

Mr. Jones

HEARINGS BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EXECUTIVE REORGANIZATION  
OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Afternoon Session: December 6, 1966

WITNESS: Lee Rainwater, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology,  
Washington University (St. Louis)

SUBJECT: Poverty and Deprivation in the Crisis of the American City

Professor Rainwater told the Subcommittee that until we make really significant headway in solving the poverty problem (and thereby also the problems of race and ethnicity) it will prove impossible to plan urban environments in a rational way, in a way that is useful and satisfying to urban populations.

He started by describing one particular lower class Negro community which, with a dozen colleagues, he studied intensively for the past 3 years. This is the Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project in St. Louis. Built in 1954, the project was the first high-rise public housing in the city. It consists of 33 eleven story slab shaped buildings designed to provide housing for about 2,800 families. At present, it houses about 10,000 Negroes in 2,000 households. What started out as a precedent-breaking project to improve the lives of the poor in St. Louis, a project hailed not only by the local newspapers but by Architectural Forum, has become an embarrassment to all concerned. In the last few years, the project has at all times had a vacancy rate of over 20 percent. News of crime and accidents in the project makes a regular appearance in the newspapers, and the words Pruitt-Igoe have become a household term for the worst in ghetto living in lower class Negro homes, as well as in the larger community.

Pruitt-Igoe, in Professor Rainwater's opinion, condenses into one 57-acre tract all of the problems and difficulties that arise from race and poverty, and all of the impotence, indifference, and hostility with which our society has so far dealt with these problems. Processes that are sometimes beneath the surface in less virulent lower class slums are readily apparent in Pruitt-Igoe. Because Pruitt-Igoe exists as one kind of Federal Government response to the problems of poverty, the failure of that response will perhaps be of particular interest to the Committee, Professor Rainwater said.

Professor Rainwater brought out the following facts in regard to Pruitt-Igoe:

1. All the whites have moved out and the population is now all Negro.
2. The overall vacancy rate is 20 percent.
3. The project is riddled with the indignities, such as broken glass and trash, dangerous elevators, mice and cockroaches.

4. The tenants mistake by throwing things out of windows, hurting people, etc.
5. Tenants, therefore, have a jaundiced view of the Public Housing Program.

Professor Rainwater said that we must start with an understanding of why lower class life is this way. He believes the lower classes act this way because of two problems:

1. Inability to find work and adequate pay.
2. Because of lack of finances, they live among other individuals similarly situated, individuals who, the experience of their daily lives teaches them, are dangerous, difficult, out to exploit or hurt them in petty or significant ways. And they learn that in their communities they can expect only poor and inferior service and protection from such institutions as the police, the courts, the schools, the sanitation department, the landlords and the merchants.

Professor Rainwater contended that efforts to solve the general problems of urban management will forever be frustrated, or at least much, much more costly without a solution to the problem of poverty, both urban and rural.

He proposed channeling national income (particularly the yearly increment in national income) to families in the lower thirty to forty percent of the population so that a family income floor is established which is not too far below the median income for American families as a whole.

Professor Rainwater thinks that there are basically two strategies implicit in the various programs and suggested plans for doing something about poverty. One, by far the most entrenched at present, might be called the services strategy, and the other the income strategy.

In his opinion, the problem with the services approach is that to a considerable extent it carries the latent assumption either that the poor are permanently poor and therefore must have special services, or that the poor can be changed (by learning productive skills, by learning how to use their money more wisely, by developing better attitudes, etc.) while they are still poor and that once they have changed they will then be able to accomplish in ways that will do away with their poverty.



A second problem, he said, with the services approach is that the priority of needs of the poor is categorically established when the service programs are set up.

An example he described is that the Federal public housing program provides a service to each household in Pruitt-Igoe in the form of a subsidized apartment that costs about \$545 a year. This amounts to a fifth of the mean family income of the tenants in the project. It is very likely that from the point of view of the needs of many of the families who live in Pruitt-Igoe that \$545 could be put to much better use.

The Professor said that those economists who have pursued this line of thinking in studying the problem of poverty have suggested that the income strategy requires three elements:

- A. An aggregational approach--which involves general economic planning directed at the maintenance of tight full employment with a real unemployment rate (that is, taking into account labor force drop outs) that is extremely low. Such an employment rate has characterized this country only during the height of World War II.
- B. A structural approach--which compensates the tendency for unemployment among low skilled workers to remain at relatively high levels even under conditions of tight, full employment. Such an approach would require that Federal programs to bring about full employment be tied to guarantees of labor force entry jobs for unskilled men, and guarantees of training on the job to upgrade those skills. In this context, that is tight, full employment at all skill levels, a high minimum wage would also be necessary and would not have the negative effect of hastening the replacement of men by machines.
- C. An income maintenance program--which fills in the income gap not touched by the tight full employment programs. The income maintenance program would be required for families with disabled or no male head and where the wife should not work because of the ages or number of the children. Such a program could take the form of family allowances, a negative income tax, or an annual reorganization of the Government's current income maintenance programs (particularly AFDC and other types of public assistance) since these are by far the most stigmatizing poverty programs now in existence.

WITNESS: Milton Kotler, accompanied by two associates.

Mr. Kotler described to the Subcommittee the activities and accomplishments of the ECCO project in Columbus, Ohio. He said that the success of this project and the solving of the majority of urban problems ~~there is~~ there is neighborhood self-governing decision. The neighborhood, ~~constituted as a non-profit, tax-exempt, democratically structured,~~ constituted as a non-profit, tax-exempt, democratically structured, corporation with its own assembly, officials, and revenues is the



principal agent of change to rebuild our slums into a legal community of culture, freedom, and prosperity. The neighborhood must become a legal community of self help and self-governing decisions with the sufficient capacity to relate to other organizations, public and private, for the resources and technical assistance required to build a better city.

Mr. Kotler made the following recommendations:

1. The Federal Government can assist the formation of neighborhood corporations by funding their administrative costs and program operations.
2. The independent neighborhood corporations of a city should become delegate agencies of the existing Community Action Organization.
3. The neighborhood corporations would use the Federal funds to subcontract to private industry to rebuild the city.
4. An alternative is for the neighborhood corporation to become a delegate agency of the local housing authority.

WITNESS: William A. Doebele, Jr., Professor of City and Regional Planning, Associate Dean for Development, The Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Professor Doebele made the following recommendations:

1. That it request the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development to initiate at the earliest possible opportunity, in cooperation with appropriate professional organizations and universities, a comprehensive study of manpower resources in the field of urban affairs, relating the same to the needs of both the public and private sectors, and the requirements not only of existing programs, but those contemplated or likely within the next decade.
2. That the current \$500,000 appropriation for fellowships for graduate study in community planning and allied fields, first provided for in the Housing Act of 1964, but not funded until this year, be immediately increased to at least \$10 million per year, and extended to cover urban studies in many fields and at many levels of training.
3. That since the most critical shortage of personnel is at the top policy positions, a special fund of \$5 million per year for 5 years be appropriated for the purpose of promoting the establishment, at selected universities, of programs designed to give special and advanced education to young persons already showing great promise for leadership in urban affairs, on the



analogy of the advanced management programs of leading schools of business administration, certain programs of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, the Neiman Fellowships, and the new Kennedy Institute at Harvard.

4. That an equivalent sum be appropriated for the purpose of doing research and establishing pilot programs relating to the training of inhabitants of slum areas to participate effectively in the actual rebuilding of their own environment.
5. That a sum of not less than \$20 million per year be made available to an appropriate Department or a national council, for distribution to universities and other research organizations for studies to increase as rapidly as possible our basic understanding of the nature of urbanization and urban areas.
6. That a separate sum of not less than \$250 million per year be established under the administration of one or several Federal Departments for the construction of large-scale experimental urban environments, to test and evaluate, using the methods of the social and natural sciences, the effects of a wide range of possibilities which are now technologically feasible but cannot be built because of financial, legal or other constraints.

In reply to a question by Senator Kennedy, the Professor said that he would put a priority on his first recommendation, the second suggestion next, and then number five as third priority. Senator Kennedy was very impressed with the professor's recommendations to get more information about urban environments, since this is one of the reasons the problems have not been solved at this time.

Main questions raised by Senators Ribicoff and Kennedy (the only members present):

1. Fruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis.

Senator Ribicoff asked Professor Rainwater whether there were any advantages at all to living in Pruitt-Igoe, and the Professor replied that the tenants were pleased with the interiors of the apartments, but that the world that has grown up around the project and within its boundaries is what gives the project its bad name.

Ribicoff was interested in whether this project sheds any light on public housing in general. The Professor said that it shows that public housing should be built at scattered sites and in small settlements.

2. Use of public housing money.

Senator Ribicoff broached the possibility that public housing money might be put to better use by letting each person procure his own private housing with an equivalent amount each month (about \$90).

A proposal made at a previous session was also discussed. That proposal would be to have an urban homestead similar to the old Homestead Act. Professor Rainwater also pointed out that Denmark uses cooperatives and nonprofit cooperatives to provide low-income housing by giving the owner a subsidy to rent up to 20 percent of his building to low-income families (rent subsidies). Professor Rainwater told Senator Ribicoff that he definitely would substitute something else for the present public housing program although the program works better in some places than in others.

3. Cooperation between HUD and other agencies in Pruitt-Igoe.

Professor Rainwater told the Subcommittee that there have been many efforts to coordinate activities in this project by HUD and the Labor Department, but they have never really gotten off the ground. He said there is not a tremendous amount of coordination. In 1961, a Concerted Programs Services was begun, but was not very successful.

4. Role of the Universities.

Professor Rainwater, in reply to Senator Ribicoff, said that he did not think that a University could use the money that is being spent on Pruitt-Igoe and do a better job than the Government is doing now. He said that his group are not practitioners. He thinks the real problem in public housing is political. Whether the country is willing to do a better job. He thinks the role of the university is to develop programs for the young people and to try and understand the community.

5. Higher incomes - key to the problem.

In Professor Rainwater's opinion, the real key to urban slums is to provide people with an adequate income. He thinks this has priority over housing and everything else. The solution to the problem of inadequate income would simplify all the other problems.