FOREWORD

Lewis Mumford, the American writer and social scientist, wrote that cities were created as "a means of bringing heaven down to earth." They are a "symbol of the possible." His idealism is hard to grasp these days when our cities have become symbols of despair. Solving urban problems sometimes seems impossible.

At the Bruner Foundation in Manhattan, we remain hopeful. Time and again, we have watched people do the impossible: transform their neighborhoods, cities, and even regions through innovative, collective action.

These successful models of urban excellence should be celebrated, and their success must be examined so that their lessons can be applied across the nation. The Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment was founded in 1986 to help make this happen. Primarily, the award is a tool of discovery. Searching for worthy programs, we attempt to find out what kinds of things improve cities. With the urban crisis growing and resources shrinking, false solutions must be avoided; the cost in human terms is too high.

It is the rigorous, innovative process by which the Bruner Foundation evaluates urban places that lends the award special value. Each round of competition takes two years. The Selection Committee members are chosen not only for their reputation in particular areas of expertise, such as landscape architecture or community development, but for displaying receptivity to issues outside their respective fields.

Over the years, Bruner selection committees have tried to avoid defining urban excellence too narrowly. A simplistic perspective is one reason so many urban projects—even projects that win architec-

ture or design awards—sometimes bring disappointing results in both human and economic terms.

We believe the development process to be a highly complex contest involving diverse perspectives and goals, none of which is sufficient in itself to create excellent urban places: developers and architects pursue economic and aesthetic objectives; governments promote their planning and growth policies; and neighborhood groups focus on the quality of life in their communities.

The Rudy Bruner Award competition seeks to identify, reward, and publicize urban places that reconcile these competing objectives. The economic, visual, and social perspectives must complement one another.

Although the limits that define eligible submissions for the award are quite broad, the project must be a real place, not just a plan. It must demonstrate its excellence in action. The people affected by the project must be involved. The values should be explicit and viewed as worthwhile by the local community. Conflicts must be discussed and resolved openly. Besides showing social responsibility, economic viability, and aesthetic sensitivity, the projects must also be ecologically benign.

With this broad mandate as a backdrop, each Bruner Award Selection Committee walks onto an empty stage without a script. The debate about what constitutes urban excellence begins afresh with each round of competition, inspired and framed by the eighty to ninety detailed responses to our call for submissions.

The senior author of *Breakthroughs: Re-Creating the American City,* Neal R. Peirce, is one of America's most knowledgeable urban journalists who served as a Rudy Bruner Award Selection Committee member and who participated vigorously in the debate that designated New York City's Tenant Interim Lease Program and Portland's Downtown Plan and Program as 1989 winners.

At the end of each chapter, critical conversations have been included in order to provide additional perspectives on the projects described. The contributors to these commentaries include Robert Shibley and Polly Welch, longtime consultants to the Bruner Foundation, as well as members of the Selection Committee who evaluated the award entries: Mary Decker, director of Capital Planning and Policy, Board of Commissioners of Cook County, Illinois; George E. Hartman, Jr., a partner in the Washington, D.C., architectural firm of Hartman-Cox; David Lawrence, senior vice president of Gerald Hines Interests, a Houston-based real estate firm; Steve Livingston, director of the Department of Parks, Charleston, South Carolina; the Honorable Joseph P. Riley, Jr., mayor of Charleston; Anne Whiston Spirn, professor of landscape architec-

ture and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; and Aaron Zaretsky, the former executive director of the Market Foundation in Seattle and currently the executive director of the Grove Arcade Public Market Foundation in Ashville, North Carolina. Robert Shibley is the director of urban design and a professor of planning and architecture in the School of Architecture and Planning at the State University of New York at Albany. Polly Welch, an architect, is the former deputy assistant secretary of public housing in the Executive Office of Communities and Development of the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Simeon Bruner
Treasurer, Board of Trustees
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INTRODUCTION

It has never been easy for American cities. They have been obliged to survive in a nation born into Jeffersonian agrarianism and later to mature into suburban flight. Large or small, America's cities have had a perennially difficult time generating admiration, respect, or understanding. They have served the nation magnificently as fountainheads of commerce, finance, and the arts. They have taken millions of new Americans from their point of entry and helped those newcomers elevate themselves economically into the American mainstream. In recent years, the greatest of cities—such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—have become command centers of a new global economy.

Yet in the popular American image, the cities have rarely come off well despite the fact that it was to the cities that masses of immigrants and racial minorities first came, to those cities that generated the most social tensions and that harbored the most notorious political machines. Organized crime, drug rings, and frightening crime rates all acquired a distinctly urban aura, and from generation to generation, rural and then suburban politicians found cities their safest whipping boy.

The problems of American cities go deeper than image, or the fact that they have lost much of their backbone of solid income-earning residents, or the reality that the vast majority of the menial and manufacturing jobs they could once offer strong-backed but ill-educated newcomers has disappeared in the years since World War II. With their loss of the middle class and with the waning of self-confident, homegrown business leadership and strong ethnic neighborhoods in the era following World War II, cities have become

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tougher places to lead, to coalesce for the common good. Cities and their citizens feel acted upon, victims of vast demographic, economic, and social forces far beyond their control. Ordinary residents often feel they are more victims than beneficiaries of massive urban bureaucracies whose chief interest seems to be protecting their own institutional prerogatives.

Sometimes it seems as if *nothing* civic, of general benefit, can be achieved in American cities. Out in the neighborhoods, the so-called NIMBY syndrome—"not in my backyard"—surfaces to block halfway houses, havens for the homeless, even hiding places for battered women. Residents who toil to save their homes, to turn around deteriorating communities, sometimes receive a not-so-subtle message, even from their own city's leaders, that it might be easier to pack up and leave than to stay and fight, that entire neighborhoods are doomed to failure. An architect proposes a truly creative new building or public space and investors begin to carp that it is too expensive, that corners had better be cut. Business or citizen reformers, trying to reinvigorate school systems that do not teach or to shake up police forces that cannot stop crime, get shunted aside by unions and entrenched, civil service–protected staffs.

This book is not principally about these problems of urban life, however real they are. This is a book, rather, about the glowing exceptions, the *breakthroughs,* the tentative, fragile, critical lead indicators that might lead to stronger urban societies in the twenty-first century. It is a chronicle—a sampler, if you will—of six efforts selected because of their exemplary approach to urban problem solving by the Rudy Bruner Award. Each of them, in deeply individual ways, offers nuggets of hope and guidance to American policymakers seeking to recover from the excesses and failures of the 1960s-style Great Society social tinkering and the callous neglect and denial of the minimalist policies of the Reagan era.

When one looks across today's American cityscape, there *are* exceptions to urban mediocrity, discouragement, and complacency: collaborative city planning efforts that can, and do, work; housing programs that can function without being throttled by bureaucracy; local governments that bend themselves into new shapes and forms to accommodate their citizens; a revived city market or new urban plaza that is a joy to walk through; schools that ignite a love of learning, of possibility, in their students; police systems that treat citizens more as allies than suspects; community-based partnerships that create new housing and new enterprises even when government agencies claim it cannot be done.

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in seemingly disparate elements—people, public-private partnerships, at first glance off-the-wall coalitions—that somehow coalesce to forge new approaches to old problems and new dilemmas alike.

No single definition of urban success springs out among the diverse models for nurturing and re-creating a new, more viable, and, yes, more human city. For some, it may be building a neighborhood with a genuine sense of community, a place with an internal support system that functions family to family, neighbor to neighbor, the kind of neighborhood that many of us can remember as a vibrant, caring place. A *community.* Others see it in a school system or a police force that responds to the needs of the people it should serve and is, in fact, in large measure controlled by them. Others think the great city is one with "good" urban design, though there is great debate about what that is: Is it a "signature building" that makes the pages of major architectural reviews? A plaza that buzzes with activity in broad daylight and after dark? A park that invites users from diverse neighborhoods to mix on common ground? Perhaps, even more broadly, the right mix of design and social sensitivity that leads to appealing *public* spaces, whether a broad downtown plaza or a pocket neighborhood park?

The truth, of course, is that urban success, the urban genius starting to bud across our cities, can be defined by any of these elements, and more. Positive urban breakthroughs rest not so much on electing brilliant people to office—though it is surely handy to have them there—as on the birth of a civic culture of cooperation and a belief in the future, with individuals willing to take up the torch to make that better future a reality. The rebirth process hinges on developing and cultivating a sense of the possible, even in the face of the seemingly formidable odds that confront every urban resident, whether he or she lives in Boston, New York City, Atlanta, Houston, Milwaukee, or Denver.

Partnerships are a critical ingredient of the new approach. In the past, governments, corporations, churches, foundations, and nonprofit organizations all worked independently to fight poverty. Their efforts were well-intentioned but far too disjointed to make any impact. In the 1980s, in communities from Baltimore to Miami to Cleveland, these players learned how to work together to rebuild hard-pressed areas. Community groups—often community development corporations actually rehabilitating housing and starting new businesses—became involved in a broad set of partnerships with local governments, states, foundations, banks, and businesses. These alliances became the troubled neighborhoods' chief road to survival and growth in the 1980s as federal support for communities atrophied. Some new, extraordinarily significant intersocietal con-

nections were made. They promise to become even more critical in the 1990s.

Thoughtful people have begun to recognize that the challenges in American society are far more complex than simply putting roofs over people's heads. They have to do with community. They have to do with assuring all Americans a safe place to live. Communities overrun by drugs, crime, and splintered families are not safe. Neither government housing authorities nor police rushing in with sirens wailing and lights flashing is capable of making them secure and decent. The most critical ingredient of neighborhood safety is neighbors insisting on safety in their own home turf. Neighbors know how to set standards and with peer pressure get them enforced. In order to work, revitalization efforts must address the intimate ties between housing, employment, education, and home conditions.

Indeed, traveling around America in the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a profound contrast between neighborhoods with a sense of their own identity and worth, and some measure of self-control, as opposed to those that simply received largess from government bureaucracies. With rare exceptions, for example, the low-income housing owned and administered by grass-roots organizations was superbly maintained. The contrast could not be more dramatic with the stereotypical run-down, graffiti-smeared, publicly run inner-city public housing development. Why? Again, because a neighborhood knows how to establish its own rules, its own order, and its own discipline in a way outsiders rarely if ever can.

The empowerment of people serves double duty. It is *the* critical vehicle for change, and it should be the overriding goal of any and all efforts to rebuild a city block, a neighborhood, or an entire community. Empowerment is perhaps one of the toughest changes policymakers will have to contend with in the 1990s, for it is far more easily proclaimed—made a political slogan—than achieved. The empowerment of people to improve their own lives has never been a clear-cut, executable strategy some high level of government can snap its fingers and effect. Just as racial divisions continue to plague our society and we have no simple formulas to reduce them, empowerment is a change that may be encouraged but basically must percolate upward. Faced with such dilemmas, public administration theory falters.

The new urban theory recognizes a communitywide "ecosystem" that, when it can be put in place, nurtures and enhances community-based development. There are important ingredients: committed civic leadership, an aggressive and competent state or city government, strong intermediary groups, a cast of supporting banks

and insurance companies, foundations, and private corporations—plus people and a growing base of neighborhood leaders.

The new urban theory of our time is first and foremost about people—individuals who effect change in ways both small and grand; people who organize their communities against seemingly impossible odds; nonprofessionals who tackle problems that have stymied the so-called "pros" for years and manage to find some light at the end of the tunnel, even if they do not find *the* solution.

In the late 1980s, when the Ford Foundation set out to recognize the most innovative programs in state and local government around the nation, receiving literally thousands of entries, it discovered a most interesting phenomenon: Roughly half the programs singled out for special recognition were not conceived within the government at all; rather, they had originated with citizen activists who sold authorities on the idea and were then invited in to run the programs. Alternately, the fresh ideas originated somewhere far out in the tentacles of the bureaucracy, far from central headquarters, out of the day-to-day experience of government service providers. Then, instead of being quashed—the fate of many fresh ideas in large organizations—they were embraced by exceptionally farsighted administrators and carefully "sold" to the entire organization. In the overwhelmingly male world of local officialdom, many of the winning programs were run by, if not first proposed by, women. Even more was afoot than citizen activists and women making a strong mark: A handful of government administrators was finding ways to encourage innovative ideas from "down in the ranks" and making it clear they could tolerate failure in trial-and-error efforts in the hope of making large bureaucracies more responsive to the needs of ordinary people, their "customers." One got the idea that an avant-garde of progressive state and local government agencies is moving rapidly into the new age of participatory, nonhierarchical (or "bottoms-up") management already celebrated in such books as *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies* (Warner Books, 1988).

In most places, practice lags leagues behind the best new theory. No clean-cut, simple solutions can be laid out for practitioners to duplicate. The urban theory that runs through the experiments described in this book tends to turn the very foundation of our centralized society upon its head and present, by contrast, a new world of quite unconventional approaches. In some cases, we even see sweeping, radical decentralization in which ordinary people, operating block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, seize control of their own destiny and sometimes accomplish more in six months

or a year than traditional governmental entities have managed to do in a decade of bitter fighting and flailing.

The six stories we relate in *Breakthroughs: Re-Creating the American City* are a seemingly disparate bunch—the tale of a grassroots housing program in New York City's toughest neighborhoods, for instance, or the saga of stopping a highway in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the struggle to undo several *decades* of governmental neglect and bungling.

The stories told here are not a clean cross section of the most promising experimentation in our cities, yet among the six projects profiled in these pages—projects singled out by the Rudy Bruner Award for their excellence in the urban environment—are the nuggets of new and powerful notions about urbanism one has to believe bear immense promise as the nation struggles to keep up with the new developments and challenges of the 1990s. They are stories about places and policy, tales about government and communities. Above all, they are stories about people: People who fight, at untold personal sacrifice, and win; men and women who serve as inspirations for entire neighborhoods; individuals who stand as counterweights to despair.

These are the six projects. Four are from cities. Two are actually out of rural America. All of them illustrate the vital import of individuals as catalysts:

- New York City's intriguing "TIL" (tenant interim lease) program, a landmark housing program that has enabled thousands of America's poorest minority people to become owners of their own apartments.
- The Portland Downtown Plan of 1972, credited for transforming the city's Willamette riverfront from a roaring traffic artery to a park, leading to a handsome bus mall and successful new light rail system, swimming against the tide to increase the downtown's share of regional retailing. The plan has helped make Portland, Oregon, one of the continent's liveliest, most appealing cities.
- Boston's Southwest Corridor, the story of how a fight against freeways culminated in a mass-transit line and neighborhood-sensitive development along its every mile. The project became the biggest public capital effort in Massachusetts history and is landmark testimony to how "officialdom" and citizens, poor and rich, can work together.
- Lincoln's "Radial Reuse" project, a lesson in how citizens can correct a monumental blunder by city hall and remake—for people and homes and community—a four-mile corridor that had been devastated to become a road corridor. In Lincoln, Nebraska, grass-

roots protest was transformed into rebuilding and a powerful lesson into learning how to think and act anew.

• Cabrillo Village, a California community rebuilt by farm workers who decided to take their future into their own hands and who organized to save their own homes. They ended up building new housing, providing vivid evidence that low-income housing can be aesthetically appealing and can reflect a village's strong native culture.

• Vermont's Stowe Recreation Path, at first glance simply a pedestrian and bicyclist way through a famed vacation resort town, but watch how the path operates and you discover a new place that every age group, every class of citizen enjoys as a new common ground, a Main Street for the automobile age, a model potentially as promising for great cities as small towns.

It is interesting that of these six finalists, the New York City TIL program and Portland's Downtown Plan—entries spanning a continent and worlds apart in their ostensible approach—eventually tied for the Rudy Bruner Award and received it jointly. The jury's dilemma, in retrospect, was predictable. The TIL program addresses, directly, America's problems of housing, social deprivation, and the nation's threatened polarized two-class society. By teaching existing tenants how to run and operate their buildings, it leads them toward the American dream of home ownership. The story is made all the more exciting by the fact that TIL buildings are located in some of America's meanest urban environments.

Yet the jury found Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan, and its follow-up over the years, equally exciting. The net result was no less than turning downtown Portland into one of America's most vibrant urban centers, making the downtown *work* in the age of the automobile and the surburban subdivision, when so many center cities have failed. In the process, albeit with travail, much low-income housing was preserved, an income mix was introduced into the downtown residential picture, historic preservation was honored, and magnificent public places were created. Immense technical and planning expertise, and the skill of great artists, went into the Portland plan, yet it worked principally because it never lost sight of its roots in the will of the people and it never lost its determination to improve every Portlander's quality of life.

BONFIRES OF REALITY

The cynic may, of course, say: "It's nice to have highly original projects, but does the nation *need* a new theory of urban revival? Cities

at least *look* better off than during the riots of the 1960s. As for the urban poor, they've been around since the dawn of time and we've done well anyway—especially here in America—so why don't we be realistic and accept more of the status quo?"

Our reply is: Tune on the evening news and watch the incredibly disturbing images that pass before us every day. In New York City, reality mirrored the fictional plot line of author Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), the Big Apple yarn of materialism, class division, and poisonous racial tension. In a Queens neighborhood called Howard Beach, a gang of white thugs chased a black man—who had committed the sin of being in the wrong place at the wrong time—out onto a highway, where he was run down and killed. A young white professional woman was brutally attacked and gang raped in Central Park by black and Hispanic teenagers out for a night of "wilding" in an incident that became known as the case of the "Central Park jogger"—a national symbol for everything that has gone wrong in urban America. As if to confirm that everyone's fears were not terribly misplaced, a young man visiting New York City for the first time from Salt Lake City was stabbed to death trying to defend his parents from subway muggers who were out robbing for money so they could dance the Manhattan night away. The press, once again sounding a familiar refrain, began commiserating over the fate of the world's greatest city in glum terms that had not been heard in nearly two decades.

Boston. Chicago. Philadelphia. Atlanta. Miami. New Orleans. San Diego. No city has been immune from the daily onslaught of bad news that seemed to emanate from our urban centers. In such seemingly "safe" cities as Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, residents discovered that they were not safe from "big city" drug trafficking as the police moved in to shut down crackhouses doing a thriving business.

Los Angeles, America's Shangri-la on the West Coast, has begun to trade in an image as an oasis of palm trees, sunshine, and Hollywood for a grimmer reality of foul air, twenty-four-hour-a-day traffic jams, desperately poor immigrants, and drug-dealing gangs that traded blows in drive-by shootings. Sometimes it seemed that anytime one struck up a conversation with a Southern Californian, the topic would inevitably turn to the area's grave mismatch between jobs and homes, with remarks about how it might have taken him or her two hours to get to work from a home located sixty, seventy, even one hundred miles distant. The facts of life are chilling: the great majority of jobs are going into western Los Angeles and Orange counties and the bulk of remotely affordable new housing into Riverside and San Bernardino counties, many freeways away. The

L.A. 2000 citizen/business/civic committee, appointed by Mayor Tom Bradley, warned of a fearsome future:

> . . . a balkanized landscape of political fortresses, each guarding its own resources in the midst of divisiveness, overcrowded freeways, antiquated sewers, ineffective schools, inadequate human services and a polluted environment.

Old-fashioned political corruption reattacked the cities in the 1980s. In the nation's capital, a city government battered by corruption and ineptitude was shaken to the core when Mayor Marion Barry was videotaped by the FBI during a sting operation smoking crack in a hotel room. In Atlantic City, the East Coast's outpost of casino gambling and one of the nation's saddest cities, virtually the entire elected local government was indicted and hauled off to jail for corruption. In New York City, officials were picked off in droves in one of the most far-reaching, pervasive corruption scandals uncovered in the twentieth century. That such public malfeasance and inefficiency continued to thrive in an era when public money was in critically short supply made the imperative of intelligent management even more critical and the tragedy of the squandering of scarce resources even more poignant.

Meanwhile, nearly every city began to sag under the combined weight of federal cutbacks and skyrocketing demands for social services. The era of President Ronald W. Reagan and "scorched earth" federal domestic budgets had not been kind. Reagan's eagerness to cut federal assistance to the cities—a policy he proclaimed and the American public seemed to endorse in two landslide elections—had become virtually enshrined in a national budget with twelve-digit federal deficits stretching into the infinite future. All one had to do was examine any urban need, whether it was rotting bridges and potholed roads or miserable housing, and the outlook for federal assistance was the same: negligible. Before Reagan was elected president, federal aid amounted to 26 percent of what the nation's cities raised from their own tax sources. By 1988, it was down to 7.5 percent. For many cities, such reductions amounted to real losses in federal aid of upward of $200 million a year.

Fiscal prudence, of course, was often missing at city hall. In 1990, it seemed the nation might be in for a repeat of the 1970s when such cities as Cleveland and New York faced a dismal fiscal abyss. Philadelphia, the city where the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were written, became the first major American city to succumb to the cresting urban financial nightmare. Strained to the breaking point by constricted tax revenues, loss of

federal aid, and an indifferent state legislature, the city teetered perilously close to the edge of bankruptcy through much of 1990 and 1991. Similarly ominous rumblings were heard in Boston, New York City, San Francisco, and countless other cities.

City school systems performed so abysmally that a neighborhood-business alliance in Chicago got the state legislature to wrest control from the massive downtown school bureaucracy and vest it largely in popularly elected, parent-controlled school committees for each of the city's 590 schools. Across the nation, dropout rates approached and exceeded 50 percent in many of the largest cities. Teenage pregnancy continued at staggeringly high levels, with as many as one in every two births in the inner city coming to unwed young mothers. School governance was proving itself so inept that Boston and other cities talked of dismantling their school boards, shifting education to the control of general purpose government.

From Los Angeles to Chicago, Washington, D.C., to Atlanta, local prison systems were so full of criminals that there was no place left to warehouse them. Courts were so overwhelmed they generally were incapable of even processing the few offenders that hard-pressed law enforcement officials managed to catch and bring to justice. Everywhere urban hospitals were finding themselves coping with seemingly endless streams of patients—suffering from everything from the common cold to AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and gunshot wounds—that taxed them to the breaking point. Chicago's hospital system, one of the nation's finest, had already come nightmarishly close to breaking down, overwhelmed by a wave of hospital closings and a frightening crush of emergency cases brought on by poor, inner-city patients with nowhere to turn.

On the social front, AIDS cut a devastating path through the homosexual community concentrated in urban areas, made frightening headway among heterosexuals in many minority communities, and threatened to create new financial and social burdens for cities that would haunt them through the 1990s and beyond.

The ranks of the homeless swelled to frightening proportions in the big city and small town alike. In New York City, thousands made their homes in bus terminals and train stations and panhandlers stationed themselves on virtually every street corner. In warmer climates, entire families lived in their cars or in crude Third World–style shantytowns underneath expressways or anywhere they could find a modicum of shelter. Desperate-looking men rummaged through the trash and combed magnificent Southern California beaches from San Diego to Los Angeles to Santa Barbara. Tattered men and women could be seen pushing shopping carts full of meager belongings on rural roads from northern Indiana to central Flor-

ida. At times, it seemed that American cities were in a perverse competition to see which could best approximate the place described by Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities.*

The late 1970s and 1980s brought the *best* news in a generation to urban America: People who had abandoned downtowns in the 1950s and 1960s rediscovered the unique joy of the city. During the 1980s, American downtowns, from Boston and Baltimore to Chicago and Minneapolis, experienced the biggest, most concentrated building booms of their history. Their skylines burgeoned and were transformed as a new generation of superbuildings—some commonplace, others quite intriguing in varieties of postmodernist garb—rose in downtowns across America. Architects such as Phillip Johnson and Helmut Jahn took their place on the American landscape side by side with Mies van der Rohe and Louis Sullivan, a new generation of urban designers for a new era of downtown building. Center cities once written off as dead found new life as attractions such as festival marketplaces, aquariums, convention centers, and other "magnets" began to attract both resident and visitor alike.

In Boston, developer James Rouse opened Faneuil Hall in 1976, a wildly successful festival market near Boston Harbor. Imitators swarmed to the scene. By the end of the 1980s, there was scarcely a major American city without a festival marketplace or new downtown shopping mall. Some were successful and helped touch off downtown revivals; others were far less so (and quite a few went bankrupt). Projects such as Rouse's Faneuil Hall and Harborplace in Baltimore were joyful and sensitively designed environments adding immeasurable vitality to the cityscape. Others tended to be walled-off enclaves turning their back on the urban fabric.

Architectural gems or bad jokes, they all stood as evidence of the rebirth of confidence in the American city. Even some of the nation's most hard-up cities, places such as Newark, New Jersey, so buffeted by adverse social tides that they embodied urban rot in the American consciousness, began to experience modest downtown building revivals. The resurrection of such cities was scarcely conceivably for anyone who had witnessed the glowing embers of 1967 and 1968 when one American center after another was racked by brutal and destructive riots.

Still, the hard questions remained: To what end? How far would the newfound life and prosperity of the American downtown spread? Would the struggling residents of New York City's Bedford-Stuyvesant, Boston's Roxbury, Newark's Central Ward, or Chicago's South Side share in the revival or would they become bystanders stranded on a periphery that became further removed from a miragelike prosperity they could see but could not touch?

As Robert Gannett, a Chicago neighborhood activist, told us in 1987, "We really fear a tale of two cities where we're left with a thriving lakefront while the rest of the city is devastated."

The same concern, the same observation could have been valid for virtually Any City USA. The American city, of course, had not quite become Rio de Janeiro, where the shantytowns of the desperately poor—*favelas* so wrought with crime and lawlessness that even the police feared entering many of them—hug mountainsides overlooking the homes and playgrounds of the mind-bogglingly wealthy. Still, as the gap between have and have-not widened, it was hard to ignore the kinds of urban contrasts that Americans assumed were relegated to the Third World. The nation appeared to be starting the 1990s in evermore polarized, isolated camps of race and income.

A successful lawyer could dine on formal china in a glitzy downtown restaurant while a beggar jangled a cup with change within his sight. The tenement dweller was entitled to a million-dollar view of awe-inspiring skylines out the window and filthy streets teaming with poverty and deprivation out the front door. Neighborhoods struggled for economic crumbs and city services while there seemed to be no end to the interest and investment in downtown. A young executive could finish off a day at work, stroll down to one of those new gourmet grocery stores that sold twenty-four different varieties of pâté and little vegetables produced more for show than for taste, then head off to the gym for a workout on a $20,000 piece of exercise equipment while entire neighborhoods and even cities remained bereft of basic grocery stores, banks, restaurants, and even movie theaters.

None of the contrasts were new. A check of New York City's history alone would reveal frightening past contrasts of immigrant working classes living in squalor while the wealthy luxuriated in comfort. Fires once ravaged great stretches of the urban landscape; street urchins starved or froze to death; poor women died in childbirth without medical attention; municipal thievery outmatched anything we have seen for a half century or more. A century ago, New York City's Lower East Side alone harbored some 1.5 million people, mostly immigrants, jammed into hovels and rat-infested buildings.

However, all that was before a careful social safety net had, ostensibly, been constructed to help a nation's less fortunate, before Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, and innumerable new protections. As if a more developed social conscience were not good enough reason to be concerned, there was the reality that the United States was plunged into an increasingly tough global economic competition—and that its most advanced competitors, the Europeans

and Japanese in particular, had far more sophisticated social support, child-care, educational, and school-to-work programs in place. That meant that their populations would be measurably more competent—that is, competitive—in the years ahead. American public costs, even for the most elementary social services, were sure to soar—not to mention expenditures for prisons, which were already skyrocketing. The bottom line was that urban waste of people was becoming a less and less affordable American "luxury."

By the late 1980s, Americans faced such jarring realities as nearly two-thirds of black children being born to unwed mothers. More than half of all black families were headed by women, and in some of the nation's cities, the figure approached 90 percent. Some 70 percent of the children in those families were growing up poor. A new generation of academicians found a career studying the "under class," the most desperately poor of all Americans—largely black in America's cities, white in rural areas, and women and children for the most part. Brilliantly chronicled by New York City writer Ken Auletta in *The Underclass* (Random House, 1982), they were Americans permanently stuck on a poverty treadmill: outcasts, drug dealers, hard-core unemployed, single mothers caught up in the welfare system, deranged vagrants and other homeless, illiterate teenagers, muggers, burglars, and murderers. They numbered between one million and more than ten million, depending on which academic was applying which set of standards in making the count. The emergence of the underclass through the 1970s and 1980s represented, in the words of William Julius Wilson, a University of Chicago sociologist, "one of the most important social transformations of the last quarter of the twentieth century."

Meanwhile, America was at work building a new generation of cities—the so-called "urban village"—great suburban and exurban concentrations of office buildings, shopping centers, and subdivisions that leapfrogged across the landscape in ever-widening circles away from the central cities and their problems. Bedroom communities became boardroom cities, home to every imaginable economic interest, from America's biggest corporate giants to its smallest upstate industries. Small country roads were transformed from meandering, scenic byways into roaring traffic arteries so underequipped to handle the strain that rush hours seemed to stretch from dawn until dusk with little letup in between.

The runaway suburban growth of the decade changed the nation's economic face and balance of power forever. The Office Network in Houston, a real estate group that kept track of such things, reported that in the 1970s, only 25 percent of America's office space was located in central cities. By the end of the 1980s, however, the

balance had been dramatically, and perhaps irrevocably, altered. Some 60 percent of the nation's office space was now in far-flung urban villages, places with names like Tysons Corner, Virginia, or Southfield, Michigan, many of which did not even appear on maps. The wave of suburban and exurban growth was so massive and so profound, as Tony Hiss observed in *The New Yorker,* that it could be likened to "the work of the great beasts of the last interglacial period, whose browsing destroyed large areas of thick forest."

The first suburban growth wave of the 1950s and 1960s had been accompanied by debilitating white flight and disinvestment, but America's second great suburban migration presented complicated new problems for city residents as development moved ever further away from concentrations of the poor and minorities. Jobs that used to be located downtown were now hours away—via grueling, if not impossible, commutes—from their own inner-city neighborhoods. As the economy boomed in the suburbs and "Help Wanted" signs went up on everything from data processing centers to gas stations, unemployment in the inner city remained stuck in double digits, approaching 40 and 50 percent in some minority communities.

The growth of jobs outside of the city, in places virtually inaccessible by mass transit and where housing was only remotely affordable even for the most well-paid executives, threatened what might be called an "American Apartheid"—a corrosive geographical and social separation of black from white, rich from poor, and opportunity from need. It was a development that demanded public action—concerted regional action from leaders who recognized that such problems transcended every municipal boundary and governmental jurisdiction. Without concerted efforts to repair torn pieces of the metropolitan fabric, the future prospects of every jurisdiction, every neighborhood, and every family across that metropolitan region were in some measure dimmed. Unchecked and ignored, such mindless growth patterns threatened a permanent segregation of America conceivably more intractable and impenetrable than that of South Africa.

TOWARD NEW URBAN MODELS

Americans have fixated on the ills of their cities for decades, at various times seeking to flee the problems and at other points trying to "solve" them in great bursts of governmental social activism. Yet by the dawn of the 1990s, it was amply clear that national megasolutions were not likely to solve our gnawing neighborhood problems and clearer still that the cut-and-run approach that had been cham-

pioned by President Reagan would only lead down a long road to national disaster. The federal government was broke. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, created in the 1960s to ride to the rescue of the cities, was paralyzed by internal dissent and paroxysms of corruption, unlikely to get billions of new dollars to provide housing and fix cities. Any kind of national income redistribution scheme to stamp out poverty enjoyed nonexistent prospects in what promised to be years or decades of tight national budgets; nor was there any reason to expect that large social service bureaucracies—whether they were school systems, welfare administering agencies, or housing departments—were at all equipped, on their own, to serve neighborhood and family interests. The evidence, in fact, pointed to the contrary, that megainstitutions more often than not compounded rather than alleviated the problems they were created to address.

In that context, the projects singled out by the Rudy Bruner Award point to vital lessons, potential approaches for the years to come.

The critical shortcomings of traditional government. Among these projects there are reminders aplenty of previous government failure, painful illustrations of the shortcomings of the heavy-handed, top-down approach so favored by government at all levels during the 1960s and 1970s. Both Lincoln's Radial Reuse Project and Boston's ambitious Southwest Corridor undertaking, for instance, are literal responses to misdirected public action—in each case abandoned plans to build monstrous roadways that would have torn the very heart from vital urban neighborhoods.

It fell to residents—many of them average working people without any previous involvement in activism or politics—not only to stop the projects but to rescue their communities from the aftermath of the ill-fated government plans. New York City's inspirational TIL housing program stands as a direct rebuke to the inability of the nation's largest city to cope with the country's largest inventory of publicly owned residential property, a response, in effect, to a world-class disaster in a city with world-class housing problems. Portland's critically important 1972 Downtown Plan could only come into being, and flourish, when a very traditionally minded incumbent city planner was eased aside.

We are left with the conclusion that government's inherent conservatism and its frequent alliance with entrenched interest groups represent formidable obstacles. Just as in the successful modern-day corporation, fresh breakthroughs most often have to start with sweeping away a good part of the old—its approaches, coalitions,

solutions. Politicians and government officials alike must learn that uncomfortable, sometimes drastic change, a ceding of power to new forces, or at a minimum unprecedented *sharing* of power may well be *essential* if the community is to renew itself.

The power of decentralization. In past decades, officials, bureaucrats, and planners were all wed to a mentality of central control. It is a mentality, an approach, that now stands discredited around the world, from corporate boardrooms to the top echelon of governments. Those with their hands on the lever of central authority would have scoffed in the past at the notion that individuals, acting of their own initiative, could produce results in situations that had stymied central government for years. Yet here in the Bruner awards is plain evidence of the fact. In New York City, city-owned housing was and remained a disaster until the city stepped aside and allowed residents to take control of their own lives. No one believes the Boston transportation project could have gone forward without its remarkably decentralized, consultative design. Stowe got its recreational path by "letting go," entrusting the task to one trusted special employee who, in turn, enlisted scores of others. By the same measure, reform can come to a Chicago school system, the Houston police hierarchy, or healthcare systems delivering preventative care through community clinics only if substantial decentralizing, simultaneously *trusting* and *challenging* the constituent parts, becomes a central method of operation. For our society to reach its full potential, to meet its mounting social and physical problems, bureaucrats and planners must step out of the way to allow locally driven solutions to thrive and prosper.

A new role for government. Government may not be the sole repository of knowledge and solutions, yet it remains a powerful enabler. As local ecosystems develop to assist communities in finding solutions to housing, economic, recreational, and a host of other problems, the role for government—federal, state, and local—has shifted in critical ways. It is not enough for government simply to "get out of the way." The public sector has a critical role as the pole around which a multitude of interests can rally. Money, of course, is one key. Without a proper level of governmental assistance, few projects can be expected to prosper. Few community efforts—however well-intentioned, even inspired—can be expected to make a dent without the public sector's advice and collaboration on every front, from cash grants to friendly regulation. New York City's TIL program provides a critical illustration of the powerful role of the public sector in providing financing, training, and an overriding

framework for community cooperation. The Portland Downtown Plan and Boston's Southwest Corridor testify to the same need—and the greatly increased potential when it is met.

Often the way government helps is by making what could be complex far simpler. Robert Shibley, one of the reviewers and field reporters for the Bruner Award, notes the frequency of "simple organization of complex projects" and uses the Southwest Corridor as an illustration:

> A very simple structure of a task force, assigned by the governor, was established outside the frame of formal power and authority. The task force was then used to influence the various elements and constituencies around the project, face-to-face, in the neighborhoods that had organized to stop the highway. This was done to make a very complex project, the largest capital construction project in the state of Massachusetts, happen. It was a task force of six people. It had one leader, and no formal power or authority other than the governor appointed them to have these conversations. It was a simple organization to run a very complex project. And it worked.
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> (Robert G. Shibley and Ellen Bruce, eds., *Excellent Architecture: How DO We Know and So What?* Edited transcript of the American Institute of Architects Presentation, May 6, 1989, in St. Louis.)

The unsung role and power of the invisible bureaucrats. Without the dedication of behind-the-scenes institutional players and unsung workaday people—the bureaucrats who labor with a project through many, many years and who are often reflexively maligned as faceless governmental apparatchiks—community projects will die on the vine.

In city after city, from Lincoln to New York, progress would never have been possible without the tireless dedication of government officials who excelled, who opened the road to more creative futures, by simply "doing their jobs." Over five years and ten years, sometimes even longer, these are the players who survive the turnover of elected officials, who last through the successions of community leaders who get burned out or who move on to other pursuits. These men and women are not charismatic community activists or powerful politicians. They rarely get public recognition or the public appreciation they deserve. They provide critical institutional stability, however, and they are the glue that holds any successful project together through tough times or sometimes fateful moments.

On occasion, there was the political courage of a public official who helped to make one of these projects possible. One thinks of Massachusetts Governor Francis Sargent, who turned back $650 million in federal highway funds, *hoping* he could get the money

back in interstate transfer funds for the Southwest Corridor. In Portland, there was Neil Goldschmidt fighting the bulldozer-happy political establishment in his premayoral days and Governor Tom McCall working assiduously to make Waterfront Park, once the impossible dream, come true.

The beauty of citizen participation and inclusion. Citizen participation and inclusion are messy undertakings that often demand infinite patience. Still, without clear and decisive public participation, projects are doomed to failure. Boston's Southwest Corridor would likely have been a design disaster and/or fallen victim to one subsequent budget cutback or another without exhaustive public inclusion, including even late-night sessions to battle out such minute details as the kind of shrubbery to plant along a corridor park in different neighborhoods. Portland's Downtown Plan process practically defined a new, inclusionary mode of bringing citizens "in on the act"—not only creating an enormously important permanent base of citizen understanding and support but transforming the city's mode of decision making in the process. In California's tiny Cabrillo Village, a potentially tragic situation was turned around thanks to the concern and participation of nearly every single resident. The result is a community that was saved and then rebuilt sensitively and sensibly, a model for housing bureaucracies around the nation. The Stowe Recreation Path became reality only through the most painstaking consultation with landowners and local citizens.

There are those who poor-mouth citizen participation, who say it inevitably leads to delays, to stalemates, to wrongheaded compromises. We disagree. There can be negative consequences, but stick with a consultative process long and conscientiously enough and the chances of a positive result are greatly enhanced. When the relevant stakeholders are brought into the action early, and truly heard, and whether the issue is renovating homes or building a park or even getting community agreement for a halfway house, the product is infinitely more likely to be sensitively designed and ultimately successful. Just as vital, consultation is the way to build citizen competence, to make democracy work, to have knowledgeable partners in place when the next major public decision-making process rolls down the pike.

The alternative—stonewalling, secretiveness, attempts to "push one over" on the public—is of course tempting. In isolated cases, such techniques work, but far more often, the result is political embarrassment, delay, higher cost, and, if the project goes forward at all, mediocrity in the ultimate product. This is sure to be increasingly true in the future as the multiple racial and ethnic and income

and community groups of America demand a piece of the decision-making pie so often denied them in times past.

Human empowerment is both a vehicle and a goal. The ability of people, even the poorest and seemingly most disenfranchised, to seize control, to make a difference, to determine their own lives, and to grab control of their own futures is a critical ingredient of any urban project. Powerlessness leads to frustration which leads to bitterness and antisocial behavior. Empowerment has the opposite and wonderfully positive set of outcomes. New York City's TIL program offers abundant evidence of the blunt power of empowerment of residents, for instance, who were told by their friendly local police to give up, that they would never manage to rid their buildings of the drug dealers who infested every crack and crevice. What the police could not do the residents—energized by the sense of their own potential—managed to accomplish at literal risk to their own life and limb. Welfare mothers—unskilled in the niceties of management theory or bookkeeping—were trained, took over the management of their buildings, and ran them with an efficiency and spirit that paid professionals had never and probably could never hope to have. Many of these same people, having taken control of their own environments, took control of their own lives, confounding the social service bureaucrats who had consigned them and their offspring to lifetimes of dependence on governmental services. They found jobs. They found careers. They realized a potential that the system had refused to acknowledge. In little Cabrillo Village in California, as the residents seized control of a community threatened with oblivion, something curious happened: men who had spent their adult lives working in the backbreaking and often inhumane environment of the fields gained the motivation and the skills to move on to different kinds of work. In a village where high school diplomas were rarities, dozens of teenagers became the first in their families to attend college.

As one of the New York City organizers of the TIL program, who had spent the better part of a decade working with poor New Yorkers to upgrade their living conditions, told us: "People live up to expectations. They're perfect mirrors of the expectations placed on them."

Individual people with ideas and vision are indispensable—but not always enough. Often in the 1980s, antigovernment conservatives resorted to the cult of the individual—a community leader (oftentimes a formerly unemployed black woman) who made a project click. In part, it was their way to underscore their arguments about

the hopelessness of institutional process. Some of the heroines identified—the likes of Kimi Gray, who organized tenant control of a decrepit public housing project in Washington, D.C., or Bertha Gilkey, who accomplished the same feat in St. Louis—in fact *did* work wonders in returning order, civilization, and a sense of family safety to savaged public housing projects.

In the 1990s and beyond, American society will still need the social pioneers, the stereotype shatterers, but it will also need thousands of ordinary, dedicated men and women, supported and encouraged by government and business and nonprofits alike, to park fresh social initiatives across the continent. The training and creation of successive generations of leaders, people who likely will never garner the publicity of an appearance on "60 Minutes" or be invited to pose beside the president at the White House at the invitation of political image makers, is the explicit goal and lifeblood of such programs as New York City's TIL.

Design is not the only thing, but it can be everything (or, how for lack of a screw the war was lost). Sensitivity to design assures that we do not repeat the past, a past in which we built such monstrosities as antihuman housing projects to warehouse people, creating some of the most fearsome social hellholes on the North American continent. Good design, by contrast, shows respect; people accorded respect are far likelier to be contributing, productive citizens. From Boston's Back Bay or Roxbury to rural Stowe, from simple but carefully designed Cabrillo Village to the urban splendor of a redone downtown Portland, sensitive design is paying off.

Good design and a positive *sense of place* go hand in hand. Until America can promise not just social equity but attractive and safe and welcoming places to live for all its citizens, our civilization will be in jeopardy.

For all our nation's faults, these case studies of the Bruner Award, these examples of the *potential* of what our brightest have done and what millions more can do, are a glimpse of a future in which we will all be able to take more pride in being Americans.