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COMMENT



Advocacy Planning in the Age of Trump: An Opportunity to Influence National Urban Policy

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In the years following World War II, the United States experienced a period of unmatched economic prosperity and political influence, which many scholars refer to as ‘Pax Americana.’ While the majority of Americans saw their employment status, household incomes, housing conditions, and overall quality of life significantly improve during this period, the majority of African American, Latino, and Native American communities did not (Lane, 2012). Growing disparities between rising economic expectations in the general population and limited educational, employment, and housing opportunities afforded to racial minorities – reinforced by institutional racism based in white privilege – laid the foundations for the American Civil Rights movement which grew in size and influence throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1965, Paul Davidoff, reflecting upon growing racial inequality in American society, wrote, ‘Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning’ which challenged several of the most important assumptions underlying the rational model of planning which dominated mid-century professional practice in the United States and Europe (Davidoff, 1965). This article, which remains one of the most often cited in planning, argues against the existence of a unitary public interest in favor of multiple public interests based upon race, class, religion, ethnicity, and gender. The article also questions the objectivity of local planning agencies which Davidoff believed advanced policies and plans benefitting powerful economic elites at the expense of those living in poor and working-class neighborhoods.

Having identified these limitations of mid-century planning, Davidoff proposed what William F. Whyte called a “social invention” to address the disturbing role planners were playing in promoting uneven patterns of metropolitan development at a time when African American youth were engaged in courageous acts of non-violent civil disobedience to dismantle racial discrimination in education, employment, housing and transportation (Whyte, 1983). Davidoff urged social-justice oriented planners to work with poor, racial minorities, immigrant communities, senior citizens and persons with disabilities to produce high quality plans featuring redistributive policies and participatory policy-making processes to serve as effective alternatives to those being proposed by centralized planning agencies privileging the needs of, what Logan and Molotch termed, urban growth machines (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

By working with groups frequently ignored by mainstream planning to generate oppositional plans, Davidoff believed advocacy planners could transform municipal planning commissions into deliberative bodies capable of critically assessing the underlying assumptions, theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence and planning recommendations of competing plans – thereby producing more thoughtful and equitable planning decisions. Inspired by Davidoff’s ideas and angered by

deteriorating conditions within American cities in the mid 1960s, hundreds of community activists, elected officials, and professional planners came together, under the leadership of Walter Thabit, to form Planners for Equal Opportunity (PEO) which challenged planning agencies and schools to diversify their staffs, faculty, and student bodies. PEO also pressured these institutions to abandon their support of urban renewal, public housing, and federal highway policies that displaced, isolated, and concentrated the poor (Thabit, 1999). Furthermore, PEO encouraged planners to create plans aimed at expanding educational, employment, and housing opportunities for city residents with the fewest choices. Between 1965 and 1974, PEO members generated reports, plans, legislation, lawsuits, and organizing campaigns encouraging municipal planning agencies to integrate their staffs and boards, abandon inner city freeway projects, reject clearance-oriented redevelopment policies, promote socially integrated housing, and embrace more participatory forms of planning.

Sadly, many of the PEO members who led these efforts were fired for their activism and left our profession. In 1969, Chester Hartman, who was denied tenure at Harvard for the assistance he and his students provided to communities opposing the urban renewal policies of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, launched Planners Network (PN) to bring local activists working for progressive change together (Hartman, 2002). For the past forty years, PN has served as an important vehicle enabling local activists and progressive planners to share their community organizing experiences, learn about innovative urban policies and planning methods, advocate for increased funding for community development, and establish relationships with activists from other countries engaged in the Right to the City Movement (Lefebvre, 1996).

While Davidoff's advocacy planning ideas and methods never achieved dominance within our profession, they did inspire generations of planners to support resident-led planning in economically distressed neighborhoods. This in turn improved living conditions within these areas while generating useful models of equity-promoting development that could be replicated in areas facing similar challenges. A few examples of such practices include:

- **Ron Shiffman's** work in establishing the Bed-Stuy Restoration Corporation, one of the nation's first community development corporations, which has produced thousands of affordable housing units and launched hundreds of successful minority businesses in this once-devastated section of Brooklyn. Also, Ron's role in creating the Pratt Institute for Community and Environmental Development which has trained thousands of community leaders and graduate students for socially-responsible planning and design in underserved communities.
- **Juan Salgado's** role in expanding the organizing efforts of Chicago's Resurrection Project, establishing the Instituto del Progreso Latino – a nationally recognized leader in the field of workforce and human capital development, and creating the Instituto's Health Sciences Career Academy which serves as a critical pipeline for low-income residents of Chicago's Southside seeking employment in the health care sector.
- **Michelle Whetten's** successful efforts to redevelop Hurricane Katrina-damaged Lafitte Public Housing Project in New Orleans, leadership of the Enterprise Community Partnership's Gulf Coast Redevelopment Fund which has produced more than \$320 million in revitalization loans and grants along the Gulf Coast, and technical assistance which enhanced the organizational capacity of New Orleans' Providence Community Housing.
- **Jackie Leavitt's** creation of UCLA's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment which brings students and labor activists together to conduct action research projects designed to remove the most serious barriers to labor justice for low-wage workers in LA.

Ambitious efforts to organize poor and working-class communities in support of redistributive urban policies and participatory planning, which these and other advocacy planning efforts supported, also helped establish a popular base for the election of progressive city councils and mayors in a number of American cities. Pierre Clavel analyzed the reform efforts of equity-minded activists, planners, and officials in Burlington, VT; Hartford, CT; Cleveland, OH; Santa Monica, CA; Berkeley, CA; Chicago, IL, and Boston, MA in the 1970s and 1980s in his 'Progressive Cities and Activists in City Hall' books (Clavel, 1986; Clavel, 2013). In these volumes, Clavel explains how elements of the community-based planning movement, in which advocacy planners frequently played an important role, joined public employee unions, good government groups, Civil Rights organizations and environmental justice networks in formulating progressive municipal agendas and electing candidates committed to implementing these ideas. Clavel chronicles the role these "Progressive Cities" played in implementing such important municipal reforms as: participatory budgeting processes, inclusionary zoning ordinances, rent control regulations, industrial retention and expansion programs, first source hiring practices, linkage development policies, urban land trusts, buy local initiatives, and living wage policies during the Reagan and Bush Administrations when neo-liberal values and policies dominated national political discourse.

Paralleling these neighborhood and city-scale reform efforts in the 1970s and 1980s, was the growth of state-wide citizen action groups representing poor and working-class interests, inspired by the work of Saul D. Alinsky, Fred Ross, and George Wiley (Fisher, 1984). Among these organizations were the Welfare Rights Organization (WRO), Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Citizen Action (CA), Gamaliel Foundation (GF), Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), National People's Action (NPA), Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO, now Faith in Action), and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP). These organizations were frequently supported by advocacy-oriented planners and faculty who undertook research, planning, and design initiatives to advance the legislative efforts of these groups. During the last quarter of the 20th century these organizations, in partnership with industrial and public employee unions, environmental justice organizations, civil rights groups, and women's organizations, were responsible for passing significant state and federal legislation related to: utility rate reform, prescription drug pricing, workers' right to know (exposure to toxics in the workplace), bank redlining, commercial credit access, voter registration reform, family medical leaves, transportation alternatives and renewable energy. They also played an important role in electing an impressive number of progressive officials to local, state, and federal offices.

In 2008, a first-term U.S. Senator who chose to work for Chicago's Southside Organizing Project rather than a 'blue chip' law firm, following his graduation from Harvard Law School, was elected America's first African American president. Assuming the presidency during the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, Barack Obama managed to restore the health of the American economy, pass historic legislation extending health coverage to more than 30 million individuals, move the nation towards clean energy, halt the development of a nuclear weapons program in Iran, pass the Marriage Equality Act, establish a new consumer protection agency and help build an international consensus for dramatic action on climate change.

In 2016, former U.S. Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and New York City businessman, Donald Trump, competed against each other in a hotly contested presidential election. While Clinton won the popular vote by 2.9 million votes, Trump secured a decisive majority within the Electoral College by advocating neo-liberal policies and nativist values designed to "Make America Great Again" and was subsequently elected the 45th president of the United States.

Since taking office, President Trump has slashed domestic spending programs for affordable housing, public transportation, workforce development, and supplemental nutrition. He has

withdrawn the United States from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, reduced auto emission standards, ended America's Clean Energy initiative, and expanded private drilling for gas and oil on public lands. After voicing support for common sense gun control following a mass killing at a public high school in Florida, he has vigorously opposed such reforms as: extended waiting periods and raising the purchase age for firearms. Working with a Republican Congress he also passed a massive federal tax cut, disproportionately benefiting large corporations and the wealthy, which, along with increased military spending, has resulted in record increases in the national debt. In addition, he has waged an aggressive campaign to reduce both illegal and legal immigration into the United States which recently resulted in the separation of more than 2,500 children from their parents for families crossing the Mexican/US border to legally request asylum. Finally, he has taken unilateral action to "rebalance" American trade by withdrawing the United States from previously negotiated trade agreements while imposing unprecedented tariffs on goods coming from Canada, Mexico, South America, Europe, and China – which has destabilized the stock market.

While many of these actions have negatively affected the urban poor, they have proven extremely popular with President Trump's political base. This includes millions of working-class and middle-income whites living in older industrial cities within the American 'Rust Belt', who have endured stagnant wages, heightened job insecurity and persistent poverty due to massive deindustrialization caused, in large part, by increased international competition (Mallach & Brachman, 2013). As the U.S. approaches the mid-point in President Trump's first term, planners concerned about the long-term impact of his policies have the opportunity to work with others to craft a progressive urban policy agenda attractive to those living in 'Legacy Cities' within the American Heartland, who are feeling economically vulnerable and culturally ignored within our new information-based global economy.

Advocacy planners and their allies who undertake this work should give serious consideration to the rich, urban reform legacy of the neighborhood organizing movement of the 1960s, the progressive administrations of the 1970s and 1980s and the state-wide citizen action campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. Drawing upon the most transformative policies of this era will enable advocacy planners and their allies to formulate a national urban agenda that responds to the needs of Midwesterners struggling to make ends meet in a deeply challenged regional economy. Such an agenda would provide a progressive alternative to President Trump's neo-liberal policies that promise a nostalgic return to the optimism and comforts of Post-World War II America through unregulated markets, free trade, lower taxes, fewer environmental regulations, aggressive military spending, down-sized social welfare programs, nativist immigration policies, and thinly-veiled appeals to white supremacy and racism. This 'promise' is one the Trump Administration is highly unlikely to be able to deliver on, without the Keynesian economic policies, acceptance of labor's rights, investment in public education and human services, skepticism towards militarism, empathy towards those displaced by violence, terrorism, natural disasters, and economic deprivation, and international solidarity and cooperation which accounted for so much of that period's success.

What might a progressive urban policy agenda for economically challenged Midwestern cities built upon the urban policy achievements of the social movements of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s look like? Our review of the most successful policy initiatives from this period suggests the following ten-points as an initial framework for such an agenda.

- (1) Pursuit of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing every American access to quality lifelong public education as a prerequisite for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as promised by our founding fathers and advocated by Robert Moses, former leader of the Mississippi Freedom Project and The Algebra Project.

- (2) Commitment to “housing as a right” as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Housing Act of 1949.
- (3) Replacement of the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare), with a universal single-payer health insurance program, delivered through an expansion of Medicaid incorporating the best aspects of both Canadian and French health care.
- (4) Establishment of a guaranteed minimum family income, similar to that proposed by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan during the Nixon Administration, through a significant expansion of the existing Low-Income Tax Credit Program.
- (5) Launch of a domestic “Marshall Plan” to provide jobs for the long-term unemployed, especially those living in the Rust Belt’s Legacy Cities. This program would construct the infrastructure needed to create the Smart City, Region, and Nation of the 21st century, focused on energy-conserving buildings, green infrastructure, transportation alternatives (non-auto-centric), and climate change adaptation projects.
- (6) Direct the considerable research, teaching, and outreach capacities of America’s 1860’s land grant and 1890’s historically black colleges and universities to address our planet’s rapidly escalating food security crisis, through the development of new, sustainable agriculture and aquaculture policies and practices.
- (7) Embrace a “zero waste approach” to solid waste management to dramatically reduce the volume of materials being placed in landfills and/or incinerated, through the minimization of product packaging, recycling of residential, commercial, and industrial wastes, and composting of organic materials.
- (8) Implementation of ambitious state and federal industrial policies to assist firms in ‘sun-setting’ industries in redirecting their technologies, and retraining their workforces to successfully develop innovative new products and services for economic sectors likely to experience significantly higher than average future growth.
- (9) Encourage colleges and universities to establish long-term partnerships with civic associations, non-profit organizations, trade unions, municipal and state agencies, and community-minded corporations, to develop workable solutions to the most serious ‘wicked’ environmental, economic, and social problems confronting local communities within this region.
- (10) Extension of most favored credit status to worker owned and operated businesses by the United States Comptroller of the Currency, to expand employment opportunities for those living in severely distressed communities, especially older workers who have been displaced, and new immigrants seeking a place in our ever-changing, knowledge-based economy.

Advocacy planners in the U.S. have a unique opportunity during the coming year to work with organizations representing marginalized groups from frequently-neglected communities and regions to formulate a progressive urban policy agenda, built upon the successful urban reforms of the last quarter of the 20th Century. In doing so, progressive planners can offer alienated working and middle-class white Midwesterners a meaningful political alternative to the neo-liberal policies of the Trump Administration. In creating such an agenda, they will be offering residents, institutional leaders, and elected officials from a region struggling to find its place in the new global economic order, the opportunity to consider and embrace alternative approaches to advancing racial and social justice at the national scale – just as Paul Davidoff had encouraged them, in an earlier era, to do at the municipal and regional scales of government. In doing so, we can encourage a thoughtful debate on the promise and limitations of neo-liberal versus progressive national urban policies, in order to provide working and middle-class white families from economically challenged regions, especially in the American

Heartland, with opportunities to actively support policies and political leaders that more effectively address their economic and political interests.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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