

## NEIGHBORHOOD AS METAPHOR for the Diverse Democracy

Imagine your neighbor's house just burned to the ground.

If you merely point out that many houses in the neighborhood still look very pretty, or that most of them are in a much better state today than they were thirty years ago, your neighbors would understandably feel that you are being obtuse. The first order of business should be to help them put out the fire and, if they need accommodation, offer them a place to stay for the night.

But once the fire is out, and your neighbors have somewhere to go, you should insist on figuring out what happened. If you want to stop other houses from burning down in the future, you really do need to get a good idea of why existing safeguards failed. Let's imagine you find out that there used to be a lot of fires in the neighborhood. To cut down on risks, every house installed new fire alarms. But as it turns out, the number of fires never went down. This would give you valuable information. Perhaps the fire alarms are faulty. Or perhaps the fire brigade takes too long to get to a burning house. Either way, it seems that the current solution to the problem isn't working. You need a drastic change of course.

Alternatively, let's imagine you find out that there used to be a lot of fires in the neighborhood. To cut down on the risks, most houses replaced outdated electrical systems. And though a few houses have not yet had a chance to install the new system, and continue to catch fire at a high rate, the incidence of fires in the neighborhood as a whole has gone down drastically since these changes were introduced. This would likely lead you to a very different conclusion. Clearly, the measures taken in the past are making a valuable contribution to fire safety. Perhaps you could make sure they are completed more quickly. Or perhaps you could add additional safety features. But if you want to stop more houses from burning down, you should build on, rather than reverse, the steps the neighborhood has taken so far.

This, it seems to me, comes closer to the situation we now face.

There are very real problems and injustices in our metaphorical neighborhoods. For reasons both moral and prudential, we must seriously investigate them, and commit ourselves to remedying them as best we can. This is an urgent task, and one that will by no means be easy. But as we set out to do so, we can, thankfully, build on the real progress we have made in recent decades.

Mouk, Yascha. *The Great Experiment* (pp. 227-229). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.