected five times to the Pennsylvania State Senate before running for mayor in 1959, was more low key than Lawrence was but skilled in legislative compromise. In the turbulent, disruption-filled environment of the 1960s, Barr was the right man for the job. Never vengeful when attacked politically and capable of respecting differences, Barr defused potentially volatile issues whereas Lawrence might have tried to exert control over situations that could not have been controlled. Barr gave his staff ample room to do what they considered best for the city. He was an old-line political figure, but he adapted to new political realities.

Although I was the mayor's assistant secretary for manpower, I did not have much direct contact with the mayor, for Barr had entrusted Colautti with considerable responsibility. Colautti wrote the mayor's speeches, drafted the budget, and managed the staff. He had shown himself to be worthy of trust: He had no personal ambitions, extremely modest tastes, and a great respect for the stature of elected officials. In 1998, when Pitt PhD student Michael Snow asked him in an interview to what extent he was responsible for Mayor Barr's policies, Colautti replied:

You have to remind yourself, and I used to have to remind some of my staff colleagues, that our ability to see our ideas come to fruition were due to the fact that we worked for a mayor and a city council who had to run for election and stuck their necks out to support those ideas, even if they were unpopular. ... No staff person, no matter how effective, could do it, unless he were willing to do the tough part of the job, which is to run for election.

Colautti also was willing to be the mayor's "bad cop." He was a demanding manager, and he regularly clashed with ward chairs over patronage and other political issues and with the media over his control of access to the mayor. Ironically, when a tough issue arose and Colautti didn't want to deal with it personally, he sent the media in to see the mayor—and they sometimes came out more confused than enlightened. As Colautti would put it, "The mayor is not dumb, but he often talks in a circular way."

The actual work was interesting, too. We were on the front end of the economic shock treatment that Pittsburgh would receive over the next 40 years, as the metals industries that had fueled the city for so long were showing their first signs of trouble. My task was to coordinate the dozen or so job training programs functioning in the city and to connect them with community groups that could help them to locate candidates for training or retraining. We had no direct responsibility over the programs, as they neither worked for us nor received their funding from the city, but we sought to draw on the mayor's stature and our ties to the federal government to bring everyone to the table and ensure that available job training funds were used effectively.

Two important principles of mediation worked in my favor as I built a citywide job training system out of the mayor's office. First, I had legitimate neutrality because we were not connected directly with any of the players; everyone could see that my only agenda was to achieve quality outcomes. Second, having a powerful base of authority strengthened my position as a mediator.

We tried to project anticipated needs in the health care and leisure sectors as well as the demand for basic skills like plumbing and electrical work and to persuade local unions to open up their training programs to underrepresented groups.

I dealt with a fascinating range of individuals each day. One minute I would be talking with senior White House staffers, and the next call might be from a local resident trying to find a training program.

Because of my background in community work, I also was called on to defuse community problems—a rather tense assignment during the civil rights years, when we were always worrying about what incident might cause the city to erupt into rioting.

One hot summer day, I got a call about a problem in a Hill District housing project. Inexplicably, large bugs were showing up in the residents' water. They were angry as hell, and they wanted clean water in a hurry. I immediately contacted the public works department and arranged for several street-sweeping trucks with considerable water-carrying capacity to come to the Hill District. I met them at the housing project. As residents came out with empty containers, the public works staff began pouring water out of their trucks—and it was full of bugs! I began wondering whether I would leave the Hill alive or dead that day. Upon inquiring of the public works staff, however, I discovered that they had driven to the Hill District and then filled their tanks from a fire hydrant just a short distance away.

“Look, we screwed up,” I told the residents. “We’ll get these guys back with clean water, I promise you.” I didn’t leave the site until the trucks returned from another part of town with verifiably bug-free water.

### **Structuring the War on Poverty**

In August 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the centerpiece of his Great Society War on Poverty legislation, the Economic Opportunity Act. This law authorized the federal government to send money directly to local governments to fund such poverty initiatives as the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and Head Start. The most innovative and controversial provision called for the creation of local Community Action Programs (CAPs) that would work to eliminate poverty. The law required CAPs to involve substantial representation of the populations being served.

As early as March 1964, when President Johnson called for an economic opportunity act in a special message to Congress, we anticipated the potential for millions of poverty dollars to come to Pittsburgh. Colautti encouraged me to put together a program quickly so that we would be in position to become one of the first big-city recipients of funding. Within two months, I was chairing a planning committee, and Green, Jim Cunningham, ACTION-Housing's Kiernan Stenson, and I were making frequent trips to Washington to keep tabs on the developing legislation and get direction for our local efforts. In fact, we became informal consultants to the executive branch staff who were working on the federal legislation, and they came to Pittsburgh to learn from us.

As Neil Gilbert (who worked for the poverty program in Pittsburgh and went on to a distinguished career at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Social Welfare) described in his PhD dissertation, we decided, in the interest of efficiency, to involve existing agencies in the poverty battle rather than create new ones. So we had to sell social service agencies on the idea of Community Action Programs, including the expected citizen participation requirements. Ironically, my own planning committee sought no citizen review of its grant proposal due to the perceived urgency of completing it quickly so as to be among the first in line for federal funding. I was caught in an awkward position, as I was leading an effort to develop a program that we hoped would increase representation and opportunity for lower-income people and other underrepresented populations, and yet we ourselves were leaving these groups out of the planning. In the implementation phase, this initial oversight was corrected.

We felt that, to keep the project manageable, we needed to have no more than eight separate neighborhoods each getting their own Community Action Program. To encompass a large swath of territory and thereby gain wide-ranging multiracial support, we defined eight fairly large "neighborhoods"; the whole North Side, for example, was defined as a single impoverished community, and the South Side,

West End, and Beltzhoover also were treated as one neighborhood despite the ethnic and geographic distinctions among them. We faced unexpected resistance in Lawrenceville and Bloomfield, where Catholic parish representatives supported participating in the program but other civic leaders opposed having their neighborhoods designated as being in poverty. As Cunningham recalled in his book *Urban Leadership in the Sixties*, the Lawrenceville ward chair took his objection directly to Mayor Barr, who “gave him sympathy but no support.”<sup>2</sup> The disagreement became quite rancorous, to the extent that I saw residents of Catholic neighborhoods spitting at nuns. In fact, Lawrenceville withdrew from participation in the poverty program in 1966.

### **You May Think You Have Three Choices ...**

Our planning committee made one other crucial strategic decision. While we intended to have existing agencies deliver services, we proposed creating one new nonprofit, the Mayor’s Committee on Human Resources (MCHR), to oversee the Pittsburgh poverty program. This was a significant departure from other cities, such as Chicago, where Mayor Richard J. Daley clearly expressed his desire for direct control over the program. Calling the oversight body a “mayor’s committee” but making it a quasi-public body outside the purview of the mayor’s office provided political insulation: If the program succeeded the mayor could take credit, but if it spun its wheels ineffectively, he could say that it was not his program.

To guide my colleagues in the mayor’s office toward supporting this arrangement, I compared it to two other alternatives. On one hand, we could seize complete control over the poverty program in Pittsburgh (and be held fully responsible for what it could not achieve). On the other hand, we could give the money to other nonprofit agencies with no strings attached and no control over what happened next. Between these two options, I defined the middle ground

as having Mayor Barr appoint members of and participate as part of a committee that would nevertheless operate independently of the mayor's office. In that context, we quickly agreed on creating the MCHR as the most reasonable solution.

One of my best students at the Pitt School of Social Work, Mike Eichler, frequently observed my use of this mediating tool. After joining the social work faculty at San Diego State University, Eichler authored a book titled *Consensus Organizing*. On pages 101–103 of that book, he described my “Looks Like We Have Three Choices” method. Here are some excerpts:

There were many tricks I learned from Mo [sic]. I tried to absorb all of them, but I will always have a favorite. The all-time best one had Mo spending hours with a disjointed, unfocused, argumentative group. He listened and listened then finally spoke. Then he listened and listened some more. Then he sputtered with what invariably looked like absolute spontaneity, “It looks like we have three choices.” In all the years I watched and learned, Mo never felt there were four choices, two choices, or one choice. There were always three. ... Then he pulled out a magician's sword to carve the lady. He made the first choice so radical that everyone in the audience would find it too extreme. He would then have a third choice, equally radical but in the opposite direction. Then, in between these two extreme choices that had no constituency, he would sandwich in a second choice that sounded moderate, practical, appropriate, and logical. ... I'm telling you, I saw him do this hundreds of times. He had enormous power through this skill he had perfected. He always made option number two the approach that would help the most considering the reality of the hand that had been dealt. People always left the room happy, committed, and determined to carry out their decision.



Years after realizing how this [three-choice method] worked, I was asked to bring together a group of activists from throughout the state of Connecticut. We had a series of meetings in Hartford. There was a lot of tension and distrust in the room at the meetings. Participants had very strong views on how the state should help low-income communities. Finally, at one of the meetings, I framed the debate and shouted, “Hey, I think we have three choices.” I made choice number one and three some of the worst ideas that had been proposed during the day. Choice number one was the government’s muddiest thinking and choice number three was the activists’ equivalent. The second choice never looked so good. I had a modest goal—to get out of the meeting alive. It worked. On my way out the door, shaking hands and thanking God, one of the quietest participants pulled me over and whispered, “Tell Mo Coleman I said hello.” It turned out Mo had worked in Hartford a decade earlier. She knew Mo had moved to Pittsburgh; she also knew that I had lived in Pittsburgh. She connected the dots. She wasn’t mad. She was smiling.

### **A Professionalized City (Most of the Time)**

The creation of a separate, nonpolitical entity to run the poverty program in Pittsburgh was part of a notable shift over which both Lawrence and Barr presided during their mayoral tenures: from patronage to professionalism. Historically, the Democratic machine had flourished largely by making government jobs available to its supporters, and much of government’s largesse reached local citizens via their ward chair, maintaining an unmistakable connection between access to benefits and support for the machine. But Pennsylvania had finally passed civil service reform in 1941 (a mere 58 years after the enactment of federal civil service legislation in 1883), and elected officials no longer wielded as much power over the employment pipeline. Moreover, accepting federal funds for planning and development

caused employees in those departments to become barred from partisan political activity under the Hatch Act.

Lawrence and Barr remained old-school in some political appointments, as illustrated by a classic episode that ensued after Lawrence appointed Pittsburgh City Council member Fred Weir as an Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas judge. Lawrence, Barr, and their top aides (Walt Giesey and Colautti, respectively) met to decide who should fill the vacant City Council seat. (Technically, there would be a special election, but a candidate backed by Lawrence and Barr would be virtually assured of victory.) It was agreed that, to retain proper geographic and ethnic balance, the nominee should, like Weir, be a Protestant from Shadyside or Squirrel Hill. “How about Craig?” one of the aides asked. Lawrence and Barr began their analysis, reviewing such crucial factors as the prospective nominee’s genealogy and his relatives. As they did so, Giesey said to Colautti, “That’s not Craig—they’re talking about someone else.” It turned out that, while the aides had intended to suggest city solicitor David Craig, their question had caused Lawrence and Barr to recall and review the suitability of labor lawyer Craig Kuhn. Satisfied with the results of their review, they phoned Kuhn, who accepted the invitation, was elected, and served on City Council for 10 years.

With regard to the operation of government agencies, however, Lawrence and Barr did not fight the change from patronage to professionalism; they welcomed it. Not only were they committed to making Pittsburgh a better place, but they believed that running high-quality programs was good politics. Barr could have influenced the MCHR’s hiring decisions, but he did not. The only time I saw Barr become irritated with the committee was when he felt we were moving too slowly to get programs running. No MCHR employee came out of the Democratic political organization. We selected two highly qualified African Americans, first assistant U.S. attorney David Hill and then social worker Dave Epperson, as directors.

Enjoying firm political backing and no undue interference with its work, our planning committee achieved its goal. Pittsburgh, then the nation's 16th-largest city, was one of the first 10 recipients of the poverty program funding through the newly created federal Office of Economic Opportunity. We were invited to ask for what we thought we needed, and we got what we asked for: \$1.5 million for fiscal year 1965 and \$7.3 million the following year. I was not directly involved once we launched the MCHR and it hired its own staff, but the Johnson administration considered our work a political plus and an example for the nation, as our sensitivity to social service needs was widely credited with helping us to avert the race riots that had ravaged other cities.

My satisfaction with the proposal as it developed did get me an unanticipated political lecture from then Governor Lawrence. One Friday night, I had a drink with a young *Pittsburgh Press* reporter, Roger Stuart, and shared what we were doing to pursue poverty program funds. He thought it was a good story and got himself a front-page Sunday newspaper byline on an article about our plans to address poverty in Pittsburgh. The article was accurate and positive. I don't recall any immediate feedback on it. The following Saturday, Lawrence, who frequently took over his old office during nonbusiness hours when he came to Pittsburgh, called me in. He was an intimidating figure, seated behind a spacious old desk and knocking his ring against it—which I knew was a sign of agitation.

“Young man, do you want to keep this job?” he asked me.

“Yes, I do.”

“Did you see that article in the *Pittsburgh Press* last week?”

I said yes again.

“That was a good news article, and you were quoted in it. If you want to keep your job, you never get quoted in good news articles, the mayor gets quoted.”

That was the last time I received positive media recognition during my time in city government.

The poverty program did not do as much as we had hoped to extricate people from poverty except for those youths who obtained employment and training through the Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps initiatives. It was more about improving social and educational services for lower-income groups than about enhancing financial resources. But it did two other important things: It opened up the health and social services fields to people (primarily those in underrepresented groups) who could not otherwise have entered these sectors due to educational disadvantages, and it provided management training for a rising generation of young African American leaders. Hill, who went on to become a successful attorney in Cleveland and an important figure in Ohio politics; Epperson, later dean of the Pitt School of Social Work; Ron Davenport, who was dean of Duquesne University's law school before becoming a major broadcasting entrepreneur; and Milt Washington, subsequently a prominent Pittsburgh real estate developer, all worked in Pittsburgh's poverty program, as did many other men and women who went on to succeed in business, law, academia, and health care. The poverty program created their opportunity ladder. Along the way, we discovered that people hired directly out of lower-income communities often could connect with their clients more effectively than the credentialed professionals.

I also successfully applied my experience in racial reconciliation during my consulting work for Henry Ford II, helping to address tensions within his company. At Ford's plant in Mahwah, N.J., the daytime shift was primarily White, African Americans from Harlem dominated the night shift, and there were few Blacks in middle management. Racial conflict had spawned poor work performance and even some acts of sabotage. We worked out a plan to increase the number of African American managers and to mediate plant employees' concerns, reducing animosities and restoring productivity.

## **The Riotous Days**

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn. Dr. King's death was a match to a tinderbox in American cities, many of which had already experienced severe race riots. In Pittsburgh, we had been on the edge for a couple of years, worrying about any incident with the police that might trigger a violent reaction. King's death confronted us with the possibility of a major riot. By April 5, groups of young men were gathering in the Hill District, breaking windows and setting fires. The mayor and his staff had to determine a strategy for containing the violence while also planning how, after calm was restored, the city could reconcile differences and rebuild.

Many others have described these days; I will limit myself here to recalling a few significant events and how I experienced them.

### **April 5**

On Friday morning, April 5, five of us met in the mayor's office to strategize a response to the growing riots. The participants were Mayor Barr; David Craig, formerly city solicitor and now public safety director; Robert Pease, director of the Urban Redevelopment Authority; James Slusser, superintendent of the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police; and me.

As we entered, the mayor was answering telephone calls from irate merchants in the Hill District and from fearful residents all over the city. Slusser demanded permission for the police to use any force needed to halt the looting and firebombing. Pease, Craig, and I felt that shooting young African Americans would have disastrous consequences for the future of race relations in Pittsburgh. The mayor was uncertain as to what position to take.

The person who Mayor Barr trusted most was Aldo Colautti, who had recently taken a position with the Ford Foundation in New York. We decided to call him. In his calm, rational way, Colautti told the

mayor that we could not become another Newark, (where many had been killed) or we might not have a peaceful city again for decades. He advised the mayor that lethal force should be used only when life, not property, was threatened and that he should call in the National Guard for a show of force. This course of action was followed. Although significant property damage occurred, only one person died, and that was not because of police action.

Here is how Colautti remembered the episode in a 1989 interview with a panel of Pittsburgh scholars:

I got a call in my apartment in New York City from Dave [Craig], who was the director of public safety at that time. The riots had broken out here. Things were pretty bad, I gather. Dave told me that looting had occurred in the Hill District. Of course, the police had been turned out. They were debating whether to call out the National Guard, and the mayor was under pressure to have orders given to the police to start shooting looters. Dave Craig was trying to apply some limitations. ...

On Sunday night, I called the mayor's office. I had a private number and I called Joe (Barr). It was the first time, I think, I had talked to him since I left. I didn't let him on that I knew what was going on. ...

"You left me," I think is the way he put it. "Now, I've got telegrams on my desk from merchants in the Hill District," and they were demanding that the police be directed to start shooting. I pretended I didn't know that and I said, "Joe, that would be a mistake. Because when this is over, you're going to be living with the same people that you're shooting. I know it's bad, but there has to be other ways in which to bring it under control without shooting." ... I said, "Bring the National Guard in. Bring in a show of force. Put more people than you need and let the public record show that you're doing that, but don't start shooting unless somebody has to shoot in self-defense."

Well, Joe mumbled and groaned, and we had a long talk. I'd say it was about 45 minutes. Of course, he didn't know why I had called him. To make a long story short ... he resisted the pressures from the police chief and others to start shooting.

By bringing in the National Guard as an outside force, Barr insulated the police from having to be the primary enforcement system during the riots and therefore protected them from becoming permanently branded as the bad guys. The police didn't like being restrained; they had a strong and understandable distaste for the kids who were causing trouble. But, in this moment of high stress, they needed to be restrained. If you can delay a confrontation, sometimes over time the level of emotion will decline and you can defuse the risk of violence.

I learned enduring lessons from Colautti's performance in his phone conversation with the mayor. Building on a firmly established relationship of trust, he conveyed a sense of calmness and reason in the midst of crisis. He guided the Mayor through assessing the long-term consequences of a high-stress decision, showing conclusively that one course of action (i.e., restraining the police from shooting to kill unless lives were threatened) would result in more desirable outcomes for the city. Colautti did not lose his head, and his reasoned discussion quite likely spared us from a further escalation of both immediate violence and long-term strife.

## **April 6**

I had heard that, during riots in another city, young African American men and women were recruited to help in calming things down and were given red fluorescent vests to wear in their neighborhoods. I thought that was a good idea. I shared it with Craig, who liked the idea as well and got Mayor Barr's approval to implement it. Soon, we had Black youths in red vests patrolling the streets of Homewood, urging their peers not to riot.

In a later interview for Michael Snow's University of Pittsburgh dissertation, Craig could not remember who gave him the idea, but he remembered the flak that he received for adopting it: "I was in the East Liberty police station late Saturday evening, and we had hundreds of arrestees in the lockup there, and I did have an ear-beating from some police sergeants who kind of grabbed me and said, 'Look there, director. Look at that son of a bitch wearing a red vest. I arrested him for this and that a week ago, and now he's lording it [over us].'"

The criticism was fierce; when some police subsequently circulated a petition to fire Craig, the red vests were a prominent element of their critique. Police were particularly upset that the media were giving favorable treatment to youths who law enforcement, in some cases, viewed as troublemakers and criminals. But I had worked through leaders I trusted, such as Homewood's William "Bouie" Haden, who were respected in their neighborhoods and who I knew would make carefully considered decisions as to who should get the vests. Some of the youths built on this experience to pursue further education and eventually became community leaders themselves. Craig survived the attempt to sack him and later served 16 years as a distinguished Commonwealth Court judge.

### **April 7**

Around midday on Palm Sunday, April 7, while the Hill District was still smoldering, a large crowd gathered in the Lower Hill. A protest march had been planned. The protesters would march from the Lower Hill to Point State Park, where they would be addressed by various civil rights leaders.

There was a debate within the police as to whether to let the march go on. Before the march started, a cordon of police formed, positioning themselves to block the protesters.



I was in the mayor's office that morning, fielding telephone calls from angry supporters of the march. My own opinion was that it should go on, but I was not the decision maker. I kept my opinion to myself while enduring a morning full of aggravated verbal attacks from callers.

Alma Speed Fox, an important civil-rights leader and then chief of staff of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP, recalled (in an April 2, 2008, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* retrospective article) the tense events that were transpiring on the street while I was trying to pacify phone callers. Fox had obtained the permit for the march, but as she headed for the starting point of the route, at Centre Avenue and Crawford Street—now called Freedom Corner—she heard on her car radio that the march had been canceled.

“I said, ‘How could it be called off?’ I had the permit in my pocket.” The only person who could have called it off was NAACP president and prominent Pittsburgh attorney Byrd Brown, and she knew he had not.

When Mrs. Fox and her husband arrived at Freedom Corner, they saw that the police had formed a line across Centre Avenue along Crawford Street.

“They were in their riot gear, with their helmets and their great big clubs,” Mrs. Fox said. Their job was to keep the marchers from moving past Freedom Corner into Downtown. “People were hollering and screaming and you turned your head and looked back and the Hill was on fire,” Mrs. Fox said.

During the verbal exchange Mrs. Fox looked down and noticed the wide stance of a police officer in front of her.

“I scooted right under there and got to the other side,” she recalled. The crowd, encouraged by Mrs. Fox, surged forward and the police pushed back. “By that time the police had picked me up, one had

each limb and threw me in the paddy wagon,” she said. After some more angry words and negotiations between Mr. Brown and Public Safety Director David Craig, the march was permitted.

“Well, ... we walked to Downtown Pittsburgh, we walked past Kaufmann’s, not one window was broken, not one thing was done that was disorderly. ... It was a peaceful demonstration and we gave honor to Dr. King.”

### **The Struggle Inside the Movement**

During the civil rights years, there sometimes seemed to be a march every other day. If people weren’t marching, they were picketing—either trying to put allegedly discriminatory employers and real estate developers to shame or advocating for desired legislation. I was frequently out there alongside them—not for the exercise but out of commitment to the drive for a more equitable society. In fact, I was at the National Mall for Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech, which was truly a pivotal moment in my life as well as in the civil rights movement.

Deciding to support the civil rights cause was easier than figuring out who within the movement to support. In Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, the movement had its intense internal divisions. I can remember meetings with African American pastors who felt we were giving too much credence to militant characters not representative of the Black community. Our answer was basically that we would rather try to involve a broad range of community leaders in the system than risk having them continue in their disillusionment and alienation.

African Americans were facing the question of whether they could best achieve social equity by becoming integrated into a Caucasian-styled system or by developing separate structures that rested on Black leadership and Black values. The civil rights movement actually contained three separate threads: integrationists, who believed that giving underrepresented groups new opportunities and

new access to power could minimize racial division; separatists, who argued that the racial schisms were too powerful and that Blacks should develop independent systems rather than becoming absorbed into the dominant culture; and Black youths who had no strong ideology, just anger at what they viewed as a repressive establishment. This third group alone was responsible for the riots. Both the integrationists and the separatists worked hard to stop activity that they saw as destroying the African American community.

I believe that the presence of the separatists sometimes strengthened the position of civil-rights moderates in their negotiations, because we knew that if we didn't collaborate with people like Byrd Brown, we would end up having to deal with the really tough guys. That strategy had its limitations when negotiating with the moderates made the militant separatists more dissatisfied. But over time, the militants made their own accommodations and worked within the system, sometimes very successfully. As a result, we see far more African Americans in important positions in our schools, hospitals, law firms, and major corporations than at any previous time in our history.



## CHAPTER 5

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### **Safe Places for Policy Debate: Civic Peacemaking in Hartford and the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics**

In 1969, I left Mayor Joseph Barr's staff and joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work on a full-time basis. Shortly thereafter, I was named acting dean. Entanglement in the racial tensions of the '60s had made the School of Social Work such a lightning rod that there had actually been talk of eliminating it. I was able to help in reestablishing the school's stature within the University as an important and academically rigorous program.

In 1972, I accepted a new challenge: becoming dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut. While most of the UConn campus is located in Storrs, the School of Social Work, along with the university's law and business schools, sits in West Hartford. Though still recognized as the insurance capital of the world, Hartford was facing major inner-city decline. I became active in community affairs there—and landed in the midst of a cultural and ethnic boxing match.

At that time, the Greater Hartford Process, a nonprofit organization guided primarily by leaders of the city's major corporations, heavily influenced the region's planning agenda. (For simplicity, Pittsburgh-area readers can think of this organization as, until 1975, Hartford's approximate equivalent to the Allegheny Conference on Community Development.) Commonly referred to simply as Process, this elite entity had adopted a bold solution to center-city decline: relocate the low-income residents by creating a new community in the nearby rural town of Coventry. James Rouse, famous for developing the planned city of Columbia, Md., in the 1960s, was hired to assist in the planning.

It was a grand idea, but when the plan became public, Coventry's residents, wedded to their quaint rural landscape and unexcited about migration from inner-city Hartford, mounted such fierce grassroots opposition that the plan became politically unachievable. Still worse, Hartford's substantial Puerto Rican community was angered by the leakage of a 1975 Process internal memo that recommended reducing the migration of Puerto Ricans into the city and consolidating "the welfare-dependent elements of this population" in two neighborhoods. On other issues as well, Hartford's corporate leadership clashed with community organizations, which accused Process of placing corporate interests before residents' needs.

Under this barrage of attacks, the Process leaders shelved their grand plans, laid off their big staff, and ran for political cover. Historically an entrepreneurial catalyst for development, Process retreated into the role of a mediating organization. But Hartford's corporate leaders did not want to simply walk away from their community. So, in 1977, they asked me to take over the organization and try to move it in a new direction.

At the press conference announcing my appointment, I stated that Process "must rebuild trust in the region" and said that our emphasis would be to "help other people do what they do best" rather than to develop and try to push through our own plans. Nevertheless, the reemergence of Process, even in this sharply curtailed form, was greeted with overt hostility. In fact, 12 community organizations came together as the Coalition Against the Hartford Process to fight my new employer's "racist policy." Some of my social work students at UConn hanged me in effigy when I took the Process job.

To surmount this wall of mistrust, I applied the methodology that had worked for me back in the days of Pittsburgh's poverty program: consensus building through inclusion of marginalized voices. As Jose La Luz, a prominent Puerto Rican activist, editorialized in the July 25, 1977, *Hartford Courant*, if I wanted to make Process an effective broker I should open lines of communication between the business

leaders who “really hold political power in Hartford” and the Puerto Ricans. I took up the challenge, persuading the former chair of Aetna Inc. to accompany me and meet with Puerto Rican leaders. Much as I had done with the Mayor’s Committee on Human Resources in Pittsburgh, I reconstructed the Process board into one where executives would rub shoulders with community people, including representatives of the Puerto Rican and African American communities. By giving the groups access to top corporate leadership, we strengthened Process’ new image as a broker and supporter of community interests.

We also reshaped Process’s agenda, replacing a relatively narrow focus on the priorities of business leaders with broad concern for community issues. Instead of strategic planning and social engineering, we focused on improving city residents’ quality of life through such means as sustainable housing, neighborhood revitalization, improved public transportation, and trying to strengthen the moribund city school system.

Process rented an inner-city house as its headquarters and gave free office space within the building to one of the most radical Saul Alinsky-style community organizing groups in Hartford. Not only did this expression of generosity build bridges, but it also dispelled public fears that we were still secretly plotting actions adverse to underrepresented populations and neighborhood groups. Indeed, it would have been hard for us to plan anything in secret when the people downstairs could walk upstairs and into our office at any moment.

In 1975, angered by that undiplomatic internal memo on narrowing lower-income groups’ in-migration and housing opportunities, the Hartford school board had placed an official ban on all communication with Process. So we knew we were making progress when, in February 1979, the school board rescinded its communication ban. “Process has changed its style and has been putting its money where its mouth is,” a February 1979 *Hartford Courant* article stated. “To a large extent it has regained the confidence of community leaders and the respect of the public.”

Economically, our impact was modest at best; politically, it was transforming. People who had previously been outsiders, able to get attention only through hostile protests, came to see themselves as valued players who could get their interests met through participatory engagement. The wide gulf between well-heeled business interests and low-income communities was bridged somewhat. The *Hartford Courant* recognized that achievement in a September 21, 1980, article titled “President to Leave after Transforming Social Planning Agency” upon my announcement that I was retiring as Process president and returning to Pittsburgh:

Eugenio Caro, the fiery Hispanic activist who has led hundreds of angry poor people to protests at City Hall, was lecturing a group of conservative corporate types on the history of Puerto Rican migration to Hartford.

The scene? The office of Greater Hartford Process, an unusual social planning agency that is one of the few places in the city where corporate bigwigs, neighborhood leaders and elected officials from the city and suburbs meet regularly.

The man who brings them together—Process President Morton D. Coleman—is now leaving after transforming Process and playing a key behind-the-scenes role as a political broker and peacemaker in Hartford. ...

When Coleman was elected president of the agency on June 15, 1977, Process was still the huge private development venture created by businesses in the late 1960s that, among other things, tried unsuccessfully to build a \$250 million new town in Coventry. ...

Now Process is a catalyst, bringing together corporate people with money and neighborhood leaders who need it. It has opened up its once-closed board meetings, added more minority group



members to its board and dispelled many of the bad feelings of the past.

The next day, an editorial in the *Courant* credited the Process, during my tenure there, with having “established a rapport with and between diverse groups to an extent unusual in what is often a fratricidal urban America.” Really, all I had done was to act on my belief that diverse groups ought to be at the table. Before my arrival, Process had behaved as if business leadership had the right to use its economic and political power however it pleased, without regard for competing interests. After my arrival, Process became a mediating force between corporate and community leaders, seeking common ground and ways to use its resources for mutual benefit. Listening carefully, refusing to argue, and offering meaningful help can dissipate almost any bitterness—not overnight (because restoring trust takes more than one friendly meeting) but certainly within two years.

### **Civic Resuscitation in Pittsburgh**

I left Process to resume teaching in the Pitt School of Social Work. But the civic peacemaking role I had played in Hartford was not to be forgotten. By the late 1980s, forces within the University came together to impel me toward a new bridge-building venture, though with a different clientele.

University Chancellor Wesley W. Posvar, feeling that Pitt should build stronger connections with its surrounding community, created a committee to discuss how the University could become more involved in the city. I was a staff member on the committee, and after the report was published, I developed a proposal. Among the resulting recommendations was a rather vague plan to create an institute of politics that would convene discussions on local policy issues.

I developed a proposal for University Provost Rudolph Weingartner to form the Institute of Politics as a freestanding entity, reporting directly to him rather than lodged within any department. I said that

I would do my own fundraising and not depend on the University for financial support. Moreover, I proposed to direct the Institute as part of my responsibilities as a professor of social work, without taking any additional salary. My offer was accepted, and I launched the Institute of Politics in 1989.

### **A Neutral Space for Public Discourse**

I knew that if we wanted elected officials to dialogue openly and candidly we would need to provide a safe place for off-the-record conversation, one where these public figures could speak their minds without fearing unauthorized leaks.

The Institute's programs were always open only to public officials and recognized civic leaders, mainly from academia, business, labor, the foundation community, and nonprofit agencies. But we did try to build bridges between groups who rarely talked to each other. One of our most interesting early discoveries was that two influential groups of elected officials—state legislators and county commissioners—rarely crossed paths. Both groups were appreciative of our efforts to bring them together for policy discussions.

Originally, we saw elected officials as our target audience; the other civic leaders were included so that legislators could hear from them. The initial mission statement of the Institute was “to provide elected officials with a forum in which they can freely examine and discuss difficult policy questions with each other and with experts from the University of Pittsburgh and across the nation.” We quickly saw that community, business, and foundation leaders also valued the discussions taking place at our events; in 1993, the mission statement was rewritten to include them among our target constituencies.

Early direction for the Institute came from the Board of Fellows, composed of legislators and civic leaders, and an advisory board of University administrators and professors. We identified four components that were central to establishing the Institute's credibility:

1. Participants: We had to select invitees carefully, ensuring balance and diversity of views and giving legislators access to a range of informed perspectives while maintaining their comfort level.
2. Issues: Our goals of fostering reasoned, civil policy discussion and finding common ground caused us to steer clear of divisive ideological issues. Fiscal, structural, and resource issues—like how to keep pension systems solvent, build a more efficient water system, or share public services among municipal governments—became our bread and butter.
3. Product: Every program or publication was developed with quality and balance in mind. It was important for our constituencies to see our work as informative, open, inclusive of various views, and fair to all perspectives. We included different points of view on our planning committees, acted by consensus rather than by majority, and brought in widely recognized experts as featured speakers.
4. Setting: In addition to making all forums explicitly off the record so that no one would feel the need for posturing, we showed respect for participants' dignity by using attractive venues. I knew that the best way to keep friendly discussions going was to offer a nice lunch, so the preferred program time became 9 a.m.–noon, with continental breakfast on arrival and lunch following the conclusion of the formal discussion period.

To encourage open discussion, we eschewed theater-style seating for our forums, instead arranging tables in the shape of a large rectangle, with everyone sitting around the outside of the rectangle and facing each other. This arrangement worked well for groups of 60 or fewer, but soon our events were oversubscribed, with registration frequently topping 100.

## A Humble Shop

We organized nice, professional events, but we kept other costs to a minimum. A report to a supporting foundation in 1993, when the Institute was still a fledgling operation, pointed out that it had just one full-time staff member and that its total capital assets consisted of two personal computers. Much of the early work was done by doctoral students in social work.

Suzanne McDevitt, our first program administrator, had amazing success in getting prominent speakers to come in as keynotes for our early forums. We offered them no honorarium; we just covered their expenses and treated them well. The most attractive hook, McDevitt recalled, was that we could promise them the chance to talk directly with elected officials. Marie Hamblett, initially hired for one term in December 1992 while another student was away, was an outsider of sorts—an undergraduate in political science—and was thus in a unique position to observe how a staff full of social workers operated. Given the responsibility to set up the room for Institute events, she would arrange a number of chairs equal to the number of registered participants and then would watch in horror as the rest of us came in and started removing chairs. “I knew nothing about community organizing,” she said, “and it took me a while to learn that if 100 people were registered, fewer than 100 people would show up, and that a full room looks better than a lot of empty chairs.”

Internally, the staff culture was transparent and humble, somewhat akin to that of a low-level campaign office. Part-timers shared desks and offices, spreading papers across the floor to collate them for mailings or program folders. “It was a very unfamiliar environment for me,” Hamblett recalled. “People freely talked about their feelings, their health issues, whatever was wrong with them.” Perhaps most strategically, no one on the staff cared who got the credit—an essential job qualification if you want elected officials to depend on you.

The Institute has always been happy to stay under the radar, avoid the limelight, and define success in terms of helping its constituents do well. Grant Oliphant, the late Senator H. John Heinz III's last press secretary and the current president of The Heinz Endowments, paid the Institute a prized compliment when he stated that he likes partnering with the Institute "because they make me look good."

In this regard, our firm commitment to keeping all discussions off the record was particularly strategic. Few places exist where elected officials can ask questions or express their thoughts freely without fear of embarrassment. Ask a dumb-sounding question in a public setting and you could become a target for ridicule; come to an Institute of Politics forum and you can become better educated in a safe setting. As Terry Miller, who became the Institute's project administrator (and only full-time staffer) in 1992, put it, "They knew what they said would not be in the newspaper the next day, so they did not have to posture; they could just come in and have a civil conversation."

We did have media at some sessions, but only as participants, not reporters. One of our memorable early successes was a creative forum on public officials and the media. Colorful Pitt communication professor Ted Windt, chair of the committee that planned the event, devised scenarios in which members of the media played the role of legislators while the real elected officials interviewed them. The session deepened each group's appreciation for the other's job and enhanced appreciation for the Institute.

### **Reinvigorating a Good Idea**

Although it is hard to measure the concrete policy impact of an institute whose main goal is to give policymakers a chance to talk with each other, the consistently high turnout at our events suggested that we were meeting our constituents' needs. Increased funding, primarily from local foundations, enabled us to expand our programming to the point where we were holding about 15 major policy events

a year. After my retirement in 1998, Denny McManus became the Institute's first paid director and further broadened its engagement of community and nonprofit organizations.

After 15 years, however, a sense of stagnation forced the Institute to reconsider one of our original self-imposed restrictions—namely, our stated commitment to being a neutral convener and not a policy-making entity. At the outset, as our events became popular, I felt our biggest challenge would be that legislators and others would begin to expect us to solve policy problems, not just set up first-rate venues in which to talk about them. As a result, we steered so far away from trying to stimulate policy decisions that we began to receive the opposite complaint—namely that we were holding excellent forums with no follow-up and no practical impact. Participant evaluations would consistently praise the quality of the material presented at Institute events and then ask, “Now what?” The foundations that funded us, though conceptually supportive of the Institute's communication and education goals, also expressed a desire to see more concrete, measurable outcomes.

So, in 2005, we took a bold step. We restructured our policy committees into nine working groups and told each of them to identify a policy issue or problem that could be addressed using the Institute's resources. Beginning that year, our annual retreat included time for each policy committee to set its programmatic agenda for the following year. Some of the projects were educational in nature, such as a comprehensive summary of the region's infrastructure needs or a forum on the value of diversity in the workforce. Others, however, were more directly aimed at advancing a policy solution. For example, a special committee on municipal pensions generated several specific proposals aimed at reducing the widespread problem of underfunded pension plans. As usual, our committee was broad based and acted by consensus, so controversial alternatives were left on the cutting room floor, but the committee's report and some subsequent behind-the-scenes advocacy spurred

the passage of legislation that forced Pittsburgh to shore up its woefully underfunded pensions.

Our search for cooperative, consensus-based, regional solutions sometimes exposed us to another line of criticism. Some who favored local decision making saw the Institute as a proponent of regionalism, or the concept that regional bodies could make the best, most effective, and most equitable decisions on a host of issues. Sponsoring the Regional Water Management Task Force, holding a major forum on the possibility of city-county consolidation, and convening discussions on regional governance and tax base sharing made us easy targets for those who prefer to keep government small and simple.

But after more than 20 years, many county commissioners, state legislators, and other important decision makers of all political stripes continue to view the Institute of Politics as an invaluable provider of ideologically balanced policy forums and publications on issues of regional significance. The Institute's geographic reach has gradually expanded beyond metropolitan Pittsburgh, as leaders from as far north as Erie and as far east as Philadelphia have asked to become involved in its activities, and Temple University even sought our assistance in order to replicate the idea.

### **One Special Relationship**

The continued success of the Institute of Politics can be attributed substantially to the fruit of one long-term mentoring relationship with a graduate student. Terry Miller grew up in poverty, living in a run-down Pittsburgh public housing community. As the daughter of a single mother on welfare who suffered with physical and mental health issues, Miller experienced all that goes along with that life—hunger, neglect, and abuse. At an early age, Miller became the primary caretaker for her mother and brother. Then, at age 29, worn thin by her early life experiences, yet having risen to the executive offices as a human resources administrator at Koppers Company, Inc.,

she found herself in the office of a Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, who asked her a question she had never been asked before: “Have you ever thought of going to college?” And indeed she had not, because, as Miller recalled, “Back then, poor kids from the projects, no matter what color your skin, never thought or dreamed of such things.”

Miller went on to earn her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work, first encountering me when she took my community organizing class. Later, I was her field placement advisor and supported her efforts as she created the Pennsylvania Organization for Women in Early Recovery (POWER) during 1989–91. The organization is a long-term, gender-specific drug and alcohol treatment program. She is its founder and served as its first executive director.

In 1992, feeling exhausted and burned out after working 80 hours per week for three years to get POWER off the ground, Miller called me to discuss potential job opportunities. She was concerned that if she didn’t step down as executive director of POWER, she would hurt something she worked so hard to create. As she put it, “Moe sympathized with me for about 15 seconds and then told me to come over to work with him at the Institute.”

Miller served ably as project administrator and later became assistant director for the Institute, where few knew her background until she shared it in dramatic fashion at a forum on welfare reform in 2004. After McManus left the Institute in 2005, the University initiated a search for his replacement but soon agreed with my insistence that the right person for the job was already on staff. Miller was officially introduced as the Institute’s new director at the opening session of the 2006 annual retreat. University Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg commented after that session that he had never received such a rousing ovation just for mentioning a name. The response to his announcement was an unforgettable reflection of how widely Miller’s work has been appreciated. She developed a remarkably capable small staff, including the Institute’s longtime deputy director



of finance, Marie Hamblett. Her uniquely sensitive, unassuming, and unfailingly responsive leadership makes me feel very privileged, as my career nears its close, to consider the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics the last and most enduring major piece of my professional legacy.



## CHAPTER 6

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### Protecting the Middle

I have always exercised great caution about extrapolating from past experiences to present policy recommendations or future projections. Even when one can clearly define what happened in one time and place, applying that knowledge to solving issues in a different time and place remains uncertain. So I am hesitant to deduce best practices from my lifetime “in the middle” as a civic leader and mediator. Other experts have spelled out effectively how a successful mediator defines issues and guides the process of resolving them. As they have drawn on extensive research and a large number of cases, their conclusions are more reliable than reaching any conclusions from the series of single cases contained in my personal history.

With that large caveat, I do believe that my experiences offer some important lessons and highlight some of society’s most enduring challenges.

- My experiences with settlement houses and neighborhood organizations suggest that, even in an age characterized by advanced technology, instant communication, and a highly mobile population, the need for place-based institutions remains. Our community “safe places” must adapt to changing times, but they continue to provide a sense of belonging and cultural awareness, enhance public safety, address neighborhood-level differences, and empower communities in their interactions with larger entities such as city and county government and private foundations.
- The 1960s War on Poverty, in which I participated as a strategist in Pittsburgh, presented both the possibilities

and the limitations of government action to address human need. The essential challenge is to balance a safety net of protection with incentives for economic advancement so as to lead disadvantaged persons toward a better life without creating dependency. We found that attempts to eradicate poverty that were not directly tied to employment had limited success—a lesson that echoed in the 1990s debate over welfare reform. Civil rights movements over the last 50 years have provided important opportunities for women and underrepresented populations. However, communities have still not found a way to eliminate the widespread use of violence to solve disputes.

- The Greater Hartford Process experience remains a fascinating case study of what can happen when powerful economic and political forces with good intentions try to carry out civic change with little understanding of how their efforts will impact local communities or how those communities feel about the decision. In its later stages, Process recovered its good name by working to link disadvantaged communities, especially the growing Puerto Rican component of Hartford's population, with the city's elites. As the United States undergoes unprecedented demographic change, finding ways to link rather than divide new and old groups will be increasingly important.
- The success of the Institute of Politics suggests the value of fostering regional policy development through informal dialogue involving elected officials of different parties and other civic leaders. Providing objective information and a space for private interaction on regional issues, which tend to be more pragmatically focused and less ideological in nature than national and state issues, could reduce polarization in communities across America.

The saying “May you live in interesting times” often is described as an ancient Chinese curse. I disagree. I feel fortunate to have lived in interesting times marked by startling technological change, increased social equality, and a growing sense of humanity’s global connectedness. I also have enjoyed stimulating interaction with an incredible range of thinkers, ideas, and social forces. I have found that living in the middle enables one to view life from many perspectives. And when being in the middle helps to bring people and communities together to achieve something significant, then it is definitely the most rewarding place to be.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My memoir, *Finding Common Ground*, is a walk back in time that relies on my own memory and understanding of past events, and so the contribution of others to the telling of my story was critical and incredibly valuable. I'm very grateful for the help I received in writing and editing the book, enriching its content, and financing its production as well as for the overall support I received in completing the task. The following are a few of the individuals who contributed to the project and of whom I am incredibly appreciative.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Booton Herndon, *Ford: An Unconventional Biography of the Men and Their Times*, (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), 334.
- <sup>2</sup> James V. Cunningham, *Urban Leadership in the Sixties* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 1970), 59.



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