

Paul Davidoff: An Appreciation

Paul Davidoff's memorial service, held at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York, produced a remarkable turnout of people from all walks of life, all his battles and alliances: neighbors from Brooklyn, Larchmont, and New Hampshire (where he vacationed, and on busman's holiday helped challenge discriminatory rural zoning practices); colleagues from schools where he taught: Penn (1958–65), Hunter (1965–69), and Queens (1982 on); legions from civil rights, housing, and neighborhood groups all over the New York metropolitan area; and the best of the city's liberal political establishment, with which he worked closely: Ruth Messinger, Elizabeth Holtzman, Bella Abzug, Al Vann, Carol Bellamy. I once half-jokingly observed that the expression "a famous planner" was something of an oxymoron. Paul came as close as any of our colleagues to contradicting that bit of professional self-deprecation.

He was a man totally committed to equity and justice, one whose work and life were of whole cloth. The term "advocacy planning" and its underlying rationale were

pretty much his copyright. He saw planning not as a neutral skill but as a tool that could be used to serve a wide range of ends and masters. The poor and minorities were his central concern, and he wanted planners to devote their energies to increasing their economic and political power.

Everything he did personally and professionally, as a lawyer and planner, lived out the concept of advocacy he propounded in his seminal November 1965 *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* article, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning." His zest for politics extended to running for Congress in 1968 from his Westchester County district; had he succeeded, he is one person who would have made a real difference in that body.

In 1969, he formed the Suburban Action Institute (later renamed the Metropolitan Action Institute), with the goal of using research and litigation, along with other strategies, to open up housing and jobs for minorities and the poor, especially in the suburbs. He saw the symbiotic relationship between city and suburb—and between jobs

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and housing, and he shaped such strategies as "inclusionary zoning" and "inclusionary revitalization" to make sure government used its powers to force the private market to consider those it tended to neglect or harm. He applied these strategies to suburbs in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—attacking zoning restrictions; requiring relocating corporations to protect the rights of their minority workers; and applying civil rights protections to major public works like New York's Westway highway project and to the use of community development and housing subsidies. He was an expert court witness, initiator of lawsuits, author of studies, organizer, leader.

Paul was an imposing presence, big of body and voice, someone who, when he saw something wrong, tried to do something about it. Yet he was also a gentle man, with a penchant for telling good stories (and bad jokes) and a way of treating everyone with respect and affection. Above all, he was almost never dispirited—a remarkable quality, considering the times we live in and the deep personal losses he had suffered.

The most moving segment of his memorial ceremony was when, Friends worship service-style, person after person arose to give a brief, spontaneous remembrance. Paul Davidoff was, as one person in that gathering put it, "our drum major for justice."