

# Bitter experience makes me wary of Consensus: Jackie Warren-Moore



Construction of Interstate 81 along Almond Street, looking south from downtown Syracuse. When considering a grand plan to merge Syracuse and Onondaga County governments, "I see the splitting of the spine of the city with the building of Interstate 81," writes guest columnist Jackie Warren-Moore. Photo is from the 1960's Photo from the Onondaga Historical Association (*Onondaga Historical Association*)



By **Jackie Warren-Moore** | Guest columnist

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*Jackie Warren-Moore, a poet, playwright, theatrical director and freelance writer, writes regularly for syracuse.com and The Post-Standard. Her new book is "Where I Come From" (Nine Mile Press, 2016).*

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Opinions rage on about the **Consensus issue**. I've read and seen the reports and studies, statistics and wide ranging opinions. I know how I feel about it, but I decided to ask a few others their opinion.

As a black Syracusan who has lived and loved here for most of my life, I've had the opportunity to witness some things. I've seen some fancy, highly researched, highly regarded projects that have been foisted on the minority and poor communities. Things that were advertised as "improving lives and communities."

When I first read about Consensus, and its recommendation to merge Syracuse and Onondaga County, I admit to the hair rising on the back of my neck. I see flashes of the destruction of the 15th Ward. I see the wholesale and divisive gutting of the federal anti-poverty program, the Crusade for Opportunity. I see the splitting of the spine of the city with the building of Interstate 81. And now what to do about the un-building of I-81, and how many poor and already disenfranchised people will again be affected. Maybe it's just me, but my antenna goes up and I'm braced for when the next blow falls.

I spoke with Linda Ervin, Democratic Floor Leader of the Onondaga County Legislature. She is someone who has read the reports and seen the stats. She is also an advocate of ordinary folk, the kind of everyday people whose lives may be greatly affected by the proposed merger. Ervin respectfully thanks the committee members who worked tirelessly on Consensus. She speaks openly about her concern that the merger would "take away voting power and the opportunity for more minorities to become elected officials." (This is also mentioned in a **commentary** by former City Court Judge and current Syracuse Corporation Counsel Joseph Fahey, who wrote, "No member of a minority group has ever been elected to countywide office, no matter how well-qualified.")

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Ervin says, "It is not about white or black, but a whole city population. It must be a plan not restricted in terms of voting strength, the possibility of running for office and the power and will of all the people. It has to be a plan that encourages economic stability for the city, surrounding towns and the county. A plan that comes from the people, not one handed down to them."

In speaking with folks, I noticed one immediate response. It was a mirthless chuckle that I interpreted as, "Here we go again. Been there. Done that. I'm too old a cat to be tricked by a kitten. Promised Thomas's (as in English muffins) and can't get toast."

Several people did not want to be identified by name. Nancy Keefe Rhodes, a city resident, community member and longtime activist, replied with that chuckle, "Don't fall for the okie doke! It's not a new idea, just an old story."

I also resent having a money prize dangled in front of our noses that magically morphs into a threat if we don't "get it right."

For my vote, if I still have one, proud city resident that I am, I vote no.



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