ONE

Professional Turf Battles in the Planning of the Mobilization for Youth Project

IRONIES OF URBAN REFORM

SOCIAL PROBLEMS do not exist simply because bad social conditions abound. Powerful people decide what and—in many instances—who is a social problem. In the absence of effective social movements by the socially oppressed, the determination of the existence, nature of, and proposed solutions to the social conditions they endure rest with society's social policy–focused institutions and the elites who run them. In the late 1950s and early1960s private foundations and federal government agencies responded to profound demographic, social, and political changes that altered the landscape of American cities by initiating urban reform programs that ostensibly addressed the problems of juvenile delinquency and poverty among low-income people of color. One of the earliest and the best known of these was the Mobilization for Youth (MFY) project and at the center of that social policy response was the collision of two important national values; science and democracy.

Whereas the production and application of scientific knowledge are organized through a hierarchy of professional expertise, the exercise of the classic, participatory ideal of democracy presumes effective mechanisms of direct mass-scale participation. This conundrum generated insightful ironies (i.e., outcomes "of events contrary to what was, or might have been expected")[1] regarding the use of social scientists and other elite professionals as agents of urban reform. Consistent with my focus on elite competition, community action, and democratic theory, in this chapter I examine the role of elite competition in the origins of Mobilization for Youth, divergent models of community action held by the two major competing camps involved in the planning of MFY, and the important democratic theory–related ironies of urban reform that manifested themselves in that dispute.[2]

MOBILIZATION FOR YOUTH

The Mobilization for Youth project is generally considered to be the most influential of the immediate project precursors to the War on Poverty Community Action Program and its planning offers an excellent portal through which to examine important ironies of urban reform and changing democratic processes. Such an examination is especially important because the accounts of the origins of Mobilization for Youth tend to ignore its first three years.[3] The answers to several questions for this period are particularly revealing. *Why* did settlement house, government agency, and social science elites decide to ameliorate the problems of juvenile delinquency and poverty among low-income, inner-city residents of color? *How* did they conceptualize these problems? And *what* solutions did they propose?

The Lower East Side: Mobilization for Youth's Project Target Area

Geographically, the Mobilization for Youth project target area consisted of most, but not all, of Manhattan's Lower East Side. In the upper (i.e., northern) central portion of the Island of Manhattan was Harlem, another economically depressed section of the city. The slum conditions of both of those sections of the city's wealthiest borough were well suited for juvenile delinquency and related social problems.

In 1960 the MFY project target area, with its more than one hundred thousand residents, contained a high concentration of slums.[4] Located within the boundaries of the MFY project's thirteen slum-area census tracts were six low-income housing projects and many dilapidated tenements. A 1961 MFY survey found that only 27 percent of the area's residents had attained a high school education or better and most of its breadwinners were employed in low-paying, semiskilled, unskilled, or service-related jobs. Unemployment was high. One out of eight of the persons surveyed who usually worked were unemployed at the time of the MFY target-area survey. That same survey found that 14 percent of area households received "welfare" from old age assistance, aid to dependent children, or general welfare assistance; with some households receiving multiple forms of aid.[5]

Moreover, the area's slums were rapidly changing in their ethnic composition. From 1960 through 1967 the percentages of, mostly low-income, Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the area nearly doubled as many Jewish and Italian residents moved out.[6] The MFY target area's problems were further compounded by the fact that a large number of its residents (22 percent), most of whom were Puerto Ricans and African Americans, were recent arrivals to the Lower East Side who had lived there for less than five years.[7] In addition, many of the area's social service agencies pulled out,[8] and those that stayed faced the formidable challenge of using reduced philanthropic

funding to meet the substantial needs of people who were perceived as being racially and ethnically different from those populations the agencies were accustomed to serving.[9]

It was within this social and economic context that local social service agencies worried about a dramatic rise in gang violence and other youth crime.[10] Indeed, children's court and police department statistics showed that youth offenses in the Mobilization for Youth project target area more than doubled from 1951 through 1960, a faster rate of increase than for both all of Manhattan and the city as a whole. Area residents were also worried, as was revealed in a 1961 MFY target area survey that asked them to rank five problems facing the area. Forty percent chose teenagers' behavior as number one and 65 percent selected teenagers' behavior as either the biggest or the next biggest problem.[11]

ELITE COMPETITION IN THE
ORIGINS OF MOBILIZATION FOR YOUTH

THE HENRY STREET SETTLEMENT

In response to this growing concern about juvenile delinquency the Henry Street Settlement decided to address the issue. During the summer of 1957 a businessman attending a meeting of the Henry Street Settlement board of directors offered to fund the cost of a plan to address the area's increasingly alarming problem of juvenile delinquency.[12] His contribution was the seed money to what became an ambitious grant proposal. The forging of that blueprint involved considerable time, effort, and conflict as competing groups of professionals battled over appropriate goals, strategies, and tactics.[13] That recurring conflict and its various outcomes were central to the rise and ultimately the fall of the Mobilization for Youth project.

The first controversy was over which area institution should have administrative control of Mobilization for Youth. Whereas other conflicts took place between the settlement house leaders and alliances of professional social scientists and social workers, this dispute was largely among the six area settlement houses and other area social service agencies themselves.[14] The first draft of a MFY proposal to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), completed in April 1958, specified that the Henry Street Settlement would administer the project. According to that early proposal, Mobilization's program director would report to Henry Street director Helen Hall and a coordinating council would ensure representation of participating area agencies.

Representatives of other area settlements, social service agencies, and miscellaneous local institutions, however, had other ideas. They argued that because Mobilization for Youth was intended to serve much of the Lower East Side it should be operated by the Lower East Side Neighborhood Association

(LENA). With LENA running Mobilization for Youth it seemed less likely that the highly regarded Henry Street Settlement, which was established in 1893,[15] would expand its turf at the expense of other area settlement houses and social service agencies.[16] In November the contestants reached a compromise whereby Henry Street retained fiscal control but the project would have its own board of directors, consisting of representation from LENA, the settlement houses, and other participating agencies.[17]

The settlements and other area social service agencies had no choice but to agree to some type of cooperative arrangement. In its response to the initial Henry Street proposal, NIMH specified two funding requirements that were also intended to help reform the existing agencies. First, the Lower East Side community must demonstrate its "readiness" to initiate such an ambitious undertaking. Second, the revised proposal must contain a research and evaluation component.[18] The NIMH funding preconditions pushed the Henry Street Settlement away from its customary ways of thinking and acting. The first requirement ensured that Henry Street would work with other settlements and other social service agencies in launching a community-wide initiative. The second mandate forced the settlements to affiliate themselves with university-based social scientists. If Mobilization for Youth had remained a Henry Street Settlement project that would have greatly reduced the likelihood that it would consider new and innovative approaches to addressing the problem of juvenile delinquency. Forcing Henry Street to work with others was a powerful leverage that pressured the old and highly respected settlement to allow Mobilization for Youth to become a model for innovation rather than a confirmation and promoter of the social services status quo.

NIMH's Rejection of the Henry Street Settlement Proposal

United behind a community-wide, anti–juvenile delinquency initiative, the settlement house leaders' next hurdle in obtaining the funding they needed was the issue of whether their proposal was sufficiently innovative to win federal funding. In its effort to obtain funding for Mobilization for Youth, Henry Street Settlement director Helen Hall and MFY director James McCarthy met with officials of the National Institute of Mental Health during the summer of 1958. Hall recalled that NIMH indicated that it would not fund the entire project. Its interest was limited to the proposal's program to prevent delinquency by engaging preadolescents in recreational and educational activities.[19] But Hall and other settlement leaders wanted a broader "saturation" approach, which they regarded as unique. Hall stated that the most important and innovative aspect of their proposal was its

> attack on the multiple causes of delinquency over a wide geographical area
> in a city slum, bringing to bear every device and every known—or to be

devised—method to change the social climate of the area. We wanted to get away from a piecemeal approach and to deal with the community as a whole. It was an effort to saturate a whole poverty area with services enough to change its living conditions.[20]

The funding of their saturation approach would have fulfilled the settlements' dream by providing them with an opportunity to demonstrate what could happen if, for once, they were granted the money they needed to employ all of their methods at one time in one place. The settlement house leaders were confident that they already possessed the necessary knowledge and know-how. They just needed the money to put it to use.[21] In their view, existing social service agencies such as the settlements should be the recipients of ample funding; not the targets of reform.

The saturation approach had still another meaning for Henry Street and the other settlements it aligned itself with in the quest for funding. By affirming and testifying to the effectiveness of the settlement houses and their methods it would win them *national* attention and prestige. Such recognition was especially important because settlements in the late 1950s faced many challenges to their hegemony over the amelioration of the effects of urban poverty. Those confrontations included charges of class paternalism and irrelevance by social scientists and militant community organizers, and concerns about the settlements' ability to adapt to more effectively meet the needs of clients of color. By saturating the Lower East Side with social services the settlements hoped to regain their status as cutting edge leaders in social reform.[22]

Unfortunately for the settlements, the NIMH and its social science allies disliked three components of their saturation approach. First, the saturation of social services approach stressed the provision of services to individuals and families rather than community organization that involved more than the settlements' view of community organization as coordination among social service agency heads.[23] Second, the settlements deemphasized the need for research to obtain new knowledge. Third, the settlements did not push for local institutional reform.

In describing the original Mobilization for Youth proposal, Winslow Carlton, chair of the Henry Street Settlement House board of directors, acknowledged that their saturation approach consisted of "a melange of partly tested programs from settlement house experience," which "didn't have any real coherence, except that it zeroed in on simple aspects of the problem."[24] But Carlton felt that the comprehensiveness of the Henry Street plan was its chief innovation,[25] a position consistent with that of Henry Street Settlement director Helen Hall who believed that additional innovative programs would evolve through the saturation process of trial and error. As she put it, "We felt that the concentration of services in a wide area was the most important innovation in the Mobilization for Youth plans" and "expected

that many new ways of dealing with the problems of a neighborhood such as ours would grow out of it."[26] To the settlements their saturation approach was bold and innovative. The National Institute of Mental Health disagreed.[27]

NIMH Gains Control of MFY by Setting Conditions for Funding

After NIMH rejected the original Mobilization for Youth funding proposal the technical review panel insisted on two changes to facilitate a shift of power to area residents. First, the revised proposal must demonstrate cooperation among not only agencies within the Lower East Side but with powerful institutions based outside of the project's target area. In this way previously unaccountable institutions, such as the school system, would be encouraged to share power in anticipation of the established project ultimately becoming "indigenous."[28] The second mandate was that the revised plan include a research and evaluation component[29] guided by social science theory.[30] That research and evaluation component requirement meant, in effect, that the settlements must align themselves with social scientists to receive federal funding for MFY. This prying open of the traditional settlement house approach to the question of who should decide issues of community reform provided another powerful leverage for social-agency reform.

The alliance between settlement house leaders and social scientists, however, did not necessarily mean that the project would be innovative. That depended in large part on the social scientists chosen. The same year that the Henry Street Settlement launched Mobilization for Youth (1957), New York University psychologist Isadore Chein wrote *A Proposal for a Community-Centered Demonstration and Research Project Aimed at the Control of Maladaptive Behavior Among Juveniles*.[31] Chein's emphasis on a psychological approach that stressed counseling and group therapy suggested that he would work well with the saturation of social services–oriented settlement house originators of MFY, especially since he endorsed the saturation idea and needed a community in which to test his strategy.[32] But Chein reportedly had a personal conflict with Helen Hall[33] and the settlement house workers ultimately allied themselves with two sociologists then conducting a study of juvenile delinquency, Lloyd Ohlin and Richard Cloward. Ohlin was the director of the Columbia University School of Social Work Research Center[34] and Cloward was a Columbia University social work professor affiliated with that center. These sociologists were a perfect match for the NIMH reform goals. Indeed, their book, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, provided the "opportunity theory" rationale for the War on Poverty and some of its influential project precursors, including Mobilization for Youth.[35] This was not the case, however, for the relationship between the settlement house leaders and the Columbia University professors involved in the planning and administration of MFY. From its beginning that alliance was an uneasy one.[36]

Conflict Between the Settlement House Leaders
and the MFY Administrators

In reflecting on her career as a settlement house leader Helen Hall, the director of the Henry Street Settlement, painted a picture of intense elite competition in which the settlement houses were frequent targets of predatory social work and social science professionals. "I . . . have listened to continuous comment about how old-fashioned the settlements are, have lived through the time when sociologists told us there were no such things as neighborhoods in cities," and, she complained, "settlements have become the 'Establishment,' whatever that means."[37] That conflict continued.

Divergent Models of Community Action:
Consensus Building versus Social Protest

One of the most interesting of the major areas of disagreement between the settlement house leaders and the Mobilization for Youth administrators during the two-year planning-grant period involved the appropriate model of community organization and change for MFY. The settlement house model of community organization was heavily influenced by the traditional council of social agencies approach. That is, the main focus of their community organization efforts was the coordination of the work of the social agency heads operating in a particular community.[38] As Henry Street board president Winslow Carlton put it,

> We were not accustomed to being enablers of contentious protests. For years, Miss Hall had taken delegations of mothers and youngsters to City Hall . . . requesting city action on one kind of bill or another. . . . But it was under the wing of a settlement as an institution, rather than having the neighbors going on their own. And . . . a basic tenet of the Mobilization program was that people should go on their own—should feel that they had some power. That was what was meant by opportunity. . . .[39]

Richard Cloward made similar observations about Helen Hall and her mode of operation.

> Now, you have to understand that Helen Hall was a figure . . . the kind of person who could tweak Mayor Wagner's cheek. . . . She tweaked his daddy's cheek, too. . . . [S]he was a towering figure in . . . the New York City politics of altruism. And the last thing in the world that she wanted was to have a bunch of people running around the Lower East Side organizing rent strikes, or taking lawsuits against the Department of Welfare. . . . Helen Hall did not want to offend liberal political figures because she and other settlement figures thought that much of the progress in New York City came about because of their close relations with this political stratum. The idea of

rousing up the people themselves to start raising hell about their housing conditions, having sit-ins in welfare waiting rooms, and things like that just blew their minds. It threatened to disrupt these long established relationships, which the heads of the settlements had with leading political figures in the city.[40]

Conflict over the appropriate model of community organization also reflected the desire of the Mobilization for Youth administrators to have the project engage in another practice that was philosophically at odds with the settlements' consensus approach to community reform, the sponsorship of racially, ethnically, and class homogenous grassroots organizations. Unlike settlement leaders, the Mobilization for Youth administrators opposed attempts to create neighborhood councils or other organizations that were intentionally blind to those differences because, in their view, organizations structured in that way would impose middle-class values on area residents and ignore their legitimate discontent, which was beginning to express itself along racial, ethnic, and class lines.[41] The MFY administrators thus saw the settlements' consensus approach as out of sync with contemporary social trends toward what would become known as the "participation revolution,"[42] which were driven by the growing civil rights movement and included efforts of poor people of color in northern cities to become politically enfranchised.[43] It is important, however, not to exaggerate the vision of grassroots democracy held by the Mobilization for Youth administrators during the project's planning process. As MFY project program director George Brager explained, "Our grass-roots involvement, and notions of self-determination came as we were on the streets, and engaged with people rather than . . . out of the planning of the program."[44] The project's movement toward grassroots democracy occurred primarily through the MFY administrators' use of social protest as a means to secure local institutional reform and through the coupling of that protest onto the growing ambitions of the civil rights movement. In reflecting on MFY's deployment of a militant social protest strategy of community involvement, Richard Cloward recalled

tremendous pressure on us, in organizing residents in these areas, to draw them into existing bodies and to draw them into existing channels of negotiation with the political stratum. . . . In other words, not to make trouble. We, on the other hand, thought that the people should be organized to deal with their own interests. . . . The question was, how can you best organize residents of these neighborhoods to exert their interests? By making them parts of existing structures, or organizing them to engage in conflict?[45]

For Cloward and other reformers of the 1960s, broadening the base of participation among low-income people was not an intrinsic value, but a way for project professionals to challenge local institutions that were not serving

the needs of area residents.[46] Participation (e.g., on boards) was judged to be good if it facilitated the goals of the social protests the residents were engaged in. It was bad, however, if it inhibited that process. In brief, although MFY's elites were not indigenous movement leaders, they took it upon themselves to decide for area residents not only what "their interests" were, but that MFY-led social protest was what they really needed to do to realize them, and that certain arenas of participation should be avoided because they were no more than co-optation. This strategy was consistent with the very negative assessment Cloward and other social scientists held about the leadership and organizational ability of the poor. For example, Cloward and MFY project historian Frances Fox Piven later argued that protest among the poor had less to do with their own efforts then with macrohistorical changes in the social structure. As they put it, "Protest wells up in response to momentous changes in the institutional order. It is not created by organizers and leaders."[47]

The emphasis of the Mobilization for Youth administrators on decision making by professionals as opposed to grassroots leadership reminds us that we should not forget the similarity in the MFY and settlement house approaches. Whether community action was to be limited to the provision of social services, as the settlement houses would have preferred, or was to include social protest initiatives, as advocated by the MFY administrators, both thought it should be launched by the project's professionals rather than by an independent organization of local residents.[48] Consequently, MFY may be seen as an example of "the professionalization of reform."[49] This is also evident in the fact that social stature and influence, not target area representativeness, were the criteria used in the selection of MFY's board members.[50] Indeed, when Mobilization was established, its board did not include a single representative of the residents of the area to be served.[51]

It should also be noted that although much of the discussion here has focused on the social protest activities that precipitated important project-altering crises, the overwhelming majority of Mobilization for Youth's money and programmatic efforts went to youth employment and job training.[52] Fiscally, community organization was a relatively minor part of the overall MFY project.

It may seem remarkable that, given the many disputes between the settlement house and Mobilization for Youth administrators, they still managed to present a united front to their financial backers. Their incentive for doing so seemed to be the anticipation of funding. As Richard Cloward put it, "In the end, money was the glue that held these competing factions together."[53]

POLITICS AND THE NIMH APPROPRIATIONS

Though social science was essential to both the National Institute of Mental Health and the Columbia University/Mobilization for Youth administrators'

approach to urban reform, the planners had to turn to politicians for funding. Consequently, by controlling its purse strings, politics, not social science, ultimately decided the fate of Mobilization for Youth. The relationship between social science and politics was never simple, however. The quest for an increase in NIMH appropriations is a case in point of how the roles of politicians and elite social problems professionals were not always neatly distinguishable. Instead they sometimes blurred, and they often overlapped.[54] Despite the authoritative demands made by NIMH it did not actually have the money needed to fund a proposal as ambitious as the one it negotiated with Mobilization for Youth. Its congressional appropriations would need to be increased if NIMH was to finance the new MFY proposal it solicited.

Both settlement house leaders and the Mobilization for Youth administrators saw themselves as having powerful political connections in Washington that helped the National Institute of Mental Health obtain the appropriation it needed to fund MFY. A key link supporting both claims was Mobilization's administrative director James McCarthy,[55] a former youth gang worker and the director of the New York City youth board.[56] McCarthy had an important family connection which proved to be useful to MFY. His uncle had close ties to Congressman John Fogarty of Rhode Island, the chair of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and its National Institute of Mental Health component. Through his uncle, McCarthy was able to influence Fogarty.[57] The political influence of Columbia University also strengthened the uneasy alliance between the settlement house leaders and the MFY administrators. Indeed, Cloward himself proved useful to Congressman Fogarty in helping him to line up a set of "friendly witnesses" for a crucial committee hearing.[58]

These examples suggest that the fact that politicians had the ultimate say-so about projects such as MFY does not diminish the significant role of other elite professionals, or the complexity of the interactions of the policy actors and social forces involved. In brief, Mobilization for Youth cannot be adequately understood as an exclusive product either of the efforts of elite social problems professionals or of politicians. The building of the Mobilization project was much more complicated than can be explained by such an either/or analysis. Mobilization for Youth's origin and development was a consequence of the convergence of social forces and policy actors. Elite social problems professionals played a crucial role in the conceptualization of MFY. They were also instrumental in selling the idea to politicians and other funding source buyers. Within a broad consensus shared with fiscal sponsors and politicians these professionals had substantial latitude in determining what its programs would and would not look like.

It was within this important context that the elite competition between the settlement houses and social scientists mattered. The Henry Street Settlement leaders conceived of Mobilization for Youth in response to a per-

ceived social problem, not at the beckoning of politicians. And the social scientists, who crafted opportunity and community organization–focused theories of juvenile delinquency, began their work before politicians launched a major campaign against juvenile delinquency. But both the social scientists and settlement house leaders helped convert politicians to their cause, for national politicians had no master plan about how to exploit politically the changing ethnic composition of American inner-city neighborhoods.[59]

When their various professional and other goals converged, politicians, the settlement house leaders, and social scientists cooperated. The settlement houses provided social scientists with a site to field test their ideas. Social scientists helped legitimize the project. This in turn enabled the settlements, foundations, federal government funding agencies, and politicians to become more involved in that increasingly Puerto Rican and African American neighborhood. And it was politicians, of course, who provided the needed government funding. When important goals were in conflict, competition, and ultimately power, determined the outcome. Mobilization was built with this mix of cooperation and competition among elite social problems professionals and politicians.

CONCLUSION

The Mobilization for Youth project did not evolve simply by rational design based on the gradual accumulation of the best social-scientific knowledge available. Within the limits set by its financial backers, MFY was forged through conflict between the traditionally dominant settlement houses and a group of social science and social work professionals who challenged the settlements' turf. In a very real sense, however, the contest was rigged. The research and planning mandate of the National Institute of Mental Health forced the settlement house leaders to align themselves with social scientists sympathetic to that funding agency's views. Other actions were taken, including the expansion of the MFY board, which further tipped the balance of power in favor of the social scientists. The settlement house leaders found themselves in the untenable position of possibly winning the battles but losing the war. That is, if the settlements prevailed in core disputes—as viewed by the NIMH and other potential funding sources—MFY would not be funded.

Had the settlements somehow triumphed and secured funding, however, there would have been less emphasis on institutional reform and on social protest as a mechanism toward that end. Victory by the settlement houses would probably have meant that Mobilization for Youth would have chosen a safer course of community action than the social protest tactics which later provoked crises that threatened the project's funding. Finally, because of the historical significance of projects such as MFY, there could have been an

even more important consequence of a settlement houses' victory in the dis-
pute. Mobilization might not have aligned itself as quickly and decisively
with the civil rights movement's northward thrust and the militant actions
that supported the emergent citizens participation revolution.

Despite their other differences, however, the settlement house leaders and
Mobilization for Youth's social scientists faction did not differ fundamentally
in their views of the role of area residents in the planning and operation of the
project. Both assumed that such decisions rested in the hands of professionals.
Neither the settlement house leaders nor the MFY administrators stressed
grassroots involvement in the planning of Mobilization for Youth.

Yet it is important not to place too much emphasis on the *intentions* of
the planners of MFY and other project precursors to the War on Poverty
Community Action Programs. It is not my goal to indict these designers of
community action for failing to stress resident participation in the planning
of those projects. They were, indeed, acting within the framework of elite
planning characteristic of the times. And as the times changed so did the pro-
jects, as their leaders used social protest–focused community action to latch
their community reform efforts to the growing militancy of the civil rights
movement. The real democratic processes story to be found in the history of
these projects is therefore not the intentions of their planners but how the
civil rights movement later deployed community action programs in its suc-
cessful effort to expand the democratic participation of low-income, inner-
city, residents of color.

Finally, we should remember that few of the numerous areas of disagree-
ment between the settlement house leaders and Mobilization for Youth
administrators were definitively resolved before the project was funded and
implemented. The two factions remained sharply divided on both the over-
all community action vision of MFY and on specific strategies and tactics.
This "unfinished business" came back to haunt the project when it found itself
under attack for its sponsorship of social protest activities.[60]