

point of view

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Cleveland Rulers

Writer Diana Tittle in a history of the Cleveland Foundation ends with a description of a crucial meeting of Foundation leaders, concluding with director Steve Minter in the parking lot.

"Still, before driving away, the director permitted himself a moment of celebration. 'I think I'll go home,' Steve Minter said triumphantly, 'and take a nap!'" writes Tittle.

Yes, and on the seventh day, He rested.

One guesses an institution with \$600-million (and growing) in assets has a way of making you think it has boundless capacity.

The book - which is more than the history of the Foundation, but a primer on how Power is wielded with some very detailed studies of recent Cleveland history - is named, pretentiously, "Rebuilding Cleveland." A serious look at the issues tackled by the Foundation, however, results in a far less sanguine conclusion. Poverty, housing, health, neighborhoods, discrimination and education problems are all much worse in Cleveland now though the book says that the Cleveland Foundation was heavily involved in the solution of these problems.

Tittle's book - though an authorized history of probably the most powerful private institution in the city - presents a more candid look at how private power works than one would expect from what might be a vanity book, paid for by the Foundation. It's a journalistic achievement as Tittle had to assimilate enormous amounts of material on a gamut of urban issues in order to examine the Foundation's role in so many areas of community life.

Tittle pays her dues in celebrating the guiding powers - Minter, Homer Wadsworth, Dolph Norton, Dick Pogue, Jack Reavis, all the way back to Harold T. Clark, and a gang of business-legal leaders who represent Power hereabouts - all duly back patted.

But there are also some examples of candid information and revealing quotes that Tittle tosses in that the observant reader can make up his or her own mind about their meaning. I think Tittle sometimes subtly lets us in on some insights just dropped there for those who will pick it up.

One that quickly stands out reveals the arrogance of business leaders toward blacks during the beginning of the civil rights strife here. Edward "Pike" Sloan, then head of Oglebay-Norton, part of the iron ore-shipping-steel Establishment that held so much power here, says after a meeting trying to cool racial tensions: "We didn't speak the same language. The blacks would take off on long speeches. First one of them would speak for a half an hour, then another would feel he had to say something, and he would get up for a half hour. Half the time I couldn't understand their pronunciations. You see, they finally had an audience. It took a lot of forbearance." Pass the Grey Poupon!

Tittle allows critics to throw some darts, but not too many. Harry Fagan, a neighborhood organizer, says of the Foundation's reluctance on funding neighborhood organizing, "They didn't get into it very fully because they had a different agenda and were very chicken."

The book has detailed accounts of crucial issues involving race in the 1960s though the concentration on the Foundation ignores and underplays other forces that played crucial roles at that time, and, in fact, forced the Establishment and the Foundation into some action.

Despite the significant historical information contained in the book, it has been ignored by the morning newspaper. No review. The Pee Dee has the unique capacity to ignore now what it so distorted when it was happening. The Pee Dee so often can be read as a newspaper from another city, since it so avoids explaining this one. The book belongs on any shelf of Cleveland history.

What Tittle ignores would be crucial to a non-vanity book about the Foundations: Where did the wealth come from? From interests, such as the Hanna family, which exploited workers and corrupted government. (Ironically, the Foundation in the Reagan decade of the 1980s, reflecting the incredible wealth accumulation by the rich, saw its assets rise by \$100-million. "It is adding to its wealth at a greater degree than it is able to make grants to the community," said its treasurer. Ask all those in Cleveland who had unmet needs in the 1980s and still do).

The book also fails to grapple with the question of self-interest so inherent in the elite control of the Foundation's decision-making, which is never out of the hands of top business and legal leaders. The questions of who the Foundation really serves - the community or those who control it, the wealthy - never arises. The selfinterest was evident from the beginning as Fred Goff of Cleveland Trust originated the idea. Private philanthropy may have played a role but the trust business could not have escaped the banker's mind.

There are some juicy quotes. Tittle quotes director Wadsworth saying, after a meeting in which Cleveland school superintendent Paul Briggs tells cheering business leaders that every graduate from his school goes on to college, "Have you ever heard such horseshit in all your life?"

But Wadsworth and Foundation officials knew of the debacle of Briggs' leadership (particularly in contributing to the school desegregation issue that damaged the city so) but they remained publicly silent and Briggs' leadership went on for years. It helped create the corrupted system business leaders now say they want to change. One can surmise that when the Cleveland Press finally began to take shots at Briggs, Wadsworth and others from the Foundation were quietly helping encourage such attacks. It's part of the Cleveland Culture (more later) to work behind-the-scenes with little public debate and less public education on public issues. This method is much a trade-mark of Foundation activity. No dirty hands that way. But then the "solutions" contain the seed for future problems.

A problem for the Foundation evolved from the incestuous nature of the city's institutions dominated by business leadership. After all, the Businessmen's Interracial Committee on Community Affairs (BICCA) was Briggs' angel but also closely connected with the Foundation.

The private nature of the Foundation's role in community affairs is implied in the language used by Tittle. There are numerous phrases about activities indicating secrecy - "never made plain," "Political agenda that had never been publicly acknowledged," "BICCA wanted a select group," "less than forthcoming," and "without the press around," for an illegal meeting with the entire city council." In the last 150 pages (when I began counting) the phrase, "behind the scenes," was used eight times in describing Foundation behavior.

The reason for this stealth should be clear. The book might as well have been entitled, "Private Government." Foundation officials, elected by no one, heavily involve themselves in public decision-making. Tittle shows how easily one slips into believing that's the way it should be. Talking of the Foundation's growth, Tittle writes: "For Norton personally, the management of all this growth had a downside: it resulted in his inability to roll up his sleeves and dig into the latest municipal problem." Who elected him?

The thrust of the book is that in certain periods, particularly recent history, the Foundation has been in the forefront of civic advances. But the areas I've watched suggest otherwise. In the last 25 years the Foundation has been involved in addressing

issues of education, neighborhoods, health, poverty in the city and one can look and find that in all categories the situation is worse now than 25 years ago.

It has been involved also in the physical redevelopment of downtown and can claim some success there. But even downtown the building successes of recent years came after the devastating destruction of earlier years, which still affects Cleveland's political and social life. Cleveland mayors (not often mentioned in this book) and blacks took most of the blame for the results of an urban renewal push that came directly from the business community and Foundations.

Tittle outlines the creation of two Foundation-spurred and financed institutions the Cleveland Development Foundation (CDF) and the University Circle Development Foundation (UCDF). Much of the funding came through the Leonard C. Hanna Fund, intertwined with the Cleveland Foundation.

UCDF, in addition to the destruction of Hough, destroyed much of the housing and all of the potential of the Circle area as an active, human livable place for an artistic colony that had been developing naturally. A natural tourist attraction. Cleveland, like other cities, are into creating tourism out of alcohol-dependent traps where profit reigns under the resource grabbing auspices of low lifes like the Jacobses.

CDF had as its charitable chore to "eliminate and prevent slum and blight." But clearly CDF was a major cause of future blight and one of the weakest of warriors when it came to elimination of slums. Yet, Pike Sloan, a CDF chairman, said that "It would be a mistake to think that the Foundation ever had as its main concern housing... The main thing was to make land available for industrial and commercial use." He also fretted that blacks saw CDF as an "ambivalent Santa Claus," and that its image had "become too oriented toward minority interests."

The result of those two private institutions was the massive urban renewal program in Cleveland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Designed privately to renew downtown and protect and enhance the culture-educational center at University Circle, they caused the movement of huge numbers of poor, primarily black, people from the inner city, destroyed housing and resulted in what one sees in the devastated east side inner city. CDF pushed the city of Cleveland into more urban renewal acreage than any other city in the nation - a program the city had neither the resources or ability to pursue. The movement of people and the withdrawal of repair and renovation of housing it caused created racial animosity that still burns today in Cleveland.

If the Foundation is to take credit for the various actions that are spelled out in the book, then it must take considerable blame for the major miscalculations that have created the Cleveland we have today with its deteriorated neighborhoods, vast population loss, decrepit school system and debilitating poverty.

Communities, like corporations and other institutions, develop cultures. Cleveland's present Corporate Culture may result from the fact that it had its progressive reform movement too early, at the turn of the Century with Tom Johnson, who was called the "best mayor," and Cleveland, "the best governed city in the United States" by Lincoln Steffens. Cleveland developed progressive health and welfare systems, public transportation and electric power systems, and a government that reflected its constituency of poor people against Privilege.

The genesis of today's Cleveland Culture evolves from the institutionalization of its progressive movements and stifling of its creativity into a corporate dominated social welfare system that cheers itself for "making the goal" financially but utterly fails in dealing with the problems of the people of Cleveland, particularly those in most need.

The financial wealth of the first half of the Century has been institutionalized in trusts, run by foundations that have no political authority. The lack of political authority leads to the necessity to manipulate, as the Cleveland Foundation's history indicates, but the good intentions always get mixed up

with the self-interest of the corporate leaders who run the institutions created by the Foundation from the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation, which Tittle describes in detail, to today's mechanism, Cleveland Tomorrow.

The result is Cleveland's leadership has the tone and content of a First World attitude toward a Third World population. The concern is control, not solution to the most dire problems of the majority who live in Cleveland - low income people.

One can go back to the assessment made by publicist Bill Silverman (then employed by Foundation funds, now by Dick Jacobs, among others) back in the late 1960s to find the modus operandi at work all these years by the corporate establishment relating to Cleveland's problems. Silverman, as did the businessmen, worried about the city's poor national image. Silverman noted: "Favorite targets are race relations and urban renewal. The extent of negative publicity on the national scale has reached such proportions that many businessmen and civic leaders are concerned it might be seriously harming their ability to attract new industry and capable people to the area."

The Establishment answer came years later. Tittle quotes James Biggar, as head of Cleveland Tomorrow and now head of Gateway, saying, "We believe Cleveland has an opportunity to remake itself into a different city - both downtown and in the neighborhood - by focusing on a limited number of high potential projects that might include downtown sports facilities, hotels and housing and neighborhood commercial and housing development."

It sounds good. But what it means is public funding of Gateway, the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame, tax abated everything downtown, and now for the neighborhoods, the creation of Neighborhood Progress, Inc., described in the book as the Foundation's escalation of "a battle to save the inner city previously fought for years by a subsidiary, the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation." More likely, under the cloak of helping the "inner city," NPI will mean the movement to build middle and upper income housing to accommodate people business would like to see in the city, but neglect or push out of those who live there.

The future looks bright for Cleveland's corporate rulers. They have in City Hall a mayor who sees the future much as they do. Corporate interests have in Mike White a monopoly board mayor who fits their bill. Though White couldn't keep city swimming pools open this August, in September he established a 22-member Sports Commission to lure sporting events to Cleveland.

If Cleveland's reform movement came too early in this Century maybe the cycle of change has brought us to the point where some leadership can arise to end this Century with a new upheaval. But don't count on it.

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so long as those who are
now possible remain possible.*

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