

Lincoln loved and left by local power—professor

By Kathy Stokebrand

The Lincoln community has been used as a resource for funds instead of a place in which to build and invest, according to Jack Siegman, UNL sociology professor.

Siegman, speaking at the Glass Onion Friday night, said "Lincoln is peanuts." It is not the arena in which people in political and economic power positions play because they get their money here and invest it elsewhere, he said.

A past president of the Lincoln Alliance, a neighborhood association group, Siegman spoke on the "Lincoln Power Structure" to a crowd of about 60. The Lincoln power structure exists on two levels, he said. Most of the power holders at the top level are "faceless people." They rarely get into public issues other than through school board positions, Siegman said.

The individuals in second-level power positions, "errand boys," are more visible and evident to the majority of the public, he said. Siegman cited the Chamber of Commerce and land developing associations as some organizations in which second-level people are found.

The second-level people are struggling and depend upon the first-level people for their wealth, he said. Overt political roles in the power structure are played in second-level people, he said.

The second tier of the power structure is so financially dependent upon the first level that it would never vote against the economic interests of the first tier, he said.

There is an interdependence between economic institutions and community leaders, Siegman said.

Those who hold power have top level positions in Lincoln banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and the university, he said. The Board of Directors for the National Bank of Commerce is comprised of people from the university and

First National Bank, among other areas and organizations.

The Nebraska Foundation is also closely connected with these groups, he said. The Nebraska Foundation is organized to get funds for the university system.

Siegman said the Lincoln Alliance has gathered some information and found six or seven family names common to positions on several prominent boards in the community. Family names he cited include Abel, Woods and Stuart.

But "names are irrelevant," Siegman said, because they merely represent the way in which corporations are interlocked.

"My concern is when economic power is translated into political power," he said.

Lincoln is similar to most other towns in its power structure organization, he said. The people in first level positions are affiliated with others in top level positions economically throughout the nation. Much of the power in local communities has left for other areas where more money and power can be accumulated, Siegman said.

Neighborhood groups battle over issues that are important in our lives but in a relatively minor sense, such as whether or not to widen a street, Siegman said. Decisions that affect inflation, war and peace are made at the top level of the power structure. This decision-making process and those involved are unreachable, he said.

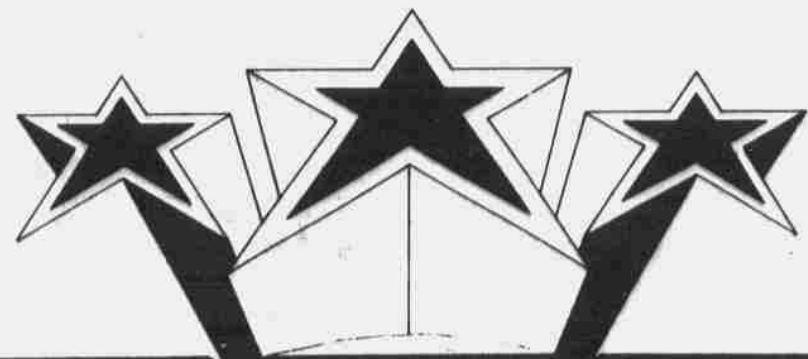
"I am not attempting to derogate what we can do but we cannot kid ourselves," Siegman said. Increasingly, the power has moved out of the communities and gone to a national scale, he said.

But he said he was optimistic about a change in Lincoln. He urged the community to organize and take its place in the political arena, but added that political parties are not effective vehicles because both parties represent the power structure.

Downtown Lincoln is in better shape than most other cities of the same size, Siegman said. Omaha and Grand Island have been "suburbanized to death," he said.

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