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Education in a Multi-Ethnoracial Setting: Seattle's Neighborhood House and the Cultivation of Urban Community Builders, 1960s–1970s

Eileen H. Tamura

During the mid-1960s, the War on Poverty ushered in a change in outlook on the poor and stimulated Neighborhood House (a social service agency that began as a settlement house) to focus on educative, community-building initiatives. Yet ironically, while staffers offered educational programs for residents, they were themselves becoming educated. The space Neighborhood House provided emerged as a powerful venue in which staffers developed their talents to become socially minded civic leaders. This study of the post–World War II transformation of settlement work in a city in the Pacific Northwest reveals commonalities with other places as well as distinctiveness to Seattle conditions. The article expands the extant scholarship on multi-ethnoracial communities, War on Poverty programs, and settlement house responses to societal changes. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which Neighborhood House provided an important educative space for those who worked there, a place that nurtured their growth as civically minded community builders.

At first glance, Harry Thomas, Dwayne Evans, and Judi Carter might seem to have had little in common. Thomas served as executive director of Seattle's Neighborhood House (NH) for thirteen years, while Evans and Carter were clients of the social service agency—Evans as a high school student and Carter as a young, single mother with two children. However, a closer look at their lives and career trajectories reveals important commonalities. All three had lived in Seattle's public housing and eventually became leaders at NH, and for all three, NH provided a valuable educational space that encouraged

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their development and identities as community builders. While their growth was more visible than that of other staffers, the latter, too, developed as civic leaders within the educative space of Neighborhood House.

This essay illuminates the educational significance of Neighborhood House, a social service agency that began as a settlement house in 1906. The community it served changed over time—from Jewish to primarily African American—but the agency's educational thrust continuously supported residents in their efforts to negotiate more effectively in their economic and social environments. In the process, the institution also navigated a changing policy context, from the social settlement era to War on Poverty programming, a context common to similar enterprises of the time and chronicled by scholars of social welfare. Notwithstanding these contextual changes, NH continued to sustain its vision of providing a comprehensive, multiservice, community-building agenda. This agenda not only included programs in crisis intervention, transportation, and other like services, but during the 1960s and 1970s, focused on community-empowering initiatives such as community councils, tutoring, field trips, and social action.

Ironically, while staffers offered educative programs for neighborhood youths and adults, they were themselves becoming educated, and the NH space emerged as an important educational site for the people who worked there. Extant literature includes educational biographies of Progressive Era settlement house reformers, but less has been written on the education of urban community leaders of later decades. This essay helps to fill the gap by focusing on a team of staffers of this later generation.[1]

What was this educational space that NH created? Based on archival research and oral history interviews with staff, volunteers, and participants, I argue that the War on Poverty stimulated NH into offering a powerful venue in which staffers developed their talents and abilities

[1] The field of women's history provides many examples of such studies on the progressive era. For example see Robyn Muncy, *A Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers," *Signs* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1985), 658–77; Iris Carlton-LaNey, "The Career of Birdye Henrietta Haynes, a Pioneer Settlement House Worker," *Social Service Review* 68, no. 2 (June 1994), 254–73; Linda J. Rynbrandt, "The 'Ladies of the Club' and Caroline Bartlett Crane: Affiliation and Alienation in Progressive Social Reform," *Gender and Society* 11, no. 2 (April 1997), 200–14.

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and honed their skills in becoming socially minded civic leaders in a multi-ethnoracial[2] setting. Even after they left NH, many continued their career trajectory of community service; their experiential learning at NH played a key role in their education and life choices.[3]

During the period studied, several overlapping points of tension pervaded the work at NH. The first came from Seattle's ethnoracial population and the shifting constituency that NH served. As the middle-twentieth century approached, the ethnoracial mix of staff and volunteers began to reflect NH's changing clientele, which was becoming increasingly African American. With this change came complex racial dynamics that led to intrastaff rifts requiring improved communication and greater openness to contrary perspectives. Coupled with this was tension arising from the close partnership that NH had developed with the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA). At the same time that NH staffers understood their relationship with the SHA as necessary, they worried about what it would do to NH's reputation among its public housing clientele. A further point of tension emerged as staffers offered programs based on differing assumptions. Early on, they had accepted white, middle-class norms as the standard. In this vein they sought to develop public housing residents' cultural capital—the institutionalized, widely shared, high-status cultural signals, attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials thought necessary for upward mobility.[4] But the War on Poverty turned their attention to neighborhood residents' cultural wealth—the assets that the

[2]Ethnoracial refers to "both an ethnic and racial identity and can be seen as a naturalized identity of groups who are seen or see themselves as culturally and racially unique people," Tekle Woldemikael, "Eritrea's Identity as a Cultural Crossroads," in *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2005), 340. Allison Varzally uses the term to indicate the "perceived biological, historical, and behavioral qualities by which groups bounded themselves and were bound by others," Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925–1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 9. Ethnic groups (for example, Han, Hmong, Ilokano) are identified within racial categories (for example, Asian). Works using "ethnoracial" include David Hollinger, *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); and Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[3]Linda H. Lewis and Carol J. Williams, "Experiential Learning: Past and Present," in *Experiential Learning: A New Approach*, ed. Lewis Jackson and Rosemary S. Caffarella (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 5.

[4]Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243, 246; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82–95; David Swartz, *Culture and*

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community brought with them to the table.[5] While this new perception made their earlier thinking questionable, they did not discard it totally. The result was an ambiguity of purpose in their educational program. To be sure, staffers did not use the terms "cultural capital" and "community cultural wealth." Instead, they said that they wanted to provide an inviting and supportive space, serve as "role models," give neighborhood youths opportunities "to grow up and learn, and become successful," and offer programs for adults and youths to understand "how the system worked."[6]

Focusing on the 1960s through the 1970s, this article discusses these tensions as they emerged in the course of NH's initiatives in both nonformal education (an organized, purposeful transmission of ideas and values outside the school setting) as well as informal education (meaningful learning that occurs spontaneously through people's experiences). In the process of this inquiry, the essay highlights the informal educational experiences of NH staffers.

The intra-institutional dynamics at NH occurred in the context of external influences with which NH interacted. Having experienced a break from its parent organization, the Council of Jewish Women (CJW), NH entered the 1960s with strengthened ties with the SHA, followed by federal largess with President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, and ending in retrenchment with President Ronald Reagan's administration. NH felt the impact of these national trends, with monumental expansion during the 1960s and 1970s and drastic reductions in the 1980s. This study's examination of the influence of national policy swings supports arguments made by War on Poverty scholars like Noel Cazenave, and refutes others made by Frank Stricker.[7]

This case study of Seattle's Neighborhood House provides an opportunity to explore continuity and change in social service work in the transforming demographic and policy contexts of the post–World War II era—a context that was similar in some ways to those

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Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 102–05.

[5] Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005), 70–80.

[6] Dwayne Evans, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 25, 2013; Judi Carter, interview by author, Seattle, WA, Sept. 29, 2013; and "School Survival Workshops," *Rainier Vista Views and News* (Seattle, WA), Jan. 1981.

[7] Noel A. Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007); and Frank Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty and How to Win It* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

of other US cities described in Judith Trolander's *Professionalism and Social Change* and Annelise Orleck and Lisa Hazirjian's *War on Poverty*. At the same time, Seattle's complex ethnoracial context prompted some different possibilities and choices.[8]

This essay adds to the studies of race and ethnicity by Mark Wild, Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, Mark Brilliant, and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn. In so doing, it moves away from the racial binaries prevalent in educational history (African American vs. European American, Latino vs. European American, Asian American vs. European American, and Native American vs. European American). By examining a multi-ethnoracial institution within a multi-ethnoracial city, I add an important dimension to the scholarly landscape of racial and ethnic educational histories.[9]

From the Council of Jewish Women to the Seattle Housing Authority

Established in 1906 by the Seattle chapter of the CJW, Settlement House, as it was then called, was one of a few settlements on the US West Coast and the first in Seattle. Created in the spirit of London's Toynbee Hall and Chicago's Hull House, Settlement House—among twenty-four Jewish settlements across the nation—began with the purpose of providing services to low-income Jewish immigrants who lived in the neighborhood after fleeing poverty and persecution in Russia.[10]

Like settlements elsewhere in the country, Seattle's Settlement House attempted to bridge the gap between immigrant life and city institutions by providing those recently arrived with services that

[8]Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); and Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[9]Wild, *Street Meeting*; Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway: Prewar Seattle and Japanese Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

[10]Jean Porter Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House: 1906–1976* (Seattle: Neighborhood House, 1976), 5–7. In 1910 Deaconess Settlement (later Atlantic Street Center) opened in Rainier Valley. Regarding the twenty-four Jewish settlements in 1910, see Allen Freeman Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 15, 20.

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would enable them to integrate into their new environment. To this end, Settlement House, renamed the Educational Center in 1917, offered classes, clubs, scholarships, a library, guest lectures, theater and music productions, employment placement, and legal advice. In these ways, the Center attempted to provide opportunities for participants to acquire middle-class knowledge and skills. While staffers and volunteers did not use the term "cultural capital," the concept speaks to their purpose.[11]

During and after World War I, blacks migrated from the rural South to cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Most settlements responded to ensuing racial tensions by excluding the newcomers, conducting segregated activities, or even closing their centers. At the same time, the National Federation of Settlements, founded in 1911, rejected the idea of serving African Americans. As Lasch-Quinn notes, settlements proclaimed "ideals of objectivity, progressivism, and cosmopolitanism" at the same time that they opposed racial integration.[12]

Before World War II, the Center's neighborhood was largely Jewish, but during and after the war, increasing numbers of African Americans arrived, seeking jobs in the aircraft and shipyard industries. With the changing population near the Center, the CJW turned its attention to Jewish refugees settling elsewhere in the city. At the same time, the CJW selected an African American woman, Shirley Wilcox, as board president, the first non-Jewish woman to hold that position. Then, in 1948, it gave the Center a new name, Neighborhood House, reflecting similar name changes nationwide.[13]

By the early 1950s, the CJW had removed itself completely from the NH board. For all practical purposes, the two entities existed independently, their only connection being the CJW building that NH leased for a dollar a year. Lasch-Quinn's critique of settlements that failed to serve the increasing number of African Americans moving into the neighborhood applies to the CJW. To be sure, from its inception the CJW had been focused on the needs of Seattle's Jewish community, and World War II had led to an influx of Jewish refugees to the city. Nevertheless, its neglect of its low-income neighbors marked a

[11] Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House*, 8–13.

[12] Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 1–3; and Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 22, 94.

[13] Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House,* 23; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 217. The national trend in the late 1940s was to use "neighborhood" instead of "settlement" to avoid a paternalistic connotation. See Mary Lynn McCree Bryan and Allen F. Davis, *100 Years at Hull-House* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 281.

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break from its past. It was left to NH to continue the original Settlement House purpose of serving the neighborhood.[14]

At this point, the CJW and NH agreed informally that, after three years, ownership of the building would be transferred to NH, with the idea that NH would become legally independent of the CJW. But the planned transfer never happened. In 1956, to the dismay of the NH board, the CJW sold the building to the bakery next door for $30,000.[15]

With morale low and staff leaving, including the executive director, Wilcox and her board put the pieces together, bit by bit. Trolander, who examined changes among settlements from their beginnings, noted the trend after World War II of hiring executive directors who were African American men with master's degrees in social work. The NH board reflected this trend when it convinced James White, an African American and well-liked NH group worker with such a degree, to take on the challenge of serving as executive director. Next, the board took the necessary steps to have NH incorporated and thus legally independent of the CJW. Their final goal was to find a new home.[16]

Fortunately for NH, board member Rose Morry knew of available space at the Yesler Terrace housing project. Weeks of negotiations between NH and the SHA followed. Then, on September 1, 1956, the two institutions signed an agreement whereby NH would pay a dollar a year for rent. This was the beginning of what would become a long-standing interdependent relationship.

The close relationship between NH and the SHA was mirrored on the US East Coast. In the 1950s, the New York Housing Authority paid the salaries of one or two settlement workers in each of its housing projects. Furthermore, in the late 1950s, some neighborhood centers in New York City moved their operations into public housing buildings. Trolander argues that doing so inadvertently blurred the lines between centers and housing authorities. As a result, social service agencies lost some of their independence. While Trolander's point is well taken, NH administrators believed that moving into public housing was a godsend financially, and that the benefits more than outweighed the costs. In succeeding decades, the

[14]Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House*, 23–25; and Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 23–46.

[15]Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House,* 25; Mrs. Carl Koch to Mrs. Lewis Wilcox, Oct. 30, 1955, file 39, box 17, National Council of Jewish Women, Seattle Section, 1900–2009, Special Collections, Allen Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, hereafter NCJW; from Mrs. Lewis Wilcox to Mrs. Carl Koch, May 8, 1956, file 40, box 17, NCJW.

[16]Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 31, 49, 65; and Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House*, 25.

relationship between the SHA and NH grew. Not only did the SHA provide office space for the agency, it also paid the salaries of a couple of NH staffers during the 1980s and funded the agency's newsletters. Moreover, by locating themselves within the housing projects, NH centers were accessible to their clients.

At the same time, the close relationship led to ongoing tensions between the two institutions. As former NH executive director Harry Thomas explained, the two agencies held conflicting goals. While the SHA sought to have residents pay their rent and keep their yards clean, for example, NH sought to prevent the SHA from evicting residents. Former center director Jerry Janacek opined, "I think [the SHA administrators] tried their best, but they were landlords. They had problems if people didn't pay." As a result, "we didn't want to be too closely aligned with the housing authority because the tenants didn't like that, and we couldn't be too closely aligned with the tenants, because the housing authority wouldn't like that."[17] These comments illustrate the costs inherent in NH's dependency on the SHA. Because budgetary constraints prevented NH from greater financial independence, staffers often found themselves caught between landlord and tenant. To be sure, the SHA also felt the tension at the same time that it benefited from its close relationship with NH, which provided public housing residents with educational and social services that alleviated potential tenant problems. The result was a delicate symbiotic relationship requiring skillful maintenance and negotiation.

Serving Multi-Ethnoracial Neighborhoods

As African Americans, Shirley Wilcox and James White reflected the increasingly black population in Yesler Terrace, and of the residents who used NH's services. White's position as executive director, like that of his predecessor, also reflected the nationwide change in neighborhood centers from female to male leadership, and from whites to blacks as staff members and leaders.[18]

While residents in Yesler Terrace and other Seattle public housing projects were increasingly nonwhite, most of the city's residents during the 1950s were of European descent. But during succeeding decades, the city's population of ethnoracial minorities grew, from 46,528 or 8.3 percent of the population in 1960, to 101,452 or 20 percent

[17] Harry Thomas, interview by author, Seattle, WA, Oct. 30, 2013; Jerry Janacek, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 27, 2013; and Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change,* 82–83, 90–91.

[18] Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, ix, 1–2, 99.

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by 1980, among them African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. Yet even before this period, Seattle, like other US West Coast cities, included a multi-ethnoracial population. While Seattle's African Americans were the most numerous of the minority groups in the 1960s through the 1970s, Asians had been the most populous in the decades before World War II. They had migrated to the city and other parts of the West Coast during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Seattle in the early 1900s, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, and blacks lived in the area of Yesler and Jackson Streets, a bustling, cosmopolitan district of residences and small shops. In 1940, the year before the United States declared war on Japan and before ethnic Japanese were forced to move to US concentration camps, there were twice as many Asians (6,975) as African Americans (3,789). Yet before World War II, nonwhites constituted a small minority of all city residents.[19]

While Seattle's Asians and blacks shared ethnoracial hostilities directed against them, they lived as "uneasy neighbors" as they competed for the low-wage jobs available to them. Thus in Seattle, as in other parts of the US West Coast, the "'race problem' was never singular," Brilliant noted writing about California, "never simply synonymous with … the 'Negro problem.'"[20] This contrast with the racial binary in much of the rest of the country would make the work at NH distinctive.

The arrival of World War II brought a booming ship and aircraft construction industry to Seattle. As with other West Coast cities, this wartime boom generated a massive influx of people, dramatically changing the social and cultural landscape of their adopted cities, what Marilyn Johnson called "the most enduring legacy" of the war.[21]

The war transformed Seattle's black community, increased its size dramatically, and brought its members out of the shadows. Between 1940 and 1950, the African American population surged from fewer than 3,800 at the beginning of the decade to over 15,600 in 1950. They arrived mainly from the southern states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. In the 1970s, refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia began arriving, so that by the late

[19] *Population Trends by Race in the Seattle Area, 1900 to 1976* (Seattle: Office of Policy Planning, 1977), Table 1, n.p.; Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 108, 116–18, 238; and Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway*, 42.

[20] Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 107, 128–30; and Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 13.

[21] Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 159–61; and Marilynn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2–8.

1980s, the number of Asians surpassed that of blacks. Because of federal and local discriminatory policies, blacks, Asians, and other people of color settled in Seattle's Central District, including Jackson Street and Yesler Terrace, as well as in other low-income areas.[22]

In their studies of the move of African Americans to Seattle, Quintard Taylor and Howard Droker neglected to discuss the even larger numbers of white job seekers—over eighty-six thousand from 1940 to 1950—many of whom migrated to the city from other parts of the Pacific Northwest, the Rocky Mountain states, and the northern Great Plains. This inattention is problematic, because the migration of whites, when added to that of blacks, provides a larger picture of the extensive human movement to the city. Moreover, it helps to explain how war industry employers could deny jobs to blacks at a time when a large workforce was needed.[23]

While Seattle was a more liberal city compared to the US South, as the above indicates, racism nevertheless pervaded life for blacks and other minorities. This racist sentiment underscores the significance of the policy initiated by Jesse Epstein, the first executive director of the city's housing authority. In the 1940s, Epstein countered the national norm by integrating the SHA's newly built public housing projects—surprising whites and nonwhites alike. African Americans, who thought that they would be excluded from the units, were further surprised when they learned that they would not be segregated within the projects. Decades later, Epstein recalled, "I made the decision administratively, early, that there would be no discrimination, no segregation." Careful to avoid objections to his plan, he purposely refrained from asking for a written policy from the SHA board. Both the board and the mayor made no objections. Epstein also avoided confronting the US Housing Authority with the idea, and it did nothing to block his actions, even though most other projects in the country were segregated, including the one in nearby Portland and those in

[22] Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 134, 159; James Greer, "The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Development of the Residential Security Maps," *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 2 (March 2013), 292–93; and Amy Hillier, "Residential Security Maps and Neighborhood Appraisals: The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Case of Philadelphia," *Social Science History* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 226–28.

[23] From 1940 to 1950, the white population went from 354,101 to 440,424, while the nonwhite population went from 14,201 to 27,167, *Population Trends by Race in the Seattle Area*, table 1, n.p.; Clark Kerr, *Migration to the Seattle Labor Market Area, 1940–1942* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1942), 137–39; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*; and Howard A. Droker, "Seattle Race Relations during the Second World War," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (Oct. 1976), 163–74.

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California.[24] Epstein's success in actualizing his vision likely resulted from the multi-ethnoracial character of the Yesler Terrace site in the decades before construction there of Seattle's first public housing project. As Lee noted of the years before World War I, "One of the most common observations made of [the area] … was its bustling heterogeneity," its "diverse peoples intermingling with ease," and its "multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities."[25]

Because of Epstein's integration policy, coupled with housing discrimination elsewhere in Seattle, people of color moved into public housing, providing a startling demographic contrast with the rest of the city. By the late 1970s, blacks constituted 44 percent of public housing residents compared to 9 percent in the city, while whites were 31 percent of the public housing population and 80 percent in the city. Asians and other nonwhites constituted 25 percent of public housing residents and 8 percent of city residents.[26]

Bill Francis, a European American who lived in Yesler Terrace, recalled his teen years in the early 1960s when the executive director, James White, took youths to his farm in nearby Issaquah. "At that time he was probably the only black person in Issaquah," noted Francis. "We would go out there and camp or fish. I remember working on the land, clearing the weeds. Because I was Anglo, I looked like everybody else that lived there. But you could tell that the neighbors were wondering, 'Who are all those little black and brown kids?'"[27] What Francis observed as a teen playing with African American, Asian American, and Mexican American youths in a setting surrounded by European Americans taught him more than books could about ethnoracial relations in a dominant white setting. "In school they always taught us about the United States of America being a so-called melting pot," he noted, "but to me, there was never really a true melting pot—except for Yesler Terrace. We had everyone. We had Anglos, Blacks, Asians, and some Native Americans. … That one thing I have always valued in my upbringing."[28] Dwayne Evans, an African American who lived in

[24] Jesse Epstein, interview report by Howard Droker, March 13, 1973, 1, Howard Droker Papers, Special Collections, Allen Library, University of Washington; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 6, 196; Rudy Pearson, "'A Menace to the Neighborhood': Housing and African Americans in Portland, 1941–1945," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 159–79; Charlotte Books, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 144.

[25] Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway*, 42.

[26] *Annual Population Report*, Dec. 31, 1980 (Seattle: Housing Authority of the City of Seattle, 1981), 10; and Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community*, 238.

[27] Bill Francis, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 22, 2013.

[28] Ibid.

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the High Point project, recalled having black, white, Mexican, and Asian neighbors. "It seemed like they would purposely put different races [next to each other in the] duplex units. … One of my mom's best friends was a white neighbor."[29] Jean Harris, an African American who lived in Yesler Terrace in the 1950s and had both Asian American and white friends, noted, "My best friend in the neighborhood was a Sansei [third-generation Japanese American] girl."[30] As these comments indicate, the experience of growing up alongside people of other ethnoracial groups made lasting impressions. This was the demographic milieu, an educational space in itself, in which NH conducted its programs. Serving multiple ethnoracial minorities gave a certain distinction to its work.

The War on Poverty: Staff Growth through Community Empowerment

In the 1950s and early 1960s, NH focused its attention on residents in one community, Yesler Terrace. But the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson produced a sea of change in NH's reach into other high-poverty neighborhoods. Soon after he took office in 1963, Johnson began his multifaceted War on Poverty, a massive federal commitment to combat economic distress and urban blight. Much of the government's largesse pouring into social welfare services went to nonprofits. As a result, NH, like other social service agencies nationwide, grew rapidly. "When I started as a youth worker in Neighborhood House in the 1960s," recalled Thomas, "the staff was about twenty." Over the next ten years, "it grew well beyond a hundred."[31]

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the centerpiece of the War on Poverty, created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to coordinate the federal government's various antipoverty programs. The law enabled the federal government to identify the nation's "high impact poverty areas." Portions of the city of Seattle fell under this category. Like other states, the state of Washington took the opportunity the new law provided. It established boards as umbrella organizations receiving federal funds; in turn, the boards allocated funds to competing private nonprofits. In this administrative structure, the Seattle-King County Economic Opportunity Board became the entity to which NH and other social service agencies

[29] Evans, interview by author.

[30] Jean Harris, phone interview by author, Sept. 20, 2013.

[31] Thomas, interview; *Neighborhood House Annual Report* (Seattle, Neighborhood House, 1977), Seattle Room, Seattle Public Library Special Collections, Seattle, WA, 6, hereafter *NH Annual Report*.

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applied for funds. Such funding enabled NH to expand its services dramatically. Similar expansion experiences occurred with neighborhood centers nationwide. In November 1965, for example, the OEO granted over $10 million for social service projects. This hefty influx of government monies led NH and other social service agencies to become increasingly dependent on federal and state funding, a marked contrast to the early years of Settlement House, when it received monies largely from private donations. During the 1920s and the Great Depression, the Community Chest and then some public funding helped it stay afloat. According to Robert Fisher and Michael Fabricant, the War on Poverty brought a dramatic inflow of funds that turned settlements like NH into publicly funded, antipoverty, social service agencies. As Trolander points out, this financial dependency shifted their orientation toward the War on Poverty's priority of community empowerment, including leadership development and direct action.[32]

The Community Action Program (CAP) was at the heart of the War on Poverty. It mandated that agencies encourage residents in low-income neighborhoods to take an active role in making decisions on services they received and in advocating for their needs. This mandate helped to shift staffers' perspective from deficits to strengths of neighborhood residents. To this end, NH worked with the SHA to encourage the formation of community councils in each housing project. Committees within the community councils worked with NH staff to generate program ideas, and residents attended council meetings to voice their views on issues they faced. Janacek recalled of the 1970s, "We worked hand-in-glove [with the community council] because we felt the people in the community knew what the issues were."[33] A European American who had served with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and later earned a master's degree in social work, Janacek had considerable experience living and working in low-income neighborhoods. Steve Fisher, another former center director, noted, "We were trying to build a sense of community."[34] Fisher, a European American, had begun at NH in 1979 as a trainee under President Richard Nixon's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). He was assigned various jobs at NH and later

[32] Thomas, interview; Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House*, 37; Robert Fisher and Michael Fabricant, "From Henry Street to Contracted Services: Financing the Settlement House," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 29, no. 3 (Sept. 2002), 10–15; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 185, 205; and Bryan and Davis, *100 Years at Hull-House*, 281.

[33] Janacek, interview.

[34] Steve Fisher, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 20, 2013.

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became a center director. This vision of collaboration and mutual support led to programs that benefited not only the growth of participants but also the experiential learning of staffers.[35]

To further resident participation, the NH Board of Trustees in 1966 amended its bylaws to allow for three members from each community council to be elected to serve on the agency's board. This meant that about fifteen of thirty board members were from Seattle's public housing communities. This policy initiative placed NH at the forefront of encouraging public housing residents to take leadership roles in the governance of neighborhood centers; only 25 percent of neighborhood centers nationwide included neighborhood residents on their boards.[36]

In addition to supporting community councils, the partnership between the SHA and NH allowed the latter to lease from the SHA a new and larger space for its central office for a dollar a year. By 1967, with War on Poverty funding support, NH had opened additional centers in the housing projects of Rainier Vista and Holly Park in South Seattle, and in High Point in West Seattle. It also provided services in a few of the city's other low-income neighborhoods, and at a center in Park Lake, a housing project just south of West Seattle, outside Seattle's city limits. The SHA realized that providing more space for NH to manage its operations would increase services to families whose needs lay beyond what the housing authority could provide. As a result of the close partnership between NH and the SHA, NH became fully identified with public housing.[37]

By this time, NH included African Americans, European Americans, and Asian Americans as staff members and center directors, led by the African American executive director Harry Thomas, who, with his staff, reflected both the multi-ethnoracial communities NH served as well as the 1950s and 1960s civil rights activism and increasing emphasis on ethnic pride.[38] "There was just such an amazing spirit [at NH], and I really believe that Harry had a lot to do with that," opined Terri DiJoseph, a European American who worked at NH during the 1970s and 1980s, first as a work-study student and tutor

[35] Annelise Orleck, "Introduction," in Orleck and Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty*, 10; *NH Annual Report 1977*, 16; Jerry Janacek, "Community Councils," *Yesler Happenings* (Seattle, WA), October 1980, 4; and "Yesler Terrace Community Council," *Yesler Happenings* (Seattle, WA), March 1981, 1.

[36] Thomas, interview; and Fisher and Fabricant, "From Henry Street to Contracted Services," 17.

[37] "Report 1965," Housing Headlines, Seattle Housing Authority 16, no. 4 (June 1966), 1; Devine, *From Settlement House to Neighborhood House*, 37; and *NH Annual Report*, 1966–67, p. 7.

[38] Janacek, interview; Kristin O'Donnell, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 26, 2013.

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coordinator, then as a youth counselor. "He was so passionate himself, and so motivating."[39] Beth Pflug, a European American who began at NH in the 1960s as a work-study student and later became a grant writer and director of tutoring, recalled, "He created a real collegial process. He allowed everybody to be part of the decision making, although he was willing to be the final arbiter. He was open with the Board, he brought people along."[40] Fisher explained, "He was empathetic and compassionate, and had a great deal of integrity."[41]

Born in 1941, Harry Thomas grew up in Renton, just southeast of Seattle, in public housing that separated different ethnoracial groups in different sections. When he was twelve, his family moved to Seattle's Holly Park, which was integrated, and where he continued to live until 1963, when he graduated from college. During his youth, NH had not yet opened a center at Holly Park, so he was unable to participate in its afterschool programs. A year after graduating from college, having worked at multiple part-time jobs and, in particular, having been a youth counselor, NH hired him as a youth "street worker" at its Rainier Vista Center. After two years, he became Yesler Terrace center director—meanwhile earning his master's degree in social work—and three years later, when he was only twenty-eight, he became NH executive director, a position he held from 1969 to 1982. His past experiences, aptitude for experiential learning, and approachable personality enabled him to take advantage of the educational space NH provided, which for eighteen years fostered his development and identity as a civic-minded community builder.[42]

This educational space likewise benefited NH staffers, who also found opportunities there for growth. One such opportunity came from the institution's multi-ethnoracial staff and clients. To further their goal of community empowerment, staffers needed to cross racial and ethnic lines. As Mark Wild noted, doing so "challenged established and … restrictive notions of national, ethnic, or racial identities," at the same time that it "carved out a space where [people] could expand their social and cultural opportunities, a space where more inclusive notions of community, however inchoate, might compete with narrower definitions."[43] While Wild was writing about Los Angeles, his words aptly describe a key aspect of the educational landscape at NH.

To be sure, inclusivity demanded time and patience. With trial and error, noted Kristin O'Donnell, a former NH participant and

[39] Terri DiJoseph, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 27, 2013.

[40] Beth Pflug, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 23, 2013.

[41] Fisher, interview.

[42] Thomas, interview.

[43] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting*, 6.

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staffer, the agency learned to improve its "services to non–English-speaking immigrants who were a large percentage of the folks living in public housing."[44] During the 1970s, for example, Chinese American staffers at Yesler Terrace assisted a number of elderly Taiwanese widows who spoke little English. The staffers accompanied them on their errands and translated for them at the SHA meetings. Similar assistance was given to refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia during the 1970s and 1980s. Staffers believed that this support was essential in helping residents gain confidence as they adjusted to life in the city.[45]

Working outside their ethnoracial comfort zone could create intrastaff tensions. Janacek, a white center director who had a largely black staff, had lived and worked among African Americans as a VISTA volunteer and thus felt comfortable interacting with blacks. He recalled, "We … occasionally had issues between black and white. … The white folks weren't very attuned with black culture," and at times "white staff did not want to follow the leadership of their black supervisors." When this happened, Janacek intervened by "having conversations, having dialogue, having expectations."[46]

To open up communication, staffers participated in workshops meant to illuminate different perspectives regarding race and discrimination. The issues of school desegregation, civil rights advocacy, and black power were in the news and would not have been far from staffers' minds. They attempted to bridge their differences, often in heated discussions. "There was a lot of tension!" recalled Pflug. "We were forced to do a lot of self-examination about prejudices you didn't know you had and what kind of biases you grew up with." While she was raised in "a pretty liberal household," she found herself reflecting on what she heard during training sessions and conversations with colleagues. "Learning about 'white privilege'"—not a term used in the 1970s—"was what hit home to me." Staffers did not resolve all issues, and tensions continued to erupt now and again, but they recognized the need to widen and broaden their perspectives, however difficult.[47]

The Nixon administration that followed Johnson's ended the War on Poverty. Because Nixon faced a Congress controlled by Democrats, however, much of the funding for antipoverty programs continued, especially during Nixon's first term, despite rhetoric to the contrary and despite moving programs to other agencies and shifting control of programs to the states through block grants. In 1973, Nixon signed

[44] O'Donnell, interview.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Janacek, interview.
[47] Pflug, interview.

into law CETA, a major public jobs program, which made it possible for social service agencies to hire and train unemployed residents in the neighborhood. NH did just that, giving its new hires a means to earn a living and the opportunity to learn skills that would be useful in later jobs. In 1977, NH hired eighty-one new employees, all residents of public housing, and in the next half year another twenty-seven residents joined the staff, all funded by CETA. The NH budget exceeded $3 million in 1977, with more funds from CETA (21 percent) than from any other source. In 1980, with funds from grants and contracts, its budget totaled $4 million. As a result, over half of NH employees were CETA-funded. The new hires worked as teacher's aides, program aides, youth workers, van drivers, and office workers.[48] Karen Ko, an Asian American staffer, noted the assets that neighborhood residents brought to their work. While not using terminology Tara Yosso developed decades later, Ko referred to residents' linguistic capital in their ability to communicate in the languages and styles of their neighbors, familial capital in their ability to demonstrate warmth and caring, and social capital in their friendships with neighbors. She recalled, "People who lived in the housing projects understood better than anyone else could what it was like to be a tenant in the housing project. They would bring this wealth of personal experience and expertise to the organization—and credibility! It enabled them to talk with their neighbors, literally their neighbors, and convince them to get involved with a program, an event, or an issue."[49] While Ko did not use the term "community cultural wealth," her statements reveal a mind-set congruent with the concept.[50]

Unfortunately for NH, Ronald Reagan's presidency dramatically shrank funds for antipoverty programs. Opposing any federal role in social welfare programs, not to mention federal funding for community-building and advocacy work, Reagan made drastic cuts in programs such as school lunches, food stamps, Pell grants, student loans, and unemployment compensation, and Congress ended CETA in 1981. As a result, NH was forced to lay off half of its staff and radically reduce emergency food and clothing assistance as well as programs such as hot lunches, child care, van service for basic

[48] Robert F. Clark, *The War on Poverty: History, Selected Programs, and Ongoing Impact* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 5, 13; Orleck, "Conclusion," in Orleck and Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty*, 438–40; *NH Annual Report*, 1977, 10; *NH Annual Report*, 1978, 2–3; *Harry Thomas Appointment as Interim Director*, Seattle Human Rights Department, Nov. 22, 1985. Seattle Room, Seattle Public Library Special Collections, Seattle, WA; and Pflug, interview.

[49] Karen Ko, interview by author, Seattle, WA, Nov. 12, 2012.

[50] For Yosso's five forms of capital that have been included in this essay, see Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?," 77–81.

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shopping needs, field trips and other youth activities, and adult education. Robert Moon, who succeeded Thomas as executive director, called the Reagan administration's actions "shameful" and "indecent."[51]

During the difficult years of the 1980s, NH survived, but only barely, often dictated to by funders to run programs it otherwise would not have initiated. While Fisher and Fabricant see a major problem in grant recipients having to follow "categorical programs" of funding agencies, NH was sometimes able to apply creativity in using such monies to address some of its own priorities. At the same time, true to Fisher and Fabricant's critique, during the Reagan administration NH avoided direct social action because it was anathema to the president. In these ways, NH operated precariously. Despite its difficulties, however, NH continued to offer its services as best it could. Declared Moon in *The Voice*, the NH monthly publication financed by the SHA, "The historic mission of Neighborhood House continues—advocacy on behalf of immigrants, refugees, and people in need."[52]

Tutoring and Field Trips: Work-Study Students and Residents Become Community Builders

Because children and youth constituted about half or more of public housing residents, from a low of 45 percent in 1942 to a high of 75 percent in 1966, tutoring became a major program at NH. Its leaders believed that unlocking the doors to literacy was key to achieving economic stability, a vital component of community empowerment.[53]

In 1965, the tutoring program's second year, there were 112 volunteers. Believing in the program's value, SHA administrators expanded it. Collaborating with the University of Washington and NH, the SHA applied for the Economic Opportunity Act's Work-Study funds. With funds channeled through the university, NH hired students with financial need to help administer the program. At its peak in 1967 and 1968, as many as a thousand youths received

[51] Lee Moriwaki, "Thinner Budgets Will Change Many Lives: CETA Workers Out in the Cold," *Seattle Times*, May 17, 1981, 30; Clark, *The War on Poverty*, 70–71; "Neighborhood House in Trouble," *Park Lake Express* (Seattle, WA), April–May 1981, 1; "Service Cuts Hit Holly Park," *Holly Park Grapevine* (Seattle, WA), May 1981, 1, 3; and Robert Moon, "Viewpoint," *The Voice* (Seattle, WA), May 1985, 2.

[52] Robert Moon, "Viewpoint," *The Voice*, Aug. 1985, 2; and Fisher and Fabricant, "From Henry Street to Contracted Services," 18–22.

[53] *Seattle Housing Authority Report, 1942* (Seattle: Seattle House Authority, 1943), 30–31; *Seattle Housing Authority Report,* (Seattle: Seattle Housing Authority, 1957), n.p.; *Seattle Housing Authority Report* (Seattle: Seattle Housing Authority, 1966), 1; and *Seattle Housing Authority Report* (Seattle, Seattle Housing Authority, 1980), 10.

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tutoring. As funding decreased, NH continued the program by creatively integrating it with other programs.[54]

How did tutoring at NH work? Volunteers, most from nearby colleges and high schools, tutored youths after school until late evening. Each housing project included a Neighborhood House Tutoring Center in one of the housing units, which, as a former tutee explained, was "a fourplex unit that they had modified by removing some of the walls so you could just walk all the way through it. We would go in and they had all kinds of different educational stuff."[55] Although the youths were of all grades, most were at the elementary level. Each youth was tutored individually in one-hour sessions once a week, primarily in math but also in reading, in addition to receiving help with their homework. The program sought to help decrease the student dropout rate by developing a supportive relationship, encouraging a positive attitude toward learning, and—in cooperation with schools—offering guidance and academic help to suspended students (fifty-two in 1966). In addition to receiving a training manual, tutors attended orientation as well as in-service training sessions. School teachers and administrators referred students to the program and also led some of the in-service workshops. The demand for tutors remained high throughout the program.[56]

Susan Nakagawa, an Asian American who began with NH as a work-study student in the 1960s, noted, "It was all individualized. … Maybe the child comes in with homework, and then you get an idea that maybe they need help in spelling. In the end, it's the attention to the person, and it's almost like it evolves into a big-brother, big-sister kind of a thing. Some of them have that kind of relationship where they took them on individual one-on-one field trips."[57] While the program began with a cultural capital approach that focused on the disadvantaged status of public housing residents, staffers soon recognized value in the strengths resident participants brought with them to NH. In other words, as the aforementioned indicates, volunteers and staffers sought to help their tutees acquire white, middle-class attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. At the same time, however, they tapped into the youths' cultural wealth by encouraging positive emotional bonds that built on the youths' familial capital. These contrary

[54] *CARITAS and Neighborhood House Tutoring Programs: Final Report, 1968,* Seattle Room, Seattle Public Library Special Collections, Seattle, WA; Carter, interview; and Clark, *The War on Poverty*, 29.

[55] Evans, interview.

[56] *Interim Report, Central Area Motivation Program and Neighborhood House Service Centers, 1966*, 56–60, Seattle Room: Seattle Public Library, Seattle, WA.

[57] Susan Nakagawa, interview by author, Seattle, WA, May 23, 2013.

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mind-sets gave rise to an underlying tension that continued throughout the program.

That the tutorial program tapped into families' aspirational capital—their hopes for their future—was evident in residents' dismay at the program's demise in the early 1980s, resulting from Reagan's massive cuts to social service programs. "[Parents] desperately wanted a tutoring program for their children," stated DiJoseph, who recalled that there were about four hundred children on the wait-list at that time. It took ten years before the housing authority was able to find funding that would once again make tutoring available to public housing residents.[58] In a competitive proposal process, Catholic Charities received the grant and hired DiJoseph as program head. DiJoseph recalled, "So much of what I learned at Neighborhood House went to form the program."[59] Here was an instance of her informal education impacting a new program. But this discussion jumps ahead in time.

Returning to the NH tutoring program of the 1960s and 1970s, it should be noted that it provided more than help with homework, reading, and math. The goal was to support youths in whatever ways that benefited them. Many times it meant spending time with them in unstructured settings. DiJoseph recalled, "We would have about twenty kids at night [at High Point]. Some of them just came to hang out. We worked with them, played games, and talked with them. … It was informal, meant to really build trust with the kids."[60] Pflug explained, "Often kids who had troubles or behavioral problems … would come in a lot. Centers were a [place to] drop in. They would hang out with us because we were there."[61] Staffers understood implicitly the importance of building on the youths' familial and linguistic capital.

Their perspective in engaging with youths is illustrated in a major NH initiative intimately tied to tutoring: field trips. Tutors—both staffers and volunteers—took youths to parks, beaches, museums, theaters, and other places of interest in and out of the city. The idea was to expose youths to new experiences and thereby strengthen their understanding of their community and places beyond it. Resident response was enthusiastic. In the 1965–1966 school year, for example, over eighteen hundred youths participated in four field trips.[62] "Some of the kids had never been out of the project," explained DiJoseph. "And we really

[58] DiJoseph, interview; Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?," 77–81.

[59] Ibid.

[60] DiJoseph, interview.

[61] Pflug, interview.

[62] *Interim Report*, 1966, 58; Neighborhood House Tutoring Program, Preliminary Evaluation, 1965, p. 17, Seattle Room, Seattle Public Library, Seattle, WA.

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wanted that one-to-one relationship, for the tutor to be a mentor. Some of the tutors and students had really good rapport and became very good friends. … It was very much like a family situation."[63] Nakagawa recalled, "We took them on hikes. Our housing project was very close to West Seattle, where the Alki Beach is. So, we took them there. We took them on a ferry. You know, when I think about the things we did with them, it was just getting them out … and spending the time with them. And, we had a great time!"[64] Francis, who as a youth had participated in NH activities, confirmed the value of the field trips, noting, "The ocean is two hundred miles away! Mount Rainier is one hundred miles away. [The outings] really, really, broadened our horizons."[65]

In the summer, NH offered a full program of weekday activities: dancing, swimming, cooking, karate, science projects, storytelling, fishing, and hiking. During the summer and spring breaks, staffers organized camping trips. David Good, a teen at Holly Park, wrote of the friends he made. He also enjoyed seeing bald eagles and "families of deer wandering nearby." The overwhelmingly positive response from residents showed that the program had connected with the aspirations of youths and their parents for eye-opening and horizon-widening experiences. This major effort reinforced staffers' identity as community builders and gave them learning experiences in organizing, leading, and interacting with diverse residents.[66]

As staffers and volunteers tutored their charges, they themselves learned, demonstrating the ways in which NH provided space for informal education. The experience of African American Dwayne Evans provides one example. His family moved to High Point housing in 1952, when he was three years old, and he continued to live there until he reached eighteen. "My first involvement with Neighborhood House was when I was a sophomore in high school," he recalled. "I was having a hard time in English and Neighborhood House had a tutoring center. … If I went out my back door, I was right across from where the tutoring center was. So, it was really convenient for me." Of the tutoring experience, he said, "It helped me, so I kept going." After a number of sessions, the tutoring coordinator, who had recognized in Evans aspirational and familial assets that would benefit both him and NH, asked him if he would tutor elementary school children. Evans recalled, "I was getting tutored, and I was tutoring. … It was a real

[63] DiJoseph, interview.

[64] Nakagawa, interview.

[65] Francis, interview.

[66] David Good, "Camp Orkila," *Holly Park Grapevine* (Seattle, WA), July 14, 1977, 4.

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positive experience for me. [Tutoring] made me feel like I had responsibilities to kids, and that really influenced my choices as to whether or not I was going to smoke dope, or drink, and all that kind of stuff—because I'm working around these kids. They're already offering me cigarettes. Every time I turned around they would say, 'Do you want a cigarette, Dwayne?' You had to be a model, so I would say, 'No, no, and no.' To think a kid might hear I was smoking dope or drinking—it was like, 'Oh no, I have to stay away from that.'" In his effort to model positive behavior, Evans set out on a trajectory toward his personal goals, which ultimately improved his academic and leadership abilities. "After I graduated from high school," Evans continued, "I went to Highline Community College and got a work-study at the Tutoring Center." Then he became a youth worker. "If a kid got in trouble at school we would go up to the school and talk with the teacher, talk with the principal. If a youth was sent to juvenile court, we went to court with the kid to be a support." Evans's effectiveness in his job eventually led to his appointment as center director, first at Rainier Vista and then at High Point. Beginning as a youth using the services of NH, Evans developed into a community builder in his own right.[67]

Judi Carter, a European American, was another public housing resident who benefited from participating at NH. Her contact with the agency began in 1969 when she was a twenty-two-year-old single mother living in Park Lake Homes with two small children. "[NH staffers] kept sending me letters, and I didn't read them. Then one time I did read one and it said there was a tutoring program. So I called them and said, 'If you can find somebody to watch my kids, I'll tutor another kid.'" Tutoring helped her gain self-confidence. Observing her effectiveness as a tutor led staffers to see her linguistic, aspirational, and familial assets. They asked her to attend community meetings. After much prodding, she eventually acquiesced. Later they asked her to run for a seat on the Park Lake Community Council. To her surprise, she won. Experience on the council added to her knowledge and self-assurance. NH staffers then encouraged her to continue her schooling. "Neighborhood House gets this deal from public assistance," she recalled. "They tell me that they can choose eight people from the community to be involved in … an education program. It would give you two years of education, with child care, and $30 a month extra, and bus fare, and they would pay for the books and the tuition." Afraid of being unable to meet their expectations, she told them: "Go away—get out of my face! Leave me alone! I've failed at

[67] Evans, interview; "Dwayne Evans Leaves High Point for Rainier Vista Center Director Position," *High Point Herald* (Seattle, WA), Jan. 31, 1979, 1.

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everything, why would I want to do this again?" With patience and persistence, they convinced her to enroll in Seattle Community College. Doing well there improved her self-image, which led her to enroll at the University of Washington, where she was hired as an NH work-study tutorial coordinator. "I got my bachelor's degree in social welfare, and then a master's degree in public administration. Neighborhood House saved me."[68]

In 1985, as center director at Yesler Terrace, and fifteen years after her first encounter with NH, Carter explained the approach of the agency. "Everything we do here is to try and bring people out of their isolation. People's daily lives are hard enough without their feeling alone. … There's no way I could have gotten to where I am without a hell of a lot of support. I was on welfare. I was a single mother with two kids under the age of two. … Neighborhood House was there for me."[69] Decades later she reflected, "Neighborhood House has done a lot of really great things for a lot of people. I know Neighborhood House has hired people who could not find work, and allowed them to grow up and learn, and become successful. They have fed people, they have clothed people. They have empowered people." These comments point to the underlying aims of NH, to support residents in their effort to gain strength, learn new skills, and reach their aspirations. For Carter and Evans, this support meant having a rich educational venue to develop as socially minded community leaders.[70]

Social Action: Staffers Developing as Civic Leaders

Other staffers, too, found NH's milieu conducive to their professional growth. As with Thomas, Evans, and Carter, the educational space at NH allowed them to develop their effectiveness as community builders. In fact, many staffers began working at NH without intending to make careers of social service work. Several examples illustrate. Pflug and Ko began at NH as part-time work-study students to help defray college expenses, Pflug in 1964 and Ko in 1973. After graduation, both took full-time positions at NH, with increasingly greater responsibilities. By the 1980s, Pflug was writing grant proposals and directing the tutoring program, while Ko was supervising all center directors. In the 1970s, DiJoseph also began at NH as a work-study student. As tutor coordinator, she observed, listened, and learned, and from her experiences conceptualized in the 1990s a new tutoring program that she directed. Fisher graduated from high school in 1966, and subsequently

[68] Carter, interview.

[69] "Yesler Terrace," *The Voice* (Seattle, WA), May 1985, 3.

[70] Carter, interview.

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attended college and worked in various jobs, unsure of what he wanted to do with his life. In 1979 he began at NH as a CETA trainee, working in senior and then family outreach. After five years, he became center director, a position he held for fourteen years, first at High Point, then at Rainier Vista, and later at Park Lake Homes. What staffers had in common was a worksite full of activity and diversity, a place where they could grow and gain confidence as socially minded civic leaders. As Nakagawa explained, "It was a great time," with staffers working together with the mission of building community.[71]

A key initiative vital to the NH program of building community was social action. Especially strong from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, this initiative involved advocacy work and collaboration with residents on projects involving direct action. Ko explained that NH staffers believed their role was "not to be the leader, but to be the support to people to help them find their voice, and to help them figure out … how the system worked, how to be strong, and be able to get what they were entitled to."[72]

To this end, NH collaborated with other agencies in offering workshops to help residents understand the political and social system. In offering sessions on the school system, NH staffers reasoned, "Parents and students have a better chance of getting the best possible education if they know how the system works, what the laws say, and how to use them."[73] NH also promoted Youth Councils as a place for youths to meet, "figure out what the problems are," "move in on the real rules in the adult world," and train "for survival and success."[74] Youths learned about school suspension policies and students' rights, and helped organize sporting events, dances, car repair workshops, and martial arts classes. The idea was to tap into "networking skills" as well as leadership and organizational experiences.[75]

Scholars such as David Berliner have pointed to the dire influence of poverty on children's academic achievement, while Michael Katz has analyzed the historical failure to acknowledge structural causes of poverty. In this light, critics would say that some NH programs, such as crisis intervention, food and rent assistance, transportation services, and employment search assistance, did not get at the root causes

[71] Pflug, interview; Ko, interview; DiJoseph, interview; Fisher, interview; and Nakagawa, interview.

[72] Ko, interview.

[73] "School Survival Workshops," *Rainier Vista Views and News* (Seattle, WA), Jan. 1981, 4.

[74] "Youth Councils Build Success & Survival Skills," *Rainier Vista Views and News* (Seattle, WA), May 1981, 3.

[75] Ibid.

of poverty, and that tutoring and job training focused wrongly on individual behaviors instead of structural changes in society. This criticism is reflected in the issue among historians of settlements being agents of social reform and/or of the status quo.[76] According to Trolander, "Settlement workers were, and always have been, concerned with the *effects* of poverty."[77] In the same vein, Allen Davis argued that Progressive Era efforts toward social reform, which were a major part of settlements, decreased after World War II, with the result that "many settlements became institutions to serve the neighborhood rather than levers for social change."[78]

NH programs in the 1960s and 1970s challenge Trolander's and Davis's criticisms. During this period when it had federal funding support, and spilling into the early 1980s when Reagan cut funding for the poor, NH activities aimed at social action. Yet staffers understood that social reform efforts took time before change, if any, would take place, while there was a clear necessity to address immediate and basic needs of neighborhood residents. Moreover, Davis's critique misses the importance of programs aimed at helping youths gain literacy and interest in learning, which have been of benefit to academically struggling youths of all socioeconomic levels.

That NH programs did more than ameliorate the effects of poverty can be seen in the agency's activities, illustrated by the examples below. Stimulated by the OEO push for community participation in program development and its encouragement of direct action, NH emphasized changes to the status quo. Staffers saw social action as an important educational tool. "There have been times," wrote one of them in the Holly Park newsletter, "when the immediate needs of the public housing communities have been so great that the total energy of the agency has had to be devoted to the delivery of services. But the social conditions that create problems for low-income people must be dealt with if the condition of the poor is to change rather than [be] patched up." [79] To that end, staffers kept a close eye on social and economic issues locally and nationally, tapping into the resistant capital of neighborhood communities—their fund of knowledge and skills that could be brought to bear in challenging inequality.[80]

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[76] David C. Berliner, "Our Impoverished View of Educational Reform," *Teachers College Record*, Aug. 2, 2005, http://www.tcrecord.org, ID Number 12106; and; Michael B. Katz, *Improving Poor People: The Welfare State, the "Underclass," and Urban Schools as History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[77] Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change,* 159, emphasis added.

[78] Davis, *Spearheads for Reform,* xiii.

[79] Jean Devine, "Of This and That," *Holly Park Grapevine* (Seattle, WA), March 10, 1977, 4, emphasis in original.

[80] Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?," 80.

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NH staffers encouraged residents and their community councils to voice concerns and initiate projects to improve their lives. At Holly Park, residents' persistence paid off. After twelve years of concerted action, the city in 1978 installed a traffic light on a busy road. That same year Park Lake residents demonstrated and marched, stopping the impending move of their neighborhood post office to a distant location inaccessible to most residents. Several years later, residents at High Point and Holly Park called on the city council to stop the planned closure of their community libraries. Under intense pressure, the library board rescinded its plan, instead agreeing to close the main library for a half-day a week. As Ko, passionate about community action, declared, "All power to the people!"[81]

Staffers also encouraged neighborhood residents to testify at hearings and to lobby political leaders. In 1980, a group of residents traveled to the state capital in Olympia to advocate for raising the welfare cost-of-living allotment to keep up with inflation. In writing about their success, the Rainier Vista Center director asserted, "See what can happen if you take the time and energy to fight!"[82]

In *Why America Lost the War on Poverty,* Frank Stricker argued that the program failed because it promoted job training instead of creating jobs, depending solely on tax cuts to stimulate economic growth that would in turn generate private sector jobs. Contrary to Stricker's claim, the War on Poverty did create jobs through agencies such as NH. Using OEO funds and working with the Seattle Day Nursery, NH hired and trained resident mothers to be certified day care providers and employed other residents as community aides. These jobs were mirrored in other nonprofits throughout the country. And as discussed earlier, CETA funds in the 1970s offered low-income residents with additional jobs and job training, which provided new skills that enabled residents to find other work when federal funding ended. According to Michael Katz, Mark Stern, and Jamie Fader, even beyond specific legislation, the War on Poverty had an important legacy—the acceptance of the idea of "public and publicly funded employment"—and was "a powerful vehicle" for economic advancement for African Americans and other minorities.[83]

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[81] *NH Annual Report*, 1978, 8, 10; Sally Temple MacDonald, "Elderly Protest Plans to Close Post-Office Branch," *Seattle Times South Times,* Nov. 8, 1978, H1; David Suffia, "Patrons Singe Council Members over Proposal to Close Three Libraries," *Seattle Times*, July 2, 1981, B2; and Susan Gilmore, "Compromise Saves Three Neighborhood Libraries," *Seattle Times*, July 17, 1981, B2.

[82] "Advocates for the Poor," *Rainier Vista Views and News* (Seattle, WA), July 1980, 3.

[83] Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty,* 2, 62–67, 72–75, 235–39; "Neighborhood House," *Housing Headlines, Seattle Housing Authority* 17, no. 3

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In his critique, Stricker admitted that the War on Poverty community action initiative did some good, but he maintained that its effects were limited and that it did not substitute for jobs. Unlike Stricker, who downplayed community action, NH staffers promoted it. Their perspective, that direct action empowered low-income residents and increased their political participation, concurs with Noel Cazenave's *Impossible Democracy*. To be sure, efforts at direct action, as Trolander and Orleck note, threatened the existing power structure and could mean loss of financial support. As Yesler Terrace resident Kristin O'Donnell explained, "If you are doing effective advocacy fighting city hall, and you're getting some of city hall money, you think, 'Do we want to push this?' … If you decide to push it … you're not going to have your money to do the services."[84] Because of this reality and Reagan's opposition to social action programs, in the early 1980s NH moderated considerably its efforts at direct action.[85]

Yet they did not eschew direct action entirely; they were just more selective about what they chose to do. For example, after Reagan's massive budget cuts, public housing residents testified at hearings held by city officials, convincing the mayor to provide funds to offset some of the cuts. "While these [funds] do not *begin* to compensate for the loss of services and employment opportunities provided through CETA contracts," declared Thomas, "they do reflect a recognition by the Mayor's Office of the seriousness of the need in our area. Again we see the results that can be achieved when community residents and [agencies] work together toward a common goal."[86] Furthermore, despite the political backlash, Cazenave concluded that direct action effected changes that bettered participants' lives and spawned a proliferation of activist community organizations beyond the 1960s and 1970s.[87]

Conclusion

As the experiences of Evans, Carter, Thomas, and other NH leaders illustrate, NH provided them with an important educative space, a

(Aug. 1967), 5; and Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, and Jamie J. Fader, "The New African American Inequality," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005), 88.

[84] O'Donnell, interview.

[85] Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty,* 235–39; Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 171–81; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change,* 65, 130; and Orleck, "Introduction," 10–11, 16.

[86] "Block Grant," *The Voice* (Seattle, WA), Sept. 1981, 1.

[87] Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 171–81.

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venue to develop their talents and abilities and gain confidence in themselves as socially conscious civic leaders and community builders. In other words, as they worked for community empowerment, they themselves were becoming empowered. Thomas, for example, developed into an exceptionally able NH administrator who was passionate about his work, holding open discussions with his staff. Fisher recalled, "I really learned from Harry."[88] And Thomas also learned—how to work with others and lead a team. After leaving NH, he held executive positions in the city, county, and state governments, and for thirteen years served as executive director of the SHA. He had come full circle, first as a youth living in the SHA's public housing and later as an adult directing the department. While others did not have such a dramatic career trajectory, they too moved on to important social service positions. Ko and Pflug worked subsequently as administrators in Seattle's Neighborhood Service Centers, Fisher became a supervisor in the King County Housing Authority, DiJoseph joined Habitat for Humanity as program design and evaluation specialist, Evans worked for the city as an adolescent drug and alcohol counselor, and Carter became an SHA supervisor.[89]

The tensions arising within the NH educative space, as difficult as they were, became opportunities for learning: how to work with another institution having conflicting yet overlapping goals, how to work with people of different perspectives and different ethnoracial backgrounds, and how to navigate with middle-class perspectives while valuing the cultural wealth of communities in poverty.

The mid-1960s ushered in a monumental national change in outlook on the poor as the War on Poverty's CAPs reached across the country. This in-depth case study of the post–World War II transformation of settlement work in a city in the Pacific Northwest shows commonalities with other places as well as distinctiveness to Seattle conditions. My examination of Seattle's Neighborhood House provides insights that expand on existing scholarship—as that by Wild, Lee, and Brilliant on multi-ethnoracial communities, by Cazenave, Stricker, and Orleck on the War on Poverty, and by Trolander, Lasch-Quinn, and Davis on settlement house responses to societal changes. In doing so, it extends the literature on Progressive Era settlement reformers by highlighting the education of a group of

[88] Fisher, interview.

[89] Seattle Housing Authority, "Harry Thomas, Champion of Public Housing," March 13, 2004, http://www.seattlehousing.org/news/releases/2004/harry-thomas-profile/; *Harry Thomas Appointment as Interim Director*, Seattle Human Rights Department, Nov. 22, 1985, Seattle Room, Seattle Public Library Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

post–World War II urban community leaders, revealing the ways in which NH provided a powerful educative space for those who worked there, a place that nurtured their talents and abilities as civically minded community builders.

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