

Remarks on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the  
New Jersey Department of Community Affairs  
March 1, 2017

It was fifty years ago this day,  
When Ylsivaker signed on to the fray.  
Creating DCA had taken a fight  
'Til Governor Hughes exerted his might  
So may I present to you...  
Yadda, yadda.

If the Beatles' "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" is not resonating for you just now, it's because I'm neither musical, nor clever, enough to pull it off. I wanted to try it because the release in the US of the Sgt Pepper album and the events we've gathered to commemorate were roughly coincident; I'm hoping it might stand in for all the interesting cultural aspects of the late 1960s, which I won't have the luxury of taking up today.

The invitation from representatives of Commissioner Richman's office to talk about the context for the creation of DCA, brought to mind a quip about the period. "If you can remember the '60s," the saying goes. "You weren't there."

On the assumption that most of the people here today, were not "there" in the 1960s, I'm going to take you on a quick tour of the, mostly political, context for – the things I think most relevant to understanding – the world the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs was born into fifty years ago today.

DCA was a pet project of Democratic Governor Richard J. Hughes, who was governor from 1962-1970 and chief justice of the state supreme court from 1973-1979: the only man in NJ history ever to hold both positions. His memory, of course, is honored by that million-square-foot building down the block.

In the 1961 gubernatorial race Hughes, then a superior court judge, faced James P. Mitchell, former Secretary of Labor in the Eisenhower administration. One of Hughes's campaign promises was

to create a “one stop shopping” means for local officials to deal with state government in managing aspects of the linked problems of urban decline and suburban development. At first Hughes wanted to call it the Department of Urban and Suburban Affairs. Once in office, the governor commissioned a study of the new department and appointed to lead it the chair of the New Jersey Highway Authority (which oversaw the Garden State Parkway), Katherine Elkus White. Mrs. White deserves a momentary aside. In the mid 1950s, she was the mayor of Red Bank, the first woman to hold that job. She was also the first woman in the US to head a toll-road authority. These milestones suggest the changes that were underway in the freedom of women to play a role in civic affairs, although the pace was glacial.

Her report went to the governor in November 1963. It made two basic arguments for the new department: it would improve “immeasurably” state services to local government; and the adjust the state’s “administrative machinery” to better meet the “growing problems of our communities.” For a couple of years the idea went nowhere. Some of its opponents saw it as an assault on “home rule.” Others worried that it would funnel money to “bottom up” community organizations and activists rather than through established government channels.

I daresay November, 1963, is not remembered for the White Report. It is recalled instead as the month President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. In the aftermath of Kennedy’s murder, a shocked nation hungered for strong leadership, which Lyndon B. Johnson provided. In his first state of the union address, delivered just two months after he was sworn into office, Johnson declared “unconditional war on poverty in America.”

A few months later, at the University of Michigan, Johnson unveiled his vision for a “Great Society,” in which “no child will go unfed, no youngster unschooled” amidst general affluence. Seated in the audience in Ann Arbor that day, it so happened, was Roger Lowenstein, the Michigan student-body president, a graduate of Newark’s Weequahic High School, whose father had chaired the Newark charter reform effort in the mid ‘50s.

Seizing on the national mood, and using his considerable legislative skills, LBJ pushed an unprecedented set of bills through Congress. There were 5 anti-poverty measures that created: Head Start (in which NJ was the first state to participate), Jobs Corps, Medicare, and Medicaid, and strengthened the food-stamp program. There were clean water and air bills and other environmental acts. Add to these: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin; the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that aimed to overcome state and local barriers to African Americans exercising their constitutional right to vote. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 ended the national origins quotas that had been in place since the 1920s and opened the door to the mass migration from the Third World that began in the 1970s. My friends in this audience (both of them) will disown me if I don't add the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which created the national register of historic places, and the state historic preservation offices. This legislation represents the greatest string of social legislation in American history.

In the midst of this, in November, 1965, Hughes was reelected. He handily defeated Wayne Dumont, Jr., a state Senator from Warren County, who was once a minor-league baseball pitcher. Both houses of the legislature turned Democratic in that election (for the first time since 1914). This was due both to the national mood, but also to the restructuring of the state legislature, which federal "one man one vote" court decisions had required. The otherwise forward-looking 1947 Constitution had not reorganized the legislature, leaving less-populous rural counties with disproportionate power over urban counties with more people, until federal courts stepped in.

The strong win in 1965 provided Governor Hughes with the opening he needed to move on DCA. He returned to the question in his second inaugural address in January, 1966. But he added a new element to the case. Earlier the aim was to improve state government's ability to help municipalities. Now he introduced the idea of making the state more efficient at handling (i.e. getting more of) the rapidly growing amount of funds coming out of Washington to build the "Great Society"

and wage the “war on poverty” – in particular from the brand new Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In May, enabling legislation went in, which passed in short order. Governor Hughes signed the act in late November, and it became effective March 1, 1967, as you know.

The man sworn in 50 years ago, Paul Ylvisaker, was the son of a Lutheran minister and college president from Minnesota. He was a religious man whose faith guided his life’s work. After stints in academia and public service, in the mid 1950s Ylvisaker went to the Ford Foundation. At Ford, he rose to become director of public affairs, and he pushed the foundation to focus on what he called the “gray areas”: the deteriorating sections of cities situated between their downtowns, which were stable, and the suburbs beyond their boundaries, which were growing. This idea became very influential in the “War on Poverty,” and Ylvisaker was named by LBJ to chair the Task Force on the City, one of the core “Great Society” research projects. It is often overlooked that a central part of the Great Society was to assemble the best thought and the broadest knowledge to work on the vision.

In 1966, Ylvisaker clashed with the foundation’s new head, McGeorge Bundy, former National Security Advisor to Lyndon Johnson. Maybe it was a turf battle between bureaucrats; maybe something more. I don’t know, but Ylvisaker left.

The mix of housing, planning, and anti-poverty programs that were bundled together in the new DCA might have seemed an ideal fit for Ylvisaker. But a couple of his friends disagreed. Robert F. Kennedy (who reportedly wanted PNY for his staff at the justice department) and the dashing, young, liberal-Republican Mayor of NYC, John V. Lindsay, who asked PNY to become Deputy Mayor, both thought it was a poor choice for Ylvisaker. For his part, PNY relished the challenge.

And challenges there were. Between the end of the Second World War and 1970, NJ added nearly 3,000,000 people to its population, an increase of around 70 percent, twice the national pace. The growth was suburban. As developers offered many times the theretofore going price for farmland, barns, silos, and chicken coops became housing tracts and office parks, seemingly overnight. Suburbs such as East Brunswick, Wayne, Cherry Hill, Brick, and

Livingston, to name just a few, grew like mushrooms. Ocean County gained 150,00 residents between 1950 and 1970. No place expanded like Willingboro in Burlington County, the site of the third and largest development by pioneer builders Levitt and Sons. Willingboro's population grew between 1950 and 1970 from less than 900 to over 43,000.

Meanwhile, New Jersey's cities were losing jobs, population, and resources. In 1950 over ¼ of the state's population lived in its six biggest cities: Camden, Elizabeth, Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, and Trenton. They all lost population in the 1950s, and all but Elizabeth during the 1960s too. Newark lost more than 56,000 people between 1950 and 1970, almost 13% of its population. Jersey City lost a similar percentage of its population while losses in Trenton and Camden were proportionally greater.

Factory districts declined as employers shifting from rail to truck transportation found their old multi-story plants less desirable than the horizontal buildings they could build beyond the cities' boundaries, convenient to the state's expanding road network. The last new industry to move into Newark was the Anheuser-Busch brewery in the late 1940s. Trenton lost its Roebling wire rope mill, as well as its rubber, and pottery industries. Camden lost New York Ship, which employed tens of thousands at its post-war peak.

The architectural critic Martin Filler recently wrote about this:

Camden...was a thriving blue-collar community when I lived there from [1954-66]. By the mid-1960s, the city's industrial base began to erode and there was a rapid exodus of whites from the once-prestigious Parkside neighborhood...which bigots dubbed "Darkside" when striving blacks moved in. By the time I brought my new wife to revisit the scenes of my youth in 1978, my parents and all their friends had long since escaped to the suburbs.

Filler describes what is often called "white flight." In a different setting I'd interrogate the term. Today suffice it to say that a number of complicated causes underlay the shift of jobs and people out of the cities and into the suburbs. Consumer choice was certainly a very large part of it. The single-

family, detached houses the Levitts, and others, built put the dream of home ownership within the reach of hundreds of thousands of middle- and working-class families.

But public policy played a role too. In the post war decades, spending on roads in New Jersey outpaced the national average while spending on education and public welfare lagged it. Government agencies worked with lenders to draw “red lines” around areas in which they would not write mortgages. Real-estate brokers used tactics known as block busting to try to start panic selling. As painful, complicated, and difficult as it is to talk about, race cannot be ignored. In Newark, approximately 100,000 white residents, more than ¼ of the population, left the city in the 1950s. Weequahic High School went from 19% to 70% African American in the five years between 1961 and 1966; West Side High from 33% to more than 80%.

As the white working class was replaced in New Jersey cities with black and brown-skinned workers, the darker-hued residents faced many problems. The shrinking job market was paramount among them, with the absence of decent housing not far behind.

One of the key problems the cities faced was the state’s tax structure. Without a broad-based tax, NJ placed the tax burden heavily on localities. The 1965 gubernatorial race between Hughes and Dumont was a face-off between an advocate of an income tax (Hughes) and a sales tax (Dumont). In the event, though Hughes won the election, he lost the argument. He was unable to get an income tax through the Senate, and had to settle for a 3% sales tax, which was made less regressive than the typical sales tax by the exemption of food and clothing. Under Hughes’s successor, William Cahill the sales tax was raised to 5%.

As their tax bases declined and the social costs the cities had to cover did not, city governments increasingly turned to “urban renewal” projects, which typically replaced older housing stock located near abandoned industrial sites in hopes of attracting new businesses and higher income residents. Because of the impact of these projects on black neighborhoods, critics called it “black removal.”

The degree to which Jim-Crow type segregation and discrimination existed in mid 1960s New Jersey can be a bit shocking. Two examples. In Plainfield, the public swimming pools were whites only. There was no swimming option for African-American children in Plainfield until 1966 when arrangements were made to bus black children to a majority-black pool in Rahway. In Newark, the housing authority put white families and black families in otherwise similar buildings in different parts of the city.

Segregated and inferior housing, discrimination, unemployment, and overcrowded schools took their toll. Signs of discontent were evident in August, 1964, when rioting hit Jersey City, Elizabeth, and Paterson.

In these and other cities, complaints of police brutality and discrimination in public housing were sources of high frustration. In Newark there was an additional, unique ingredient. The state was looking to build a new medical school, and Mayor Hugh Addonizio felt strongly that bringing it to Newark would be good for the city. When the site selection committee initially chose Madison, the Mayor offered 185 acres of vacant urban renewal land in the Central Ward. Med school authorities saw the wisdom of a Newark location, but they asked for an alternative tract of land southeast of the City Hospital that was a stable, if struggling, working- middle-class neighborhood of homeowners and renters. Addonizio was disappointed, but he believed bringing the medical school to his beleaguered city was a greater good, worth the destruction of a viable neighborhood. In the summer of 1967, Newark's African-American community was on edge.

On Wednesday night July 12, John Smith, an African-American cabdriver was pulled over after passing a double-parked police car. Accounts vary, of course. But Smith was taken to the 4th precinct where he was charged with assaulting police officers and other crimes. The precinct house where Smith was taken is in full view of the Hayes Homes, a large public housing project, and Smith, who ended up with a broken rib and other injuries, was seen being dragged into the precinct house. A rumor began circulating that he had died in police custody. In fact, he had been released to an

attorney who took him to Beth Israel Hospital. The precinct house became the focus of a protest which dissolved into rock throwing at hard-hat wearing police officers who had emerged from the stationhouse brandishing clubs. False alarms sent fire trucks careening into the city's Central Ward as looters smashed windows, and threw merchandise onto sidewalks.

The next morning Mayor Hugh Addonizio announced it had been an "isolated incident." But he was thinking wishfully. Thursday night, after rock throwing protesters were dispersed at another police station, looting began along Springfield Avenue, the heart of the area's business district. After a car was torched and a policeman injured by a flying brick, shotguns were issued to police officers, who were authorized to use deadly force to defend themselves. By midnight the looting had spread, a number of buildings were on fire, chants of "black power" were heard on the streets.

In the wee hours of Friday morning, the 14<sup>th</sup>, Mayor Addonizio recognized that the city was beyond police control. Five people were dead, hundreds wounded, and over 400 in city lockups. Reluctantly, he appealed to Governor Hughes for help. The governor's first response was that, a "criminal insurrection" was underway "hiding behind the shield of civil rights." To Addonizio he responded, "The line between the jungle and the law might as well be drawn here." By mid-afternoon, 3000 National Guardsmen and 500 state troopers, untrained for this kind of duty, were in Newark. Amid never corroborated reports of snipers on buildings, their convoys moved into the streets of a city with which they were unfamiliar.

To this day there is no consensus narrative on these six days in Newark: what exactly happened, who was responsible. Nor even an agreement on what to call it: disorder, race riot, police riot, uprising, rebellion. Before the violence subsided on Monday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, there were 26 fatalities (24 African Americans), 750 injuries, 1000 incarcerations, and over \$10M in property damage (equivalent to closer to \$80M today). In 1997, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a Newark Rebellion Marker was installed on Springfield Avenue with the names of the dead. A remembrance event is held at the monument every year on July 12. I'd imagine it will be a large event this summer.



The Newark riots came only 4 months after DCA became operational. If its main mission was to be a conduit between the more than 400-some federal grant programs and the New Jersey municipalities who might receive those grants, it was also expected to be an informal monitor of race relations in New Jersey.

By Saturday, Paul Ylvisaker and some of his staff were in Newark. He organized food delivery into areas where grocery stores couldn't operate, and he helped get a system running where the hundreds of arrestees who were clogging the jails and courts could arrange for bail. When the violence spread to Plainfield, Ylvisaker urged the police and National Guard to leave behind their armored personnel carriers as they went door to door searching for weapons, which many observers think helped defuse the situation.

The disorder in Newark was not alone. Detroit, famously, erupted a few weeks after Newark and Plainfield. Elizabeth, Englewood, and Jersey City were also among the 100 or so other U.S. cities that suffered through racial violence during the summer of 1967. Differences emerged immediately over how to explain these events; what lessons to draw, what remedies to prescribe. President Johnson set up a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The forward to its report includes what has become one of the most famous passages in American history: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."

Commissioner Ylvisaker played a role in shaping the federal investigation. In his conversation with Commission planners, he emphasized that sour relations between the police and the community were fundamental. He persuaded them that the etiology of the violence was more complex than newspapers had presented it, and that careful analysis was called for. Thus would the commission write: "The causes of recent racial disorders are embedded in a tangle of issues...that arise out of the historic pattern of Negro-white relations in America."

One of Ylvisaker's main points was that to understand the disorder many voices had to be heard. In this, the state investigation surpassed the federal. Soon after the violence began Governor

Hughes softened his view, which had been inflammatory at first, as I suggested. Hughes began to see that maybe law enforcement was escalating the violence in Newark rather than checking it. Therefore, the official investigation he commissioned looked at both the underlying causes of the riots and the specific question of the role of official violence. Commissioner Ylvisaker was one of the first two witnesses called by the NJ commission, chaired by Robert Lilley President of the NJ Bell Telephone Company. In the end, the Lilley commission argued that “law and order...a cardinal principal of society...can prevail only in conditions of social justice.” Taking on one of the most sensitive issues in NJ, it did not duck. “Suburban residents must understand that the future of their communities is inextricably linked to the fate of the city.” There was no point, the report elaborated, in suburbanites “harboring the illusion that they can maintain invisible walls, or continue to run away.”

There was considerable pushback against the liberal consensus reflected in the state and national investigatory efforts. The law enforcement community was prominent among the objectors. The New Jersey state patrolmen’s benevolent association commissioned its own riot study, which “categorically and totally” rejected the idea that rioting was “traceable to poor housing, to substandard education, [and] joblessness,” or caused by “white racism,” or “police brutality.” Echoing the Kerner Commission, the PBA Riot Study Commission also found the nation “moving toward two societies” except theirs were “one bound by the rule of law and the other exempt from the law.” To characterize the state and national commission reports, it quoted future president Richard M. Nixon who observed that the Kerner Commission “put the blame for the riots on everybody but the rioters.”

In the aftermath of the riots, DCA was involved in negotiations that led to a relocation of the medical school in Newark, which relieved some tension. It also created the first state-level “Model Cities” program in the country.

It’s not my task to take the DCA story beyond its origins. You have a panel of former commissioners upcoming to do that. Let me close with one observation about the fate of the liberal

vision for government which animated the birth of DCA. For better or worse, answers were “blowin’ in the wind.” The PBA had the better weather vane.

DCA was one of three expansions of state government that Governor Hughes engineered. He also created a Department of Higher Education, and broadened the Highway Department into a Department of Transportation. They were manifestations of what he called “northern Democratic liberalism,” by which he meant a vigorous state government promoting progress and growth. Some others call it “growth liberalism,” because it was underpinned by the most dramatic period of economic growth in US history: the approximately three decades that followed the end of World War II.

Four months after those awful July days in Newark, Ylvisaker spoke to the annual League of Municipalities convention. This was before the various riot assessments I just mentioned were issued, but everybody in his audience knew that how one read the riots held the key to how one expected to move forward. Looking for an upbeat tone, Ylvisaker told the local officials assembled in Atlantic City that he worried New Jerseyans would “scare ourselves to death.” In fact he was hopeful. New Jersey, was the “fastest growing state in the Northeast,” he claimed, and history showed “that one man does not have to give up his share of the economic pie to another, provided the pie can be enlarged.”

I mentioned earlier that the legislature went Democratic for the first time in half a century in 1965. Well, it swung strongly back to the GOP only two years later. Following that mid-term drubbing, a dejected Democrat called it “a reaction against President Johnson, against last summer’s riots, against Negroes in cities, against the war in Vietnam, against taxes, against anyone who was in office, against anything you can name.”

That writer – regrettably I don’t know her or his name – could have added that growth was leveling off, that wages were stagnating to the list of grievances. Sometime between the late ‘60s and the early ‘70s, Ylvisaker’s pie stopped expanding.

In 1961 Hughes criticized his general election opponent, James Mitchell, for not being a liberal: one who believed that government can and should actively attack the social problems of the day. A decade later liberalism was in retreat. The year DCA was created, Ronald “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” Reagan was elected governor of California. By the early 1970s, Reagan’s predecessor, Jimmy Carter was arguing that “government cannot solve our problems.”

I don’t want to reduce the collapse of the liberal vision to economic frustration. There were lots of factors. We can take them up at the centennial. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 were plenty disillusioning. The war in Vietnam War and Watergate brought home the message in the early 1970s that governments lie. And some of you are surely thinking about the “Abbott v Burke” and “Mount Laurel” cases: liberal rulings in the realms of school funding and affordable housing, suggesting that a variety of this type of liberalism – though not uncontested – lasted longer in New Jersey than many other places.

But I’m out of time.

It’s been wonderful to be here,  
It certainly was thrill.  
You’re such a lovely audience...  
I’d love to take you home

I don't really want to stop the show,  
But it really is time to go.