THE OAKLAND PROJECT: ACTION AND RESEARCH

IN A CORE CITY

by

The Oakland Project

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At a time when much is said but little is done about the university's

relationship to urban problems, it is useful for those who are looking for

ways of relating the university to the city to take a brief look at the

Oakland Project of the University of California, which combines policy

analysis, action in implementing proposals, training of graduate

students, teaching new undergraduate courses, and scholarly studies

of urban politics. "The university" is an abstraction, and as such

it exists only for direct educational functions, not for the purpose of

doing work within cities. Yet there are faculty members and students who

are willing to devote large portions of their time and energy to investigating

urban problems and to making small contributions toward resolving them.

Our cities, however, do not need an invasion of unskilled students and

professors. There is no point in hurtling into the urban crisis unless

one has some special talent to contribute. After all, there are many

people in city government--and even more on street corners--who are

less inept than untrained academics. The university must offer the cities

the talent and resources which they need and which they could not get

otherwise.

Nearly four years ago, Aaron Wildavsky assembled a group of graduate

students and faculty members at the University of California at Berkeley

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to become involved in a program of policy research and action in the neighboring city of Oakland. As members of the Oakland Project, we have tried to meet some of the city's most pressing analytical needs and also to make suggestions that can be implemented and, if successful, transferred to other urban areas. Ultimately we wish to study the process of policy initiation and change in Oakland in order to make an analytical contribution to policy analysis, for a good analysis is not merely one that satisfies the maker or his professional colleagues; it must be one that is actually put into operation and produces desirable results.

The city of Oakland has provided a worthy challenge to our attempts at policy analysis and change.
Unemployment is about twice the national average, and there is racial conflict, a blighted downtown area, and inadequate housing. To make matters still more difficult, local governmental authority is fragmented into a number of autonomous agencies and City Hall faces a constant shortage of financial resources. Finally, Oakland lacks organized political groups, including political parties, which might be expected to generate interest in local politics and policies. As we discovered in a series of interviews during the summer of 1969, few people in Oakland seem to care about their city. In short, Oakland is characterized by "low-resource" politics. It is not only poor people but the citizenry in general who are inactive.

Starting in 1966, the Oakland Project has provided assistance to key governmental and non-governmental actors in the city, while simultaneously studying those actors. As we learn more about Oakland, we continuously

alter both our assessments of policies and the focus of our research.
From an early concentration on budgeting in city departments, we broadened
our study to include topics like racial conflict, the ideology and
techniques of decentralization and community control, and the problems of
policing the central city. By studying budgeting, we learned about the
internal mechanisms of city departments, and with these insights we were
able to suggest policy advice which would have a chance of being implemented.

We believe that the project has made contributions in five major
areas. They are: 1) Action and Service; 2) Scholarly Collaboration and
Teaching; 3) Specific Policy Studies; 4) Institutionalization of Analysis;
and 5) Studies of Basic Institutional Change.

1. Action and Service

In the words of numerous city officials, Oakland has been "studied
to death." The federal government, research institutions and individual
urbanists   have graphically outlined the extent of Oakland's problems.
Typically, these experts present the results of their studies (showing
high unemployment, slow reading progress in schools, etc.) to city officials
and then leave the city to solve its own problems.

The Oakland Project has pursued an entirely different course. Rather
than studying Oakland and then leaving it, students on the project have
made substantial time commitments (usually about two years) to working
in a particular Oakland city agency. Normal working time has been two
days a week, although special crisis situations in the city have sometimes

necessitated much larger blocks of time. In contrast to Washington intern-
ships, in which college students are often given "make-work" projects which
keep them busy but do little for Senators or Representatives, Oakland
Project assignments consisted of work that needed to be done. A number
of Project members were repeatedly asked to expand their working time
with the City.

Oakland Project members work with city officials and remain in the
city to help implement the suggestions they have made, thus avoiding the
"hit and run" stigma that members of city agencies often attach to out-
siders. By attempting first to deal with problems as city officials
understand them, Project members have developed the necessary confidence
to be asked to undertake studies with broader implications.

For the first two years of the Project's existence, Arnold Meltsner--
now a faculty member at Berkeley's Graduate School of Public Affairs--worked
as a consultant to the Oakland City Manager and the City Treasurer. At
that time, Meltsner was a graduate student in Political Science, having
previously worked in the Rand Corporation for a number of years. In the
City Manager's office, Meltsner's major contribution was the designing and
implementation of a Financial Capability Study which examined the City's
revenue resources. Out of this review came specific recommendations con-
cerning new sources of revenue and changes in the existing revenue structure,
such as an increased rate-schedule for the sewer service charge and a new
tax on garbage collection. Meltsner worked carefully with the City Manager
to determine the feasibility of tapping various potential sources of revenue

in the light of Oakland's particular governmental, financial, and political situation. He also helped the City to straighten out its automatic data processing system and successfully encouraged the hiring of a statistical services officer to take charge of that system. Finally, Meltsner introduced Resources Allocation Planning to the City's Planning Department; this is a process which features an inclusion of both capital expenditure and operating costs and which focuses on City rather than department functions. Through this type of planning, the City will be able to examine its total resource situation more thoroughly and efficiently.

Although Oakland's council-manager form of government leaves most of the effective jurisdiction within the city government in the hands of the City Manager, the Mayor is the "chief elective officer of the City, responsible for providing leadership and taking issues to the people and marshalling public interest in and support for municipal activity."[1] In order to perform these tasks, the Mayor needs speech writers and research assistants, but his staff consists only of one administrative assistant (now part-time) and three secretaries. To fill some of the gap between needs and staff resources, Jeffrey Pressman--who is a Political Science graduate student-- worked in the Mayor's office for two years. He carried out research projects and wrote speeches dealing with the areas of poverty, housing and employment policy. In 1968, Pressman completed a book on Federal Programs in Oakland, which describes where the annual federal input of $95 million

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[1] Oakland City Charter, Sec. 219

(compared to a city budget of about $58 million) was going in the city;
it is interesting to note that only about $1 million went to City Hall
itself. In the past year, Pressman has been succeeded in the Mayor's
Office by Jay Starling, a graduate student who has been helping the Mayor
in employment and poverty areas. Starling has carried out studies for the
Mayor which examine the feasibility of an expanded City role in social
programs.

Police problems are among the most difficult and controversial topics
facing the city government, and David Wentworth (who is a former Criminology
student now working toward a doctorate in Political Science) focuses on this
area. After spending a year studying resource allocation in the Police
Department and formulating a number of recommendations, Wentworth became
a staff assistant to the Oakland Police Chief. In this capacity, he has
prepared policy reports on the budgetary process, the department's Personnel
Section, and the need for a third police radio channel. Wentworth has also
worked on minority recruitment, a misdemeanor citation program, and a
computer analysis of beat structure and crime patterns.

On the basis of interviews with department heads and personnel officials,
Frank Thompson has been providing a series of reports for the Oakland Civil
Service Office. He has written a paper on the knowledge and innovative
tendencies of department heads with respect to the personnel system.
Thompson has also written a report which probes the attitudes of department
heads towards the Civil Service Office and which makes tentative recommenda-
tions for the modification of personnel procedures. Using his knowledge of

Oakland's personnel system, Thompson is now helping the City Manager.

Judith May has been working in the West Oakland black community for
the past four years. Through her long-term commitment and concern, May
has achieved a high degree of acceptance in that community. She has
carried on informal consultation with leaders of community groups, and
the community-based poverty program (Oakland Economic Development Council,
Inc.) plans to use one of her papers for staff training.

The research and service activities of the Oakland Project have also
been carried on outside the city government. Bill Cavala, for example,
another Political Science graduate student associated with the Project,
played a substantial role in the charter reform campaign of 1968. The
success of the campaign meant that City Hall would be able to exert a
greater measure of control over Oakland's fragmented units of government.

A member of the Economics Department, Frank Levy, has spent a year
working on a project for the Acting Superintendent of Schools which includes
doing general economic work on resource collection and allocation. He
does budget forecasting and projections, including both expenditures and
income. He compiles data on resource allocation in the system. He also
compiles sets of official standards on what resource allocations should
be by the system's own rules. Then he compares actual allocations with
the normative allocations.

In all these cases, students and faculty are making considerable
time commitments to people and agencies in Oakland who request their help.
When studies are made, they address themselves to local difficulties and
sensitivities. And when Oakland Project members offer recommendations for

action, they are prepared to work with the relevant city personnel to implement those recommendations. (In one case, a student associated with the Oakland Project-- Jerry Neufarmer--became permanently employed by the city as Administrative Assistant in the new Public Works Department. While a student, Neufarmer had written the draft of a new personnel ordinance to implement charter reform.)

2. Scholarly Collaboration and Teaching

In addition to offering assistance to Oakland governmental (and non-governmental) agencies, members of the Oakland Project have been engaged in scholarly research and writing, a large part of which is based on their experiences in Oakland. It would not be possible (or educationally desirable) to get talented graduate students to devote large portions of their time to work in Oakland unless they could use this experience as a source of data for their dissertations. Successful collaboration must be based on mutual interest. The officials receive valuable help and the students receive invaluable experience, as well as material for a doctoral thesis.

Arnold Meltsner has written an original doctoral dissertation on the politics of local revenue, analyzing the difficulties which local officials face in finding sufficient resources to maintain a stable level of services. Meltsner judges the financial problem to be political as well as economic, and thus he shows how city officials actually make decisions regarding revenue. Finally, he makes political recommendations for ameliorating financial problems and building support for increased taxes. Mayors, Councils, and City Managers get advice they can actually implement, instead of being told that if their cities were richer they could spend more.

Just as Arnold Meltsner has attempted to reformulate and revitalize
the entire field of municipal revenue by stressing its totally neglected
political elements, Judith May is using the Oakland experience with four
waves of poverty programs to increase our understanding of the important
ideological changes that have gone on underneath the furious rush of
everyday events. She examines Associated Agencies, Ford Grey Areas, Poverty
Programs, and Model Cities in the context of two competing ideologies: the
offical ideology, which concentrates on economic growth, and the insurgent
ideology, which aims at political and economic redistributions. In writing
an analytic history of these developments, May will focus on three
central problems: the relationship between economic and political structures
and policies; the relationship between experts and citizens; and the
relationship between citizens and authorities.

Drawing on his experience in the Mayor's office, Jeffrey Pressman
is writing a dissertation on the impact of federal involvement upon Oakland's
local politics. Pressman will examine the substantive impact of federal
aid (where does the money go?) and the organizational impact (federal-city
delivery systems), but his main emphasis will be on the creation of new
groups with federal funds, and the shifting alliances between federal
agencies, city departments, and community groups. Comparisons will be
made with the impact of foreign aid on developing countries, for just
as foreign economic assistance has been known to have destabilizing political
effects on recipient regimes, so the creation of new groups and independent
bureaucracies in American cities poses a direct challenge to City Hall.

David Wentworth's dissertation will be a policy-oriented analysis of the problems of policing the core city. He will estimate which policy changes can be realistically expected from the police after analyzing the power relationships within the department and the pattern of demands upon the police bureaucracy from the environment--especially from middle class Americans and blacks. The examination of abilities and propensities of various actors to mobilize resources will provide a clue to which police policies will prevail. The crime problem, manpower allocation, supervisory control and disciplinary requirements, hardware-community relations dichotomy, referral capacity, research and the problems of giving advice are among the topics to be discussed in Wentworth's treatment of police issues.

The field of personnel administration is usually a dreary subject in which the scholarly work has little relationship to actual practice. However, Frank Thompson's direct experience with the Civil Service Commission and its interaction with the department heads of city government allows him to focus on the goals and tactics of actors in the arena of personnel. He will examine the ways in which officials obtain personnel resources, fire people, and train them to insure compliance. Thus Thompson has the unusual opportunity of going beyond the formal personnel system to provide a badly needed political analysis of this subject.

We have seen that the action experiences of Oakland Project members are a vital portion of the scholarly enterprises in which they are engaged.

These efforts have not proceeded in isolation from each other; scholarly collaboration has been a unique characteristic of the Oakland Project. We have had a continuous seminar, meeting once every few weeks, to discuss major analytical problems and to inform one another of significant developments in Oakland. At the outset of our Project seminar, we concentrated on research design, interviewing, and data collection. Just as we have adapted the focus of our research, so have we been able to broaden our discussions to include such special topics as planning, political participation, computer simulation of budgetary systems, models of the Oakland financial system, political development of West Oakland (in a seminar led by a local activist), the relationship between economic analysis and political dilemmas, and many more. We have also held many seminars on individual topics concerning Oakland.

When a Project member has completed a draft of an essay or dissertation chapter dealing with a particular policy problem, he initially discusses it with Aaron Wildavsky. Following this discussion and any subsequent revision, the entire seminar meets to talk about the paper and to offer suggestions for further development. It has been extremely useful for us to exchange differing perspectives with each other because each Project participant has in-depth knowledge about one part of the Oakland political universe, and because those separate parts often function simultaneously in city issues and conflicts.

The advantages of the Oakland Project for doctoral students have been enormous. Participation in the Project provides them with a

unique opportunity for immersion in a political situaticn. This immersion sensitizes the students to the values, concerns, and thought processes of those involved in public life, so that Oakland Project members are better able to understand public actors and to contribute advice which they can utilize. Finally, instead of having to choose between studying abstract theory and participating in "relevant" public activity, students can have the best of both worlds. We at the Oakland Project use social theory to gain insight into concrete political situations. - Thus students who are studying social science at least in part because of an interest in and commitment to political action will find our project particularly valuable.

Since its inception, research and collaboration within the Oakland Project has been stimulating not only for those of us involved in the Project itself, but also for a wider group of University students and faculty to whom we have tried to make our findings available. It is with this end in mind that for the last two years we have been engaged in teaching a range of courses in the field of urban policy. Aaron Wildavsky taught a two-quarter honors seminar last year on resource allocation in Oakland and is now teaching a year-long course on Oakland's policy problems. This course features guest appearances by leading political and governmental actors in Oakland, in conjunction with intensive class discussion of the policy areas covered by the speakers. In addition, each student is required to conduct a major research paper based on field work in Oakland. The

experienced Project members, familiar with personalities and events in Oakland, are able to direct the students into fruitful lines of inquiry and to supervise their work so that it will be useful to all concerned.

Graduate students who are members of the Project have initiated and taught a number of original courses dealing with specific policy areas. Judith May taught a course on "Politics and Urban Poverty," concentrating on economic and political development in the ghetto. "The Politics of Urban Leadership," taught by Jeff Pressman, dealt with the problems of mayors in city administrations both past and present throughout the country. David Wentworth's course on police, which featured visits by a number of police officers, focused on the police department as a bureaucracy in a political environment. And all of these courses focused on Oakland for case studies and for field work by students.

The educational impact of the Oakland Project has extended beyond courses taught by Project members themselves. William K. Muir, a Political Science professor who is not a formal member of the Project, based an introductory course in American Politics on student interviewing of residents -of particular city blocks in Oakland. To prepare for interviewing these Oakland citizens about their feelings toward the political system, students and teaching assistants in this course consulted with Oakland Project members and used the Project library. A class at Oakland's Laney Junior College taught by John McCully has used Project questionnaires in order to gain understanding of how citizens feel about the city and its government.

In addition to providing assistance with courses, the Oakland
Project has served as a focal point for students and faculty members
throughout the university who are interested in studying urban problems
and policy formation in the context of a nearby city. Teachers and
students of Sociology, Law, Education, City Planning, Economics, and other
--related fields have attended Project seminars and have made extensive
use of the Project library.

3. Specific Policy Studies

We have already mentioned a number of specific policy studies which
have been of use to the City--Meltsner's on financial capability, Wentworth's
on police budgeting and minority recruitment, and Thompson's on personnel.
These studies have not only been useful to Oakland, but are applicable to
the problems of other core cities.

A further range of policy studies now in progress in the Oakland
Project should also be transferable to other cities' experiences.
Professor Frank Levy, who is a specialist in the economics and politics
of education, is spending the present year working in the Budget Office
of the Oakland school system and as a classroom aide in various Oakland
·schools. During his stay in the Oakland school system, Levy will be able
to gather extensive data on the distribution of costs and effectiveness
_of_educational programs. Levy's research interests focus on the education
of ghetto children, and his writings on this subject will be relevant to
a wide range of cities with substantial minority populations.

Another study which is now approaching completion examines the city's library system and presents alternative structures and processes for that system. A former Oakland Project member, Fred Deyo, has completed a description of the internal decision-making process in the system, and City Planning Professor Michael Teitz and his students have conducted a study of the circulation patterns and efficiency of the system. The problems of Oakland's libraries are legion: high costs of circulation, underutilization of branches and of the central library, and low interest in the library among members of the community.

Based on a study of current library practices, the effective circulation radius and demand patterns among neighborhoods, and the use of library personnel, Aaron Wildavsky will suggest a number of possible changes in the library system: decentralization of decision-making authority to branches, substitution of community people for library "professionals," and the relocation of libraries to conform to new patterns of demand. Oakland's library seems a prime candidate for decentralization; such a move here could be a step toward increasing responsiveness of government without demanding more of its scarce financial resources. After presenting our report, we will offer our assistance to the city government in the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Although improvement without extra cost may be possible in the library system, it is not possible in other areas where a number of policy changes are badly needed. The City will still be faced with the problem of inadequate funds. Arnold Meltsner (in collaboration with John Kramer) will continue his work in revenue by examining the feasibility of using

previous bond elections as indicators of taxpayer support for increasing
city revenue. An attempt will be made to construct multiple regression
models that will relate demographic and campaign variables to tax support
on a variety of municipal and school bond elections. Equations will be
developed both for census tracts and neighborhoods to provide officials
with convenient indices of support or the lack of it. Unless public
officials—in Oakland and elsewhere—learn how to gain support for tax
measures, they will be unable to do much else.

The federal government is an important source of added funds for cities,
but the effectiveness of these "foreign aid" programs is often doubtful.
The recent history of the Economic Development Administration program
designed to "save" Oakland by creating new jobs for minorities—long
stalemated by disagreement between federal, city, and Port of Oakland
representatives—provides an excellent opportunity to study obstacles to
the success of federal urban programs. Project members are presently work-
ing on such a study. We will attempt to spell out the organizational and
political recommendations for the effective execution of large federal
programs in cities. Rather than examining "federal urban policy" by putting
together bills passed by Congress, we will gain a "consumer perspective"
by focusing on the actual impact of the federal government on a particular
city.

4. Institutionalization of Analysis

Although good analysis of individual problems may be helpful to
cities, their importance is overwhelmed by the need for a continuing process
of policy analysis. Hit-and-run analysis by people with no long-term
commitment to the city is likely to be resented and rejected by local

government officials. Only by initially doing projects that local officials
ask for and can use have Oakland Project members gained the kind of access
which ensures that their advice will be listened to.

Still, the need for full-time policy analysis is acute, and this need
cannot be filled by the part-time work of the Oakland Project's faculty
members and graduate students. Nor can a city as poor as Oakland afford
to hire a team of full-time policy analysts. Therefore, the Project would
like to supply the city with one or two full-time policy analysts who
would concentrate on areas like housing, redevelopment, and employment.
(The service of good analysts is expensive, and the Project would need
additional financing in order to pay such people.) We would then be able
to learn whether this imput could be used in catalytic fashion to demonstrate
the advantages of analysis to those in government, so that they would want
to continue using it. (Aaron Wildavsky and Arnold Meltsner, in a recent
essay entitled "Leave City Budgeting Alone!",[2] suggest reform proposals
which stress the importance of conducting policy analysis in municipal
government and outline the way in which this might be done. They propose
that a group of policy analysts, separate from the budget staff, be formed
to work directly for the Mayor or Manager. Such a group would be built
around two new policy analysts and would include recruits from Engineering,
Planning, Budget and Finance Departments.) Unless policy analysis--related

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[2]To be published in J. P. Crecine and L.H. Massotti, eds., Financing the
Metropolis, Vol. IV (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1970).

to current city politics, resources, and governmental structures--is institutionalized by cities, their capacity to absorb federal social programs will continue to be low.

5. Studies of Basic Institutional Change

We believe that if a city government is able to develop a strong team of policy analysts with close ties to those in power, then the government will be better able to deal with specific problems in its environment. But the problems of our cities are much too deep and complex to be solved by merely installing better analytical talent in City Hall. For many residents of our urban areas--particularly poor people and minority groups-- the political processes appear to be distant, unfair, unresponsive and even illegitimate. The gap between City Hall and the community, and the desire of many in the black community to "control their own destiny," are not issues which can be solved by analysis of specific policies. For this reason some members of the Oakland Project have turned their attention to the responsiveness and viability of the political process itself, and to the basic institutional changes which might be necessary for meaningful alterations in Oakland's policies.

In her dissertation, for example, Judith May will examine in detail the consequences of political structures for Oakland's economic development; she will make a case for positive government action to reorder the existing pattern of economic benefits. She will also discuss the consequences of involved citizens designing social programs, and she will advocate the invention of structures and policies which allow the involvement of citizens in a manner commensurate with their increased organizational, administrative, and political capabilities.

Research on political and organizational development in the black community will also be carried out by Jesse McCorry, who has had extensive experience in national education policy as a consultant for Educational Associates in Washington, D.C. McCorry is currently studying and writing about the preconditions and consequences of decentralization and community control of schools.

Oakland's political institutions have further problems than those involved in relating and responding to the demands of the black community. The fragmentation of city government and the lack of interest and activity in the electoral process (which was exemplified by the last city election, in which all three incumbent Councilmen running were unopposed) makes political leadership difficult. Bill Cavala's work on charter revision was designed to make the city more governable by reducing some of the fragmentation. Jeff Pressman is currently examining the political structures and processes in Oakland--parties, groups, forms of elections, resources available to political leaders, distribution of incentives for political action--and will suggest preconditions necessary for effective political leadership in the city. If city government does not gain additional resources and become more accessible, then interest in city politics will continue to lag.

Conclusion

Starting in 1966 as a program to provide service and carry out research on urban policy, the Oakland Project has become a point of communication for individuals and groups in the city of Oakland and throughout the University of California community. Our focus has expanded during the

past four years from a concentration on city budgeting to a wide range of substantive policies and questions of political process.

We have provided assistance to governmental (Mayor, City Manager, Chief of Police, Head of Civil Service, Superintendent of Schools) and non-governmental (community group) actors, and we have based numerous research essays on our experiences in the city. In order to transmit the knowledge we have gained, Oakland Project members have taught courses-- open to both undergraduate and graduate students--dealing with urban problems and policies.

In the policy areas of revenue, police, personnel, federal aid, education, and libraries, participants in the Project have carried out studies which have provided assistance to the city government. Now we hope to stimulate the institutionalization of analysis by supplying full-time analysts to the City. But all of these internal changes may not significantly alter the outcomes of governmental action unless basic political changes are undertaken, and we hope to be able to continue to aid the city of Oakland in making these changes.