

Keynote Address for
“What Works in Community Investing: A Community Development Summit”

November 8, 2013

Piper Auditorium, Harvard Graduate School of Design

By

Lizabeth Cohen

Dean, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study

Howard Mumford Jones Professor of American Studies, Dept. of History

Harvard University

Thank you, Eric Belsky and Ellen Seidman, for inviting me to speak at this exciting summit. It's not every day that a historian has an opportunity to talk to policy makers. I feel as if I come bearing greetings from the land of "what worked (or not) in the past" to the land of "what might work in the future." Although I am not a believer in popular axioms like "history repeats itself" or "those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it," I do think the past can be instructive and I will do my best today to suggest some ways that history is relevant to the important "What Works" project, based on my own research in twentieth-century US history.

Let me begin by asserting that I think we are at a moment of crisis in urban development in the US that starkly mirrors the 99 vs. 1 percent divide put on the map by the Occupy Movement. With my contribution to this Summit in mind, I encountered three pieces of disturbing evidence over the last few weeks that I'd like to share with you. The first was an article in *The Nation* magazine of October 21, 2013, by Ken Silverstein, entitled "Miami, Where

Luxury Real Estate Meets Dirty Money.”¹ What attracted my attention here was the focus on Sunny Isles Beach, commonly dubbed “Florida’s Riviera” and filled with luxury condominiums and resorts and high-end retail stores. What had been a modest resort community of low-rise motels and small apartment buildings catering to ordinary tourists and retirees was transformed after 1997, when real estate developers and other business groups managed to pass a referendum incorporating a simple neighborhood into a separate town. Building, planning and zoning decisions were then removed from the Miami-Dade County Commission and turned over to the independent jurisdiction of Sunny Isles Beach City Commission, a corporate-type entity currently made up of a real estate executive, a property lawyer and a former advertising executive. The Trump-dominated development that followed was described by author Silverstein rather unabashedly as “a property developer’s wet dream.”

Lest you say that mile-square Sunny Isles Beach is an extreme case of corporate profitmaking dangerously undermining civic authority and a broadly conceived community interest, let me share evidence #2 and #3. Number 2 is an article I encountered in the October issue of *Alaska Airlines Magazine* when flying recently from Boston to San Diego.² The article was entitled “The New Town Square,” and it sang the praises of “Neighborhood-friendly developments [that] are changing America’s urban and suburban landscapes.” What followed was an exuberant exposé of the mixed-use projects that are popping up in downtowns all over America, “creative combinations of upgrades to existing buildings along with high density new construction,” where “some of the most appealing projects are zoned for retail, restaurant and office use, as well as including housing.” The reader then was treated to vivid descriptions of developer-driven downtown fantasy lands of restaurants and cafes, exclusive shops, and

expensive condominiums in places as diverse as Salt Lake City, Utah; Maui, Hawaii; Seattle, Washington; and San Marcos and Emeryville, California. The article concluded by registering approval of this growing “new type of real estate development...that expresses a sense of place and meets the needs of its many constituents.”

And finally, evidence #3 was the cover story in the *San Francisco* magazine I found in my hotel room just this past week, “Dizzy, Delirious Development: 50 Views of a Radically Changing City,” which focused on “the 50 groundbreaking, zeitgeist-revealing projects that are reshaping San Francisco right now,” they being only a fraction of the 150 major real estate developments under construction in the city, with another 145 or so going through the approval process.³ (I should add that I woke up the morning after election day to a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline “High-rise project loses big at polls,” announcing that determined voters had managed to beat back a developer’s plan to construct high-rise luxury condominiums on the San Francisco waterfront, overturning approval from the Board of Supervisors, which claimed to have blessed the project for its contributions to the affordable housing fund and anticipated future revenues to the city.⁴ Victorious organizers against the project denounced this as a deal with the devil.) I share these stories because I think it is important that we bear THIS BOOMING urban scene in mind as we probe the very different urban world inhabited by many of the 47 million living in poverty (15% of all Americans and 20% of American children), the 48 million who are dependent on food stamps to put food on the table, the 48 million without health insurance, and the long lists of those waiting for affordable housing through public housing or Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers. We seem closer than ever in the United States to Benjamin Disraeli’s warning of the dangers of two nations (and I remind you of his mid-nineteenth-century quote),

“between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets. The rich and the poor.”⁵

This reality of two urban Americas , which I hardly need to describe any further to those assembled here today, leads me to make a provocative statement in the fall of 2013, not long after the federal government shut itself down and has only been resuscitated on borrowed time and money and when many state governments are facing assault by right-wing, anti-government forces. But here it is: the only way I can see to achieve the kind of integrated, collaborative approach to community development that addresses the economic needs of the whole of cities and metropolitan areas—the kind of thought and action being advocated by the authors of *Investing in What Works for America's Communities*—is to re-awaken Americans' confidence in government and the public sector.⁶ With all due respect to the local non-profits and the national-level philanthropies represented here today, many of whom are trying their hardest to compensate for the growing influence of the private development forces I just discussed at the start of this talk and to fill a void created by the vicious attacks unleashed on government over the last few decades, I see no substitute for an effective public sector empowered to speak and act for the common good. The book we are here to discuss today has helped me appreciate the impressive ways that non-profit- and even private-sector actors are applying their tools and strategies to help make communities work better, but I think there are limits to what is possible without the *partnership* and even—to use the language of this book—the *quarterbacking* of responsible government. In fact, government is little mentioned in this volume, and I think we can understand why, given its 2012 copyright. But I invite you to take a

journey with me through the twentieth century, to remind yourselves of the critical role good government has played at crucial moments in building American communities that work for the 99, not just the 1, percent.

First stop on our journey is another moment in the 20th century when ordinary Americans found themselves in big trouble: unemployment was sky high, homelessness was growing, hunger was rampant, and the safety net--to the extent it existed--was stretched beyond capacity: that moment was the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁷ By the end of the decade, the New Deal had created a strange new world of an American-style welfare state with a social security system for retirees, dependent women and children, and the disabled; unemployment insurance for those without work; minimum wages and hours for many kinds of labor; protection of the right to organize industrial unions; stronger defense of the rights of consumers; construction of the first public housing; and more. There were many flaws in how these programs were designed and implemented. And it is fashionable among historians to stress the limitations rather than the achievements of the American approach to government provision of social welfare. But that misses, I think, the more important lesson. Despite tremendous opposition by corporate America to the expansion of the public sector and a populace that itself had limited experience and expectation of receiving help from a more activist government (after all, many Americans in the 1930s were first- and second-generation immigrants who had rarely voted in national elections and whose experience of local and state government consisted of getting a favor from the local machine boss in exchange for a vote)—still the vast majority of Americans by the end of the New Deal had gained new respect and confidence in government. The 1930s and 1940s were a different time in the United States and

the path to people's political reorientation was unique to that moment. The social movements orchestrated by a grassroots-oriented national Democratic Party and an ambitious labor movement could not be replicated in the 21st century. But the point is that over the course of a decade, people's expectations about where to look for help, whom they could count on, what they were entitled to as citizens, and how communities could be made fairer shifted dramatically. It wouldn't happen the same way today, but it could happen again if those who advocated for "investing in what works" made a priority of arguing that there is no substitute for the neutral hand of a government remaining responsibly accountable to the people and their best interests.

Next stop on this journey takes us to the quarter century after World War II—from say 1948 to 1973—an era in the aftermath of World War II marked by aspirations to achieve national affluence and to win the Cold War by incorporating as many Americans as possible into widespread prosperity. Elsewhere I have called this vision a "consumers' republic" for how the pursuit of traditional American ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy became linked to the goal of incorporating all into a mass consumer economy.⁸ This was an agenda that many different interests in American society bought into---from corporate America to elected officials to organized labor, which partly judged its own success by the expansion of workers' purchasing power. Built in to how the consumers' republic played out were many limitations, particularly the persistence of inequality alongside the ideal of inclusion, which I have explored extensively in my book *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. Overdependence on the property tax to deliver crucial services like schools, the privatization of downtowns in shopping centers, and other unfortunate developments undercut the

progressive potential of the consumers' republic. But the important point I want to make here is that an acknowledgment prevailed that achieving a prosperous America required the broad-based prosperity of all Americans. And government policies played a crucial part in delivering that prosperity. Urbanists are rightfully quick to condemn the fragmenting suburbanization created by the National Highway Act or the segregated metropolitan areas brought about by the red-lining embedded in FHA and VA mortgage programs, but let's not forget the other ways that progressive redistribution of income took place and a more activist government was empowered in this era: through a progressive income tax compared to today, with the highest tax rate set at 90% and never dipping below 70% from the 1950s through the 1970s; a more robust estate tax where the top marginal rate stayed at 77% until 1976; social security more aligned with the cost of living in retirement; and the federal passage of extensive consumer, environmental, and other regulatory and protective legislation that would--by the end of the twentieth century--be dismissed as the too-long arms of the nanny state.

The third moment on this historical journey that I want to stop at is at an example that is closely aligned with our discussion today, focused as it is on urban revitalization. And my invocation of it as any kind of a model may surprise you, given its poor reputation within urbanist circles. Yet here goes: I propose that there was a time when government, particularly the federal government, took responsibility for the survival of cities; appropriated funds to improve the availability and quality of affordable housing and to promote job-producing economic investments; and linked the provision of better social services—job training, legal services, presschooling, and the like—with the improvement of the urban infrastructure. That moment was the era of federal urban renewal from the early 1950s until the early 1970s. I

want to make clear that there were many aspects of urban renewal that I roundly condemn: I think most of us would agree that there was too much blanket destruction of the old fabric of the city and too much insensitive construction of the new. The fixation on modernist concepts and design often overly emphasized the car, led to isolating and alienating towers-in-the-park and superblocks, and encouraged buildings constructed more as statements than liveable environments. And frequently community participation in planning received more lip-service than attention. BUT I am learning through the book I am currently writing, titled *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban American in the Suburban Age*, that we should be alert in the urban renewal era to more variation over time and place, more learning on the job, more innovative experimentation, and--most relevant for today's summit--a surprising amount of effort to address just the concerns voiced by the editors and authors of *Investing in What Works*, specifically three things that stand in dramatic contrast to today's agenda-setting by private developers that I mentioned earlier:

1. Strategies aimed at integrative and collaborative efforts to address urban ills, with public officials serving as quarterbacks even when private sector investment was a necessity as means and ends in the urban renewal project;
2. A prioritizing of the kind of economic revitalization that would create jobs for workers of diverse social classes, not simply seeking an elite niche market or operating on the small scale of a neighborhood;
3. A deep recognition (if no easy strategy for undertaking it) of the need for metropolitan-wide solutions to the difficult problems faced by cities and city dwellers.

Let me take each of these three areas briefly in turn and show you how Ed Logue--in his urban redevelopment work in New Haven in the 1950s, Boston in the 1960s, and New York City and New York State in the 1970s and 1980s—placed a premium on just the kinds of concerns we are discussing here today, even if not all of his planning and design solutions would appeal to our modern day hearts and minds. What I hope to leave you with, however, is a stronger confidence that “it CAN happen here.”

Let's start with how Logue and his colleagues in New Haven in the 1950s came to recognize that, as they undertook the urban renewal of neighborhoods with deteriorated housing, they were encountering what they called “multi-problem families” unreached by existing social agencies in the city.⁹ Logue thus invited an old acquaintance, Paul Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation, to visit New Haven and learn more about the complex, multi-faceted problems poor people in New Haven faced. What resulted was Ford's Gray Areas Program, which funded Community Progress Incorporated (known as CPI) in New Haven and similar programs in five other cities. Logue would in fact establish a similar initiative with Ford support when he came to Boston to head an expanded Boston Redevelopment Authority (or BRA) in 1961—here known (and still with us today) as ABCD. Although far from perfect, CPI as developed under Mike Sviridoff (who would later take over for Ylvisaker at Ford and serve as the first president of LISC) became an incubator for many of the community action programs that would become signatures of President Lyndon Baines Johnson's War on Poverty in the mid-1960s, such as Jobs Corps, Headstart, and Neighborhood Legal Services.

In addition to pioneering an integrative approach to the problems of poor urban residents, Logue's efforts in New Haven and elsewhere are significant today for how he insisted that public officials needed to be in charge, fulfilling that "quarterbacking" role prescribed in *Investing in What Works*. In fact, he and his colleagues in New Haven pioneered a new kind of urban generalist expert who had broad skills in negotiating for the new kinds of resources available at the national level and in overseeing a wide range of initiatives. In the case of urban renewal 1950s-style, that expansive portfolio included urban planning, real estate, design, construction, management, legal matters, public relations, community organizing, lobbying, and more. In fact, Logue felt that the broad education in "public interest law" that he received at Yale Law School served him particularly well. I should add that many observers at the time recognized that a new kind of public official was emerging in the urban field, although they shared no common label for this budding role. *Time* magazine dubbed the new field "urbanology," which journalist Fred Powledge defined as dominated by "educated, articulate men [remember this was a half-century ago!] who had training or experience, or both in...disciplines bordering on the behavioral sciences, along with an appreciation for and understanding of practical politics, [and] were able to accumulate and use power in rebuilding cities."¹⁰ Even Jane Jacobs, who would become the leading critic of urban renewal and on several occasions would single out Logue for criticism, applauded in her *Death and Life of American Cities* of 1961 the broad general knowledge of the public officials she observed working in New Haven. Rather than pursuing narrowly defined and isolated responsibilities in what she called bureaucratic "labyrinths" and "fractionated empires," in New Haven "agency

heads and their staff...can be experts in two matters simultaneously: they can be experts in their own responsibilities and they can also be experts in the subject of New Haven itself.”¹¹

Most crucially, Logue and his elected partner in New Haven—Mayor Richard Lee—and in Boston—Mayor John Collins—insisted that although federal urban renewal was premised on attracting private developers to invest in cities by minimizing the financial investment and risk of undertaking projects in declining urban areas, public officials—not the real estate developers and investors they recruited—should be in the driver’s seat. As Logue put it with his characteristic bluntness, “I’ve always felt [you] can’t trust the private sector to protect the private interest.”¹² When I interviewed prominent architect I.M. Pei a few years ago, he appreciated that even architects benefited from the presence of strong public redevelopment administrators. As he looked back on his extensive work in urban renewal partnering with William Zeckendorf from 1948 to 1960 in many American cities and close to our home, working on the Government Center Plan in Boston, he lamented that when less federal dollars overseen by public officials were in play, private-sector developers, overwhelmingly “interested in their bottom line,” called more of the shots, often lobbing them at architects: “They want to be celebrities themselves”....Back in the days of urban renewal, he recalled nostalgically, “The developer, the architect, and the city and state [were] really working together. I’m not saying all equal, but they [were] all important.” Pei regretted the greater authority that private-sector developers have gained over projects at the expense of government administrators, architects, and the public.¹³

Let me give you one final example from Logue's career of an integrative approach to trying to improve city life for residents. Governor Nelson Rockefeller brought Ed Logue to New York in 1968 to head an innovative statewide urban renewal agency, called the Urban Development Corporation (or UDC). Rockefeller felt thwarted in his effort to build more affordable housing and to develop more industrial capacity in New York State as voters defeated his bond issues at the polls. So he sought an alternative, which became the UDC, self-financing through the issuing of its own bonds, to be backed by the "moral obligation" of New York State, and endowed with enormous powers to employ eminent domain, override local zoning and building codes, and make its projects tax exempt. The jewel in the UDC's crown became one of three new towns built in the state, the car-free "new town in town" of Roosevelt Island, formerly Welfare Island in New York City's East River. Here Logue orchestrated, piecing together funding available at the federal and state levels, a mixed-income, mixed-use community, with public schools located within residential buildings to bring social classes together; and with a wide mix of apartments and services to provide homes for single working people as well as the elderly, the disabled, and large families. As Logue proudly bragged in 1975 after the UDC defaulted on its bond payments and Logue was forced to resign, "It was too good to last....They felt threatened....I was engaged in—bankers said this—social engineering. As if that's a mortal sin. I was very proud of the fact that Roosevelt Island was a total piece of social engineering."¹⁴

A second goal that *Investing in What Works* actively promotes, and that the urban renewers of the 1950s and 1960s like Logue shared, is to make sure that efforts at urban revitalization include broad economic planning for a city's economy and particularly for jobs

available to a wide range of urban residents. That too was a goal in New Haven, which, as Douglas Rae has powerfully demonstrated in his 2005 book *CITY: Urbanism and Its End* was already decades into devastating deindustrialization by the 1950s, sadly just as African Americans were arriving from the South in hopes of securing good industrial jobs.¹⁵ Although urban renewal never provided enough of those good jobs and it brought new problems of its own, redevelopment included developing a new wholesale food market and industrial district at New Haven's harbor alongside Interstate 95 and making major investments in downtown retail to fend off competition from proliferating suburban shopping centers and keep consumer dollars in the city. In Boston, Logue focused on creating more jobs downtown by prevailing upon federal, state, and municipal governments to invest in a 60-acre Government Center and then pressuring Boston's business leaders to erect new office towers nearby. With the promise of more workers downtown, the BRA goaded merchants to help renovate the city's retail core and launched plans to rehab and reuse Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market. City Hall and other public buildings in fact were intentionally designed without extensive cafeterias to push employees and their business out into the surrounding city. And in New York State, the UDC developed industrial parks and undertook other strategies to create badly needed jobs in the deindustrializing parts of the state. In Logue's last big job as President of the South Bronx Development Organization (SBD0), to which he was appointed by New York Mayor Ed Koch in 1978, he also made job creation a top priority, developing industrial parks to bring manufacturing and commercial markets to the area.

The third and final goal I saw emphasized in *Investing in What Works* that was also shared by Logue and the urban renewers of the 1950s to 1970s is perhaps the most intractable

one: the ability to make and implement plans on a metropolitan, even regional, scale rather than be constrained by municipal boundaries. The population of the New Haven suburban ring increased 51% between 1950 and 1960, while the city's population fell 7.5%, making it only 50% of the metropolitan area, and by 1970, only 39%. Given this stark reality, the redevelopers in New Haven tried to create and empower metropolitan-level structures of governance, development and taxation; as Mayor Lee put in 1955, "Social, economic, and human problems do not stop at the artificial political boundaries which segregate our[metropolitan] community."¹⁶ Lee and Logue managed to create some semblance of a regional planning body around the need to coordinate planning for the Highway 91 route through New Haven and its northern suburbs, but their Quinnipiac Valley Development Corporation proved impossible to sustain after that planning ended. In Boston, Logue was an early and vocal voice for a metropolitan solution to the city's highly segregated and unequally resourced schools. In New York State, he went the furthest—and was repaid with a backlash that contributed significantly to the ultimate undermining of the UDC itself. Frustrated in New Haven and Boston with the exit of middle-class city residents to the suburbs to live and increasingly to work, leaving what he saw as an unfair burden of solving social problems to cities and their remaining residents, in 1972 Logue introduced a "fair share" housing plan to construct 100 units of housing in 9 wealthy suburban Westchester communities. And he threatened to use the UDC's power to override local zoning if necessary. His project was met with a ferocious rejection, including pressure put on the New York State legislature to curtail the UDC's override powers in the state's villages and towns.

I have tried to show you in this brief tour of key moments in 20th century US history times when government intervention has made a difference or at least made the effort to achieve the kind of improvements in the lives of poor urban residents that you have set out in this book and today's summit to promote. My message is that government can—and I would argue—should be a lead partner in investing in what works.

As foreign as this message may sound in today's world, I would also suggest that at this particular grim moment we may have a new opportunity, where the enemies of an activist government and more robust public sphere may have gone too far. Might there be a silver lining, I wonder, to the paralysis that anti-government forces have brought upon Washington and that has inevitably seeped out into the far corners of the nation where dependence on government runs deeper than critics would have us think? As we debate today various entrepreneurial strategies for greater integration, collaboration, quarterbacking, economic development, and metropolitan action, let's not forget that almost all efforts can be made more influential if backed by the political power, economic incentives, infrastructural investments and democratic support of a robust public sector. While Washington, DC is a very challenging nut to crack at this particular moment, two new progressive mayors have just been elected in Boston and New York, cities that powerfully dominate their regions. My final words to words to you as we head into an afternoon of discussion with terrific and experienced panelists are, to use language that became a rallying cry for social scientists not so long ago who were seeking to understand social change and politics, "bring the state back in." Let's remind ourselves that in a democracy, government does belong to the people and therefore it—and they—deserve the seat at the head of the table.

¹ Ken Silverstein, "Miami: Where Luxury Real Estate Meets Dirty Money," *The Nation*, October 21, 2013, 12-23.

² Debra Prinzing, "The New Town Square: Neighborhood-friendly developments are changing America's urban and suburban landscapes," *Alaska Airlines Magazine*, October 2013, 122-36.

³ Ben Christopher, "Cranespotters: The 50 Groundbreaking, Zeitgeist-Revealing Projects That Are Reshaping San Francisco Right Now," *San Francisco Magazine*, November 2013, 86-97.

⁴ John Wildermuth, "High-rise Project Loses Big at Polls," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 6, 2013, A1, A12.

⁵ [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/benjamidi134330.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/benjamindi134330.html), accessed January 2, 2014.

⁶ Nancy O. Andrews and David J. Erickson, Senior Editors; Ian J. Galloway and Ellen S. Seidman, Contributing Editors, *Investing in What Works for America's Communities: Essays on People, Place & Purpose* (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and Low Income Investment Fund, 2012).

⁷ See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) for discussion that follows on the Great Depression and the New Deal.

⁸ See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) for discussion that follows on the postwar era I call a consumers' republic.

⁹ Discussion of Ed Logue's urban renewal work comes from manuscript chapters of Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, forthcoming).

¹⁰ Fred Powledge, *Model City, A Test of American Liberalism: One Town's Efforts to Rebuild Itself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 22.

¹¹ Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 410-13.

¹² Linda Corman, “Former BRA Head Takes Another Look at the City He Helped Plan,” *Banker & Tradesman*, October 21, 1987, 6.

¹³ Lizabeth Cohen, Interview with Ieoh Ming Pei, June 20, 2007, New York, NY.

¹⁴ Frank Jones, Interview with Edward J. Logue, April 1, 1999, Martha’s Vineyard, MA, Tape 3, 38.

¹⁵ Douglas Rae, *CITY: Urbanism and Its End* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Richard C. Lee, “New Haven Plans for Tomorrow,” *U.S.A. Tomorrow*, January 1955, 15, in Robert A. Solomon, “Symposium: Building a Segregated City: How WE All Worked Together,” *Saint Louis University Public Law Review*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1996-97), 283.