THE 'INDEPENDENT AGENCY' MEETS 'MAXIMUM PARTICIPATION'

I talk with glib generality about these ideas, but when pressed to pin down the meaning of them specifically, I'm at a loss.
—*a member of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency*

We were going on faith…We seized on an idea without really knowing what it would mean when it got translated.
—*a staff member of the Council of Economic Advisers*

The choice of "Gray Areas" as the moniker for the Ford Foundation's program of comprehensive, coordinated community action—the crown jewel among its cluster of national initiatives—was, it turned out, more apt than anyone may have realized. It was actually no one at Ford, but economist Raymond Vernon who first used the term to describe the deteriorating but not-yet-deteriorated fringe areas between a city's downtown core and its affluent suburbs: working-class, blue-collar neighborhoods "poised on the cusp of decline," in Lou Winnick's phrase. With Gray Areas, the Public Affairs division of Ford sought to provide the foundation with a response to the growing marginalization of the inner city and its residents—a response of sufficient sweep and amplitude to be worthy of its imprimatur.

Everything about Gray Areas was nebulous, particularly the program's philosophical basis and its long-term objectives. And the vagueness of its intended ends was paralleled and compounded by the imprecision of its proposed means. The primary strategy of Gray Areas was "community action"—a concept that, despite its later ubiquity, turned out to be something of an empty shell. Moreover, advocates of different approaches to urban regeneration variously defined "community action" to reflect their understanding of what the cities needed and how to get there. Even the target population for the initiative was unclear: was it the working-class inhabitants of the intermediate, deteriorating areas originally singled out by Vernon? Or was it the largely unemployed poor of the already-deteriorated inner cities?

What was to be done with (or for) this target group was equally unclear. Part of Gray Areas' proclaimed mission was the accelerated acculturation of the new wave of urban immigrants. The program planned to speed the transition of these immigrants, mostly blacks and other minorities, from undereducated, under- (or un-) employed slum residents (although the initial "Gray Areas" were not slums) to college-educated, middle-class urbanites or suburbanites. But despite the rough specificity of this goal ("assimilation, and assimilation now," was Winnick's sweatshirt version), it was underplayed in practice.

In fact, journalist Gordon Harrison, asked by Paul Ylvisaker to inspect and evaluate Gray Areas sites—and those of Ford's earlier Great Cities program of education

reform—reported that the goal of rapid assimilation "never figured greatly in the thinking of [Gray Areas] project directors." (Winnick thinks that Ylvisaker pressed the acculturation issue as a selling point, and even used it as a scare tactic. As Winnick paraphrases him: "The social order was doomed to certain and violent collapse if angry black youth weren't successfully absorbed.") In any case, some argued that acculturation was a problematic goal: was the idea to make the gray areas (or the slums) livable? Or to evacuate them? Was it to assimilate the disadvantaged new-comers—that is, blacks and other minorities—to the ways of middle-class white America? Or to empower them on their own terms?

Indeed, developing local leadership within these ambiguously defined target communities was either an additional Gray Areas goal or subsumed under some of the fuzzier (and, it would ensue, more incendiary) notions of community action. Gordon Harrison pronounced it "the most slippery of concepts in theory." Cultivating indigenous leadership, he wrote, "is hard to appraise [as a goal] because it is by no means clear what indigenous leadership means"—perhaps the quintessential Gray Areas observation.

Gray Areas can best be understood as a series of experiments, or more precisely, demonstration projects—and as an improvisational response to urban degeneration and decline. Yet the program's "experiments" were, in Winnick's words, "singularly lacking in clearly defined and measurable outcomes," and informed by "uncertainties about what was going in and what was supposed to come out." Gray Areas was a program that could look to no established precedents. It would necessarily define itself as it went along and establish its criteria for success pragmatically.

This improvisational approach was sometimes defensible (at its best) when its implementers had a sufficiently forceful and realistic idea of their local opportunities and objectives—recognizing that they got little guidance on these points from either the Federal government or the Ford Foundation. Mitchell Sviridoff, recalling how he adapted the Gray Areas idea in New Haven, points out that the program was "a strategy for *getting started* … in a way that was politically possible." So long as frontline operators knew what they were getting started *at*—what they were hoping to achieve with their improvisations, and the local resources and obstacles with which they were working—their effort prompted excited attention from frustrated reformers natiowide.

But that proved exceedingly rare. When the indeterminacy (and, at times, inco-herence) of the Gray Areas idea was at its weakest—when local leadership was either ineffectual or unfocused—observers like Harrison could react with little more than mystification over the program's content and purposes.

After being visited by Ford's Public Affairs staff, officials in some of the potential target sites for Gray Areas interventions were left, in the delicate phrasing of evaluators Peter Marris and Martin Rein, with "some uncertainty as to what, exactly, the Foundation had in mind." No less than the president of the Ford Foundation, Henry Heald, after visiting one such site declared that *for the first time* he had some inkling of what Gray Areas was about. Heald would subsequently indict Gray Areas as, in Winnick's words, "a concept with no shape or destination." This charge was surely borne out in Harrison's evaluation-cum-epitaph: "One cannot … expect to find a clear and consistent Gray Areas idea."

Articles Of Belief

But if Gray Areas was lacking in consistency and clarity, its proponents did not lack for a clear and consistent faith. (As Winnick writes, Gray Areas seemed to outside observers to be a "faith-based mission…infused with unexpressed spiritual over-tones.") Ylvisaker and his Public Affairs colleagues believed in governing institutions and their capacity to enable change on a large scale. In particular, they believed in change that could ameliorate the lot of "the least of these, my brethren"—and thus not only effect change, but be a positive and deliberate force for good in human affairs. This sort of thinking was then (and perhaps now) the cornerstone of postwar American liberalism.

Governance was, Ylvisaker believed, at the heart of urban problems. Existing municipal governments were structurally incapable of tapping the political and finan-cial resources necessary to address changing metropolitan demographics. The institu-tions that were supposed to serve the growing numbers of minority migrants to the cities were rigid, insensitive, and unresponsive to the point of irrelevance. This was especially true of those institutions that were supposed to expand opportunity—schools, social welfare agencies, municipal governments, or what Marris and Rein call the "enabling institutions of assimilation." Those public and private programs that did exist were fragmented and uncoordinated, even competitive with one another, and they cried out for a coherent strategy and a purposeful effort.

So rationalizing governance and governing capacity would be the focus of Ford's reform activity: the redress of bureaucratic failure and the re-shaping of established agencies to be more attuned to the needs of the new urban poor. The result, it was hoped, would be better-coordinated, more efficient service delivery, especially in the areas of education, housing, employment, and welfare: the services that were sup-posed to lead from poverty and misery to the American mainstream.

The Ford Foundation's Public Affairs Program had arisen from just such ambitious thinking—it was conceived as nothing less than "the planned reinvention of service delivery systems to the poor," in Winnick's sweeping phrase. Yet the program was in essence quite conservative (though "liberal" in '50s terms) in its assumptions and its naïve optimism. The problems in urban areas came from flaws in the urban gov-erning machinery, not from fundamental inequalities of economic and political power. Therefore, the solution involved better planning and coordination, not redis-tribution of power or an infusion of wealth. City Hall and the business/civic estab-lishment, the poor and their social welfare shepherds, virtue and power—all of these actors would be harnessed together in a unified effort, and progress would occur through benign collaboration.

Cooperation with existing political leadership and the major bureaucracies—not confrontation with "the power structure"—was, therefore, a requisite. Points of leverage within the bureaucracy would be employed, as it were, against the bureau-cracy itself. Ylvisaker called it the "social application of the art of jujitsu." The Gray Areas program was intended to play a supporting role, stimulating and shoring up existing institutions rather than replacing them.

But the catalyst for all of this action would nonetheless be a new institution: the *independent community agency*. These agencies were charged with daunting tasks,

including the "unfreezing" of whole, tangled networks of authority responsible for housing, social services, and employment for the poor; the mobilization of public/private coalitions; and the stimulation of creativity and innovation when searching for answers to the problems of the inner cities. In every community in which Gray Areas set up shop, the community agency (always a private, nonprofit corporation) would develop a plan for addressing poverty in the neighborhood, by enlisting and re-directing the efforts of city government, schools, social welfare agencies, and neighborhood leaders. The plan, and the independent agency itself, was meant to catalyze, coordinate, and rationalize—*but not replace*—the work of official public authorities. That plan, along with Ford seed money, would then be invoked to induce financial commitments from other agencies—public and private, local and national.

In this schema, existing institutions would be energized to respond in new ways to the problems of the poor. (Indeed, a requirement of Gray Areas involvement was an overt, serious commitment on the part of the target city to the program, including the allocation of substantial local resources.) Communities would be motivated, it was hoped, to organize themselves with the help of key leadership. Integrated planning and program development, comprehensive and coordinated services, institutional innovation and the money to support it, and the involvement of the poor themselves—an explosive issue down the road—these would be Gray Areas' bedrock principles, along with research and continual evaluation of its "demonstration projects."

(The insistence on research and evaluation was primarily at the behest of Ford's board and Federal bureaucrats, both of whom hankered for measurable results. Ylvisaker's sardonic view of elaborate research protocols—which he saw as benefiting engorged academics rather than hungry poor folk—has already been noted.)

Gray Areas would focus on changing the environment rather than the individual, on transforming institutions rather than their users. In other words, the program tilted more toward opportunity theory and less toward behavioral psychology. The driving ethos was about rebuilding community, about finding the "human face" of the urban crisis. (Urban Renewal had enriched developers; the Federal highway, tax, and mortgage programs, homeowners; Gray Areas would enrich *communities* and their residents.) And, as already noted, faith to accomplish all of this was placed in existing institutions and their capacity to instigate change on a large scale. A basically sound system would be made to work the way it was supposed to.

Birth Of A Notion
After a two-year period of planning, preparation, and reconnaissance of select sites, Gray Areas was formally launched on March 30, 1961 with an allocation of $4.75 million. Over time, $26.5 million would be disbursed, first to Oakland, California on December 28, 1961, then to New Haven, Philadelphia, and Boston in 1962, and finally, to Washington, D.C. in 1964. In 1963, the Foundation appropriated $7 million to support community development and educational programs throughout the state of North Carolina.

With Gray Areas support, the demonstration cities—Ylvisaker took to calling them "pilot communities" when appealing to Federal bureaucrats for support—

focused on similar issues across the board. The menu mainly consisted of education—including pre-school, remedial reading, and after-school tutoring—recreational activities and health services, legal services for the indigent, and job training and placement. The foundation had, after all, cut its inner-city teeth with a joint Education/Public Affairs initiative called the "Great Cities School Improvement Program," launched in response to a request from school superintendents. The program was aimed at "culturally deprived," "disadvantaged" migrant children and their special needs. In this new incarnation of Ford's philanthropic vision, schools would continue to be seen as linchpins of community renewal and self-help.

Services to the poor, in general, were to be *coordinated* and *integrated* and *comprehensive*—these were the popular Gray Areas buzzwords. Although there was some attention given to adult literacy and job training, young people (children and adolescents) were very much the focus. This emphasis reflected both the Foundation's abiding concern with juvenile delinquency and the attention paid, in the academic research that served as the program's scripture, to the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Aside from the focus on youth, the concerns taken on by Gray Areas were all, more or less, the conventional concerns of political reform and urban social services during that time. The nonprofit community agency was Ford's most distinctive contribution to the cause.

Race and Place; Power and Process
The independent community agency was Gray Areas' designated vehicle for service innovation and coordination. It was also perhaps seen as the means of assimilating socially and economically marginal people into the larger society in these cities. (One of the program's assumptions was that either goal was beyond the unaided ingenuity of existing community agencies.) But the choice of vehicle, like the choice of Gray Areas as a foundation program, was itself significant. It represented institutional values, priorities, and anxieties, and a judgment of what was doable (or worth doing) and not doable (and therefore, not worth doing). The community agency was as much a response to Ford's institutional imperatives as to the needs of the cities and their migrant populations.

The coordination theme of Gray Areas, because it seemed non-threatening, appealed to professional bureaucrats, in government and in social work agencies. This program would work with, not confront, authority. (Ironically, institutional self-protectiveness and bureaucratic inertia, inefficiency, and in-fighting, would in fact impede Gray Areas' achievements in every demonstration city.) More generally, Gray Areas focused the foundation's efforts on what Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding,* calls "the somehow apolitical question of *process,*" not on the substance or requirements of radical change. "Ylvisaker had no *program* for social reform," Moynihan notes, "only a *method* whereby local communities could evolve their own." So the foundation would be protected from charges (hurled, likely as not, from Congress) of social engineering devised by unelected and unaccountable tax-exempt nonprofit institutions.

Of course, there was nothing apolitical about this emphasis at all, because the pressures to which the Foundation was responding were inherently political. The

realities of power, and power politics, held sway. But Gray Areas quite deliberately addressed itself to the provision of services and the processes of governance, not to the more complicated issues of power, and who held it. (The independent community agency would, in fact, be likened by some to a 1960s updating of the late 19th-century settlement house, one directed at domestic migrants rather than foreign immigrants, and "a little more theoretically glitzy," to use Richard Cloward's phrase. It was a comparison that could not have pleased militants like Cloward, most of whom perceived the settlement house as essentially accommodationist, and something of an abomination.)

Nor did Gray Areas address the issue of race. The extent to which racial inequality pervaded the major agencies in the urban system, the extent to which racial discrimination was implicated in unemployment, poor schools, and other symptoms of urban decline—these factors were not on Ford's compass. By ingenious, or simply careless, redefinition, every urban black area became a "gray area"—as did the issue of race itself, which had somehow been transformed into one of *place*. To Ylvisaker, Gray Areas offered a middle road through the racial struggles of the time. Nicholas Lemann saw the program as a cover for not dealing with race—or at best, for dealing indirectly with it. "Gray Areas," he wrote, "was a euphemism."

"Community action," on the other hand, was not so much a euphemism as a catch-all. Coined by David Hackett and Richard Boone at one of the meetings of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, the phrase meant whatever an activist—conservative, liberal, or radical—wanted it to mean.

The Name Of The Game: Action, Empowerment, Involvement

Like everything connected with Gray Areas, the concept of "community action" was not only vague but an article of faith, rather than a tested or even well-articulated strategy. It seemed a known—or at least, likely—way to get from here (urban deterioration and distress) to there (at the very least, the alleviation of poverty). To those embracing the faith, it "had the excitement of a new idea," and "it seemed fresh and vigorous," according to Lemann.

Yet the seeds of what Alice O'Connor would later call this "evolving, eclectic approach to social reform" lay in rejection and disillusionment. Community action was a rejection of the top-down approach to social change that had been epitomized, for reformers, by the magisterial ravaging of Urban Renewal. The disillusionment was with so-called "categorical" programs run out of Washington, without attention being paid to the specifics of local conditions. So the new style in social change would invert these premises: community action would entail locally grounded program coordination, or bottom-up political activism, or both.

The first would prove more straightforward, or at any rate, less problematic. Coordinated service delivery was, after all, one of the defining characteristics of Gray Areas. And community action, as Lemann describes it, was "originally an idea for delivering government social services in poor neighborhoods more efficiently and sympathetically." The ideas were at least close cousins. But (as often happens when cousins get too close) they shared and reinforced a common flaw. Moynihan wrote, "Coordination is the ever-invoked, but never-achieved ideal: a system that would

work with harmony and efficiency." By marrying Ylvisaker's dream of front-line local coordination with Federal planners' dream of overall administrative efficiency, the idea magnified the weakness of both—to wit, the closer they came to specifying exact tactics and methods, the more farfetched and unpredictable they became politically.

To compound the problem, as O'Connor trenchantly observed, the foundation "helped to nurture not one but several models of community action." Moynihan argues, that "the one term ("community action") concealed at least four quite distinct meanings: organizing the power structure, as in the Ford Foundation programs of Paul Ylvisaker; expanding the power structure, as in the delinquency program of Cloward and Ohlin; confronting the power structure (as in the community organizing of Chicago radical Saul Alinsky); …and assisting the power structure (as demonstrated by the Peace Corps)." Howard Hallman, deputy director at Gray Areas' New Haven site, was perhaps best able to describe the essential dichotomy, as a clash between what he called "the democratic elitist … harmony-of-interest approach" (which could have been a debating position label for Ylvisaker) and the "populist … conflict approach."

The first "focused on working from the inside to achieve institutional reform and better service delivery," observed O'Connor, "and did its best to contain rather than encourage oppositional organizing activities among low-income citizen groups; …[it] de-emphasized citizen participation and highlighted the importance of systems change." The New Haven Gray Areas program, run by Mitchell Sviridoff, epitomized this approach. The second philosophy (best represented by New York City's Mobilization for Youth) disdained the organizing of people to operate within the existing system. It was a *power* (or, more commonly, *empowerment*) strategy, not a services strategy. People were poor, so the theory went, because they lacked political power—and the way for them to escape poverty was for them to *get* power.

The MFY model was accordingly confrontational, even (in the frequently honorific usage of the time) "militant." The poor were encouraged to take on the local power structure to whatever extent possible. The ensuing contentiousness would eventually come to be associated with all community action strategies, especially as they were later underwritten by the Federal government as part of the 1960s War on Poverty. The collaborative approach associated with Gray Areas would quickly fade into the more dramatic (and more lavishly funded) style supported by the Federal government.

(It's worth noting that, although Ford lost control of the "community action" idea on the national scene, it never gave up on its own, essentially collaborationist, approach to the topic. The foundation would, in fact, preserve and ultimately resuscitate that approach as a fundamental principle of the community development movement—through the dozen or so community groups it supported throughout the 1970s, and more ambitiously in the '80s, once the national hangover from "community action" had subsided.)

So community action in the "empowerment" sense was a genie in a bottle. The concept was a far more romantically appealing battle cry to antipoverty warriors than was the more staid, institutional formulation of Gray Areas. But it had potentially chaotic, unpredictable results when released. Among other things, the strategy of

confrontation predictably aroused enmity amongst the confronted. "We ought not to be in the business of organizing the poor politically!" would be *the* complaint of many mayors, soon relayed to Lyndon Johnson, who shared their disquiet but (like Ford) found he had lost control of the program.

Still, in intellectual and militant circles, the romantic appeal of the idea was strong. Empowerment was hailed as "the elixir of social change," according to Winnick, "but that potion had no prescribed dosage. ... Toxic injections of community participation inevitably produced unnegotiable demands," for power and control, as happened with Mobilization for Youth, and even more egregiously, with HarYOU-ACT, the designated community action group in Harlem.

The brew grew even more toxic with the addition of a famously open-ended phrase in Federal anti-poverty legislation, requiring the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in all Federal community-action programs. Richard Boone, the President's Committee staff member who coined the phrase, "didn't know exactly how maximum feasible participation would work…in practice," Lemann recounts. But Boone was a high-risk adventurer, a reckless idealist for whom "just shaking things up" was inherently gratifying.

The gospel of empowerment proclaimed what Ford's David Hunter referred to as the "competence" of their communities to resist their own disintegration, without the (condescending) help of middle-class outsiders. The problems of the ghetto, like delinquency, were not intrinsic to it, not reflections of failings of character or purpose; they were the fruits of powerlessness. So said HarYOU's founder, the eminent sociologist Kenneth Clark, among others. Thus empowerment—including the very act of planning for and controlling their own future—would engender a new sense of purpose, bring a community together, and serve as a first step out of poverty. It had *symbolic* as well as (or "instead of," as critics increasingly said) *actual* political power.

By contrast, a value like "community involvement" (an aptly fuzzy term) in the Gray Areas scheme of things had none of the electricity, or even the bracing appearance of clarity, of "empowerment." Community "involvement" came nowhere near what was considered to be the extreme notion of community action as a taking of control. Ylvisaker and his colleagues clearly envisioned an important place for citizen participation in program planning, but they were not specific about what participation should and could mean, why it was important, or how it would be expressed. Those were presumed to vary from place to place, in response to local assets and needs, and most of all, to local political realities. At bottom, participation of the poor meant, perhaps, nothing more than according a sympathetic respect for their views, and perhaps the enlistment of their help in implementation. Yet at the same time, Ylvisaker averred as a goal the cultivation of "indigenous leadership"—a phrase whose meaning was likewise up for grabs, but one that implied some degree of resident power.

In truth, the problems of inner cities were so complicated, so various, and so inter-related that it was probably never clear—at least to anyone not possessed of a radical vision—what was needed. But as Sviridoff recalls, Gray Areas offered, for many less-radical activists, "a way of beginning to think about and experiment with new ways of dealing with these extremely difficult problems." This point is so subtle that it is easily dismissed—as it mostly was in its day. The point of Gray Areas was never to be a national formula for saving all communities in the same way, with the same play book, gauging progress in all places against pre-defined benchmarks. Scholars begged for that kind of clarity, and recoiled in horror when they didn't find it. Government reformers thought they had achieved it in their diktat of "maximum participation"—only to discover they had created a Frankenstein monster whose main impulses were destructive and whose only consistency was chaos.

Gray Areas was undeniably too loose and unformed an idea to deliver on its outsized ambitions: "to transform the political and social life of the community," as Moynihan summed it up, or as Winnick puts it, to usher in "a salvational social and civic regime for uplifting the impoverished." Ends that grand may have been unachievable by any means. But if the greatest weakness of Gray Areas was the amorphous grandeur of its ambitions, its one strength may have been the very modesty of its strategy: *set up a few promising innovations led by energetic and visionary people, let them find their way among their own opportunities and roadblocks, and see what kinds of reform might prove possible.* The merits of that approach, if any, would have taken many years of patient trial-and-error to sort out. The national mood of the 1960s offered neither the patience nor the subtlety for any such thing. Meanwhile, the program's outsized and nebulous goals set it up to be quickly and easily demolished by the decade's bumper crop of radicals and purists.

Gray Areas, such critics swiftly concluded, did not go far enough in its community organization or deep enough in its critique of the problem. They insisted that the voice of the poor must be not just listened to, but *obeyed;* conciliation must give way to confrontation. The poor must be immediately politicized, or meaningful change (by the epochal standards that Ford itself had helped to define) would never occur.

Before long, even that view (like most other reform prescriptions of the time) would strike many as hopelessly inadequate and condescending—an act, to use a favorite term of the period, of "ghetto colonialism." Black activist Norman Hill, associate director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, succinctly pilloried the "empowerment" nostrum in a review of Moynihan's *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding:*

> In a classic case of elitist condescension…, the middle class decided that what the lower class needed was participation, and the maximum feasible amount of it to boot. They needed not money, but identity; not jobs, but self-respect; not decent homes, but a sense of community;… not better schools with more funds to make education effective, but control over their own destiny.

In the end, neither the reformers nor the radicals—and least of all, the poor—were in control.

If any city did have the answer—if any city knew where it was going, and where urban America should be going, and how to get there—that city should have been New Haven.
—Fred Powledge, in *Model City: One Town's Efforts to Rebuild Itself,* 1970

By the 1950s, well into its third century, "New Haven was afflicted," Russell Murphy wrote in *Political Entrepreneurs and Urban Poverty,* "by a general malaise that pervaded its social, political, and economic life." Following a typical pattern of urban poverty and deterioration, blue- and white-collar residents, mostly white ethnics, had followed business and industry farther and farther away from New Haven's core. Sometimes it was business that followed its potential customers, but either way, the result was the same: a blighted, economically stagnant, physically dilapidated, yet still crowded community.

The crowding was the result of an influx of uneducated, unskilled (and as journalist Gregory Farrell poignantly noted at the time, "largely unwanted") blacks from the South. Their presence helped drive whites even farther away. (Indeed, as the New Haven Gray Areas program took shape, its organizers feared that it would be charged with attracting blacks, other minorities, and the poor to the city.) Eventually, what remained of the white population consisted almost entirely of the elderly, the childless, and the destitute.

Poverty in New Haven, Murphy pointed out, had assumed both a geographical and a racial dimension. The unemployed, the elderly, unmarried mothers, juvenile delinquents, and welfare recipients—all the components of what Gray Areas would call "multi-problem families"—were concentrated in half a dozen neighborhoods that accounted for more than half the city's population. The neighborhoods were characterized by overcrowded, substandard housing and antiquated, inadequate public and private facilities. Almost eight out of every ten adults in these areas had never finished high school; close to six out of ten had never completed the eighth grade. Between a quarter and a half of the areas' families were subsisting on marginal incomes (less than $4,000 a year). These "inner-city" neighborhoods (as they would soon come to be called by students of urban life) would be the focus of Gray Areas work in New Haven.

These neighborhoods—not so much deteriorating as already deteriorated—were well removed from the original denotation of "gray areas." Even so, they were very true to the phrase's unacknowledged connotation: poverty in New Haven was largely a black problem. The higher the proportion of blacks in a neighborhood, the higher the rate of broken families, families on welfare, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, and under-education. Notwithstanding the ambiguity and evasiveness of the original Gray Areas founders, the New Haven Gray Areas pro-

gram would unapologetically (though not exclusively) focus on blacks, and especially on black youth—the future of the city's core population.

Poverty in New Haven was becoming increasingly severe, but it was not especially conspicuous. "[T]he problems of the poor," wrote Murphy, "and especially of black poor, were low in visibility, not ones the ordinary citizen encountered in his normal daily life." Prior to the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* in 1962, little had happened to focus the nation's attention on the poor.

The state of things in New Haven would soon become more visible, however. One account noted that although the city's problems were "typical of those besetting many American cities," under the personal leadership of Mayor Richard Lee, "the response to these problems [would be] quite atypical." New Haven would "discover" poverty as a result of an aggressive program of redevelopment in the late 1950s and early '60's. In his book *A Climate of Change*, Gregory Farrell comments that New Haven "became famous as America's Urban Renewal city, and Lee as America's Urban Renewal mayor." Lee, in fact, deliberately recruited what one observer called "planners with a social conscience."

By 1958, New Haven had attracted more Federal Urban Renewal money per citizen than any other city in the country. All that tearing down and rebuilding, however, did not so much reveal the reality of poverty in the city as uncover the human problems that bulldozers couldn't repair. What had so optimistically been called Urban Renewal actually helped less to *renew* the city than to uncover and redefine the true nature of the problem—poverty—that it had tried and failed to solve. Poverty began to be understood not just as a lack of money for decent housing or other necessities, but as a cluster of economic and social problems requiring concerted action.

Lee and the people around him started envisioning "human renewal"—"people-programs," as Lee sometimes preferred to call them. "We knew we had to develop a human renewal program as broad and as comprehensive as our Urban Renewal program," Lee would recall later. One official called it "an all-out attack" on the social and economic problems of the central city. But help was needed to launch the assault.

Model City

"New Haven's problems of housing, transportation, health, education, and race relations may have been enormous, but they were not *infinitely* enormous as were those of New York City, or Chicago, or Los Angeles," remarked Fred Powledge in his aptly named case study *Model City: One Town's Efforts to Rebuild Itself.* He went on to observe that "those larger cities were becoming ungovernable." New Haven may have had some advantages, therefore, as a site for "human renewal," but they went only so far. "No American city," wrote Farrell, both descriptively and presciently for 1965, "has within its boundaries the financial resources it needs to combat poverty and its causes. To get things going, New Haven had to get money from outside sources."

The money—$2.5 million in 1962, the same amount the following year—would come initially from the Ford Foundation. What was also needed, along with a com-

prehensive plan fleshing out the content of the proposed reform, was a "human renewal" *agency,* a vehicle through which the human side of urban renewal could be implemented. This role would be played by a new, private, nonprofit corporation—variously described (depending on the audience) as the coordinating body, catalyst, fundraiser, and planning agency for New Haven's antipoverty program—to be called Community Progress, Inc., or CPI.

Everything about CPI was carefully thought through, beginning with its name, which reflected a shrewd sense of public relations. The name conveyed, of course, a very American belief in the possibility of progress. It carried with it the implication that poverty was not, perhaps, an immutable condition of human existence; that New Haven's problems (which were the problems of other cities) were perhaps not so intractable; that American institutions were at bottom benign, and the ills of the inner city susceptible to non-upheaving reform. But the first word was especially important: the community *as a whole* would be enjoying "progress," as a result of New Haven's investment in human renewal. The entire community would benefit—from newly-tapped productivity, lowered costs of public assistance, better-managed public housing, and more efficient law enforcement and public health services. Another benefit, though not always explicit, was the prospect of avoiding social unrest and upheaval.

From the first, CPI was intended as a political animal, an active participant in the processes of government and the shaping of public policy. Not the least of its political responsibilities was the task of selectively distributing the considerable money it raised (something like $20 million in private, Federal, and state funds in 5? years) to finance local antipoverty work that it favored. And CPI aimed to be political in its style and *modus operandi* as well as in its effects. The support, cooperation, and participation of the city's public and private bureaucracies was actively sought and regarded as crucial. Politicos and administrators (members of the "community power structure," in the lingo of a top CPI staff member) were deliberately courted for leadership—not a meritocracy of businessman, bankers, and industrialists—and dominated its (originally) small, nine-member board as well.

CPI would become a highly centralized, executive-centered organization yet the world in which it operated was anything but. Power and influence were highly fragmented in New Haven among individuals, groups, and institutions, and between public and private agencies and their administrators. It might be thought—actually, it *was* thought—that such decentralization of power would impede innovation and change. But in New Haven, CPI parlayed the multiple cross-currents of power into a kind of interagency jujitsu that most often ended up leading where CPI wanted to go. It sought support from one agency or administrator when another proved unsympathetic or even hostile. In return, it was able to offer to supportive bureaucrats (those who were interested in change) the resources and expertise of its staff; its carefully cultivated political ties; its own administrative and bureaucratic savvy; the financial wherewithal to seek out funds; and overall, its innovative spirit and energy.

CPI's wooing of the city's established bureaucratic order was not matched by any notable attempt to enfranchise what the Economic Opportunity Act would eventually refer to as "the residents of the areas and members of the groups served." These

groups were left out of the top-level planning and administration of the project, as were other community groups. The agency was consciously structured to be politically potent and at the same time remain formally outside electoral politics. It neither sought nor even imagined any formal electoral mandate from the communities whose progress it was spearheading; that mandate came from the established electoral and administrative order. CPI was protected, or so it seemed, from hostile political intervention on the part of a volatile inner-city electorate.

Such insulation ensured a certain autonomy for CPI, but of course it carried a price. Substantially unaccountable to resident scrutiny and oversight, CPI would in time be caught unawares by mounting pressures, enlightened or not, from the target groups it served—demands that they be included in the planning and implementation of programs that were intended to benefit them. Had CPI enjoyed less protection from the political process—had it found a way to incorporate resident leadership without succumbing to neighborhood factionalism—it might, paradoxically, have weathered the later pressures for a more-maximal "participation." Co-opting grassroots leaders might have had both an inoculative and prophylactic effect.

Still, between CPI management and the bureaucracies that undergirded its reform coalition, matters were mostly copacetic. Community Progress, Inc., was to work in conjunction with the established, respectable public and private institutions in the city, not at odds with them. Controversy and conflict were, as much as possible, to be avoided; harmony was the goal.

Harmony was also sought at the philosophical level. There was a conscious effort to present the new program as congruent with basic, consensual American norms and values. Thus the theme of individual responsibility was repeatedly invoked: individuals who had hitherto been dependent on society would be transformed into productive, self-sufficient citizens.

Poverty, though, however, had become self-perpetuating. The changing American economy and the changing nature of the job market, with the resultant lack of jobs for the unskilled and uneducated, had deprived the new urban poor of the *opportunity* to *become* self-sufficient. So if poverty consisted, at bottom, of a lack of opportunity, then *providing* opportunity was what an antipoverty program should be about. CPI's guiding document, first presented to the Ford Foundation in September 1961 (before *The Other America,* though it would actually be published the same year) was entitled "Opening Opportunities":

> [O]pportunity will be the central theme of this comprehensive program…[S]elf improvement is a natural corollary [to opportunity]. … People will be encouraged and aided to help themselves. It must be recognized, though, that encouragement alone is insufficient if inadequate resources are available and also that services alone will do no good unless people choose to use them.

CPI's commitment, then, was threefold: first, it would mobilize and coordinate resources—money, expertise, political support, the bureaucracy. Second, it had to persuade the city's poor to participate, at least in implementation, if not in leadership. And third, it was supposed to "alter the [presumably impaired] opportunity structure."

The explicit assumption was that the traditional acculturative institutions and processes were not functioning as they should, so opportunity for society's lowest economic ranks had been pre-empted.

From its beginnings in the spring of 1962, CPI's major program emphases would be on education and employment, or what it called "opportunity (or opportunity-connected) programs." These were the "functional systems" most conspicuous in their failure to work properly. New Haven was declaring war on poverty two years before Lyndon Johnson declared it officially, and took it nationwide.

Model Project

The first step, of course, was to seize the opportunity presented by the Ford grant. The vehicle—CPI—and some start-up money for its journey were in place. So where was it headed?

"At first glance," wrote Russell Murphy, "the New Haven project…did appear jumbled and confused … a random collection of programs and personalities." But in fact there were, as Murphy noted, "recognizable patterns in the agency's activities": a sense (whether too limited or too ambitious was another matter) of what it was trying to do and how it would go about doing it, and a conviction, perhaps less clearly articulated, of what it was not seeking to do as well.

There was also, at CPI, a clear understanding as to who was at the helm of the project. The personality and politics of the agency's first executive director (from 1962 to 1966), New Haven native Mitchell Sviridoff, dominated the functioning of the agency. His credentials fit the bill: former regional director of the United Auto Workers, former president of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, recent president of the New Haven Board of Education, and a longtime champion of progressive causes in the state. During his tenure, New Haven's antipoverty project—easily the best known and most widely publicized of the Gray Areas programs—was hailed as a model for the country. Indeed, it became a prototype for the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty (though in ways that quickly became unrecognizable as that program ballooned). The project would closely mirror Sviridoff's style and world-view, all his considerable strengths and human limitations, for good and ill.

Sviridoff was a supremely self-confident "can do" activist perfectly in tune with the Kennedy White House. He made New Haven's antipoverty effort, as Russell Murphy remarks, "both an occupation and a preoccupation." Shielded from both legal and political intrusions by the peculiar institution erected around CPI, Sviridoff proceeded unapologetically to surround himself with an elite, professional, and academically diverse staff, many of whom were recruited from outside the city.

Sviridoff and his associates spurned such unruly and ill-defined goals as "community organizing" and "citizen participation," which loomed large in the internal correspondence of Boston's Gray Areas counterpart, the far less successful ABDC program. (All for naught, though: these ideas would, in time, engulf his own institution as well.) The Sviridoff team was likewise mostly indifferent to the issues of structure and process that preoccupied Boston's program. They were consumed with a desire to act, to get things done.

Sviridoff's blunt pragmatism was evident in how the agency, as he put it, "delib-

erately and unashamedly [courted] success in the early stages of the program." He understood that "success breeds success." If the agency was to attract money and grow in stature and effectiveness, it had to produce results—visible, concrete achievements—and soon. Put most benignly, that meant "[starting] where starting is possible," as an early account of the project put it. A more blunt construction, however, was that the project selectively recruited as clientele the people most likely to succeed— "the saveable poor." "This is not a social work operation," confided one upper-echelon (African American) CPI administrator. "It's a cruel decision to make, but we have to concentrate on the people we can help to take advantage of employment and education opportunities, and we can't expend as much time with the families who have deep-seated psychological problems."

Such tough-mindedness perhaps had its downside. A mainstream 1960s liberal, impatient with ideology and lengthy polemics on the inequities and injustices of "the system," Sviridoff, as Murphy astutely observed,

> defined himself as a reformer, not a revolutionary, one whose role was to modify, not recast, the entire order of things. The goals ascribed by [philosopher] Karl Popper to "utopian social engineers," namely, "to weave an entirely new gown, a really beautiful new world," was not a goal to which he aspired. He was rather [what Popper called] a "piecemeal engineer," ...whose responsibility it was to foster marginal or incremental changes in the system.

But did poverty in America's inner cities need utopian radicals or incremental engineers? It was not a question to which Sviridoff or his corps of able, idealistic activists would give much attention during those heady days.

And why would they? "An aura of success surrounds the city [of New Haven]," observed a Ford Foundation evaluation of the program conducted after Sviridoff left, but which could just as aptly have been written during his tenure. "Especially when viewed from afar," the report added, tellingly. From afar—and sometimes up close— the New Haven project was the jewel in the tarnished crown of antipoverty programs. It was declared "a national showcase" by *The New York Times,* "to which people make pilgrimages to see how it is done."

Five days a week, more than a thousand visitors a year came from all parts of the country and even from abroad. These visitors included school superintendents and principals, welfare directors, employment experts, social agency heads, priests and rabbis and ministers, and foundation and government officials. Most importantly, local groups planning their own programs came to visit the New Haven project. They were treated to elaborately orchestrated tours, and they were clearly impressed with what they saw.

What *did* they see?

Model Program
They might see a pre-kindergarten class in a low-income housing project; a work crew of five or six school drop-outs, clearing a trail in a local park; a storefront employment center; and particularly a school—open, surprisingly, well into the evening, serving as a neighborhood center for people from toddlers to senior citizens.

In all, upwards of 25 agencies participated in New Haven's war on poverty, and CPI sponsored something like twice that number of programs. Approximately a third of the money CPI raised went into job training (mostly under the Manpower Demonstration Act), and about a fourth into education. The rest fell broadly into the categories of recreational activities, health and other social services, and one of the first legal assistance programs in the country. There was also a cultural enrichment program called "Higher Horizons" that brought the arts more directly into participating neighborhoods and schools. Some components, like Legal Assistance and the pre-kindergarten program (the precursor of Head Start), would have national reverberations. CPI would present most of these programs to potential funders, interested government officials, and others as demonstration or pilot projects—an effective way, CPI found, of attracting national attention and funding to essentially local endeavors.

All told, the New Haven project was, if not revolutionary, a reform effort of considerable scope and consequence. And even if CPI and its allies did not discover or invent most of the individual programs that eventually were incorporated into their anti-poverty enterprise, they were among the first to propose joining these programs through a coordinated initiative—and also among the first actually to *implement* their proposals.

CPI's proposed operating style was remarkable as well: to tap (as we have seen) the energy, expertise, and creativity of their potential partners among politicians and bureaucrats. In fact, CPI went so far as to *enlarge* the roles and even the resources of the establishment players in the anti-poverty effort, so those players could be a more effective instrument of social change.

Most CPI programs were based, of course, in the half-dozen or so troubled, "multi-problem" neighborhoods identified as targets for intervention. Above all, the determination, wrote Russell Murphy, was to "break the 'cycle of poverty' ... to improve the life chances of a new generation of poor and ... make this generation self-sufficient in a highly competitive society." *Intergenerational* poverty was the conceptual focus, so the young were the primary target (and young men in particular— in the hope of reducing the incidence of single-parent families).

This group was especially at the heart of job training and education programs, the pillars of the New Haven effort. These were *success-oriented* programs, intended to equip the poor, and especially the young, with the skills that would allow them to succeed in school and in life. The goal was that every high school graduate would be employable, so the emphasis was on acquiring marketable skills and adopting appropriate social norms and work habits. These were strategies of upward mobility—in the preferred word of the time, of "acculturation."

The focus was on "work-related learning" (and learning-related work, an ancestor of the 1990s' "work-first" employment programs). Prominent efforts included middle-skill on-the-job training programs for occupations (laboratory, x-ray, and electronic technicians; telephone and machine operators; secretaries and cooks) where positions were known to be available. There was a pre-vocational training center where would-be auto mechanics, woodworkers, and draftsmen were taught the necessary skills. At the same time, "work crews" (really modified public works projects) enabled out-of-school, out-of work youth, many with criminal or delin-

quency records, to gain closely-supervised outdoor work experience in parks or other community service projects, or with a private employer, with the hope that they would then return to school or get a regular job. And basic or remedial education classes and adult work training were provided for the chronically unemployed.

The skilled and employable would, whenever possible, be placed in jobs. The unskilled or unemployable would start with an appropriate combination of education, training, work experience, and counseling, and in time this diet of services would lead to a job placement. Four Neighborhood Employment Centers recruited, counseled, tested, and placed candidates for job training or placement, and sought out potential employers to uncover, or even create, job possibilities. Staff at the centers were both professional employment counselors and neighborhood workers with no special credentials except their knowledge of the area and its residents. The underlying belief was, in Farrell's words, "that access to good jobs could be a powerful force—perhaps the single most powerful force—in breaking the cycle of dependency, the habit of poverty, in the inner city." Social work, counseling, and other human services might be necessary for the most deeply afflicted people and families, but for the most part, poverty could be cured with skills and employment. This belief also constituted a cardinal tenet for CPI.

Just as jobs and education were seen as crucial to individual mobility, schools were regarded as linchpins of community renewal and revitalization. The education component of CPI was a soup-to-nuts compensatory and supplementary program comprising everything from the aforementioned pre-school education, remedial reading, dropout prevention, and work-study programs to cultural experiences and adult literacy courses. Curriculum improvement, voluntary summer schools, and a corps of "helping teachers" (experienced teachers who supported and trained less experienced ones) strengthened existing schools. Most radically, and innovatively, one school in each of the targeted inner-city neighborhoods was transformed from a regular educational facility into a so-called "community school," open 12 to 16 hours a day as a multi-purpose, year-round public facility, a center for regular and supplementary education (adult, pre-kindergarten, work-study), and athletic and leisure-time activities for all ages. It offered access or referral to social services (health, housing, employment, legal assistance), and became, in general, the focal point for civic and neighborhood activity. "After 3 o'clock and until 10 at night," read one account, "it's everybody's school."

The vision of schools as integral parts of their communities was surely one of the most remarkable components of New Haven's assault on poverty. In this role, schools could be "a unifying force in their neighborhoods," according to CPI's guiding document, "Opening Opportunities"; "an institution assisting citizens in the study and solution of neighborhood problems," according to a New Haven Board of Education policy statement adopted soon after "Opening Opportunities." The idea was a creative updating and re-visioning of Jane Addams' settlement house—a gateway to mainstream opportunity for the newly arrived and the long-marginalized alike.

The community school epitomized the entire Gray Areas idea of comprehensive, coordinated, integrated "community action"—a far more prescriptive, goal-specific notion than the phrase later came to describe. The same could be said of the multi-

service centers opened by the Neighborhood Services Division of CPI in each targeted neighborhood. A multi-service center functioned, according to one account, as "a combination 'branch city hall,' a community center, a social-service bureau, and an information office." These offices served as bridges between neighborhood residents and the gamut of available social services they needed: food stamps (New Haven was one of their first venues); health care, including preventive health care; consumer action; fighting evictions and other legal services (though New Haven's Legal Assistance Association was incorporated as an independent agency in 1964); assistance with troubled families; and, of course, education and employment. The centers employed "neighborhood workers,"—residents working under each Neighborhood Services Director—to help coordinate services and organize neighborhoods around these activities. One of the workers' primary tasks was to recruit residents aggressively for the opportunity programs (education, jobs, and job training) and persuade them to participate—especially in remedial programs like adult literacy, for which people were often ashamed to apply. These neighborhood workers—someone called them "ward healers with consciences"—were renowned for seeking out the poor, the unemployed, and the school dropouts in churches and on street corners, as well as in bars, pool halls, and jails ("and other locations that eluded the more conventional social welfare agencies," as Russell Murphy delicately put it). It was through the "neighborhood workers" that CPI sought its version of maximum "participation." Typically, for CPI, the "participation" was in getting things done, not in picking goals and setting agendas.

After a year of this brand of broad-based community organizing and outreach, the first signs of restiveness among neighborhood residents were becoming apparent. Here and there a few of CPI's constituents (and even some of its "neighborhood workers") were beginning to complain that the program was largely the invention of white patriarchs whose decisions were beyond residents' influence. Without community control, they felt, there would be no community progress.

CPI issued a policy statement around this time insisting that "neighborhood staff shall not do *for* people, but work *with* people." That general instruction nicely embodied what Sviridoff and CPI's allies meant by "participation" and "community action."

But just beyond their walls, the rest of the world was beginning to formulate some quite different definitions.