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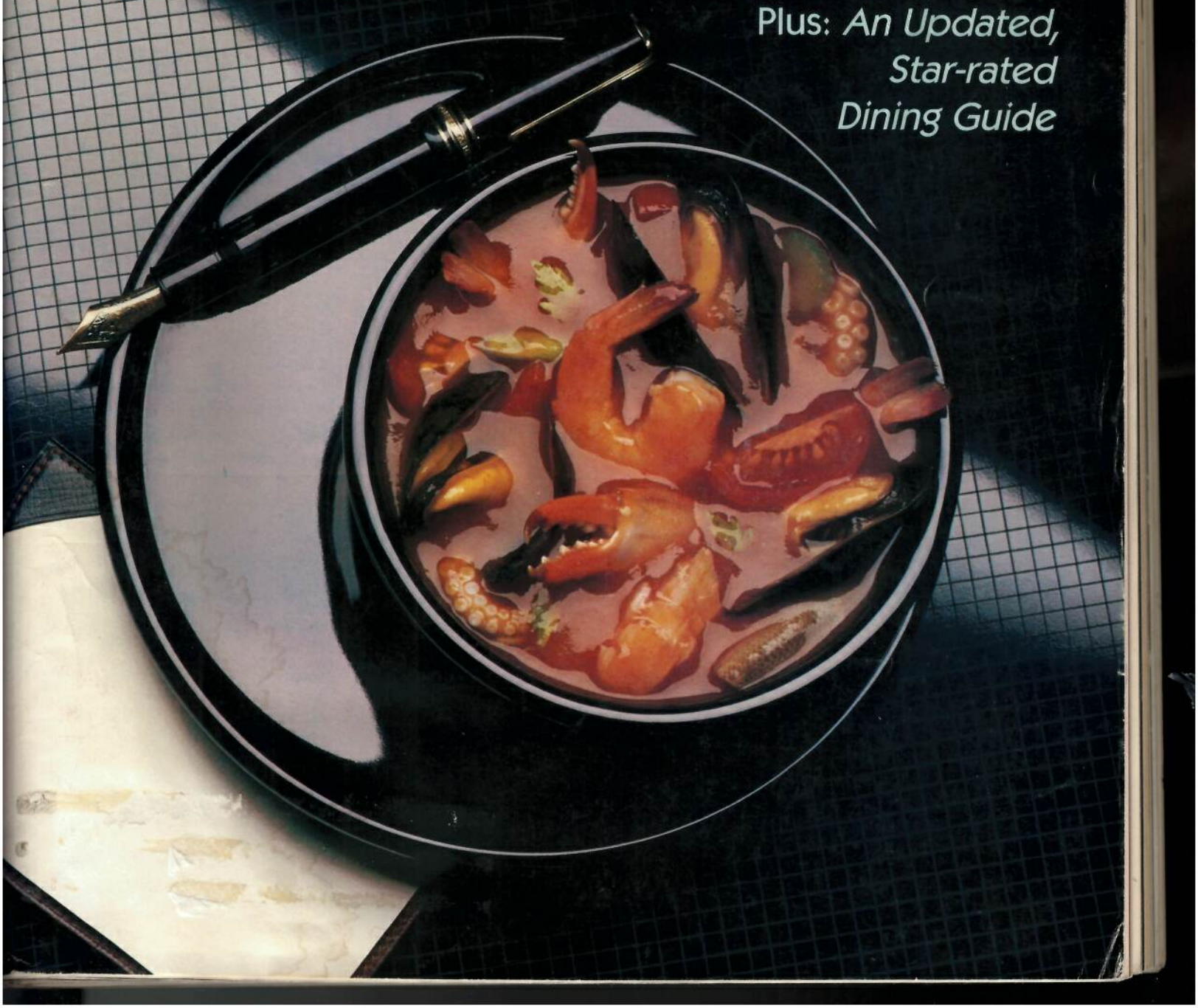
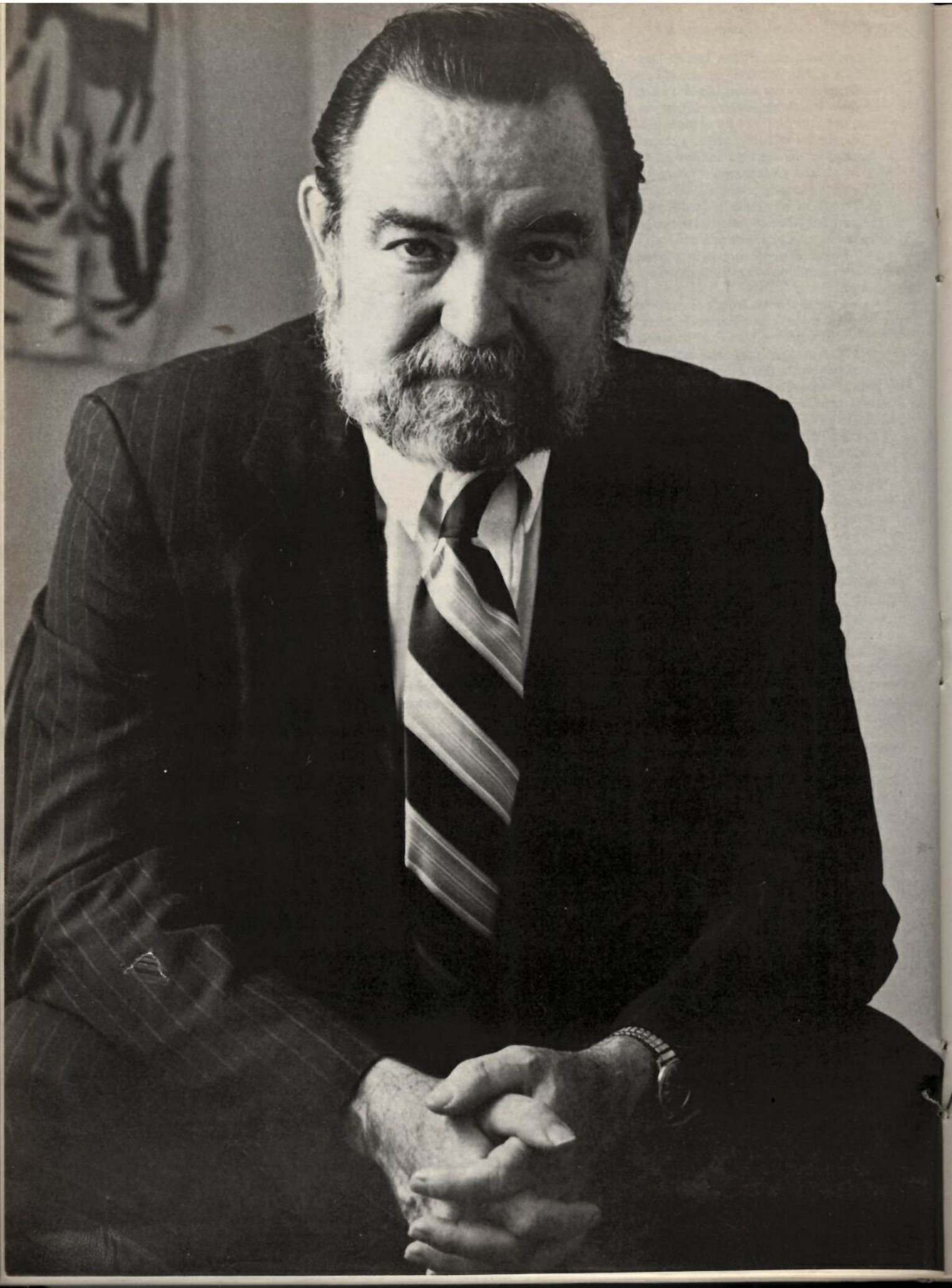




JOHN McKNIGHT

An influential, original "urban philosopher" talks sense about welfare, neighborhoods, race relations, and life in Chicago in the "postindustrial era"

John McKnight is a professor at Northwestern University who, in his quiet, professional way, continues to have a major influence on the redevelopment of Chicago.

He is a theoretician. If you ask him what he thinks about a particular project or proposal, he will analyze it in terms of his own unique set of theories and experiences.

That theoretical framework is neither liberal nor conservative. On the one hand, McKnight has clearly been a leading liberal. He was part of a small group that framed and launched the first affirmative-action programs under Attorney General Robert Kennedy and Vice-President Lyndon Johnson. He helped persuade police superintendent O. W. Wilson to do something about the fire bombings of the houses of blacks in hostile neighborhoods. He co-authored an appendix to the Kerner Report defining institutionalized racism. He was executive director of the Illinois Division of the American Civil Liberties Union and Midwest director for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

On the other hand, he is a firm believer in self-reliance, religious and family values, and the dangers of centralized planning, giant bureaucracies, and the welfare state. He is a former member of the governing board of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Evanston.

Politically he is more than anything else a new version of a Midwestern populist. Over his desk in his comfortable Evanston home there is a button from the last Presidential campaign of William Jennings Bryan. He is a close friend of the Mexico-based philosopher Ivan Illich.

Years ago, when I had a stint of writing editorials for the Sun-Times, *I would often call McKnight, then with the Commission on Civil Rights, and rely on his analysis of the most controversial social issues. He has a deeply felt belief in democracy, and in the wisdom of Everyman. "Every city is supposed to have a philosopher," says Scott Bernstein, executive director of the Center for Neighborhood Technology and a former student of McKnight. "John is ours."*

—Christopher Chandler

Chicago: What do you see as some of the more hopeful signs for the future of Chicago?

McKnight: Jane Jacobs has recently written a wonderful book in which she says that the real power behind cities is their ability to replace imports. Chicago is a place where we are going to have our future defined by our ability to do just that, to make more of the things that we use, become producers rather than consumers, do for ourselves what the centralized institutions are not going to do for us.

Chicago: How about major projects for economic redevelopment? Efforts to reopen U.S. Steel's South Works plant, or to locate a new car assembly plant here?

McKnight: No, I think we have to recognize that the industrial sector of America has abandoned us and that, in the most basic sense, our future is in our own hands. Do you know about the cargo cults? After the Japanese had captured New Guinea in the Second World War—which really meant they had captured the coastal cities, because the middle was jungle—the Americans dropped commandos into the mountains to harass the Japanese from the rear so that they wouldn't be able to run their ports. And in these jungles were some of the most original people, untouched by the outside world. These Americans came down in parachutes and they cleared away the trees, and then their cargo airplanes dropped boxes full of the most wonderful things that these native people had ever seen in their lives: food, clothing, guns, everything. The natives developed almost a worshipful feeling about these Americans and these parachutes. Their whole economy was built up around cargo drops. Came the end of the war and the Americans left; the planes didn't come, the cargo didn't drop. And the people thought they must've offended God somehow. So they began building huge mock airplanes out of sticks and clay. The religions that developed as people continued to worship the parachute landings are called "cargo cults." There are many people in Chicago today who are waiting for a Saturn plant to drop down. They are waiting for a parachute load of transistors to come and save us. It's a tragic mistake. We need a harsh, clear look at who we are, what we have, and what we can make that we and others need, a kind of understanding about a renaissance in our own productivity that will depend very little upon help from the Federal Government and the major corporations. I don't think they are going to drop plants down from the sky.

Chicago: So you see industrial abandonment as the city's major problem?

McKnight: There are two great systems that have been harmful to Chicago: the goods-producing industry and the service industry. One has abandoned us, and one has, in a sense, become the monkey on Chicago's back in the neighborhoods. In other words, the industrial truth about Chicago is that we are an abandoned people. The service truth is that we now have all kinds of people in our neighborhoods who depend upon the poor. And all kinds of poor who can't depend upon industry.

Chicago: We don't usually talk about

Photography by Matthew Kaplan

service industries as a problem.

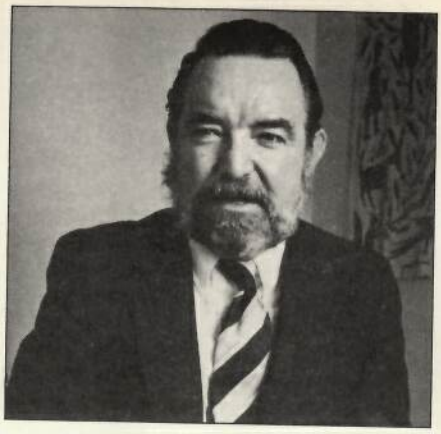
McKnight: When I first came to Chicago, 956, I spent a lot of time working on the st Side with health problems and neighhood organizing. Cook County Hospital and the Medical Center were worn-out, overcrowded places and the neighborhoods on the West Side were pretty decent. Since then I have seen a systematic change. The Medical Center has grown and been renewed. It is like Oz out there today, a huge Emerald City. And at the same time, all around it, the real city has slowly decayed, collapsed. One wonders what it is about a society that lets the work that needs to be done—that is, the maintenance of our economy, our neighborhoods, and our housing—come to a stop, and at the same time has these huge investments in a medical empire. Our West Side is a great metaphor for the modern tragedy of not understanding what work really needs to be done. We don't need medical empires. We're doing everything we can at the policy level to stop them from growing more. The last three Presidents were concerned with the question of how we can stop the medical monsters. But we haven't been able to. We have taken what needed badly to be done, that is the good work in our city, and replaced it with what we call "good works." We have built up the medical empire and we have allowed the neighborhoods to collapse. Now, that is just a basic mistake in terms of what we should be doing with our people.

Chicago: We have too many social workers and not enough bricklayers.

McKnight: We're turning out young people from universities right and left who really are looking for something to do. In the elite universities what do we offer them? We offer them the chance to become lawyers. Do we need more lawyers? Do we need more doctors? We've got too many doctors. They're forcing the prices up and up. Teachers, too. Illinois is populated with teachers without jobs. The fact of the matter is, we don't need this glut of servicers. But here we are with unemployed teachers, with lawyers who most people can't believe are going to bring us more justice, doctors who are becoming increasingly specialized. I sit in the university and I see us preparing people to be accountants, doctors, lawyers, teachers, all kinds of specialized counselors at a time when Chicago is falling down around us.

Chicago: In your article "A Nation of Clients?" you described the basic shift going on in our economy.

McKnight: The great sweep of the last hundred years has been a shift away from people making their income by producing things to people making their income by producing services. Today about 70 percent of all Americans make their income by producing some kind of service. Only 30 percent of the people are basically involved in goods production. When we reach the year 2000, only about one out of ten Americans will be involved in actually making things.



Chicago: Is that a necessary shift?

McKnight: Well, one way of looking at it is to say that because of the industrial revolution, and now the postindustrial era, we don't need nearly so many people to produce the goods that we need—the food, the wheat—or running our mines and factories. And, therefore, one might say we have had the problem of deciding what we will pay people for, now that we don't need them to be making things.

Chicago: In testimony before Congress, you used some figures about medical costs in one particular community. You said 57 cents is spent on medical care for every dollar spent in payments to the poor.

McKnight: Well, we first began to try to look at how much of the public program money being expended for people in our lower-income neighborhoods was money that was income—that is, real welfare income.

Chicago: Money they could spend.

McKnight: Spendable money. And how much of it was in programs, in medical care, Medicaid cards, social workers, educational and mental health programs. We began to see that there was probably more money spent on each low-income person for services than that person was given in cash. Then I noticed that the state of Illinois itself has a strange inversion in its budget. It was paying more money for the medical care for the poor than it was giving the poor population in income. A study was completed recently in New York City that calculated all the money spent in relationship to low-income people on a per capita basis—about $7,000 per capita, $28,000 for a family of four. That is a moderate income. But about 35 percent of it was income and 65 percent services. Now, can you imagine me offering you a job in which I said, "This is a $10,000-a-year job, but you are going to get $3,500 in cash, and $6,500 worth of doctors, teachers, and social workers"? Nobody would take that job, except the people who are really impoverished. And that's the job we give them. That job is to support the professional servicers who ride on their backs. I believe that one of the most progressive things we could do is to transfer to the low-income population the income that is now consumed by the professional servicers. To let people decide whether they want to purchase these services or not. But don't spend it on the services and then say to the poor, "You can use them free of charge." We've really got it backwards. So we need to look at all public programs and say that those large amounts of public wealth should be going to individuals as income; those programs should be hiring people who are low-income people. And a part of that money should be looked at as investment, to start new kinds of enterprises like home health-care activities or community rehab efforts.

Chicago: You and the Center for Urban Affairs were involved in a project that may be a good example of the kind of enterprise you're talking about. A community organization asked you to study the high hospitalization rate in a neighborhood due to dog bites.

McKnight: It interested me to see the people in that organization thinking about that problem. The city government has employees who are paid to be "dogcatchers," but the community group did not contact the city. Instead, it decided to take a small part of its money and use it for "dog bounties." Through its block clubs, the group let it be known that for a period of one month, in an area of about one square mile, it would pay a bounty of five dollars for every stray dog that either was brought in or had its location identified so that it could be captured. There were packs of wild dogs in the neighborhood. The children thought that catching dogs was a wonderful idea, so they helped. In one month, 160 dogs were captured, and cases of dog bites brought to the hospitals decreased. Two things happened as a result of this success. People learned that their action, rather than the hospital, determines their health. They also helped build their organization by involving the children as community activists.

Chicago: You worked with some welfare clients in Gary, Indiana, for a while. Did that start you along this line of thinking?

McKnight: Yes, that was a very important experience for me. When I was working for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission as the Midwest director, there was a young alderman in the Gary City Council who was on our state advisory committee. His name was Dick Hatcher, and he said to me, "You ought to come over to Gary and look at the dilemmas faced by the welfare recipients. See if we can't figure out something that might turn their situation around." For about six months, I spent all my time in Gary with a group of women who were organizing themselves into a welfare mothers' group to broaden their opportunities and the opportunities of their kids. The thing that really impressed me about them was that they were trapped. I could see how, if it were me, I wouldn't be able to figure out how to get out of the trap that I was in. I could identify perfectly with their situation and see that the economic reality that surrounded them was an impossible situation to get out of. I was helping them get organized at the time the antipoverty programs were becoming avail-

able in the neighborhood. It was then that I first began to see this problem of trying to substitute services for income. Because the neighborhood became inundated with people who were helpers. There were housing aides, educational aides, assistants to help with health care, and all kinds of people who hadn't been there before. When they first arrived, I was pretty impressed. But, as I kept working with these women and watching what happened, none of them got out of the trap, except a few who married men who had good jobs.

Chicago: Do you think that is true in general of the War on Poverty?

McKnight: To the degree that the War on Poverty attempted to provide services in lieu of power or income, it failed. The basic reality in our society is that income is power. Poor people are poor in power. You cannot service somebody to freedom or liberty. In our society freedom and liberty come from income and power, and unless something happens to change the quantum of those two things in the neighborhoods, the neighborhoods won't change. And that is why shifting income out of the service sector into economic opportunity for poor people is absolutely essential. Gary taught me that you can't substitute a teacher and a doctor and a social worker and a mental health worker for a decent income.

Chicago: Weren't you also involved in some of the early work on affirmative action?

McKnight: Yes, I went into the Federal Government shortly after Kennedy had signed the first executive order making it an offense to engage in discrimination. It required government contractors to engage in affirmative action. No one in the Federal Government had been involved in civil rights or race relations, so they hired some people from the outside to develop this program. I was one of those people.

Chicago: Where was it in the government?

McKnight: Well, I was placed in the Army Materiel Command. The Kennedys were hiding us. They were, in essence, acting with executive power. President Kennedy said that a lot of progress could be made by using executive power. There had been a lot of complaints about how the Southerners had slowed everything down. He issued the executive order, and then the staff to enforce it was hired and placed in various Federal contracting agencies. We just had offices there. We basically worked for Bobby Kennedy; we reported to one of his chief aides. We expected to go into Washington and find out what affirmative action meant and how it was to be enforced. But when we got there we found that nobody knew what it meant. Some lawyers had written some words down and we were supposed to invent it. I remember spending 30 days with my peers in Washington figuring out what it meant. And after we had developed our ideas about what would be appropriate under affirmative action, we tried it out on Henry Ford. I can remember, I was 28, 29 years old,

"The basic reality in our society is that freedom and liberty come from income and power"

going into the boardroom of the Ford Motor Company with another guy, one of my opposite numbers from Detroit, and sitting down at the end of this long table getting ourselves all prepared to tell Henry Ford and all his vice-presidents what affirmative action meant and then seeing what happened.

Chicago: What happened?

McKnight: What happened was, we made this presentation and they asked a few questions. They were all very nice and polite and they said, "Thank you very much." And we went back to our hotel and sat around and waited to see what was going to happen. What happened, I understand, is that Lyndon Johnson was the person who was, at least legally, responsible. He was the person the President had assigned the responsibility for the implementation of this program. And they called Lyndon up and told him what we had said and asked, "Do we have to do that?" And he said yes. He held firm. We had no idea whether he would or not, but he did.

Chicago: The Ford Company then went ahead and—

McKnight: —and began to work with us on implementation of that program.

Chicago: What year was that?

McKnight: Might have been 1962.

Chicago: How about the Contract Buyers League?

McKnight: When I was working with the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, a lawyer named Mark Satter was on one of its committees and I was a staff member. Mark told me one time that the greatest economic exploitation of black people in Chicago was the contract sale of houses, on land contracts. When I got to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, I was working with a neighborhood organization and a lady told me about her land contract. So I did a study that laid out the basic pattern, how whites were frightened and sold their houses cheap and then, since there was no legitimate mortgage money available, syndicates would buy up mortgages and sell them on land contracts at high interest rates and double the price. So many black people were buying a home at twice what the white person who had sold it had paid. And it was straight racial exploitation, outrageous, systematic, widespread, all over the West Side, all over Englewood. I wouldn't be surprised if half of the property being transferred in the fifties was going by land contract, but it was all undercover. After I had gotten the study done I went around for about a year or two trying to interest various groups in this problem. I tried to sell it to Dr. King. I remember that [minister and civil-rights activist] Jim Bevel was sold on the idea that there was an issue there.

Chicago: It was 1966 when King came to Chicago.

McKnight: Yes, right. But Bevel could not sell it to Dr. King, and so Dr. King then moved into tenant organizing. I explained it to groups all over the city and tried to get people interested in it and they all nodded their heads and thought maybe they understood it. I even have used Monopoly money to explain it. Finally, I was just about to give up when a young seminarian came into my office. He was sent by one of my old, good friends, Monsignor Jack Egan, who was out at Presentation parish on the West Side. I explained this to him, and he went back and ran into one or two people in the neighborhood who admitted they had purchased land on contract—it was an embarrassment to admit that you had been involved in something like this. And out of that he began to organize people together to fight the contract purchasers. His name was Jack Macnamara. He is now president of the Busch Sausage Company, but he was one of the most phenomenal organizers in Chicago, including Saul Alinsky. Macnamara got hold of this contract buyers issue and brought together hundreds and then thousands of people, particularly from the West Side, and got enough popular pressure developed. Working-class people who had every last buck sunk into these vicious contracts. And by putting the pressure on the speculators and syndicates that were holding these things, I believe that that movement of contract buyers probably brought more economic benefit to more minority people than any single organizing effort of that time.

Chicago: There was a lawsuit, wasn't there?

McKnight: Macnamara got Jenner & Block involved. It looked like a little thing at the beginning. Ask Tom Sullivan. He was the chief lawyer for the contract buyers. The last I heard, I don't know how many millions of dollars of pro bono time they had put into those contract buyer suits. Jenner & Block really came through, but the litigation, I think, wouldn't have amounted to much if it hadn't been for the political pressure. I've seen it over and over again in Chicago. The law responds; it doesn't lead. When the people are out there in the streets and they have a good cause and they keep at it, then the legislators will change and the courts will begin to give you a hearing. And that group, the Contract Buyers League, had a kind of breadth and depth commitment on the part of real tough working-class people that any organizer would envy. And so Jack Macnamara, president of the Busch Sausage

Company, belongs in the annals of ganizing.

Chicago: So what is the final result?

McKnight: Well, these contracts got renetiated. The price, in essence, was re-established at a fair price and the person got access to standard mortgage money at a decent rate of interest, six percent for 20 years, whereas these people might have had contracts at 17 percent for 40 years. The net result was that family after family was saved twenty, thirty, forty thousand dollars that they weren't going to have to pay as the price of being black.

Chicago: How about the "disinvestment" idea?

McKnight: We had some college faculty members and a group of young graduate students who formed a team to look into the problem of the unavailability of mortgage funds. When financial institutions wouldn't lend the money in neighborhoods, by their very act they sentenced the neighborhoods to deterioration.

Chicago: And to contract buying.

McKnight: And the people who bought on contract had to bring more people into the house; they had to convert the house to get enough income to pay double price. The contract buyers problem resulted from the abandonment by our downtown financial institutions of Chicago's own neighborhoods. Now, you can put a lot of pressure on these syndicates, and speculators, and the people who are making profit immediately on those contracts, but the fact of the matter is that they were jackals moving into a vacuum. And the vacuum was a neighborhood that had been sentenced to death by the president of a bank on the 62nd floor of a building in the Loop. The next step was to document on a systematic basis the redlining that was going on in neighborhoods. This was done by a group made up of a faculty member, Len Rubinowitz, and two graduate students, Al Bradford, who is now a professor at the University of Minnesota, and Darel Grothaus, who is a clergyman now, I guess. The neighborhood movement across the United States took that information, plus work done by others, and fashioned Federal legislation, the Community Reinvestment Act and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, which require financial institutions to provide service to the areas that they said they were going to serve and to disclose each year where they were actually making their mortgages. It was the first real major reform in this process by which our own financial institutions were going in and vacuuming local money and exporting it to build condominiums in Miami, lending it to people who were building retirement villages in Arizona, while our neighborhoods were bereft of mortgage money.

Chicago: Your research was shared with activist groups.

McKnight: Especially with National People's Action, Gail Cincotta's group, because she led the national movement to get Federal legislation.

"America is renewing the social and economic space that has been abandoned by our large institutions"

Chicago: There was local, state, and Federal legislation, I think, before it was all over.

McKnight: Yes, and part of that movement was also to get the city to pass an ordinance. [Former alderman] Dick Simpson was involved in that. And the state, under treasurer Adlai Stevenson, would deposit only in banks or financial institutions that would make commitments to lend in neighborhoods.

Chicago: There was legislation; then there was noncompliance. Just last year, major financial institutions in Chicago pledged to spend $175 million in housing and commercial loans here, as a result of the disinvestment studies, as well as the follow-up studies done by the Woodstock Institute.

McKnight: One piece of legislation required financial institutions to, once a year, make available by census tract the number and amount of mortgages they made in the neighborhoods. Any time a financial institution that is covered by Federal regulation decides to change its legal status—that is, to be bought by somebody else, or to buy somebody else—then a review of its practices under the Community Reinvestment Act is required. And what happened in Chicago was that when the First National Bank was going to purchase something, you could activate a review of their compliance. There were studies done of their census tract allotments. They did those studies for several big downtown banks and then said, "We're going to file a complaint against you unless you reinvest as required by the law."

Chicago: What do you think of Ronald Reagan? There is some kind of feeling, judging by the polls, that America is back.

McKnight: America is back, but on the other hand it hasn't got back to Western and Madison yet, and that's where we've got to keep our eye. It seems to me that there are two countervailing trends in America. The one I think bodes no good, and the other isn't very visible. What isn't, I think, going to help us in the long run is that we are going through a period of the consolidation of our institutions into ever larger, ever more centralized, and therefore ever more controlling institutions. You see that in the area that I pay special attention to, the health area. And what's happening is, there is vertical integration. Hospices are being taken over by hospitals, and hospitals are developing joint programs and are becoming managed by corporations, and corporations are buying up hospitals and then the corporations themselves. Two great hospital health corporations just consolidated. So one can see this process, not just in the area of health, but in education, certainly in the area of large corporations, this process of centralization and consolidation. Vertical integration, great power and hierarchical pyramids. And it seems to me that the long-run interest of any society is not tied up with having a few institutions controlled by a few people with great power. And while Mr. Reagan talks localism, it seems to me that he has pushed for those kinds of changes which have allowed for consolidation and centralization. When he's gone, we will have fewer medical institutions, fewer farms, fewer corporations, fewer educational institutions; and those that remain will be more powerful, more centralized, directed by a few. That does not seem to me to be what America is basically about. You can't have a democracy if the average citizen can't effectively control institutions in the society. And I think that we are moving ever more toward a sort of a monopolistic society in one part of America. Now, on the other hand, the hopeful things are taking place in those places where things like systems and management and high tech are not in control, places where creative individuals, small entrepreneurial groups, inventors are trying to find new ways of dealing with our lives, our ways of producing things. My guess is that a part of America is a land of the dinosaurs. Part of America is populated with people who are inventors. I see more invention going on . . . a lot is invention of necessity.

Chicago: What do you think about Harold Washington?

McKnight: I think that one of the more hopeful things that this Mayor has done is to move toward making information available that will allow people to get an economic handle on city spending. You know, every time that we contract with a company from Des Moines, the city of Chicago, which doesn't have an awful lot of investment capital, is redlining Chicago. I think that this Mayor has done a pretty good job of trying to get the information out to people in neighborhoods, out to minority groups, out to women, so that they can direct the economic power that the city's own capital expenditures represent to the benefit of the city rather than some large centralized contractor from California. And we need to nurture those kinds of efforts. We are beginning to see a lot of neighborhood groups that are experimenting with how they can provide home health care instead of sending people away to our high-cost medical centers, our great emerald empires. We can see experiments in education where people are trying to maintain and define their own schools so that children once again have an opportunity to learn. You see fascinating little economic development ef-

forts going on all over the city. You see the new vitality coming into the city from the new immigrants. Gee, the economic energy they are bringing to our neighborhoods! The Asians—just phenomenal. And the people from the Caribbean as well as people from Central America, from Mexico. All those people are bringing new energies and a kind of revitalization into Chicago. It was the engine that drove Chicago in the beginning, its new immigrants. They are, by the great leading institutions of our society, abandoned, but they are people, I think, who are not captured by cargo cultism. They have a sense that whatever we are going to be we are going to be because of our own command of our own possibilities and our own resources.

Chicago: You were very much involved in the new city program that provides Housing Court data to community organizations every month. How is that program working out?

McKnight: We're going to do our first systematic follow-up in three months. We had a meeting of groups that were using it a month ago, and we're writing that up and calling it the User's Manual. The ones that are using it are the most sophisticated ones, which means that we need to figure out ways of making it simpler. No planner or bureaucrat in City Hall, with all due respect, will ever come up with half the ideas that are going to come if you give 160 groups the same, but very localized, information and watch and see what they do. What they will do is, they will grow the first generation of uses. Right? Someplace down the line you look at that and say, "Well, gee, there are six different kinds of uses. We see four uses right now." And then you say, "How can we nurture those four uses?" There is something finally that is absolutely dull about big institutions. The magnification of minutiae in large institutions consumes the lives and destinies of millions of Americans. The decisions here are being made locally.

Chicago: One of your fellow professors mentioned that you were interested in the question of what will happen if and when our giant systems collapse.

McKnight: I have a friend named Robert Rodale who is the publisher-owner of Rodale Press. He publishes *Prevention* magazine and other magazines having to do with self-sufficiency. He has been reading about what happens to the earth when we stop misusing it. What happens after the great tractors, the herbicides, the pesticides, the chemical fertilizers have absolutely taken every last ounce of vitality out of the land. What happens, Bob explains very well, is that it begins to regenerate, that there is in nature a first growth of plants. They are not the plants that will be there a hundred years hence, but they are programmed in nature to be the first plants in the regeneration. And then comes a second plant culture, a succession. One follows the other.

Chicago: Seems like recapitulation of evolution.

McKnight: It could be. It's called succession, and the first plant, for instance, might be a plant that has very large leaves and it will only be there for four or five years. But its purpose is to provide shade for the next generation of plants that aren't able to live in the sun until they have grown for a year or two. And when they have gotten to their appropriate level, the first generation of leafy plants, shading plants, die away.

Chicago: Because the second generation takes the sun.

McKnight: Takes the sun and comes up through. But there is a succession, as nature's will redesigns an environment that has been decimated. Now, that's like Chicago. If you look closely, Chicago is a place that has been, in many neighborhoods, decimated by systems and institutions, disinvested, exploited; and now we are beginning to see the first generation of new growth. Sometimes it's immigrant people. Sometimes it's a funny little not-for-profit corporation that begins to see how they recycle materials. Sometimes it's a group that's starting to grow stuff on rooftops; sometimes it's a neighborhood group of welfare mothers who decide to start a home health-care company. Those are the first-generation plants in the regrowth of Chicago—as Rodale would say, "in the regeneration of Chicago." So that one of the things that I am interested in researching is this regenerative process in city rebuilding in places where the large institutions have abandoned us. How does that happen? Now, it's very important to understand that there is a regenerative process alive. And the role of government in a city like ours is to understand that regenerative process enough, that it can take away barriers and provide incentives and redirect its resources. And that's why this process of feeding information to local neighborhood groups, the process of providing purchasing and opportunity to plug into public expenditures is an incentive support system. We are on the right track in doing that. But we need to really get the universities, the creative minds, the newspapers, and the media to pay attention to this new generation of growth in Chicago's neighborhoods and stop watching for cargo planes. They aren't going to drop that plant here. And just look at the attention that is being riveted by our media on the horizon—looking for the Saturn cargo, when all over Chicago we're seeing this first growth of the future.

Chicago: You have a lot of faith in neighborhood organizations, don't you?

McKnight: Neighborhoods are the exciting places, because that's where there is diversity, where there's creativity, eccentricity, sometimes madness; that's where people still speak about the spirit. You know, it isn't all cold, secular. That's where people laugh. That's what vitality is about, that's what democracy is about. And when you get into our large megastructures, there's a kind of silence there that feels to me more and more eerie.

Chicago: There's a common story in science fiction about the hero fighting the impersonal bureaucracy of the giant system.

McKnight: I suppose all of this is sort of like Charlie Chaplin's commentary in *Modern Times.* There just comes a time when what is happening is, the machine is using the people rather than the people using the machine. We have a home in Sauk County, Wisconsin. That was the home of the Sauk Indians, and there is still the Sauk Prairie. There are some high hills and they slope down and there are about five miles of prairie right on the edge of the Wisconsin River. Father Marquette, when he came down the Wisconsin River and was the first European in this area, found their town. He describes it with amazement. He says it was almost like a city. The houses were carefully laid out. They grew beans and corn and pumpkins and squash. They fished in the river and they hunted deer. He describes it as this amazing, plentiful, life-supporting place. Then, in 1837, a treaty forced the Sauk people off the land. And then the sodbusters came and made that plentiful place into a desert in 30 years.

Chicago: What is it like now?

McKnight: Well, it's got two towns on it now, Prairie du Sac and Sauk City. The government came during the Second World War and made a huge munitions factory there, the Baraboo Munitions Works. They took about half of the remaining prairie and made it into a munitions dump, so there's not much left. But a small group of people decided to try. They bought 14 acres and went all around the Midwest to get prairie seeds, and they are replanting the prairie, so maybe it will all come back. I'm going to be a little careful. I'm not interested in going back in time. But I am interested in getting out of the shadow of the dinosaur.

Chicago: So you see us moving ahead.

McKnight: I see that the exciting part of America is in this regeneration, this renewal of the social and economic space that has been decimated and abandoned by our large institutions, and in the inventions and creativity and opportunities for people to be citizens again rather than clients. The large institutions need clients and consumers. Chicago doesn't need one more consumer or one more client. Chicago today just needs more citizens. ■