

R00033 7192:

The Remaking of a City:

**Rochester, New York
1964-1984**

**Lou Buttino
Mark Hare**



**KENDALL/HUNT
PUBLISHING COMPANY**
Dubuque, Iowa

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
Part I: New Voices and Visions	
Chapter One: The Rochester Riots of 1964	1
Chapter Two: Black Power in Rochester	13
Chapter Three: Fighting Poverty: Action for a Better Community	39
Chapter Four: The Rochester Urban League	53
Chapter Five: A New Community of Hispanics	67
Chapter Six: Friends of FIGHT to Metro Act: White Liberals Organize	81
Chapter Seven: The Rise of Neighborhood Groups . . .	91
Part II: The Past Responds to the Present	
Chapter Eight: Business Stages a Comeback	109
Chapter Nine: Rochester Labor	125
Chapter Ten: The Democratic Party	153
Chapter Eleven: The Republican Party	185
Part III: The Pressures on Government: New Demands; Restraints New and Old	
Chapter Twelve: The City Schools: Two Crises	215
Chapter Thirteen: The Politicians Decide: Social Realities and Financial Crises	245
Chapter Fourteen: An Issue That Won't Die: The Elected Strong Mayor	331
Part IV: Conclusion	
Chapter Fifteen: The Remaking of a City	361
Endnotes	397
Select Bibliography	401
General Bibliography	403
Index	413

Introduction

The central theme of this book is that the Rochester of 1984 is vastly different in population, politics, and character from the Rochester of 1964. Our purpose is to describe the nature of that change and to examine how the city, and its oldest institutions, have responded to it.

In part, the reshaping of Rochester owes to national trends and events: the Civil Rights Movement, shifting economic conditions, increased political activism.

Yet, the changes of the past two decades also stem from regional or state-wide conditions. Like other "Frostbelt" cities of the Northeast, Rochester has faced increased competition from the new "boom towns" of the South and West, where energy and labor are cheaper and taxes lower.

Like other cities in the state, Rochester is subject to constitutional limits on its taxing powers and on its growth. In the past two decades, as the exodus to the suburbs has accelerated, those constraints have forced the curtailment of some city services and given rise to demands for increased state aid and consolidation of government services at the county level.

But perhaps the most dramatic changes have been

demographic. During the 1950's, Blacks began migrating to Rochester in search of jobs and a better way of life.

The city's technological industries were unprepared to hire or to train this new wave of immigrants. Caught up in the national struggle for civil rights in the 1960's, Rochester's Blacks began to organize and demand jobs, housing, and quality education.

Part I of the book examines how those groups, whom we have described as the city's "New Voices," began to organize and take an active role in the social and political life of the city.

The book begins with the riots of 1964 (Chapter 1). No other event in the city's recent past aroused such controversy, inspired such institutional change, or encouraged such self-examination as what happened on those sultry July days of 1964.

Blacks came together after the riots and created the city's Black Power organization (Chapter 2). Although FIGHT faded in the 1970's, two other largely Black community organizations—Action for a Better Community (Chapter 3) and the Urban League (Chapter 4)—prospered and continue to press for civil rights and for attention to the economic and educational needs of Blacks, other minority persons, and the poor in general.

Also included in the New Voices is the Hispanic community (Chapter 5), which has continued to grow, despite overall population decline in the city since 1960.

We look also at how the Civil Rights and Black Power movements spawned a new awareness among the city's liberal White community (Chapter 6). At first, liberals organized Friends of FIGHT to carry the demands for integration and civil rights into the White community. Later, these same activists formed Metro-Act.

The neighborhood movement (Chapter 7), according to some analysts, supplanted the traditional political ward system and gave rise to demands for housing programs, tougher zoning laws, environmental safeguards, and a more

responsive city government.

Part I offers a chronological account of how these new constituencies congealed and helped transform Rochester from a largely homogeneous community into a pluralistic community, one which placed new demands on the city's established business, political, and governmental institutions. In Part II we examine how the city's dominant institutions responded to, and made room for, the new groups demanding a say in the city's future.

At first reluctant to come out of the boardrooms, the business leaders—through the Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Management Council—began actively to support the Civil Rights Movement, to assume more responsibility for job training, and to take an active role in addressing the fiscal problems of city government (Chapter 8).

A succession of Chamber presidents—James P. Wilmot, F. Ritter Shumway, and George Beinetti—urged business leaders to speak out on community issues and to get involved in the governmental and political processes.

Organized labor (Chapter 9), partly in response to the formation in 1977 of a Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee, stepped up its political involvement, becoming more active in local, state, and national political campaigns.

As they were doing in other parts of the country, in the 1960's Rochester's unions began to turn their organizing efforts toward public employees and service workers. The most vigorous and visible labor organizing over the past twenty years was within those two sectors.

The largest union growth was in the public sector. Teachers, police officers, firefighters, and civil servants all formed powerful unions which won expanded benefits for members and placed additional demands on government coffers.

But hospital workers, restaurant workers, hotel workers, and retail clerks also began organizing in unprecedented numbers. And through those unions, organized labor recruit-

ed Blacks, Hispanics, and women.

Part II also examines how the political parties changed as a result of the city's new pluralism. With the advent of civil service reform and public employee unions, the patronage system began to fall apart and the political parties began to lose the control they had held over rank and file party members.

In addition, as the city's problems grew more serious and more complicated, constituents no longer turned to ward leaders for favors. The ward leaders may have had the power to get the trash picked up or to get a new stop light installed, but they were not able to solve the new problems their constituents faced: higher taxes, increased crime, the closing of neighborhood schools.

In some ways the political parties were replaced at the grassroots by neighborhood organizations. But the parties, too, began adapting to the changing needs and demographics of the city.

First the Democrats (Chapter 10), and then the Republicans (Chapter 11), began actively recruiting women and minority members. They reformed their nominating processes, opened up their committees, and curbed the influence of party leaders and the largest of political contributors.

Like Part I, this section looks at these institutions individually and traces chronologically the changes they have weathered since 1964.

In Parts I and II, we trace the development of new constituent groups in Rochester and examine how business, labor, and the major political parties responded to changing times. But in large measure both the new and the old interest groups looked to government for direction and for solutions to the problems associated with demographic, social, and economic changes.

In Part III, therefore, we undertake an examination of how local government—the Rochester Board of Education (Chapter 12) and the Rochester City Council (Chapter 13)—

responded to a whole new set of demands. From the 1930's to the 1950's, local government faced none of the problems associated with a declining population, a shrinking tax base, racial unrest, poverty, unemployment, and a general mistrust of authority—government in particular.

Beginning in the mid-1960's, however, local government was confronted with all of those problems.

We also examine, in Chapter 14, the elected-mayor issue. It is one of the most controversial yet persistent issues of the last two decades. A demographically and politically transformed city may be pressuring the political institution that served it so well in the past to adapt radically, or be abolished altogether.

We begin Part III with an examination of the Rochester School Board. We depart from the strict chronological format in looking at the crises in the city schools. Two issues seem paramount in reviewing the record. They also clearly demonstrate the thesis of the book.

Thus Chapter 12 is divided into two broad sections. The first examines efforts to end racial segregation in the city schools. The second section describes the strategies used by school officials to improve the quality of education in a time of dwindling enrollment and revenue shortfalls.

Those two challenges, to end segregation and to upgrade the city's education standards, are the most vivid examples of how changing demography reshaped both the city's educational plant (the size and number of schools) and its educational programs and goals. The increased amount of time the Board devoted to searching for new revenues highlights the terrible frustration when the demands of the new demography came up against the city's severe fiscal crisis.

In Chapter 13 we return to the chronological format and give a year-by-year account of City Council's role in the remaking of Rochester.

A new Democratic majority on City Council began attacking the problems of inadequate housing, urban decay,

and police brutality in the early 1960's. But the Democrats and a succeeding Republican majority quickly discovered that solutions were not always within their grasp.

As middle-class Whites moved to the suburbs, some city neighborhoods decayed faster than others could be reclaimed, even with substantial help from the Federal government.

With the proliferation of new demands on local government, the city's fiscal crisis was exacerbated. As City Council began to tackle the city's formidable urban development problem, Council members had to search continually for outside sources of revenue—from the county, state, and Federal government—in order to stay within the city's constitutional tax limit.

It is apparent, we think, that fiscal crises have severely restricted the ability of the Board of Education and City Council to cope with the demands of an increasingly pluralistic city.

We end Part III with a look at the controversial issue of an elected mayor, an issue which dates to the 1920's, when George Eastman and other members of the "Good Government" movement campaigned successfully to replace the elected-mayor form of government with the council/manager system.

There have been periodic organized efforts to amend the City Charter in order to return to the elected-mayor system. These have come with increasing frequency in the past two decades, and in Chapter 14 we recount some of those efforts.

Whether or not the city returns to an elected-mayor government, we think the issue is an important one. Government in Rochester is without an executive, without a single policymaker.

The council/manager system leaves to an appointed administrator a number of decisions which, under an elected mayor, would be subject to political pressures. The allocation of housing rehabilitation subsidies and public works grants, for example, are decided largely through the application of administrative formulas.

Opponents of the elected-mayor system say the council/manager government is more evenhanded and efficient. That may be true, but the system also makes it harder for an active citizenry as now exists in Rochester to influence their government. A mayoral campaign would set up the possibility of competition among candidates with very different goals and agendas for the city's future.

City Council campaigns rarely feature candidates who propose an agenda intended to appeal to a broad cross section of constituent groups. Council candidates—even at-large candidates—are not expected to announce an agenda. Council members are, by virtue of the nature of their jobs, asked to advance a program after the election, in consort with their colleagues.

It is rare, therefore, that City Council elections offer any guidance on how voters want to apportion the city's scarce financial resources. The campaigns do not generate coalitions among interest groups around a candidate with even a loosely defined set of priorities.

We think some background on the elected-mayor issue helps put into context the difficult decisions faced by the Board of Education and the City Council. We also wonder if the persistence of this issue in the past two decades is the result of a Rochester transformed.

The conclusion is intended to highlight the major points we have covered in the rest of the book. It is not only a review of what has come before, but an attempt to synthesize and correlate. We have also tried to tie in what was happening locally with what was occurring elsewhere. We believe the evidence suggests the appropriateness of the book's title, *The Remaking of a City*.

The book in its entirety is certainly not the complete picture of change in Rochester during the past two decades. This is true, for example, with regard to the role of the churches.

We would have liked to include a study of the role of both

the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the change of the past two decades. We know, for example, that Protestant churches—Black, White, and mixed—took an active role in community organizing which helped transform the city. We also are aware that Catholic Bishop Matthew Clark's outspoken views on the arms race are part of a tradition of social activism by Rochester Bishops.

The churches, more examples from labor, a detailed account of Rochester's changing technological character—all are examples of areas we would have liked to include. We chose not to, however, because the information was too scattered or incomplete, the organizations too disparate, or because we simply could not get a conceptual handle on the subject. Limitations of time and space were also factors.

While the book is not a complete picture of change in Rochester during the past two decades, we believe, based on the historical record and our interviews, that it represents a very large picture. We intend it as a preface rather than a conclusion, a beginning rather than an end, to the debate regarding the city's recent past and its immediate future.

We believe such a book is necessary. The volume, complexity, and inherently fragmented nature of information in the contemporary world often results in the reinforcement of encrusted prejudices, or widens the gap between perception and reality.

The problem of too much information too fast, and without conceptual coordinates, makes democracy difficult. How can governors and the governed choose wisely when urgency is always in the air and when the larger view is nowhere in view?

Such a dilemma has made the writing of contemporary affairs more respectable among academics, and perhaps more vital to a society which stakes its existence on the opinions of its public. Though writing about public affairs while you are in the midst of them is a gamble, it is also, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has written, "now a necessity. . . ."

Rochester is still an unfinished city. We are in the throes of a great and still unfinished transformation. We have not tried to argue a point of view but to lay out the historical record so that the city in which we find ourselves may grow in understanding.

We are hopeful in that regard.

Re-Publication Reviews of
The Remaking of a City: Rochester, New York, 1964-1984
by
Lou Buttino and Mark Hare

"The past twenty years have been critical ones in the life of the greater Rochester community. The two decades since the 1964 riots have brought enormous changes in our community and it is very useful to have a book such as this which recounts the major developments of this period. I commend Mark Hare and Lou Buttino for their initiative and professional scholarship and hope all our community leaders and historians will be sure to read this remarkable account."

—*Thomas P. Ryan, Jr.*,
Mayor of Rochester

"I have read the lengthy manuscript, *The Remaking of a City: Rochester, New York, 1964-1984*, by Lou Buttino and Mark Hare, with great interest. They have done an excellent job of research, tracing down the activities and reporting the accomplishments of the varied groups involved in this important and controversial aspect of Rochester's recent history. Their record of these developments should definitely be preserved and made available to students of Rochester's history and to officials and citizens concerned with the city's development."

—*Blake McKelvey*,
former City Historian

"*The Remaking of a City* represents a continuation of Rochester's splendid tradition of first-class local history. This book brings up-to-date Rochester's history in the critical post-riot years. I am delighted to see it appear during the Sesquicentennial year."

—*Edward P. Curtis, Jr.*, Chairperson,
Rochester Sesquicentennial, Inc.

"This book is an important historical account of twenty years of the most dynamic change in Rochester history. The community owes the authors a debt of gratitude. It is hoped that the community will read this important work."

—*Laurence Kirwan*, Vice Chairperson,
State Democratic Party



KENDALL/HUNT
PUBLISHING COMPANY
Dubuque, Iowa

B 403451 01
ISBN 0-8403-3451-6