

# Welfare Policy: Why the Past Has No Future

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**W**ith its successful offensive against social programs and human services, the Reagan administration seeks now to revise the basic assumptions that guide welfare services. Yet even before the 1980 election, welfare policy had collapsed, the victim of its supporters' vast expectations. For the liberal intelligentsia and those who administer welfare programs, welfare policy always meant something more than minimum material support for the poor. Public assistance was linked to other services that had a broadly therapeutic intent; together these programs did not merely maintain clients but sought to restructure their lives in the hope that they might better cope with the challenges of modern society. Through the intervention of human service specialists, welfare policy aimed to supply the preconditions for full participation in middle-class culture, thus narrowing the divisions between social classes. The programs included juvenile courts, community mental health clinics, halfway houses for drug addicts, and community action programs. But the events of the past two decades—abrupt expansion of welfare services followed by civil disorders, clients' rights movements, and disaffection among welfare functionaries—ultimately exhausted the therapeutic strategy and left its advocates befuddled. In the aftermath the Reagan administration has been free to gnaw at the carcass of the welfare behemoth.

Why did the therapeutic agenda fail? The answer lies in the origins of welfare policy. We can trace the notion that public social agencies should integrate marginal groups into the mainstream of American life back to the urban reformers of the Progressive era. Earlier urban observers had worried that social order in the city was threatened by the collapse of traditional social institutions. The Progressives reasoned that a new instrument, the human service agency, could be inserted into urban neighborhoods to heal the damage done to the poor, the immigrants, the factory workers, and the young. The reformers also looked to the state to sponsor these human services, thus harnessing the therapeutic impulse to public authority. In creating modern welfare policy, however, the Progressives permitted a state apparatus with sweeping powers and left clients with no voice and few rights. Reform ideology invited the welfare agency to insinuate itself into the most private affairs of its clients—a recipe for disaster only recently realized.

In light of this dismal record, therapeutic welfare policy has nothing to offer as an alternative to the bleak conservative vision now ascendant. But the past can also help us recover ways of thinking about the welfare problem that lie outside the present debate. In particular, the Progressives who took up residence in the slums learned that even badly deprived neighborhoods contained the seed of their own regeneration. This perception was stifled by the rapid triumph of statism, but by examining the road not taken we may discover possibilities for liberating our own future.

**S**everal factors, separated chronologically by more than fifty years, defined how Progressive social reformers would view the city and its problems. First, during the antebellum period genteel professionals identified the erosion of traditional institutions in the city as a threat to social peace, and invested reform with the reactionary task of restoring preurban values among the urban masses. Second, by the 1870s some reformers realized that to preserve order and aid the vulnerable, formal organizations might have to intrude upon family relationships commonly regarded as privileged. But under the influence of traditionalist ideas, those who operated the new social agencies tended to minimize and distort their clients' needs. Hence the significance of a third factor, the growing influence during the 1880s and 1890s of modern social science. By emphasizing that irresistible social forces denied individuals control over their own destiny, social science undermined the preurban faith in personal responsibility that had led charity organizations to dispense advice rather than aid.

In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the rise of new forms of capitalist enterprise set in motion parallel changes in work patterns, social norms, family structure, and public affairs. For example, the shift of labor from the home to the shop or factory accelerated the trend toward the redefinition of family relationships. With fathers no longer a steady influence in the home, the strict patriarchal code of the colonial family gave way to an enhanced role for mothers in childrearing, and to a developmental view of childhood. Another example: reorganized production allowed a physical separation between social classes, with workers soon concentrated in identifiable city quarters. As early as the 1820s this differentiation by class manifested itself in the form of "mass politics"; the first political bosses gained power in cities such as Philadelphia.

An older middle class, composed of ministers, lawyers, and doctors was threatened by these developments. What is most interesting about the response of the genteel professionals is its distinctly antimodernist expression. Many members of the gentry had been raised in the very different world of the small New England village. When a minister or doctor moved to the city, his sphere of reference was a society populated by farmers, craftsmen, and professionals. Further, he had been taught a different set of values—patriarchal authority in families,

reciprocal obligation between social classes, and respect for nonpecuniary accomplishment—than those prevailing in the city. The professional man remembered, too, that the village contained a status hierarchy in which persons of his rank exercised social and political stewardship. With the gentry dominating the city's early literary life, this collective memory became the basis for urban discourse and provided the standards for criticizing the city. New family mores, unchecked poverty, the political assertiveness of the urban masses—all signified to the middle class the absence of traditional sources of communal order and the breakdown of reciprocity between social classes.

The genteel professionals, determined to resist the encroaching forces of capitalism and modernity, moved swiftly to reassert social preeminence in the city. To preserve order and avert class conflict, some analogue to the social arrangements of the rural community would have to be invented for the metropolis. The middle class first hoped to reclaim its moral leadership directly, by distributing bibles and religious tracts to the working class and poor and by organizing Sunday schools. Later reformers leaned toward the asylum as a substitute for the patriarchal household. Neither technique succeeded as hoped: mere rhetoric could not close the class divisions that capitalism had generated in the city; nor could an institution replicate the sensitive discipline of a family. Nevertheless, failure did not deter reformers from new efforts designed to recapture a lost moral order. The assumption that urban society was gravely jeopardized by the weakening of preurban authority-structures continued to underly reform projects down to the Progressive era.

In other ways, however, the traditionalist sensibility was transformed after the Civil War. Certain reformers, notably Charles Loring Brace, objected to the romantic view of rural values and institutions shared by most urban moralists. For example, preurban rhetoric celebrated the family and paternal authority at a time when urban lower-class parents often neglected or exploited their children. Brace began to speak instead of function: families ought to be regarded as socializing instruments, and evaluated for how well or poorly they prepared their members for life in the community. By demythologizing the family, Brace created a space in which social agencies (like his own Children's Aid Society) might act with some latitude to separate children from unacceptable homes.<sup>1</sup> In the process he helped establish the belief that social order among the urban masses would be maintained, not through rhetoric or by isolating the deviant in institutions, but by organizations operating as vehicles of moral education beside or even in place of families. And we can take this logic one step further: the social agency that assists or displaces a family might share its moral authority—and use it to neutralize the hostility that the working class and the poor commonly ex-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop and Hallenbeck, 1872), pp. 22, 27-30, 40-43, 47, 234-35.

pressed toward reformers.

The typical postwar social agency did not capitalize on this possibility. People who sought aid from the local charity organization society often received a patronizing lecture on the virtues of thrift, self-sufficiency, and sobriety. In the slum itself the same message was circulated by the so-called friendly visitor, usually a woman drawn from the upper middle class who believed the poor needed nothing so much as sympathy and guidance. Such practices reflected the conviction that an individual exercised control over his immediate circumstances—still another residue of the preurban mentality. But the faith in individual potency diverged sharply from the reality of urban and industrial life. By the late nineteenth century one could no longer afix responsibility for poverty or joblessness on the victim. Here we must turn to the university, where new social science disciplines emphasized a different view of social causality. To the political economist or sociologist, an individual might fall prey to forces beyond his control, perhaps even beyond his awareness. It made no sense to counsel self-sufficiency to the man who lost his job when a business panic forced his factory to close. This message served as the immediate catalyst for Progressive reform.

**S**ocial science met the slum through the creation of the settlement house. Patterned after East London's Toynbee Hall, the first American settlements appeared in New York and Chicago in the late 1880s and spread rapidly until, by one loose count, they numbered four hundred at the turn of the century. A desire to apply scientific methods to concrete problems inspired young university graduates to take up residence in the poorest urban quarters. Settlement founders also believed that the educated middle class, having lost touch with the struggles of common life, needed to revive a sense of mutual duty between social classes. At the risk of oversimplifying a diverse movement, I will focus on the ideas of its most famous leaders, Jane Addams and Robert A. Woods. Their writings, however impressionistic and untheoretical, constituted a first attempt to define the scope and function of therapeutic welfare policy.<sup>2</sup>

Both Addams and Woods described the settlement house as a "social laboratory." Following the method of contemporary social science, the settlements aimed to amass a body of facts about local conditions and problems. The settle-

<sup>2</sup> This analysis is based on several works by Addams and Woods. By Jane Addams: *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1902); *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, 1961); and the essays "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," "The Objective Value of a Social Settlement," "Why the Ward Boss Rules," and "A Function of the Social Settlement" in Christopher Lasch, ed., *The Social Thought of Jane Addams* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). By Robert A. Woods: selected chapters in *The City Wilderness* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899); and the essays collected in *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building* (1923; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1970).

ment house resident, by living as a neighbor alongside the working class and the poor, could be at once unobtrusive and systematic in gathering accurate information. Experience, however, quickly taught the social settlements that access to the intimate facts of neighborhood life could not be gained overnight. Only after constant social intercourse—initiated first with the local children and teenagers, then their mothers, and lastly with the men of the district—did the newcomers earn a measure of acceptance.

In settlement house reports on the slums, long-standing fears about family collapse, delinquency, and the immigrants' antidemocratic proclivities surfaced once again. But there was a marked difference in tone. When Addams described the plight of the immigrant in Chicago, torn from Old World customs and demoralized because he could not practice his family trade, she voiced sympathy and respect for her subject. Similarly, she balanced her account of threats to the family—frequent joblessness, overcrowding, unstable households, and no recreation for children—with a testimonial to the steadfastness of family affections among the working class. Woods, too, paid homage to the durability of the families he observed in the neighborhood around his Boston South End House. Settlement residents most clearly demonstrated the new attitude when they discussed unemployment. Having witnessed firsthand the 1893 depression, they insisted on an environmental interpretation of joblessness rather than genetic or moral explanations.

Life in a working-class district also yielded the startling observation that each neighborhood, despite centrifugal forces, contained hidden resources for its own regeneration. Successive waves of immigration had turned neighbors into strangers; more, the district as a whole was isolated by language and custom from the mainstreams of city life and American culture. Yet working people went overboard to extend aid and kindness to those in the greatest distress. Woods noted also that, on a more advanced level, the benevolent efforts made by voluntary associations formed within the district—clubs and lodges, trade unions, street gangs—eclipsed the activities of outside philanthropists.

To Woods this impressive record suggested a simple but quite radical possibility for social reform. With few financial resources, the working class had called forth its own eclectic organizations and forged a system of mutual aid. Imagine what might be done if the district were given formal administrative responsibilities coupled with greater political autonomy. He urged measures that would restore to the neighborhood its old village powers, with local representatives controlling public welfare and education. The experience of self-government would nurture among residents an identification with the district and a commitment to its future; the neighborhood would again become the center of interest, activity, and enterprise. In short, Woods recognized that social integration was fundamentally a political process: when people shape their destiny through collective

action, they take pride in the results and feel a personal stake in the social order they have helped to create.

But what role did Woods's call for neighborhood self-determination leave for the settlement house itself? After all, the settlement did not exist merely to accumulate facts; as Addams liked to say, fact-gathering for its own sake was the business of universities. Settlements intended to apply their knowledge to the rational reconstruction of urban society. If careful observation was linked to controlled practical experiment—a laboratory in the fullest sense—the settlement workers could eliminate the social pathologies of the neighborhood and produce a better life for all inhabitants.

By this broad rationale there was no limit to the range of tasks settlement houses might undertake. Settlement residents saw themselves mediating between the neighborhood and the existing system of benevolent agencies; this served to humanize the charitable relationship while focusing aid toward the working poor who would benefit most. Addams extended the mediation concept to the city as a whole. To adjust the neighborhood population to life in an industrial city, the settlement would sponsor a host of social and educational programs. Soon the schedule at Addams's Hull House included social and political clubs, recreational activities, classes in "domestic science" for working mothers, child care and kindergarten, manual training for young people about to enter the factories, and even a labor museum in which traditional crafts might be preserved.

Woods thought experimental scientific methods suitable for improving the neighborhood's capacity for self-organization. Like the naturalist in search of a rare specimen, the settlement worker sifted through his district for "every germ" of spontaneous association. He then investigated how such collective action might be stimulated from without and directed toward "some better and worthier end." By this technique Woods expected the settlement to make the neighborhood's own efforts more efficient. At all times the settlement worker aimed to enlist community cooperation in new ventures, for he neither possessed nor desired formal authority over his constituency. The settlement house did not dictate to its neighbors.

In Addams's and Woods's statements of the settlement function, we can discern important elements of therapeutic welfare policy. Consider first the implications of settlement strategy for the practice of social agencies. The settlements represented a permanent, constantly expanding presence in the slum—the realization of Charles Loring Brace's vision of organization. This kind of social agency could observe details of local behavior invisible to the occasional interloper such as the charity visitor. In addition, the settlement movement, while seeking community rebirth, reaffirmed the principle that an outsider should penetrate a neighborhood through its individuals and families. These smaller units were the designated vehicles for social reconstruction.

Woods and Addams also contributed to justifying outside intervention in the ordinary affairs of the urban masses. First, both argued that such intervention was indispensable: in the face of threats from all sides, the worker and the immigrant needed outside support to restore a meaningful community life. We have encountered before the reform assumption that cities destroyed traditional institutions and created instead a dangerous moral vacuum. The settlement movement thus continued an old theme in urban discourse. The new environmental perspective, however, meant that urban victims would no longer be chastised for their plight—and therefore should not resent the social agency acting on their behalf. Second, Woods and Addams shared a confidence that modern social science would make intervention more effective. Social agencies now possessed thorough knowledge of social conditions, and, as every Progressive knew, better facts yielded better solutions. Lastly, the two movement leaders raised the glittering prospect that if a social agency employed certain methods it would not only be tolerated but embraced by its clients: intervention was legitimate. Settlements, too, had first met with the suspicion usually directed at reformers. But by combining neighborliness with expertise, the settlement house had been accepted as a partner in the daily struggles of working-class families, an organic member of the neighborhood.

**J**ane Addams believed that ultimate success for her movement depended upon enlisting the state in projects initiated by the settlements. After the settlement house demonstrated the utility of a program, she expected the government to assume operating responsibility and provide the financial support. Only in this way could an experimental service be made available to the entire public. She also called for the government to initiate programs for which it alone disposed of the requisite legal or fiscal wherewithal. Thus Addams envisioned for the state a far-reaching role in the reconstitution of urban community. The significance of this scheme for welfare policy can be illustrated by noting what happened when settlement and state met in two specific programs, the juvenile court and the so-called widow's pension plan.

First established in Illinois in 1899, the juvenile court was based on the conviction, popular among settlement workers and other reformers, that the criminal justice system injured young offenders to no sound public purpose. For Progressives, children were a most precious resource—one not to be dissipated through factory labor, poor education, or institutionalization. Adult courts, on the other hand, either incarcerated juveniles for serious offenses or, just as bad, simply released those accused of minor violations to return to city streets that promoted delinquency. Reformers endorsed the juvenile court as a device that might address gaps in the regular judicial apparatus.

The new creation occupied a shadowy area between legal tribunal and social agency. Juvenile court judges did not welcome defense lawyers; hearsay testimony was admissible evidence; and many proceedings were conducted entirely off record. All this made sense if, as reformers believed, the juvenile court's purpose was less to punish specific misdeeds than to understand completely how a young person's circumstances had precipitated the offense. From this nonpunitive ideal it followed that the court would seek other case dispositions besides incarceration. Another Progressive innovation, the probation system, became the preferred option because it gave judges some alternative to dismissal for juveniles charged with minor offenses. In theory the probation officer, who was trained in the latest social work techniques, monitored a youngster's environment and behavior until he had shed all traces of deviancy. The court tried to reestablish through probation a delinquent child's ties to the community. The juvenile court did not so much adjudicate as provide a surrogate for family and communal discipline thought to be lacking in working-class neighborhoods.

But if we look more closely at the juvenile court, a different reality emerges: whatever its therapeutic aspirations, it is still an instrument of the state, backed by a system of legal coercion. When reformers linked social integration to a judicial apparatus, welfare policy ceased to be a genteel avocation and became instead a form of power. Unlike the settlement house, the juvenile court could compel adherence to its recommendations and take harsh measures if necessary. Let us bear in mind, too, that Woods and Addams had justified intimate involvement by social agencies in their clients' lives. Because the juvenile court doubled as a social agency and used settlement techniques—indeed, a Hull House resident served as the first Chicago juvenile probation officer—the exercise of power could be pervasive, even unrestrained. Yet reformers, by extending the settlement analogy, had good reason to expect that the court's practices would be accepted as legitimate by juveniles and their families. Here was a model for state-sponsored human services.

In practice juvenile courts proved much more adept at expanding the state's police power than at social rehabilitation. A new population of youngsters guilty of minor offenses or loosely defined improper conduct came under the jurisdiction of the legal system. But the juvenile court demonstrated little ability to modify behavior. One could blame the lack of resources that reduced probation to a meaningless ritual, yet even where a court expanded probation efforts and worked closely with child guidance specialists, the results were poor. Judges often ignored professional advice, which may have been just as well given the crude state of scientific knowledge. More fundamentally, juveniles brought before the court never lost sight of the fact that they were engaged in an encounter with power; the threat of punishment remained. Thus, despite the court's desire to win acceptance, its clients never embraced the state in a joint effort to adjust to

middle-class values. Where there was power, no therapeutic partnership could form.

Settlement workers also played a prominent role in the campaign for widow's pension legislation. We have seen that an environmental view of poverty set apart the settlement movement from most charity activity. To the charity establishment, public relief appeared inefficient and turned recipients into dependent paupers, and therefore ought to be used only as a last resort. Well into the 1890s this perspective still dominated relief work. But charity methods proved inadequate during the economic crisis of that decade, and came under heavy attack from the settlement movement. Gradually charity officials paid less attention to the "moral" causes of poverty and recognized the influence of larger economic forces. Settlement workers and other reformers began to agitate for public insurance programs for the innocent victims of economic catastrophe, particularly the elderly poor and families without fathers. In the settlement view, it made more sense to keep a family together through public support, so that a widowed mother could raise her children in a true home, rather than force her to work and surrender the children to an institution. By 1920 the movement for old-age insurance had stalled, but a number of states had authorized "pensions" for widows with young children.

Here, too, settlement house doctrine suggested a therapeutic dimension to a simple maintenance program. Settlements had offered working-class mothers counseling in child care, hygiene, and home economics; surely impoverished widows could benefit from the same kind of expertise. The relief system would be asked to encourage modern household habits rather than just to provide a minimum standard of living. Of course, domestic tutelage required that the client reveal every facet of her life to the relief worker. This had been common in the settlement, where confidences could be shared with those of long acquaintance and neighborly association.

Once again, however, we must note that the juxtaposition of state power and therapeutic purpose can have pernicious consequences. When a welfare worker gave advice or requested information, legal sanctions loomed in the background. Because state legislatures refused to appropriate funds for all eligible families, it became necessary to devise elaborate criteria to select clients. Relief agencies tried to determine whether an applicant might work, had other sources of support, or had hidden resources; her psychological profile might single her out as an unfit mother. The client faced the threat that noncooperation would lead to a termination of benefits. Under these conditions the quest for intimate knowledge became humiliating for many women. No great distance separated the settlement ideal from the welfare caseworker's interrogation about a client's sex life, or the notorious midnight raids. Reformers only needed to add the state. Progressivism's contribution to welfare policy thus includes the record of abuse

later compiled by public assistance bureaucracies.

Even as the new public welfare agencies began to undermine therapeutic ideals, the settlement movement found itself bypassed in the tide of reform. The academic social sciences increasingly exercised intellectual hegemony over the definition of welfare policy. At the same time, social workers and city administrators stressed the need for professionalism and efficiency in welfare service delivery, repudiating the amateur style represented by the settlements. Settlement leaders acquiesced in the rise of competing models of social practice. As a consequence, no one remained to speak for the working-class neighborhood—to interpret it to society, as Jane Addams once said—or to identify what the neighborhood needed for self-renewal.

Among the social science disciplines, sociology assumed early leadership in the quest for a formal theory to guide reformers in the rational reconstruction of society. Sociologists sought particularly to improve “social control” by strengthening the artificial mechanisms that function to preserve order in modern societies. Edward A. Ross, perhaps the foremost Progressive sociologist, argued that social control would have to be directed consciously by an expanded administrative state. This state, drawing upon sociologists’ expertise, would reeducate its citizens to respond first to the corporate needs of an interdependent society. On occasion, Ross admitted, the state would have to use control techniques to break up obdurate family units.<sup>3</sup> That such intervention might require coercion was frankly admitted by Luther Lee Bernard, a fellow social control theorist. He proclaimed that the state should insist on conformity to the rules that science found to be in the interest of society. “Where a social fact is established it should become as obligatory as the laws of astronomy or physics.” Bernard expected that, given the plasticity of individual minds, the targets of state intervention would eventually acknowledge and accept its therapeutic purpose.<sup>4</sup> By implication social control theory completely depoliticized the social integration of the urban masses. Scientific control left no room for a community to define itself, as Woods had envisioned, through self-governance and administrative autonomy. Such practices left too much to chance.

As the neighborhood role diminished, that of the expert increased. Other social sciences—social psychology, psychology, and psychiatry—spoke more precisely than sociology about the techniques a trained specialist should use to assist

<sup>3</sup> Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), pp. 88, 111, 426–27, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Luther Lee Bernard, “The Transition to an Objective Standard of Social Control,” *American Journal of Sociology* 16 (1910–1911): 333, 336, 523–24, 531–35.

each client in coping with the demands of modern life. While the settlements had tried to reach the community through its individual members, this emphasis on counseling as the *goal* of therapeutic practice signified a basic shift in orientation. Advocates of the new approach began to distinguish themselves as professionals. By the 1920s they had delineated a field of social work with its own individual-casework methodology that required advanced study in professional schools. Further distancing themselves from the settlement movement, social workers tried to sanitize therapeutic practice of any reform content.

The consolidation of statist welfare policy was completed in the arena of urban politics. Elected officials, under pressure to improve public services for all social classes, turned to privately sponsored municipal research bureaus to reorganize city departments and rationalize administrative procedures. These management specialists—some of whom, like Henry Bruère, had been settlement house residents—often shared the settlement conviction that government ought to extend welfare services to the working class and the poor. City governments thus began to operate a variety of social programs, including public health stations, tenement code enforcement, recreational facilities and public baths, visiting nurses, and milk quality inspections. These measures contributed to the well-being of the entire city population. But there was a cost, too: reformers became convinced that administrative efficiency required centralization and sophisticated knowledge. No place remained for local autonomy through which working-class citizens might learn to manage services for themselves. To the professional administrator, of course, such involvement meant nothing because public agencies, properly organized, satisfied the most pressing needs of the urban masses.

Settlement workers greeted the professionalization and bureaucratization of social agencies with deep ambivalence. On the one hand, Woods and a colleague asserted that administrative solutions to neighborhood decay threatened to undermine the foundations of democratic government. Indeed, the very rationalizing processes so beloved by middle-class reformers made the public domain more baffling to common people and increased their sense of isolation and futility. But the same two writers also complained that indigenous working-class organizations were often manipulated by outsiders—presumably bosses—in ways that stifled initiative. When offered the opportunity to support reform causes, the settlement's neighbors proved unready to assume responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Amidst such confusions it is not surprising that Woods finally threw up his hands in frustration. "I may be allowed here to express a wish that there might be a long 'off-season,' during which nobody might use the word 'democracy' and we might have

<sup>5</sup> Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon: A National Estimate* (New York: Russell Sage, 1922), pp. 360, 316-17, 72.

the opportunity of developing a fresh psychological approach to its meaning.”<sup>6</sup> Neighborhood autonomy as a means of collective definition had lost a leading advocate.

**A**s we consider the future of welfare policy, we must confront the meaning of the past. Therapeutic welfare policy proved to be a resounding failure. The working class and the poor never accepted the state apparatus as a well-meaning partner; on the contrary, clients regarded welfare functionaries with sullen resentment. This disdain—an inchoate resistance to power—reflected people’s unwillingness to view themselves as defective personalities, to be rehabilitated much as an automobile is fixed by a mechanic. Welfare agencies learned to use their power with striking capriciousness against individuals who lacked the resources to protect themselves. Eventually the policy ideologues and professionals, disenchanted with the obvious gap between theory and reality, decided to reform the bureaucracy by institutionalizing client “input.” This approach—taken to greatest extreme by the community action program but tried in some form almost everywhere—sought to make clients more effective by allowing them to demand better services. For the policy planners, however, clients never lost their principal identification as service recipients who needed benefits and counseling. Participation became the latest therapeutic technique.

Against the therapeutic model, we would do well to reiterate Robert Woods’s early insight that social integration is best strengthened by the experience of political action. He observed the inner resiliency of urban communities and concluded that this capacity had to be given political expression. If people were to see themselves as members of the larger community (the city or the nation), they needed the forums in which to develop leaders, argue and express conflict, and ultimately create their own self-governing institutions. Although Woods himself thought outside expertise could enhance local resources, the therapeutic approach was in fact incompatible with the political one. Social agencies treated people as passive objects whose refusal to welcome intervention was taken as a sign of pathology. No room remained for autonomous action. But while therapeutic welfare agencies helped to maintain social order—the enduring preoccupation of urban reformers—that order could not be made legitimate. For people will acknowledge as just or fair only a social order that they themselves help to define.

This political understanding suggests that we ask neighborhoods to create a shared identity among those effectively disenfranchised by the concentration of

<sup>6</sup> “The Settlement Reconsidered in Relation to Other Neighborhood Agencies,” in Woods, *Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, p. 270.

power in distant bureaucracies, corporate and state alike. It is not clear, however, that the neighborhood unit can sustain this burden. During most of this century, private investment patterns and public programs encouraged people to flee urban communities until these maintained only a marginal existence. For example, to city planners with elaborate dreams, neighborhood texture counted for nothing next to the monuments that emerged from urban renewal and the highway trust fund. Nevertheless, while many districts succumbed, others rallied themselves, mustered their limited resources, and held their ground. That we have recently witnessed a visible surge in local organization gives cause for modest optimism.

But to become the vehicle for social identification, local initiative must be given a substantial political content. This remains the blind spot of conservatives who celebrate the vitality of churches, kinship networks, and voluntary associations. The capacity of such groups to resist encroaching power on the modern scale is severely limited; they can flourish only under a benign sovereign. And that in turn means that authority now vested in public bureaucracies and private corporations will have to be devolved to ward-based, participatory governing councils. To these political bodies will go responsibility for planning and development, administration of public services and social programs, and local investment. In effect, this welfare policy reasserts the importance of place, the notion that people rise with their communities and not in spite of them.

If the recesses of the past can help us formulate an alternative to therapeutic or conservative welfare policy, historical inquiry also teaches the need for great caution. Exaggerated hopes and unexamined assumptions led us once to construct a massive edifice of power that enjoyed wide latitude and inflicted much pain on its subjects. A political approach to the problem of membership in the collectivity still entails the exercise of formidable power, even if by citizens themselves. People can be harmed by their neighbors, perhaps as badly as by the state, especially when localities suffer the same class divisions as society as a whole. Against this grim possibility we can only hope that power will be concealed behind fewer mystifications and will therefore enjoy no moment of peace.