

The soul of the city was ravaged in the night.

—Phil Ochs, “In the Heat of the Summer”

The federal government had played no small part in creating the urban crisis—the transformation of gleaming cities into what Mitchell Sviridoff describes as “depopulated urban wastelands.” Washington had largely subsidized and certainly encouraged “the cult of the suburb,” through Federally underwritten mortgage insurance, the mortgage-interest tax deduction, along with the mammoth interstate highway program. “The ribbon of highway” that Woody Guthrie famously wrote about in his 1940 song *This Land is Your Land* was, by the 1950s, spiriting a rising number of middle-class Americans away (often quite purposefully) from the people Guthrie cared the most about.

But if the government deliberately set out to support the flight to the suburbs, it ravaged the inner cities even more by a string of misguided, if arguably well intentioned, efforts in those areas. The Urban Renewal program, established by the Federal Housing Act of 1940, sought to reinvigorate downtown economies through “slum clearance”—destroying inner-city neighborhoods in order to save them.

The renewal program was concerned primarily with the economic revitalization of the commercial sector. It therefore put the interests of business leaders and real estate developers first, confident that commercial growth would benefit everyone. Meanwhile, slum clearance was uprooting and relocating large numbers of poor blacks and Hispanics, displacing many more than it helped, and leaving behind a rubble of demolished churches, social institutions, neighborhoods and gathering places—the last hope of cohesion in poor communities. (Herbert Gans’ book *The Urban Villagers* provides a particularly scathing indictment of this process.)

By herding the relocated families into more and more massive public housing complexes, Urban Renewal, the antipoverty program of the ’50s, ended up subverting the original intent of public housing, the antipoverty program of the ’30s. Public housing’s original vision of clean, orderly communities of affordable housing for working families soon became a convenient dumping ground for hard-to-relocate slum dwellers. Some mayors, eager to quarantine poor minorities in invisible or remote locales, deliberately sanctioned gargantuan new public housing developments in the shadow of superhighways or other concrete *cordons sanitaires*. The relocated families (and for that matter, the even unluckier ones left behind) were more often than not the “multi-problem families” described earlier. It was difficult to see, at least in hindsight, how their detachment from the economic mainstream could possibly become any better in public housing’s slab-like modernist canyons, or in the residue of “cleared” neighborhoods where churches, clubs, and shops were merely a memory.

But that was, in fact, the official hope.

The ruin of the central cities was thereby hastened—and often made all but irreversible—by the very programs that were intended to save them. Meanwhile, as black inner-city neighborhoods became communities of concentrated poverty, alienation, dependency, and denial, the Urban Renewal program had no answer to lingering social questions. Who would see to the human needs of these massively reorganized communities, especially the social, educational, and employment problems that so much “renewal” had only exacerbated?

Among the increasingly angry and restive black residents, Urban Renewal (widely referred to as “Negro removal”) was becoming an important organizing tool for local civil rights leaders. Chastened reformers, both in and out of government, gradually had to confront the unsettling racial realities of the inner city, the mounting human cost of the abortive “renewal,” and in general, the social and human dimensions of urban poverty. But through most of the 1950s, government’s role in creating the urban predicament remained in the intellectual shadows. The suburbanization of the middle class, the displacement of lower-skilled poor minorities, the relocation of industry—“all of these processes,” wrote historian Alice O’Connor some 40 years later, “were depicted as...the product of seemingly inexorable and inevitable forces...as if government policies had played no role in encouraging them.”

As the decade closed, however, social scientists and government activists alike grew more and more acutely aware of the urgency and complexity of the cities’ plight. Moreover, they believed that unless the country made some different policy choices and consciously developed a strategy for dealing with urban poverty and its social effects, it would be facing a domestic crisis of the first order—one that would more likely metastasize than abate over time.

By the mid 1960s, the Model Cities program would try to atone for the sins of Urban Renewal by fixing slums up instead of tearing them down. But well before that, one especially visible syndrome of antisocial behavior and concentrated poverty came to encapsulate for reformers all of the components of the urban malaise. The “hot problem”—which euphemistically went by the name “youth development” or, less neutrally, “juvenile delinquency”—gave an increasingly impatient cadre of activists something to get to work on. They were rebels *with* a cause.

“You live here, don’t you?”

“Who lives?”

—*Rebel Without A Cause*

By the early 1950s, two million young people had reached the age of 18, with a further doubling of that number expected by the end of the ’60s. The sheer mass of youth in the inner cities—compounded by often fatherless households, rampant unemployment, and communities in disarray—made for a high incidence of anti-social, “delinquent” behavior in schools, and an even higher incidence outside school walls. The latter problem was manifested in an explosion of street gangs and street crime. Half a million youths passed through the juvenile court system in 1953.

Romanticized for pop culture consumption in movies like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, given colorful but sugar-coated dramatization in *West Side Story*, juvenile delinquency was more soberly viewed by both academics and policy makers as the troubling symptom of a deeper dysfunction in America’s cities. The behavior of many teen-agers and young adults was inextricably tied up with problems related to low income, high unemployment, and failing schools. The wider citizenry was frightened and outraged by news reports (some accurate, some greatly exaggerated) of juvenile crime. The atmosphere was ripe, and the constituency aroused, for a public response.

The first stirrings of such a response, in fact, were already occurring in the 1950s. Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver’s Commission on Organized Crime, which started work in 1951, soon branched out into an investigation into the “root causes” of juvenile delinquency—a question that, as we will see, simmered beneath the surface until it boiled over in the next decade. The FBI rode herd on street gangs, and Dwight Eisenhower’s Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Oveta Culp Hobby, convened a National Conference on Juvenile Delinquency—the forerunner of a more sustained response by the next Administration.

Despite these efforts, the extent of inner-city poverty in America was perhaps still unacknowledged by the Federal government and the public when President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961. It took Michael Harrington’s 1962 best-seller *The Other America*—supposedly taken to heart by the President himself—to highlight the invisibility of poverty in what another best-seller of the time had called “the affluent society.” But if urban poverty was not yet on the political stage in 1961, juvenile delinquency was already very visible (Harvard President James B. Conant coined the term “social dynamite” to refer to out-of-school, out-of-work, mostly black youth in his book *Slums and Suburbs*, published that same year.)

A leftover recommendation from Secretary Hobby's National Conference, that the Federal government undertake a series of research and demonstration projects in this field, was waiting for the Kennedy Administration when it took office—a recommendation that it essentially adopted. Kennedy proposed just such a series of experimental projects in a message to Congress on May 11, 1961, in which he noted that delinquency, apparently on the rise, “seems to occur most often among school drop-outs and unemployed youth faced with limited opportunities, and from broken families.” In response to the President's message, Congress passed the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act that following September. At the same time, the President announced the establishment by Executive Order of a committee made up of the Attorney General; the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Secretary of Labor. The committee's mandate was “to coordinate their efforts in the development of a program of Federal leadership to assist the states and local communities” in this area.

The new President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (PCJD) would have, as it turned out, a hugely outsized effect on Federal policy, and on the way the President and Congress thought about cities for the next decade. More than from any particular initiative, the Committee's influence came from how it engaged some central issues. Daniel Patrick Moynihan pointed out in his book *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* that three pivotal concepts, “opportunity,” “community,” and “coordination,” were embedded in the President's initial proposal. However, the committee's influence came not only from how issues were engaged, but also because of *whom* the committee engaged to address them.

Foremost among these players was the President's brother and Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, who chaired the Committee. With Labor's Arthur Goldberg and HEW's Abraham Ribicoff as congenial colleagues, and his childhood friend David Hackett installed as executive director, Robert Kennedy had set off on an endeavor that would bring about, for him, nothing short of an epiphany. In short order, Bobby Kennedy metamorphosed from a law-and-order conservative into what Nicholas Lemann calls “the soulful champion of the downtrodden”; from machine-tooled scion of big-city Irish pols to empathetic savior of the left-behinds; from cold warrior (and, indeed, ferocious anticommunist) to poverty warrior.

The welter of juvenile delinquency programs in the early '60s was but an initiation for Robert Kennedy, a coming-of-age that represented both remedial and undergraduate education. The mature work—the dissertation—would come later, with community development and the creation of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. In the process, RFK would be duly chastened by the excesses of the antipoverty effort that he helped advance. Yet the juvenile delinquency movement spoke to something deep in Kennedy; it had aroused what *The New Yorker* later called “his deep and impatient moral intensity.” Delinquents were, for one, “people he could identify with personally,” Lemann argues. “They were troubled adolescents just as he had been—outsiders.” Kennedy's zeal for the topic may even have been heightened by the Committee's increasingly explicit focus on *black* youth—a group seemingly despised by the very upper-class establishment that had once scorned his Irish-American forebears. PCJD had become, Lemann notes,

“the government agency with the black-ghetto portfolio”—in large part because no one else was interested. But Kennedy certainly was.

Yet if Robert Kennedy (unlike his famously cool, cerebral brother, the President) led more with his heart than his head, others on the Committee took all the social scientific theory of delinquency—or rather, competing theories—seriously. One theoretical view treated delinquent behavior as resulting from psychological issues, another held that it was the economic and social conditions of the inner cities. But either way, the members' social-scientific bent led them to insist on private and public interventions as genuine experiments, subject to empirical social scientific evaluation. It was an emphasis that the more activist-minded anti-poverty workers would often find frustrating.

Even the activists, though, paid attention to some intellectual framings of the issues—the books that made it out of the academy, so to speak. Journalist Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, Conant's *Slums and Suburbs*, and Sociologist Herbert J. Gans' *The Urban Villagers* had helped put inner-city poverty and its discontents on the country's (and, perhaps, the Kennedy Administration's) agenda. Now some other volumes would address the more incendiary question of why the ghettos were poor and socially dysfunctional—or, in barstool parlance, whose fault it was. Were poor blacks themselves to blame, along with the ghettos' “culture of poverty?” That view was countered William Ryan, a (white) Boston psychologist and civil rights activist, a form of “blaming the victim.” This was a phrase he bequeathed to the language (and to the next generation or two of social policy debates) in rebutting Moynihan's notorious but visionary 1965 report on the deteriorating black family.

The alternative explanation—in the 1960s it was the less controversial one—was that white society, racist and economically inequitable, was to blame for the ghettos' ills—and, it then followed, for juvenile delinquency. This view made explicit that poor African Americans and other minorities were, in Ryan's phrase, the “victims” of a malign social order. The loaded terms, and the view they evoked, would remain at the heart of American social debate, revered as gospel or decried as heresy, for the balance of the century.

The choice between these theoretical models was, of course, far from incidental—the theory dictated the intervention, or at least suggested a direction for study. Thus, the earliest research around juvenile delinquency underwritten by the Ford Foundation—for whom delinquency became the pathway to a broader antipoverty agenda—focused on the psychological roots of delinquency. Family dynamics, specifically, family disintegration tied to poor early childhood development was identified (by Harvard social psychologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck) as the primary cause of delinquent behavior. The goal of the Glueck's research was to produce personality profiles of at-risk youth, with an eye to early detection, redirection, and prevention. The issue was thus defined as one of individual and family pathology rather than social or communal disease—as behavioral, rather than structural or economic.

But in time, a very different understanding of delinquency would come to drive the Ford Foundation's involvement in delinquency research and interventions—and for several years, the focus of the President's Committee and the subsequent War on

Poverty. An early statement of this view came in a book by Albert K. Cohen called *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, which attributed “the origins of delinquency among lower-class youth...less [to] a failure of personality than [to] a failure in the opportunity structure” (emphasis added).

This “opportunity theory” of delinquency was further developed in a signal book by two Columbia University sociologists, Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, called *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs*, published in 1960 (the year of JFK’s election). This book would become nothing short of revealed scripture for a generation of social reformers and radical activists. Cloward and Ohlin argued that delinquency, far from being a species of deviant behavior, was actually an adaptive, (albeit dangerous), response on the part of alienated poor and minority youth to a society that did not offer them sufficient opportunity to fulfill socially approved goals (e.g., upward mobility) in socially approved ways.

Opportunity—one of the three critical concepts identified by Moynihan and embedded in JFK’s opening gambit to Congress on juvenile delinquency—was the key word for this school of thought. Delinquent behavior was tied to low income, neighborhood decline, diminished social and economic opportunities, and the severe constrictions that all of these factors placed upon young people’s aspirations. If more real opportunity became available, the incidence of delinquency would decrease.

The consequences of opportunity theory for anti-delinquency work—and antipoverty efforts generally—were potentially profound and far-reaching. For if antisocial behavior grew out of behavioral deficiencies, the ameliorative response would be to change the behavior; if it was *society’s* deficiencies that were to blame, then what had to be changed was society, the environment, or “the system.” It then followed that programs aimed at more effective acculturation or social mainstreaming of black youth were misdirected, and offensive to boot.

Cloward and Ohlin fell squarely in the latter camp: it was white society and its racist institutions that were failing inner-city youth. The system *was* in need of changing. Delinquency would not be conquered, they argued, without transforming all institutions into genuine opportunity paths for delinquent young people. To this sweeping imperative of opportunity creation and comprehensive institutional change, Cloward and Ohlin added another, even more explosive requirement: the deprived, the “victims,” must participate in devising those transformations. The “problem people” must be regarded as “solution people,” as prime shapers of their own fates—otherwise minority youth would reject those transformations as so much top-down patronization, the bureaucratic equivalent of a bygone Lady Bountiful, descending with basket and sermon.

It was not clear—it was never clear—what “participation” could (or should) mean, or what it might achieve. But the call to what would come to be known as “community empowerment” (another of the three critical concepts identified by Moynihan) was nonetheless an ideological time bomb. *Community empowerment*, let loose from the last of its theoretical restraints during the War on Poverty, would quickly give birth to a litter of fuzzy if appealing notions and buzz-words, including the political perennial “community control,” and the legislative imponderable “maximum feasible participation.” Its ultimate, if perverted, fulfillment would come in the

noisy implosion of the very programs that most conspicuously adopted the concept for their credo, like the ill-fated Mobilization for Youth.

Whatever the merits or clarity of Cloward and Ohlin’s thesis, however, their impact was unmistakable. Robert Kennedy’s protégé David Hackett, as he began directing the work of the President’s Committee, was quickly turned on to the Cloward/Ohlin vision and observed: “It just made sense to me that barriers to people caused delinquency.” He immediately conscripted Ohlin as a consultant to the Committee, and hired one of Ohlin’s former researchers, Richard Boone, as his full-time deputy. (Cloward would eventually become research director at Mobilization for Youth.) Leonard Cottrell, another close associate of Ohlin’s, was also recruited as a consultant for the committee. Cottrell—like Ohlin, a University of Chicago-trained sociologist—was the chief articulator of the “community competence” version of the empowerment credo: “You get a community of people who have lost the competence to act [on] a community problem ... the way to attack it would be to restore the community’s confidence to act.” Opportunity theory and empowerment theology were fast becoming the two tablets of antipoverty law.

The Ford Foundation, too, was deeply influenced by the new empowerment/opportunity gospel. David Hunter, Ford’s program officer for juvenile delinquency, was an early and eager disciple. In a 1960 speech, he berated social workers for their focus on psychological explanations of delinquency—Ford’s own emphasis theretofore—and affirmed the new faith: “The bulk of delinquency arises from the social conditions in which people live. ... The object is to change the climate of the neighborhood from one of frustration to one of hope.”

But in truth, just what was the object of juvenile delinquency and antipoverty programs was not at all so clear. Social science-driven research goals ran up against more activist, reformist agendas, and eventually, more and more radical visions. Moynihan recalls that Congresswoman Edith Green, chair of a House panel on juvenile delinquency, repeatedly had to remind the PCJD that its legislative mandate was “not to reform urban society, nor yet to try out the sociological theories of Emile Durkheim on American youth...[but] to reduce juvenile delinquency.” (Though after six years of PCJD experimental interventions, Leonard Cottrell would ruefully conclude that “there are no demonstrable and proven methods of reducing the incidence of serious delinquent acts...”)

Yet in its confused or conflicting goals, and its ambiguous achievement of them, the advance guard of the juvenile delinquency movement was merely anticipating the confusions (and the achievements) that would generally characterize the nation’s antipoverty effort. Was the latter’s goal supposed to be better, more efficient service delivery to the poor (here Moynihan’s third term, “coordination,” became the operative buzzword)? Or was it radical institutional reform? Or redistribution of wealth? (Ford’s David Hunter was talking up “class inequality,” a term deliberately expunged from other hymnals of the period.) As in the delinquency debates, the nettlesome question continued to be whether it was the poor who needed changing (or “acculturation,” in socio-speak), or society itself?

What was changing were the actors in this tangled skein of a play. Juvenile

delinquency and the ravages of Urban Renewal had energized the Federal government into a more substantial response. It was becoming clear to all involved that the disparity between urban problems and urban resources was increasingly dangerous. Among other things, the government's record of indirect action—trying to prompt and support efforts by the private sector—was showing dismal results by the end of the 1950s. The stage was set for innovative programs from the philanthropic sector, and specifically from the Ford Foundation.

CHAPTER FOUR AN OPTIMIST'S FAITH

It is chiefly by private, not by public, effort that your city must be adorned.

—John Ruskin (1853)

Private beneficence is totally inadequate to deal with the vast numbers of the city's disinherited.

—Jane Addams (1910)

As early as 1953, the Ford Foundation had become preoccupied with the problems of cities. At that moment, any preoccupation at Ford was sure to have sweeping consequences: barely three years had passed since a huge grant from the Ford family had transformed the Foundation overnight into a major player in what it called “nationwide philanthropy.” For the leaders of this new colossus, the mounting fiscal and demographic troubles of big cities seemed to offer a suitably large and prominent canvas on which to make a mark. And there was no mistaking the issue's urgency: “Our cities,” warned a Ford memo of that time, “have completely outgrown their boundaries and their financial resources.”

But if the Ford Foundation was determined to lead the charge in rescuing American cities, it had only the vaguest idea about where it wanted to go, or how it proposed to get there, or even (much of the time) in what sort of vehicle. Ford's braking system—a complex, overlapping set of institutional and philosophical constraints and inhibitions—seemed always to be more sharply defined than its frequently amorphous aims. For the most part, the foundation was much clearer about what it could, or should, or would rather not do with its money than about what it proposed to accomplish, or why.

Ford's earliest strides into the urban arena were both impelled and constrained by its bureaucracy. The Foundation was impelled to be innovative and to put its money to good use and constrained by a fear of stepping too far in front of public or congressional opinion—or for that matter, of its own innate cautiousness. The institutional wariness was exacerbated by a succession of attacks from political conservatives that dogged the Foundation throughout the 1950s and beyond. The Ford Foundation wanted to attempt something bold but not *too* bold, something at once consequential and prudent. But most of all, its notion of what *needed* to be done set a narrow perimeter around even its grandest visions.

Columbia University political scientist Robert Halpern observes that in the early 1950s, Ford's staff, and even more its Trustees, “had no inclination to question the basic tenets of the social and economic system that had created and sustained...the Foundation. They believed that America's values [and its] economic and social system essentially were sound.” Fundamental, structural change, then, was uncalled-for,

despite increasing concentrations of poverty, deprivation, and unemployment; inner-city school failure and infrastructure decay; and patterns of industrial and population relocation that were in every case harmful, and sometimes shattering, to cities.

Evidence of economic contraction and massive social dislocation was everywhere, yet Ford's thinking was markedly incremental. It was idealistic but essentially confident: the system needed fine-tuning, not overhauling; better-coordinated service delivery, not redistribution of wealth, power, or opportunity. These things were achievable precisely because they were not revolutionary, yet their consequences, if effectively carried through, could be far-reaching and vastly beneficial.

In Ford's America, there were no discernible class interests or conflicts. More strikingly, there were no significant *racial* differences either. Race was, in the words of one Ford professional at the time, "verboten territory"—not to be acknowledged, let alone confronted or dealt with. (That view persisted, in fact, until well into the 1960s.) Here, Ford had a reason for its restraint more tangible than just intellectual or ideological caution: when the Foundation, through a subsidiary, funded a national study of housing segregation in 1954, Ford car dealers in the South raised an "unholy howl" of complaint. The claim (heard by Henry Ford, no less) was that they were being threatened with boycotts—as indeed they were, though to no noticeable effect.

The omission of race from the Foundation's agenda—and of issues of equality generally—helped keep it, in the words of one observer, on the "trailing edge, not the cutting edge, of change." Thus, in general, did its economic self-interest and political circumspection rein in the '50s-style "liberalism" of many on its staff—a brand of liberalism that was (by later standards) essentially conservative in its resistance to broad-based structural change.

It was an optimistic conservatism, though, and an activist one—the two qualities that defined Ford as "liberal" by the standards of its day. And the leader in acting on that optimism was the foundation's Public Affairs program, one of nine grantmaking programs, which steered the Foundation toward a more vigorous role in urban affairs. In taking that route, it would have to navigate a perilous course of bureaucratic infighting and factional rivalry, compounded by the foundation's obsession with public relations and its trustees' nagging distrust of what they perceived to be a maverick, even out-of-control staff.

It was a growing, increasingly distinguished staff, groping for a mission to suit its stature and newfound resources. In the mid-'50s, the foundation's domestic policy program—in contrast to its forceful, if sometimes controversial, presence in foreign affairs—seemed weak and rudderless. Its Public Affairs section was especially unfocused, having become (according to an internal memorandum) something of a catchall "miscellany department." Propelled by an energetic group of newly recruited staff members, the Public Affairs program would in time become the vehicle by which Ford would approach urban social problems with a somewhat bolder activism than it had ever shown before.

Public Affairs would come to introduce a new style, a new *modus operandi*, and a new focus to Ford's domestic agenda. The Foundation's "reigning belief," notes veteran foundation officer Louis Winnick, was that "most social problems could be traced to

a 'deficiency of knowledge' and [were] susceptible to solution by an intelligent citizenry were they sufficiently and widely informed." The Foundation saw its mission as "essentially educational," according to Henry T. Heald, its president from 1956 to 1965. According to a 1950 report issued by Heald's predecessor, Rowan Gaither, what historian Alice O'Connor calls "the strategy of knowledge-building" would govern Foundation programs. Academic research and inquiries by distinguished commissions would, accordingly, be its preferred modes of problem solving.

Public Affairs' first grants likewise emphasized conventional academic research and study, but these gradually gave way to programs of direct action—experimental interventions and demonstration projects—that focused on a number of deteriorating central city areas. Here began one of the more consequential partnerships in the early years of Ford's urban programs: Public Affairs Program Officer David Hunter, the foundation's resident specialist in delinquency, had struck a close working relationship with the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, and particularly with its staff director, David Hackett. More and more, Hunter synchronized the foundation's direct-action projects with the work of the President's Committee, further cementing the foundation's deepening ties with the Kennedy Administration. As the Hunter-Hackett axis grew, political smarts and an inclination towards activism, more than academic credentials, became the prime credentials for a successful program officer. Ford soon found them both, along with a sturdy idealism and a sense of mission toward the left-behind, in a minister's son and (fittingly) *ex-academic* named Paul N. Ylvisaker.

For an organization hungry for innovation and with a penchant for the grand gesture, yet preoccupied with its image and fearful of risk; intimidated by academics but wary of activists; blessed with enormous resources to expand but beset by factional and personal rivalries—for all of these needs, Ylvisaker was very nearly the all-round perfect hire. By his own reckoning, Ylvisaker started out as an unlikely urban activist. Born in 1921 in St. Paul, Minnesota, the son of a Lutheran minister who first trained to follow his father into the ministry, he was at home in academic circles—he earned two Harvard graduate degrees and taught at Swarthmore for five years—yet restless there. He left Swarthmore for political work at the urban front lines in Philadelphia, after which came Ford in 1955. He would stay a dozen years, the last eight as Director of Public Affairs.

The intertwining of Ylvisaker's three career paths—aspiring clergyman, professor, and urban practitioner—provided just the right balance for Ford. He was ready, even eager, to push the philanthropic envelope, but not so far as to scare off the foundation's board and brass; passionately committed to the downtrodden, yet no ideologue, and a tireless coalition-builder; deeply religious in outlook and motivation, but not above shrewd internal politicking when necessary. "An energetic, creative social innovator," was Daniel Patrick Moynihan's description. *The New York Times*, in his obituary, called him "a man of courage and gritty street smarts."

Above all, he was a religious personality, both in his inner impulses and his perspective on the world. "Ylvisaker lived in a suburb in New Jersey," historian Nicholas Lemann recounts in *The Promised Land*, "and when he had to travel on Ford Foundation business, he would take a bus to the Newark airport that passed through

Newark's black ghetto. 'You could see the frustration,' he says. 'You could *read* it. You come to the North, where it's supposed to be better, and you find this!'"

"There was always a tension within Ylvisaker," remarks Mitchell Sviridoff, between "the business of being practical and the business of meeting moral commitments." An ability to live with this tension was a useful quality, surely, in an organization that had to strike a balance, as one Ford operative put it, between the important idea and the doable one. In many respects, Ylvisaker's religious sensibility was not so much undermined or compromised by his taste for consensus-based, non-confrontational activism as it was expressed by that approach, and fulfilled in it. If, for radicals, conflicting class interests underlay most serious societal problems, for the unradicalized Ylvisaker—precisely because of his religious idealism—there need be no class struggle, because there was, at bottom, no class conflict.

In Ylvisaker's peaceable kingdom, different social and economic groups ultimately had the same interests, and individuals could transcend their own particular demands. Urban society itself was for him a "benevolent anarchy," whose institutions and bureaucracies had lately lost their way, and forgotten their (ameliorative) purposes. The less benign perspective of an emerging, more radical Left—that these institutions and bureaucracies might in fact be serving the interests of those holding economic and political power—was as alien to the young Paul Ylvisaker as it was to the more reserved senior statesmen of the Ford Foundation hierarchy.

The time had not yet come for that kind of cynicism. The late 1950s and early '60s were still, to Ylvisaker, "a beautiful running time, when the world wanted to solve the problems, when the Ford Foundation was golden, when ... you could talk about experimental programs that would go into governmental programs." And he ran with it. Impatient with Ford's (and the President's Committee's) preoccupation with academic theorizing and elaborate research, Ylvisaker helped move Public Affairs in more practical, hands-on directions, emphasizing demonstration projects, getting things started, and producing substantive results. "We have," he complained, "by bringing the academicians into the picture, opened a Pandora's box of research wonders, paid too much for our research whistle, and created a new class of high-salaried academic 30-day wonders."

"We are helping the intellectuals," agreed one Ylvisaker ally on Ford's board, "but missing the level that was helping people." Ylvisaker, for whom helping the poor and fallen was a spiritual vocation, did his part to effect an intellectual and policy shift from the "bricks-and-mortar" focus of urban renewal programs to the "human face," the "people problems," of the urban crisis. And as Alice O'Connor notes in her 1998 essay "Swimming Against the Tide: A Brief History of Federal Policy in Poor Communities," he pursued that agenda at a time when most of the country was still reluctant to acknowledge the existence of an urban problem. "Hardly a grant among the \$100 million we [at Public Affairs] have committed over the past decade," Ylvisaker wrote in 1963, "does not in one way or another address itself to urban problems and conditions."

Among all the undercurrents and hidden sources of the urban malaise, migration patterns, and particularly the middle class's rush to the suburbs, emerged front and center for the Ford team. The explosion of interstate highways, suburban

subdivisions, and easy credit for suburban homes were offering middle-class America an easy escape from aging city neighborhoods—and from the poorer city-dwellers newly arriving from the South, the farmlands, and abroad. Even without acknowledging the increasingly obvious racial element in this story, Ylvisaker and others at Ford noted with alarm that the normal patterns of American mobility were taking the cities toward a precipice. Instead of just moving up, the middle class was moving *out*, into rapidly developing hinterlands—leaving the poor stranded within city limits where economic and political opportunity were dwindling fast.

Ylvisaker believed deeply in the assimilative role of American cities. They had worked, for many earlier generations of immigrants and American rural migrants, to bring poor, low-skilled, and marginalized people into the social and economic mainstream. But they could not continue to do so if successful people all fled to new locales, and new paths of mobility did not open up for those left behind. Reforms in the process or governance and improvements in governing capacity were therefore the primary goals, as Ylvisaker saw them—both to accelerate the mobility of the poor and to strengthen cities' appeal to the better-off. Radical overhaul was unnecessary: the traditional means of mobility still existed in American society, Ylvisaker and the Ford team believed, but the cities in particular were losing their ability to take advantage of those means. Ylvisaker sincerely believed that governance (or the inadequate capacity of existing municipal governments) was at the heart of urban problems.

Central to Ylvisaker's approach to solving these problems was an optimist's faith that most of society shared a commitment to expanding opportunity and broad-based mobility. Reform was possible precisely because it did not require overturning the existing institutions, power structures, and bureaucracies. Mutualism was the operative faith, and urban reform would be its reward: a harmonious, pre-Aquarian realignment of the interests of city halls, social agencies, and slum dwellers.

But "Ylvisaker's grasp and perceptions of the urban problem," Winnick reflects later in this book, "were not always sharply analytical"—and the resulting lack of definition, of clarity with respect to goals and methods, would, as we will see, substantially hobble Ford's primary venture into urban problem-solving.

Could any urban community reverse a nationwide process of physical and economic isolation and deterioration with a program that so depended on goodwill—one that, for the sake of political comity, would avoid talking about race and fail to engage issues of structural inequality? Would the goal of such a program be to change "the system," or even "the bureaucracy"? Or would it seek to change those who live within the system? And what role would those people play, or did they need to play, in bringing about their own improvement? As they came to grips with these and other questions of content, vision, and purpose, with the nuts and bolts of social change, the Ford Foundation and its Public Affairs program found themselves marching headlong into an enormous gray area of their own.