

## Building “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”

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# Building “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”

Sherry Arnstein, Citizen Participation, and Model Cities

John Gaber

## ABSTRACT

**Problem, research strategy, and findings:** Sherry Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” is the cornerstone for planners thinking about citizen participation. Arnstein wrote the article based on her experiences working at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from 1967 to 1968 as the chief advisor on citizen participation in the Model Cities Program. Despite the article’s substantial influence on the planning field, very little has been published about Arnstein herself and the contributing factors that influenced her writing. In this article, I draw on life history and archival research to place “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” and its author in their historical context, offering new insights into the politics behind the emphasis on citizen involvement in the Model Cities Program and Arnstein’s call to action for a new “partnership” interpretation of citizen participation. I conclude with Arnstein’s broader partnership model as a new point of departure for the emerging dialogue about the equalizing relationship between local government and community groups among the next generation of planners and scholars.

**Takeaway for practice:** There are two takeaways that practicing planners can learn from following Arnstein’s journey in building “A Ladder of Citizen Participation.” First, Arnstein’s career is a blueprint that shows how community advocacy planners can be pragmatic instigators for change. Her professional working model in establishing shared understandings while working within institutional constraints is an important strategy Arnstein used to tackle nationwide injustices ranging from juvenile delinquency, to segregation of hospitals, to inequitable citizen participation practices. Second, Arnstein only discusses half of her HUD citizen participation work in “A Ladder.” The other half of her citizen participation work looked at local governments taking the lead for creating equitable citizen participation processes through the building of long-term “partnerships” with local community groups.

**Keywords:** citizen participation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Johnson administration, Model Cities Program, Sherry Arnstein

Sherry Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (Arnstein, 1969) forever changed how planners, communities, and governments think about citizen participation (Burke, 1971). Based on Arnstein’s work with the Model Cities Program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from 1967 to 1968 (Arnstein, 1969), the article was published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (now the *Journal of the American Planning Association*) in 1969. “A Ladder” remains a seminal document with an extensive reach; it was translated into five different languages, and at this writing Google Scholar lists more than 18,000 citations, indicating its continued importance to the field. Posthumously, Arnstein’s contributions were recognized in 2005, when she received the AICP Planning Pioneer Award. Despite this acclaim,

however, there is remarkably little written about Arnstein herself, the experiences she drew upon, and the context in which she wrote.

In this article, I investigate the people and events that directly influenced “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” placing Arnstein and her work within the context of federal policy discussions on citizen participation in the 1950s and 1960s. Following a brief discussion of Arnstein’s ladder and the research methodology of this study, I explore Arnstein’s background in community advocacy prior to her arrival at HUD, including experience working on juvenile delinquency for the Kennedy administration and desegregating hospitals in the South during the Johnson administration. I then turn to the evolution of competing narratives regarding citizen participation, noting federal policymakers’

changing approaches, from the Gray Areas programs established in the mid-1950s to the Kennedy administration’s growing interest in community action and the Johnson administration’s response to the Watts riot through the Model Cities Program and the War on Poverty. The next section traces the development of the Model Cities Program, the inclusion of the “widespread citizen participation” requirement for applicants, and Arnstein’s experiences with the program. This research highlights the importance of Arnstein and her team’s authorship of HUD’s Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3, *Citizen Participation in Model Cities* (HUD, 1968), which formed the basis of “A Ladder.” I argue that the Bulletin and “A Ladder,” read together, present a broader, partnership model of citizen participation that can form the basis of a more enlightened dialogue about citizen involvement among a new generation of planners and scholars. The research I present here is significant to practicing planners and planning scholars in two ways. First, learning how Arnstein worked as a community advocate provides insights into the step-by-step process by which she confronted social injustice, sized up the community context, and executed a plan that resulted in real and permanent change. Second, Arnstein’s “partnership” observation literally opens up the other side of the citizen participation equation—local government—and provides a new point of departure in the growing discussion on how government can overcome the distrust of the disenfranchizing planning process among generations of community groups.

### Background: Arnstein’s Ladder

The decade of events leading up to Model Cities and Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” was extensive. It was also the 1960s, a time of movements and demonstrations that included the civil rights movement, “Black Power/Black Is Beautiful,” the anti-Vietnam War movement, the second wave of feminism, the women’s movement, the environmental movement, the beginning of the gay rights movement, and the youth movement. Model Cities was part of The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, signed into law on November 3, 1966, and ended in 1974. At the signing of the Act, President Johnson changed the title of the City Demonstration program to the Model Cities Program because Johnson feared that it could contribute to further urban demonstrations (Califano, 2000). In the Model Cities Program, federal funds were designated for declining urban communities to allow them to develop “imaginative (programs) to rebuild or revitalize slum and blighted areas” (Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, 1966, p. 1255). To

receive Model Cities designation, applicants needed to document “widespread citizen participation” in their development of proposed community programs. This created a problem for both the White House and Model Cities applicants. Although community groups were required to document citizen participation, there was no official definition in the law, nor did HUD offer any internal guidance about citizen participation and what it might look like. The Johnson administration and HUD officials anticipated some initial implementation problems at the beginning of Model Cities because of the lack of clarity on what constitutes citizen participation.

Internal White House uncertainty over widespread citizen participation during the development of Model Cities turned into national confusion among Model Cities applicants during the project roll-out, with hundreds of community groups asking, “What is citizen participation?” and receiving no consistent answer from HUD officials (Tigan, 2005, p. 201). It was at this flashpoint that HUD recruited Arnstein for the position of chief advisor on citizen participation in 1967, tasked with repairing the citizen participation component of the Model Cities Program.

Arnstein wrote “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” based on her HUD staff’s study of first-year Model Cities programs and their experiences with the citizen participation process (Arnstein, 1969). In her article, she created an eight-rung “ladder,” shown in Figure 1, to

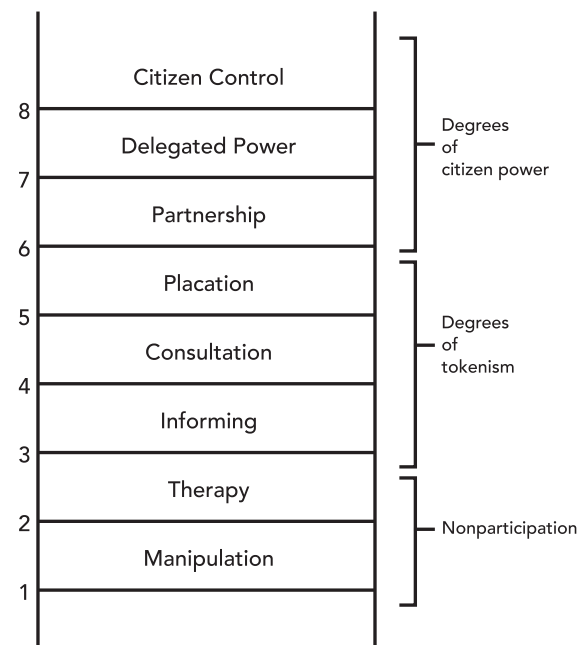


Figure 1. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation. Source: “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” by S. Arnstein, 1969, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), p. 217. © 1969. American Planning Association. All Rights Reserved. Image redrawn with permission.

represent the Model Cities community experiences in relation to how local governments approached citizen participation. As she put it, “The ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). The bottom-level rungs (nonparticipation and tokenism) represent little to no citizen power in the citizen participation process, whereas the higher rungs (degrees of citizen power) have higher levels of citizen power. She concludes that through the “redistribution of power,” community groups will be better able to realize their community goals (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

A widely recognized “problem with Arnstein’s ladder” is Arnstein’s “framing of citizen participation as an overt struggle for power between government officials [‘them’] and community activists [‘us’]” with the primary focus on the struggles of disenfranchised community groups (Tritter & McCallum, 2006, p. 157; see also Collins & Ison, 2009; Maier, 2001). The “us and them” criticism of “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” is accurate; Arnstein unapologetically tells the reader that she is being “provocative” in her account of citizen participation in the Model Cities program to educate community groups about the “Mickey Mouse (citizen participation) game” (Arnstein, 1969, pp. 216, 218). “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” was Arnstein’s effort in

aiding the poor to reach increased levels of sophistication about what makes the city system (and subsystems) tick, to learn who and where the powerholders are and which levers to press to effect action, and to incorporate such sophistication into concrete programmatic approaches. (Arnstein, 1975, p. 55)

Yet Arnstein’s advocacy for community power in “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” was only of half of what she understood and advocated for in her citizen participation work at HUD.

## Research Strategy and Methodology

The observations I make in this article are based on an exploratory, sequential, multimethod investigation divided into two parts: researching Arnstein’s life history and archival document analysis into the Model Cities Program. The life history research was framed around the question, “Who was Arnstein, and how did her life experiences influence writing ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation?’” A brief literature review reveals little biographical information about Arnstein, who died in 1997. Over a 2-year period, I conducted an exploratory life

history research project (Denzin, 1989), contacting Arnstein’s friends, relatives, and colleagues. Extensive interviews and email conversations with George Arnstein (Sherry Arnstein’s husband) and Dan Fox (HUD colleague) provided critically important insights, direction, and material that significantly shaped this article. George Arnstein provided personal accounts on Sherry Arnstein’s life from a teenager growing up in Los Angeles (CA) to her working in Washington (DC) with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. A particularly valuable source provided by George Arnstein was the “community advocacy section” of the interview transcript of Sherry Arnstein conducted by Preston Reynolds in 1989. Dan Fox provided insights on the personal challenges that Sherry Arnstein faced working at HUD. It was Dan Fox who suggested that I conduct archival research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library on the Model Cities documents to find HUD Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3, which he co-wrote with Sherry Arnstein, that formed the basis for “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” and internal reports and memos that Johnson administration staffers were discussing in regards to Model Cities.

I focused the archival document analysis on recently declassified documents related to the Model Cities Program held at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin (TX). Document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies because it can help the researcher to better understand “the historical roots of specific issues and can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under investigation” (Bowen, 2009, pp. 29–30). This research was guided by the question, “How did the Model Cities’ ‘widespread citizen participation’ requirement come about?” The archival material provided insights into the motives, infighting, and outright battles between competing interests within the Johnson administration that went into the development of the Model Cities Program and HUD approaches to citizen participation. Materials at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library related to the Model Cities Program are housed under “cities” and “The Department of Housing and Urban Development.” Under these two titles, the materials are organized into eight topical files. These files include White House Central Files, White House Confidential Files, Office Files of the White House Aids, HUD Legislative Background, Enrolled Legislation, Task Force Reports, Federal Records, and Personal Papers. The documents I reviewed ranged from classified internal published reports to handwritten notes by high-level presidential staff members (e.g., Joseph Califano, special assistant to the president for domestic policy) on their thoughts about key Model Cities meetings. I reviewed a

total of 73 boxes (each containing several dozen files) and took 1,786 photographic images of the text files. The files begin in 1962 and end in 1968.

### Arnstein’s Early Life and Career: Forming “Army’s Army”

Arnstein was born Phyllis Sherry Rubin in 1930, in New York City, to Russian immigrant parents. Her family moved to Los Angeles when she was 11. Arnstein graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1950 and skipped her graduation ceremony to marry George Arnstein (a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley) to start a new life in the Bay Area while George worked on his PhD (G. Arnstein, personal interview, September 3, 2002; personal correspondence, February 12, 2003).

Arnstein started her career as a caseworker in the Alameda County (CA) Juvenile Court. From 1952 to 1954, she learned firsthand about troubled youth and how they were processed in the juvenile court system. Arnstein was frustrated with how little assistance was given to help youth living in poverty and that the only sense of local government they knew was the juvenile court system (G. Arnstein, personal correspondence, November 1, 2002). The lessons she learned as a juvenile court caseworker later influenced her thinking about community organizing and the relationship between poverty and juvenile delinquency when she worked with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s (G. Arnstein, personal interview, September 3, 2002).

In 1955, the couple moved to Washington (DC), where George Arnstein started his new career at the National Education Association. Sherry Arnstein became director of community relations at Alexandria Hospital in nearby Virginia. The experiences she gained working in health administration, first with Alexandria Hospital (from 1955 to 1957) and later with B’nai B’rith Women (from 1958 to 1961), provided her with important insights that she used in desegregating southern health care facilities when she worked at the Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in the mid-1960s (G. Arnstein, personal correspondence, September 4, 2002). Part of her work with Alexandria Hospital was to desegregate the hospital. In 1989, Arnstein told interviewer Preston Reynolds about her work at Alexandria Hospital:

That hospital was headed by a man who wanted to build a new hospital. He had come out of Ohio and thought that segregation was ridiculous administratively. I came to the hospital from California. He told me that

he wanted to desegregate the hospital and while we were doing this, he wanted to fund raise in the community so that when the new hospital opened, it would be a desegregated hospital. That’s how we learned how to desegregate a hospital starting with the nursery and moving very carefully through the hospital desegregating the staff cafeterias so that you get the staff on board. (Reynolds, 1989, p. 33)

While Arnstein worked at Alexandria Hospital, she took night classes at American University toward a master’s in communications (G. Arnstein, personal correspondence, February 14, 2003). After graduating in 1961, she left health administration to take the DC editor’s position at *Current* magazine. Through her work at *Current*, Arnstein was introduced to the Kennedy administration’s efforts on juvenile delinquency.

John F. Kennedy became president, with Lyndon B. Johnson as his vice president, on January 20, 1961. Four months later, he signed Executive Order 10940, which established the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (PCJD), housed in the Department of Justice under the direction of his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The PCJD (discussed in more detail in the following section) provided federal resources to “stimulate experimentation, innovation and improvement in Federal programs” in the development of programs and policies that promoted the welfare of its younger citizens (Executive Order 10940, 1961, §2). The Kennedy administration’s approach to juvenile delinquency was significantly influenced by pioneering delinquency research in the early 1960s (Perlman & Gurin, 1972). Social work researchers Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin started to realize that juvenile delinquency was more of a function of deteriorating low-income communities than individual deficiencies (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). In 1962, PCJD spearheaded the passage of the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act, which helped fund and operate projects aimed at preventing and treating delinquency in inner-city neighborhoods (Trattner, 1989). This intervention developed strategies for “planned changes” in inner-city neighborhoods through “direct participation of local citizens” (Rein, 1970, p. 225).

Arnstein worked with PCJD from 1963 to 1965. Here, Arnstein “helped design and mount the first 14 experimental Community Action programs funded by PCJD” (G. Arnstein, personal correspondence, November 2, 2002). In her interview with Reynolds, Arnstein described her years as a Manpower for Youth consultant with the PCJD as when she learned how to “go into a community” by working with mayors, planning committees, and other community groups. “That’s where I

heard the notion about an anti-delinquency program and the idea that we were going to treat communities that create delinquents rather than treating delinquents . . . . The notion of citizen participation was fundamental to this program” (Reynolds, 1997, p. 49).

After 2 years with the PCJD, Arnstein returned to the issue of hospital desegregation, this time at the federal level. Beginning in 1965, she spent 2 years working for James Quigley, assistant secretary of HEW, desegregating hospitals that received federal Hill-Burton funds. Armed with the 1963 *Simkins v. Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital* decision and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Quigley worked to “eliminate racism in medicine” by leveraging the Hospital Survey and Construction Act, also known as the Hill-Burton Act (Reynolds, 1997, p. 898).<sup>1</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964, in particular Sections 601 and 602, gave federal agencies authorization to seek compliance with the Act by withholding federal funds. Passed in 1946, the Hill-Burton Act provided funds to modernize hospitals, which had suffered from a lack of investment during the Great Depression and World War II (Leiby, 1978; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). From the beginning, Hill-Burton Act funds provided federal dollars to racially segregated hospitals. Starting in the late 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its Legal Defense and Education Fund mounted a campaign to stop Hill-Burton funds from going to health care institutions that practiced racial segregation.

In 1965, Quigley hired Arnstein to help him desegregate hospitals in the South that were receiving Hill-Burton funds. In her interview with Reynolds, Arnstein described her role:

**Arnstein:** So, Jim Quigley and I agreed that I would take a team of officers to Atlanta and start desegregating the hospitals . . . . When I first went to the regional office in Atlanta, there was an old line director, deeply southern, deeply racist . . . . They called us “Army’s Army.”

**Reynolds:** What did you do when you first went into the regional office?

**Arnstein:** We first met with the director and said there were some problems with the 441 forms and that Quigley had sent us to Atlanta to help him deal with all these complaints. They thought the hospitals were desegregated because they had signed the 441 forms, and we said that there were these complaints that said that they weren’t desegregated, and we were determined to find out who was right and work with

the public health officer to correct the situation. I would say, “You say they are in compliance and the officials at NAACP say they are not and that we are going to go together to get the facts. We’ll all have the same facts, and we’ll all try to find out what it takes to desegregate a hospital.” An hour later the word went out that “Army’s Army” had arrived. (Reynolds, 1989, pp. 42–43)

Arnstein’s pre-HUD career is a story of courage and of being an instigator of pragmatic change. She was good at sizing up pressing national issues (e.g., segregation), establishing shared understandings, and devising practical courses of action that did not conform to existing establishment practices. Her time as a caseworker in the Alameda County Juvenile Court gave Arnstein firsthand experience of working in local government and exposure to community difficulties in interacting with bureaucratic systems. Here, she was able to learn the community’s perspective on how local government can be very disconnected from residents and more part of the problem than the solution. Arnstein’s experiences desegregating southern hospitals allowed her to work with multiple sides of an issue to create a desired outcome for politically marginalized communities. Through her work with Quigley at HEW, Arnstein masterfully leveraged NAACP complaints, southern hospitals’ untruthfulness on 411 forms, and federal regulations under the Civil Rights and Hill-Burton Acts to achieve the goal of desegregating federally funded southern hospitals.

## The Origins of the Model Cities Program and “Widespread Citizen Participation”

When Arnstein arrived at HUD in 1967, she landed in the midst of widespread confusion and ongoing conflicts over approaches to citizen participation among federal policymakers. In this section, I explore the evolution of these competing narratives of citizen participation in addressing urban problems in the 1950s and 1960s, which Arnstein’s “A Ladder” would subsequently label nonparticipation, tokenism, and citizen control. The varied approaches to citizen participation were particularly apparent in the Johnson administration’s plans for Demonstration Cities, which eventually resulted in the Model Cities Program in 1966.

## Urban Problems and Community Action

In the 1950s, social and political approaches to a host of urban issues—sluggish economic growth, racial

disparities, poverty, neglect of education, suburbanization, migration, and juvenile delinquency—converged, resulting in much of the policy development that bore fruit in the 1960s (Abu-Lughod, 2007; Lemann, 1991; Marris & Rein, 1967; O’Connor, 1999). Under the leadership of Paul Ylvisaker, director of public affairs, the Ford Foundation started the “Gray Areas” project in 1955, seeking to change the direction of U.S. domestic history by funding projects that focused on the declining, “blighted” conditions of American cities (Esposito, 1999). Gray Areas project staff took a top-down approach, pushing federal and state governments to pressure local governments into carrying out programs in low-income communities, with minimal information or feedback sought from residents (Wood, 1993). The Gray Areas approach—what Arnstein would later term “nonparticipation,” forming the bottom rungs of her ladder—is representative of many federal policymakers’ positions on citizen participation in this period.

During the Kennedy administration, a second strand of thinking on citizen participation and urban problems emerged. In the White House, this was apparent in its juvenile delinquency initiatives under the PCJD (where Arnstein worked from 1963 to 1965). The PCJD was particularly interested in “community action” as a policy approach. At the time, community action was an up-and-coming public policy strategy that focused on assisting low-income people in their efforts to mobilize and organize themselves (with minimum government direction) to create positive change in their communities (Marris & Rein, 1967; Raymor, 1999; Stossel, 2004). A prominent example of the community action approach was Mobilization for Youth, a prominent New York City community action program that was the brainchild of Richard Cloward. Located on the Lower East Side, Mobilization for Youth was funded under the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act in 1962 (Lemann, 1991; Rein, 1970; Trattner, 1989).

From the committee’s inception, PCJD staff worked closely with the Ford Foundation’s Gray Areas project staff (Lemann, 1991; O’Connor, 1999). The funding of the Mobilization for Youth Project marks the ideological fork in the road between PCJD staff and Gray Areas personnel (Silberman, 1964). The younger, more liberal PCJD group often called themselves “Bobby’s Guerrillas” after Robert Kennedy because they were small in numbers and held opinions outside of “standard governmental operating procedure” (Wood, 1993, p. 64).<sup>2</sup> Bobby’s Guerrillas, focused on citizen participation as a means of redistributing power and resources to low-income communities, represent a second strand of White House policymakers’ interest in citizen

participation, which Arnstein would term “citizen control” when she created her ladder.

### Johnson’s Solvable Urban Problems Turn Into an Unsolvable Urban Crisis

President Johnson opened up his “second front in the war on poverty” in 1964 with the development of his secret Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Affairs (Lemann, 1991, p. 187). This task force defined the “urban problem” in the same fashion as the Gray Areas projects of the 1950s:

[T]he disadvantaged, are unnecessarily and arbitrarily restrained in their choice of location, too often forced to settle in the older, dilapidated central portions of the urban community, while the moderate-income groups are often forced to settle *outside* the central portion. (Outside Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Affairs, 1964, p. 4, emphasis in original)

In their view, local governments were unable to solve urban problems largely due to the “limitation of resources which (has) prevented a comprehensive, consistent attack on major urban problems” (Outside Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Affairs, 1964, p. 1). The Task Force made the recommendation that “Presidential leadership” could solve urban problems through “creative federalism” and suggested that the president develop a “Demonstration City program to provide generalized or experimental assistance for State and local programs” (Outside Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Affairs, 1964, pp. 4, 9).<sup>3</sup> Johnson’s “creative federalism” was his attempt to get the federal government working more closely with local grassroots efforts (Duke, 2014, p. 2). At the start of his presidency, Johnson was suspicious of city government and personally felt that “big-city machines” (Califano, 2000, p. 79) left to themselves would “neglect the problems of poverty neighborhoods in the course of providing services to the city-wide population” (Haar, 1975, p. 175).

On May 15, 1965, Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers and close confidant to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., made a presentation to the Johnson White House on the urban problem that introduced a third line of thinking on citizen participation. At the end of his talk, Reuther introduced his approach to citizen participation. In particular, “special citizens” made up of the “private sector, cities (local government), industry and the financial community” would be organized for “action” through “a joint effort with the federal government assuming the cost of administration, engineering, research, and prototype development as any large scale

industry would do if it were to create a new prototype" (Reuther, 1965, p. 3). Reuther's "joint effort" approach to citizen participation, which Arnstein would later label "tokenism," contrasted with both the Gray Areas project's nonparticipation approach, which ignored local resident experiences, and Bobby's Guerrillas' citizen control perspective on redistributing policymaking power with local residents.

Everything changed in the second week of August 1965 as the Watts riot turned the simple list of solvable, Gray Areas-style urban problems into an overwhelming, national "urban crisis" (Piven, 1975). The riot "shocked all those who believed that racial relations were improving in areas of the country outside of the deep South" (Haar, 1975, p. 10; see also Abu-Lughod, 2007; Cohen & Murphy, 1966; Kearns, 1991; Kirsch, 1966). Two months after the Watts riot, President Johnson organized the Task Force on Urban Problems, internally known as the Woods-Haar Demonstration Cities Task Force. This group was responsible for drafting the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, which created the Model Cities Program (Califano, 2000). The Woods-Harr Task Force members included Henry Kaiser (Kaiser Steel), Walter Reuther (United Auto Workers), Robert Weaver (director of HUD), and Whitney Young (National Urban League). In the opening task force meeting, Reuther restated his vision for citizen participation in Demonstration Cities: "The unmet need of urban affairs and the conviction that existing plans capable of being carried out by local power elites was the key to the solution" (Califano, 1965a, p. 1). Kaiser immediately followed on this line of thinking and discussed "the capability and possibility of mobilizing parapolitical groups for entire metropolitan areas" (Califano, 1965a, p. 2). Here, Reuther and Kaiser were envisioning a new federal agency operating outside of local government but directly involved in developing and implementing federally funded local initiatives. In line with Johnson's creative federalism initiative and operating as a hybrid mixture of community action agencies, community advisory committees, and Urban Renewal's local planning agencies, the proposed parapolitical agency would be made up of local private and public power elites that would advise and consult with federal officials on how best to distribute Model Cities funds.

Contrary to the lack of clarity on widespread citizen participation in the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act passed by Congress, the Woods-Harr Task Force put a tremendous amount of work into defining citizen participation, focusing on the implementation of Model Cities and the impact on local

governance. Two unauthored staff papers stand out, dramatically documenting the split among task force personnel over the role of citizen participation. The first paper, "Community-wide Citizen Participation" (1965), focuses on the needs, goals, and practices of integrating citizen participation into the local planning process and is closer to the Reuther/Kaiser model of citizen participation. Here, the authors focus on integrating local residents' viewpoints into the decision-making process and are less concerned with what citizen participation produced in terms of actionable projects that benefited the community. "If citizen thinking is incorporated in the early development of policy and programs, the public officials have the benefit of the citizen viewpoint before making their decisions" (Wood, 1965, p. 115).

The second paper, "Timing of Social Welfare Activities" (Wood, 1965, p. 105), argues for a Bobby's Guerrillas' community action approach to citizen participation. This group of authors is motivated by "a sense of urgency" that area residents need to see immediate results produced by shared decision-making projects ("social input activities") and are less concerned with formulating a citizen participation process for a generic decision-making model (Wood, 1965, p. 105). After a Model Cities agency is established in the community, the authors envision a flurry of activities in the first year beginning with a series of "officially initiated" community services (e.g., employment services), as shown in Figure 2. The creation of these "social input activities" was a function of the local Model Cities agency taking in social input from the community via the citizen advisory committee and then assisting local residents "to form block or neighborhood groups, (and) encouraging the identification of issues that concern them and helping residents to solve their problems" (Wood, 1965, pp. 107–108). At around 4 months, social input from area residents will start transitioning away from "officially initiated" activities to "shared" activities (e.g., clean-up day). By the end of the first year, the authors anticipate that the neighborhood council should successfully begin at least one "resident-initiated" activity (e.g., a wide variety of social services and community organization activities continue). One noteworthy observation in Figure 2 is how the authors are aware that the Model Cities funds used to help local residents develop neighborhood organizations for needed programs like daycare may also be used by local residents to produce resident-initiated activity that might go against the interest of local government and "possibly (start) protest actions, rent strikes, and marches on city hall" (Wood, 1965, p. 112; see Figure 2).



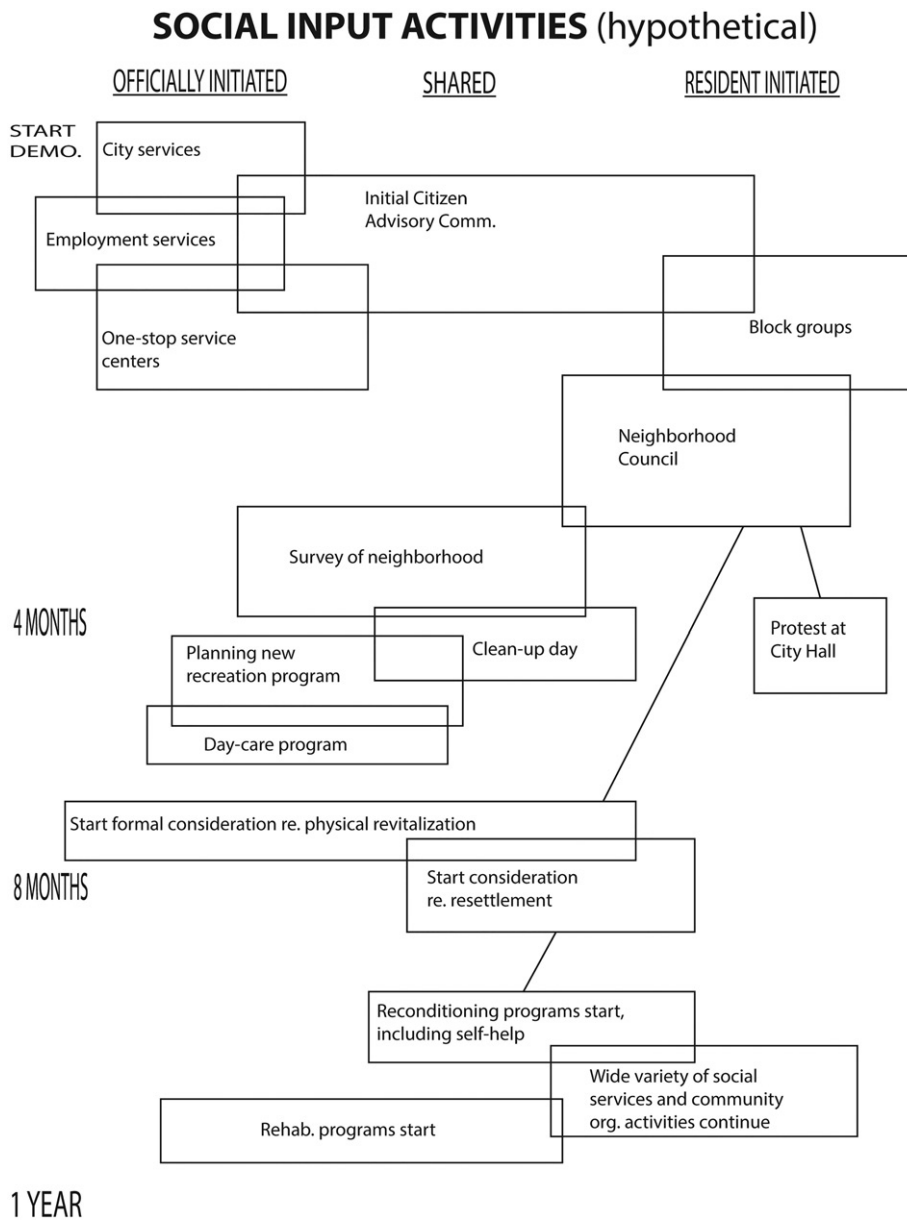


Figure 2. Social input activities (hypothetical).  
Source: Wood, 1965, p. 112.

### Rafsky Committee Defines HUD's Internal Position on Citizen Participation

While the Demonstration Cities bill was before Congress, HUD Secretary Robert Weaver introduced a new plot twist into White House debates on citizen participation. Weaver created an internal Advisory Committee on Demonstration Program Development, chaired by William Rafsky, the controversial Philadelphia city housing coordinator. The task of the "Rafsky Committee," as it became known, was to rework the

Woods-Haar Task Force report to better fit Weaver's vision for a smaller "advisory" citizen participation component in Model Cities.<sup>4</sup> The Rafsky committee took the position that Model Cities should be held accountable to local government, with neighborhood residents playing a very distant secondary role (Brown & Frieden, 1976). Weaver saw citizen participation "as only one of many relevant sources of public opinion" and wanted to marginalize citizen groups from the decision-making process (Burke, 1971, p. 759). The Rafsky Committee's position of citizen participation in Model Cities

dramatically went against both Bobby's Guerrillas' citizen control and Reuther/Kaiser's parapolitical, tokenism approach and added a nefarious purpose to the non-participation application of citizen participation in Model Cities: "manipulation."

### Arnstein's Ladder as an Organizational Tool for the Three Approaches for Citizen Participation

The second story in building the ladder is Arnstein organizing the three major positions on citizen participation along a continuum of citizen control: "[I]t is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). On the right side of the ladder, Arnstein provides an ordinal ranking of the three most widely discussed internal White House positions on citizen participation. At the bottom is the least empowering position, with Gray Areas project/HUD's Rafsky Committee position as "nonparticipation," where local elected officials only listen to community residents. "Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 218). Reuther/Kaiser's parapolitical organizations of "elite" community leaders occupies the middle position in which some power from local elected officials is transferred to the community, where they are able to inform and consult city decisions. Arnstein recognized that "informing" citizens is an important "first step toward legitimate citizen participation" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). However, the end result is the same as the lowest rung on the ladder: "People have little opportunity to influence the program designed 'for their benefit'" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). The top rung on the ladder ("degrees of citizen control") represents the Bobby's Guerrillas community action approach with the redistribution of power to the community. Arnstein recognized "partnerships" and "delegated power" as positive shared power working relationships between city government and local community groups.

### Arnstein's New Interpretation of Citizen Participation: "Partnerships"

A new story behind "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" is its origin as part of a larger federal effort to improve the relationship between local governments with local community groups. At the time Arnstein was hired, HUD was in total "confusion and conflicted in ideology"

on the meaning of citizen participation (Burke, 1971, p. 762). The core team of citizen participation experts at HUD (Arnstein, Len Duhl, and Dan Fox) was part of "a federally funded experiment that worked on mobilizing people to participate in community activities" (D. Fox, personal interview, October 31, 2002).<sup>5</sup> Upon her arrival at HUD, Arnstein realized that she needed to develop an independent understanding of citizen participation, in contrast to HUD's Rafsky Committee "nonparticipation" approach (Brown & Frieden, 1976). So, akin to her "Arny's Army" experience at HEW, she generated firsthand observations on how citizen participation actually worked in the project communities, conducting a series of field observations and personal interviews with Model Cities Program directors. Arnstein and her team wrote up their observations and made specific recommendations on how to improve the Model Cities citizen participation process in Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3 (HUD, 1968). According to Fox, Arnstein based "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" on these observations (D. Fox, personal interview, October 31, 2002). It is in Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3 that we find Arnstein engaging with the expanded "new public interpretation of HUD's approach to citizen participation" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 221) that she would later address in "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." Arnstein's approach in the Bulletin is somewhat different from that of "A Ladder," in which citizen participation is used as a categorical term for citizen power: "It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). In the Bulletin, however, citizen participation is "the basis (for) creative, coordinated partnership between city governments and residents of Model Neighborhoods" (HUD, 1968, p. 1).

Although Arnstein defines citizen participation differently in the two publications, which were written for two different audiences, the two positions reinforce one another to create a much broader understanding of citizen participation. The Bulletin is Arnstein's snapshot of the existing relationships between local governments and organized citizen groups, demonstrating how Model Cities could allow for a more balanced partnership between government and its citizens. In Arnstein's analysis, a critical ingredient in any relationship is that both parties are on equal footing:

A partnership in which one partner is ill-informed or lacks the knowledge to negotiate with the other partners is likely to contain within it the seeds of its own dissolution. The weaker partner will see nothing to be gained from remaining in the partnership if it lacks

the capacity and, for all practical purposes, the opportunity to contribute to and participate in partnership decisions (HUD, 1968, p. 18).

In "A Ladder," which uses the citizen power definition of citizen participation, Arnstein is isolating the critical ingredients needed in a positive working relationship: that both parties occupy a fairly even playing field, with local bodies transferring decision-making power to the community to strengthen the partnership between local government and its citizens.

To Arnstein and her HUD team, the Model Cities requirement for widespread citizen participation offered an opportunity to improve broken relationships by developing new contractual partnerships between local governments and community groups, facilitated by HUD acting as both funder and rule enforcer (D. Fox, personal correspondence, February 26, 2003). From this perspective, Model Cities provided a type of "partnership agreement . . . between citizens and the local government in the execution of [the] Model Cities program" (HUD, 1968, p. 15). The Bulletin continues,

The contractual responsibility of the city to HUD . . . represent[s] a vital part of the mechanisms by which cities share power with citizen structure. Such mechanisms for sharing power and responsibility are essential to citizen participation and to the ultimate success of the Model Cities program. (HUD, 1968, p. 5)

According to Dan Fox, "Citizen participation is ineffective absent someone with authority to act on its results" (D. Fox, personal correspondence, November 18, 2002). Arnstein was acutely aware that new federal programs would not eliminate generations of citizens' distrust of public officials and forecasted that "years" of partnership may be necessary:

Citizens' distrust of public officials can neither be argued nor rationalized away. Public agencies' procedures, styles, and skills cannot be changed solely by admonition or the carrot of new Federal programs. Years of partnership may be necessary to compensate for generations of distrust. (HUD, 1968, p. 17)

Model Cities' formalized funding and managerial relationship between local government and community groups, as prescribed in Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3, was in keeping with the Johnson administration's conception of creative federalism. In the Bulletin, Arnstein singularly places the responsibility on local government to develop new relationships with

community groups so that "collective actions [are implemented] together to improve the quality of life in American cities" (HUD, 1968, p. 2):

It is equally clear that local government must develop new relationships with and responsiveness to people in neighborhoods if it is to meet effectively their needs . . . . It follows that citizen participation, in any city, is a complicated cluster of rights and responsibilities that affect both citizen and local government. (HUD, 1968, p. 2)

This was to be made possible by HUD operating as funder, technical advisor, rule maker, and rule enforcer between local governments with their citizenry. In this way, HUD would manage the citizen participation partnership between local governments and community groups by making sure that all parties followed the five-point "Checklist for Action." If local governments or community groups decided not to follow HUD's citizen participation guidelines as outlined in Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3, HUD would exercise their authority via Executive Order 11297 (1966) to withdraw funds from local governments until they fell in line with federally mandated citizen participation guidelines. This is the same framework with which Arnstein concludes "A Ladder of Citizen Participation":

If the ground rules for these programs are clear and if citizens understand that achieving a genuine place in the pluralistic scene subjects them to its legitimate forms of give and take, then these kinds of programs might begin to demonstrate how to counteract the various corrosive political and socioeconomic forces that plague the poor. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 224)

Shortly after submitting Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3 to HUD Assistant Secretary Ralph Taylor, Arnstein, "who had seen her mission as that of persuading HUD to promote strong resident involvement, became convinced that Taylor would do nothing further in this direction [and] resigned from HUD in September [1968]" (Frieden & Kaplan, 1975, p. 78). No new programs or changes in the execution of citizen participation came out of Arnstein's work at HUD. The only exception was the Office of Economic Opportunity (and not HUD) committing \$4 million for one-time training and technical assistance to help neighborhood citizens' organizations to access information to allow them to make informed decisions (Frieden & Kaplan, 1975).

<u>Established Agencies And Governing Boards</u>	<u>Coalition of Establishment and Neighborhood</u>	<u>The Model Neighborhood</u>
<p><b>1.Executive Group</b></p>	<p><b>2.Citizen Participation Structure</b></p>	<p><b>3.All-Neighborhood Group</b> (it is possible to have this group serve as the Citizen Participation Structure referred to in the adjoining column.)</p>
<p>- Who in the Executive Group will take the initial steps toward establishing the Model Cities decision-making process?</p>	<p>- Will this decision structure be composed solely of neighborhood representatives or will it be a coalition of neighborhood representatives and other [public and private figures?</p>	<p>- Is there a neighborhood group which has the confidence of neighborhood people?</p>
<p>- Can the executive branch consider programs and policies for the model cities effort which have <u>not</u> been reviewed and recommended by the citizen participation structure?</p>	<p>- What provisions will be made for future revision of the structure and the process for decision making?</p>	<p>- How will neighborhood leadership be held accountable to a neighborhood constituency?</p>
<p>- Can the executive branch veto a recommendation made by the citizen participation structure without some form of negotiation, public hearing or mediation?</p>	<p>- How will you (Executive Group) insure that all of those who are part of the decision-making structure (problem task force members) know the purposes of the program, how decisions are arrived at, and what their role and authority is in making decisions?</p>	<p>- Will the process for selecting neighborhood representatives deal with the need to hear the voices of youth, the aged and those who are different from the majority residing in the model neighborhood area?</p>
<p><b>4.Technical Advisory Group</b></p>	<p><b>5.Problem Area Task Forces: Evenly divided between both sectors or a majority to either one.</b></p>	<p><b>3a. Problem Area Task Forces: Composed of Neighborhood people.</b></p>
<p>- In addition to the citizen participation structure, will there also be a technical assistance technical advisory group?</p>	<p>- If problem area committees or task forces are established, can the citizen participation structure consider programs which have <u>not</u> been reviewed and recommended by the task force?</p>	
<p>- How will the Technical Advisory Group connect to the citizen participation structure?</p>		

Figure 3. Model Cities decision structure and "Checklist for Action."  
Source: HUD, 1968, p. 23. No Rights Reserved. This work is in the Public Domain.

## Takeaway for Practice: “Checklist for Action”

Arnstein concludes the Bulletin with a “Checklist for Action.” Realizing that community planners would be asking for specific takeaways for practice based on her findings, she point-blank writes, “It would be exceedingly risky to conclude this analysis with a series of things to do or not to do” (HUD, 1968, p. 23). Instead, she provides a checklist of questions that, if answered, would produce a citizen participation process in the interest of all parties. The Checklist for Action is organized into five potential groupings in the Model Cities decision structure, as shown in Figure 3. Three immediate takeaways for planners are seen in the Checklist for Action. First, Arnstein sees the decision-making process as made up of three sectors: 1) established agencies and governing bodies, 2) coalition of establishment and neighborhood, and 3) the model neighborhood. The “coalition of establishment and neighborhood” is seen as a standalone structure separate from government and neighborhood. So, instead of thinking of citizen participation as a flow from government to community or vice versa, Arnstein makes the observation that it should be understood as a separate sector that is developed per problem area. This makes organizational sense based on Arnstein’s new “partnership” understanding of citizen participation. One way to get local government to work in an equal partnership with the community is by putting them on the same team where they are working together for the shared goal of an equitable citizen participation process.

Second, Arnstein dividing the decision-making process into three independent sectors brings up a new series of questions about citizen participation, which is why the Bulletin concludes with the Checklist for Action. The largest concentration of questions focuses on what a sector can or cannot do when their boundaries cross over into the space between sectors. For example, “Can the executive branch consider programs and policies for the Model Cities effort which have *not* been reviewed and recommended by the citizen participation structure?” (HUD, 1968, p. 25). Third, Arnstein was aware that the composition and representation of the sectors can have a significant impact on the Model Cities decision-making process. Several questions in the Checklist for Action look at the composition of the three sectors. In particular, Arnstein was interested in how persons were selected as representatives of a sector (“Will this decision structure be composed solely of neighborhood representatives or will it be a coalition of neighborhood representatives and other public and private figures?” [HUD, 1968, p. 24]). and

the representativeness of the representatives (“Will the process for selecting neighborhood representatives deal with the need to hear the voices of youth, the aged and those who are different from the majority residing in the model neighborhood area?” [HUD, 1968, p. 25]).

## Conclusion

After leaving HUD, Arnstein wrote in “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” that she meant to be provocative to encourage community groups to actively secure more community power to equalize their relationship with local governments and to ensure a more equitable citizen participation process. One of the reasons that “A Ladder” remains so provocative—and why some critics continue to find it limiting—is that the article presents only half of the picture of citizen participation that Arnstein developed at HUD. Based on the research I present here, planners and planning scholars now have an opportunity to engage in a more complex dialogue about a broader picture of citizen participation and explore the various “creative, coordinated partnerships between city governments [with their] residents” (HUD, 1968, p. 1).

With this research I offer new insights into the concept of citizen participation as it developed in the context of the 1950s and 1960s and the ways in which Arnstein’s ladder expanded the conversation about community engagement in planning and policy. A lot has changed in the last 50 years. In moving forward with a more contextualized understanding of Arnstein’s ladder, we have a new “Checklist for Action” and a clear benchmark to evaluate our accomplishments (and setbacks) in providing an equitable citizen participation partnership, where citizens have meaningful access to and influence on a planning process that affects their day-to-day lives.

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## NOTES

1. Operating through the Public Health Service, the Hill-Burton Act provided funding to states for planning and expanding their health care facilities, especially in rural areas. "State health departments had to arrange a survey to bring out unmet needs in various areas of the state and various medical specialties, and establish a broad-based advisory board to determine priorities" (Leiby, 1978, p. 288). The Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital in North Carolina was a segregated hospital that used Hill-Burton funds to expand its facilities. When dentist Dr. George Simkins and a handful of Black dentists, doctors, and patients were denied admissions to the hospital, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund pursued a discrimination suit against the hospital on grounds that the Hill-Burton statute of "separate-but-equal ... (was) unconstitutional under the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment" (Reynolds, 1997, p. 902).

2. The Guerrillas advocated a more aggressive redistribution of resources and "bottom-up" policymaking, controlled by local poor residents (Raymor, 1999, p. 214). The group was first called "Hackett's Guerrillas" after PCJD member David Hackett, Robert Kennedy's aide in the Justice Department, who first championed their cause (Wood, 1993, p. 64). Hackett's Guerrillas became "Bobby's Guerrillas" following the assassination of President Kennedy, when Robert Kennedy began to aggressively push a bottom-up, community action approach to urban change, in contrast to President Johnson's more restrained, Gray Areas-style vision (Stossel, 2004, p. 366). As soon as community action became a national policy, it quickly ran into trouble both internally and externally. Internally, the Office of Economic Opportunity staff, filled with former PCJD "Bobby's Guerrillas" staff members who operated using a less-than-orthodox approach to government and were commonly derided as "space cadets" by non-Office of Economic Opportunity White House staff (Lemann, 1991, p. 119). Externally, the provision of federal dollars funneled to local community action agencies for the delivery of social services in low-income communities was immediately seen as a threat by local governments who thought it was their "moral responsibility" to take care of their own residents (Marris & Rein, 1967, p. 221).

3. Using the findings published in the 1964 Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations annual report (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1964), Johnson launched his creative federalism initiative and made Model Cities the case study for his creative federalism vision. The spirit of creative federalism was based on a cooperative effort of state, county, and local governments, working together on innovative new programs put forward by the federal government to address pressing domestic problems. Creative federalism was part of a long line of federal centralizing practices, beginning with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s via the Public Works Administration and later with the National Resource Planning Board; President Harry Truman continued the practice with the National Housing Act of 1949 (Wood, 1993). The report concluded that based on the "paucity of (local) political leadership... [federal action is needed to improve intergovernmental relations in metropolitan areas]" (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1964, p. 2).

4. The Rafsky Committee produced an unpublished document, "Report to the Secretary on Proposed City Demonstration Program," and presented it to HUD Secretary Weaver in September 1966 (Brown & Frieden, 1976).

5. Arnstein recruited Len Duhl and Dan Fox as independent consultants to help her develop an independent understanding of citizen participation from what was currently held by HUD staffers. At the time, Len Duhl was a young community health planning professor at UC Berkeley, and Dan Fox was a nationally recognized local community organizer.

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