

Rolland F. Smith, Neighborhood Centers

What John Grabowski's informative paper illustrates is that the history of Cleveland has always been a tale of two cities. Its partitioning has been a product of physical dividers: rivers, ridges, rails and roads; but the roots have always been economic. So we had back then and have now both the best of times and the worst of times in our two cities.

Today, the successor to Euclid Avenue is the outer ring suburbs connected by a Corridor to the developing Downtown and University Circle. The second city is what we now call "the neighborhoods" where the poverty rate ranges from 50 to 90%, the drop out and crime rates soar, and the population rate plunges. It is also where you find our neighborhood centers.

These centers are testimonies to a vibrant tradition of philanthropy. Yet the second city flounders as the first city prospers. Why? Some would say, gloating over Society demise, that it demonstrates anew the triumph of capitalism and the failure of socialism. Yet, as Michael Harrington demonstrated, the amount of public subsidies to the affluent far outweighs those to the "other America". But, of course, what is called investment in the first city is called welfare in the second. Investment focuses on assets, is strategic and long term. Welfare focuses on deficits, is piece-meal, and year to year.

It is problematical whether we can accurately call Cleveland neighborhoods "neighborhoods" at all. Indeed, Euclid Avenue and its successor meet the definition better than what we usually call "the neighborhoods". Perhaps "neighborhood" is no longer a descriptive but a heuristic concept. That is, "neighborhood" depicts not what is, but points to what might be.

Is that the challenge the historians throw us community activists? Recognizing the historic significance of neighborhoods in the development of people, we need to explore the regeneration of communities not merely as places of common residence but as opportunities to participate in economic and political power. At least that is the challenge I take for the twenty plus neighborhood centers in the settlement house tradition. To restore former neighborhoods is a lost cause. But to recreate community is a must if the city is to survive. For Cleveland cannot remain a tale of two cities; for the prospering first city is being undermined by the floundering second city. The very demise of Euclid Avenue should be a prophetic warning. Social entropy cannot be overcome in part. We are all in this together.