



# Political Designs: Architecture and Urban Renewal in the Civil Rights Era, 1954-1973

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Political Designs: Architecture and Urban Renewal in the Civil Rights Era, 1954-1973

Abstract

This dissertation considers the impact of the U.S. civil rights movement on postwar urban design and urban policy, looking specifically at the case of urban renewal, a federal program of urban reconstruction intended to help central cities modernize and compete with the growing suburbs. Tracing the history of three renewal projects from planning through design and implementation, it argues that these projects were shaped by public debates on civil rights and desegregation and the growing ability of community groups to organize and advocate on their own behalf. This dissertation also revisits the usual critique of urban renewal as a program of social and physical destruction and describes these years as a tumultuous period of construction and community building defined by new expectations for community participation and racial justice.

Conceived in the 1950s, as the impact of postwar suburbanization began to be felt in older urban neighborhoods, renewal projects aimed to revitalize declining areas through targeted interventions in the built environment, including the construction of modern housing, shopping centers, and community facilities, as well as the rehabilitation of existing housing. During the turbulent 1960s, these physical design strategies took on political significance, as city officials, planners, and residents considered urban change alongside the social issues of the period, such as the racial integration of the housing market, *de facto* school segregation, and community control over neighborhood resources. Although these projects often began as idealized experiments in

racial and economic integration, they quickly became battlegrounds on which communities struggled to balance their desire for federal investment and modernization against the costs of displacement and gentrification. Ultimately, as the civil rights and Black Power movements gathered strength, racial identity and community control were privileged over integration and assimilation, and the buildings and spaces that represented postwar liberalism became targets of anger and protest. While many of these spaces now seem ill-conceived or poorly designed, the collapse of urban renewal is no mere failure of design or planning policy—it is the result of a profound shift in social and political relationships that played out through the negotiation of change in the urban built environment.

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Introduction  
After the Bulldozer: Urban Renewal and the Construction of Community

***Introduction***

In early 1958, Mayor Richard C. Lee spoke to a reporter from *Life* magazine about the ambitious program of urban renewal that he had launched in New Haven, Connecticut. At a time when other small cities were struggling to get their programs started, Lee and his redevelopment agency had moved quickly to take advantage of federal subsidies to help cities modernize aging urban areas and enable them compete with the growing suburbs. Beginning in 1954, they charted out the demolition of the city's oldest tenements along Oak Street, then they began to replan New Haven's business district at Chapel Street. By 1958, they had five projects in the planning stages, encompassing much of the city's downtown and older neighborhoods. "I won't accept things as they are," Lee told the reporter, explaining the grand scale of his plans. "Just because they've always been that way doesn't mean we shouldn't change." Lee posed for a photo on the site of the Oak Street project, sitting in the cab of a crane with a wrecking ball and gesturing confidently. **[figure 1.1]** "Some mayors give out keys to the city," he said. "We knock down buildings for our guests."<sup>1</sup>

Mayor Lee was the darling of the pro-development media in the late 1950s; the *Los Angeles Times* observed that he had brought "sex appeal" to the "unglamorous word 'redevelopment,'" and the *Boston Globe* speculated that his success rebuilding New Haven had made the young mayor one of the hottest politicians in New England and a viable candidate for

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<sup>1</sup> "City Clean-up Champion," *Life* (February 17, 1958), p. 88.



governor or senator.<sup>2</sup> But if Lee's optimism and efficacy were extraordinary, the message he conveyed was not. Throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, politicians and planners and newspaper editors across the nation echoed Lee's words: demolish, rebuild, modernize. Demolition was a sign of progress, and the new city would not emerge without the destruction of the old. Lee explained urban change with optimism and charisma; New York's master builder Robert Moses put it much more brutally: "When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat axe."<sup>3</sup>

Even more than other periods of dramatic change in U.S. cities, the three decades after the Second World War are associated with demolition, bulldozers, and empty lots. It was not just urban renewal that reshaped central cities during these years; highway construction, market-driven redevelopment, and, in other cases, disinvestment and abandonment also transformed the urban landscape. But urban renewal—a comprehensive set of urban policies launched with the Housing Act of 1949—occupied a privileged place in the public imaginary, and it quickly became most closely associated with the bulldozers and demolished buildings that seemed so prevalent in postwar urban life. Particularly in the first years of the program, public discussion of planned urban change focused on the harmful effects of slum life, the need for the demolition of older buildings, and the elimination of outdated street patterns and land uses. Advocates of renewal like Lee posed with hard hats and shovels for the press, campaigned on ideas of comprehensive urban change, and targeted larger and larger parts of the central city for intervention.

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<sup>2</sup> Earl Banner, "How New Haven's Young Major is Solving Urban Redevelopment," *Boston Globe* (April 1, 1956); Fred Danzig, "Redevelopment of City Wins Friends, Influences Voters," *Los Angeles Times* (November 4, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Moses, *Public Works: A Dangerous Trade*.

Meanwhile, critics, astonished by the number of people who were displaced and horrified by the sheer extent of demolition, also began to portray urban renewal as an exercise in destruction—the work of the “federal bulldozer,” as one opponent memorably phrased it. Gathering force in the early 1960s, they attacked the urban renewal planners, whose heavy-handed, top-down approach to the city seemed unnecessarily destructive. “This is not the rebuilding of cities,” Jane Jacobs wrote in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. “This is the sacking of cities.” Critics like Herbert J. Gans observed the impact of redevelopment on older urban neighborhoods and documented the accompanying destruction of a working-class way of life. Observers like Gail Sheehy, who travelled to New Haven in the late 1960s to describe the emergence of the Black Panthers as a political force in the city, saw the urban renewal years as a period of erasure and profound dislocation. “Bulldozers were the great weapons in the war on blight,” she wrote. “Bulldozers ate up the ugliness and plowed under the obvious. City fathers ran their bulldozers over New Haven’s inner-city neighborhoods for twelve years. By the time black folks woke up, downtown New Haven was gone.” This sense of loss pervades the literature on the period, from the writings of contemporary observers like Jacobs and Gans and Sheehy to historians like Marshall Berman, who remembers watching the demolition of old tenements in the Bronx for a new expressway with a sense of grief.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, more often than not, the construction crane followed the bulldozer. While they are not often described this way, the urban renewal years were a period of massive public and private investment in center cities, even as suburban development exploded at the urban

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase “the federal bulldozer” comes from Martin Anderson’s book of the same name. See also: Jane Jacobs, see *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 4; Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers*, pp. 371-374; Gail Sheehy, “The Consequences of Panthermania,” *New York Magazine* (November 23, 1970), p. 46; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, p. 290-309.

periphery. These years saw the construction of hundreds of thousands of new units of housing, new schools, new shopping centers, industrial parks, cultural centers, civic buildings, libraries, parks, tot lots, and plazas. If local redevelopment authorities had a flair for destruction, they were also engaged in a complex and largely understudied attempt to reconstruct the city and reshape the social practices that took place within it. Critics and historians have spoken eloquently about the process of demolition, but we have yet to come to terms with the profound social and spatial transformation that urban renewal represents.

Shifting our focus from the large-scale redevelopment projects of the 1950s to the more incremental renewal projects of the 1960s, this dissertation revisits the usual critique of urban renewal as a program of social and physical destruction and suggests instead that we need to understand and analyze the urban renewal years as a period of urban construction and social change, marked by intense, often heated public debate about what might make a good neighborhood and a good city. Coinciding closely with the growth of the suburbs, the establishment of the interstate highway system, and the proliferation of shopping malls, urban renewal was the single most significant policy affecting the central city, reshaping it in the image of postwar modernity: clean, spacious, ordered, and normatively middle-class.

Renewal area residents responded to urban change in myriad ways. They endured the dislocations, adopted the city's vision, challenged its plans, and intervened throughout the planning process and the long years of implementation. Some residents were proponents of renewal, which projected an appealing, stable, middle-class vision for neighborhoods that were suffering from disinvestment. Some attempted to revise the city's plans to their own ends. Some fought the bulldozer. Some were radicalized by the events of the sixties—particularly the burgeoning civil rights movement—and in the process began to understand just how destructive

planned change could be in poor neighborhoods and communities of color. If initially renewal plans offered the illusion of a seamless, inevitable unfolding of change—and indeed the bulldozer metaphor certainly strengthened that impression—implementation proved to be far messier. The public process of project approval and the complexities of redevelopment and rehabilitation meant that urban renewal needed to be made and remade, project by project, year by year, in social, political, and economic circumstances that were changing so rapidly the planners and the politicians could hardly catch up.

Urban renewal itself was transformed by public engagement, critique, and protest. Earlier urban renewal projects, like Boston's troubled West End project or New York's high-profile Lincoln Center, had envisioned the construction of luxury housing or institutions of high culture as ways of drawing the suburbanizing middle and upper middle classes back into the central city. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, liberal politicians and planners were backing away from large-scale clearance projects, which had sparked accusations of land grabs, mismanagement of public funds, and insensitivity toward the residents they displaced by the thousands. Chastened by the experiences of these early projects and dependent on good will for continued support at the polls, planners and city officials began to scale back their renewal plans and articulate the short-term and local benefits of renewal for the specific communities affected as well as for the city as a whole. In a calculated effort to win the support of critics and community leaders who were worried about the impact of displacement, they argued that federally subsidized physical planning projects, implemented with the consent of residents, might improve life for residents in the very urban neighborhoods that were being replanned and renewed, all while helping modernize the city as a whole.

In older urban neighborhoods, planners proposed spacious new middle-income housing, rehabilitated apartments, moderate-income coops, and public housing projects. Rather than envisioning institutions of high culture, they planned elementary schools, community centers, and public libraries. In an effort to generate community support and convince residents to relocate or participate in rehabilitation programs, they drew residents into the planning process, created citizens' committees, and framed these urban renewal projects as participatory and democratic, an opportunity for declining neighborhoods to stabilize and transform themselves. Most significantly of all, as news of the civil rights struggle in the South began to appear in the newspapers of the North, they used the language of racial liberalism to emphasize the renewal program's commitment to racial integration and the potential for physical planning to create stable, racially and economically mixed urban neighborhoods. Public intervention in the postwar city, they argued, would do what the private housing market on its own could not: break up the ghetto and encourage the movement of black and Puerto Rican families to the new suburbs and integrate existing urban neighborhoods.

The idealism of this integrationist, participatory, and neighborhood-oriented idea of urban renewal stands in stark contrast with the evidence of the often adverse impact that renewal had on urban neighborhoods, particularly with the evidence of the impact of relocation politics on working class residents and communities of color. Between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, when the urban renewal program was in effect, projects in hundreds of American cities displaced hundreds of thousands of urban residents, disrupting neighborhood life, damaging local and small-scale economies, and altering the social geography of the city. Even the less heavy-handed, more liberal neighborhood renewal schemes had devastating effects. In the polarizing atmosphere of the 1960s, damning critiques of the impact of renewal developed on both the right

and the left, and mainstream liberal proponents faltered under the pressure of public critique, inflation, mounting construction costs, diminished federal funding, and increasingly organized community groups critical of relocation policies. Critics and subsequently historians of the program argued that it did not matter what ideas motivated the supporters of urban renewal policies in the 1960s, when their plans had so clearly gone awry.<sup>5</sup>

Recovering the liberal ideas driving renewal, however, is an essential historical task. Without recovering some of the sense of possibility of these years, it is impossible to understand why urban housing emerged as such a powerful and contentious site for debate in the 1960s, what the growing opposition reacted against, or why the program remains such an important part of our urban histories today. Renewal projects brought together an unlikely coalition of liberal supporters, among them civil rights leaders, who supported the construction of integrated housing; homeowners, who were eager to participate in local decisions about their neighborhood; unions and local institutions, which supported investment in construction and in neighborhood development; and liberal members of coop boards, who saw themselves integrating the central city, one building at a time. For a brief time in the early and mid 1960s, they were joined by tenant organizers, community activists, public housing advocates, and other allies on the left, in part because the participatory and open housing requirements of the urban

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<sup>5</sup> The best-known work of criticism of the urban renewal program from the right remains Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1964). Among the most significant radical and progressive critiques focusing on the impact of renewal are Herbert Gans, “The Human Implications of Current Redevelopment and Relocation Planning” (*Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 25, 1961) and “The Failure of Urban Renewal” (*Commentary*, April 1965); Robert Goodman, *After the Planners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); and Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach : Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1993. More recent scholarship has paid greater attention to liberal ideals and ambitions, notably Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: WW Norton, 2007) and Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

renewal program made urban renewal areas natural targets for intervention and change. The vision of the stable and racially and economically mixed renewal neighborhood was the only thing that brought these groups together and made the extensive redevelopment and rehabilitation of the 1960s possible. When that liberal vision collapsed, these coalitions fell apart, and the radical reshaping of the city that had characterized the 1950s and the 1960s came to an abrupt and uncelebrated end.

This dissertation charts the history of three neighborhood renewal projects in three cities in the Northeast: Dixwell in New Haven, Washington Park in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury, and the West Side Urban Renewal Area in New York. All three projects were begun in the late 1950s, well after the urban renewal program got underway, as city officials confronted public backlash against both the social upheaval and the radical physical transformation effected by the first experiments with urban renewal. All three sought to use less intrusive physical planning techniques and reduce displacement. Most importantly, all three were the product of a liberal local power structure that thought it could use federal money and modern planning to improve the quality of life in the city's declining neighborhoods as it promoted modernization.

In a sense, projects like these three represent unstudied cross-currents swirling beneath the broader trends described in the existing literature on renewal and the postwar city. While none of these case studies necessarily contradicts existing narratives, all demonstrate that transformations were far more complex and nuanced than the old paradigm allows. In New York, New Haven, and Boston, the experience of renewal was characterized by changing alliances, shifting objectives, and an evolving agenda for the physical transformation of the neighborhood. Above all, urban renewal was an uncertain business, more complex in its social consequences and less effective achieving its economic goals than we might expect. Where historians usually

presume a clear, cause-and-effect relationship between federal policies and changes in the spatial organization of the city, I argue that urban renewal was not so much a vehicle of large-scale change as a politically charged, social and cultural process, the outcomes of which were less predetermined by demographic chance and large-scale economic restructuring and more affected by the events of the 1960s than previous research implies.

All three projects were planned in the late 1950s, when growing prosperity and optimism about the power of physical planning led cities to chart out ambitious programs for rebuilding their oldest areas. The first generation of projects, planned in the late 1940s and early 1950s, tended to be large-scale clearance projects in neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. They targeted the oldest, most deteriorated housing—the so-called slums—and replaced them with modern, high-rise apartments and shopping centers intended to lure middle-class residents back from the suburbs. Public reaction to the large-scale demolition, charges of corruption in the development process, and—in New York and Boston especially—gross mishandling of the relocation process meant that cities looked for a new approach with projects begun in the late 1950s. These projects used more targeted clearance and a battery of other tools and techniques, including a rigorous enforcement of the housing code and loans for residential rehabilitation. They typically targeted declining neighborhoods further from the city center in which only some of the housing was deemed too deteriorated to retain and thus only some of the residents would be displaced. In order to assemble a coalition in support of these projects, local officials had to reach out to residents of renewal areas for the first time and engage them in the planning process.

The twin phenomena of increased citizen participation and progressively more intricate, multi-part plans characterize the renewal projects begun in the late 1950s. The multiple physical planning approaches of this generation of projects—spot clearance, rehabilitation, and code-



enforcement or conservation—divided the community socially as well as geographically and created a complex political dynamic in which some residents would be displaced and some, often the working-class or middle-class homeowners, would stay. Planners and city officials began to articulate the short-term and local benefits of renewal as well as the long-term, city-wide goals of modernization and economic viability in the face of suburban growth. On the overcrowded West Side in New York, they emphasized the prospect of spacious, middle-income, modern housing; in Dixwell and Washington Park, both predominantly African American neighborhoods facing red-lining and disinvestment, they proposed new schools, community buildings, and government-backed loans for home improvement. Aware that they needed widespread community support to get these plans through public hearings and that they needed to convince residents to relocate or participate in rehabilitation programs, they drew residents into the planning process, created citizens' committees, and framed these projects as participatory and democratic. In all three cases, they emphasized the renewal program's commitment to racial integration in federally aided housing and the potential for physical planning to revitalize the neighborhood. The racial liberalism of the planners and politicians who backed renewal was mirrored in the hopes of middle-class leaders in communities of color, where racial integration, individual opportunity, and the potential to move into middle-class neighborhoods outside the ghetto were important priorities in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Beginning in the early 1960s, nineteenth century tenements were replaced with high-rise housing in New York, and aging frame houses gave way to modern, two-story townhouses in New Haven and Boston. New schools, churches, community buildings, public plazas and neighborhood parks were constructed. Older housing was modernized and brought up to code, streets were widened and landscaped, and corner grocery stores were replaced with shopping

centers. For neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment, the phenomenon of new construction was a remarkable and often symbolically important phenomenon. But a detailed description of the changing design objectives and the politics of implementation suggests that some of the most meaningful changes in the built environment were small-scale; indeed, amidst so much building and rebuilding in the center city and in the suburbs beyond, residents understood renewal not in terms of its overall impact but in the details of development: where a new school was located, which lots stood vacant, how many units of affordable housing were promised and how many ultimately constructed. Concerned first and foremost with quality of life issues, working within the constraints of the planning paradigm rather than making systemic critiques, neighborhood groups viewed renewal in more concrete terms than planners and city officials. Focused on such everyday issues as street cleaning and abandoned buildings, the affordability of housing, the availability of home improvement loans, and the quality of education in the public schools, they approached renewal plans critically, attempting to make the most of the new attention paid to their neighborhood and the federal funding that was suddenly available to local communities.

We tend to think of local residents—often black, poor, elderly, Puerto Rican, or recent arrivals in the city—as victims of the urban renewal process, but all three of these projects created coalitions of residents with hopes for and fears about the renewal process that suggest they exercised much more agency during the process than histories of the period tend to suggest. Both the participatory requirements of this generation of projects and the red tape and numerous roadblocks to implementation meant that all of these plans were negotiated and renegotiated, with different aspects of the renewal process receiving more or less attention as city and community priorities shifted. Who had the right to speak for the community and set the agenda during the planning and implementation process was a deeply contentious issue, and that right

was often challenged during the course of the project. Planners and city officials often began by dealing with established community leaders like ministers and principals and drew on the conservative organizing tradition of homeowners' groups, block improvement programs, and clean-up, fix-up campaigns. Only as the 1960s wore on did new and more radical groups like civil rights and Black Power organizations and anti-poverty and student activists gain enough support to participate in the renewal process, where their demands were sometimes supported by sympathetic architects and planners. Similarly, although residents living in housing targeted for demolition and redevelopment had long had reservations about renewal, effective community protest against displacement and inadequate relocation practices gained momentum only as the civil rights movement did. In fact, the increasing organizational ability of all types of local groups to deal with public agencies and articulate community positions on planning issues seems to be rooted in the community organizing movements of the 1960s as much as it related to the planning process itself.

The Dixwell project in New Haven was pushed toward completion relatively quickly, but in Washington Park in Boston and on the West Side in New York, the consensus developed around the liberal idea of neighborhood renewal collapsed in the late 1960s. Tenants organized to protest their displacement, activists pointed out the disproportionate effects renewal had on the poor and residents of color, and even residents who had initially supported these projects grew disillusioned by the impact of demolition and vacant lots, unfulfilled promises on the part of planners and city officials, and the slow pace of rebuilding. Under-funded and ill-maintained, the modern housing complexes and public plazas that figured so prominently in renewal plans eventually became unpopular with local residents, and, in the face of increasing unrest in African American neighborhoods and growing criticism over displacement, residents and planners and

city officials ultimately came to believe that the new schools, community buildings, housing, and open spaces of these renewal projects were achieved at too high a cost. Just as organizing in support of renewal brought together unexpected constituencies in the early sixties, protests against renewal helped local community articulate common interests, and a growing awareness of a community and racial identity brought about by the civil rights and black power movements was essential to the opposition that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

By the time a federal moratorium on renewal funding brought these projects to a halt in the early 1970s, renewal was widely viewed in negative terms. Local citizens' groups backing renewal, proponents of modern architecture and physical planning, and advocates of federal programs to aid minority and low-income communities—the constituencies most invested in the change that urban renewal represented—viewed them as a failed experiment. Local citizens' groups opposing renewal and critics on both the right and the left viewed the program more cynically, arguing that its high social costs had been evident from the beginning and that local interests had been sacrificed in the process of modernizing the city for the middle class. On New York's West Side, where an influx of middle- and upper-middle class residents took advantage of the rehabilitation program and precipitated the gentrification of the neighborhood, we can see hints of the structural transformation that historians have described. But in poor black neighborhoods like Dixwell and Washington Park, where the social effects of displacement were exacerbated by continuing disinvestment and decline, the story is not so straightforward. What does seem clear is that between the late 1950s, when these three projects were inaugurated, and the early 1970s, when the renewal program collapsed, attitudes towards the housing crisis, the potential of physical planning, the accountability of local and federal government agencies, and the right of low-income and minority residents to make decisions about their own neighborhoods

all changed as dramatically the built environment did. By exploring the social context of various decisions in the physical planning process and the changing cultural assumptions and expectations of the major local actors, we can better understand the way the process of modernization transformed the postwar city. Ultimately the story of urban renewal is a story about local attempts to shape the built environment—to control the design and development of new buildings and spaces, to be sure, but also to redefine the very meaning of “neighborhood” and “community.”

### ***The Liberalization of Urban Renewal***

In October 1955, New York City Mayor Robert Wagner quietly announced that he planned to designate Manhattan’s entire West Side, from West 59th Street to West 125th Street, from the Hudson River to Central Park, for something he called “urban renewal.” “We think we have a new and workable approach,” Wagner said in a hearing organized by the Housing Subcommittee of the House Banking and Currency Committee. “It involves a cooperative effort on the part of private enterprise and the city, state and federal governments to rehabilitate one entire section of our city—to concentrate on it, rather than a few square blocks here and there.” Drawing on ideas developed by the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council, a liberal planning advocacy group, and by Samuel Ratensky, the planning director of the New York City Housing Authority, the mayor described an approach to the 200-block area in which the modern buildings in the area would be preserved, the deteriorating buildings would be rehabilitated, and those buildings that were not salvageable would be demolished and replaced with new low- and middle-income housing. By concentrating city, state, and federal resources on a single district—perhaps even devoting the city’s entire low-income housing budget to it—the city could reverse

the fortunes of a declining area. “We feel that if we set the pace, as we reclaim a three-block section here, and another there, that private enterprise, using the public credit under the urban renewal law, will go in and reconstruct the adjoining block, since the area will be on the way up again.”<sup>6</sup>

Wagner made no mention of the New York’s controversial redevelopment czar, Robert Moses, and said nothing to suggest that these plans contradicted the city’s current approach to redevelopment, but the designation of the West Side for “renewal” rather than “redevelopment” would mark a major change in the city’s—and the nation’s—approach to declining neighborhoods. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Moses and the city’s redevelopment agency, the Slum Clearance Committee (SCC), had launched the most ambitious and widely watched urban redevelopment program in the nation, aiming to improve the overall quality of the city’s housing by targeting large swaths of substandard housing, marking down the price of the underlying land through Title I—the urban redevelopment provisions of the 1949 Housing Act—and reselling the discounted properties to private developers who promised to demolish the slums and rebuild the neighborhood anew. Moses, who had been constructing parks, parkways, and playgrounds in and around the city for two decades, was a firm believer in the bulldozer approach and fully prepared to take advantage of the federal redevelopment legislation as soon as

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<sup>6</sup> “Mayor’s Remarks at Housing Hearing,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1955. On the origins of the West Side project and the source of the mayor’s ideas on renewal, see J. Clarence Davies III, *Neighborhood Groups and Urban Renewal*, pp. 116-117. While Davies emphasizes Ratensky’s role in bringing these ideas to the mayor, the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council, headed by Roger Starr, had also begun advocating for conservation on the West Side in its widely distributed newsletter with “West Side Area Needs Conservation Measures,” *Housing and Planning News* 12 (January 1954) and “Neighborhood Conservation Plan Sent to Mayor,” *Housing and Planning News* 12 (February 1954). In *West of Fifth: The Rise and Fall of Manhattan’s West Side*, James Trager notes that a series of discussions held by the Riverside Neighborhood Council in the early 1950s were another source of thinking on the renewal project. *West of Fifth*, p. 101.

it appeared. The SCC's first report was issued the day before the 1949 Housing Act was signed; by 1953, seven Title I projects were under contract; by 1955, the city's first project was open for occupancy. At a time when most other American cities were still figuring out how to use the new legislation, Moses had developed an extraordinarily effective method for attracting "sponsors" or developers, ushering plans through the bureaucracy of the federal regulations, and getting projects under construction as quickly as possible.<sup>7</sup>

"The New York Method," as Moses' approach was called, was designed to convey land to private sponsors as quickly as possible, minimizing the city's risk and involvement and stream-lining a complex public process. It involved back-room deals, a secretive and highly managed process of sponsor selection, and virtually no city involvement in the most difficult part of the redevelopment process, the relocation of residents and small businesses from the areas slated for clearance. In every other city in the country, local authorities interested in beginning a redevelopment project would acquire the land in the project area, supervise the relocation process, demolish the buildings on the site, and then, finally, resell the land at a mark-down to the highest bidder. In New York, however, Title I projects were pre-negotiated and sponsors pre-selected. Resale was immediate, and sponsors took on the responsibility of relocation and site

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<sup>7</sup> New York City's Title I program has come under the scrutiny of several generations of scholars and critics. For contemporary accounts of the program emphasizing Moses' efficacy, see Cleveland Rodgers, *Robert Moses* (New York: Henry Holt, 1952); Rexford Tugwell, "The Moses Effect" in Edward C. Banfield, *Urban Government: A Reader in Politics and Administration* (New York: Free Press, 1961); and Jeanne Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time* (New York: Random House, 1967). Robert Caro's *The Power Broker* (New York: Knopf, 1974) places Moses' Title I work in the context of a ruthless, career-long drive for personal power. Joel Schwartz's *The New York Approach* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1994), documents the coalition of city agencies, liberal groups, and real estate interests that made the city's Title I program so effective. More recently, the Title I program has received a broad overview in Hilary Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal," in Hilary Ballon and Kenneth Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Making of the Modern City* (New York: WW Norton, 2007).

clearance themselves. If sponsors shared Moses' commitment to getting things done, the New York Method proved an effective way of getting Title I projects off the ground.<sup>8</sup>

It was also, however, highly susceptible to corruption and mismanagement. In the summer of 1952, a group of sponsors took title to an urban redevelopment area on the Upper West Side known as Manhattantown and became landlords to the area's 11,000 residents. The private relocation firm they had hired offered little assistance. Plumbing went unfixed, windows were broken, and in some cases heat and hot water were shut off. Vacated units were not boarded up, and vagrants began to move in. Meanwhile, the sponsors continued to collect rent from tenants while neglecting their duties as landlord, milking the site for profits much as the old slumlords had—now, apparently, with the city's approval and support. Word of corruption spread, and the story finally broke in the *World-Telegram* in 1959 under the damning headline "The Shame of New York."<sup>9</sup>

Sponsor abuses were particularly egregious at Manhattantown, but they were not uncommon. As reports of cronyism, profit-taking, and resident distress spread in the late 1950s, it became clear that the federal urban renewal program as it had been was in flux. Not just in Mayor Wagner's New York, but in Chicago, Boston, and countless other cities, redevelopment

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<sup>8</sup> The system was designed in part to ensure that the city found a committed redeveloper for the project area—and indeed, New York avoided the fate of several cities that cleared redevelopment sites before discovering there was little interest in the land. For a summary of the process in Moses' own words, see "General Memorandum Title One Procedure for the City of New York, August 19, 1954," Robert Moses Papers, Box 116, Folder "Housing 1954"

<sup>9</sup> On Manhattantown, see the SCC brochure *Manhattantown* and "Manhattantown Title I" in *Robert Moses and the Modern City*. For reports on the relocation office and on conditions at the site, see Women's City Club of New York, *Tenant Relocation at West Park*, especially pp. 2 and 10-13; Charles Grutzner, "Hardship Common in Clearing Slums," *New York Times*, April 1, 1954; Gene Gleason and Fred Cook, "The Shame of New York," *The Nation*, October 31, 1959, pp. 286-290; Robert Caro, *The Power Broker*, pp. 969-976.



officials faced public outrage over back-room sponsor-selection process, sponsor corruption, and mismanaged relocation programs. Development delays plagued projects, and many sites in downtown locations sat vacant for month or years or were converted to parking lots. Public officials sensed the first stirrings of community unrest over the large-scale clearance of housing units during a housing shortage, as well as outrage over the sheer extent of demolition that the first redevelopment projects had entailed.

Even before the publication of Jane Jacobs' influential 1961 critique of urban renewal policy and planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, politicians and development officials nationwide were reconsidering the impact of urban renewal and determined to reinvent it. Drawing on the new provisions of the Housing Act of 1954, which attempted to shift the focus of the program from individual slum clearance projects ("redevelopment") to a more comprehensive approach emphasizing long-term planning and several types of intervention, including clearance projects, code enforcement, and rehabilitation ("renewal") they pledged to scale back clearance, to preserve rather than rebuild marginal neighborhoods, and to improve relocation programs and build more housing for displaced residents.<sup>10</sup> They promised more extensive citizen participation and reached out to residents in renewal neighborhoods, seeking their support and including them in the planning process.

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<sup>10</sup> In 1953 the social scientist Miles Colean noted that the term *redevelopment* was "generally limited to specific projects involving the assembly, clearance, and preparation of land within a designated area for rebuilding," and suggested instead *renewal*, "borrowed from Patrick Geddes...to represent the comprehensive process of maintaining urban vitality." (*Renewing Our Cities*, p. 28, n. 25) The term was adopted in the 1954 Housing Act, where *renewal* indicated a comprehensive program of planning, redevelopment, and rehabilitation. The footnote in Miles Colean's book is the earliest use of the term I have been able to document; thanks to Matt Lasner for calling my attention to it. Outside official circles, where the use of the word *renewal* signaled a very clear shift in federal policy, *redevelopment* and *renewal* seem to have been used interchangeably until the early 1960s, when *renewal* becomes the favored term.

As Mayor Wagner described it, renewal would be simultaneously broader in overall scope and more fine-grained in approach than Moses' model of slum clearance and redevelopment. Rather than focusing on a single site and relying on a single sponsor, plans would encompass a larger area, involving dozens or even hundreds of smaller investors and encouraging incremental improvement rather than wholesale demolition and rebuilding. Planners could designate the properties in the worst condition—often, the most dilapidated housing—for demolition and redevelopment, while nearby buildings could be spared. In a sense, renewal was far more suited to the real estate dynamics of existing cities than redevelopment had ever been. Although the city was responsible for long-term and comprehensive planning, individual parties—real estate developers, individual property owners, or, later, community organizations—were only concerned with the development of a single parcel of land or the rehabilitation of individual buildings. Renewal spread the responsibility for change among hundreds or even thousands of parties rather than a single sponsor or developer, and it acknowledged the complexities of neighborhood decline, which did not affect all properties equally.

Renewal also created complex coalitions of residents, building owners, and small businesses who had very different stakes in the renewal process. Some buildings would be condemned and demolished, their owners and residents displaced, while others would be designated for rehabilitation—itself a demanding and expensive process the city had the power to enforce on an unwilling owner. Some properties would be designated for “conservation” and left alone entirely. The division among properties, property owners, and residents was not always clear-cut. Often residents and properties owners fought condemnation and displacement, but a rehabilitation designation was not necessarily a better scenario. Slumlords whose buildings were designated for rehabilitation were, unsurprisingly, reluctant to comply. Many working-class

homeowners resented the financial burden of rehabilitation, which could be onerous. Other property owners had previously been unable to secure a loan to improve their properties and welcomed the designation for rehabilitation, along with the federal loans that came with it. Similarly, sometimes residents in declining neighborhoods had tried and been unable to sell their houses and welcomed a condemnation and guaranteed payment from the city. Owners whose properties were not condemned often had strong feelings about nearby blighted or deteriorating buildings that affected their own property values and quality of life. Home owners and long-term tenants often had a very different relationship with the renewal process from short-term tenants, absentee landlords, or small businessmen. The planner's map that divided the neighborhood divided the community, too, and not in ways that were easy to predict or explain.

In 1961, a further amendment to the Housing Act provided for long-term, below-market-rate loans to community groups or organizations that acted as non-profit developers for moderate-income housing, a policy shift that radically changed the politics of housing construction in urban renewal areas. Up to that point, local authorities had favored new, market-rate housing, which added to the city's tax rolls but was unaffordable for local residents and economically unrealistic for declining neighborhoods, while planners and housing advocates had favored public housing, which was so controversial in many locations that it was politically implausible for the city, no matter how needed it was in the neighborhood. Provisions for new, moderate-income housing—called 221(d)(3) housing, after the clause that authorized it—raised hopes that central cities might see the construction of the kind of modest, affordable, modern housing had transformed the suburbs in the late 1940s and 1950s. Through its sponsorship requirement, 221(d)(3) also increasingly drew local organizations into the planning and

development process, as local organization began to view 221(d)(3) housing as a way to ensure that residents could remain in the neighborhood in a time of change.

So, too, as the 1960s wore on, the citizen participation requirement of the 1954 Housing Act took on new meaning.<sup>11</sup> In 1954, responding to the recommendations of President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs, the federal government introduced the a new funding requirement, the "workable program," a nine-point plan of action that cities were required to submit to the federal government as part of their funding application to demonstrate that their individual renewal project was part of an effective comprehensive plan.<sup>12</sup> The last of these points required that a citizens' advisory committee be established to encourage citizen participation. Participation was not necessarily a politically progressive or idealistic requirement; it had support not only from idealists, who wanted to see the planning process democratized and made more responsive to local needs, but also from pragmatists, who recognized that local support was an effective way to preempt opposition and ensure the smooth progress of a renewal project. It was, however, transformative.

Many cities already had civic organizations dedicated to encouraging good governance and better planning and housing, and many of those organizations had already taken upon themselves the task of generating support for the renewal program and addressing citizens'

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<sup>11</sup> Title I, Section 101, subsection (c). As described in the legislation, the "workable program" was "an official plan of action...for effectively dealing with the problem of slums and blight within the community and for the establishment and preservation of a well-planned community with well-organized residential neighborhoods of decent homes and suitable living environment for family life" It had seven specific requirements intended to insure that LPAs actively addressed such comprehensive planning issues as the growth of slums outside the designated clearance areas, a phenomenon noted in the first redevelopment projects.

<sup>12</sup> President's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs, *Report to the President*, 1953.

concerns. Often these organizations, like the Citizens' Council on City Planning (CCCCP) in Philadelphia or the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council (CHPC) in New York, were well-established; dozens of housing and planning advocacy organizations had been founded in the wake of turn-of-the-century progressive interest in the slums.<sup>13</sup> Others, like Mayor Lee's Citizens Action Commission (CAC), were formed specifically to provide a forum for public involvement in the program. Initially, local authorities satisfied the participation requirement by pointing to the active involvement of an organization like New York's CHPC or the recent establishment of a city-wide citizens' advisory committee like New Haven's CAC.<sup>14</sup> But in the political climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s, amidst charges that renewal was dispossessing the poor and causing more harm than good, local authorities turned their attention from blue-ribbon committees of local notables to the ordinary residents of renewal project areas. "Planning with people" became a mantra, not only for planners and development officials, who believed that citizen participation would redeem the beleaguered Title I program, but for project area residents, who believed that they would benefit from a formalized role in the planning process.

In theory, citizen participation—the active involvement of ordinary, project-area residents in the process of planning, redevelopment, and rehabilitation—was one of the most

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<sup>13</sup> Apart from the CCCC and the CHPC, the most important included the Philadelphia Housing Association (1909), the San Francisco Housing Association (1910), and the Better Housing League of Greater Cincinnati (1916), the Pittsburgh Housing Association (1928), Chicago's Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (1934), the Washington Housing Association (1935), and Baltimore's Citizens' Planning and Housing Association (1941).

<sup>14</sup> On the early experiences of community organizations involved in redevelopment, see Coleman Woodbury, ed., *The Future of Cities and Urban Redevelopment*, pp. 426-486. On the "workable program" spelled out in the 1954 Act and its citizen participation requirements, see "Citizen Participation in Urban Renewal," *Columbia Law Review*, pp. 522-529.

significant changes to the urban renewal program during the 1950s and early 1960s, raising the possibility that cities and neighborhoods could finally make the connection between two very different aspects of the original, 1949 Housing Act—the social provision of “a decent home and suitable living environment” for urban residents and the economic development of the city through the modernization of its built environment. In practice, the shift from “redevelopment” to “renewal” was complex. In some cases it amounted to little more than a cosmetic improvement on current practices—*pro forma* consultation with the community, or ambitious talk about rehabilitation where demolition was still the order of the day. In some cases, it signaled genuine changes in the relationship between city and community—resident involvement in the planning process, a formal commitment to addressing the needs of working class and poor neighborhoods, which, very often, centered on housing. In some cases, the shift from redevelopment to renewal simply put in place a more public commitment to better planning that would only come into play years after the fact, when residents began to demand that the city live up to its promises. But in all cases we see a kind of slow liberalization of urban renewal, in the sense that important aspects of the program were brought progressively closer in line with liberal social, political, and economic ideals of the 1960s favoring an open, expanding middle class, economic growth, racial integration and civil rights, and public expenditures on housing, schools, and health. If in 1949, urban renewal represented a difficult compromise between conservative business and real estate interests and liberal and leftist housing and planning interests, by the 1960s, particularly in the case of neighborhood renewal, it was much more coherent, pushed toward mainstream liberalism both by the politicians and planners who reformed it and by local communities who pushed for change.

## *The Narrative of Urban Renewal*

From the beginning, the narrative of urban renewal has been a contested, political affair. The complexity of the legislation, the multiple and conflicting motives and ambitions behind it, and the difficulties that politicians and voters had in understanding it meant that the program needed interpreters and advocates in the early stages. The daily newspapers, the Sunday supplements, and the national magazines wrote the first draft of renewal's history in their efforts to explain the program and report on the debates that inevitably arose around it. Journalist Jean Lowe—also an advocate for urban renewal as an employee at the national American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods—wrote extensively about renewal for various media in the 1950s and 1960s, publishing the first full-length survey of the program, *Cities in a Race with Time*, a book that remains the fullest description of the program in print, in 1967. It is a frankly partisan, optimistic account, stressing the good intentions of its proponents, but it's typical of early popular writings on renewal, which were often deeply invested in evaluating a current, controversial national policy.

Academics initially viewed the program as an exercise in local governance and wrote eloquently about the political alliances that made renewal effective and the impact redevelopment had at the local level. Harold Kaplan's *Urban Renewal Politics: Slum Clearance in Newark*, published in 1963, and Peter Rossi and Robert Dentler's *The Politics of Urban Renewal: The Chicago Findings*, published in 1962, are both examples of this type of scholarship. But the program was so extensive and so intimately tied to so many aspects of urban life—politics, governance, planning, real estate, local economies, community formation, social activism—that it also functioned a kind of case study for economists, sociologists, and political scientists who were more broadly interested in the American city and the social life of its

residents. In perhaps the best known example, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, Eric Lindemann, launched a large-scale research project into the effects of relocation on residents who were displaced from the adjacent West End urban redevelopment area. The study launched the careers of three junior researchers, Herbert J. Gans, Marc Fried, and Chester Hartman, who found that the loss of a home had profound, negative social and psychological effects. More importantly, perhaps, they helped reevaluate the importance of older, working class neighborhoods that had previously been dismissed as slums. Under the pressure of a demolition schedule, critical of the redevelopment policies being implemented, academics like Gans, Fried, and Hartman documented and reconstructed the West End's local neighborhood culture in sympathetic terms. They treated terms like "slum" and "blight" with the utmost caution; they took local social structure and local values seriously.<sup>15</sup>

Gans, Hartman, and Fried were also among the urban renewal program's first prominent critics. Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the effects of the projects of the late

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<sup>15</sup> See especially Herbert J. Gans, "The Human Implications of Current Redevelopment and Relocation Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 25 (1959):15-23; *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), and "The Failure of Urban Renewal." *Commentary* (April 1965); Marc Fried and Peggy Gleicher, "Some Sources of Residential Satisfaction in an Urban Slum," *Journal of the American Institute of Planning* 27 (November 1961): 305-315, and Marc Fried "Grieving for a Lost Home" in Leonard J. Duhl, ed., *The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis* (New York: Basic Books, 1963) and *The World of the Urban Working Class*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); and Chester W. Hartman, "The Housing of Relocated Families," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 30 (Nov 1964): 266-288.

As the social scientist Christian Topalov has pointed out, the publications by Gans, Hartman, and Fried—particularly Gans' *Urban Villagers*, changed the way both scholars and policy-makers thought of marginal neighborhoods by giving them the vocabulary to describe their positive qualities. "Though reporters and other observers had sometimes used the village metaphor, concern with personal demoralization and urban deterioration had prevented scientists from using such places and 'neighborhoods,' 'communities,' *quartiers*, or 'villages.'" Topalov, "Traditional Working-Class Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Emergence of a Sociological Model in the 1950s and 1960s," p. 213.



1940s and early 1950s reached the headlines, scholars and journalists lashed out against the urban renewal planners whose heavy-handed, top-down approach to the city seemed unnecessarily destructive. Scholars and critics on the right, like Martin Anderson, whose critique *The Federal Bulldozer*, was published in 1964, were concerned with eroding property rights and the increased power of the state, and they blamed the planners and the expanded use of the powers of eminent domain that enabled such extensive replanning and redevelopment in the first place. Scholars on the left, horrified by the social costs of relocation, blamed the planners and the technocratic, efficient vision of the city that had led to the wholesale condemnation of older urban neighborhoods in the name of modernization.

Jane Jacobs is, by far, the best known of these early critics. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published at the end of 1961, took on not just the urban renewal and public housing programs but the basic assumptions and values that drove them. Planned change, Jacobs argued, was simply not effective as a top-down proposition; cities grew best organically, developing a fine-grain complexity and diversity that could not be imitated by housing and renewal schemes. The kind of money that accompanied renewal programs was “cataclysmic,” effecting immediate, large-scale, unsustainable change where neighborhoods needed to grow slowly and incrementally. And housing and renewal programs were particularly harmful because of the way that they replaced the small-scale social spaces of the sidewalk and street—policed by residents and small businessmen—with empty plazas and undefined green expanses.

Jacobs’ essential insight, that housing and renewal schemes created public spaces that were too intrusive and too disconnected from the social networks of the neighborhood to work, gained traction quickly and was interpreted a critique of physical determinism—though Jacobs herself clearly believed that more traditional types of urban spaces nurtured particular types of

social interaction. Meanwhile, radical activists like Staughton Lynd, academics like Gans and Scott Greer, housing advocates like Charles Abrams, and hundreds of local journalists and critics attacked renewal on social grounds, pointing out the program had been devised so that its costs were borne disproportionately by the working class, the poor, the elderly, and by blacks and Puerto Ricans and other urban minorities.<sup>16</sup>

Early scholarship on the program tended toward a portrayal of urban renewal in the terms it presented itself—as a policy solution to particular urban problems, including poor housing and outdated commercial and industrial areas, or traffic congestion, or a declining central city tax base. Sympathetic writers tended to see it as an effective—or potentially effective—solution to pressing and important problems, while critics saw it as ineffective or misguided—or even a solution that created other problems. Some of the more powerful critiques, like those of Jacobs and Gans, argued that politicians and planners had misidentified the problem at the start—that, for example, older housing might be a valuable resource rather than a blighting condition. But only in the late 1960s did scholars and critics begin to point out that urban renewal might be operating in broader and more subtle ways, accomplishing things it did not necessarily claim to address.

By the time Nixon dismantled the urban renewal program in the early 1970s, younger scholars were beginning to formulate a more complex narrative for what had happened in central cities across the US under urban renewal. Many of this new generation had been radicalized by protest or community organizing in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were sensitive to the grass-roots devastation wrought by a policy with at least nominal social aspirations. They turned

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<sup>16</sup> See Staughton Lynd, “Urban Renewal—For Whom?” 1961; Scott Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention*, 1965, and Charles Abrams, *The City is the Frontier*, 1967.

to political economy for explanatory frameworks. Focusing on the “pro-growth coalition,” the unexpected alliance of actors who had made renewal possible, they argued that urban renewal was only a chapter in a much larger story of political and economic change. Politicians eager for urban growth, developers eager for profit, key business and civic leaders, and even unions and social services had shared interests in the spatial restructuring of the postwar and increasingly postindustrial American city, where service industries were replacing the city’s older, manufacturing base and white collar workers replacing the city’s traditional working class. Harvey Molotch’s classic 1976 essay, “The City as a Growth Machine,” argued that above and beyond political ideology or policy concerns, the key urban actors were united in their desire for urban growth and the concurrent creation of wealth. Political economists like Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, Michael Peter Smith, and John Mollenkopf took a similar approach to the subject, emphasizing the inherent conflict between urban residents, for whom the city was a primarily place to live and to work, and urban elites, for whom it was not.<sup>17</sup>

The other major revision of the urban renewal narrative has come from scholars researching the racial politics of urban renewal and associated housing policies. Local activists and the black press had long accused local authorities of targeting communities of color with their urban renewal plans, but historians like Arnold Hirsch placed these protests in the larger historical context of endemic white violence against people of color, demonstrating how housing and renewal policies—in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s, in Hirsch’s case—helped displace

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<sup>17</sup> For political economy approaches, see also Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, et al, *Restructuring the City: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment*, 1983; John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 1983; Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*, 1984; and Harvey Molotch and John Logan, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, 1987.

black residents and re-segregate them in a “second ghetto” of isolated public housing projects. Similarly, Thomas Sugrue described how the displacement associated with urban renewal policies was part of a much larger pattern of disruption, disinvestment and violence in the lives of blacks in Detroit.<sup>18</sup>

With so much focus on the structural causes and ultimate consequences of federal intervention in the postwar city, relatively little had been written on the various ways in which federal policies were translated into local programs and individual projects until recently. Some historians have begun to fill out the narrative of urban renewal with case studies of the programs in individual cities and begun to reconsider the larger narrative of central city crisis and decline that permeates writing on the city.<sup>19</sup> Others have revisited the original legislation and the impulses behind it in an effort to write a more nuanced history of the program and to determine why it developed the way it did.<sup>20</sup>

Even more recently, urban historians and cultural historians have begun to revive the politics and ideas driving renewal projects—redirecting our attentions to the cultural meaning or significance urban change. These latest articles and books represent another major revision of the urban renewal narrative, one that departs significantly from the first generation of writings,

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<sup>18</sup> For perspectives emphasizing the way housing and renewal programs grew out of and reinforced institutionalized racism, see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, 1983; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 1996; and, more recently, Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> See Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization 1940-1985*, 1990; Robert Beauregard, *Voice of Decline: The Fate of Postwar US Cities*, 1994; Howard Gillette, *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*, 2005;

<sup>20</sup> See Alexander von Hoffman, “A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the 1949 Housing Act,” and Job Teaford, “Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath,” both articles from an issue on the legacy of urban renewal published in *Housing Policy Debate*, 2000.

which were deeply invested in an evaluation of a current urban policy, and the second generation of narratives, which tried to understand the structural forces beneath the social and economic changes associated with urban renewal. Sandy Zipp, for example, has described the changes that reshaped New York City in the 1940s and 1950s as part of a “symbolic and imaginative struggle” over the city’s image. Christopher Klemek has described renewal not just as an urban policy but as part of a postwar social and cultural “order” that included a popular interest in modernist architecture and urbanism, an increased reliance on professionalism, an expanded role for the federal government, and the rise of reformist, anti-machine politicians in local politics.<sup>21</sup>

### *Argument*

This dissertation takes a similarly revisionist position, arguing that urban renewal might be more fully understood in the broader context of postwar liberalism, expanding middle-class consumerism, changing attitudes towards federal intervention, and an increasing emphasis on self-determination in poor neighborhoods and communities of color. The changes we see in renewed neighborhoods in New Haven, Boston, and New York were the result of intense negotiation that dealt with far more than the specific redevelopment and rehabilitation projects at hand. The participatory requirements of this generation of urban renewal projects as well as the amount of red tape involved in implementation meant that plans were not simply imposed upon a neighborhood at the beginning of the process but negotiated constantly, with different aspects of the renewal process receiving more or less attention as city and community priorities shifted.

Debates and conflicts over urban renewal projects tapped into the cultural values and aspirations of urban residents, changing conceptions of racial identity and racial solidarity, and

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<sup>21</sup> See Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*, 2009, and Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal* 2011.

hopes for social change. Neighborhood renewal projects often helped produce unexpected coalitions of residents brought together by varying hopes for and fears about their neighborhood. Moderate activists became radicalized. New coalitions emerged. Who had the right to represent the community and to set the agenda during the planning and implementation process were deeply contentious issues, and the right to speak for the community could be challenged during the course of the project as new organizations and concerns emerged. Planners and city officials often began by dealing with one group of consensus-oriented community leaders, powerful during the optimistic days of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and ultimately found themselves negotiating with radicals by the end of the decade. Even where residents held reservations about renewal from the outset, effective protest required a strong sense of community identity and organizing skills, and in many cases protest only gained momentum only as residents learned from the social movements of the 1960s.

All too often when they write the history of urban conflict over renewal and redevelopment, historians tend to think of the attitudes of local residents as predetermined, primarily by their class and racial identity and their immediate interests in the issues at hand. Instead, this dissertation argues that conflict over change in urban neighborhoods helped form racial and community identity just as much as it exposed underlying racial and class divisions. Paying particularly attention the growing northern civil rights movement, this dissertation argues that neighborhoods undergoing renewal were an important locus for debates about integration, community power, and community control. Indeed, as we reconsider the legacy of the postwar period, we need to pay more attention to these highly charged, contested locations, which marked the negotiation of new ideas, debates, and identities just as much as the passing of an older type of urban neighborhood and an older way of life. Projects like those in Dixwell, in

Roxbury, and on the Upper West Side remind us of what was at stake during the tumultuous decade of the 1960s and help us understand the complexity of social change at the most local levels.

The following chapters show just how closely neighborhood renewal debates were tied to larger social concerns and how deeply they were influenced by the social movements of the 1960s, which galvanized even moderates and radicalized many residents. In Chapter 2, we trace the history of the Dixwell Urban Renewal Project in New Haven, a project made possible by an alliance between the city, which wanted to rebuild and rehabilitate the deteriorating black neighborhood, and the neighborhood's middle-class black leaders, who saw in urban renewal a chance to desegregate the ghetto and bring new housing and new public facilities into the community. Chapter 3 tells the story of the Roxbury project in Boston's emerging black ghetto, where pro-integration community leaders supporting renewal faced challenges from black power advocates, who offered powerful critiques of the program even as they attempted to shape it to their ends and wrest control, funding, and jobs from it. Chapter 4 follows the progress of the racially mixed West Side Urban Renewal Project in Manhattan, where local residents seized upon the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion in the city's initial plan and pushed it to use the tools of renewal to preserve the neighborhood for the Puerto Rican newcomers as well as middle-class blacks and whites. In all three cases, we see local groups coalescing around key issues of housing, schools, and jobs, organizing for change and finding themselves increasingly defined by their own activism and their own approaches to neighborhood issues. As this dissertation argues, neither neighborhoods nor the communities that live in them are autonomous; each works shapes and recreates the other.

## Chapter 2

### Power Structures: The Built Environment of Postwar Liberalism Dixwell, New Haven

#### *Introduction*

For residents of the Dixwell neighborhood in New Haven, the urban renewal process began modestly enough in the summer of 1959 with a knock on the door. Pollsters were canvassing this aging, crowded neighborhood with questionnaires in hand. The city was considering plans to improve the area, the pollsters said. Would residents like to see new housing built in the neighborhood? A green? A new shopping center? Would they be interested in low-interest loans to fix up some of the older houses? Would they still support these plans if some of their neighbors needed to move? If local businesses had to relocate? Would their opposition lessen if they learned that better shopping might come to their neighborhood, or a health clinic, or a new park? At house after house, the pollsters found that Dixwell residents wanted more modern housing, new community facilities, new schools, and more municipal services, all of which renewal promised to deliver.<sup>22</sup>

If the bulldozer symbolized progress in New Haven in the 1950s, the pollsters' arrival in the predominantly black neighborhood of Dixwell in the summer of 1959 quietly marked a new

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<sup>22</sup> The polling was conducted by Louis Harris. Questions paraphrased from an untitled Louis Harris draft interview form dated June 1959. Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 105, Folder 1062. I have been unable to locate the raw data from the Dixwell poll. For description and analysis of the results, see memo from Howard Hallman to Ed Logue, August 19, 1959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 105, Folder 1062. See also Jean Cahn, "History of Dixwell's Renewal," p. 72. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Box 345, Folder "History of Dixwell's Renewal Jean Cahn's Thesis." For Logue's reaction to the results, see letter from Logue to Louis Harris, August 19, 1959, Logue Papers, Box 105, Folder 1162.



era in the city's postwar rebuilding. Unlike many cities that experienced a sharp break in the development of their urban renewal programs in the late 1950s—unlike Boston, for example, which saw the restructuring of its program around the arrival of a new redevelopment administrator after the failure of the West End project, or New York, which regrouped in the wake of the scandals that rocked Robert Moses' program of slum clearance—New Haven's program evolved gradually. Beginning as a relatively conventional program of slum clearance focused on modernizing and revitalizing the center of the city in an attempt to compete with the expanding suburbs, it gradually became much more comprehensive, combining redevelopment with residential rehabilitation with social programs in an effort to improve the quality of life in the city's outlying neighborhoods. Dixwell was not the city's first experiment with neighborhood renewal—new methods and tools were tried out at Wooster Square first—but, in the context of the burgeoning civil rights movement of the 1960s, it was one of its most contested and politically significant.

In accordance with theories current during the early years of Lee's tenure, New Haven's earliest redevelopment projects were primarily concerned with the elimination of slums and outdated commercial areas and were designed to attract the suburbanizing middle class back to its department stores and downtown apartments. The Oak Street urban redevelopment project, begun under Lee's predecessor, William Celantano, involved the demolition of a neighborhood of dilapidated tenements, the relocation of its residents to public and private housing in other parts of the city, and its redevelopment by high-rise, luxury apartments intended to attract young professionals to the city center. **[figure 2.1]** The nearby Church Street project reorganized the city's main commercial district around an enclosed shopping mall and a massive parking structure adjacent to the new highway; here the aim was to alleviate traffic congestion and

compete with the new shopping malls emerging in the suburbs. [figure 2.2] These early projects were primarily economic development projects intended to make the city competitive with its own prosperous, expanding suburbs; early in Lee's tenure, in fact, the New Haven Redevelopment Agency published its grand list—the list of the appraised values of all real estate parcels in the city—on the back of its annual report, implying that the success of the Agency's effort could be read in its increasing tax rolls.

By the late 1950s, however, New Haven's redevelopment program was transforming into a more complex, socially inflected program of neighborhood renewal, combining limited clearance and housing development, code enforcement, residential rehabilitation, and the construction of neighborhood-scale buildings like schools, shopping centers, and civic buildings. Economic development was still important, but under the supervision of administrator Edward J. Logue, the Redevelopment Agency expanded to include experts in rehabilitation and social services. The Family Redevelopment Office hired additional social workers to help displaced residents find better housing. In 1959, a well-known housing official from Philadelphia, Howard Hallman, was brought in to supervise an extensive program of code enforcement. In 1962, the Ford Foundation helped establish the anti-poverty agency Community Progress Inc., which became active in urban renewal areas. This combination of social programs and physical redevelopment and rehabilitation quickly became the hallmark of New Haven's renewal program. None of these new programs were aimed at the affluent suburbanites targeted in the 1950s; the second generation of urban renewal projects focused on improving existing neighborhoods rather than attempting to restructure the metropolitan area, and they addressed social problems as well as physical deterioration or obsolescence. "You can't bulldoze all slums into extinction," Lee told a *Life* reporter in 1965, retreating from his earlier claims. "You can't

just push people from slum to slum. You have to work with them, help them rehabilitate their homes and build pride in their neighborhood and their city.”<sup>23</sup>

Neighborhood renewal in New Haven began in the mid 1950s in Wooster Square, a predominantly Italian American neighborhood of stately nineteenth-century Italian revival houses and small businesses just east of downtown New Haven. A veteran of Philadelphia’s pioneering renewal programs, the planner Mary Small, was brought in to coordinate the project. Beginning in Wooster Square, one of the nation’s first neighborhood renewal projects, the city learned how to work with landlords and homeowners to rehabilitate older buildings, how to relocate existing businesses to modern facilities, and how to rally the community around public meetings. Hundred of homeowners were persuaded to update their buildings by a team of architects who offered instruction on how to bring their structures up to code and—where the houses had architectural value—how to restore them to their original state. **[figure 2.3]** Teams of financing specialists followed, showing homeowners how to refinance their properties with long-term, low-interest loans from the Federal Housing Administration. A local factory operating out of a nineteenth century industrial building, Sargent and Company, was persuaded to stay in the area and invest in a new plant in the newly designated Wooster Square industrial district. Plans for an outdoor plaza with refreshments quickly ran up against the area’s powerful Catholic priests, who frowned at the prospect of social mixing in the neighborhood’s new public spaces, and the city refocused its efforts instead on the replacement of the aging Columbus School with a modern, community school that included an auditorium and public meeting rooms. **[figure 2.4]**

The city’s second neighborhood renewal project in Dixwell posed even more challenges. On its face simply an experiment in new planning techniques like Wooster Square, the Dixwell

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<sup>23</sup> “Nine Tough Pros Sound Off,” *Life* (December 24, 1965), p. 141.

project presented social and political obstacles that previous projects had not; Dixwell's status as the city's largest black ghetto raised the stakes for both the city and the black community. Unlike Wooster Square's working-class Italian families, few households in Dixwell had any savings to draw on to rehabilitate their houses. Unemployment ran high, and economic evaluations of the area predicted that it would be almost impossible to attract significant private investment to the area. The city's Family Relocation Office had struggled to find relocation housing for black families displaced from the Oak Street area, and ultimately many had been relocated not to the outer neighborhoods, but to Dixwell, which had a public housing complex that was nominally, if not officially, black. **[figure 3.4]** The prospect of another round of relocation was daunting. Already in 1956, when plans for a renewal project in Dixwell became public for the first time, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) wrote to Lee in concern, anticipating large-scale displacement from the area.<sup>24</sup>

And yet the Dixwell project also promised rewards that hadn't accrued to the Wooster Square project. Neighborhood interest, as gauged in polls in the summer of 1959, proved high. Black support at the polls was solid; in fact, black support for new housing, new schools, and new parks—the major promises of a renewal project—far outpaced the support indicated the city's other ethnic groups. Local institutions like the venerable Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church had already expressed a keen interest in building in the proposed urban renewal area. Then, during the early 1960s, as the North began to take note of the civil rights struggle taking place in the South, the relationship of city and neighborhood changed dramatically. To Lee, who

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<sup>24</sup> For an initial economic evaluation of the area, see Chester Rapkin, "The Economic Feasibility of Urban Renewal in the Dixwell Area." On the NAACP's initial concerns, see the Letter from Charles Hubbard, secretary of the New Haven branch NAACP, to Harold Grabina, director, NHRA, May 21, 1956. NHRA Records, Box 427, Folder R-20 Project Planning.

thought of himself as liberal on race issues, Dixwell presented an opportunity to take a stand on civil rights issues in New Haven as well as a chance to reverse physical decline in the area.<sup>25</sup> For New Haven's black community, the project represented an opportunity to build for the future. For both parties, Dixwell represented an opportunity for systemic change and a test of the vigor of New Haven's professed racial liberalism, which promised that a declining, predominantly black neighborhood could be revitalized and brought into the larger life of the city.

### ***Community Power in Neighborhood Renewal***

In a landmark study of local or "community" power published in 1959, *Who Governs?*, the Yale political scientist Robert A. Dahl described New Haven's political system in the late 1950s as pluralist, characterized by multiple, changing, and competing interests. Where earlier researchers like Robert and Helen Lynd, Lloyd Warner, and Floyd Hunter had found that cities were ruled by a small, close-knit group of local elites who shared many of the same interests and objectives, Dahl argued that power was dispersed among members of temporary alliances and competing coalitions whose interests and objectives often clashed. If the elite theorists had depicted the American city as a place where resources were tightly controlled and decisions settled behind closed doors; Dahl's pluralism argued that the public realm was a place of debate, compromise, and opportunity for the most interested and active parties.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> On the Congregational church's early interest in participating in the renewal project, see the Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church brochure, NHRA Records, Box 73, Folder 624. Lee's record on civil rights consisted primarily of symbolic appointments. In 1954, shortly after taking office, he had appointed a black man, George Crawford, as the city's Corporation Counsel, the head of the city's legal staff. In 1956, he appointed blacks to positions on the Welfare Board and the Board of Education.

<sup>26</sup> On the midcentury debate between pluralists and elitists, see Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown*, 1929, and *Middletown in Transition*, 1937; Lloyd Warner, *The Status System of a Modern Community*, 1942; Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure*, 1953; C.

Many of the arguments and ideas found in *Who Governs?* were drawn from Dahl's observations of the political process in New Haven and from interviews with participants in Lee's redevelopment program in particular, and, indeed, the pluralism Dahl describes bears a strong resemblance to the balance of power that seemed to underlie the city's renewal process in the 1950s. Early redevelopment efforts and public outreach efforts like the formation of CAC involved the cooperation of very different interests in the city, including industrialists and labor leaders, representatives of the university and the city, the local Chamber of Commerce and good-government groups, and both political parties. As Dahl argued, this kind of dispersed power was a key element of stable and largely democratic governance in New Haven more generally.

The realities of neighborhood renewal posed a significant challenge to widely accepted ideas about democracy and pluralism in New Haven—challenges to ideas about the transparency of the political process, the balance of power among competing groups and interests, and the openness of the system to the ideas and interests of the unorganized and powerless. As planners in Wooster Square and Dixwell quickly discovered, neighborhood renewal projects were complex exercises in local or community power, demanding extensive and unprecedented compromise and negotiation. Even total-clearance, “bulldozer” redevelopment projects like those at Oak Street and Church Street had required extended negotiations with various parts of the community. Residents and small business owners living in the urban renewal area needed to be convinced to relocate and needed help finding new housing and new properties, and the city's

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Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, 1956; and Robert A. Dahl, “A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model,” 1958. Dahl's work was complemented by studies carried out by two of his students, Nelson Polsby, *How to Study Community Power*, 1960, and Raymond Wolfinger, *The Politics of Progress*, 1973. Both, like *Who Governs?*, draw heavily on material related to New Haven's renewal program. William Domhoff revisits Dahl's original interviews and provides a critique of pluralism in *Who Rules America?*, 1967.

Family Relocation Office grew rapidly, from a single employee in 1956 to a staff of 18 in 1962, including interviewers, social workers, real estate agents who helped relocated families and individuals across the city.<sup>27</sup> [figure 2.5] Support needed to be drummed up for the public hearing process, both Lee's administration and the Redevelopment Agency worked hard at public relations, establishing committees of local leaders like the Citizens Action Committee (CAC) and constructing a futuristic exhibition space, the Progress Pavilion, to publicize Redevelopment Agency plans and argue for the renewal's urgency and importance. [figure 2.6] Neighborhood renewal projects, with their more targeted clearance and rehabilitation programs, demanded even more negotiation than these early projects, requiring the cooperation of local interests long after plans had received public approval and residents and businesses had been relocated. Support need to be solicited from local residents and organizations that would be directly affected by the renewal process. Civic organizations, small businesses and local institutions like the parish church all had strong—and often conflicting—ideas about how change should come to the neighborhood. Even where change seemed straightforward—as was the case with the city's campaign to enforce the housing code at overcrowded or illegally subdivided buildings—individual property owners accustomed to lax municipal oversight needed to be persuaded to take action.<sup>28</sup>

In theory, at least, redevelopment and renewal depended upon a balance of power that was continually negotiated among politicians, planners, business interests, civic leaders, and

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<sup>27</sup> On the relocation process in New Haven, see Alvin A. Mermin, *Relocating Families*, and Mermin's untitled, undated typescript beginning "Interview in the Home." Alvin A. Mermin Collection, New Haven Colony Historical Society Archives, Box VIII, Folder H (Reprints of articles/speeches 1958-1966).

<sup>28</sup> On the Wooster Square project, see Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time*, pp. 463-489, and Mary Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*.

residents. The basic legal mechanism behind redevelopment, rehabilitation, and code enforcement, the power of eminent domain that allowed the city to condemn and purchase substandard properties, seemed to give the city the upper hand in negotiation. In practice, however, Lee's administration and the Redevelopment Agency operated under a variety of constraints. Sponsors and developers needed to be solicited. Where federally backed loans weren't sufficient, local banks needed to be persuaded to lend money for development and rehabilitation. A hostile press could make the public approvals process difficult. Powerful opponents could easily derail a city's redevelopment program, and cities with successful programs, like New Haven, found that they needed to assemble a coalition of downtown business interests, and of civic and labor leaders, and local powerbrokers who all recognized the need for continued central city development and modernization in an era of suburban expansion.

Individuals who felt their interests were not well-represented in the process could—and did—object to the Redevelopment Agency's plans, as we see in the case of the jeweler Robert R. Savitt, a small businessman who challenged the city's "substandard" designation of a building he owned on Church Street in a law suit that held up the project for years. Others launched petitions and appeared at public hearings to voice their concerns. Those who lacked resources to protest still could engage in what the anthropologist James Scott has called the "ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups" including foot dragging, dissimulation, and false compliance (and, indeed, the records of the Family Relocation Office are filled with evidence of this kind of covert protest).<sup>29</sup> Finally, even if indirectly, the vote mattered. No matter how

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<sup>29</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi. For Family Relocation Office Records, see Alvin A Mermin Collection, NHCHS, Box V, Folder A: New Haven Family Relocation Office—Daily Log of Relocation Data, 1956-1958.



effectively Lee portrayed his renewal program as nonpartisan, it was still very closely tied to his own administration and political career, and in New Haven he stood for reelection every two years. One of the first politicians to use polling extensively in his campaigns, Lee surveyed voters about their reactions to redevelopment extensively, managed voluminous correspondence on issues related to renewal, and even badgered his staff at the city's Progress Pavilion for feedback on the public perception of his program. "Your memos overwhelm me, and I am grateful to you," he wrote to Anita Palmer, the Progress Pavilion hostess, several months after the exhibition space opened in 1960. "There must be some people who are critical, however, what are they critical about? What are they negative about? What do they believe is going to happen? Are they concerned about the timetable? Do they make any snide comments? Are there any questions you can't answer?"<sup>30</sup> He wrote to his redevelopment staff repeatedly, asking them to address concerns that residents had expressed.

Increasingly in the 1960s, however, critics of New Haven's renewal program began to argue that the kind of power that neighborhoods and residents possessed—largely reactive—did not compare with the power the city wielded over residents of urban renewal areas, no matter how concerned it was for its residents. Lee's administration and the Redevelopment Agency set the agenda, defined the options that were presented, and controlled the direction of neighborhood renewal. In the academic sphere, Dahl's pluralism was challenged by younger scholars like Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, who began to research non-decisions, areas in which power might be exercised covertly, and Steven Lukes, who argued that cultural norms could be so powerful

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<sup>30</sup> Memo from Lee to Anita Palmer, November 22, 1960. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Box 32, Folder 688, Correspondence: CAC Progress Pavilion 1960.

that conflict never arose.<sup>31</sup> In New Haven, pluralism ran up against an emerging generation of young radicals, black, white, and Puerto Rican, who rejected the implicit individualism of Dahl's approach in favor of class-based critiques of local power, black nationalism, and Black Power.

### *The Avenue and the Plaza*

Dixwell is one of the city's oldest residential neighborhoods, located close to the Green and directly northwest of the Yale campus. **[figure 2.7]** In the late 1950s, at a time when the city as a whole was losing population to the suburbs, Dixwell was growing. Migrants from the rural South were beginning to settle here, as well as families displaced by the city's first redevelopment project, which was just getting underway at Oak Street. Housing in the area—apartments over stores along the major thoroughfares, Dixwell and Goffe Avenues, as well as two- and three-story wooden frame structures along the side streets—became increasingly overcrowded as landlords subdivided existing apartments. Rents were rising even as apartment conditions deteriorated.

Historically, Dixwell had been the center of the city's small African American population, which had grown dramatically since WWII, both in absolute numbers and in proportion to the city's total population. Between 1950 and 1960, as middle-class whites relocated to the suburbs and black newcomers arrived, the city's black population had increased from approximately 6% of the city's total population to approximately 15%. Blacks found it increasingly difficult to rent outside the neighborhoods that were emerging as New Haven's primary ghettos: Dixwell, Dwight, and The Hill. With the Winchester Repeating Arms Factory, a major employer of blacks during the war, and the modern Winchester Community School,

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<sup>31</sup> See Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "The Two Faces of Power," 1962, and "Decisions and Non-Decisions," 1963; and Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 1974.

Dixwell drew many of the newcomers. It was also the destination for a significant number of black families displaced by the Oak Street project and highway construction, some of whom found rental housing in the area and some of whom settled in Dixwell's Oak Haven public housing project. Dixwell Avenue, a busy commercial strip lined by converted frame houses, ran through the heart of the Dixwell neighborhood, home to most of city's black institutions, including the main black churches, jazz clubs, and restaurants.<sup>32</sup> [figure 2.8]

Renewal faced little organized opposition in New Haven neighborhoods in the late 1950s, and Dixwell was no exception. Dixwell had been slated for redevelopment by the City Planning Commission as early as 1950, and specific proposals for the area had been in the works for several years, first becoming public in 1956.<sup>33</sup> If anything, the prospect of intervention in the neighborhood appealed to long-time Dixwell tenants and homeowners who were frustrated by what they perceived as signs of a declining neighborhood—overcrowding, deteriorating buildings, and instances of public drinking and gambling along Dixwell Avenue—but who were unable to move elsewhere, even if they could afford to. As one survey found, by the early 1960s, more than one-quarter of black Dixwell residents had looked unsuccessfully for housing in New

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<sup>32</sup> “32 Per Cent of Negroes Here Live In Poverty, Study Shows,” *New Haven Journal Courier*, November 19, 1964. On Dixwell's history in the early twentieth century, see Daniel Y. Stewart, *Black New Haven*. On Dixwell's demographics in the late 1950s, see Chester Rapkin, *Economic Feasibility of Urban Renewal in the Dixwell Area*. Jean Cahn supplements Rapkin's findings with her own observations and research in “The History of Dixwell's Renewal.” Box 345, NHRA Records.

<sup>33</sup> “Dixwell Area Eyed for Redevelopment,” *New Haven Journal Courier*, March 10, 1956. A Survey and Planning Application for the area was approved by the Urban Renewal Administration on August 1, 1956.

Haven's wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods in New Haven or in its almost exclusively white suburbs.<sup>34</sup>

Despite New Haven's reputation as a liberal New England city, the black community in Dixwell in the late fifties had few organizations working to address its problems.<sup>35</sup> The Dixwell Congregational Church, founded in the nineteenth century, had long played an important role in the community, as did the other Black churches. The Dixwell Community Council had been formed in 1950 to help provide social services, and the new Winchester Community School offered classes and meeting space to adults as well as children in the community. But a long-standing local chapter of the NAACP was among the few organizations actively working on issues of segregation and discrimination in housing. When the Reverend Edwin Edmonds, a civil rights activist in North Carolina in the fifties, moved to New Haven to take over the leadership of the Congregational Church in 1959, he found little political organization or institutional support for civil rights issues here. "This was one backward town," Edmonds later recalled.<sup>36</sup>

In 1959, the Redevelopment Agency approached community leaders about plans for urban renewal in Dixwell, and the leaders of the established Dixwell community organizations consolidated behind the plan. Charles Twyman, a school teacher and the former head of the

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<sup>34</sup> The survey was taken by the New Haven Human Relations Council in 1962. The survey is cited in David Hsu, "Neighborhood Spirit: The Role of Community in the Urban Redevelopment of the Dixwell Neighborhood," p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> On Black politics in New Haven, from the fifties through the early seventies, see Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power*.

<sup>36</sup> Edwin Edmonds, Oral History, February 26, 2004, p. 3. New Haven Oral History Project typescript. A 1938 graduate of Morehouse College and an ordained Methodist minister with a doctorate in social ethics from Boston University, Edmonds moved to Greensboro in 1956 to teach sociology at Bennett College. He moved in New Haven in 1959. On Edmonds' earlier activism in North Carolina, see Oral History with Edwin Edmonds from the William Chafe Oral History Collection, <<http://library.uncg.edu/dp/crg/oralHistItem.aspx?i=638>>

Dixwell Community Council, was invited to join the Renewal Committee, as was Fred Smith, a doctor; Isadore Wexler, the principal of the Winchester School; and Alphonse Tindall, head of the Dixwell Community House. Lee perused the list while it was being formed in 1959 and shot back to his administrators: “How is it in your Urban Renewal Executive Committee you don’t have a single minister? ...These people are our friends and they do have some influence.”<sup>37</sup> Edmonds, the pastor of the Dixwell Community Church, was added at Lee’s request. James Mitchell, formerly the only black supervisor at the Winchester Repeating Arms Factory, the largest employer in the area, was hired as a community liaison. The Redevelopment Agency shied away from including businessmen on the executive committee for fear of committing themselves to selling specific parcels of land in the project area to committee members, but business interest in the plan was high. By early 1960, the committee had expanded, with an executive committee of 35 members and an additional 70 on a business committee and 44 on a residential committee.

Together with members of the Redevelopment Agency’s project office, the committee began to organize the neighborhood to support the proposed plan. Between 1959 and 1960, the committee passed out leaflets, organized subcommittees, held public meetings, and consulted with the Redevelopment Agency. Code enforcement and rehabilitation were high on their list of priorities, as was the possibility of bringing more black-owned business to the neighborhood, which was a point they mentioned repeatedly.<sup>38</sup> Working with the planning consultant Maurice Rotival, the redevelopment agency developed four different plans for review during these early

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<sup>37</sup> Memo from Richard Lee to Tom Appleby, March 2, 1959. Lee Papers, Box 105 Folder 1062.

<sup>38</sup> See memo from Chuck Shannon to Ed Logue, February 16, 1960, and minutes of the executive committee, February 25, 1960, NHRA Records, Box 430, Folder: R-20: Dixwell Renewal Committee.

meetings in 1959 and 1960. One plan, referred to as the “scatteration” or “scattershot” plan, directed renewal funding only to the most dilapidated structures in the project area. Another, modeled on the agency’s work along Grand Avenue, a commercial strip near Wooster Square, proposed rebuilding commercial Dixwell Avenue with more spacious, modern buildings. The final two, the two plans the agency considered viable, were variations on an approach that was much more radical than either: the total clearance of the most overcrowded and deteriorated four-block area in the center of the neighborhood, which would be redeveloped with a large public square, a modern shopping plaza, and new housing. This central redevelopment project would be complemented by the rehabilitation of houses along designated residential streets, including Dickerman, Orchard, Admiral, and Henry Streets; the widening of Goffe Boulevard; and the construction of small parks and the planting of street trees throughout the renewal area.

At first glance, the plan approved by the city in 1960 was not especially remarkable. **[figure 2.9]** As the city argued during the public process, it eliminated substandard and mixed use dwellings in the center of the neighborhood, introduced modernized housing, lowered the overall residential density in the neighborhood, created new open space, separated vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and improved traffic circulation, especially on streets like Dixwell Avenue and Goffe Boulevard, which connected downtown to New Haven’s wealthy northern suburbs. Its goals and physical planning strategies were, in short, the same goals and strategies of countless redevelopment agencies the late fifties, with the possible exception of its residential rehabilitation agenda, which was relatively innovative in 1960.

Upon closer inspection, however, one aspect of the plan stands out: the large public square that was designed to traverse Dixwell Avenue near Admiral Street. **[figure 2.10]** The plaza was the most radical intervention in the neighborhood and the clearest sign of change. It

opened up the area in front of the popular and busy Winchester Community School, a spacious, modern structure that had been built in 1950 to replace a deteriorated century-old school after community protest. **[figure 2.11]** It was the selling point for the Dixwell plan; images of the plaza were circulated among Dixwell residents and used to publicize and rally support for the city's renewal plans.<sup>39</sup>

More importantly, perhaps, the plaza functioned as a negation of Dixwell Avenue—one so complete and rhetorical it proved almost unbuildable. Extending from the planned new housing located on the west side of Dixwell Avenue all the way to the front of the Winchester School on the east, the plaza was essentially a monumental void. In a neighborhood increasingly associated with crime and overcrowded conditions, along a street associated with package stores, the plaza replaced the commercial strip with an open space that echoed the genteel, leafy public squares of Wooster Square and the New Haven Green, creating a new axis for the neighborhood perpendicular to the one it eliminated. The city's renewal plan blandly referred to the plaza as “badly needed open space in the heart of the neighborhood,”<sup>40</sup> but the radical transformation it represented quickly became evident in preliminary designs for the area developed by the architect John Johansen in 1961, 1962, and 1963—designs that included extensive commercial space on the west side of Dixwell Avenue and three civic and residential buildings on the east, as

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<sup>39</sup> Memo from Chuck Shannon to Ed Friend regarding Dixwell Brochure, dated May 4, 1960. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Box 427 Folder R-20 Project Planning.

<sup>40</sup> “Final Project Report (Part I—Application for Loan and Grant) Dixwell Project Area”, December 21, 1959. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records. Series XVIII, Box 428 Project Planning (Dixwell).

well as an amphitheater and skating rink and a pedestrian bridge that spanned the busy Avenue.<sup>41</sup>

**[figures 2.12, 2.13]**

In the early 1960s, the only shopping center in the New Haven metropolitan area with more than 100,000 feet of retail space was Hamden Plaza, located just north of the city of New Haven, along Dixwell Avenue in the suburb of Hamden. One economist studying the new shopping center estimated that patrons made five times as many trips to Hamden Plaza as they did to downtown New Haven and concluded that “its drawing power resembles that of a CBD [central business district] of a medium-sized city.”<sup>42</sup> Hamden Plaza was, in fact, New Haven’s chief retail competitor and one of the reasons the city had invested so much effort the shopping center at the heart of the Church Street project. Encompassing approximately 105,000 square feet of retail in its first iteration, with 22,000 additional square feet of office space, the proposed commercial spaces of Dixwell plaza were large enough to compete with Hamden Plaza and rival the Chapel Square Mall that had been under construction downtown since 1957. Even in a second, more developed conceptual design published in September 1964, the commercial space still included 78,000 square feet of retail space, including two supermarkets, a restaurant, a pharmacy, and no fewer than 319 off-street parking spaces.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Lee, a strong proponent of engaging top-flight designers, had corresponded with his redevelopment administrator Ed Logue throughout the public approvals process in 1960 in an effort to identify an architect of national standing to create preliminary designs for the central plaza. Initially the Redevelopment Agency approached Paul Rudolph, but Rudolph was occupied with the Temple Street Garage in the Church Street redevelopment area. The Agency also considered Harry Weese but ultimately decided on John Johansen of New Canaan as the local candidate. See especially memo from Appleby to Logue, May 9, 1960. Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 110, Folder 1114, Dixwell Neighborhood Renewal Project 1960-1961. See also memo from Ed Logue to Richard Lee, May 18, 1960. Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 110, Folder 1114.

<sup>42</sup> On Hamden Plaza, see Bart J. Epstein, “Evaluation of an Established Planned Shopping Center,” *Economic Geography* Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 1961), pp. 12-21.



Ultimately, the commercial space on the west side of Dixwell Avenue was reduced again and reoriented along the street at the request of its prospective tenants, who wanted to be “on the Avenue.”<sup>44</sup> [figure 2.14] The vast expanse of open space east of Dixwell Avenue was reduced by siting a public building in front of the Winchester Community, while funding for the amphitheater and pedestrian footbridge never materialized. But if the original vision for the plaza was never realized, the political legacy of the original design was powerful.

In a very real sense, renewal dislocated one set of local leaders—the owners of the package stores and nightclubs and small businesses that were condemned by the renewal plan to make room for the plaza—and empowered another—the civic leaders and professionals who sat on the area’s Renewal Committee. Citing a potential conflict of interest, the Redevelopment Agency had refused to consider Dixwell Avenue’s small businessmen, black and white, as leaders of the renewed neighborhood. None were invited to join the Renewal Committee; a separate and less powerful business committee only after repeated requests. Only two displaced businesses, the supermarkets Capitol Market and Shiffrin’s, were deemed important enough to consult about the possibility of relocating to the new commercial area. (Both ultimately did.)<sup>45</sup>

With the formation of the Renewal Committee in 1959, the area’s small businessmen were sidelined, and a core group of black teachers, ministers, social workers, and professionals given a more prominent role in the life of the neighborhood. The tone of the public process leading up to the plan’s approval in 1960 was, predictably, high-minded and ambitious. Their

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<sup>43</sup> Logue’s successor as Redevelopment Administrator, Melvin Adams, proudly claimed that it “[would] compare favorably to any similar center in Connecticut.” “\$2 Million Retail Center Planned,” *New Haven Register*, August 31, 1964.

<sup>44</sup> Hasbrouck, *Transformations*, p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> Memo from Edward J. Logue to Richard C. Lee, dated May 5, 1959. Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 1062. The two supermarkets, previously located at 186 and 221 Dixwell Avenue, became anchors of the new shopping center.

efforts culminated in a strong show of community support for the plan at the public hearings in the summer of 1960.<sup>46</sup> Approximately 300 people came to hear committee member Charles Twyman, speaking on behalf of the Renewal Committee, denounce the “blight” of overcrowding, vermin, gambling, narcotics, and prostitution in the Dixwell area. He called the plan a “calculated risk” that would “bring about many changes in the usual order of things”—calculated, but a necessary, an effort to “set the pace for good community living.” James Gibbs, speaking for the local branch of the NAACP, encouraging expanded project boundaries, increased demolition, and the designation of open-occupancy housing. All the major organizations in the Dixwell area supported the plan; opponents included a Republican politician running for state office and a long-time hotel owner whose business was located in the area slated for demolition. The hotel owner spoke in favor of the plan but wondered what would happen to the single men, often poor and alcoholic, who rented rooms from him. “You [are] going to build a good place for the people, yes, but what are you going to do with that class?” he asked.<sup>47</sup> In a memo to Lee shortly after the final hearing, Logue called the Dixwell public process “far and away the best substantive solid support we have ever had.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Praise, Some Warnings Mark Dixwell Hearing,” *New Haven Journal Courier*, August 23, 1960.

<sup>47</sup> “Public Hearing Dixwell Redevelopment and Renewal Plan...August 22, 1960,” pp. 44-45, 50-51, 61-62, and 68-69. Box 427, NHRA Records.

<sup>48</sup> Memo from Edward Logue to Richard Lee, August 23, 1960. Box 36 Folder 791: Correspondence Redevelopment: Dixwell Project 1960, NHRA Records.

### *Go Slow: Housing as Social Change*

In late July 1960, six months after four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College first sat down at the segregated lunch counter at the F.W. Woolworth department store in Greensboro, NC, Mayor Lee turned to the problem of slum housing in New Haven. Speaking in front of a black church group on July 28, 1960, several weeks before the public hearings on the Dixwell plan, he proposed similar direct action for New Haven's slum dwellers:

Why not a 'sit-out' to follow the sit-ins?' ...Just imagine, if all the people who live in the slums of our great cities were to leave their tenements, take chairs into the middle of the streets, and sit, out under the stars some fine summer evening at 5:30. Perhaps then, when traffic ground to a halt and commuters were late for supper, perhaps then we could convince some of the landlords and businessmen who make their living in the cities but live in the suburbs to take a walk through the slums and see the conditions which prevail.<sup>49</sup>

But Lee, the liberal, the Kennedy supporter, the warrior against slums, had stepped too far. The *New York Times* picked up the story. The local Connecticut newspapers hammered him. The *New London Day* described the suggestion as a "tactical blunder." The *Hartford Times* found it "irresponsible." The *Waterbury American* described it as "enthusiasm...carried too far."<sup>50</sup> A week later the city received preliminary federal approval for the Dixwell Redevelopment and Renewal Plan as well as some good news: the federal Urban Renewal Administration had set aside approximately \$14.3 million for the project, and due to savvy accounting, a state

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<sup>49</sup> "Remarks of Richard C. Lee. Occasion: International Sunday School Convention of Church of God in Christ." Edward J. Logue Papers, Box 110, Folder 1114.

<sup>50</sup> See "Mayor Lee's Sit-Outs" and "The Press Views Slum Sit-Outs," *New Haven Journal Courier*, August 5, 1960.

contribution, and the complexities of “in-kind” local contributions, New Haven did not even need to contribute any cash to the project.<sup>51</sup> Lee never mentioned sit-outs again.

The burgeoning civil rights movement, however, continued to influence the planning and implementation process. From the beginning, Lee had worked closely with the Family Relocation Office to ensure that African American families displaced from projects at Oak Street and Church Street were not re-segregated in the process of relocation. He went so far as to characterize the city’s relocation program as a positive method for integrating families of color into established white neighborhoods and in 1957 invited Jackie Robinson to New Haven to visit the relocation office and see what it had accomplished. “I’d like you to come to New Haven quietly and I will show you our whole program on relocation and integration,” Lee wrote.” I feel confident you will be impressed by it.” (Robinson declined.)<sup>52</sup> Although a number of national black newspapers including the *Chicago Defender* and the *Amsterdam News* had warned that relocation caused by highway construction and urban renewal was reducing already meager housing opportunities for African Americans, Dixwell’s leaders were not alarmed. They saw renewal as an opportunity to bring resources into a neighborhood that city government had long neglected this part of New Haven. No new private housing had been built in Dixwell for half a century, and redlined homeowners were unable to obtain loans to rehabilitate or modernize their

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<sup>51</sup> *New Haven Journal Courier*, August 5, 1960. The “in-kind” contributions included the construction of a new high school for the city to replace two schools located on the border of the Dixwell neighborhood that had been condemned and demolished, the site sold to Yale for the construction of the new Ezra Stiles and Morse residential colleges. As Douglas Hasbrouck commented, “since the City must cover only one-sixth of net renewal costs, the three million dollars generated some \$18 million worth of renewal. It is not inaccurate to say that Yale’s purchase of the high schools has largely financed the Dixwell project (now budgeted at approximately \$19 million).” Hasbrouck, *Transformation*, p. 52

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Lee to Robinson, May 9, 1957, Richard C. Lee Papers.

property. Urban renewal promised new community facilities, new housing, government-backed, and low-interest loans. Given Lee's interest in integration and Dixwell's proximity to downtown New Haven and Yale University, the renewal plan also seemed to be an instrument the city could use in the process of desegregating the city. And, the city promised, it would be accompanied by a relocation program that would help displaced residents find better housing elsewhere in the city.

This point deserves further elaboration. No one in the late fifties—neither city officials nor community leaders—expected that rehabilitated units or new construction might accommodate all the residents who would be displaced from the neighborhood. In fact, the very opposite was true: one of the salient attributes of a renewal plan like this one—for both city officials and community leaders—was the likelihood that a significant minority of the residents of the neighborhood would be relocated from the neighborhood and find new housing in other parts of the city. In the case of Dixwell, the Family Relocation Office prepared for several hundred families, while the plan included only 200 new housing units and—through code enforcement, rehabilitation, and spot clearance—would probably cause the elimination of a number of other illegally subdivided apartments.

To the city planners, this was part of the process of decentralization, the suburbs absorbing newcomers from outer urban neighborhoods, the outer urban neighborhoods absorbing population from the overcrowded urban renewal areas and former “slums.” To those concerned about the housing crisis for Blacks, however, this was part of the process of integration. As the suburbs absorbed young white families, the outer urban neighborhoods—and perhaps even the suburbs—would absorb those Black families who were, for the first time, able to move out of the ghetto. As the NAACP argued in a policy statement:

...the [urban renewal] program can serve as an effective tool not only to eliminate slum and improve housing conditions but also to broaden the housing opportunities of Negroes and other minority families being displaced...urban renewal programs often present minority families with a long-awaited opportunity to move out of racial and economic ghettos into better neighborhoods with better housing.<sup>53</sup>

To New Haven's Black community, the Dixwell renewal process would be an opportunity break up the ghetto and to open housing throughout the city to black occupancy as much as it was the chance to renew and rehabilitate of an existing neighborhood.

Indeed, the racial politics of relocation were closely associated with white resistance to integration—rather than black resistance to displacement—that the Dixwell renewal project featured in the 1961 mayoral campaign. When Republican mayoral challenger James Valenti warned voters that the Dixwell project represented a misguided “bulldozer approach” to renewal in the area, local leaders defended Lee and the renewal plan, charging that Valenti wanted to preserve the “Negro ghetto” in the neighborhood.<sup>54</sup> Taking the cue from the mayor and his Redevelopment Agency, the Renewal Committee speculated on the possibility that planned relocation might open the city's wealthier neighborhoods to black occupancy. “Here in Dix[well] there is a new oppor[tunity] to bring balance of groups back into area,” they noted.<sup>55</sup> Valenti's opposition, they implied, might be a sign of his unwillingness to see blacks move into neighborhoods throughout the city.

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<sup>53</sup> NAACP, “The Urban Renewal Program and NAACP Guidelines to Integration,” p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> “Dixwell Groups To Study Valenti's Petition Claim,” *New Haven Journal Courier*, July 17, 1961.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes of the executive committee of the Dixwell Renewal Committee, January 9, 1963. NHRA Records, Box 430, Folder: R-20 Dixwell Renewal Committee.

Increasingly in the early 1960s, however, various community leaders and organizations began to question the coalition that had formed between the city and the Renewal Committee. Could Lee, a liberal and an advocate of civil rights, be trusted to keep the interests of the black community in mind as he rebuilt the city? Did the black community need to place additional pressures on him—or represent its own interests? Would new housing help bring about social change or would protest? Between 1961 and 1963, the debate took shape, with the older generation—ministers, teachers, social workers, professionals—standing behind plans for urban renewal, while the younger generation advocated new strategies to address the community’s problems, including sit-ins, pickets, and protests.

Lee’s abandoned plans for a sit-out to protest local housing conditions resurfaced again among a group of NAACP members in the fall of 1961. Several members of the local chapter of the NAACP, including President James Gibbs, and Blyden Jackson, a young activist who was also part of the city’s recently formed CORE chapter, had proposed a sit-out to draw attention to residential segregation and poor housing conditions. They met with opposition from other members of local civil rights groups—supporters of Mayor Lee and urban renewal—who argued that a new statewide anti-discrimination law was just going into effect and that the group should be patient and support these efforts. At a meeting at the Winchester School, NAACP members debated the issue heatedly: should the group support direct action for open occupancy, as Gibbs and Jackson wanted, or “go slow” and wait to see the results of the new legislation? Lee supporters, in the majority, favored the “go slow” approach. Compounding the local tensions were strict instructions from the national organization: the NAACP was not supporting direct action in this case, and members risked losing their charter if they moved forward with their

protest.<sup>56</sup> No decision was made that evening. A week later Gibbs resigned as president of the chapter, saying that he was joining CORE, and CORE announced its plans to hold a “sit-out” along Dixwell Avenue in October.<sup>57</sup> Lee, who felt the defection keenly, was comforted by his aide, Barry Passett: “They are not necessarily mad at you. They do not however, feel the Dixwell Project is not benefiting them and they have the strong feeling that they must do something active, like down South, to win support for their cause.” The shape of black activism in New Haven for the new few years seems to have been determined by Gibbs’ defection; there would be little compromise or communication between the groups, simply competing strategies for social change.

The sit-out took place on a Friday evening, October 6, much as Mayor Lee had imagined it. **[figure 2.15]** After a CORE rally in a local park, leaders urged attendees to take a seat along the sidewalk along Dixwell Avenue near Foote Street—the same site selected by planners for the new civic and commercial plaza, the symbolic heart of the community. About a hundred demonstrators did so. CORE leaders issued a statement condemning the “subtle, nagging, Northern brand of racism” and the “snail-pace of improvement” in housing and employment, demanding a meeting with Lee and calling for the enactment of municipal ordinances that prohibited refusing or raising rents on the basis of race or raising rents without improvements on the apartment.<sup>58</sup>

All in all, the event was more orderly than the one Lee had suggested—no one blocked traffic or challenged the suburban commuters during their Friday afternoon flight from the city.

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<sup>56</sup> “Threat To Charter Kills NAACP Talk Of Sit-Out,” *New Haven Register* September 21, 1961.

<sup>57</sup> “Gibbs Quits as President of NAACP,” *New Haven Register*, September 28, 1961.

<sup>58</sup> “First Sit-Out Is Staged Along Dixwell Ave. Curb,” *New Haven Register*, October 7, 1961.



It was also, however, more radical. The young CORE activists had clearly declared their independence from both the NAACP and the politics of conciliation that marked race relations during the early stages of the Dixwell plan. So, too, had they rejected the argument that isolated new projects in New Haven's black neighborhoods would bring about change in the overall condition of housing for the majority of residents. In 1961, as households were relocated from the Dixwell neighborhood, in 1962, as demolition began, and in 1963, as the city broke ground on the first redevelopment projects, CORE continued to work on the issues of segregation and substandard housing with its own tactics, sending inspection teams into apartment buildings to document code violations, holding rallies, and staging sit-ins at businesses owned by slumlords.<sup>59</sup> [figure 2.16] When the New Haven Board of Aldermen voted in February 1962 to reject a fair housing ordinance, CORE picketed outside city hall. It continued to place pressure on Lee and his Redevelopment Agency, following up with renewal area families who had been relocated to substandard housing and naming Lee, as the head of the city and the landlord to dozens of substandard units awaiting rehabilitation, one New Haven's worst slumlords. As the historian Yohuru Williams argues, CORE was, during 1962 and 1963, "a significant challenge to the Lee Administration," one of the few he faced in the early and mid 1960s.<sup>60</sup>

Shortly after CORE's sit-out in the fall of 1961, Mayor Lee announced that negotiations were underway for approximately 200 units of private, moderate rental apartments in Dixwell, to be built under section 221(d)(3) of the Federal Housing legislation passed in July 1961. The most recent of a series of Housing Act provisions intended to support the construction of new housing,

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<sup>59</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, pp. 243 and 244. See also "Nation-Wide Call? CORE Considers Housing Protests," *Yale Daily News* no. 125, April 12, 1965. CORE targeted the city both for lax prosecution of slum lords and for "faulty urban renewal policies"

<sup>60</sup> Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power*, pp. 15-16.

221(d)(3) provided for below-market-rate mortgages for nonprofit organizations that wanted to build rental or cooperative housing for low- and moderate-income families. This legislation was anticipated eagerly by administrations like Lee's, which wanted to see new housing construction in renewal areas but were unwilling to support controversial public housing projects. With typical bravado, Lee declared that New Haven was "on the threshold of the great private housing construction boom in its history."<sup>61</sup>

If, prior to 1961, members of the Renewal Committee conceived of physical planning as an essentially negative process—the clearance of the most deteriorated housing, or the elimination of code violations or night clubs, or the dissolution of the ghetto—the requirements in 221(d)(3) for non-profit sponsorship helped draw community organizations into participation in the renewal process and helped them formulate a positive conception of Dixwell as a modern, middle-class, and racially integrated neighborhood. New housing, the city promise, would attract new residents to the area. "Through sensitive planning in which the community really participates, you can make a former ghetto attractive enough to integrate it," redevelopment official Mel Adams declared.<sup>62</sup>

Studies of the housing market in Dixwell conducted before the advent of the renewal program indicated that, given the neighborhoods demographics, any new housing would almost certainly be occupied by African American families. Now, with integration in the air, the city engaged a public relations firm to advertise the Dixwell project—now "University Park Dixwell"—with whites. Color brochures touting the "outstanding architects" involved in the

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<sup>61</sup> On the meeting with Lee, see *New Haven Register*, October 23, 1961. On Lee's announcement, see *New Haven Register*, October 26, 1961.

<sup>62</sup> Adams quoted in Hommann, "Symbolic Bells in Dixwell," p. 57.

project and described the project as creating a “brand new neighborhood” with “ultramodern” housing and a new elementary school that offered “enriched curriculum and numerous services supplementing the regular school program.”<sup>63</sup> [figure 2.17] Unlike the upmarket apartments then under construction in the Oak Street project, housing in Dixwell was geared toward families. The plaza figured prominently in the advertising materials, as did a young white family no doubt intended to appeal to prospective white buyers. [figures 2.18, 2.19] As one housing researcher noted:

Experience in other communities, notably in the Lake-Meadows-Prairie Shore area in Chicago, has shown that the integration of an existing non-white community is most likely to succeed where young white families can be encouraged to move into an area. These families apparently can be attracted only by new housing developments which provide good housing and good location at a reasonable cost, and by new school facilities.<sup>64</sup>

Florence Virtue Homes, located in the central clearance area, adjacent to the new shopping center and civic plaza, was the largest and most closely watched of the 221(d)(3) developments. [figures 2.20, 2.21] With 129 cooperative units named after a longtime neighborhood resident, Florence Virtue was sponsored by the Dixwell Congregational Church, the chief local supporter of the renewal program. A series of flat-roofed, concrete block townhouses designed by John Johansen, Florence Virtue was designed to fit into the scale of the neighborhood and yet stand out as bright and modern in a neighborhood of late nineteenth century wooden frame buildings. The city recommended two or three-story town houses and warned against any institutional feel reminiscent of public housing: “The design of all multi-

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<sup>63</sup> “The New University Park Dixwell,” brochure. New Haven Free Public Library.

<sup>64</sup> “Questions and Answers on Urban Renewal in the Dixwell Neighborhood,” typescript, p. 4. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Box 427, Folder R-20 Project Planning.

family units should approximate as closely as possible, a development of single family row houses directly related to well defined public and private spaces.”<sup>65</sup> It was important to “capture something from the ‘past’ for the ‘new’ neighborhood,” the architectural program advised.<sup>66</sup>

As the first new housing built in Dixwell in more than fifty years and ambitious experiment in racial integration, its progress was monitored by the local press and advertised aggressively by the city, which promoted its low-to-moderate sales prices and monthly maintenance charges, modern appliances and open spaces.<sup>67</sup> Advertisements emphasized the modernity of the houses—all-electric kitchens, parking spaces and private patios. Units were staggered in pairs, so that backyards to afford more privacy.<sup>68</sup> **[figure 2.22]** As the ads claimed, Florence Virtue offered “the privacy and seclusion you desire, yet with every advantage of city living close by.”<sup>69</sup>

And indeed, on the opening weekend at Florence Virtue in November 1964, a thousand people toured the model apartment.<sup>70</sup> The *Register* proclaimed Florence Virtue a “significant step in integration” and Reverend Edmonds praised the cooperative ownership system and

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<sup>65</sup> “Design Standards for Multifamily Developments in the Dixwell Renewal Area,” NHRA Records. Series XVIII, Box 428 Project Planning (Dixwell).

<sup>66</sup> “Architectural Program for Dixwell Square Housing,” p. 3. NHRA Records. Series XVIII, Box 428 Project Planning (Dixwell).

<sup>67</sup> The city promoted cooperatives in several neighborhoods throughout the mid 1960s. Brochures were distributed by the Family Relocation Office explaining the ownership structure of cooperatives and the federal program that made low down payments possible in simple, direct language.

<sup>68</sup> John M. Johansen, *John M. Johansen*, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> “Florence Virtue Co-operative Town Houses,” brochure, New Haven Free Public Library.

<sup>70</sup> “1,000 View New Co-op,” *New Haven Journal Courier*, November 30, 1964.

declared that the “ingredients” to neighborhood revitalization were “responsibility, pride of ownership, and stability of neighborhood.”<sup>71</sup> At approximately \$325, the down payment was modest, and the city helped arrange loans for those who did not have the payment upfront. Monthly maintenance fees ran from \$91 to \$130, making the smaller units at Florence Virtue slightly more expensive than the average rental in the area when studies were first conducted in 1960.<sup>72</sup> By the time the project neared opening in 1964, there was strong demand for the new housing units from the black community itself, but Lee pressed the issue of racial integration. “We aren’t having a 100 percent black project as long as I have anything to say about it,” he said. “We’re getting 30 percent whites, or I don’t open it.”<sup>73</sup> The project opened integrated at 45 percent white and 55 percent black.<sup>74</sup>

Between 1961 and 1964, St. Martin de Porres Church, the Human Relations Council, a local civil rights organization, and one member of the renewal committee, Dr. Fred Smith, all took on sponsorship of new housing developments that opened in 1965 and 1966. Although together these projects only accounted for approximately 250 new units of housing, and although the requirements for sponsorship were minimal—in most cases sponsors were responsible for a down payment of 10% of the project costs—symbolically the stakes were high. Sponsorship

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<sup>71</sup> “Florence Virtue Co-op Unites Significant Step in Integration,” *New Haven Register*, July 11, 1965.

<sup>72</sup> On the rental market in Dixwell in 1960, see Chester Rapkin, “The Economic Feasibility of Urban Renewal in Dixwell,” pp. 9-10. New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Box 110 Folder 115 Dixwell Redevelopment Area.

<sup>73</sup> Lee quoted in George Nelson, *On Design*, p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> Hasbrouck, *Transformation*, p. 55. The racial balance set by the NHRA echoes the balance we see at other experiments with integrated housing, such as Morris Milgram’s Concord Park, developed from 1952 to 1958. On Milgram and Concord Park, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, pp. 230-243.

represented a joint investment, federal and local, in a community that was experiencing disinvestment and neglect.

At one end of the market, One Dixwell Plaza, Fred Smith Housing, was Dixwell's first and only private (non-subsidized) development.<sup>75</sup> One Dixwell Plaza contained two professional offices opening out onto the plaza and 22 one- and three-bedroom units, designed New Haven architect Gilbert Switzer. These apartment had modern electric kitchens, wall to wall carpeting, sliding glass doors, enclosed balconies or patios, off street parking, a master TV antenna.<sup>76</sup>

**[figures 2.23, 2.24]**

During these years, the city also built a limited amount subsidized housing for the elderly. Prescott Bush Housing for the Elderly at Henry and County Streets was a low-rise garden apartment block with 60 public housing units designed by the local firm Granberry Cash and Associates. (It was named after the Connecticut senator whose advocacy on New Haven's behalf in the Senate was one reason the city's renewal program was so well-funded.) **[figure 2.25]**

The campaign for residential integration was complemented by efforts to transform Dixwell in other ways.<sup>77</sup> In meetings and negotiations in the early sixties, for example, the

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<sup>75</sup> "Negro Developer to Dedicate First Dixwell Plaza Building," *New Haven Register*, November 11, 1966.

<sup>76</sup> *Dixwell Renewal News* 4:1 (March 1967), p. 4. NHRA Records, Box 427, no folder.

<sup>77</sup> As redevelopment administrator Mel Adams explained: "A concentrated effort is being made by the New Haven Redevelopment Agency in cooperation with the citizens of Dixwell to reintegrate the neighborhood. All of the modern techniques of public relations and intergroup relations practices are being employed. New housing, new schools, new shopping facilities and recreation facilities, plus convenient location of the neighborhood to other areas of the city, are all expected to be plus factors in efforts to encourage families of varied racial, ethnic, and economic background to move to the new 'University Park Dixwell.' Families relocated from Dixwell have tended to be dispersed into a number of neighborhoods in New Haven. Ghetto

Renewal Committee persuaded Lee to begin training programs to integrate the all-white unions that were building in Dixwell.<sup>78</sup> They also convinced the Redevelopment Agency to bring social services into the community, promoting social as well as physical renewal.<sup>79</sup> Several of the neighborhood's churches, including Rev. Edmonds' powerful Dixwell Congregational Church, joined together and reached out to white church-goers in an effort to integrate their congregations.<sup>80</sup> The Redevelopment Agency also actively sought out New Haven landlords who had pledged open occupancy policies for their rosters at the relocation office. Dixwell project director Lloyd Davis declared that renewal was "as much a vital part of the civil rights-free revolution as our sit-ins, boycotts and demonstrations"<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the local Redevelopment Agency office sponsored public information campaigns, worked to create block associations to deal with the more mundane neighborhood problems of maintenance and repair, and promoted rehabilitation and clean-up campaigns in the neighborhood. Far more than redevelopment, rehabilitation required community outreach.

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concentration has not been a pattern." Walter McFarland, ed., *Residential Rehabilitation*, pp. 297-298.

<sup>78</sup> Edwin Edmonds, Oral History, February 26, 2004, p. 16. New Haven Oral History Project typescript.

<sup>79</sup> Committee member Fred Smith and Ed Grant received an \$18,000 grant from Lee's social renewal agency, Community Progress, Inc., to open a storefront center for recovering alcoholics. On the establishment of the Union of Indigent Persons, see [www.fredsmith.com](http://www.fredsmith.com).

<sup>80</sup> "3 Churches Planned for Dixwell Project," *New Haven Register*, November 30, 1964.

<sup>81</sup> Lloyd Davis, "New Haven's Dixwell: A Success Story of Citizen Participation," p. 11. NHRA Records, Box 430, Folder R-20 Neighborhood Participation. On the appointment of Davis, a black planner, Richard Lee recalled: "They [the Dixwell planning staff] didn't have any black professionals. In order to work in that neighborhood, I felt we had to have one." Interview with Paul Bass, undated typescript [filed with another interview typescript dated October 22, 1998], Box 2, Folder 21: Notes on and Interview with Dick Lee, Paul Bass Papers.

Throughout the mid 1960s, the local office worked to create block organizations to deal with more mundane neighborhood problems. It sponsored contests in the local schools in the fall of 1962 to determine the name of a mascot for its fix-up, clean-up campaign, and the winner, Freddy Fixer, presided over the first annual Freddy Fixer Parade, held May of 1963 along Dixwell Avenue before some 7,000 people. (The parade, in fact, outlasted the renewal program by several decades and continues to this day.)<sup>82</sup>

The local Redevelopment Agency office promoted rehabilitation by sponsoring informational coffee hours, distributing booklets with design recommendations, and rewarding compliant homeowners with a plaque from the Dixwell Redevelopment Office suitable for mounting on their houses, evidence of the work and money invested.<sup>83</sup> After teams of inspectors canvassed the neighborhood, taking stock of both external conditions and interiors, the local office began visiting homeowners, household by household, explaining where their buildings had fallen out of compliance with the building code, describing the kind of FHA-sponsored loans might be available to help them in the process of rehabilitation, even bringing renderings to show the homeowners what their house might look like when rehabilitated.<sup>84</sup> **[figure 2.25]**

Although rehabilitation was important to the renewal program, however, the new development of the mid 1960s had a symbolic potential that newly tidy older houses lacked. Both the city and the neighborhood's Renewal Committee had a clear vision of the new

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<sup>82</sup> William H. Banks, Jr., "In Search of Freddy Fixer," *New Haven Independent*, February 16, 1989.

<sup>83</sup> Melvin J. Adams et al., "The Wooster Square and Dixwell Projects in New Haven, Connecticut" in *Residential Rehabilitation*, ed. M. Carter McFarland and Walter K. Vivrett, p. 296.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Hommann, "Neighborhood Rehabilitation Is Working in Six Projects in New Haven," p. 189.



Dixwell—orderly, vibrant, respectable, and interracial—that was defined by the clean lines of the modern architecture and the open places that symbolized their reforms, particularly in the center of the renewal area, which the Redevelopment Agency described as “a very attractive core which will radiate strength throughout the area.”<sup>85</sup> The power of physical design was clear to the city and the Renewal Committee; the new housing, school, shopping center and open spaces would bring modernity, stability, and middle-class affluence to the neighborhood at a time when it seemed to face isolation and decline. The open floor plans, floor-to-ceiling windows, and green spaces of Johansen’s Florence Virtue Houses and the powerful, prismatic shapes of the Grant School, the Congregational Church, and Dixwell Community House all stood out from the surrounding built environment, announcing the neighborhood’s break with the past. At the same time, they also represented strengthened ties with the white power structure in the city. Promotional images of the new neighborhood produced in the mid 1960s announced this vision explicitly with illustrations of well-dressed black and white families mingling in the neighborhood’s new spaces, interacting, shaking hands. [figures 2.27, 2.28]

### *A Riot of Their Own*

By the mid 1960s, the costs of the alliance struck between the city and the Renewal Committee were beginning to become clear. While the Renewal Committee expanded multiple times and ultimately included several hundred members, it did not effectively represent newcomers or the very poor, who invariably lived in the areas that were designated for demolition rather than rehabilitation and who received eviction notices rather than government grants and loans for improvements. Large families found it difficult to relocate; already in 1961, the

Family Relocation Office had to offer a finder's fee of \$100 and \$150 for the rare three- and four-bedroom unit that would house a larger family. Demolition and redevelopment were expanded in amendments to the plan in 1963 and 1964, bringing the total number of families displaced, once estimated at approximately 200, closer to 800.<sup>86</sup> At numerous hearings and public meetings, the Redevelopment Agency heard requests from Dixwell residents for greater demolition in the area, particularly on the poorest blocks with the worst housing conditions. Long-time middle-class and working class residents of Dixwell knew what parts of their neighborhood they would like to see redeveloped, and they were invariably the poorest areas: the deteriorating wooden frame houses in the center of the neighborhood that had been subdivided into multiple units for the recent Southern migrants who were moving to New Haven in the fifties and sixties. Subsequent amendments to the plan continued to expanded demolition and displacement. **[figure 2.29]**

Support for renewal remained high among the city's black population as a whole, but there were also signs that many former supporters were becoming disillusioned with renewal and its disruptions and dislocations.<sup>87</sup> The city had difficulty filling vacancies in the new shopping center. Interest in the complex had died down during the long period of construction, and the city filled one of the properties with a branch library. Tenants began organizing in the Elm Haven public housing projects, where they were experiencing problems with overcrowding, punitive

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<sup>86</sup> Figures for household relocation from "HUD Periodic Review of Relocation and Program Findings," Box 342, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records. (The report specifies that 786 families and 324 individuals were relocated as of March 31, 1971.)

<sup>87</sup> As the pollsters reported to Lee: "Redevelopment, speeding it up, and providing more of it was more important to Negroes than any other group. The same was true with their concern over more housing, lower rents, and more industry and jobs." "A Survey of the Political Climate in New Haven, Connecticut, Post-Election 1965," p. 24. Richard C. Lee Papers, Box 128, Folder 2273 Surveys and Polls 1965-.

evictions, and dilapidated conditions. They demanded security guards, elevator operators, and playgrounds.<sup>88</sup> At One Dixwell Plaza, Fred Smith ran out of patience with the responsibilities of a sponsor. Shortly after residents moved into One Dixwell Plaza in December 1966, drainage problems in area caused flooding in the units. Then a sequence of fires damaged the units again, causing vacancies. Smith, whose property taxes had risen sharply, tried repeatedly to turn the complex over to the New Haven Housing Authority, but the NHHA refused him. Smith, who had served as a housing commissioner for eleven years, joined the police commission in 1967.<sup>89</sup>

Then riots hit New Haven in September 1967. Like many cities that saw civil disturbances in the summers of the mid 1960s, New Haven was shaken by the experience. Resident participation in the riots, estimated at about 30%, was high, and observers believed that “the riots revealed Lee’s redevelopment had not affected the lives of those who needed it the most.”<sup>90</sup> Although events were centered on Congress Street in the Hill, and not in Dixwell, the main office of Elm Haven broken into and the white-owned stores in the neighborhood were hit. There were scattered reports of looting and fire-bombs and three nights of violence in Elm Haven housing project along Dixwell Avenue, as crowds gathered in the neighborhood’s empty lots. Small businessmen in the Dixwell Plaza shopping center reported that the area had become so closely associated with the riots that business in area never picked up.

After the disturbances, Lee stopped speaking on behalf of the city’s blacks. Many blamed his disruptive renewal policies for unrest in the city’s neighborhoods; by 1967, nearly every

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<sup>88</sup> Gil Fuchs, “Housing Project Angers Tenants,” *Yale Daily News*, June 2, 1968. The play areas were essential; by the late 1960s, approximately 1000 of the 1500 residents were children.

<sup>89</sup> HUD eventually foreclosed on the property in February 1972. For Smith’s story, see <<http://www.fredsmith.com/history60.htm>>, accessed August 7, 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy Bates, “Yale and Black New Haven,” *Yale Daily News*, November 15, 1967.

working class neighborhood in central New Haven had been designated for renewal. **[figure**

**2.30]** As one observer wrote:

How are we to react to your [Lee's] statement quoted in the August 20 *Register*: 'I seriously thought it would never happen!' Is our Mayor naïve? Had he no idea of the violence, disruption, and insecurity that has become a permanent part of their daily lives? Is he unaware of the violence that is daily perpetuated upon them by the Redevelopment Agency?<sup>91</sup>

In a word, the riots discredited Dahl's vision of New Haven as a city with a pluralist balance of power. Critics like Marian Glaser, a public health student who opposed the city's renewal program, began to circulate research on the official documentation justifying New Haven's redevelopment projects, arguing that the Redevelopment Agency had repeatedly abused its power and condemned buildings without serious defects or deterioration.<sup>92</sup> A local anti-Vietnam, anti-Lee political movement, the American Independent Movement, gained traction, and its newsletter expanded its coverage of the displacement and conflict that renewal was causing. The newsletter published critiques of the Lee administration and its renewal policies, including a damning analysis of the planned Ring Road that would have cut Dixwell and nearby Dwight off from downtown. **[figure 2.28]** When the AIM leader and Yale political scientist Robert Cook declared that "the forces which control the community are in fact illegitimate, and that at bottom

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<sup>91</sup> "Open Letter to Mayor Richard C. Lee, Concerning the violence in New Haven's Ghettos," August 1967. Typescript in the possession Howard Gillette. Thank you to Professor Gillette for sharing it with me.

<sup>92</sup> Glaser analyzed 180 buildings with a total of 1,244 code violations; over one third exterior defects (broken doors, stairs, roofs, chimneys); another third included 160 instances of defective wiring or electrical hazards; 125 instances of defective or inoperable plumbing, 34 cases of infestation by rats or roaches; one third included interior damage. Her report, "Code Violations in New Haven, Coalition of Concerned Citizens, New Haven 1968," is discussed in William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, pp. 178-179.

their position rests upon force and violence,” he spoke of Lee’s power in New Haven as well as the US’s involvement in Vietnam.<sup>93</sup>

So effectively had Lee drawn black activists into his administration that after the collapse of the local CORE chapter, the city had few independent black organizations able to respond to the disturbances. The *Register* ran lengthy articles about leadership in the black community, trying to identify the next generation of leaders. The Hill Parents Association, formed in 1966 over protests about conditions at the Prince Street School in the Hill, was the most effective organization at expressing the anger of blacks who felt they had not benefitted from the Lee’s administrations programs, and the political center of gravity shifted from Dixwell to that neighborhood, where younger and more radical activists involved in the black power movement demanded Lee’s attention. When the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders held public hearing in New Haven in 1968, activists from the Hill offered the only challenge to the city’s account of liberalism that simply had not gone far enough.<sup>94</sup> When Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in the spring of 1968, the Rev. Edmonds was the only Dixwell leader invited to speak at the memorial service on the New Haven Green.

In Dixwell, construction projects begun long before September 1967 were pushed to conclusion. The open plaza on the east side of Dixwell Avenue was completed. **[figures 2.32, 2.33]** The Brutalist Dixwell Congregational Church, designed by Johansen, opened in 1969, its crystalline form, isolated from the plaza and the street by a moat, now inappropriate for a black community that was abandoning its vision of a new, interracial city and embracing its members on their own terms. **[figures 2.34, 2.35]**, Where changes to the designs in progress could still be

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<sup>93</sup> “We Have Just Begun,” *AIM Bulletin* vol. 1 no. 14 (Tuesday, November 22, 1966), p.5.

<sup>94</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, p. 125.

made, they were. The Dixwell Community House/Neighborhood Services Building, a joint public private building designed by Edward Cherry in association with Herbert Newman, was completed in 1970. **[figures 2.36. 2.37]** Designed to echo the same powerful, geometric shapes as Johansen's church, the Community House expanded its social service-based program in the late 1960s to include meeting spaces for local organizations and a library for Afro-American culture.

By the late 1960s, the modern, heroic vision of Dixwell has lost its appeal and legitimacy. Its monumental buildings housed institutions closely associated with the community leaders of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and they represented a political alliance between the city and the members of the Renewal Committee that had since come under fire. The city, no longer so sure of its welcome, reversed course with its last projects, commissioning contextual buildings that tried hard to fit in. Rehabilitation plan for a block of eight Civil War-era row houses on Henry Street begun as moderate-income housing when it was announced in 1966, now became one of the area's showpiece projects. **[figure 2.38]** Cherry, a black architect and the designer of the Dixwell Community House, was awarded the last major housing project at Goffe Boulevard and Orchard Streets. **[figure 2.39]**

The commission for the last major public building in the urban renewal area, the firehouse on Goffe Boulevard, went to the firm of Venturi and Rauch, well-known for its contextual designs. The firehouse, designed in 1970 and completed in 1974, strives for the ordinariness that Venturi and partner Denise Scott Brown were advocating in the early 1970. **[figure 2.40]** Venturi and Rauch's use of brick on the façade, a nod to both the tradition of firehouses in the city and to the commercial buildings along Goffe, is only the most obvious departure from the Brutalist architectural language of the rest of the project area and of New

Haven's renewal architecture more generally. In contrast to the heroism of the city's Brutalist Central fire Station in Wooster Square, for example, it sits quietly along the well-traveled route to the suburbs, rejecting even the modest element of a tower that the designers considered in early schemes. **[figures 2.41, 2.42]** A photograph of the fire station submitted for publication is an excellent illustration of the gritty realism that this building attempts to project. Carefully composed, it emphasizes the building's close relationship to the street and the commercial lettering that defines it as part of the city of New Haven, rather than Gothic Yale University visible in the distance behind it. Comparing this photo with Johansen's presentation drawings for the Grant School clarifies the difference between the Dixwell of the mid 1960s and the Dixwell of the early 1970s: where Venturi embraces the existing city, Johansen has located the school across the street from several single-story, single-family suburban houses. None of these houses existed at the time Johansen design the Grant School; the aging, three-story Victorian houses that were located there had been designed for demolition and redevelopment as part of the 1964 amendment to the renewal plan. **[figure 2.43]**

### *Conclusion*

Between 1960, when the Dixwell plan was adopted, and 1970, when the last major projects were completed, the neighborhood underwent a remarkable transformation: some 1,110 households and 194 businesses were relocated; approximately 300 buildings were demolished; 308 new housing units were constructed; several hundred buildings rehabilitated; and a half dozen community facilities completed, including a new school, a community center, several

churches, a public plaza, and a shopping center.<sup>95</sup> By the early 1980s, however, almost all signs of the renewed neighborhood of the 1960s had disappeared.

The closing of the Winchester factory and skyrocketing unemployment rates had a devastating impact on Dixwell, and by the early 1980s, the area was struggling with the effects of the drug trade and addiction, as well. In 1981, the *New York Times* revisited Dixwell and found Capitol Market, one of the anchors of the shopping center, had departed. The empty storefront was only one among several. The new, integrated housing was now almost all black and residents were much poorer. The reporter interviewed a disillusioned Isabelle Russell, a health counselor and community activist who in the late 1960s had made the decision to move to One Dixwell Plaza instead of departing for suburbs. “I see programs written up with beautiful language and a lot of numbers, but when I walk down the street, they don’t match up,” Russell said. Mayor Lee agreed. “We thought we were doing everything right,” Lee recalled. “But now we realize a lot of it came out wrong.”<sup>96</sup> The alliance between city and neighborhood and the vision that drove their work in until the mid 1960s had both been forgotten. In an oral history conducted in 2004, Renewal Committee member Charles Twyman recalled his hopes for a more extensive public housing program for displaced residents and speculated, hesitantly, that the neighborhood’s elites had allied themselves too closely to the city and not listened carefully enough to the poor.

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<sup>95</sup> Figures for business relocation from a HUD report, “Dixwell R-20, H-6000 Back-Up, Revised Through 6/30/78.” Box 432, Redevelopment Agency Records. Figures for demolition are a rough estimate from analysis of property acquisition maps in the Dixwell Redevelopment and Renewal Plan, Second Amendment, 1965. Figures for units of new construction from Redevelopment Agency annual reports, 1965-1970.

<sup>96</sup> Tracie Rozhan, “60s Dream of Renewal Fades With Time,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1981.



This was our idea of improving things. I mean, better housing, yes, but more importantly I think really trying to change the social pattern, the fabric...we didn't realized we were sort of playing into the hands of another plan, a grander plan and plans were developed...Our grand plan always appeared as though it was, you know, right on target with their plan. That's what we thought... we did not—I'm talking about the so-called inner circle—did not plan well enough, I think, to consolidate those energies, you know, by the groups that were buildings this housing, to organize it as a broad community effort.<sup>97</sup>

In 1960, the political scientist E.E. Schattschneider offered a terse and clever commentary on Dahl's vision of pluralism in New Haven: "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent."<sup>98</sup> Indeed, in the case of Dixwell, the inability of moderate, middle-class community leaders to represent the poor lead to a crisis in the years after 1967 and widespread disillusionment with the work they had already done. But race figures here strongly, as well as the growing influence of the black power movement, which offered the only ideology sufficiently distinct from the city's liberal pluralism that it was able to develop a thorough-going critique of renewal and its effects on the black community in New Haven. If many young activists felt Lee and the Redevelopment Agency had never seen the black community as genuine partners in the planning process, they may have been correct, but they were also speaking with the wisdom gained from more than a decade of community activism around renewal. In 1958, doubts about the good faith shown by Lee and his planners were complaints on the margins of black discourse in New Haven; ten years later, they fit neatly into the critique of institutional racism that black power offered. Meanwhile, the collapse of the liberal ideas behind renewal and the political alliance that helped promote it had little direct

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<sup>97</sup> Charles Twyman, Oral History, March 26, 2004, p. 13-16. New Haven Oral History Project typescript.

<sup>98</sup> E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*, p. 35.

effect on the built environment of the neighborhood but made all the difference in the world when it came to understanding and interpreting it.

## Chapter 3

### Abandoned Project: Racial Struggle and the Politics of Integration Roxbury, Boston

#### *Introduction*

In March 1962, more than two thousand people crowded into a high school auditorium in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston for a public hearing. The issue for the evening—the expansion of the geographical area included in the Washington Park Urban Renewal Project—might not have seemed especially incendiary, but as Boston expanded its Title I efforts in the early 1960s, all of the city’s renewal plans were coming under close scrutiny. None were watched quite as closely as Washington Park, the city’s first major rehabilitation project, focusing on an older residential area in Roxbury, at the heart of Boston’s growing black community. Representing the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), Development Administrator Edward J. Logue opened the meeting with a brief statement about city’s plans to use renewal funds to rehabilitate housing and build schools and public buildings in the expanded area. He was then joined on stage by six city councilors who opened the floor to the main event of the evening: the testimony of citizens and community organizations who wanted to express their support for or criticism of the expansion.

Boston’s black community had lined up behind the prospect of urban renewal in Roxbury, and support for the expansion was overwhelming. Sixty-one local community leaders, including clergy, businessmen, politicians, and representatives of community organizations, spoke in favor of the plan, arguing for the importance of intervention in a neighborhood that was experiencing disinvestment and neglect. A pastor from St. Joseph’s, a local church, threw his support behind the project, arguing that “something that has to be done” in the area. A state

representative praised the renewal project as “the first project in the United States that will benefit principally the colored people.” Another local clergyman dramatically proclaimed that if Jesus Christ appeared on the streets of Roxbury that day, he would vote in favor of urban renewal.

It was hardly evident at the hearing that renewal was a contentious topic in Boston in the early 1960s, or that the BRA was struggling to reestablish its reputation in the wake of the widely publicized failure of its flagship project of the 1950s, the West End. The few objections of the evening came from residents from other Boston neighborhoods who condemned urban renewal as a “propaganda program” and decried the BRA’s whole-scale demolition in the West End as the “destruction” of a community. Roxbury residents took no heed of this advice. “We don’t appreciate [outsiders] telling us know to live,” replied Roxbury resident Melnea Cass, speaking on behalf of the Boston branch of the NAACP. “Let us, the residents, tell you what we want, because we really know what we want here in Roxbury.”<sup>99</sup>

“What we want here in Roxbury,” in early 1962, was urban renewal. Since the mid-1950s, community institutions in the neighborhood had been educating residents about renewal and organizing residents to support it. A local interracial organization, Freedom House, had spearheaded the campaign, but the local churches and businesses had been enlisted to spread the word. The area’s primary civil rights group, the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), backed it, and other community organizations had met to discuss what it might mean for Roxbury. Just a few months after the publication of Jane

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<sup>99</sup> “Roxbury Folk Demand: Start Urban Renewal,” *Boston Globe* March 13, 1962. See also: “2000 Favor Extension of Roxbury Plan” *Boston Herald*, March 14, 1962, and Meeting Report Typescript, Boston City Council Meeting, March 13, 1962. Freedom House Records, Box 28, Folder 956.

Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, with the disaster of the West End still unfolding, just as protestors turned out in the streets to object to the BRA's renewal plans for the Allston neighborhood and the public debate on urban renewal was gaining traction in newspapers and magazines nationwide, urban renewal had found support in a most unlikely part of the city: the struggling black neighborhood of Roxbury.

Given the critique of urban renewal that was developing around 1960 and what we know today about renewal's devastating effects on communities of color, it is hard to understand the extent of the support that black community groups in Roxbury had for urban renewal in those years. Part of the reason for their support, of course, had to do with the promises made by the BRA's new development administrator, Ed Logue, and the BRA's shift from the kind of large-scale clearance projects exemplified by the West End to a new "planning with people" approach that included consultation with community groups, more limited clearance, and low-interest loans and technical assistance that would help residents rehabilitate existing housing in the neighborhood. The new BRA, Logue promised, would rehabilitate and renew rather than redevelop and destroy, positioning itself as an ally with helpful tools for neighborhoods struggling with aging housing stock and signs of blight.

And yet if initially residents and community organizations were attracted to the more concrete promises of the BRA's new "planning with people" approach, they also grasped the ways in which the transformation of the built environment might become part of a much broader transformation of black life in Boston. Especially in the early 1960s, as the black community confronted the core Northern civil rights issues of education, housing, and employment, community leaders began to dream of a racially integrated Boston where blacks might have the same opportunities as whites. As the Roxbury ghetto grew and the civil rights and black power

movements energized a formerly small and quiescent Northern black community, support for redevelopment and rehabilitation became inextricably linked to part of the much larger cultural project of racial integration that dominated black discourse and activism throughout the postwar years. At first, community leaders discussed the possibilities of government intervention in an exploitative private housing market that confined blacks to a ghetto and limited their housing choices. Then, as they became more involved in the planning process and as the civil rights movement picked up pace, they began to think through renewal's potential to address racial segregation and poor conditions in the schools; to modernize the neighborhood's housing stock and attract white residents; to provide jobs for black workers; and to construct physical spaces where racial integration might take place. For many, especially the older, more established, and more moderate liberals in the community, the fact that renewal also placed hardships on the community—especially on the poor, the transient, and the renters—was less important than the possibility it might help further integration and help the black community as a whole.

Younger, more radical blacks, on the other hand, were developing a view of racial justice that was much more sensitive to class issues and community control over decisions that affected daily life in Roxbury. As they became more organized in the mid 1960s, they were aggressive in their attempts to use renewal to bring jobs to Roxbury, and their criticisms of renewal coalesced around the issue of residential displacement. As this chapter argues, urban renewal began as one of a number of solutions to problems of racial discrimination and isolation, part of a larger project to open up opportunities for black people and integrate Roxbury into the larger, wealthier metropolitan area; only as new community groups emerged and new critiques of racial relations developed in the 1960s did support for renewal falter and goals shift. By the early 1970s, the integrationist project had run its course and community self-determination was ascendant; the

BRA had grown wary of its critics and slowed its efforts in the area, and even renewal's greatest supporters had stopped seeing the modernization of the built environment as a viable or meaningful strategy in the struggle for racial equality.

Both contemporary observers and historians writing about this urban renewal project tend to frame it in terms of class, emphasizing the divide between the established middle-class and blue-collar residents and activists who supported renewal and the very poor Southern migrants who were displaced by it as the primary dynamic of the project.<sup>100</sup> Without directly contradicting this view, I want to caution against reducing the story of renewal in Roxbury to a story of social conflict within the black community. Both proponents and critics of renewal saw themselves, first and foremost, as activists in the larger civil rights and black power movements, and their ideas and actions are diminished without the context of the ongoing debate about racial integration and community power. Could the black community accomplish more by acting in concert with white liberals or by drawing on its own resources? Integrationists saw the black community as metropolitan in scope and upwardly mobile. They assumed hardship and a certain amount of geographic displacement would be part of racial progress, and they placed a premium on modernity and equal access to middle-class resources and racially integrated physical spaces,

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<sup>100</sup> For the analysis of contemporaries, see Langley C. Keyes, *The Rehabilitation Planning Game: Studies in the Diversity of Neighborhood* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), and David R. Gergen, "Renewal in the Ghetto: A Study of Residential Rehabilitation in Boston's Washington Park," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* (1967), 243-310. For subsequent accounts of the project, see especially Richard Heath's unpublished "An Act of Faith: The Building of the Washington Park Urban Renewal Area, 1960-1967," paper written the Boston City Seminar, Urban Affairs and Planning Department, Boston University, 1990, available at the Boston Public Library. See also John H. Spiers, "Planning with People: Urban Renewal in Boston's Washington Park, 1950-1970," *Journal of Planning History* 8 (August 2009), 221-247. Thomas O'Connor's monograph on Boston's urban renewal program, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950-1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), discusses this project only briefly.

where contact between blacks and whites would reduce the prejudices of whites. Younger and more radical activists challenged this vision with their own, which focused on the strengths of the existing local community and emphasized collective justice rather than individual opportunity. In Roxbury this debate played out, contentiously, over renewal and rehabilitation plans in the Washington Park Urban Renewal Area, particularly over the construction of new housing and new schools and the issue of black involvement in jobs created by the urban renewal program. Unlike desegregation efforts in the schools, which maintained community support into the 1970s, however, renewal plans and activities increasingly came under attack by community activists and were ultimately abandoned by the city and community alike.

### *No Urban Villagers*

The Boston neighborhood of Roxbury is a few miles southwest of downtown, a streetcar suburb of two- and three-story wooden houses that was annexed to Boston shortly after the civil war. **[figure 3.1]** Lower Roxbury, closest to downtown, is flat and bustling; Middle and Upper Roxbury, the neighborhoods closer to Frederick Law Olmsted's outlying Franklin Park, are hilly and tree-lined, largely residential, tethered to downtown Boston first by the elevated railways and then by commercial corridors like Washington Street and Blue Hill Avenue. Once Yankee, then predominantly working-class and Irish, then predominantly Jewish with a small number of middle-class blacks, Roxbury was undergoing another dramatic demographic shift in the 1950s, becoming poorer, blacker, more isolated from the rest of the city, and more transient.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> On Roxbury's history, see Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2nd ed., 1978) and Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston since 1630* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).



Black Bostonians were profoundly unsettled by the change. With a long history of abolitionism, Boston enjoyed a reputation for liberalism. Bypassed by the Great Migration in favor of metropolitan centers like New York and Chicago, it had relatively few black residents, many of whom lived alongside whites in neighborhoods like the West End, the South End, and Middle and Upper Roxbury. As black migrants from the rural South began arriving in Roxbury in large numbers in the 1940s and 1950s, however, the neighborhood began to show signs of blight, abandonment, and increasing segregation. Young white Jewish and Catholic families began moving to the suburbs. The major Jewish institutions in the neighborhood moved out. City services deteriorated. In 1958 large parts of the neighborhood were redlined, meaning that homeowners and landlords were no longer eligible for loans, and fire insurance became exorbitantly expensive. Residents began to complain about abandoned buildings, overcrowded apartments, trash and autos and snow left on sidewalks and roadways, and aging buildings that absentee owners no longer repaired. Long-time residents like Melnea Cass, who had moved from the South End to Upper Roxbury in 1930, noticed increasing tension between black and white residents.<sup>102</sup>

Convinced that the stability of the neighborhood was threatened, Roxbury residents—mostly long-time African American homeowners—began to organize. The murder of a local rabbi in 1949 sparked the creation of Freedom House, an interracial community center intended

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<sup>102</sup> As late as 1940, Boston's black population numbered only 23,000, less than three percent of the total population, in contrast with New York's 110,000 or Chicago's 103,000. On the history of black Boston, see Robert Hayden, *African-Americans in Boston: More Than 350 Years* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1991). For Cass' recollections of the changing racial climate, see "An Interview with Melnea A. Cass" in Ruth Edmonds Hill, ed., *The Black Women Oral History Project*, vol. 2 (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), 311. Cass, an activist in Boston's black community since the 1920s, is an important observer race relations in the city. On Cass, see "Cass, Melnea Agnes Jones" in Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Higginbotham, eds., *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150-151.

to foster better race relations in the area. Headed by a husband and wife team of black social workers, Otto and Muriel Snowden, Freedom House also helped organize block groups in the neighborhood. Community groups like the Dale Area Improvement Association and the Warren Neighborhood Association sponsored clean-up campaigns, planted trees and flowers in the neighborhood, and protested the growing number of bars and package stores on Humboldt Avenue, one of Roxbury's main commercial streets.<sup>103</sup> [figures 3.2, 3.3] But as more newcomers crowded into Lower and Middle Roxbury, and housing conditions deteriorated further, it became clear that self-help programs could not address problems that stemmed from municipal neglect, such as substandard schools and the accumulation of waste and snow, or from institutional discrimination, such as the prohibitive rates for fire insurance that came with redlining. "We had, by this time, recognized that clean-up programs, property improvement projects, petitions for street paving, and the like had little success potential without being related some kind of over-all planning," Muriel Snowden later recalled.<sup>104</sup>

"Over-all planning" was what urban renewal seemed to promise. With its emphasis on rehabilitation as well as redevelopment and its requirement of a "workable program" that mandated the consideration of individual renewal projects in the context of an overall plan, the 1954 Act was meant to encourage longer-range planning and more systemic intervention in the urban housing market than the original, 1949 Act. When educational groups like the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods (ACTION) explained the legislation, they emphasized the need to break a long-term cycle of neglect rather than focusing on the acute problems of the

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<sup>103</sup> On the block groups, see Muriel Snowden, "Planning with People: Finding the Formula," typescript for Boston College Seminar, April 1963, p. 4. Vertical files, Loeb Library, Harvard University.

<sup>104</sup> Muriel Snowden, "Citizen Participation," *Journal of Housing* 8 (September 1963), p. 437.

“slums.” For Roxbury, a neighborhood in transition, urban renewal seemed to be a chance to redirect resources into their community and reverse its physical deterioration. Freedom House circulated pamphlets on renewal among its members and block leaders, and the Roxbury Community Council, an umbrella group for approximately three dozen Roxbury organizations including businesses, churches, and schools, was formed with the specific mandate to investigate the possibility of renewal.<sup>105</sup>

From the beginning, it was clear that any “over-all planning” would have implications for Boston’s black community. Pro-renewal literature like the pamphlets the Snowdens circulated tended to describe both the “blight” of poor housing conditions and the process of renewal itself as affecting whites and people of color in the same way. The black press, however, was well aware of the dual housing market operating in metropolitan areas and the ways in which urban intervention—particularly urban intervention that involved residential displacement—might adversely affect blacks. As early as 1948, the economist Robert C. Weaver had framed the redevelopment program then under consideration as both threat and promise. By the late 1950s, observers were increasingly pessimistic about its effects. Surveying projects under development in the late 1950s, Frank S. Horne, a housing administrator and Harlem Renaissance poet, wrote that “We are beginning to reap the whirlwind of the threat with little or nothing of the promise. The assembly and redevelopment of land has become the primary goal; what happens to ‘the

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<sup>105</sup> On the Snowden’s use of educational materials on urban renewal, see Memo to members of the board of directors from the Snowdens October 8, 1959. M16 Box 2 Folder 140. On the Roxbury Community Council, see William Loring, Frank Sweetser, and Charles Ernst, *Community Organization for Citizen Participation in Urban Renewal* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1958), 58.

people’—and especially the minorities—is an afterthought and, too often, an opportunity to reclaim desirable areas from them for developments which largely exclude them.”<sup>106</sup>

And yet, many believed that inaction was dangerous, as well. To someone like Muriel Snowden, whose education at the New York School of Social Work in the 1940s included the classic works of Chicago School sociology, the emergence of the black ghetto signaled an alarming breakdown in the city’s natural stages of growth. Chicago School sociologists like Robert Park and Ernest Burgess had theorized that newcomers to the city were absorbed and assimilated into urban life by relocating from overcrowded, low-status neighborhoods in the city center to progressively better housing in more high-status neighborhoods on the periphery. Yet discriminatory practices in the housing market that closed the suburbs to blacks trapped them in increasingly overcrowded, deteriorating urban neighborhoods. In Boston, the vast majority of Boston’s African Americans lived in a “black crescent” stretching from the South End, the oldest and most established of the black neighborhoods, through Roxbury into North Dorchester.

**[figure 3.4]** Whites were rapidly leaving; in 1950, Roxbury had been 30 percent black and 70 percent white, but by 1960 those percentages were reversed. Part of the Snowdens’ urgency in addressing housing conditions in Roxbury was their conviction that these neighborhoods faced continued deterioration and increasing isolation from the rest of Boston, with no respite in sight. One of the pamphlets they circulated among their block groups was an explanation of the effect of race restrictive covenants by the economist and future Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Robert Weaver. Entitled “Hemmed In,” it explained that:

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<sup>106</sup> Frank S. Horne, “Interracial Housing in the United States,” *The Phylon Quarterly* 19:1 (Spring 1958), 16. For Weaver’s comments, see *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1948).

Deterioration of physical facilities is the most obvious result of residential segregation. Physical deterioration is caused by economic and not racial factors. It occurs whenever and with whomever overcrowding is prevalent. But overcrowding, regardless of its cause, bring a decline in neighborhood standards. . . . As long as a group is relegated and confined to a physically undesirable area (as any overcrowded neighborhood inevitably becomes), its occupants are all lumped together in the mind of most people and then their perpetual and universal banishment to the ghetto is defended on the basis of the imputed 'racial' characteristics.<sup>107</sup>

Deteriorating conditions, in other words, were not just a nuisance for residents; they also helped stigmatize blacks and perpetuate a cycle of racial isolation, prejudice, and discrimination.

Thus black residents saw poor conditions as dangerous residents in a way they were not perceived in the white ethnic neighborhoods of Boston, and a sense of geographical constriction, of being trapped in a deteriorating neighborhood, was felt keenly throughout Roxbury, by long-time working-class residents as well as the home-owning middle class. Between the spring of 1958 and the spring of 1959, at the height of the suburban boom, Morton Rubin, a sociologist at Northeastern University, surveyed attitudes toward residential mobility among black and white residents in several Boston neighborhoods undergoing rapid demographic change from black to white. He found not only did white residents want to move—something which might be expected, given the loss of status that white residents experienced during racial transition—but 68 percent of black residents were unhappy in their present neighborhood. Among them, middle-class residents and young families favored a move to the suburbs, while working-class residents wished to move to other Boston neighborhoods. Only the poor, the most recent arrivals, the elderly, and long-time residents—those with the few resources—expressed preferences for no

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<sup>107</sup> Robert C. Weaver, *Hemmed In: The ABCs of Race Restrictive Covenants* (New York: American Council on Race Relations, 1945).

move or a move within their current neighborhood. In Boston, the stigma of the racially mixed neighborhood was felt by both black and white residents.<sup>108</sup>

Roxbury had been targeted for slum clearance efforts as early as 1949, but as the city struggled with the West End project throughout the mid and late 1950s, it had little interest in pushing forward with the project. Neither Freedom House nor the Roxbury Community Council, the two strongest local proponents of renewal efforts, managed to catch the city's attention until the election of Roxbury native Mayor John F. Collins in November 1959. During his first year in office, Collins announced an ambitious \$90 million city-wide urban renewal program, linking his own career to the progress of renewal in Boston, and hired New Haven's respected redevelopment administrator, Ed Logue. The Boston Redevelopment Authority granted the Snowdens and Melnea Cass of the NAACP a "long-sought" meeting in March 1960, and Logue and the Snowdens quickly formed an alliance as Washington Park became a high-priority project for the Authority.<sup>109</sup> Although previously the BRA had worked with both the Roxbury Community Council and Freedom House, the Snowdens argued that they were more effective organizers and better prepared to deal with the renewal bureaucracy than the large and unwieldy Council. In April 1961 the Snowdens signed a contract with the BRA to be the sole organization with responsibility for organizing the community to participate in urban renewal.

The planning process lasted throughout 1961 and 1962 and was, for the most part, amicable and productive. Under pressure to get a successful rehabilitation project underway after the failure of the West End, the BRA pushed the project forward with a concerted effort to

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<sup>108</sup> Morton Rubin, "The Negro Wish to Move," *The Journal of Social Issues* 15:4 (1959), 10-11.

<sup>109</sup> "Freedom House in Action: A Report to the Board of Directors for the period from March 8 to April 7, 1960 from Otto and Muriel Snowden." FH Records, M16 Box 2 Folder 141.

establish good working relations with the community. As Washington Park project planner Lloyd Sinclair commented, the lengthy West End project was a “sad, discouraging, bitter experience which the BRA doesn’t want to repeat here.”<sup>110</sup> First they assembled a small steering committee of approximately two dozen members—ministers from the local churches, principals, delegates from local organizations like the YMCA and eventually also from some of the neighborhood block organizations—to help establish community priorities for renewal. Then Freedom House organized a larger, broader-based organization comprised of project-area residents known as the Citizens Urban Renewal Action Committee, or CURAC, to provide feedback on the developing plan. **[figure 3.5]** Enthusiasm for renewal remained high; working meetings were frequent and well-attended, and the BRA’s major public hearings were typically attended by 1000 to 2000 residents whose support for the project was vocal and strong. The BRA wasn’t alone in its desire to see the project realized; the politicians and planners were joined by the more active community members, mostly long-term tenants and homeowners with their life savings tied up in a neighborhood where house values were sinking, who agreed that something must be done about the area quickly.

The differences between the city’s vision and the neighborhood’s, however, were significant. The BRA envisioned a renewed Roxbury first and foremost as a strengthened neighborhood. Their plans depicted the complete neighborhood unit, including all of the

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<sup>110</sup> Minutes of the Washington Park Steering Committee, August 7, 1961. FH Records, Box 30, Folder 1018. The impact of the BRA’s failure in the West End is clear in the materials it published on Washington Park. As it pledged on a brochure distributed to the community: “The whole heart and soul of the renewal process in Boston today is planning with people. It marks a shift away from the clearance project to the renewal rehabilitation aimed at preserving an entire neighborhood. The process is simple. It begins with an act of faith. The BRA staff and neighborhood groups make contact with one another. They get acquainted. They work together and develop confidence and respect. This joint effort—this confidence and respect—is the basis of success.” “Washington Park: A Bold New Program in Urban Renewal,” 1963, back cover.

elements of a self-contained community: new housing, new parks, new schools, a rehabilitation program for homeowners, a new shopping center, a courthouse, a library, and several new buildings for the neighborhood's institutions. It envisioned Roxbury, in the planners' words, as "a New England neighborhood in the middle of a great city."<sup>111</sup> The steering committee and CURAC members, on the other hand, brought a variety of concerns to the table, many of which challenged the very notion of a self-contained community and had little to do with physical planning. In early planning meetings, BRA planners distributed mimeographs of blank maps of the urban renewal area—maps with only streets and parks indicated—and asked members of the Steering Committee to show them where they would like new community facilities. **[figure 3.6]** They refused, explaining that physical planning was best left to the professionals. But they were outspoken in other matters: they wanted more police protection, better municipal services, additional schools and playgrounds, the elimination of store front churches and package stores, and increased open space.<sup>112</sup> They were concerned about the possibility of increased valuations and taxation after rehabilitation and wanted reduced fire insurance rates, low-interest loans, and low-cost rental housing constructed in other parts of the city. Homeowners were afraid they would not receive fair compensation for their homes during the acquisition process. A participant-observer at many of the community meetings during the planning process, the sociologist Rubin believed that "Renewal [was] supported as an act of desperation."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Text accompanying the presentation drawing "A Neighborhood Finds Itself." FH Records, Box 32 Folder 1097.

<sup>112</sup> See especially the Minutes of the Washington Park Steering Committee, August 7, 1961. FH Records, Box 30, Folder 1018, and Minutes of the Washington Park Steering Committee, July 24, 1961. FH Records, Box 30, Folder 1018.



Many of their requests to remove signs of blight and deterioration betray the bias of the so-called “respectable” middle- and working-class residents who were most deeply involved in the planning process; the areas of Roxbury where the new Southern migrants were settling were the areas that were most often targeted for demolition, as were signs of their presence in the neighborhood: the most dilapidated housing, the storefront churches, the package stores, and disreputable places of entertainment like the old Rivoli Theater. Over and over, however, they also expressed broader concerns about the effects of renewal on the racial geography of the city. When the BRA distributed physical planning standards to the Steering Committee in 1961, for example, members noticed immediately that the standards recommended the construction of one elementary school in a quiet, residential area and one junior high school on a major street. The group agreed that “a new school is not necessarily a good school unless there is an opportunity to gain knowledge with all groups of children” and an education subcommittee sprang up to protest the potential sites, which were located in the center of the renewal area and thus more likely to be racially segregated than sites at the project’s edge.<sup>114</sup> Cass’ NAACP continued to press for “over-all planning for city-wide housing production and rehousing...that will accommodate the development of economic and racial balance throughout the city.”<sup>115</sup> Many community members categorically refused to entertain the possibility of new public housing in the area, arguing against a concentration of the needy in black neighborhoods. The steering committee also

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<sup>113</sup> Rubin, “Resident Response to Urban Rehabilitation in a Negro Working-Class Neighborhood,” p. 253-254.

<sup>114</sup> See “Suggested Standards for the Development of a Neighborhood,” p. 2. FH Records Box 30, Folder 1018, and “Report of the Washington Park Steering Committee Meeting, May 23, 1961.” FH Records, Box 30, Folder 1018.

<sup>115</sup> The NAACP’s statement in support of renewal, delivered by NAACP branch president Kenneth Guscott, was published in *The Crisis* (April 1963), 232-234.

rejected a proposed home for unmarried women and children out of hand as a “symbol of inadequacy,” questioning the very assumption that these types of services were especially necessary in Roxbury. As Freedom House reported in 1962, as the plan moved from the steering committee to the broader-based CURAC, “There is....the constant question of the entire WPURA [Washington Park Urban Renewal Area] program in terms of the perpetuation of segregated housing pattern...” Participants at planning meetings repeated expressed concerns that “there will be no effort to help displaced Negroes to relocate outside the WPURA.”<sup>116</sup> Fear of isolation ran high. There were very few objections to the plan, even from residents living in buildings slated for demolition or major rehabilitation. Indeed, participants supported even greater demolition than the BRA planners felt was politically feasible in the wake of the failure of the West End, repeating their concerns that limited clearance ran the risk of creating a “gilded ghetto,” improving existing community conditions without altering larger patterns of residential segregation. Logue found their support of extensive clearance “irresponsible and foolish,” but ultimately, in its effort to “plan with people,” the BRA accepted many of the recommendations these committees and eliminated contentious items from the plan, including both public housing and the home for unmarried women.<sup>117</sup> In July 1961, the urban renewal area was expanded from a 186-acre project in the dilapidated Middle Roxbury to a 472-acre project that also included

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<sup>116</sup> “Quarterly Summary and Critical Evaluation,” July 5, 1962. FH Records, Box 32, Folder 1090.

<sup>117</sup> “Report of the Washington Park Steering Committee, November 20, 1961,” p. 1. FH Records Box 30, Folder 1018. Logue was quoted by Keyes, who discussed the debate over the total amount of clearance in *The Rehabilitation Planning Game*, pp. 417-420.

much of the better maintained Upper Roxbury in an effort both to expand the project's reach and keep the overall percentage of demolition politically palatable.<sup>118</sup> **[figure 3.7]**

By late 1962, the final plan was complete. **[figures 3.8, 3.9]** It prescribed 35 percent demolition in the area, a higher percentage than the BRA had initially proposed and a significantly higher percentage than was planned for the city's other two residential rehabilitation projects in Charlestown and the South End. Some 6,500 houses were to be rehabilitated. New development included 1,500 units of new moderate-income housing; three new elementary schools; a civic center including library, court house, and police station; two hundred units of public housing for elderly, the only public housing included in the project; and new community facilities and shopping, especially in Dudley Square and along Warren and Humboldt Streets. **[figure 3.10]** As at Dixwell, the urban renewal plan prescribed the consolidation of many small businesses into a limited number of local shopping centers and the radical reorientation of shopping, housing, and public facilities toward plazas, parking lots, and courtyards isolated from the street. Even the residential rehabilitation represented thorough-going change; illustrations of a "typical rehabilitated dwelling" showed a Boston triple-decker stripped of all architectural ornament, with modern, enlarged windows and an airy new staircase instead of the traditional front porches. **[figure 3.11]**

The support Roxbury residents showed for renewal, modernization, and change throughout the planning process contrasts strongly with the protests of the residents of the old West End, especially in light of the academic literature on the West End that began to appear in the early 1960s. The planner and sociologist Herbert Gans, who had lived in the West End just prior to demolition, argued in *The Urban Villagers* that the neighborhood had little of the social

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<sup>118</sup> Subsequent expansions brought the total acreage up to 502.

disorganization the planners attributed to it and instead housed a vibrant, functioning working-class community. In “Grieving for a Lost Home,” the psychiatrist Marc Fried demonstrated that residents had deep, meaningful ties to their neighborhood and that relocation could constitute a crisis so profound that residents might experience feelings of grief over the loss of home and neighborhood. The planner Chester Hartman followed up on the city’s promises to relocate West End families into decent, affordable housing and discovered that a significant number of displaced families and individuals fared poorly in the process. Reacting against the wholesale destruction of the West End, these researchers began to theorize about the importance of low-rent housing and stable, long-term community ties, even in neighborhoods that did not conform to middle-class norms. When the sociologist Morton Rubin returned to Roxbury as renewal began in the summer of 1963, however, his surveys revealed a two-to-one feeling of optimism about what renewal would bring to the neighborhood, accompanied by some reservations about the way relocation would be handled and about rising costs.<sup>119</sup> “Renewal is causing a small dispersal of owners, dislocated but compensated at fair appraisal prices,” Rubin wrote. “Such persons felt that renewal is an opportunity for them to leave an undesirable situation. There is no bereavement for a lost home. . . . stable blue-collar workers among these Negroes appreciate the need for adequate educational, recreational and safety facilities in a rehabilitated neighborhood. They are not urban villagers. Their eye is on a future with civil rights rather than on the past.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Morton Rubin, “Resident Response to Urban Rehabilitation in a Negro Working-Class Neighborhood,” p. 253.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

### ***Building the New World: Jobs, Education, Housing***

The processes of relocation, demolition, and construction in the Washington Park Urban Renewal Area began at a moment of transition in Boston's black community. Throughout the early 1960s, advocates of renewal had strategically used the planning process and the series of public hearings that accompanied it as an opportunity to organize the community around the idea of neighborhood renewal. Freedom House held information sessions, block leaders knocked on doors in the neighborhood, and pastors delivered sermons on the importance of renewal, all of them emphasizing new housing opportunities, better schools, improved city government services, and the potential for renewal to help dismantle the ghetto walls and improve living conditions for blacks in Roxbury and beyond. Those promises might have rung hollow, however, if these had not also been the years these were also years in which black activists in Boston—some of them the same people who had been involved in the planning process in Roxbury—began to mobilize around the civil rights issues of education, housing, and employment, taking inspiration from the burgeoning national civil rights movement. In 1962, a group of activists formed the Boston Action Group (BAG), headquartered at St Mark's Social Center in Roxbury, to apply pressure to companies that refused to hire black workers or hired only a few token workers in low-paying positions. Wonder Bread was targeted with the first boycott, and within a month more black workers were hired.<sup>121</sup> Shortly afterward, the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) targeted the First National Bank of Boston, which, after pickets appeared at their offices downtown and in Kenmore and Dudley Square, also hired more black workers. As various parts of the renewal plan moved into execution, local leaders began to apply

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<sup>121</sup> For an account of the Boston Action Groups campaign against Wonder Bread in the South End, Roxbury, and Dorchester neighborhoods, see Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 47-51.

pressure on the BRA to make similar changes. Rev. Breeden, also a member of the Citizens Committee for Equal Opportunity, met with Logue in December 1963 to negotiate “racially inclusive employment at all stages of the renewal process” and criteria for the selection of developers and tenants for the proposed shopping center.<sup>122</sup>

Even more than jobs, education was a powerful, galvanizing issue in Roxbury. In the early 1960s, Freedom House, which for several years had sponsored decorous coffee hours on topics of interest to women in the area, suddenly found its sessions on education and *de facto* segregation in the schools filled with opinionated and impassioned attendees. Its program gradually shifted focus from housekeeping and neighborhood issues to school desegregation and then to other civil rights issues. In 1961, the Snowdens invited local ministers Cornelius Hastie and James Breeden to speak about their participation in a Freedom Ride in the South. In 1962, Kenneth Clark spoke about the effect of school segregation in the North, and Boston University student Margaret Trotter Dammond recounted her experiences in a voter registration drive in Albany, Georgia, working with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). They were followed by Morris Milgram, a developer of interracial housing in 1964 and Bayard Rustin in 1965.

Speakers on schools were by far the most popular, and education remained at the heart of the civil rights debate in Boston. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Roxbury’s existing facilities were overcrowded and physically deteriorated. One, the dilapidated, ninety-year-old Howe School on Dale Street, had been declared hazardous to the health of its students. Textbooks were outdated and teachers transient and unable to control disruptive behavior in the classroom.

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<sup>122</sup> “Dear Friend” letter from Rev. James P. Breeden, December 18, 1963. FH Record, Box 9, Folder 337.

Student achievement lagged far behind other city schools. Parents found the city's attempts to reform Roxbury's schools with "compensatory programs" meant to enrich the curriculum of underprivileged students to be both inadequate and insulting. Complaining that the predominantly white teaching staff underestimated and failed to challenge black children, dozens of parents like the Snowdens, whose daughter was enrolled at the Ellis school, and Erna Ballentine Bryant, whose son was at the Garrison school, campaigned successfully to have racist or incompetent teachers dismissed.<sup>123</sup>

Increasingly, however, Roxbury parents saw the obviously unequal distribution of resources among the Boston city schools as their key issue, and the Boston School Committee, the administrative and political body in charge of the city schools, as their primary target. To these activists, it seemed obvious that *de facto* segregation was operating in Boston's school system and that the education their children was receiving was inferior to that offered to white children in the city. As Roxbury activist Ruth Batson recalled:

When we would go to white schools, we'd see these lovely classrooms, with a small number of children in each class... When we'd go to our schools, we would see overcrowded classrooms, children sitting out in the corridors, and so forth. And so then we decided that where there was a large number of white students, that's where the care went. That's where the books went. That's where the money went.<sup>124</sup>

Thus in 1963, members of Washington Park's education subcommittee, including Elizabeth Price, Barbara Elam, and Paul Parks, joined Ruth Batson, the head of the NAACP's education

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<sup>123</sup> On parent organizing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Polly Welts Kaufman, "Building a Constituency for School Desegregation: African-American Women in Boston, 1962-1972," pp. 621-623. On changing education policies and federal attempts to achieve equity, see Adam R. Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950-1985*.

<sup>124</sup> Ruth Batson is quoted in Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, eds., *Voices of Freedom*, pp. 588-589.

committee, in a campaign to desegregate the Boston public schools. In a public meeting in June, Batson challenged the Boston School Committee to recognize racial inequities in Boston schools, particularly the overcrowded and dilapidated schools in Roxbury, and called for an investigation. The School Committee's refusal to admit even the possibility of *de facto* segregation ran against both informal observation of the student population and the results of independent studies, which suggested extreme segregation in the city's schools caused not just by residential patterns but by institutional practices that placed blacks and whites in different schools.<sup>125</sup> The School Committee's refusal enraged activists, who organized series of increasingly popular marches and boycotts in order to draw attention to the issue. (As Batson later recalled, that was the year that "all hell broke loose in Boston."<sup>126</sup>) They demonstrated at School Committee meetings, organized a "March on Roxbury" modeled on the national March on Washington, and called for city-wide student "stay-outs" in June of 1963 and then again in February of 1964. On both occasions, as the School Committee reminded students that it was against the law to play truant, thousands of students opted instead to attend community-

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<sup>125</sup> In 1963, the *Boston Globe* published the results of a graduate student research project that had been conducted in Gordon Allport's Harvard graduate seminar on Group Conflict and Prejudice in 1960. The study found that all of the elementary schools in the Washington Park urban renewal area—Garrison, Howe, Higginson, Ellis, Boardman, Sherwin—and its Lewis Junior High were more than 90 percent Black, and several had no white students at all. "Negro Concentration in Boston Schools," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1963.

<sup>126</sup> See the Ruth M. Batson oral history interview, transcript dated December 24, 1979, for the John F. Kennedy Library. On community organizing around the issue of desegregation in the Boston Schools, see also Jeanne Theoharis, "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960-1976," *Radical History Review* 81 (2001), pp. 61-93, and "I'd Rather Go to School in the South: How Boston's School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm" in Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 125-151. See also King, *Chain of Change*, Chapters 3 and 4.



organized “Freedom Schools,” where volunteers taught African American history and non-violent resistance. Activists pushed on from the local level to the state, asking the legislature to address inequalities in the city’s schools. In 1964, the Kiernan Advisory Commission found that segregation did, in fact, exist in 78% of Boston’s schools, and the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act empowered the state board of education to deny funding to any school district that did not have a credible plan to “balance” its schools.<sup>127</sup> The Boston School Committee still refused to admit any pattern of racial segregation and didn’t seem likely to do so any time soon; in fact, Batson’s chief antagonist, School Committee member Louise Day Hicks was re-elected in November 1965. In the face of the School Committee’s intransigence, local leaders began the process of integration on their own. On the eve of the new school year in 1965, Ellen Jackson launched Operation Exodus, a voluntary, privately funded busing program that took advantage of a 1961 law that permitted parents to enroll their children in any school with empty seats throughout the city of Boston. In 1966, after a School Committee election that endorsed the status quo, a similar program, the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity or METCO, was organized to transport Roxbury children to schools in Boston’s suburbs. The number of students leaving Roxbury on weekday mornings swelled through the 1960s from approximately 200 with Operation Exodus’ first campaign in September 1965 to several thousand in the early 1970s.<sup>128</sup>

The ideal of an integrated society that drove this activism was not simple. Activists like Batson had had been deeply influenced by Supreme Court’s rejection of the separate-but-equal

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<sup>127</sup> At the time, a “balanced” school was interpreted to be a school that had no more than 50% students of color.

<sup>128</sup> On Operation Exodus and METCO, see Christine D. Tran, “The Case of Voluntary Busing in Boston,” and Efram Sigel and Gary F. Jonas, “Metropolitan Cooperation in Education.”

principle in *Brown v. Board of Education*; to them, it was essential that housing, schools, and public spaces be racially integrated, if they embraced the strategy for pragmatic reasons:

“...there were black people and a lot of our friends who said, ‘Ruth, why don’t we get them to fix up the schools and make them better in our district?’ And of course, that repelled us because we came through the separate but equal theory. This was not something that we believed in. Even now, when I talk to a lot of people, they say we were wrong in pushing for desegregation. But there was a very practical reason to do it in those days. We knew that there was more money being spent in certain schools, white schools—not all of them, but in certain white schools—than there was being spent in black schools. So therefore, our theory was move our kids into those schools where they’re putting all of the resources so that they can get a better education.”<sup>129</sup>

Others, like the Snowdens, had been influenced by the work of psychologist Kenneth Clark, who demonstrated the impact of segregation on black children’s self-image, and by postwar research into the nature of racial prejudice, including social psychologist Gordon Allport’s “contact hypothesis” that interracial cooperation between social equals working toward a common goal was a powerful way of reducing prejudice. Indeed, much of their work at Freedom House, from their advocacy of urban renewal to their youth programming, involved bringing blacks and whites together in common cause. In 1963, Freedom House helped organize “home-visits” of whites to black households as part of a national campaign to foster better interracial understanding. With the home visits, “Negroes and whites have the opportunity to sit down together in each other’s homes on what Dr. Gordon Allport calls an ‘equal status contact’ basis to talk frankly and informally,” Muriel Snowden wrote, describing the event. In 1964, Freedom House launched the Work and Study program, which brought black and white high school and college students to Roxbury to help paint the exteriors of houses whose owners were too old or

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<sup>129</sup> Batson is quoted in Polly Welts Kaufman, “Building a Constituency for School Desegregation: African-American Women in Boston, 1962-1972.” *Teachers College Record* 92:4 (Summer 1991), pp. 619-631. On Batson, see Robert W. Peebles, *School Desegregation: A Shattered Dream?* (New York: Vantage Press, 2007), 56-58.

infirm to do the work themselves. It was a way of engaging young people in a shared project of neighborhood improvement that also indirectly drew on Allport's contact hypothesis.<sup>130</sup> Even when it was not prompted by a common task, interracial exchange remained a hallmark of their leadership into the mid 1960s.

In a very direct sense, the events of the mid-1960s shaped the direction of the Washington Park urban renewal project, as happened when the Racial Imbalance Act halted progress on the first of the neighborhood's new elementary schools on Humboldt Avenue. This vision of a new, integrated world—summed up by the March on Washington's slogan, "To build an integrated society"—and the social activism of the mid 1960s also affected renewal in Roxbury in less direct and more unexpected ways. In 1962, a team of Brandeis University researchers headed by Louis Watts had interviewed middle-class blacks in Roxbury about their plans to move out of the neighborhood. Initially, they assumed that most would want to leave Roxbury for the suburbs. "Integration is in the air, and the longed-for appears at last to have become the possible," they wrote. "To our minds, everything pointed to an exodus from the ghetto into the till-now white parts of Boston."<sup>131</sup> And yet they found that fewer than half of the 250 families they interviewed had entertained the thought of moving. Ten months later, only 33

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<sup>130</sup> For a description of the home-visits, see *Interracial Home Visits*, Freedom House 'Home Visit Program' December 10, 1963, FH Records, Box 26 Folder 825. On the Work and Study program, see "The Boston Work-Study Program," BRA Collection, Boston Public Library. The Work and Study project was launched in 1964 with 28 high school and college students, both black and white, who helped paint the exterior of fifteen houses in a three-block area; in 1965, one hundred high school and college students participated in the painting of forty houses as well as running a tutoring program and participating in a local recreational program. The program was popular, running into the late 1960s.

<sup>131</sup> Louis G. Watts et al, *The Middle-Income Negro Family Faces Urban Renewal* (Boston, MA: Research Center for the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Brandeis University, 1964), 8.

families had moved, only nine of whom had moved out of the Roxbury or North Dorchester ghetto to less segregated neighborhoods. Surprised by these results, they visited the families again six months after that, but the results were the same. The frustrated geographic mobility that Morton Rubin had sensed in the late 1950s had been replaced by optimism about the future of Roxbury. By large margins, these families believed that urban renewal would improve housing conditions in the area and make it easier to borrow for rehabilitation and repairs. They also thought that urban renewal would promote racial integration in housing and schools, as well as recreational facilities. At least among the middle class, fears of racial containment had been allayed by hopes for a more racially balanced neighborhood where they lived.<sup>132</sup> As the Rev. George Thomas, the 31-year-old pastor at St. Mark's Congregational Church said, "There's a great physical need here—employment, housing, job opportunities, schooling, security, and it calls for social action."<sup>133</sup> "This is the place to be," Cornelius Hastie, the 32-year-old vicar of St. James' Church, told *Time* magazine in the spring of 1963. "If we can't administer to the needs of the impoverished people in the Inner City, then we have nothing to say to anybody."<sup>134</sup>

Concerns about relocation persisted into the early 1960s, since demolition of dilapidated housing and rehabilitation of overcrowded and aging units would displace several hundred families. If residents hadn't been able to find decent housing before renewal, how could the BRA expect to rehouse displaced families after renewal tightened the housing supply? New public housing was a potential relocation resource—many displaced families qualified—but neither the

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas was quoted in Stanley Eames, "Roxbury Unselfishness to Realizing Shining Dream," *Boston Sunday Herald* (December 16, 1962).

<sup>134</sup> Hastie was quoted in "On the Battle Line," *Time* 81.14 (April 5, 1963): 56.

BRA nor the Roxbury community members involved in the planning process favored additional public housing. Instead, the BRA endorsed the construction of moderate-income housing constructed under Part 221(d)(3) of the 1961 Housing Act, just as the NHRA had in New Haven. The 221(d)(3) approach had a number of advantages: it was neither public housing, which often faced public opposition, nor market-rate housing, which would be out of reach for the vast majority of displaced families and, like the West End's luxury high-rises, symbolize the displacement of poor and working-class families from the neighborhood. Instead, 221(d)(3) was aimed at "moderate income" working class and lower middle class families, including families of three or four with annual incomes up to approximately \$7,700. The "moderate-income" category was conceived as a way of addressing the housing needs of families who earned too much to qualify for public housing but who were not able to afford market-rate housing, although in Roxbury's black community, which earned less than the national average, it included much of the middle class. Moreover, experts agreed that new housing, and particularly the moderate-income housing created under 221(d)(3), stood the greatest chance of establishing a new, integrated pattern of living.<sup>135</sup>

Two strategies for constructing moderate income housing emerged in the Washington Park urban renewal area in the early 1960s, one defined by technology and quick, efficient construction, the other defined by community participation. Logue, sensitive to complaints about displacement, had already identified the construction of new housing in the area as a high

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<sup>135</sup> On the importance of 221(d)(3) to the interracial housing movement, see George Schermer and Arthur J. Levin, *Housing Guide to Equal Opportunity: Affirmative Practices for Integrated Housing* (Washington, DC: Potomac Institute, June 1968), especially the comments on page 65: "Partially subsidized moderate-income housing seems to offer the best prospects for integration. It is at this economic level that the greatest overlapping of the white and nonwhite market occurs."

priority and shortly after his arrival in Boston had engaged the architect Carl Koch to develop a prototype for industrialized multifamily housing. The departure of a local private school to the suburbs gave the BRA the opportunity to acquire the 15-acre site along Washington Street and push forward with “relocation housing”—that is, new, moderate-income housing where displaced families would have first priority—on the former school grounds, creating new housing at the southeastern edge of the urban renewal area without any residential displacement.<sup>136</sup> Koch, a 1937 graduate of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and a leading advocate of prefabricated housing, recalled Logue and the BRA placing enormous pressure on him to get the housing completed quickly: “We were told these people have been given promises for 100 years, and that we should get the job done overnight if possible,” he said.<sup>137</sup> He worked through multiple options for the site, including a mixture of high-rise and low-rise housing units grouped around courtyards similar to that favored by Jose Luis Sert at Harvard’s Married Student Housing in Cambridge during the same years, as well as a scheme that retained the original academic building. Ultimately, however, he decided upon a more loosely grouped, low-rise high-density scheme on a different part of the site. **[figures 3.12, 3.13]** The 202-unit Academy Homes opened in 1964, an excellent example of systems built housing, constructed with standardized and interchangeable components, including precast wall panels and long-span, pre-stressed floor planks; in fact, the complex’s “Techcrete” building system was awarded a Progressive Architecture citation in 1965. **[figures 3.14, 3.15]** Advertised as offering “Garden Living in the Heart of the City,” the four-story apartment complex climbed the hilly site with eleven different

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<sup>136</sup> For the reference to relocation housing, see “1000 Housing Units in 3 Areas Proposed by Logue in Roxbury,” *Boston Globe* October 25, 1962.

<sup>137</sup> Koch quoted in John Zeisel, “It Take More Than Technology,” p. 110.

apartment plans and modern amenities like sliding glass doors and ample parking.<sup>138</sup> The public spaces of the site were green and leafy—mature trees had been preserved—and the units were grouped around courtyards, several of which had play equipment for families with children.

**[figure 3.16]** Housing and Home Finance Administrator Robert Weaver was present at the groundbreaking in May 1963, where a street was named in his honor. In his address, Weaver called Roxbury a place where you could find a “decent home” regardless of race and described urban renewal as a symbol of racial progress.<sup>139</sup>

The second strategy involved engaging local organizations directly in the construction process by involving them as housing sponsors. Two of the neighborhood’s largest black churches, St. Mark’s Congregational Church and the Charles Street A.M.E., both staunch advocates for renewal during the planning process, each sponsored a housing development: St. Mark’s Marksdale Gardens Homes, with 82 units, and Charles Street A.M.E.’s Charlame Park Homes, with 92. Both were designed in 1963 and completed and occupied in 1964. In a nod to the neighborhood’s tradition of one-, two-, and three-family houses and black homeownership,

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<sup>138</sup> “Academy Homes: Garden Living in the Heart of the City,” brochure in the BRA collection, Boston Public Library. On Academy Homes, which was sponsored by Building Services Employees Union, Local 254, and developed by the Development Corporation of America, see also: “Boston Union Sponsors Housing,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 1963; Anthony J. Yudis, “Setbacks Plaguing Roxbury Renewal Project,” *Boston Globe*, September 29, 1963; Abraham Oseroff, “Labor Union Housing Project to Wipe Out Slum Area,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 15, 1963; Yudis, “Academy Homes Fought Many Obstacles,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1965; John Allen Long, “Experiment in Modest Apartment Rentals,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 14, 1965; Joseph Eldridge, “Low-Cost Roxbury Romance,” *Boston Globe*, December 26, 1965; John Zeisel, “It Takes More Than Technology;” Samuel Paul, *Apartments*, pp. 148-149.

This project represented Koch’s second foray into 221(d)(3) housing; he had previously designed Liberty Square in New Haven, CT, one of the first 221(d)(3) projects completed in the US.

<sup>139</sup> Muriel Snowden, “Planning with People,” 439.

the churches sponsored row housing, rather than apartments. Charlame Homes, designed by the Boston firm Bedar and Alpers, consisted of a series of two-story, flat-roofed, brick-faced blocks arranged in parallel rows in a manner reminiscent of public housing projects from the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>140</sup> [figures 3.17, 3.18, 3.19] Marksdale Gardens, designed by the black-owned and operated Associated Architect and Engineer, consisted of a series of staggered, two-story row houses arranged around a series of open spaces, including a parking lot and three small courtyards.<sup>141</sup> [figure 3.20, 3.21, 3.22]

In a neighborhood that had not seen any new housing construction in more than three decades, Marksdale struck a particularly effective compromise between new and old. [figure 3.23] With its pitched roofs, cedar shingle siding, and use of brick facing, it spoke the architectural language of the neighborhood while remaining obviously modern in site planning, particularly in its orientation away from the street, and in details like its cantilevered overhangs and its horizontally oriented windows. In comparison with the larger scale of earlier public

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<sup>140</sup> On Charlame, see Anthony J. Yudis, “Non-Profit Roxbury Apartment House Under Way,” *Boston Globe*, May 10, 1964; Fran P. Hosken, “The New Boston: Charlame Homes,” *Boston Globe*, September 13, 1964. Charlame was developed by Harold Michelson and Sumner Marcus.

<sup>141</sup> On Marksdale, see “First of Washington Park Apartments Completed,” *Boston Globe*, August 2, 1964; Franziska P. Hosken, “Low-cost Renewal Housing,” *Boston Globe*, July 5, 1964.

Associated Architect and Engineer’s principals were Paul Parks and Henry Boles, both activists in the community. Boles studied architecture as an undergraduate at IIT in the early 1940s; worked for Hilyard Robinson in 1945 and the National Capital Housing Authority in Washington, DC, from 1946 to 1947; and received a master’s degree from Harvard in 1949. Parks studied engineering at Purdue University and formed Associated Architect and Engineer with Henry Boles in 1957. Parks later became Boston’s Model Cities Administrator, the president of the Boston School Committee, and Massachusetts’ Secretary of Education under Governor Michael Dukakis. On Boles, see Dreck Spurlock Wilson, *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 61-63, and “Henry C. Boles, 68, Dies; Dennis Official, Architect,” *Boston Evening Globe*, January 31, 1979, p. 13. On Parks, see “Paul Parks, Respected Community Leader, Laid to Rest” *Boston Globe*, August 7, 2009, and Howard Manly, “Parks, Engineer of Hub School Equity, Dies at 86,” *Bay State Banner*, August 6, 2009.



housing projects and high-rise housing constructed in redevelopment areas like the West End, Marksdale fit in. “Rather than dominating the area,” as one critic wrote, Marksdale “is a small group which easily integrates into the neighborhood.” Like the surrounding houses, all units had their own entrances and fenced-in gardens, but they also had modern features like glass doors, electric kitchens, and open planning. The *Boston Globe* called it a “successful” example of subsidized housing, pointedly comparing a photograph of Marksdale with a photograph of Columbia Point, a high-rise public housing project built in South Boston in the mid 1950s. **[figure 3.24]** The *Globe* architectural critic Franziska P. Hosken found it “pleasant” and “attractive;” the *New York Times* critic Ada Louise Huxtable was even more effusive, calling it “reminiscent of Tapiola [the internationally renowned postwar garden city] in Finland” and remarking that the project “could set architectural standards for this country.”<sup>142</sup>

But some of the most important characteristics of these new housing developments were social rather than physical. All three developments would be open to residents of all races; Executive Order 11063, issued in November 1962, had banned racial discrimination in new, federally supported housing. But even more than nominal integration, Roxbury residents hoped for new spaces where blacks and whites would live as equals. Their vision is evident throughout the promotional material for the new housing developments: presentation drawings such as those done for Marksdale Gardens by Associated Architect and Engineer—itsself a black-owned firm—depicted black and white children playing together **[figure 3.25]**, while early photographs, such as the photo of Charlame that appeared in an *Ebony* article on 221(d)(3) housing, showed interracial families enjoying the modern spaces of the new housing projects. **[figure 3.26]**

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<sup>142</sup> Christopher Lydon, “Housing Without Projects,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1965; Hosken, “Low-cost Renewal Housing;” Ada Louise Huxtable, “Renewal in Boston: Good and Bad,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1964.

It was not clear, when these housing developments opened, whether young white families would want to live in a neighborhood that seemed to be increasingly poor and increasingly black. “Unless we have some white families living here, with their children going to school with our children we will never achieve integrated schools and so will defeat our purpose,” St. Mark’s Reverend George Thomas, one of the driving forces behind the church’s sponsorship of Marksdale Gardens, had declared during the planning process.<sup>143</sup> By April 1964, Marksdale had accepted five white families and had several more applications pending; by 1966, the white population seems to have reached an average of approximately one family in eight across the new subsidized developments.<sup>144</sup> Roxbury residents began to speak of “reverse integration,” the movement of white families into a black neighborhood with housing and amenities so modern and desirable that they could attract white residents with wider housing choices than blacks. In a report on the area written in 1966, the BRA predicted that “the old lines of segregated neighborhood patterns [would] crumble as relocation and new construction provide greater and freer housing choices.”<sup>145</sup> St. Mark’s Reverend Thomas had expressed similar sentiments in a sermon on the Sunday of the March on Washington in August 1963: “A whole new world is being built around us. The realization that things are in a flux has always been in the minds of

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<sup>143</sup> George M. Collins, “Roxbury Negroes Accept White Families in New Housing,” *Boston Globe*, April 15, 1964.

<sup>144</sup> BRA, “Racial Integration in 221(d)(3) Housing Developments: Washington Park Urban Renewal Area, Boston, Mass.,” (Boston, MA: The Agency, 1966), p. 6. BRA Collection, Boston Public Library.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

men. But what is novel right now is that the whole of human consciousness and the very physical shape of the world [are] being altered all over the world to be free.”<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, the physical shape of Roxbury was transformed in the mid 1960s, as the first elements of the Washington Park plan were implemented. Both Charles Street A.M.E. and St. Mark’s sponsored extensions adjacent to their original developments which opened in 1965, transforming the formerly mixed commercial corridor along Humboldt Avenue into a quiet residential area. Academy Homes II was constructed along Washington Street. At the eastern edge of the urban renewal area, where the most extensive demolition was taking place, a massive, concrete YMCA designed by The Architects Collaborative opened in March 1965. (*Architectural Record* described it as a “catalyst” for change in the neighborhood, and a “bold” and “strong” presence “in the kind of place where impermanence is common.”<sup>147</sup>) [figure 3.27] Playgrounds opened up along St. James Street and Walnut Avenue. [figures 3.28, 3.29] Carl Koch was hired by the Development Corporation of American, the contractor and developer for Marksdale Gardens and Academy Homes, to construct another Techcrete housing project, the 70-unit Westminster Terrace, along Walnut Avenue on a former estate.<sup>148</sup> [figure 3.30] A seven-acre, enclosed shopping mall near Marksdale and Charlamé, the Washington Park Shopping Mall, opened in September 1966. [figure 3.31] “A few years ago all there was here was a warehouse and old wooden houses that were all falling down and a vacant lot they made a

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<sup>146</sup> Thomas is quoted in “Sermons Praise March,” *Boston Globe*, September 2, 1963.

<sup>147</sup> “Bold Start for a Renewal,” p. 160.

<sup>148</sup> Westminster Court was the first limited-dividend (as opposed to non-profit) project in the urban renewal area and DCA’s first venture as both owner and developer. As Heath, “Act of Faith,” p. 76, points out, it was located on previously undeveloped land that had not been designated for housing in the original plan. On Westminster Court, see Anthony J. Yudis, “Washington Park Project Spurs Private Construction,” *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1966.

dump,” one resident commented during the ribbon-cutting ceremony. “Seeing it like this now...makes you feel new.”<sup>149</sup>

### *A Matter of Voice*

Toward the end of 1965, Paul Parks, the engineering half of Associated Architect and Engineer, took a journalist on a tour of Roxbury. They drove through leafy suburban streets near Franklin Park, past crumbling apartments in Lower Roxbury and North Dorchester, and, finally, past the new housing in Middle Roxbury. Narrating the story of the neighborhood, Parks tried to explain the distress they saw in its most deteriorated parts. “Negroes are criticized for running property down, but the truth is, by the time we’re allowed to move in...the landlord cancels the janitorial service. The streets aren’t cleaned. The apartments are no longer repaired,” he said. “People here have never been exposed to other ways of life, to other habits...The image of the Negro has been one of poverty and despondency. There has been no positive identity.” Later, when they see bright curtains, chrysanthemums, and newly seeded lawns in the new housing projects at the center of the urban renewal area, he speculated on the divide between the urban renewal area and the streets around it. “Urban renewal has made us into a community,” he said. “We’ve had meetings, we know one another, we plan, we’re working for a better life. Sometimes I think Roxbury is going to be a jewel in a sea of nothingness, and the people around us, the poorer Negroes and whites, are going to explode on us.”<sup>150</sup>

That tension, between those who benefitted from renewal and those who did not, had never been far beneath the surface in Roxbury, but renewal in Roxbury had begun at a moment

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<sup>149</sup> “Negroes Proud of New Store Center,” *Boston Globe*, September 30, 1966. On the shopping mall, see also:

<sup>150</sup> Jane Harriman, “Roxbury in the Rain,” *Boston Globe*, December 26, 1965.

of optimism and was sustained initially by strong community support. By the mid 1960s, the black community was beginning to question the good faith of white liberals like Logue and the leadership of moderate, pro-integration middle-class blacks like the Snowdens, who were having had a hard time retaining the right to speak for an increasingly low-income and politically radicalized neighborhood. The turning point came with a public debate on relocation and public housing.

Already in 1964, it seemed as if relocation process then underway was not proceeding as smoothly as the BRA claimed. Improbably, the BRA asserted that it had found affordable, decent housing for some 97 percent of Washington Park relocates. In 1965, however, the League of Women Voters issued a report that was highly critical of both the BRA's relocation practices and its relocation statistics.<sup>151</sup> Rumors circulated that a follow-up survey of relocated families conducted by the BRA itself had revealed many families in substandard housing but had been suppressed. Civil rights groups like CORE and the New Urban League began attending meetings sponsored by Freedom House and the BRA, arguing that the BRA was having difficulty relocating low-income families from the neighborhood and often failed to find them standard housing.<sup>152</sup>

Then in 1965, the issue of public housing arose again. Residents on both the steering committee and CURAC had rejected the possibility of new public housing in the Washington Park urban renewal area several times during the planning process. At a community meeting at Freedom House in October 1965, BRA staff broached the topic again, and in April 1966, they proposed a thirty-unit, low-rise project for large families—one of the types of families the BRA

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<sup>151</sup> "Hub Faces Crises in Low-Income Housing," *Boston Traveler*, May 27, 1965.

<sup>152</sup> "Washington Park Hears How," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 20, 1965.

had the most difficulty relocating—and put the project up for a vote. In a tense meeting, the project was rejected, 45 to 29, although purportedly 200 people were present.

The vote against a small housing project looked profoundly unsympathetic toward displaced families seeking low-cost housing in the neighborhood. “Are the relative few people who met at Freedom House the true spokesmen for the thousands of people in Roxbury? Who really speaks for the colored masses?” Harold Vaughan wrote in the *Bay State Banner* in June 1966, objecting to the decision.<sup>153</sup> During community meetings during 1965 and 1966, the consensus supporting the BRA’s plans for the neighborhood began to erode. The first organized opposition to the renewal project came in 1966, when a group of displaced tenants threatened with a second relocation began to protest the social costs of the plan.<sup>154</sup> The Boston Housing Authority hadn’t constructed a single family-sized unit in twelve years, the Massachusetts Committee on Discrimination in Housing wrote. “The Redevelopment Authority administers a program that by itself does now have sufficient tools to produce low-rent housing. Yet it has been willing to acknowledge this and it has not brought the varied tools of the public housing program—the only program that can meet these families’ needs—into renewal areas as a prerequisite to displacing thousands of families.”<sup>155</sup>

Concerns for the fate of displaced families reflected not only a growing awareness of the failings of the BRA but also a new and more radical perspective on issues of racial justice. Many of the early supporters of urban renewal were racial liberals who were concerned with issues of

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<sup>153</sup> Harold Vaughan, “Open Letter,” *Bay State Banner*, June 4, 1966.

<sup>154</sup> “Roxbury Leaders Blast Renewal Plan,” *Bay State Banner*, May 28, 1966.

<sup>155</sup> Letter to the Editor from Julius Bernstein and Chester Hartman, Co-Chairmen, Massachusetts Committee on Discrimination in Housing, *Boston Globe*, June 1, 1966

individual prejudice and individual opportunity made possible through desegregation. By contrast, the emerging generation of community leaders were increasingly concerned with issues of class and what Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, the authors of the 1966 tract *Black Power*, termed “institutional racism.”<sup>156</sup> “To the Freedom House crowd, the project became one of making Washington Park safe for the middle class,” commented Reverend Ed Blackman of Roxbury’s Eliot Congregational Church in 1966. “They organized the community...against itself.”<sup>157</sup> Such a direct challenge to renewal heralded significant changes to come.

Indeed, the final years of the Washington Park urban renewal project were marked by a retreat from the integrationist project and repeated attempts to bring the power and resources that accompanied renewal—federal grants, construction contracts, and jobs—back to Roxbury itself. As the nation backed away from integration, black employment and workforce development, a perennial but secondary issue in the earlier negotiation of renewal, now came to the fore. Just outside the boundaries of the urban renewal area, Unity Bank, a converted auto dealership, was the first biracial bank in New England. Conceived by a Harvard MBA who had written his thesis on black banking, it was formed with the express purpose of loaning to local, black-owned businesses and called itself “the bank with a purpose.”<sup>158</sup> Unlike the YMCA across the street,

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<sup>156</sup> For Carmichael and Hamilton’s early definition of “institutional racism,” see *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 1-4. On the ideological differences between the liberal Cold War civil rights activists and the radical generation emerging in the 1960s, see Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Neva Rockefeller, “The BRA’s Washington Park: Safe for the Middle Class,” *Connection* (Spring 1966), 39. The interview with Rev. Blackman was conducted in January 1966.

<sup>158</sup> With overly liberal lending policies, the bank ran into financial difficulties and lasted only four years. On the founders and early years of Unity Bank and Trust, see “Making It,” *Black Enterprise* (October 1970), p. 14; Mona Sarfaty, “Soul Business,” *Harvard Crimson*, October 28,

Unity Bank was represented a practical, minimal intervention into the existing urban fabric. Black architect Don Stull was hired to design a new exterior brick wall and freshen the interior with a new carpet, a new coat of paint, and a mural. [figures 3.32, 3.33]

The failures of the West End project still fresh in their minds, the BRA moved quickly to establish an image of technocratic efficacy and continued responsiveness to the community. They marshaled Washington Park's first residential rehabilitation loan through the approvals process. Previously redlined, the Washington Park urban renewal area was now eligible for loans made through the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group (BBURG), a coalition of Boston-area saving banks that had been formed by earlier in an attempt to make financing available in renewal areas like Roxbury. The first loan recipient, black attorney John Bynoe, had already unsuccessfully attempted to get a loan to rehabilitate his ten-room house near Harris Park when the BRA intervened. In a ceremony attended by the chairman of the BRA, and the president of the bank that had made the loan, the BRA promised that Bynoe was only the first of many recipients; some \$20 million in financing was now available through the 22 Boston-area banks that were part of BBURG. Furthermore, the BRA announced, it had hired project staff to help process loan applications and was prepared to provide technical assistance to homeowners who were now able to obtain the loans that would enable them to move forward with rehabilitation.<sup>159</sup>

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1968; and "Banking: Assets for the Ghetto," *Time*, February 28, 1969. On the bank's troubles and eventual bailout by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), see Irvin H. Sprague, *Bailout: An Insider's Account of Bank Failures and Rescues*, chapter 3.

<sup>159</sup> On the formation of BBURG, see Lawrence J. Vale, *Reclaiming Public Housing*, pp. 198-199.



By mid 1964, however, the BRA was processing only six applications per month, not the fifty it had expected.<sup>160</sup> Despite their promises, the banks were reluctant to make loans in the neighborhood, and a number of owners sold their properties, either on the private market or By mid 1965, approximately fifty buildings scheduled for rehabilitation had been abandoned, vandalized, or burned and acquired by the BRA for demolition, and the agency estimated that another 100 buildings would be need to be acquired and demolished in the near future.

By the late 1960s, the Washington Park residential rehabilitation program had some 4600 properties in its caseload and was one of the largest in the nation. Although almost \$1.7 million in private financing had been invested by owners bringing their properties up to code, rehabilitation was neither progressing as quickly as expected nor providing the kind of low-cost housing that the BRA felt the area needed. In a concerted attempt to make the program more efficient and less expensive, with the same technocratic approach that informed Academy Homes, the BRA launched the unfortunately named Boston Urban Rehabilitation Project (BURP) to coordinate the work of several large-scale, white contractors in the area. The move sparked anger in the community. When Robert Weaver, now head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, returned to Freedom House in December 1967 to speak on the project, he was met with a mix of applause and boos from the audience. Bryant Rollins, a journalist and a member of the New Urban League, charged that the renewal project “gave no consideration to local developers, non-profit developers, or local management” and demanded that one thousand of the units requiring rehabilitation be turned over to local black contractors.<sup>161</sup> “A program

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<sup>160</sup> “1/2 Million Private Investment in Washington Park,” *Boston-Roxbury City News*. June 11, 1964.

<sup>161</sup> “Rollins Attacks FHA While Weaver Turns Back,” *Bay State Banner*, December 7, 1967.

ostensibly designed to ‘help’ us operates in such a way as to continue to deprive us and keep us powerless and therefore ‘in our place.’”<sup>162</sup> Construction projects receiving federal funding had long operated with a small number of black workers to qualify them as integrated, but unions had treated them harshly, issuing them only temporary permits and dismissing midway through a job. Now, under the guidance of Leo Fletcher, local workers began to demand full control over the jobs that renewal and rehabilitation created.<sup>163</sup> An all-black construction union, United Community Construction Workers, was formed to deal with the BRA and the city, organize training for black construction workers, and take their grievances directly to the construction sites with pickets. Boston’s first black city councilman, Tom Atkins, weighed in on the issue in 1968: “If we must sacrifice some degree of efficiency for other value, then we must do it. It is a matter of voice, of dignity, of the acquisition of usable skills.”<sup>164</sup>

As the construction of new moderate-income housing and other shopping centers and community institutions progressed in the mid and late 1960s, it became increasingly clear that the “reverse integration” of whites into Roxbury was not a viable large-scale proposition. The number of whites and interracial families at the early moderate-income housing projects stagnated in the mid-1960s at roughly fifteen percent, and new moderate-income apartments at

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<sup>162</sup> Mel King writing to HUD Secretary Robert Weaver on the announcement of BURP, cited in Urban Planning Aid, Inc., “An Evaluation of the Boston Rehabilitation Program” in Jon Pynoos, Robert Shafer, and Chester W. Hartman, eds., *Housing Urban America* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1973), 485.

<sup>163</sup> On the key role that renewal projects played for black construction workers as a point of entry into the workforce, see David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, “Constructing Black Power,” *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry*, David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2010), 8-10.

<sup>164</sup> Atkins is quoted in William E. Stevens, “Negro Drive Bars Housing Advance,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1968.

Warren Gardens and resident-owned subsidized townhouses at St. Joseph's Coops had only modest levels of integration.<sup>165</sup> [figures 3.34, 3.35] The interracial vision that was still promoted in images of the housing complex had never come to pass. [figure 3.36] The often-promised stimulus to new private housing construction never materialized, either; some 1576 subsidized moderate-income units were constructed in Washington Park between 1960 and 1972, but only 32 units of private, unsubsidized housing were.<sup>166</sup> Among these private projects was the black-controlled Hinton Terrace, where Associated Architect and Engineer paired with a group of black businessmen to construct a group of fifteen town houses intended to nurture homeownership in the area. [figure 3.37]

The one important remnant of the integrationist project was in the realm of education, where private, voluntary busing programs continued to be popular with Roxbury parents and where the issue of new school construction emerged again. Initially three new elementary schools had been planned for the neighborhood, but in 1965 Massachusetts' Racial Imbalance Law had halted all new school construction projects until cities could prove that the student populations at the new schools would be "balanced" with no more than fifty percent students of color. Only in 1967, with the establishment of an independent Model Demonstration Subsystem in the Roxbury-North Dorchester area, did progress resume on one of the three schools, the Humboldt Avenue school first discussed in the early 1960s. [figures 3.38, 3.39, 3.40] Named after one of Boston's early twentieth century black newspapermen, William Monroe Trotter, it

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<sup>165</sup> For a more extended discussion of the racial composition of these complexes, see BRA, "Racial Integration in 221(d)(3) Housing Development."

<sup>166</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, "Survey of New Housing in Boston" (Boston, MA: The Agency, 1972). BRA Collection, Boston Public Library. See especially Table D: Subsidized Moderate-Income Housing and Table F: Privately Financed Housing.

opened in September 1969, the nation's second magnet school, with a student population that was fifty percent black—with students drawn from the surrounding Roxbury neighborhood—and fifty percent white—with students who chose to attend this progressive new school and were bused in from throughout Boston. Here, both local support and city support for integration remained strong. The School Committee In a sense, “reverse integration” occurred every morning, Monday to Friday, as school buses pulled up to the new school.

### *Conclusion*

By the late 1960s reductions in federal funding for renewal as well as the election of a new mayor had slowed the renewal process in Washington Park. Construction on the last unfinished projects, including a police station, a branch library and civic center, and senior housing would continue into the 1970s, but when the BRA terminated Freedom House's contract and closed the Washington Park Site Office in 1969—an event that motivated in part by the agency's response to black opposition—the renewal project was essentially over. By 1971, Otto Snowden was thoroughly disenchanted with the state of the Washington Park area. “If Washington Park as it stand today with parcels of land still vacant, blighted buildings still standing, streets and sidewalks unpaved—if this is what a ‘renewed’ community should look like, then, very simply, all of us have been fools and idiots to have gotten involved in it at all,” he said.<sup>167</sup> [figure3.41]

Freedom House continued its support of the school desegregation campaign into the early 1970, acting as a command post for community groups dealing with the crisis provoked by court-ordered busing in 1974 and the racist violence that it generated among some working-class

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<sup>167</sup> Otto Snowden to Elmer C. Foster, May 14, 1971. FH Records, M16 Box 28, Folder 962.

whites. By the mid 1970s, however, even proponents of integration in the schools had come to doubt the wisdom of their stance. As the legal scholar Derrick Bell, an acquaintance of the Roxbury activists, wrote, “now that traditional racial balance remedies are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve or maintain, there is the tardy concern that racial balance may not be the relief desired by victims of segregated schools...Our clients’ aims for better schooling for their children no longer meshed with integrationist ideals.” Education, not integration, he pointed out, had always been the Roxbury parents’ primary goal, and it was possible that desegregation lawyers, serving the interests of both black school children and the ideological goal of integration, had neglected the former in favor of the latter.<sup>168</sup> The same might be said of advocates of renewal in Roxbury, whose commitment to integration (and to urban renewal as a tool for achieving it) was so strong that they often lost sight of renewal’s impact on the black community.

The cultural project of racial integration was the product of a very specific period in the 1960s, challenged, transformed, and perhaps ultimately superseded by the cultural projects of black power and community control, especially in neighborhoods like Roxbury which had become almost entirely black by the 1970s. Within a decade, the project had lost meaning to many of its adherents. Even Muriel Snowden retreated from her uncompromising support. “...I’m not an integrationist anymore,” Snowden recalled in an oral interview in the late 1970s. “I’m not talking about that anymore. I’m talking about options, I think that’s what I’m really

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<sup>168</sup> Derrick A. Bell, Jr., “Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation” in Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1995), 5-6. Bell’s essay, a reconsideration of the wisdom and efficacy of several decades of legal action to desegregate the schools, had a powerful impact on its publication in 1976 and play a key role in the emergence of Critical Race Theory.

talking about.... This is a big turn-around for me, because I at one point would have said, I don't see why, for example, should we have black girl scout troops in Roxbury...If you have the option for a desegregated or an integrated kind of life, I think it should be your choice.”<sup>169</sup>

As the experiences at Roxbury demonstrate, if urban renewal was a cultural project embedded in a specific time and place, it had lost cultural meaning as well as political support and viability as urban policy.

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<sup>169</sup> “An Interview with Muriel Snowden: Oral History” in Ruth Edmonds Hill, ed., *Black Women Oral History Project* vol. 9 (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), 107-108.

## Chapter 4

### Balancing Acts: Participation, Protest, and Community Control Upper West Side, New York City

#### *Introduction*

In early 1961, Father Harry Browne, a priest working on Manhattan's Upper West Side, wrote to a prominent planning consultant asking how he could explain the city's West Side urban renewal plan to his working-class Puerto Rican parishioners, many of whom were facing displacement. The city was planning for new schools, safer streets, and modern, low- and moderate-income housing for this aging neighborhood of overcrowded brownstones. Would the renewal plan help residents, as promised? Browne supported the city's goals—indeed, he had actively supported the West Side Urban Renewal Plan throughout the early planning process in the late 1950s—but he was worried that the plan did not provide for the return of every family that would be displaced. Judging from the extent of redevelopment that was planned, thousands of residents would need to move. Even those who were lucky enough to secure new housing in the neighborhood faced a long waiting period before they could return. Many worried they would be forced to relocate to the outer boroughs, far from family. Was it true, as rumor had it, that Puerto Ricans were being pushed from the neighborhood to make room for new development?<sup>170</sup>

The consultant, Roger Shafer, demurred. Puerto Ricans were not so much being pushed away, he replied, as they were being given a chance to better their lives by moving out of an increasingly crowded and dangerous neighborhood. “In answer to your question of what to say to

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<sup>170</sup> Letter from Roger Shafer to Father Henry Browne, 25 January, 1961. Henry Joseph Browne Papers, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

the Puerto Rican family who accuses you of trying to push them out of the neighborhood over to Staten Island,” Shafer wrote, “I would consider the following approach: Throughout the centuries people have come a long distance to America to improve the status of their living conditions. To get your wife a decent kitchen and a clean home and a good neighborhood, surely it is worth moving to Staten Island.”<sup>171</sup>

From the aging brownstones of the Upper West Side to the new, middle-class housing on Staten Island: Shafer’s narrative of social and geographical mobility represents the height of postwar liberal optimism about the social promises of urban renewal—and the profound insensitivity that planners exhibited on issues of displacement as late as the late 1950s. The sheer scale of human displacement required by the West Side Urban Renewal Plan is shocking to us today; some 3200 families and individuals—or about 10,000 people—in this neighborhood of twenty blocks and 40,000 people lived in housing scheduled for demolition or extensive rehabilitation in the 1958 urban renewal plan. Some displaced families would be offered public housing in other parts of the city; others were offered moving expenses and assistance finding a new apartment elsewhere in the city, but relocation provisions were, on the whole, minimal. Conceived at the height of the postwar suburban boom, when a surprising 25% of the American population was estimated to be on the move, the urban renewal plan assumed that residents would be geographically mobile and have few attachments to their neighborhood. It did not acknowledge the difficulty that people of color, large families, or individuals with limited English would have leaving a familiar neighborhood and finding new housing; if anything, the plan saw renewal as an opportunity for the city to disperse poverty and arrest decline on the Upper West Side and in the West Side Urban Renewal Area (WSURA) in particular.

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*



If the logic of slum clearance in Robert Moses' New York in the 1950 dictated that the city's poor and working class would need to make room for new, middle-class residents, however, Father Brown and other community activists took their cues from the social movements of the 1960s, exploited the plan's provisions for citizen participation, and argued that renewal could be used to create and preserve space for a community that was made up of members of different races and ethnicities and different incomes and visions for urban life. The participatory provisions themselves were modest; this was New York's first foray into neighborhood renewal, after all, and its first attempt to involve residents in the planning process. By the standards of the late 1960s, under the heightened scrutiny of activists who had become wary of the city and its methods of dealing with renewal area residents, these provisions might have seemed unacceptable. But they helped create a citizen organization that played a crucial role in promoting and preserving affording housing in the mixed-income neighborhood, and they established an expectation of resident participation in the planning process that had effects far beyond what was initially envisioned.

In 1969, the planner Sherry Arnstein pushed a seminal essay on the varieties of citizen participation she had observed in the US in the late sixties, particularly in the fields of urban renewal and urban planning.<sup>172</sup> In "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Arnstein devised a hierarchy of types of participation and non-participation, ranging from Therapy and Manipulation (Non-Participation) on the bottom rungs, through Informing, Consultation, and Placation (Tokenism) in the middle, to Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizens Control (Citizen Power) at the top. It was a succinct statement of the priority placed on participatory

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<sup>172</sup> Sherry Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35:4 (July 1969).

democracy in the late 1960s and a refutation of the various types of outreach and consultation (“Tokenism”) that renewal agencies typically engaged in. But as an ideal type, it also established an extraordinary standard for participation that blinds us to the more subtle and complex ways in which residents engaged in and affected their own built environment in urban renewal areas like the West Side. The WSURA was one of the few urban renewal areas that became a genuine experiment in community control when, in the early 1970s, a group of residents facing displacement squatted in condemned buildings and demanded changes to the urban renewal plan. The squatters movement was, however, only the final chapter in a series of attempts to control the fate of the area, and perhaps not even the most significant one.

Resident activism—broadly conceived—took myriad forms in the WSURA in the 1950s and 1960s. It included idealistic discussions of the possibilities of renewal in the mid 1950s; outrage and protest over the city’s preliminary plan, which seemed to destroy the neighborhood in the process of saving it; the organization of socially and economically integrated cooperatives, which offered one solution to the problems of providing low-income housing; brownstone gentrification and clean-up campaigns that appealed to neighborhood pride; and sustained negotiations with the city to secure low-income housing in the area and provide housing for residents who had been displaced from the area.

Resident activism—again, broadly conceived—also included the formation of a community organization with the specific mandate to limit the number of low-income units in the area and kill city proposals for public housing—all in the name of retaining a mix of incomes in the neighborhood. Lila Abu-Lughod has written about “the romance of resistance” and the reluctance of scholars to recognize the complicated relationship that ordinary people have with

structures of power.<sup>173</sup> The story of the WSURA shows how complicated the issue of resident involvement can be and how effectively it can build community and identity, even when citizen control is out of reach and when immediate goals are not met. If the story of the West Side Urban Renewal Area is the story of the mass displacement of poor residents and people of color, it is also the story of multiple, conflicting attempts to define community and reshape the neighborhood in its image. While residents and community organizations did not manage to halt the large-scale displacement caused by renewal (and later by gentrification), they were more successful than they might have imagined at creating community, in both its social and physical forms.

### ***Renewing the West Side: Planning Strategies***

A residential district of tenements and brownstones between 59th and 110 Streets, Central Park, and the Hudson River, the once-fashionable West Side was in decline in the 1950s. **[figures 4.1, 4.2]** While the East Side increasingly attracted upper-middle-class and wealthy households and new high-rise development, the West Side's tenements and brownstones were subdivided into smaller apartments and turned into rooming houses as working-class and poor households moved into the area. The West Side had always been demographically diverse, home to middle-class and working-class Jewish and Irish residents who had moved to the neighborhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as wealthy professionals who lived in the elevator apartment buildings along Central Park West and elderly men who lived in single-room occupancy hotels along Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. It was also one

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<sup>173</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women."

of the more racially integrated areas in Manhattan, with a significant number of African Americans and Puerto Rican families, many of whom had moved to the neighborhood since the Second World War. Although the area was experiencing racial tension and high crime rates and had increasingly poor housing conditions—especially at the northern edge and on the side streets—few thought of the West Side as a “slum.”<sup>174</sup> Rather, marginal areas like the West Side were increasingly the kind that interested planners and city officials in the 1950s, as city agencies abandoned the slum clearance and redevelopment paradigm for a model that assumed that targeted intervention would encourage further private investment.

Mayor Wagner’s initial proposal for West Side renewal found favor in Washington, where federal officials were wary of Robert Moses and his methods and interested in the new “renewal” techniques. As city officials hammered out the specifics of the project, the initial, ambitious plans to renew the entire West Side and devote the city’s full allowance of federal low-income housing funds to the area were scaled back, at one point shrinking to a mere four-block demonstration area.<sup>175</sup> By early 1956, the city had settled on a project area of twenty blocks, from West 87th to West 97th, and from Amsterdam Avenue to Central Park West.

**[figure 4.3]** In May 1956, the federal Urban Renewal Administration approved a demonstration

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<sup>174</sup> As New York embarked on its Title I program in 1950, the SCC identified five areas in the city it believed to be “genuine, recognized slums—the indisputable cancerous areas which cannot be cured or cut out by ordinary piecemeal, private building,” and the West Side was not among them. (They included Lower Manhattan and Harlem in Manhattan, Bedford Stuyvesant and Brownsville in Brooklyn, and the South Central Bronx.) SCC, “Second Report to Mayor William O’Dwyer from the Mayor’s Commission on Slum Clearance by Private Capital, January 23, 1950,” n.p. As Wagner said when he announced the West Side program five years later, there was “too much good” in the area to contemplate large-scale demolition. “Mayor’s Remarks at Housing Hearing,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1955.

<sup>175</sup> Wagner is cited in Charles Bennett, “West Side To Get Pilot Slum Study,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1956.

grant towards a detailed planning study of the area, and in June, the City Planning Commission designated the area as “deteriorating,” qualifying it for federal aid. Between the summer of 1956 and the spring of 1958, an army of planners and consultants visited the area, compiling data and sketching out options for its future. The architectural firm Brown and Guenther coordinated the effort and worked on site planning and design in conjunction with the City Planning Commission, while the economic consultant Chester Rapkin investigated the costs of new housing in the area and the feasibility of rehabilitation, and Elizabeth C. Day researched the social structure of the neighborhood and made recommendations about the potential for community participation in the planning process. The result of their efforts, a lavish, 96-page report containing the preliminary plan for the area and entitled simply *Urban Renewal*, was published by the City Planning Commission in April 1958.

Like so many planning reports of the day, *Urban Renewal* began by outlining a picture of a neighborhood facing overcrowding, deteriorating housing conditions, and uncertainty about its future. Like the larger West Side, the project area was going through demographic transition. Between 1950, when Census figures were taken, and 1956, when the City Planning Commission took statistics in the area, the overall population of the neighborhood increased from 33,000 to 39,000. The Puerto Rican population, 4.9% of the population in 1950, had increased to 33.4%, and the non-white (predominantly African American) population had increased from a little more than 1% to 9%. While the overall percentage of the white population had dropped precipitously, from roughly 94% to roughly 58%, the trend in the area was not merely the flight of long-time white residents; more than half of the white families living in the project area were newcomers themselves. Many of these new white households were wealthier than the ones they replaced,

since per capita income for the area was rising even as more low-income families of color moved in.

The report duly noted several of the demographic trends driving change in the neighborhood, such as the departure of white families to the suburbs and the arrival of low-income families from Puerto Rico. It did not, however, mention another cause of change, perhaps the most destabilizing of all: the displacement of thousands of residents from nearby Title I and public housing projects. Beginning in the late 1940s, Amsterdam Houses, a public housing project; Columbus Circle, the city's first commercial Title I project; and Lincoln Square, the showpiece cultural center, displaced thousands of families living to the south of the West Side Urban Renewal Area. Beginning in the early 1950s, Manhattantown, the scandal-ridden Title I project, and the adjacent Frederick Douglass Houses, a public housing project, displaced several thousand families who had lived immediately to the north. Although in theory the housing authority and the private relocation firms working with Title I sponsors offered relocation housing for these families throughout the city, in practice the vast majority of tenant relocated themselves to new apartments close to home, and adjacent areas often bore the brunt of the effects of displacement.<sup>176</sup> The phenomenon of overcrowding and deteriorating housing conditions associated with public housing and redevelopment projects was not, perhaps, as widely discussed as white flight or Puerto Rican migration, but it had already gained a name by the mid 1950s: "slum shifting." Displacement from the sites of nearby housing and redevelopment projects played a significant role in the transformation of the area in the early- and mid-1950s and helped shape subsequent community response.

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<sup>176</sup> For an analysis of the problem on the Upper West Side, see Womens' City Club of New York, *Manhattantown Two Years Later*.

Aging housing stock, landlord neglect, and pressure on the housing market in the area resulting in the subdivision of apartments and conversion of brownstones to rooming houses all contributed toward declining housing conditions in the neighborhood. Although the area included a number of modern elevator buildings and luxury apartments along Central Park West, the twenty-block area had been selected precisely because it had some of the oldest, most densely developed housing in the area, including old law tenements along Columbus Avenue and parts of Amsterdam Avenue and brownstones lining the east-west side-streets.<sup>177</sup> There had been almost no new construction in the area since before the Depression, institutional lenders were reluctant to grant mortgages in the area, and owners were less and less likely to improve their buildings.<sup>178</sup> A full seventeen per cent of the dwelling units in the area were single-room occupancy, and roughly two-thirds of the brownstones had been converted to rooming houses. Residential densities on some of the side streets reached as high as 800 persons per acre. Rents in the brownstones and old-law tenements—the most deteriorated housing in the area, where many of the Puerto Rican families lived—were excessive, roughly double what was charged in nearby, high-quality elevator apartment buildings on a square-foot basis.<sup>179</sup> The physical condition of neighborhood institutions was similarly varied. The area had a number of well-established,

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<sup>177</sup> As the report pointed out, much of the neighborhood to the west of the project area had been redeveloped privately and incrementally with modern elevator buildings in the 1920s, as had 86th Street to the south. The Manhattantown Title I project to the north and Central Park to the east formed the other boundaries of the area.

<sup>178</sup> New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, p. 28. The report also noted that building owners had “shallower roots” in the area: between 1945 and 1956, the median length of building ownership had declined from nine years to seven, from 13 to eight among brownstone owners; absentee ownership increased from 64% to 72%; and the number of absentee owners who lived outside of Manhattan increased from approximately 12% to approximately 23%. New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>179</sup> New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, pp. 23-26.

thriving institutions, including churches, synagogues, and wealthy private schools, as well as a large and modern junior high school on West 93rd Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, PS 188 or Joan of Arc. Because the number of children living in the area had doubled, however, the local public elementary schools were over capacity and in some cases experiencing turnover of 50% during a single school year.

The case for public intervention made in *Urban Renewal* was not that different from the case made in the SCC reports of the late 1940s and early 1950s: the West Side was in crisis, overcrowded, increasingly poor and transient, and physically deteriorating. Private landlords had a vested interest in profitable overcrowded conditions, and only public intervention would halt the decline. But the solutions proposed in the report differed significantly from Moses'. Earlier Title I projects had typically targeted relatively small deteriorated areas of six to thirty acres, prescribing near-total clearance of the existing buildings on the site, the reassembly of the land into superblocks, and the construction of luxury modern high-rise housing and shopping for a new, middle- and upper-income population. Some of these early projects, like Corlears Hook and Morningside Gardens, were middle-income cooperatives sponsored by unions; others, like Columbus Circle and the Harlem and North Harlem projects, were developed by speculative investors and included high-end, market-rate housing. All involved large-scale clearance and the relocation of residents and small businesses in the project area on the assumption that the only way to improve housing conditions was through a completely new urban environment of high-rise buildings and open space oriented away from the existing street grid. The West Side project, on the other hand, had a different starting point: only some of the buildings in the 106 acres of the study area were so physically deteriorated that they required demolition. In most parts of the project area, the city could encourage stability and reinvestment by enforcing the housing code



and offering federally insured, long-term, low-interest loans to owners willing to rehabilitate the older housing stock. The redevelopment of specific areas still played a crucial role in this scenario, but the explicit aim was to restore the confidence of buildings owners and investors in an existing neighborhood without redeveloping it entirely—working with existing owners and with the neighborhood’s existing physical structure.

*Urban Renewal* proposed two alternate schemes for the area: Plan A, involving extensive redevelopment, and Plan B, depending more heavily on rehabilitation. Both were primarily concerned with increasing the amount of high-quality housing in the neighborhood. Plan A **[figure 4.4]** recommended the redevelopment of both sides of Columbus Avenue and stretches of Amsterdam Avenue and West 97th Street with high-rise towers—a relatively new building typology in New York City in the mid-1950s—as well as the redevelopment of the most deteriorated areas on the side streets with double-loaded corridor apartment buildings. **[figure 4.5]** Unlike the typical SCC project, the plan aimed to provide housing for all income levels: low-rent public housing, subsidized middle-income, and luxury or market rate. Specific parcels had not been allocated and the proportion of low-, middle-, and high-income housing had not yet been worked out, but the report explained how, with various types of financing, the city could achieve a wide range of rentals, from \$14 to \$18 per room per month in public housing, to \$21.29 per room per month (limited-profit cooperative housing), to \$44.82 (rental housing constructed under FHA Section 220 financing), to \$45.00 to \$60.00 (conventionally financed housing).<sup>180</sup> New construction would be supplemented by a program to finance the rehabilitation of deteriorated brownstones in the area, while most of the modern elevator buildings and almost

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<sup>180</sup> An appendix works out these monthly rentals using a single Columbus Avenue site to calculate the cost of development. See New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, pp. 90-91.

all of the buildings fronting Central Park were left untouched. This version of the plan also proposed a new public school along West 92nd Street and the construction of a network of mid-block public pathways and open spaces, including three connecting walkways that would lead from West 96th Street, a major through-street at the northern edge of the project, to Joan of Arc, the local junior high school. **[figure 4.6]** Demolition of adjacent housing would create play areas for all three schools in the area: Joan of Arc, the proposed new school along West 92nd Street, and PS 166 along West 89th Street.

Plan B **[figure 4.7]** involved more extensive rehabilitation of existing buildings in the area. This version preserved plans for a new school and the mid-block pathways and open space, but its residential strategy was quite different: only half the blocks fronting Columbus Avenue would be redeveloped with housing, and almost twice as many brownstones along the side streets would be slated for rehabilitation rather than demolition. Alternate versions of both Plan A and Plan B suggested more radical design strategies, including the closing of West 92nd St between Amsterdam and Columbus to traffic to create a large campus for Joan of Arc Junior High and a number of single-decked air rights garages over Columbus Avenue, the surface of which would serve as a pedestrian crossing over the busy avenue.<sup>181</sup> Neither version made many provisions for traffic improvements, although the report speculated that in the scenario outlined in Plan A, in which both frontages of Columbus Avenues were redeveloped, the new structures could be required to provide sidewalks within the building line, so that the avenue could be widened to include local access streets, separated by rows of trees from cross-town traffic.

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<sup>181</sup> An alternate version of Plan B shows the new elementary school located just north of the junior high school, extending the campus on the other side of West 93rd Street. New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, p. 72.

At the heart of both proposed schemes was an ambitious program of brownstone rehabilitation, to be undertaken by individual owners and financed by FHA-insured mortgages. This was the untested, experimental part of the plan; the provisions of the 1954 Housing Act had made it possible to use the so-called “tools” of Title I—the power of eminent domain, the write-down, the long-term, low-interest loans offered by the FHA—to rehabilitate as well as redevelop, but few cities had embarked on their own programs, and there were few examples to follow. The city was committed to a renewal program that depended as much as possible on private investment, so it seemed likely that it would support but not carry out the rehabilitation itself. If the tools were provided, would individual landlords be able and willing to rehabilitate their properties? A detailed study of eight blocks in the area had shown that, although both the brownstones and the tenements were deteriorated and overcrowded, the vast majority of both of these buildings types were structurally sound. Brownstone rehabilitation, however, was more likely to be a profitable venture than tenement rehabilitation; nine in ten brownstones were deemed to be in “acceptable condition” or could be returned to acceptable condition through renovation and repairs, as opposed to only four in ten tenements. Both versions of the proposed plan thus involved the extensive demolition and redevelopment of the old-law tenements, and Plan A eliminated them entirely. Along with the new high rise housing on redeveloped parcels along Columbus Avenue, the brownstones would become the basic residential buildings blocks for the new neighborhood. While the report was skeptical about the financial feasibility of purely private rehabilitation—rehabilitation involving no government subsidy whatsoever—it suggested that a combination of liberal mortgages made available through the FHA 220 program, write-downs in acquisition costs, and real estate tax concessions would make large-scale rehabilitation in the area possible.

While redevelopment would be limited in comparison with previous Title I projects, it still played a major role in both plans proposed in the report. A comparison of the aerial photograph of the project area in the mid-1950s [figure 4.3] with a perspective used on the front cover of the report [figure 4.8] underlines the dramatic impact redevelopment would have, particularly under Plan A: in a densely developed area of three- to five story brownstones and tenements, the plan proposed a new hierarchy of urban spaces: a busy, modern avenue of high-rise, high-density housing running through the center of the area; low- and mid-rise housing on the side streets, their density decreased by the elimination of the most deteriorated housing; and quiet, landscaped pathways between blocks and courtyards in the rear yards of the rehabilitated brownstones. Like the Title I plans developed by Moses' slum clearance committee, these plans show a commitment to reducing building coverage and increasing open space, maintaining high residential density through the use of high-rise housing, and reorganizing residential life around interior playgrounds and green spaces.

While the plan preserved the street grid, a high percentage of the housing stock in the area, and existing densities, it still represented a major intervention into the physical fabric of the neighborhood. Relocation plans suggested that some 2,641 households would be displaced by Plan A and some 3,242 households would be displaced by Plan B.<sup>182</sup> In an effort to minimize the relocation burden and “disturb the continuity of neighborhood life as little as possible,” the report recommended staging the renewal process.<sup>183</sup> Acquisition of condemned parcels—and thus displacement, relocation, and demolition—would begin at the northwest edge of the area,

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<sup>182</sup> While these figures are worked out in detail—block by block, by racial and ethnic groups and by household income—it is fair to assume that, due to underreporting, they are a conservative estimate.

<sup>183</sup> New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, p. 13.

and proceed south and east in four distinct stages of approximately 30 months each. Public housing, a potential relocation resource, would be constructed first, and work on the new school and school playgrounds would begin immediately, alleviating overcrowding and improving the area's community facilities. Many of the condemned tenements and brownstones would be allowed to remain standing as long as possible, so as to give residents the maximum possible time to find new housing.

Given what must have been an obvious and inevitable consequence of renewal in this area—the large-scale displacement of low-income Puerto Rican families, who lived in the most deteriorated housing and would be disproportionately affected by redevelopment and rehabilitation plans—one of the most interesting and significant aspects of the report was its commitment to racial and economic integration, made explicit in a chapter entitled “Goals of Renewal.” The report echoes the city's commitment to open-occupancy housing, first made with the 1957 Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs law, which barred racial discrimination in publicly aided housing projects. In principle, at least, housing in the West Side project, like housing in all Title I projects to date, would be racially integrated.<sup>184</sup> But the goal of an economically “balanced” neighborhood was a more complex and elusive notion, developed specifically, it seems, for the West Side of the late 1950s. As the report pointed out, the apartments facing onto Central Park, the brownstones on the side streets, and the tenements of Columbus Avenue had always been occupied by residents of very different class backgrounds and income levels. “Although this original pattern left much to be desired from a design point of view,” the report argued, “it was a balanced neighborhood in a democratic pattern with considerable character which should be

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<sup>184</sup> In practice, Title I projects had a mixed record; the high rents charged for most of the new housing ensured a middle- and upper-middle class population, though certain limited-income cooperatives like Morningside Gardens, sought and achieved a certain level of racial integration.

maintained. An economically integrated community also must have fairly extensive provisions for middle-income families, not just for high-rental and public housing tenants.”<sup>185</sup>

In the context of area’s changing demographics, particularly the increase in low-income Puerto Rican residents, the goal of “racial and economic integration” is not as liberal as it might first seem; the emphasis on “middle-income” families suggests that the city would use redevelopment and rehabilitation to retain or attract middle- and upper-middle class residents, who were likely to be white, at the expense of lower-income residents, who were likely to be Puerto Rican, all lofty language about “democratic patterns” aside. But the inherent flexibility of the concept and its broad appeal across the ideological spectrum mean that ideas of “integration” or “balance,” written into the plan from the very beginning, would become the rallying point around which future debates about the neighborhood would take place.

### ***Community Response to the Preliminary and Final Plans***

Conceived in response to some of the failings of the SCC’s approach, formulated as an attempt to use some of the untested techniques written into the 1954 Housing Act, the West Side renewal project precipitated a shift in the city’s planning and redevelopment bureaucracy. It was not the type of project the SCC would have embraced in any case; throughout the 1950s, Moses, the chairman of the Slum Clearance Committee, remained a vocal proponent of large-scale clearance and superblock planning and a critic of rehabilitation, which he did not believe was an economically feasible alternative in New York City.<sup>186</sup> The report had been supervised by the

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<sup>185</sup> New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, p. 40.

<sup>186</sup> Under political pressure from his ally Hulan Jack, Manhattan Borough President, Moses had given a nod in 1956 to a West Side spot-clearance project that proposed new housing on

City Planning Commission, an agency with few ties to the SCC, and shortly after its release in April 1958, Mayor Wagner established the Urban Renewal Board, which was charged with implementing its recommendations in what became known as the West Side Urban Renewal Area (WSURA). The chairman of the City Planning Commission, James Felt, was appointed its head, and Samuel Ratensky was given leave from the Housing Authority to become its executive director.<sup>187</sup>

From the beginning, the Urban Renewal Board was faced with the task of gathering support for the project in the face of growing opposition to the SCC's established Title I program. Initially, the project benefited from its obvious differences from Moses' bulldozer approach and its promises of fixing up rather than tearing down the neighborhood. Shortly after Wagner's announcement, Joseph Montserrat of the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, one of the most important Puerto Rican organizations in the city, offered his support, saying, "It's obvious we're not meeting the needs of lower income groups today. If this is the way to prevent continuing deterioration, we're for it."<sup>188</sup> The local Democratic club, the FDR-Woodrow Wilson Democrats, had also expressed early interest in the project, as had a number of

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scattered sites while preserving the modern apartment buildings in the area, but for the most part SCC Title I projects remained remarkably consistent in their planning throughout the 1950s. See letter from Moses to Robert Wagner, November 29, 1955, Box 116, Folder "Housing Correspondence for Mr. Moses' Library project January 1, 1955 to December 31, 1955," Robert Moses Papers, in which Moses clarifies his position, stating that "rehabilitation in the sense of rebuilding old structures with federal aid is wholly impractical in New York City."

<sup>187</sup> See "Mayor Sets Up Unit for Urban Renewal," *New York Times*, May 28, 1958, and "Ratensky to Direct Urban Renewal Unit," *New York Times*, June 23, 1958. Ratensky, a Brooklyn native, had studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania and under Frank Lloyd Wright. He had been with the Housing Authority since 1946 and had been its planning director since 1952.

<sup>188</sup> Woody Klein, "West Siders Hail Urban Renewal Plan," *New York World-Telegram*, April 1956.

institutions located in the project area and citywide advocacy groups like the Citizen's Housing and Planning Council.

And yet the success of the project was not a foregone conclusion. Between 1955, when the project was first announced, and 1958, when the city began the planning process, sponsor scandals and increasing debate over relocation for Title I projects had shifted the dynamic of redevelopment in New York. Residents living in areas targeted for redevelopment were increasingly effective making their opposition known. Activist Harris Present and the Lincoln Square Businessmen's Committee, an organization of small business owners facing displacement, were waging war against the Lincoln Square Title I project, just 17 blocks south of the West Side study area. Protesting at public hearings, launching litigating against the project, the Lincoln Square opponents were bringing their case before the city's press and political establishment with more success than community groups had previously.<sup>189</sup> Groups as diverse as the Women's City Club of New York, the organization that had investigated conditions at Manhattantown; the Community Service Society; the Citizens' Union; Samuel Spiegel, State Representative from the Lower East Side and a housing advocate; the local chapter of the NAACP; and the local chapter of ADA all were calling for a review of the SCC's policy of handing off relocation responsibilities to sponsors and the establishment of a central relocation bureau. Relocation, which was fast becoming a major political issue in the city, was destined to be a contentious and difficult issue in the West Side Urban Renewal Area, as well.

In addition, the very nature of the plan, which proposed multiple, scattered redevelopment sites and the rehabilitation of hundred of brownstones by individual owners, suggested that the plan would need extensive support from project area residents—not simply to

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<sup>189</sup> On the Lincoln Square protests, see Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, pp. 197-252.



overcome local opposition and pass through the series of public hearings required of all Title I projects, but to ensure that individual building owners would comply with the code enforcement and rehabilitation requirements of the plan and that the implementation would progress smoothly. *Urban Renewal* had stressed the need for citizen participation on both practical and ideological grounds, but its plans to organize several different types of organizations with differing stakes in the project—citywide, West Side, and project area—were vague.<sup>190</sup>

With funds from a private foundation, in coordination with city officials, the Community Council of Greater New York (CCGNY) hired staff and began to organize local groups in support of the plan in January 1959.<sup>191</sup> A number of prominent West Siders with an interest in renewal—including the former Deputy Mayor Stanley Lowell—formed the nucleus of the Park-Hudson Urban Renewal Citizens' Committee, which, as its name implied, was intended to help represent the interest of the entire West Side, from the river to Central Park. This organization consisted of 46 individuals, many of whom held leadership positions with community organizations in the area, although they did not necessarily represent them. Park-Hudson became involved in physical planning and zoning issues as well as the formation of a “conservation area” to the west of the WSURA where code enforcement might help maintain good housing conditions. It also formed a bankers' committee to promote savings for down-payments for on cooperatives that might be built in the WSURA. In May, the CCGNY staff began to organize the

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<sup>190</sup> New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, p. 88. Among the examples noted in the report are in Dayton, Ohio, where professional organizers were made available through the Community Welfare Council, and Philadelphia, where staff associated with a neighborhood house in the East Poplar project helped organize the community.

<sup>191</sup> Funding initially came from a grant from the Fred L. Lavanburg Foundation. When the grant ran out, the Housing and Redevelopment Board contracted with the Community Council of Greater New York to continue the work for another eight months.

Provisional Council of Organizations in the West Side Urban Renewal Area, a group of representatives of 40 community organizations and institutions located within the 20-block urban renewal area. This group included representatives of churches, synagogues, parent-teacher associations, block associations, tenants groups, and business organizations. It was headed by Milton Akers, the headmaster of the elite, private Walden School, located at Central Park West and West 88th Street, at the southeastern edge of the urban renewal area. Father Harry Browne, a priest at St. Gregory's and a teacher at a local parochial school, was drawn into the organization and led its housing committee. The Provisional Council was still being organized when the city released the preliminary plan for the WSURA on May 28, 1959.<sup>192</sup>

In the words of the community organizer working with Park-Hudson and the Provisional Council, the preliminary plan “shocked” West Side residents.<sup>193</sup> Although the physical plan was not very different from one of the plans described in the widely circulated 1958 report—namely Plan A, the plan in which all old law tenements and both frontages of Columbus Avenue were slated for redevelopment—the city's version contained specific details the earlier document did not, most importantly, a breakdown of how many much low-, middle-, and high-income housing would be constructed. To many area residents who had heard the report's language of “balance” and integration, the figures were staggering: of 7800 projected new units of housing, only 400 would be low-rent public housing, contained in a single public housing project, while 2400

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<sup>192</sup> Both groups are described in The Community Council of Greater New York, “Citizen Participation in the West Side Urban Renewal Area: A Series of Reports on a Two-Year Demonstration Project,” pp. 1-5. Citizens' Housing and Planning Council Records, UR NYC Misc. Box.

<sup>193</sup> The Community Council of Greater New York, “Citizen Participation in the West Side Urban Renewal Area: A Series of Reports on a Two-Year Demonstration Project,” p. 22. Citizens' Housing and Planning Council Records, UR NYC Misc. Box.

would be middle-income units built with public subsidy and a full 5000 would be market rate. In addition, there were several changes in the physical plan for the neighborhood, including the consolidation of commercial space into six shopping areas scattered through the project area and the additional of public plazas. Some 5800 households, a number larger than estimated in the report, faced relocation.

On the basis of the 1958 report, both Park-Hudson and the Provisional Council had voiced tentative support for the project, suggesting it would not face too much opposition in the area. The preliminary plan, however, met with an immediate, negative response on the part of residents and small businesses. Within weeks, local groups had formed to oppose the plan. Thomas Matthews, an African American neurosurgeon who lived on Central Park West, organized the West Side Business and Professional Group to represent the opposition of the area's 460 small businesses. The social worker Jane Wahlberg led the West Side tenants Committee, a group calling for less displacement and more low- and middle-income housing. The area's Catholic churches, St. Gregory's and Holy Name, whose Irish and Puerto Rican parishioners were likely to be displaced by renewal, were also opposed to the plan.<sup>194</sup>

Between May 1959, when the preliminary plan was announced, and October 1959, when it was adopted by the Board of Estimate, the city held approximately thirty community meetings in the project area in an attempt to explain the plan and muster support for it. During this time, the Provisional Council, the group charged with representing local interests, acted in a mediating role. As Father Browne later recalled, it worked for "concession and compromise on controversial aspects of the plan," notably the proportion of low-, middle-, and high-incoming

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<sup>194</sup> On the formation of opposition to the preliminary plan, see Davies, *Neighborhood Groups and Urban Renewal*, pp. 120-126.

housing units that would be constructed under the plan.<sup>195</sup> The City Planning Commission held a public hearing on the plan on June 29, during which the relative lack of low- and middle-income units was again a point of contention. Matthew and Wahlberg, the heads of the businessmen's and tenants' organizations, set up shop in West 96th Street storefront and rallied opponents at a mass meeting held at Joan of Arc Junior High School on July 14, shortly before the CPC was scheduled to make a decision on the project. In a story that made the front page of the *New York Times*, Wahlberg called the plan "one of the hugest real estate land grabs the city has ever known" and said that it belied "the sound concept of true urban renewal."<sup>196</sup> Speaking before approximately 300 people at the rally, Matthews argued that the plan would "eliminate the small businessman" by reducing the number of commercial spaces from the 461 currently in the area to only 80 in the six proposed shopping centers.<sup>197</sup>

The CPC responded to these objections with several concessions, promising greater attention to the relocation process for small businesses and approving the project with an increase in the proportion of low- and middle-income housing units—600-3600-3600, rather than 400-2400-5000.<sup>198</sup> The small business owners and the Wahlberg's tenants' organization

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<sup>195</sup> "Accomplishments of Citizens' Participation Program: The Role of the Strycker's Bay NC," typescript. Henry Joseph Browne Collection, Box 31, Folder: Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council, n.d, 1960-61.

<sup>196</sup> Charles Grutzer, "Tenant Unit Scores West Side Renewal; Sees a Realty 'Grab,'" NYT 7-14-1959.

<sup>197</sup> "West Side Renewal Assailed at Rally," NYT 7-15-1959.

<sup>198</sup> For the city's account of the changes made to the plan, see "City Planning Commission Report Recommending Approval of the Preliminary Plan to the Board of Estimate, July 15, 1959," CHPC Records, UR NYC West Side Box. The CPC acknowledged the community's "strong interest" in additional low- and moderate-income housing units but said that, given the presence of both a luxury Title I project (Manhattantown, renamed West Park in 1957) and a

remained opposed the plan, and they found allies in various local politicians like the Reform Democrat Irving Wolfson, who agreed with Matthew that the plan would have devastating effects on the area's small businesses. Meanwhile, the Park-Hudson Urban Renewal Citizens Committee, the Provisional Council of Organizations, and various West Side and city-wide groups like the Citizens Union and the West Side Americans for Democratic Action all backed the plan.<sup>199</sup> The project gained CPC approval, but it was politically sensitive enough that Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack delayed its public hearing in front of the Board of Estimate until after September's primary election. In an effort to ease its passage, the CPC announced a staging schedule whereby work would begin at the northern edge of the WSURA and residents and small business could be relocated within the area while waiting for new accommodations. In October, Jack gave his support to the plan in principle but called for additional low- and middle-income housing. The CPC compromised again, and the Board of Estimate passed the preliminary plan on October 22, with revised housing figures, now 1000-4200-2800.<sup>200</sup> The preliminary plan now in place, the city began to hammer out the specifics that would lead to the final plan and the implementation of the project.

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public housing project (Frederick Douglass Homes) to the north of the WSURA, it preferred to add moderate-income housing to the area.

<sup>199</sup> *Journal of Proceedings of the Board of Estimate of the City of New York* X (July 28, 1959, to September 17, 1959), pp. 10101-10109. Criticism focused on the lack of low and middle income housing, inadequate compensation for small business, and the unnecessary demolition of structurally sound buildings. The CPC recommended that 200 additional units of public housing in "vest-pocket" sites in rehabilitated housing scattered throughout the project area—not in a single public housing project, as the first 400 units were. This increased the total number of new units from 7600 to 7800. It also recommended increasing the proportion of middle-income, tax-abated housing units in the range of \$21 to \$29 per room per month.

<sup>200</sup> For Jack's statement supporting the project, see untitled typescript with penciled comment "Hulan Jack Statement," located in CHPC Records, UR NYC West Side Box.

Significantly, the area's small business owners were both the most organized and vocal opponents of the plan during this first round of debate. Since many of them were located on the ground floor of the old-law tenements along Columbus Avenue, the areas slated for demolition, and because the preliminary plan made provisions for only a fraction to return to the neighborhood, their opposition to the plan was not surprising. Small business owners, in fact, were often the first to organize against Title I projects. Highly dependent on local clientele, they were doubly affected by the renewal process—first by displacement, then by the need to develop a new base of customers in a new location—and thus more inclined to oppose it. Unlike low-income tenants, another group facing displacement under renewal and redevelopment plans, business owners tended to be well-informed about the city's plans, familiar with dealing with city officials, and deeply skeptical of the city's right to take their property. The city, by contrast, was rarely sympathetic to their pleas to stay put. The consolidation of local businesses in strip malls or shopping centers was a common physical planning approach in renewal and redevelopment projects in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the likely closure of some of the more marginal of the area's small businesses was seen as the price of progress. Indeed, small businesses had fewer legal guarantees than residents during the relocation process and received substantially less monetary compensation in comparison.<sup>201</sup> In the negotiations over the WSURA preliminary plan, they received only more comprehensive and specific relocation procedures, not any substantive changes in the plan itself.

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<sup>201</sup> Title I legislation mandated that displaced residents be relocated to “safe, decent, and sanitary housing.” While in practice this was not always the case for project area residents, no such comparable language existed for small business owners. Although by 1959 New York City was taking steps to increase the payments made to project area residents, small business owners lagged far behind.

Debate over the housing component of the WSURA plan was another matter entirely. All kinds of local organizations—from the pro-renewal Provisional Council to Wahlburg’s oppositional tenants’ group—grasped onto the plan’s notion of a “balanced” community as an ideal to strive for, and the proportion of low-, middle-, and high-income housing in the project area quickly became the aspect of the plan where negotiation would take place. Unlike the business owners, for whom any real victory would have meant changes to the plan itself, groups concerned with housing were engaged in a numbers game that was still largely theoretical. The strong push for consensus on the part of the Provisional Council and the relative lack of organization on the part of the area’s Puerto Rican population meant that the gains achieved in the process of approving the preliminary plan were relatively modest—600 low-income units—but the issue “economic integration” was not yet resolved.

### ***The Final Plan***

With the preliminary plan in place, certain elements of the West Side project could move forward, among them the 400-unit public housing project, which would be constructed by the Housing Authority, the public school, and the rehabilitation demonstration project scheduled for selected parts of West 94th and West 95th Streets between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. But the larger project stalled for three years in further planning and bureaucratic red tape, and when the final plan came before the CPC and the Board of Estimate, it went through a second and very different round of opposition and public debate.

When the final plan was announced on May 1, 1962, it contained few substantive changes from the preliminary plan: a minimum of 1,000 units of low-rent housing, of which 800 would be in new construction and 200 in rehabilitated apartments; 4200 units of middle-income

housing; 2800 units of market-rate housing; a new elementary school, two new school playgrounds, and six landscaped plazas. Among the changes were several traffic improvements, including parking bays and landscaping for Columbus Avenue and the “necking” or narrowing of many of the residential side streets to keep down the amount of through traffic.<sup>202</sup> Four of the middle-income sites had been designated as limited-profit cooperatives sponsored by neighborhood groups. During the planning process in late 1960 and 1961, a schematic scale model of the final plan **[figure 4.9]** and renderings of the redeveloped Columbus Avenue **[figure 4.10]** and the public plazas **[figure 4.11]** had been presented to local groups and exhibited at the East River Savings Bank on Amsterdam Avenue. Now, with the publication of the final plan, the city released renderings of the proposed residential buildings **[figure 4.12]**, some of which were included in a three-color brochure produced specifically to help gather support among project area residents. The architectural renderings exhibited in the neighborhood in 1960 and 1961 emphasized the clean, modern look of Columbus Avenue, dubbed “The Avenue of Tomorrow” in captions, as well as the blend of old and new visible in the spaces created by the public plazas on the side streets. The brochure, on the other hand, contained images of stoops and brownstones **[figure 4.13]** as well as modern buildings and emphasized the preservation of the existing neighborhood over the new development. “Old-time New York residents still remember a quiet, more leisurely city: clean, attractive, good to look at, good to live in,” the brochure stated. “That is essentially what the plan seeks to make out of these 20 crowded blocks... There will be large

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<sup>202</sup> Among the proposed traffic improvement were the effective widening of Columbus Avenue by mandatory 15-foot setbacks and east-west boundary or “connector” streets separating “subneighborhoods” of six or eight blocks whose interior, “residential,” streets were to be narrowed and given different textures and colors of paving materials to discourage through traffic.



areas of new building in the neighborhood, [but] the good houses of today will still be there. In short, the neighborhood will keep the charm of diversity.”<sup>203</sup> A passage on “citizen participation” reassured readers that the plan had been developed with project area residents and was illustrated with a photograph showing community representative Father Browne talking with city officials.

**[figure 4.14]**

Between 1959 and 1962, however, the climate of public opinion in the project area had changed. Father Browne’s Provisional Council had reorganized itself as the Strycker’s Bay Neighborhood Council, named after a historical designation for the area, and elected Father Browne as its president. The city’s main point of contact with the neighborhood, the SBNC was assisting with relocation planning and increasingly concerned about the problems faced by displaced residents.<sup>204</sup> The local Democratic club, the FGR-Woodrow Wilson Democrats, had recently published an analysis of the West Side plan that found the plan’s provisions for low-income residents insufficient and called for a major shift in the housing breakdown to 2650 low-income, 3680 middle-income, and 1655 market-rate units.<sup>205</sup> Most importantly, the area was

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<sup>203</sup> Housing and Redevelopment Board, *West Side Urban Renewal Area: A Summary of the Final Plan*, p. 16.

<sup>204</sup> Shortly after the public hearings on the preliminary hearing, the Park-Hudson Urban Renewal Citizens’ Committee folded and the Provisional Council held a constitutional convention, renamed itself, and became the most active citizens’ organization working in the renewal area. In November 1959, the group drew up a list of steps the city could take to ease the relocation process in the area; in June 1960, it called an emergency meeting to calm fears when relocation notices went out to the first group of displaced residents, those living on the site of the Stephen Wise public housing; in July, it explained the city’s position on unpopular policies like the demolition of old-law tenements on Columbus Avenue. During the spring of 1960, the staff organized a Citizens’ Relocation Advisory Committee to deal with displacement from the first two sites, the new school and the Stephen Wise public housing project. “Accomplishments of Citizens’ Participation Program: The Role of the Strycker’s Bay NC,” typescript. Henry Joseph Browne Collection, Box 31, Folder: Strycker’s Bay Neighborhood Council, n.d, 1960-61.

finally developing a vocal Puerto Rican constituency led by Aramis Gomez, a resident who had recently been relocated from the nearby Lincoln Square project area, who, along with several other community members, had formed the Puerto Rican Citizens' Housing Committee (PRCHC) in the summer of 1961. In a report drawn up in January 1962, the group contended that Puerto Ricans were "being 'pushed' out of so-called prime real estate in Manhattan" and that "the overall housing program seems to envision a New York without Puerto Ricans."<sup>206</sup> Like the Reform Democrats, they pushed for a significant increase in the number of low-income housing units as well as more meaningful Puerto Rican participation in the renewal project.

Public hearings on the final plan, held in May and June, 1962, were contentious. Emphasizing the city's commitment to open housing, its attempt to provide housing for all income levels in a single neighborhood, and its innovative rehabilitation program, proponents praised the project at the first CPC hearing on May 17. Speaking on behalf of the national NAACP in support of the plan, Jack Wood argued that rehousing every low-income resident in low-income housing in the area amounted to a policy of racial "containment" and "would encourage the development of a community characterized by racial and economic imbalance." Jackie Robinson, the former baseball star, appeared at the hearing to express his support, praising the project as "the first truly integrated project the city ever attempted." Attacking the extent of Puerto Rican displacement, the city's poor track record with relocation, and the disparity between the number of household displaced and the number of low- and middle-income housing

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<sup>205</sup> On the FDR-Woodrow Wilson report analyzing the plan, see Davies, *Neighborhood Groups and Urban Renewal*, p. 137.

<sup>206</sup> Cited in Davies, *Neighborhood Groups and Urban Renewal*, p.133. The other founding members were Roland Cintron, Josephine Nieves, Efrain Rosa, and Petra Rosa. The organization was funded and staffed by the city's powerful Commission on Intergroup Relations, COIR. Cintron, Neives, and Petra Rosa all had a background in social work or community organization.

units, critics argued that the social costs of the plan were too high. The PRCHC's Gomez attacked the plan as a "masterpiece of deception" intended to "get rid of the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and low-income families from the area" and declared that "if you [the CPC] approve this plan, you are declaring war on the Puerto Rican community."<sup>207</sup> After three years of delays, the city wanted nothing more than to begin the West Side project. On May 29 the CPC announced its approval of final plan, urging it forward through the upcoming Board of Estimate hearings "quickly and expeditiously" and warning that changes in the plan at this late date would cause delays.

Both critics and proponents geared up for a second round of debate at the Board of Estimate hearing in June. In a series of meetings leading up to the Board of Estimate hearings on June 22, Father Browne pushed the SBNC to support an increase in the number of low-income units to 2500 without success. He and other opponents of the plan organized a rally at Holy Name Church in support of more low-income housing on the night of June 21. In the face of this opposition, city officials conceded defeat and phoned Browne, promising an increase in the number of low-income units in the plan from 1,000 to 2,500 and the number of middle-income units from 4,200 to 4,900. The number of luxury units was reduced, from 2,800 to 2,000.<sup>208</sup> In addition, the city's Bureau of Relocation would be authorized to step in and terminate private relocation contracts if at any time the Bureau believed that relocation was not being handled adequately.<sup>209</sup> The rally was held anyway, and the crowd sang anti-renewal songs written by an SBNC activist.

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<sup>207</sup> Martin Arnold, "Disputes Aroused by West Side Plan," NYT 5-18-1962.

<sup>208</sup> *New York Times*, June 22, 1962.

At the Board of Estimate hearing the next day, Monserrat denounced the destruction of 5000 low-income units in the WSURA and the impact that would have on the Puerto Rican community. A representative of the local branch of the NAACP, Percy Sutton, spoke against the plan, challenging the national association's position and requesting more low-income units and minority representation on the City Planning Commission on the grounds that "members of the minority groups should participate in these decisions that affect us." Father Browne, who had declined to represent the SBNC's position on low-income housing in the plan, spoke about the plan's insufficient attention to low-income residents who would be displaced by the project. Defending the plan, officials cited the "very high degree of voluntary turnover" among Puerto Ricans, arguing that the effects of displacement were not as dire as the opposition made them out to be. Moreover, if the city built housing for all the low-income residents in the area, there was the danger of "permanently embedding a low-income and minority ghetto in the area."<sup>210</sup> As one official said, the plan's "vision is of an entire neighborhood truly integrated on a stable basis, not simply caught at the point where there is apparent integration while one group is moving in and another out."<sup>211</sup> Several later, on June 26, the Board of Estimate approved final plan.

By the time the plan went through its second round of hearings, two opposing views of the West Side plan had emerged: one that was optimistic about the effects of renewal and that favored the use of renewal tools—particularly new middle-income housing and loans for rehabilitation—to draw new residents to the neighborhood and precipitate change; one that was

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<sup>209</sup> Martin Arnold, "More Low-Cost Housing Added to Plan for West Side Renewal," *New York Times*, June 22, 1962.

<sup>210</sup> *Journal of Proceedings of the Board of Estimate of the City of New York VIII* (May 25, 1962, to June 26, 1962), p. 8607 and 8608.

<sup>211</sup> *Journal of Proceedings of the Board of Estimate of the City of New York VIII* (May 25, 1962, to June 26, 1962), p. 8607.

skeptical about the effects of renewal and wanted to use the its tools—low-income housing, and to a lesser extent limited-profit middle-income housing—to secure a place for current residents who would be displaced during the process. One was consensual and used the liberal language of participation, integration, and “balance;” the other was increasingly militant and wanted the city to concentrate its resources on helping the poor. The issue of low and middle-income housing was where they found common ground to negotiate.

### *High-Rise Living on the Avenue of Tomorrow*

The public projects—the public housing and the new school, both of which were constructed by city agencies with their own architects, plans, and budgets—moved into implementation quickly. The well-oiled machinery of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) got the area’s first redevelopment project, Stephen Wise Homes, underway in 1962. The 399-unit project, located on Site 29, between West 90th and West 91st and Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, opened in January 1965. **[figure 4.15]** The project was an early NYCHA experiment with public arts; two 19-story brick buildings, designed by Knappe and Johnson, enclosed a plaza in filled with a herd of plum-colored, stubby-legged concrete horses by the sculptor Contantino Nivola.<sup>212</sup> **[figure 4.16]** A second public housing project, 70 low-income units in a low-rise building on Site 15, on West 94th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus, opened in May. The new public school in the area, PS 84, located on Site 26, on West 92nd Street between Columbus and Central Park West, opened in September 1962. A brick-faced, three-story building with an adjacent play area, it represented a major improvement in facilities

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<sup>212</sup> “Rabbi Wise Housing Dedicated; Mayor Backs Low-Income Units.” *New York Times*, December 15, 1964.

for local schoolchildren, who transferred there from an overcrowded school that had closed at the end of the previous year.

The new residential development was the next element of the plan to move into implementation. In accordance with the city's vision of a mixed-income West Side, plans for the redevelopment areas along Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues—the areas where new construction would be concentrated—included both market-rate and subsidized-middle income housing. (For the most part, the public housing was confined to the side streets, where land prices were lower.) Of the three types of housing, the middle-income housing posed the biggest challenge. As city officials like Moses had been arguing for years, it was becoming increasingly difficult to construct anything but luxury housing in Manhattan without subsidy, and even then it was difficult to keep monthly rents (for rental apartments) or maintenance charges (for cooperatives) low enough that families of modest means could afford them.<sup>213</sup> In the WSURA, planners made use of legislation unique to New York State, the 1955 Mitchell-Lama Act, which offered generous financing terms for housing projects whose sponsors agreed to accept limited profits on their investment.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> On the difficulties producing low- or middle-income housing without subsidy in postwar New York, see Gordon D. McDonald and Rosalind Tough, "New York City: Changing Social Values and the New Housing," *Land Economics* 39:2 (May 1963), pp. 157-165.

<sup>214</sup> The Limited-Profit Housing Companies or Mitchell-Lama Program was devised in 1955 to encourage the production of housing in the "middle-income range," between public housing, which rented for \$8 to \$14 per room per month and privately built, market-rate housing, which rarely rented for less than \$34 per room per month. (Figures are for 1955.) A combination of low-cost financing and tax exemptions—the Act authorized state or city loans covering up to 90% of construction costs repayable for period of up to 50 years, city could also grant tax exemptions of 50% for thirty years—helped bring down the cost for private developers, who agreed to a maximum return of 6% and public oversight of design, construction, and rents, and operating costs. It was a popular financing mechanism in New York; some 138,000 Mitchell-Lama units, rental and coop, were built between 1958 and 1975. On the program, see "Mitchell-

The sponsorship requirement attracted organizations with strong social agendas that helped develop a culture of cooperative living on the avenues. The first and most active sponsors to come forward were the major community organizations involved in the planning process—the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly, which had been involved in the earliest planning stages, in the 1950s; the Goddard-Riverside Community Center, a local settlement house; and the SBNC, the organization formed to represent project area organizations and residents in the planning process. Along with a fourth sponsor, a group of individuals organized specifically for the purpose of sponsoring middle-income housing in the neighborhood, they pushed forward the first middle-income housing projects in the WSURA.

All of them approached sponsorship with the idea that middle-income housing could help solve some of the neighborhood's problems. Goddard-Riverside's housing offshoot, the Goddard-Riverside Housing Corporation (G-R Housing Corporation), for example, looked to bring middle-income residents in the so-called helping professions to live in the area and strengthen the community, while the Strycker's Bay Housing Corporation, formed out of the SBNC, wanted to provide as many units for displaced project area residents as possible. Believing that homeownership would encourage stability and investment in the area as well as a more socially minded community, these groups organized their projects as cooperatives rather than rental buildings. They set up storefront sales offices in the neighborhood, interviewed potential cooperators, and launched pre-occupancy programs aimed at introducing future residents to cooperative living. All actively sought families; Goddard Tower was the first cooperative in the city with a significant number of four-bedroom apartments, and the Strycker's

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Lama Housing” in *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, pp. 305-306; Barbara M. Woodfill, *New York City's Mitchell-Lama Program: Middle-Income Housing?* (New York: Rand Institute, 1971).

Bay sponsors opted to have fewer units than zoning guidelines allowed so that the units could have more rooms. They recruited families of color and Spanish-speakers and favored applicants who supported racial integration within the cooperative. When they interviewed potential cooperators, they also looked for residents who supported renewal on the West Side and were interested in sending their children to the local public schools. All four buildings contained a designated number of “skewed rental” units, low-income units whose lower rents and maintenance charges were subsidized by the middle-income units, echoing the ideals of economic balance of the project as a whole.<sup>215</sup>

These community groups began moving shortly after the approval of the preliminary plan, retaining architects and economic consultants, developing site plans and designs, and seeking cooperators who wanted to purchase units in the development. By early 1961, the Stryker’s Bay Housing Corporation had an executive board, an architect, a *pro bono* consultant, and preliminary plans for approximately 240 units on Site 17, on Columbus Avenue between West 93rd and West 94th Street, and already approximately one hundred families, many of whom were residents of project area, had put down a deposit on their downpayment.<sup>216</sup> The G-R Housing Corporation established a sales office in 1961, and by the end of the year it had collected down payments from 125 families for housing on Site 11, on the east side of

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<sup>215</sup> These buildings were the first in the city to use “skewed” rentals to create units affordable for low-income families. By adjusting the monthly rentals or maintenance charges of 80% of the units, the remaining 20% could be offered for monthly costs equivalent to those found in public housing—in the early 1960s, \$18 per room per month. The 80-20 formula was used throughout the WSURA until 1970, when it was revised to 70-30.

<sup>216</sup> Some of the SBHC’s success in finding tenants from the project area may have been due to its aggressive outreach program, during which the group distributed bilingual leaflets explaining the Church’s approval of cooperative living. See Letter from Henry Brown to Most Reverend John J. Maguire [Auxiliary Bishop of New York], January 17, 1961. Henry Joseph Browne Collection, Box 22 Folder Correspondence 1959-1961.



Amsterdam Avenue between West 94th and West 95th Streets.<sup>217</sup> RNA House, sponsored by the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly, secured Site 8, on West 96th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus, and Columbus Park Towers, sponsored by a group of West Side residents, was slated for Site 16, on Columbus Avenue between West 93rd and West 94th Streets.

With these projects underway, city officials and local groups—notably the SBNC—continued to negotiate the way in which the parcels along Columbus and Amsterdam Avenue would be redeveloped.<sup>218</sup> Headed by Father Browne, who was increasingly active in anti-poverty work and critical of the way the city’s housing and renewal programs were displacing low-income families, the SBNC was aggressive in its advocacy for more low-income units to house residents who had been relocated from the project area. The city agencies were changing as well, backing away from Moses-era policies that favored using redevelopment areas for market-rate housing. When the Urban Renewal Board was reorganized as the Housing and Redevelopment Board (HRB) in 1962, it had the specific mandate to construct more middle-income housing in the city. In the WSURA, the middle-income cooperatives in the first stage of the plan became the model for subsequent housing projects, and the HRB actively sought sponsors for the second and third stages that were interested in providing housing for displaced, low-income, and minority families.<sup>219</sup> When market-rate projects stalled for lack of financing, the HRB began to re-

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<sup>217</sup> On the early stages of Goddard Tower Cooperative, see Clara Fox, *Vertical Neighborhood in an Urban Renewal Community*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>218</sup> After the passage of the final plan, the SBNC had been designated the “project area committee,” the organization charged with the responsibility for facilitating community involvement in the urban renewal area.

<sup>219</sup> In 1964, the Housing and Redevelopment Board announced that 14 sponsors of housing in the second and third stages of the project included five that were “primarily interested in expanding housing opportunities for Negroes and Puerto Ricans,” including the Congress of Puerto Rican

designate these sites for middle-income housing. Successive amendments to the plan added two new public housing projects and progressively altered the proportion of low-, middle-, and high-income units, so that by the end of the decade almost all of the new development was limited-profit housing, and each of these middle-income developments contained a designated number of “skewed rental” units.<sup>220</sup>

The first of the high rise housing developments—Goddard Tower, the Strycker’s Bay Apartments, RNA House, and Columbus Park Towers—finally opened in the spring of 1967 after a four-month delay caused by a plumbers’ strike. Because of their tight budgets, carefully calculated to yield the lowest possible cost per room, they were architecturally modest, and because they were designed to incorporate as many units as possible, they were massive, on a completely different scale from the neighborhoods brownstones or pre-war elevator buildings. The Strycker’s Bay Apartments’ 235 units, designed by Holden, Egan, Wilson & Corser, were located in two plain red-brick towers sited so as not to require the demolition of an older apartment building on the site. **[figure 4.17]** Columbus Park Towers, designed by Ballard, Todd Associates, had 162 units in a 27-story tower with concrete balustrades. Goddard Tower, designed by Frederick G. Frost Jr. and Associates, had 193 units rising 27 stories above one of the six landscaped public plazas designated in the final plan. **[figure 4.18]** RNA House, designed by Edelbaum and Webster, was a long slab with a concrete façade and 207 units. **[figure 4.19]**

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Hometowns, Harlem Neighborhoods Association, the Spanish-language newspaper *El Diario-La Prensa*, a local union, and a group associated with St. Martin’s Protestant Episcopal Church. See Lawrence O’Kane, “Sponsors Named in Renewal Area,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1964.

<sup>220</sup> On the city’s decision to convert sites slated for market-rate housing to middle-income, see “Commission Nathan Offers Program To Speed Up Construction in West Side Area,” *Real Estate Builders Record and Guide* 98:14 (October 1, 1966), p. 2. For a breakdown of the housing projects over time, see “WSURA Fact Sheet.” Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council Archives, UR NYC West Side Misc. Box.

Strycker’s Bay Apartments and Columbus Park Towers, both located on Columbus Avenue, and Goddard Tower, on Amsterdam, had commercial space on their ground floors, and all had community rooms and facilities like nursery schools, as well as an active and engaged group of residents, many of whom had been involved for years in pre-occupancy programs intended to build community within the coops. Although neither the architectural language nor the spatial organization of these first middle-income buildings was especially innovative, their sheer scale and presence along the reconstructed avenues matched an equally new social agenda for neighborhood life on the upper West Side.<sup>221</sup>

And yet, problems with the plan’s vision of an orderly, humane renewal process and an integrated new neighborhood were already emerging. Shortly after the city took title to the redevelopment parcels in early 1963, a private firm began an extensive survey of residents who would be displaced by redevelopment or rehabilitation projects and discovered that even though the city had staged the relocation process to last six years and displace as few tenants as possible at any one time, “many hundreds of tenants” had already fled the area. The mass exodus, begun well before city workers arrived to help families plan their move, belied official statements that the relocation process might help families find better accommodations.<sup>222</sup> The business relocation process—which depended in large part on relocating businesses to temporary “holding areas” while their owners waited for their new spaces to be built—had fared no better. In 1966, a *New York Times* reporter checked in with Elemer Vadasz, a bakery owner who, two years

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<sup>221</sup> On the issue of the architectural banality of the first limited-income housing developments and the city’s attempt to redress it in the second and third phase of the project, see “Individualized Architecture Is Apparent in West Side Renewal,” *Real Estate Builders Record and Guide* 202:3 (July 20, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Greenleigh Associates, Inc., *Report of the Diagnostic Survey of Tenant Households in the West Side Urban Renewal Area of New York City*, p. 14.

earlier, had moved from condemned premises on West 96th Street to a holding area on Columbus Avenue. The new building he was planning on returning to was still an empty lot, and his business was struggling. By 1966, one hundred of the estimated 500 small businesses that had existed in the project area in 1959 had gone out of business.<sup>223</sup>

Moreover, there were signs that the harmonious racial and economic balance envisioned by the planners would prove elusive. Shortly before PS 84 opened in 1965, the school's largely white, middle-class parent-teacher association successfully petitioned the Superintendent of Schools to have the children from Stephen Wise assigned to another elementary school to prevent PS 84 from becoming "too low-income." When Stephen Wise opened in 1965, its school children walked several blocks to PS 75 outside the project area rather than crossing the street to attend the new school.<sup>224</sup> By the time the first housing started to open in 1967, the middle-income housing program itself was in crisis. Because rising construction costs and higher interest rates were pushing up the cost of constructing these buildings, rents and monthly carrying costs in Mitchell Lama housing projects rose precipitously in the mid 1960s. Goddard Towers had to appeal to the city to postpone their mortgage payment to avoid increases in monthly carrying costs even before the building opened for occupancy, and residents were faced with a 15% increase in carrying charges within a year of occupancy.<sup>225</sup> By the time New Amsterdam Houses, a limited-profit rental building one block north of Goddard Tower, opened in 1968, interest rates

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<sup>223</sup> Steven V. Roberts, "City Trying to Ease Impact of Renewal on West Side" *New York Times*, December 26, 1966.

<sup>224</sup> On PS 84's first years, see Joseph P. Lyford, *The Airtight Cage*, pp. 154-171.

<sup>225</sup> Clara Fox, *Vertical Neighborhood in an Urban Renewal Community*, pp. 42-43.

and construction costs had risen so much that rents projected at approximately \$25 per room per month were now \$43.

By the late 1960s, the local consensus the community groups and the city had reached in 1962 with the passage of the final plan began to unravel. When Mayor Lindsay visited the site to tout the Mitchell-Lama program at the end of 1968, he was met by a group of pickets who carried a coffin and chanted that the city had killed the middle-income housing program with rising rents.<sup>226</sup> In 1968, the SBNC—which had long worked closely with city planners and had sponsored its own middle-income housing project—found itself in the unexpected position of opposing two proposed Mitchell-Lama housing projects in the area on the grounds that the new units, once projected at under \$30 per room per month but now \$58 or more in the second and third stage projects, were out of reach for most families.<sup>227</sup>

### ***Brownstones and Rehabilitation on the Side Streets***

Brownstone rehabilitation was still an ill-defined, untested technique in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the West Side project got underway. As a potential alternative to redevelopment, it appealed to city officials, who felt public pressure to slow down the rate of demolition in Manhattan's neighborhoods, to the small group of residents who already owned and lived in their own brownstones in the urban renewal area and who wanted to see adjacent houses fixed up, and to planners, who were increasingly concerned with maintaining the smaller and more intimate scale of the pre-war city. New York needed "quiet, old-fashioned

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<sup>226</sup> Joseph P. Fried, "Lindsay Praises Housing Program," *New York Times*, December 25, 1968.

<sup>227</sup> "West Side Families Protest," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 3, 1968.

neighborhoods” just as much as it needed “brand-new monumental projects,” said Albert Cole, the national housing administrator, expressing his approval of the West Side project in 1958.<sup>228</sup> Rehabilitating the brownstones on the neighborhood’s side streets rather than redeveloping them meant that the area would “keep the charm of diversity—the mixture of old and new, big and small, the variety of people and material and buildings that has always attracted people to city living,” the Housing and Redevelopment Board declared in its summary of the final plan in 1962.<sup>229</sup>

The catch phrases the city used in discussing the plan—phrases like “worth saving,” and “keeping the good”—obscured the extent to which the HRB hoped to use rehabilitation to change the area’s side streets, where the majority of the once-grand, turn-of-the-century brownstones had been subdivided into single rooms or small, low-rent units. Almost two-thirds of the 665 brownstones in the WSURA were in use as rooming houses, many of which lacked private bathrooms and had only makeshift kitchens. Single rooms housing entire families were common. Unlike the densely developed old-law tenements, with their high lot coverage and their narrow light wells, however, the brownstones could easily be converted back into the high-quality, middle-class housing the city desired. With their high ceilings, spacious, well-lit rooms, and private back yards, they were “potentially excellent housing,” as the HRB stated in its summary of the final plan.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> For Cole’s comments, see Charles Grutzner, “U.S. Funds May Go For Brownstones,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1958.

<sup>229</sup> Housing and Redevelopment Board, *West Side Urban Renewal Area: A Summary of the Final Plan*, p. 16.

Rehabilitation thus was as much an attempt to reduce overcrowding, modernize the area's housing stock, and encourage middle-class occupancy as it was an effort to maintain the scale and physical diversity of the neighborhood or reignite interest in the area's historic architecture—a significant point in light of the emphasis on preservation we often associate with rehabilitation today. The focus on modernization is evident in the initial study of the area in 1958, in which architectural and economic consultants made detailed studies of three types of brownstone rehabilitation: minimum, which called for very few structural changes, just the patching of plaster and floors and the addition of baths and kitchenettes; intermediate, which also involved the removal of the stoop, the resurfacing of the façade, and new heating and wiring; and extensive, which called for the merging of multiple structures, the reconstruction of the entire interior space, and the consolidation of individual rear yards into communal landscaped parks and play areas. The emphasis in all three schemes was on the viability of these buildings as modern, five- or six-unit apartment buildings, not on their restoration to an earlier state. Where possible, the consultants wanted to eliminate old-fashioned features like stoops and reconfigure the units to emphasize flowing interior spaces and the open, green, park-like spaces they hoped to achieve through demolition elsewhere in the WSURA.

All three types of rehabilitation, but especially the intermediate and extensive types, were so costly that the consultants doubted individual homeowners would invest in them without some kind of city, state, or federal assistance, a point that touched on the economic challenges of rehabilitation as a way of renewing the neighborhood. What could the city do to encourage private investment in an area that was widely perceived to be declining and dangerous? What

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<sup>230</sup> Housing and Redevelopment Board, *West Side Urban Renewal Area: A Summary of the Final Plan*, p. 5. For housing conditions in the brownstones, see New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*, pp. 25-26.

combination of financial incentives would encourage investors to purchase and modernize these buildings? While city officials had initially conceived of rehabilitation as a purely market-driven enterprise, part of an effort to involve more private capital in the renewal and redevelopment process, the HRB believed it would need to offer some form of subsidy, encouragement, or guidance to attract new owners to the area and facilitate the process. Because of their location in a designated urban renewal area, rehabilitation projects were eligible for generous FHA-insured loans. In addition, city officials convinced three West Side banks to establish a lending pool of \$3 million to help with rehabilitation work—an essential form of assistance, since few institutions were willing to lend in the area—and exempted brownstone owners who improved property anywhere in the WSURA from city realty taxes for a designated period of time. The HRB also set up a site office at 167 West 89th Street offering free consultation to prospective brownstone owners that eventually grew to house a staff of thirty, including mortgage consultants as well as architect and engineers who made preliminary studies of properties eligible for rehabilitation.<sup>231</sup>

In an effort to show how rehabilitation might work in the area, the HRB planned to purchase and then auction off a limited number of brownstones to buyers who agreed to rehabilitate them in accordance with city regulations. In April 1960, while the final plan was still in preparation, the HRB designated eighty-one brownstones on West 94th and West 95th Streets

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<sup>231</sup> For financing options available to brownstone owners, see “West Side Plan Opens New Vista,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1958, and “New Program Set in Area Renewal,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1961. The loans, financed under Section 220 of the National Housing Act, were for 30 years at 5% interest for 90% of the value of the property plus the costs of rehabilitation. The realty tax exemptions were also quite generous: owners were exempted from realty taxes entirely for nine years, and then for an additional three years owners were required to pay taxes only on the value of the improvements, not the total value of the property.



between Central Park West and Columbus as part of a “Demonstration Rehabilitation Pilot Area” at the northern edge of the WSURA, in the first stage of the project.<sup>232</sup> [figure 4.20] The HRB began by targeting twenty of these brownstones for immediate purchase and rehabilitation. Rather than using eminent domain to acquire the buildings—as the city usually did in urban renewal areas—the HRB entered into private negotiations with landlords. With half a dozen city, state, and federal agencies involved, however, it took several years to get the program underway. Between 1961 and late 1963, the city purchased nineteen brownstones, all of which were in use as rooming houses, for \$20,000 to \$35,000, and developed a set of architectural and financial guidelines to guide the rehabilitation process.<sup>233</sup> When the HRB finally put a trial group of four brownstones up for auction in December 1963, only one of a group of a hundred prospective buyers qualified under the city’s stringent standards. The HRB changed tactics, offering the houses for direct sale, rather than auction, in late 1964, but even then the red tape associated with the program and various associated city, state, and federal agencies proved formidable. The HRB acquired and sold an additional sixteen brownstones in 1967, but the complicated public-private negotiations and delays involved in the city’s program meant that the showcase demonstration program, ironically, did not set the pace for rehabilitation in the neighborhood.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> On the demonstration pilot project, see New York City Urban Renewal Board, *Final Plan for the Rehabilitation Demonstration Pilot Project in the West Side Urban Renewal Area*.

<sup>233</sup> The most notable of the rehabilitation requirements were those for owner occupation and the conversion of the building into at least five dwelling units. Federal regulations specified that projects funded with Section 220 loans needed to have a minimum of five dwelling units, while even more specific New York City regulations required that the brownstones would be divided into six apartments: three-bedroom duplexes on the basement and first floors, a two-bedroom apartment on the second floor, and two efficiencies on the third and fourth.

<sup>234</sup> The *New York Times* reporter Thomas W. Ennis covered the trials and tribulations of the WSURA rehabilitation program throughout the 1960s and produced a number of detailed articles on it, including: “West Side Plan Ready To Start,” March 18, 1962; “10-Year Renewal Stirs

NYCHA, which purchased four contiguous brownstones in the demonstration area for conversion into public housing in 1961, was an unexpected participant in brownstone rehabilitation in the area. The housing authority had been a strong proponent of high density, high-rise housing and superblock planning throughout the 1950s; in fact, with almost 400 apartments housing 1,200 people on a 2.3 acre site, the nearby Stephen Wise Homes, the first public housing project constructed in the WSURA, was one of its highest density projects to date and typical of its approach. At 48-54 West 94th Street, NYCHA converted four buildings once containing a hundred single rooms into one structure containing 40 public housing units, renting from \$43 to \$79 monthly under the housing authority's supervision. Building on the success of this first project—and responding to growing community pressure to provide more local public housing for relocated families—NYCHA began planning to take over an additional 36 brownstone rooming houses on six sites on West 89th, West 90th and West 91st Streets in 1963. As it had done on West 94th Street, NYCHA rebuilt several of these contiguous brownstones, 22-42 West 91st Street, in 1965 as a single public housing project, retaining the façade but constructing modern apartments within. The 36 brownstones NYCHA acquired eventually contained some 236 public housing units for displaced area residents.<sup>235</sup> [figure 4.21]

Several private groups also purchased contiguous units and converted them into cooperative apartments, including a group of seven families that purchased seven buildings on

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West Side,” October 13, 1963; “City Alters Plan in Renewal Sale,” February 2, 1964; “Buyers Compete for Brownstones,” March 21, 1965; “Renewal Snarl May Be Reduced,” March 13, 1966; and “City Plans to Sell West Side Houses,” November 5, 1967. For a discussion of the delays and red tape plaguing both the WSURA program and rehabilitation programs in other cities in the early 1960s, see David B. Carlson, “Rehabilitation: Stepchild of Urban Renewal.”

<sup>235</sup> On NYCHA's first project at West 94th Street, see Thomas W. Ennis, “10-Year Renewal Stirs West Side,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1963 and James Trager, *West of Fifth*, p. 106. On the second project, see Samuel Kaplan, “\$3.6 Million to Be Spent on Low-Income Project,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1965.

West 93rd and West 94th Streets from a private school moving to another location on the West Side. Their cooperative, Old Ridge, included 30 apartments of one to four bedrooms, many of which were duplexes and had balconies or terraces facing onto a common landscaped garden and recreation area between the buildings.<sup>236</sup> The 9-G Cooperative at 19-35 West 93rd Street was created from nine brownstones the city had considered too small for rehabilitation and slated for demolition and redevelopment as a 10-story apartment. Brownstone owners on the adjacent south side of West 94th street opposed the development of a mid-rise building on that site and began the fight to have it redesignated in 1963. The nine units were purchased from the city for \$200,000 and the renovation was financed with a low-interest loan made possible through the 213 program for cooperatives. The architectural firm Edelman & Salzman redesigned the units, retaining the facades but reorganizing the interior space to form 34 apartments of one to five bedrooms, extending the backs of the houses to a uniform 52 feet, and creating a community garden and recreation area behind the buildings. [figures 4.22, 4.23] Among the organizers of the cooperative were the former baseball star Jackie Robinson, who had publicly supported the WSURA plan during hearings in 1962, and his wife Rachel.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See Thomas W. Ennis, "10-Year Renewal Stirs West Side," *New York Times*, October 13, 1963. The project, located at 145-149 West 93rd and 146 to 152 West 94th streets, between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, was designed by Melvin Grossgold and financed with a mortgage loan insured under Section 213 of the National Housing Act. Down payments were \$1,750 a floor and monthly carrying charges were roughly \$30 a room.

<sup>237</sup> Thomas W. Ennis, "City Plans to Sell West Side Houses," *New York Times*, November 5, 1967, and "9 West Side Brownstones Converted Into Co-op," *New York Times*, January 14, 1968. See also "Whatever Happened to the Little Old New York Brownstone," *Progressive Architecture* 49 (December 1968), pp. 46-47; "Nine-G Cooperative," *Architectural Forum* 131 (July-August 1969), pp. 78-81. In 1969 the development was cited for excellence in civic architecture and urban design: "City Club Gives Annual Bard Award for Excellence in Civic Architecture," *New York Times*, May 24, 1969. Purchase prices ranged from \$2,725 for a one-

Although the city encouraged cooperative conversions, offering three and four buildings together as “package deals” as it sold off the brownstones it had acquired, the majority of rehabilitation in the WSURA was carried out by individual owners who negotiated the purchase of individual brownstones privately. While the HRB had difficulty selling the brownstones it had purchased in the demonstration area on West 94th and West 95th Streets, private sales picked up quickly in the mid-1960s, particularly at the southern edge of the urban renewal area, on West 87th and West 88th Streets. The Kempner Corporation, a real estate firm that did property management for brownstone owners, estimated that 32 brownstones had been sold in the WSURA in 1963 and 84 in 1964. By 1968, 226 had changed hands, mostly from absentee landlords to young couples who planned to renovate them and live in them, often in duplexes on the ground and first floors. Some funded rehabilitation privately, some took advantage of the FHA-insured loans; all benefited from tax breaks and the HRB’s assistance in relocating tenants from the buildings.

These young brownstoners, as they were called, were attracted to the architectural quality of the older buildings, the cultural diversity of the West Side, and the opportunity to own a house in Manhattan. While the city certainly played a role encouraging the conversion of rooming houses and low-rent apartment houses into middle-class, owner-occupied apartments, the WSURA was only one of a dozen neighborhoods in Manhattan and Brooklyn where an influx of these home-seeking professionals—among them lawyers, bankers, architects, editors, and teachers—sparked a brownstone revival. Prices soared; available for as little as \$17,000 in the

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bedroom unit to \$10,900 for a five-bedroom unit, with monthly carrying charges ranging from \$120 to \$360.

early 1960s, unrenovated houses were worth \$25,000 to \$45,000 by 1965. By 1968, they sold for \$60,000, with renovated houses going for much more.<sup>238</sup>

One of the unexpected consequences of rehabilitation in the WSURA was the growth of local community organizations and the formation of a new constituency in the planning and development process. Like many of the middle-income cooperative owners in the high-rises along Columbus Avenue, brownstone owners were often drawn to the Upper West Side by the neighborhood's diversity and were committed to improving their houses, their blocks and their neighborhood. Interviewed in the late 1960s, one brownstoner spoke of "a sense of quickened pace, an assurance from the inhabitants that life is exciting, with an environment full of potential satisfaction no matter what my interest or mood at any moment." Another compared the Upper West Side to Greenwich Village, which "has the variety of people (races and economic) and stores I hope the West Side will achieve."<sup>239</sup> Brownstone owners helped revive and carry on the work of many of the area's block associations, organizing clean-up days and tree plantings. In 1963, Peggy Mann Houlton was among the group of West 94th street residents who saved the nine houses on West 93rd Street from demolition and formed the Little Old New York Citizens' Committee, which helped families buy and renovate brownstones and acted as a clearinghouse for information about the process. Unlike the cooperators along Columbus Avenue, the

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<sup>238</sup> Thomas W. Ennis, "Buyers Compete For Brownstones," *New York Times*, March 21, 1965; "Renewal Snarl May Be Reduced," *New York Times*, March 13, 1966; "Old Houses Gain Status in Renewal," *New York Times*, August 11, 1968; Bernard Weinraub, "W. 94th St.: Microcosm of Change," *New York Times*, December 30, 1969. On the brownstone revival on the Upper West Side, see Brownstone Revival Committee, *Home-buyer's Guide to New York City Brownstone Neighborhoods*.

<sup>239</sup> Both brownstoners are cited in Lawrence Halprin, *New York, New York*, p. 113.

brownstoners tended to have had a strong, individualist ethos, seeing themselves as “pioneers” in a declining and dangerous part of the city.

Local groups like the block associations and the Little Old New York Citizens’ Committee tended to involve themselves in the planning process because they were concerned about concrete problems affecting life on the WSURA’s side streets, but by the mid 1960s, brownstoners were also becoming interested in guiding the neighborhood’s overall growth and revitalization. They were among the most active organizers of the Committee of Neighbors to Insure a Normal Urban Environment—or CONTINUE—a group of brownstone owners, tenants, and local small business owners that coalesced around a fight to prevent the city from building additional public housing units in the neighborhood in 1967. Arguing that more public housing would concentrate low-income families and social problems in a neighborhood that was just beginning to turn around, CONTINUE argued that the city should be building market-rate housing and accommodating a limited number of low-income residents in “skewed” units within those projects. Headed by Dr. Arthur C. Logan, former head of the Harlem anti-poverty agency Haryou-Act and a well-known civil rights activist, and counting among its officers Roberta Brandes Gratz, a writer on urban issues who today is widely known as one of the foremost advocates and interpreters of Jane Jacobs’ ideas, CONTINUE became one of the key players in the planning and execution of the third and final stage of the plan.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Brandes Gratz signed early correspondence as co-chairman, along with Dr. Arthur Logan, chairman, and Jerome Fine, co-chairman. (“What’s Happening to the West Side Urban Renewal Project: A Report to the Community by CONTINUE,” dated April 1971, p. 1-2. Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council Archives, Box UR NYC West Side.) Later CONTINUE publications list her as vice-president. (“CONTINUE! A Liberal Lobby for Economically Integrated Housing.” Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council, Box UR NYC West Side.)

In a sense, CONTINUE stepped into one of the roles that the SBNC shed as it became a more aggressive advocate for displaced site residents in the early and mid 1960s. Early on in the planning process, the SBNC had functioned as an impartial umbrella organization for varied local interests and had attempted, as best it could, to develop consensus among them. Beginning with the public approvals process for the final plan, however, the SBNC began to see itself as an advocate for low-income residents, particularly those displaced by the plan. Father Browne, the organization's president for several terms during the early 1960s, became an outspoken advocate on housing issues, testifying before Congressional committees and serving on several city-wide commissions. As the plan moved into implementation, the SBNC began to deal extensively with displaced families—often advocating for them in exchanges with unresponsive city agencies—and campaign for more low- and moderate-income housing in the area. Although it maintained close ties with the city and in fact received funding from the HRB, the SBNC developed into a watchdog organization, holding the city to its promises to retain the economic diversity of the neighborhood by advocating for tenants and the construction of low-income housing in the WSURA.<sup>241</sup>

Where the SBNC felt that the city was not doing enough to ensure that relocated families could move back into the WSURA, CONTINUE was concerned that too much low-income housing—particularly low-income housing in the form of public housing projects—would discourage further private investment in the neighborhood. Its members called for the expansion of programs that subsidized low- and moderate-income units within middle-income cooperatives

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<sup>241</sup> On the SBNC, see Joseph Lyford, *The Airtight Cage*, esp. pp. 117-125. On Father Browne's career, see "Crusader for Housing," *New York Times*, May 25, 1965; "Henry Browne, 61, Rutgers Professor," *New York Times*, November 30, 1980; and Flavia Alaya, *Under the Rose*, esp. 168-186.

and rental apartment buildings, and they asked the city to revisit its plans to construct subsidized housing on several of the undeveloped parcels in the second and third stages of the plan and instead encourage market-rate housing, as it had suggested in the preliminary plan in the late 1950s. Like the SBNC, CONTINUE argued that it was simply holding the city to its original promises to preserve an economically integrated neighborhood and favored “the completion of the WSURA Plan according to its original intent.” As CONTINUE became more active in the planning process, the two groups were set to clash.<sup>242</sup>

### *The Occupation of Site 30*

In April 1970, 15-year-old Jimmy Santos died in an Upper West Side apartment, killed by the carbon monoxide emitted by a faulty heater. His death was no tragic accident—at least not to friends and neighbors familiar with the living circumstances of families like Jimmy’s. The apartment was dilapidated and unsafe; the landlord who had failed to fix the heating system was indifferent to his tenants’ complaints; the city inspectors who should have ensured that the heater was working had turned a blind eye to the landlord’s neglect. What struck neighbors as even more galling was the fact that the city had publicly committed itself to improving housing conditions on the West Side by designating Jimmy’s neighborhood a “conservation area” and the blocks immediately south an “urban renewal area.” Although the city had promised new and rehabilitated housing for more than a decade and construction had begun, housing conditions for many residents in the oldest and most dilapidated brownstones in the area had actually worsened as landlords put off repairs on the condemned buildings.

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<sup>242</sup> For CONTINUE’s positions on the WSURA, see Memo from CONTINUE: Committee of Neighbors to Insure a Normal Urban Environment, “Fact Sheet on the West Side Urban Renewal Area, August 14, 1970.”



Angry over the cycle of neglect that had resulted in a child's death, neighbors and friends gathered at Jimmy's funeral at St. Gregory's Roman Catholic Church on West 90<sup>th</sup> Street and then followed his hearse back to his apartment building, where they collected the family's furniture and belongings and brought them to the city's urban renewal project office on Columbus Avenue. **[figure 4.24]** As the two trucks hauled the furniture southward, the journey turned into a protest, as the mourners sang "We Don't Want No Rats" to the tune of "We Shall Overcome." As they approached the city's office, they began to formulate demands. "The city must find a new apartment for this family," one man shouted as the group confronted city officials. "We must show them that poor people also have rights."<sup>243</sup> City officials, taken aback, placated the group with the promise of an apartment for Jimmy's family in a city-owned brownstone nearby.

That night, however, a group of residents and activists armed with crowbars broke in to half a dozen unoccupied West Side tenements that had been shuttered and condemned as part of the urban renewal project. By morning, several dozen families had moved their furniture and belongings into the apartments. Within a week the squatters were repairing the damaged buildings, organizing politically, and calling for the city to recognize their right to safe and decent housing. Dozens and then hundreds of low-income families moved into tenements that had been emptied in anticipation of demolition and redevelopment. Operation Move-In, one of the largest and most sustained squatting movements in New York history, had begun.

By 1970, the visions of an racially and economically integrated community advocated by both cooperators and brownstoners seemed untenable and naïve to the neighborhood's low-income residents. More than a decade of city-led redevelopment along Columbus Avenue and

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<sup>243</sup> Douglas Robinson, "Home Won After a Death," *New York Times* (April 18, 1970), p. 31.

private brownstone rehabilitation along the side streets had displaced thousands of residents, many of whom, like the squatters, were low-income and Puerto Rican. Although the city had committed itself to providing decent housing for displaced families, it quickly developed a reputation as poor landlord, slow to respond to maintenance requests and reluctant to make improvements in buildings that were scheduled for demolition. Always the most contentious aspect of the renewal program, displacement now provoked anger. “On the Upper West Side, we had Amsterdam Avenue and Columbus, and they had resided on West End,” one resident, Melba Bruno, recalled. “Then suddenly they wanted everything.”<sup>244</sup>

Tensions boiled over in the spring of 1970, when Jimmy Santos’ death prompted a loose coalition of West Side community groups—among them the Puerto Rican activist group El Comité, and the anti-poverty agency Community Action, Inc.—to take action. They targeted nine city-owned buildings on West 87th, West 88th, and West 89th Streets—buildings that had been condemned for redevelopment but which were still partially occupied and still had heat and running water—and they helped twenty-nine poor Upper West Side families move into empty units. These families were soon joined by others. The squatters’ movement grew rapidly, both within the WSURA and without. By July 1970, there were 100 families living in buildings on West Side between 87th Street and Columbia University; by November there were approximately 200, the vast majority of whom were living in private and city-owned brownstones and tenements located within the WSURA. The squatters began to organize: they elected leaders from their own ranks, including Melba Bruno, a Spanish-speaking instructional aide at one of the local schools; they began to fix up the old brownstones and tenements; and

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<sup>244</sup> Jill Jonnes, “For Squatters, Rent-Free Life Is the Solution to High Costs,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1980.

they organized day care, emergency funds for distressed families, and a waiting list for families interested in joining them. [figure 4.25]

By the spring of 1971, their numbers had swelled to several hundred families, and their demands had focused on a single site, Site 30, a redevelopment parcel along Columbus Avenue, between West 90<sup>th</sup> and West 91<sup>st</sup>. [figure 4.26] In four old tenements that had been condemned for redevelopment as middle-income housing, OMI established their headquarters, as well as a coffee house, a day care center, a school, and women's liberation center. "We want Site 30 to be renovated and all the squatters to have relocation rights," said Joe Rivera, a squatter and a building delegate, articulating the squatters' primary demands. "We want 75 per cent of the new housing in the [urban renewal] area to be low-income, and we want the community to decide where and how to build it."<sup>245</sup>

Establishing their headquarters on Site 30 was a strategic move on the part of the Operation Move-In leaders; unlike the most dilapidated of the brownstones on the side streets, the four tenements on Site 30 were still structurally sound, spacious, and easy to rehabilitate. Site 30 was also, critically, the first site scheduled for redevelopment under the upcoming third stage of the urban renewal plan. In order for the city to proceed with its plans for the southernmost part of the area, it would have to negotiate with the squatters. Bargaining from a position of strength, Operation Move-In boldly called in the promises the city had made more than a decade earlier—promises to reconstruct a racially and economically integrated neighborhood. Led by Bruno, the squatters demanded a halt to demolition and construction, a chance to rehabilitate existing structures for low-income families, and a "right of return" for relocated families who had been forced to leave the Upper West Side. Frustrated with the renewal process and with an

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<sup>245</sup> Bell Gale Chevigny, "Operation Move-In Rally," *Village Voice*, July 1, 1971, p. 71.

unresponsive housing bureaucracy, the squatters began calling for a re-planning of the entire renewal area with more attention paid to the needs of low-income residents. Meanwhile, radical politics flourished in the old storefronts and tenements. OMI drew the support of the Asian Coalition, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, a gay rights group, and several Women's Liberation groups.<sup>246</sup> *Broadway Local*, the community newspaper from which most of the images in this presentation come, spread the squatters' story across the city. [figure 4.27]

The city was never sympathetic to the squatters' demands, but, faced with a public challenge to its liberal housing policies and anxious to continue with its plans, it ultimately granted various concessions, including the expansion of public housing in the neighborhood, including on Site 30 itself, and the "right of return" for all who had participated in the squatters' movement—that is, the first choice of new public housing and subsidized apartments constructed in the urban renewal area, as soon as they became available. OMI relinquished Site 30 in its negotiations with the city, but the squatting continued informally for much longer; as late as 1974, there were still 274 squatter families living in apartments on the Upper West Side.

The squatters' militancy stirred strong feelings among middle-class neighbors, particularly the multi-racial, middle-class brownstoners, some of whom panicked in the face of a forthright challenge to traditional property rights. "Polarization and hatred are supplanting cooperation and understanding among different economic and ethnic groups in the city," one brownstoner newsletter warned. "The middle class people, who with great effort and dedication have established their families on the West Side in response to the idea of a truly integrated community...are disillusioned [and] frustrated."<sup>247</sup> Once loosely organized around the practical

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<sup>246</sup> Bell Gale Chevigny, "Operation Move-In Rally," *Village Voice*, July 1, 1971, p. 71.

problems of restoring nineteenth century houses, the brownstoners now also banded together in an organization called CONTINUE, which opposed the squatters' movement as a sign of the immanent ghettoization of the neighborhood and blamed the anti-poverty activists who had been involved peripherally as “manipulators of the poor.”<sup>248</sup>

Indeed, OMI's rhetoric was revolutionary at times, as we can see in the documentary film *Rompiendo Puertas (Break and Enter)*, filmed by the activist Third World Newsreel in 1970, during the early days of the movement. In one scene, the camera pans up one of the new middle-income high rises on Columbus Avenue ominously. “The next step will not be breaking into old buildings,” a voice warns. “The next step will be breaking into those [new buildings], and see how they like it.” Others, radicalized along issues of Third World oppression, offered an anti-colonialist critique of the displacement that they had endured: “From Saigon to Hanoi we have to move. From San Juan to Santiago, we have to move.” Still others began to formulated the idea of a city of sweat equity—one in which decent housing was a right to all who lived or worked in the area, not simply those who could afford it. “We are the people who built this city. We work here. We work in factories, hospitals, supermarkets, subways, banks. So we are the city,” one squatter said. “Why should we move?”<sup>249</sup>

As we look at other accounts of the squatters' movement, however, it becomes clear that the squatters, too, were well aware of the liberal ideal of a “balanced” Upper West Side neighborhood in which families from different racial and class backgrounds might live together.

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<sup>247</sup> “What's Happening to the West Side Urban Renewal Project: A Report to the Community by CONTINUE,” dated April 1971, p. 1. Citizens' Housing and Planning Council Archives, Box UR NYC West Side.

<sup>248</sup> Unnamed sources cited in Murray Schumach, “Segregated Slum ‘Threat’ Fought on West Side,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1970.

<sup>249</sup> *Rompiendo Puertas*, dir. Newsreel, 1970.

Indeed, appeals to diversity, integration, incrementalism, and middle-class liberal ideals were just as much a part of their strategy as revolutionary rhetoric. In the negotiations with the city, OMI activists repeatedly appealed to the urban renewal plan's vision of a racially and economically integrated neighborhood and pushed city officials to fulfill earlier promises. Where activists often took a hard line on issues of displacement and continued construction, OMI proved receptive to continuing development in the urban renewal area—so long as the development included public housing, and so long as that low-income residents from the neighborhood had first priority for the new units. The Puerto Rican and Dominican community that was forming around OMI and the squatter issue was not united in its politics; indeed, after a long period of quiescence, the Spanish-speaking community was just organizing again and becoming aware of its own political power. One of the remarkable things about the squatters' movement is its persistence and efficacy over several years despite the presence of both a radicalized element concerned with developing a critique of US imperialism—the members of El Comité, for instance—and local activists, often women and mothers, who were primarily interested in achieving short-term goals, like the guarantee of housing options and the improvement of the local schools. On the Upper West Side, the focus on Spanish speakers as a constituency with their own identity and agenda helped ameliorate potentially divisive differences.

Indeed, the occupation of Site 30 sparked other actions during those same years, as activists in the squatters' movement become involved with other issues. In 1970, many of the same activists pressured the local elementary school to abolish the tracking system that had separated Spanish-speaking children from their peers and introduce new leadership; in 1971, they helped launch the city's first dual-language, English-Spanish program. As activist Federico

Lora said, “we were organized because of the housing issue...The parents moved with us from one issue to the other. When we moved, we moved not as revolutionaries but as part of the community because we were part of the community.”<sup>250</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The Nixon administration’s moratorium on the construction of subsidized housing effectively ended the experiment on the Upper West Side. The moratorium brought a halt to plans for additional public housing units along Columbus Avenue, leaving more than a dozen redevelopment parcels to languish, empty, for years. [figure 4.28] Market-driven gentrification continued to cause displacement as the Lincoln Square area to the south gentrified. In 1980, the Reagan administration decided that market rate construction could begin on all remaining redevelopment sites without any reference to the original public housing commitment. Ultimately, more than two decades after the squatters left, market-rate housing was built on Site 30.

If the squatters lost the struggle for Site 30, however, they had other victories. Far more than a struggle for turf, the occupation of Site 30 represents a crucial moment of identity construction for squatters, neighborhood activists, and especially the Spanish-speaking community on the Upper West Side. Here on the West Side, renewal was a catalyst for political organizing and a growing awareness of the power of the Puerto Rican and Dominican communities in New York—in the language of community organizers today, it “built capacity” even if it did not result in increasing in the low-income housing stock in the neighborhood.

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<sup>250</sup> Lora cited in Rose Muzio, *Puerto Rican Radicalism in the 1970s* (diss. City University of New York, 2008), p. 135.

Similarly, the modest participation provisions of the 1958 plan also put in place a surprising advocate for tenants' rights in the increasingly confrontational Stryckers Bay Neighborhood Council, which helped create moderate-income housing projects that still provide affordable housing in an increasingly expensive neighborhood. (In fact, their low rentals and monthly maintenance fees have created something else entirely over time: housing projects that today have become "Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities" due to the fact that a significant number of those residents who moved in during the late 1960s have chosen to remain in their apartments, aging in place.<sup>251</sup>)

In many neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s, the struggle for more affordable housing and better schools brought residents together and sparked conflict over different goals and strategies. In urban renewal areas like the WSURA, the experience was heightened—not just because these debates were carried out in such a public fashion, but because the very premise of the urban renewal designation meant change would come to the neighborhood. The only question was what sort of change that would be. Multiple groups and organizations struggled to define it, better defining themselves and their vision of the neighborhood in the process.

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<sup>251</sup> See Interboro Partners, "NORCs in NYC," <<http://urbanomnibus.net/2010/03/norcs-in-nyc/>>, accessed October 21, 2011.



## Conclusion

### Beyond Jane Jacobs: Revisiting the Failures of Physical Planning

#### ***Introduction***

Shortly after Jane Jacobs died in the spring of 2006, New York saw an outpouring of appreciation for the famous writer and activist. She was praised as a writer and an activist, profoundly influential in both the realm of ideas and the world of planning and policy. The *New York Times* wrote that her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, “was as radically challenging to conventional thinking as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which helped engender the environmental movement, would be the next year, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which deeply affected perceptions of relations between the sexes, would be in 1963.”<sup>252</sup> On the doorstep of the well-known Greenwich Village house where Jacobs and her family lived in the 1950s and 1960s, mourners left flowers and cards, one of which summed up a common sentiment: “Jane Jacobs 1916-2006,” the card read. “From this house, in 1961, a housewife changed the world.”<sup>253</sup>

To historians and many urban residents, Jane Jacobs’ writings mark a milestone in the history of the American city. Her condemnation of the reductive, top-down approach to city-building of the 1950s and 1960s is still seen the authoritative refutation of an older model of planning, and her prescriptions for a smaller scale, self-organized city are now part of the new

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<sup>252</sup> Douglas Martin, “Jane Jacobs, Social Critic Who Redefined and Championed Cities,” *New York Times*, April 26, 2006.

<sup>253</sup> Image from the site <http://www.dancharnas.com/2006/04/jane.html>, accessed September 14, 2007.

planning orthodoxy. So closely is she associated with both the popular and professional rejection of state-instigated physical planning projects that it can be difficult to see *Death and Life* as anything but a paradigm shift in the way we understand cities signaling a radical shift in worldview. One set of assumptions guided enlightened planners and policy-makers beforehand, another did afterward.

And yet, as this dissertation argues, debates on architecture, planning, resident activism, and the importance of the urban neighborhood were not as clear-cut as Jacobs made them out to be. As Lewis Mumford complained when *Death and Life* was first published, many of Jacobs' ideas were more securely rooted in the specific experiences of the West Village than she was willing to admit—and, conversely, there were gaps and oversights in her theories and prescriptions that may begin to help us understand what the experiences at Dixwell, Roxbury, and the Upper West Side have to teach us.

### ***Race as a Fundamental Characteristic of Neighborhoods***

Perhaps because so many in the black community ultimately came to the same conclusions that Jacobs did—that “urban planning [should be seen] more as an enemy than as an aid”—the divergent routes they took to come to these conclusions are not as clear as they should be.<sup>254</sup> As Herbert Gans, Marshall Berman, and others have pointed out, Jacobs' city was fundamentally a world of white working class neighborhoods, ranging from “solid working class whites at the bottom to professional middle-class whites at the top.” Initially, at least, people of color and issues of race seem to figure in *Death and Life* only rarely: in a discussion of the street life of East Harlem, for example, or of casual discrimination against Puerto Rican children in the

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<sup>254</sup> Chicago Urban League, “The Racial Aspects of Urban Planning.”

public spaces at Stuyvesant Town. In fact, in *Death and Life*, Jacobs maintains a resolutely color-blind approach to the issues of neighborhood decline and revitalization that is not unexpected for a middle-class white liberal woman of her age, concerned about housing, schools, and civil rights, but reluctant to ascribe more importance to race than it seems to deserve. In *Death and Life*, Jacobs actively worked to minimize cultural differences in the use of streets and public space; speaking of issues of “public character” and privacy among New York Puerto Ricans, for example, she insisted that Puerto Ricans “are essentially the same as the people of the mixed, Americanized street on which I live, and essentially the same as the people who live in high-income apartments or fine town houses, too.”<sup>255</sup> Racial differences are handled with kid gloves—she often refers to people of color not as “Negroes” or as “Puerto Ricans” but as “discriminated against.”<sup>256</sup>—and she repeatedly downplays race as a meaningful factor in neighborhood change. In the case of Roxbury, she’s quite explicit: “Elm Hill Avenue section’s basic troubles are not owing to a criminal or a discriminated against or a poverty stricken population,” she says in as terms as strong as she can formulate them. “Its troubles stem from the fact that it is physically quite unable to function safely and with related vitality as a city district.”<sup>257</sup> It may be true, as Jacobs biographer Alice Sparburg Alexiou points out, that *Death and Life* was conceived and written before the events of the civil rights movement began to appear regularly in the headlines of the New York newspapers, and Jacobs herself was very much a product of a white intellectual

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<sup>255</sup> Jacobs, *Death and Life*, p. 59.

<sup>256</sup> Harlem, for example, “has changed from a fashionable, upper-middle-class residential district, to a lower-middle class district, to a district predominantly of the poor and the discriminated against,” p. 103; in another instance, she speaks of the disempowered as “Very plain people, including the poor, including the discriminated against, including the uneducated... [who] talk with wisdom and often eloquence about things they know first-hand from life,” p. 407.

<sup>257</sup> Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 34.

world that had not yet come to grips with the deep divisions in American society that the civil rights and black power movements would expose. But she also had a certain unshakable faith the power of the slum to unslum itself that was not widely shared by blacks of Puerto Ricans at the time.

Indeed, the rejection of planning by blacks and Puerto Ricans was a much more complex affair. Unlike Jacobs, who placed her faith in the workings of the private housing market, urban residents of color faced the deteriorating conditions of the ghetto and the neglect of the absentee landlord. From their perspective, well into the 1960s, the state was poised to make changes in tangible and important ways: enacting non-discrimination laws for housing, integrating schools, desegregating workplaces, and creating jobs for minority-owned companies. Their first impulse was to control or direct government intervention themselves, not halt it altogether.

For communities of color, the dual housing market was a bitter reality that could not be explained away, and both integrationist black liberals and more nationalistic, community oriented blacks saw the need for continued negotiation with the planners for subsidized housing. Similarly, they both believed that they state would play a key role in the desegregation of local schools, the creation of low-interest loans that might make homeownership more affordable, and the opening of the traditionally all-white unions. In short, Jacobs' ignorance of the enormity of the problems faced by blacks and Puerto Ricans meant that she failed to understand just how fundamental race was a defining characteristic of the postwar neighborhood. Conversely, the kind of spontaneous unslumming that Jacobs described in the West Village and the North End was, almost by definition, a white, working-class neighborhood phenomenon. It was only possible where residents were established enough to have a bank account to draw on (neighborhoods with recent arrivals from the South and from Puerto Rico did not) and where the

neighborhood's upwardly mobile middle class had chosen to stay and invest in the neighborhood (which not the case with the black middle classes in Dixwell and Roxbury). Both Jacobs, discussing the West Village, and Herbert Gans, discussing the West End, had come to the startling conclusion that old buildings nevertheless still had value; for Jacobs, they could give small business a start, while for Gans they provided cheap rentals that allowed working class ethnics to live comfortably in central city locations. Neither, however, had genuinely deteriorated housing in mind, the type that was typical in the growing ghettos. And neither grappled with the problem of gentrification that would transform the Upper West Side in the 1970s and 1980s. The renovated brownstones, which were considered the more affordable housing option in the renewal neighborhood envisioned in the 1958 plan, quickly became popular among the middle-class and upper-middles, a trend that continued displacing lower-income tenants long after the renewal project came to a close. (Meanwhile, housing activists focused on the high-rise housing, commonly seen as the more expensive option, and were able to use the city's minimal commitment to low- and moderate-income housing to secure an unusual kind of class diversity in apartments and coops along Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues.)

### ***Resident Activism***

As it was implemented in the late 1950s and 1960s, citizen participation was a flawed and contentious process, operating within—and exacerbating—class divisions in the Black community and disguising the power relations between neighborhood, local authority, and city. Often it was only given the most cursory respect by local agencies; in one particularly frank New Haven Redevelopment Agency memo, a staffer noted that the Dixwell project team had prepared four different alternate illustrative plans for community review and comment, including “the plan

we are prepared to carry out.”<sup>258</sup> But resident involvement was extremely effective as a method of organizing local support for renewal, and if it failed as an instrument of participatory democracy—if the process never was, as it was billed in Boston, “planning with people”—it nevertheless had very important consequences.

In Dixwell, Roxbury, and the Upper West Side, active, public support on the part of project area residents was an essential factor in the political fortunes and the progress of the renewal project. Support, as evidenced by project area committees and a network of community members willing to speak on the project’s behalf, helped ensure a project’s passage through the series of public hearings that were required of it and legitimized the planning process at time when renewal faced opposition. (This was particularly important in Boston, where Logue and the BRA faced an openly hostile city council and public anger over the West End.) Moreover, a demonstration of support on the part of acknowledged community leaders could help persuade residents to back the project themselves. Just how consequential this support was in Washington Park becomes clear when we look similar projects like the one proposed for another Boston neighborhood, Charlestown. Redevelopment and rehabilitation were met with much greater resistance in this white, working class neighborhood where local leaders opposed the process from the start and where ultimately the BRA made only a fraction of the progress it made in Roxbury. The citizen participation process also helped maintain enough support for renewal to ensure compliance with it once the excitement of the public hearings was over—an important issue in new projects that included extensive residential rehabilitation, since the rehabilitation of

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<sup>258</sup> Staff meeting minutes, May 4, 1959. NHRA Records, Box 432, Folder R-20 Project Staff Meeting.

owner-occupied houses depended on the willingness of individual, local homeowners to make the changes the plan required.

Second, investment in the participatory process—both on the part of the local authority and on the part of local leaders—had a small but significant effect on the types of redevelopment projects the local authorities were able to include in the plan and implement. We don't need to believe the local agency's exaggerated rhetoric about participation and its benefits to recognize that planners needed to keep local leaders involved in the renewal process, and keeping local leaders involved in the process meant that they had a certain impact on the overall shape of plan, however indirect and unexpected.

The first and most obvious example of this indirect influence is in the lack of public housing in both Washington Park and Dixwell. In both cases the local authority toyed with the idea of constructing public housing the community as a part of their relocation program, and in both cases community leaders came out against public housing and made it a precondition for their cooperation and participation in the project. (In Washington Park, as we have seen, this opposition was seconded by CURAC, the broader-based committee of project area residents.) It was an easy point for the city to concede, since public housing was rarely a politically popular option. A limited number of low-income elderly housing units—200 in Washington Park, 60 in New Haven—were substituted instead.

The impact of the participatory culture of the neighborhood renewal project is also evident in the progressive changes that residents were able to effect at elementary schools in Washington Park and on the Upper West Side. Residents who became involved either in the planning process or in protest against elements of renewal were organized and increasingly savvy in negotiating the city bureaucracy. Cities were eager to build schools—they counted as an

in-kind contribution toward project costs and thus helped fund other projects—and they could link social programs with reforms in the schools. More to the point, new schools displaced few and satisfied many. At Washington Park the city only managed to build one of three projected elementary schools, but one that did open, the racially integrated Trotter School, included one of the most progressive curricula in the city. On the Upper West Side, as we saw, the parent revolution at PS 84 was linked directly to the housing campaign there.

Urban renewal has been linked to reform politics at the city level, but in a very real sense it introduced an old-fashioned exchange of favors at the neighborhood level, bringing resources, jobs, contracts, loans and grants, and attention to communities that were often not well represented otherwise. This kind of local involvement involved little of the self-conscious “citizen control” that Arnheim valorized and none of the issue-based organizing to defend the neighborhood that Jacobs so effectively spearheaded in the West Village. It was small-scale, opportunistic, and easily overlooked, but it was important nevertheless.

### *A Return to Culture*

Following cultural historians like Lynn Hunt, who argued for a return to culture and politics in fields of history that had too long been dominated by structural analysis, this dissertation has attempted to recover some of the sense of possibility—excitement, dread, and uncertainty—that accompanied neighborhood redevelopment projects in the 1960s. If scholars have shown us the origins and consequences of the urban renewal program and traced large-scale patterns, this dissertation focused instead on the local and short term and attempted to capture the tenor of the politics of urban change.



It has also attempted to recover some of the spatial changes and new architectural forms that were the hallmark of neighborhood renewal projects. For a policy that was focused specifically on the modernization of the built environment, urban renewal has received relatively little attention from the perspective of physical planning, architecture, and urban design. The histories of projects at Dixwell, Roxbury, and the Upper West Side suggest that there were significant spatial aspects to the social debates of the 1960s—that racial integration, for example, was linked with the dismantling of older, often bustling and vibrant black neighborhood centers, or with the construction of modern spaces—schools, plazas, apartment buildings—that provided new territory in which blacks and whites could meet as equals. They also suggest that Black Power proponents and Puerto Rican nationalists may have focused on the rehabilitation and reuse of existing spaces for both practical and symbolic reasons. Scholars like Zipp and Klemek have linked modernism with the social and cultural ambitions of the “urban renewal order,” just as the gritty realism of architects like Venturi and Scott Brown was linked with populism, but clearly more work is needed on the micro-politics of design in older urban neighborhoods. The critic Herbert Muschamp once commented that the publication of *Death and Life* had been “one of twentieth century architecture’s most traumatic events,” linking architecture and urban design with art—and then discarding art in favor of the social.<sup>259</sup> As we have seen, though, neighborhood urban renewal plans were political designs, “art” and “society” both—indeed, one is incomprehensible without the other.

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<sup>259</sup> Herbert Muschamp, “Blond Ambition on Red Brick,” *New York Times*, June 19, 2003.

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AAM	Alvin A. Mermin Collection, New Haven Colony Historical Society
BRA	Boston Redevelopment Authority Collection, Boston Public Library
CHPC	Citizens' Housing and Planning Council Records, CHPC
COHP	Columbia Oral History Project, Columbia University
EJL	Edward J. Logue Papers, Yale University
EJG	Emily Jane Goodman Collection, Brooklyn College
HJB	Henry Joseph Browne Collection, Columbia University
FLL	Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School
FH	Freedom House Records, Northeastern University
JMJ	John M. Johansen Architectural Drawings and Papers, Columbia University
NHCHS	New Haven Colony Historical Society
NHFPL	New Haven Free Public Library
NHRA	New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Yale University
RCL	Richard C. Lee Papers, Yale University
RM	Robert Moses Papers, New York City Public Library

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NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS CONSULTED

*New Haven Register*

*New Haven Journal Courier*

*New Haven Independent*

*AIM: Bulletin of the American Independent Movement*

*New Haven Redevelopment Agency Annual Report*

*Boston Globe*

*Bay State Banner*

*Christian Science Monitor*

*Boston Redevelopment Agency Annual Report*

*New York Times*

*Amsterdam News*

*The Village Voice*



Figure 1.1: Mayor Richard C. Lee as photographed for *Life* in 1958  
Source: "City Clean-up Champion," *Life* (February 17, 1958), 88.



Figure 2.1: Oak Street, before and after redevelopment  
Source: Talbot, *The Mayor's Game*



Figure 2.2: Church Street, before and after redevelopment  
Source: Powledge, *Model City*, pp. 98-99



Increasingly, New Haven used the scalpel rather than the bulldozer in restoring neighborhoods. This emphasis started in Wooster Square, where for the first time renewal combined clearance of the worst slums with the rehabilitation of serviceable residential structures or those architecturally worth saving.

(Courtesy NHRA)



Figure 2.3: A house in Wooster Square, before and after redevelopment  
Source: Talbot, *The Mayor's Game*



Figure 2.4: Conte Community School, Wooster Square, New Haven  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



Figure 2.5: Map of New Haven showing the location of families displaced from the Oak Street Redevelopment Project, Family Relocation Office, c. 1960 (black families represented by solid indicators; white by hollow)  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



The New Haven Progress Pavilion, a temporary structure, was built through voluntary contributions of labor and material by public and private groups in the City. It contains photographs, models, and maps that explain how New Haven is building toward its future.

Figure 2.6: The New Haven Progress Pavilion  
Source: *The New New Haven*

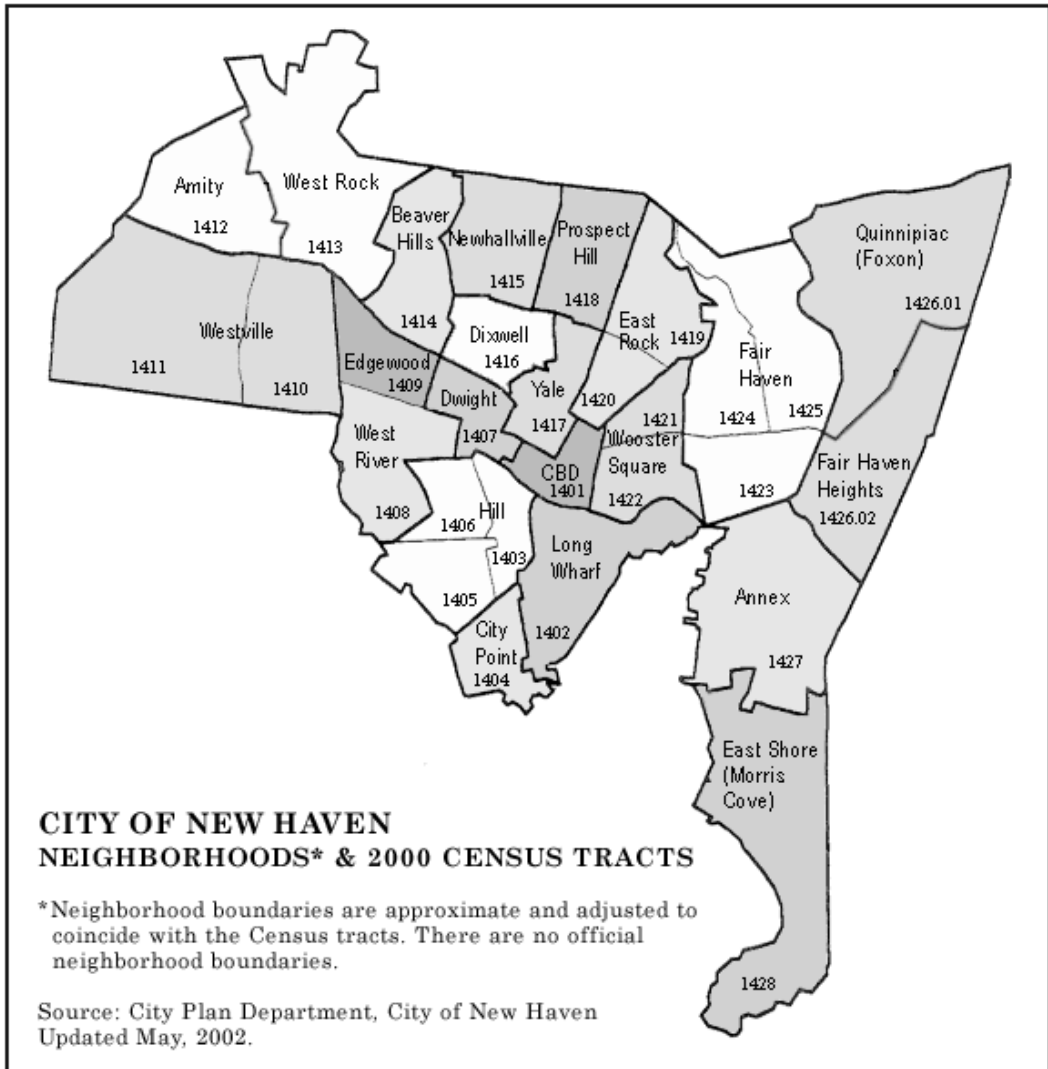


Figure 2.7: Map of New Haven showing the city's neighborhoods  
Source: New Haven City Plan Department



Figure 2.8: Dixwell Avenue near Admiral Street before 1960  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



Figure 2.9: Dixwell illustrative plan as adopted in 1960  
Source: *New Haven Development Guide*

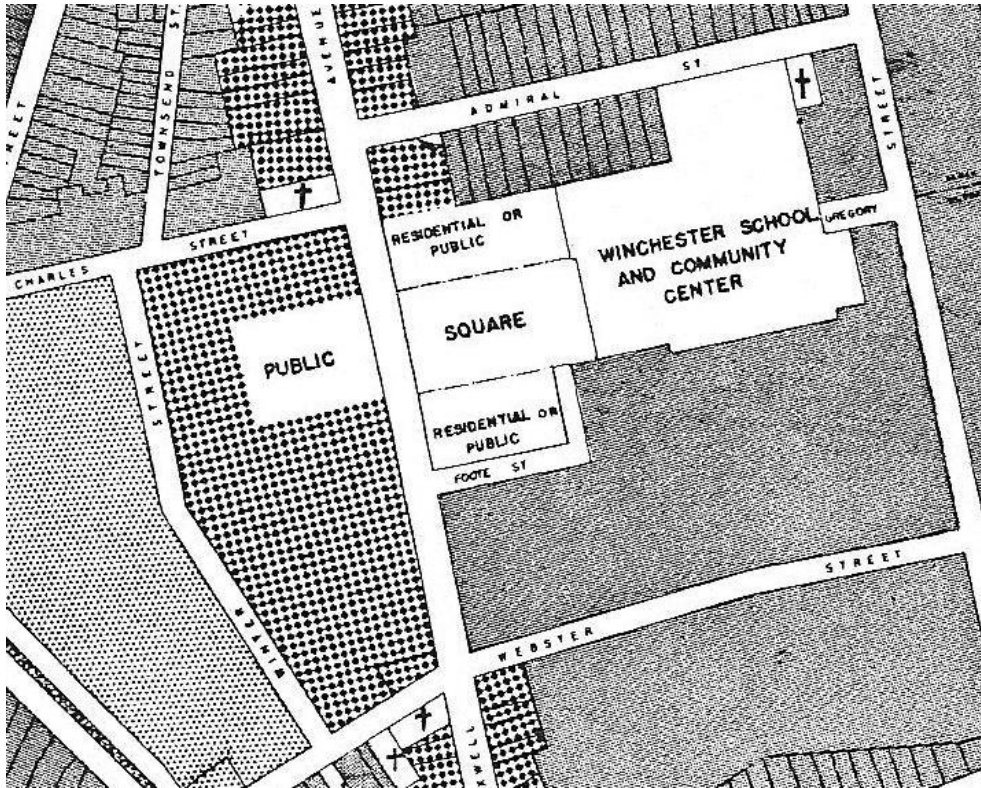


Figure 2.10: Public Square, Dixwell, proposed land uses illustrated in the Dixwell Plan, 1960  
Source: New Haven Free Public Library





Figure 2.11: Winchester Community School (now Wexler School)  
Source: Photo by author

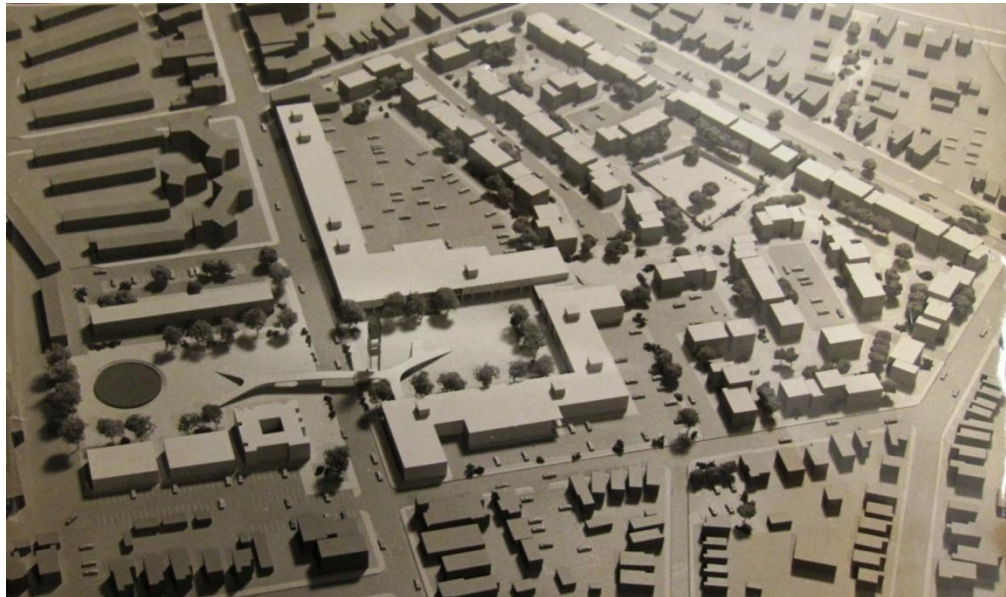


Figure 2.12: Dixwell Neighborhood Project Master Plan for NHRA Shopping and Cultural Center  
Source: John M. Johansen Archive

## The Dixwell Neighborhood . . .

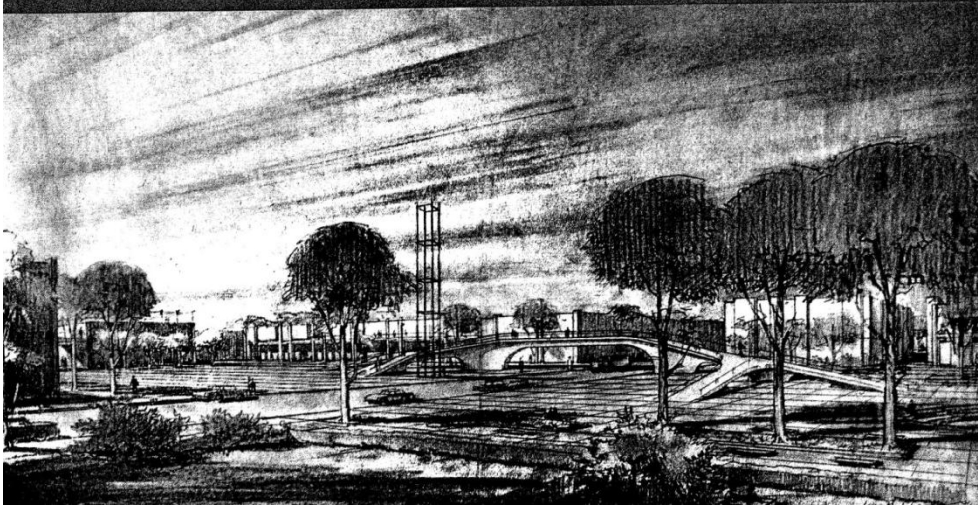


Figure 2.13: Rendering of Dixwell Plaza, John Johansen, c. 1960  
Source: New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records

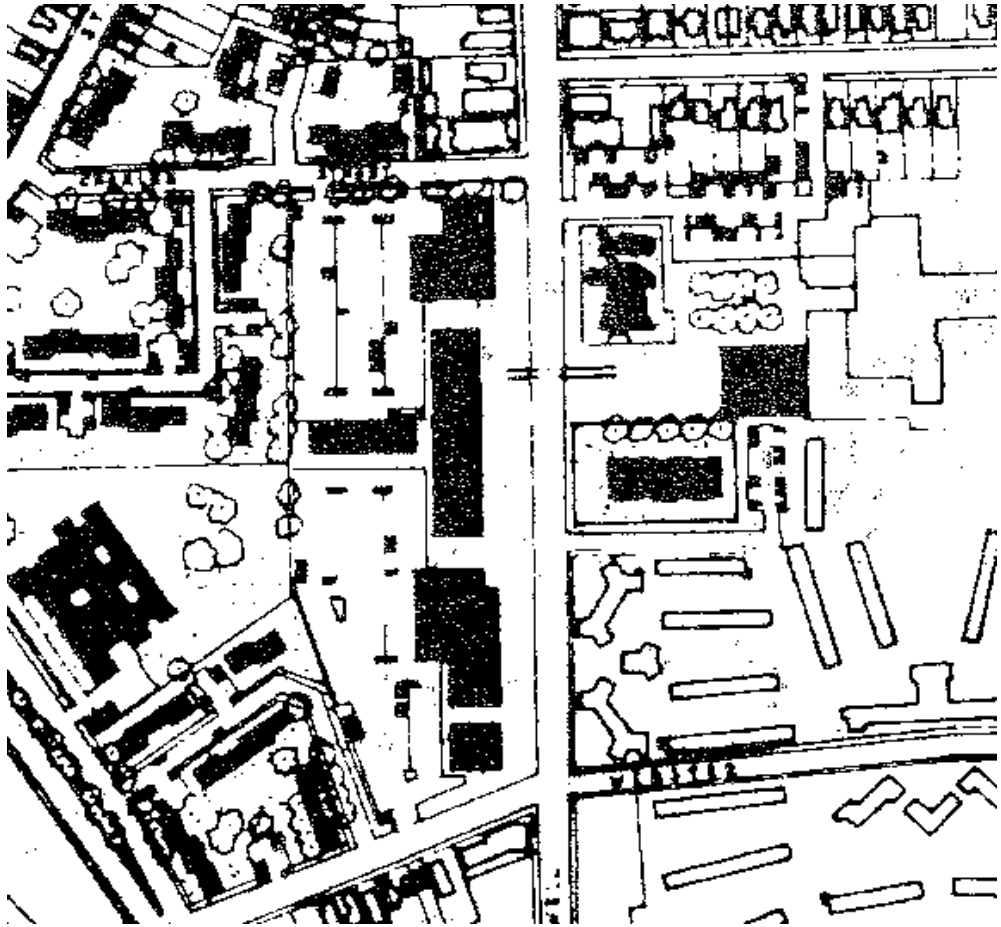


Figure 2.14: Plan of Dixwell Plaza as constructed in 1967  
Source: *Dixwell Renewal Plan*



**SIT-OUT MATERIALIZES** — Here are some of the more than 100 persons who took part in a "sit-out" demonstration Friday night on Dixwell Avenue near Foote Street. One of the advocates of the "sit-out" was James E. Gibbs, former president of the local branch of the NAACP, shown with back to camera.

Figure 2.15: Sit-out along Dixwell Avenue  
Source: *New Haven Register*



Figure 2.16: CORE housing and urban renewal protest near the Yale campus, April 10, 1965  
Source: *Yale Daily News*

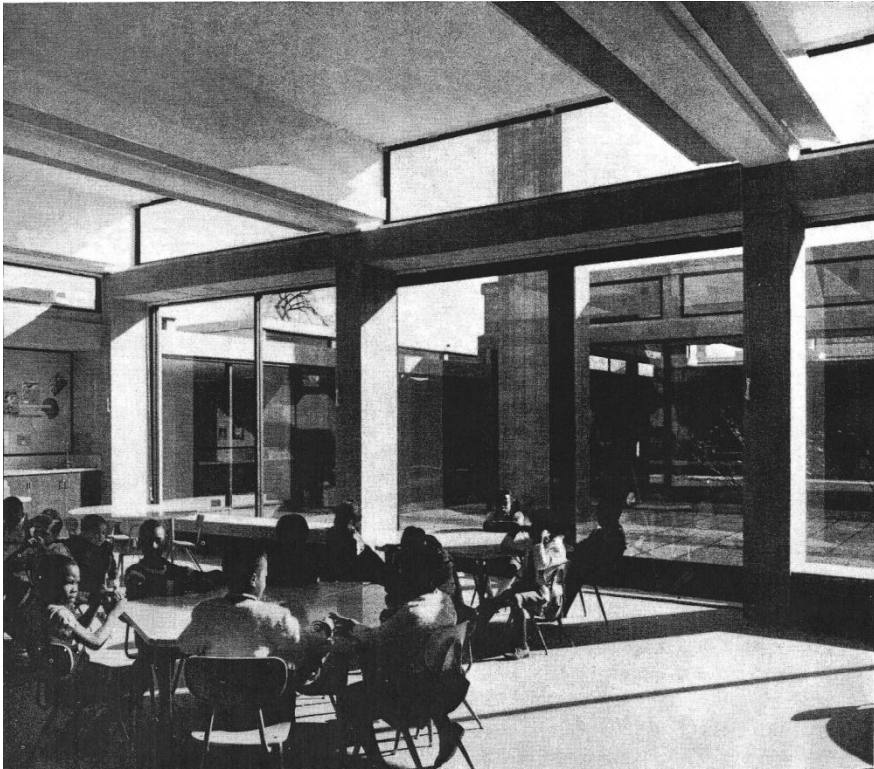


Figure 2.17: Helen M. Grant School  
Source: "Symbolic Bells in Dixwell"



Figure 2.18 Illustration showing Diwell Plaza, from a brochure  
Source: New Haven Free Public Library



private patio

a new school

a park 1 block away

these big **EXTRAS** are included with your apartment

All-electric kitchens are a feature of the Florence Virtue Town Houses. Furnished with your apartment at no extra charge are an electric range, refrigerator, and disposal unit.

Other "extras" at no cost are a master-TV antenna connection, window screens and shades, and parking space in a landscaped parking area.

florence virtue co-operative townhomes  
DESIGNED BY AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECT JOHN...  
FOR MAXIMUM COMFORT AND LIVABILITY AT MO...

**ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENT**

\$ **91**  
PER MONTH  
●  
HEAT AND HOT WATER INCLUDED

**THREE-BEDROOM DUPLEX**

\$ **119**  
PER MONTH  
●  
HEAT AND HOT WATER INCLUDED

FIRST FLOOR SECOND FLOOR

Figure 2.19: Brochure for Florence Virtue Cooperative Townhomes  
Source: New Haven Free Public Library



Figure 2.20: Florence Virtue Cooperatives  
Source: *Renewal is Improving the Quality of Life*

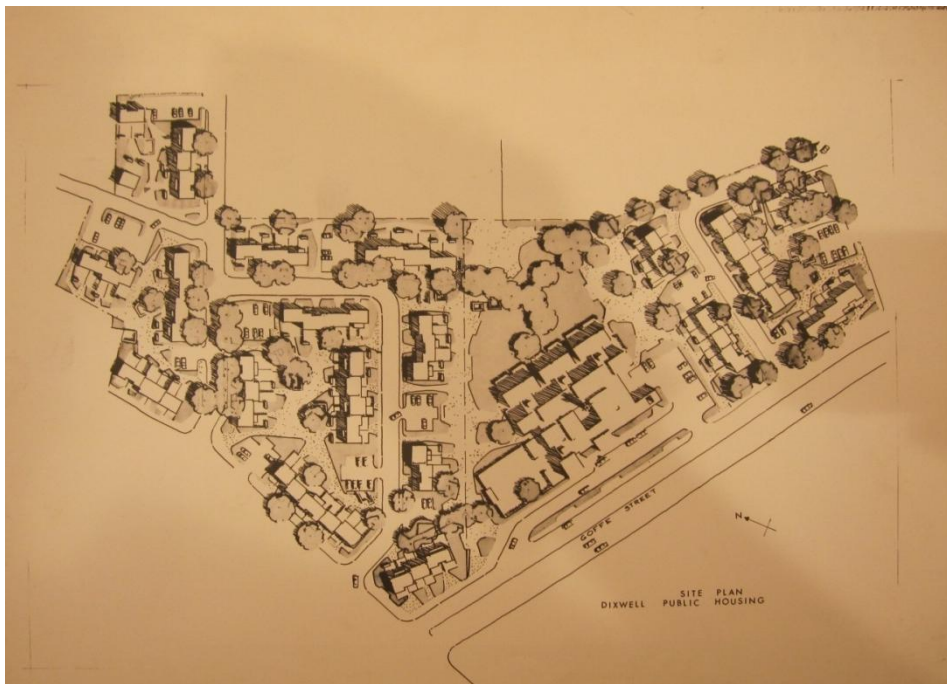


Figure 2.21: Florence Virtue Housing, site plan  
Source: John Johansen Archives, Columbia University



Figure 2.22: Florence Virtue backyard  
Source: John Johansen Archives, Columbia University



Figure 2.23: Mr. and Mrs. Fred Smith, standing in front of a sign for the future One Dixwell Plaza  
Source: [www.fredsmith.com](http://www.fredsmith.com)



Figure 2.24: Fred Smith Housing  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



Figure 2.25: Prescott Bush Housing for the Elderly  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



Figure 2.26: Rendering of 577 Orchard Street after rehabilitation  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society





Figure 2.27 Detail, rendering of the new Dixwell Community House, c. 1967  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society

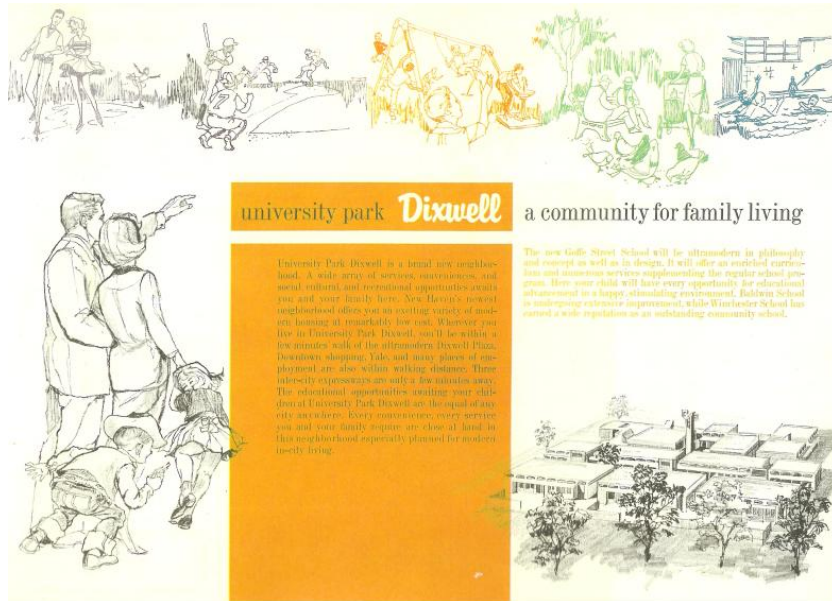


Figure 2.28 Promotional material for Dixwell housing, with detail  
 Source: New Haven Free Public Library

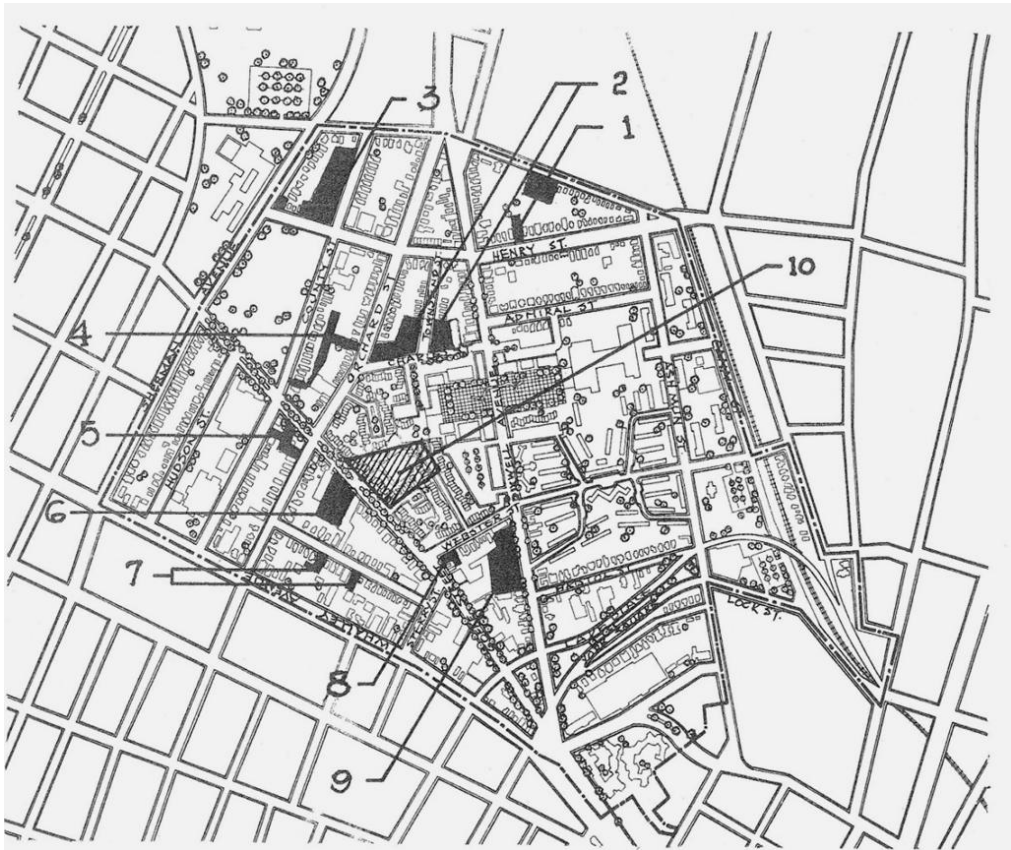


Figure 2.29: Proposed amendments to the Dixwell  
Redevelopment and Renewal Plan, c. 1963  
Source: *Dixwell News*



Figure 2.30: Map of New Haven showing the city's urban renewal areas in 1969

Source: New Haven Redevelopment Agency, *Annual Report*, 1969

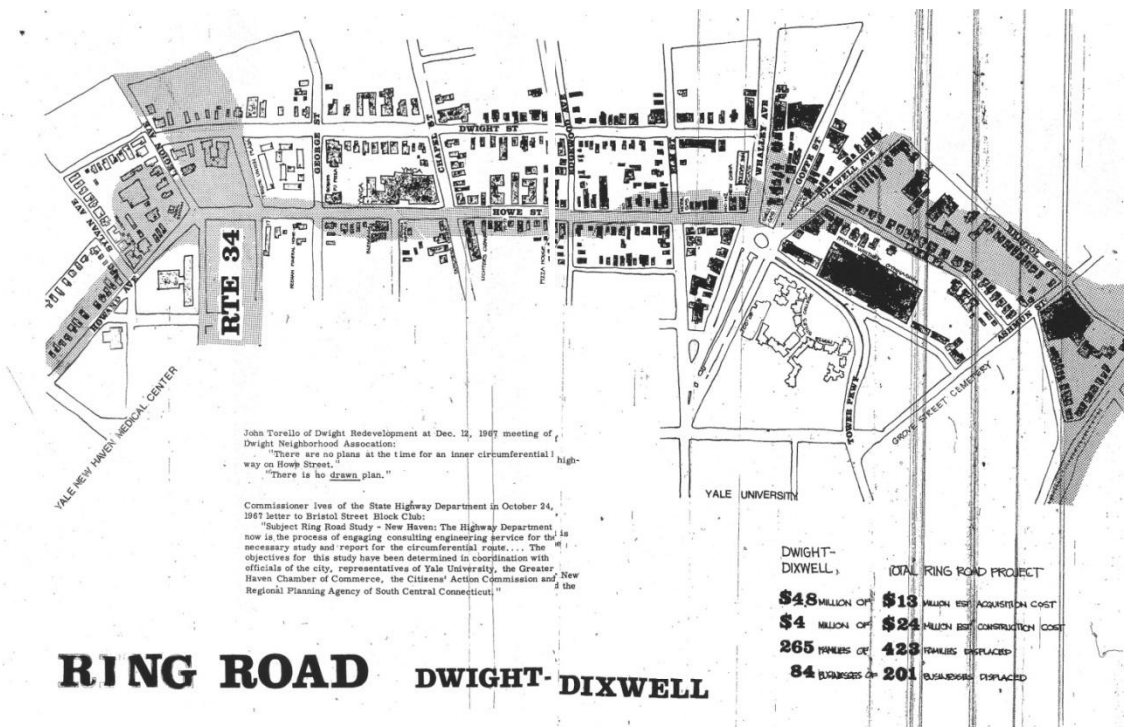


Figure 2.31: Map showing route of the proposed ring road  
 Source: AIM



Figure 2.32: Dixwell Plaza rendering  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society

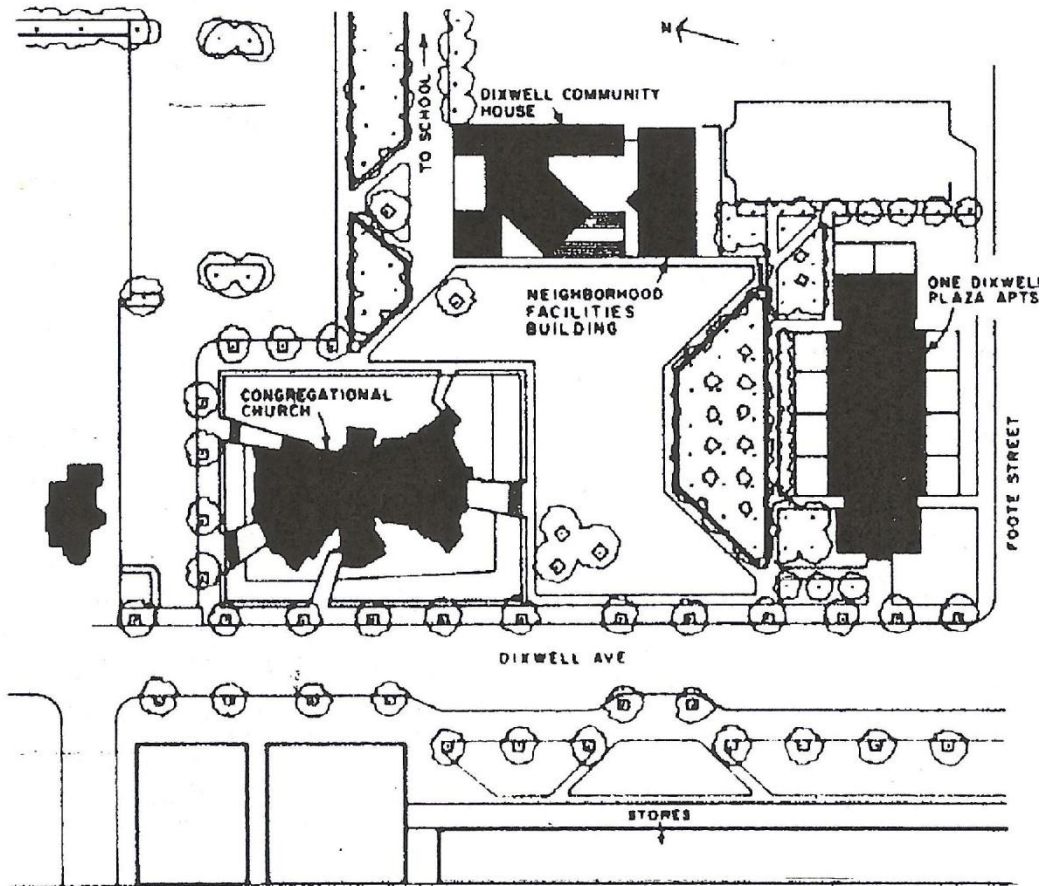


Figure 2.33: Dixwell Community House  
Source: *Architectural Record*

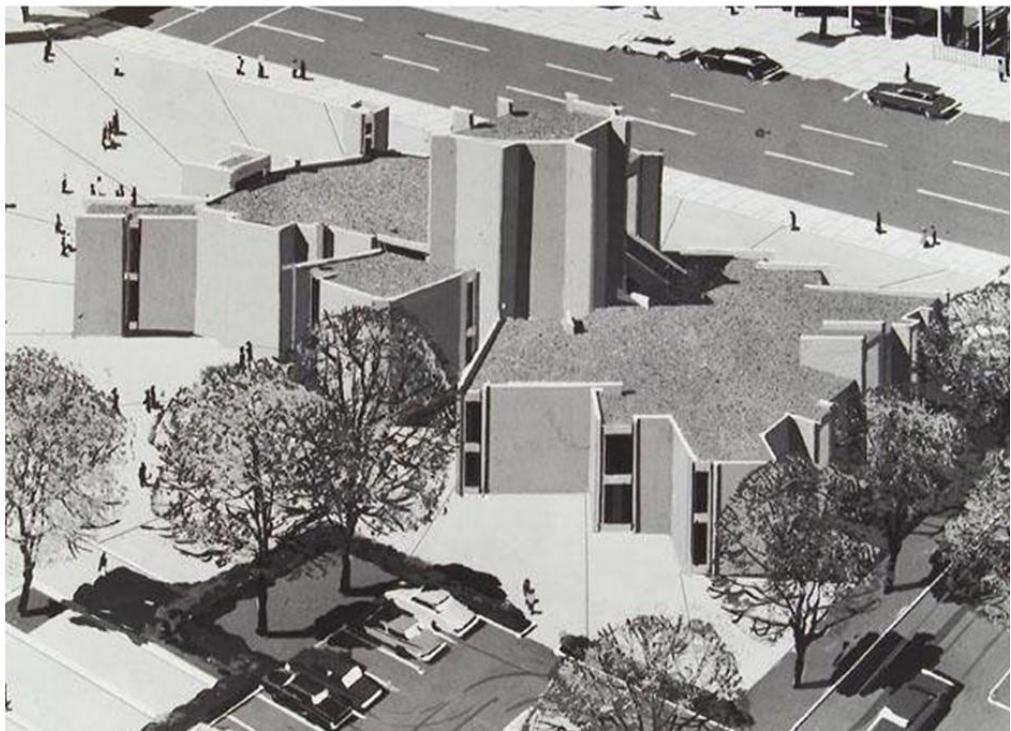


Figure 2.34: Dixwell Congregational Church  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society





Figure 2.35: Dixwell Congregational Church  
Source: *Renewal Is Improving the Quality of Life*



Figure 2.36: Dixwell Community House  
Source: Photo by author

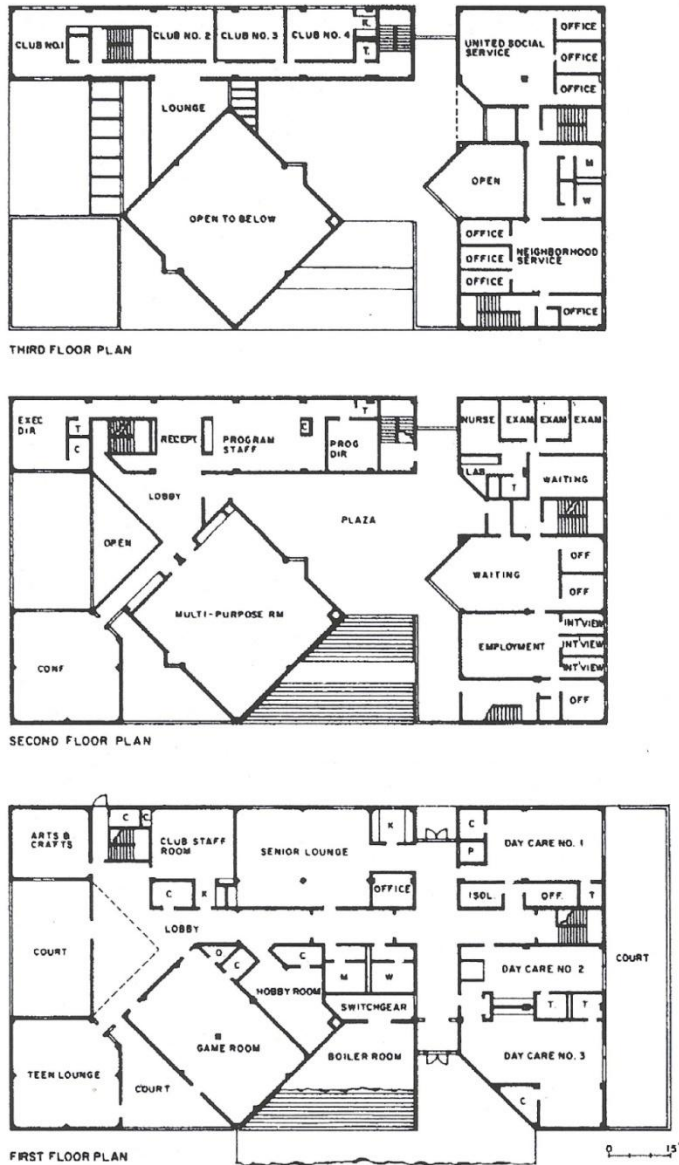


Figure 2.37: Dixwell Community House, plans for all three floors  
 Source: *Architectural Forum*



Figure 2.38: University Row Houses  
Source: Photo by author



Figure 2.39: Goffe Street Houses  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society

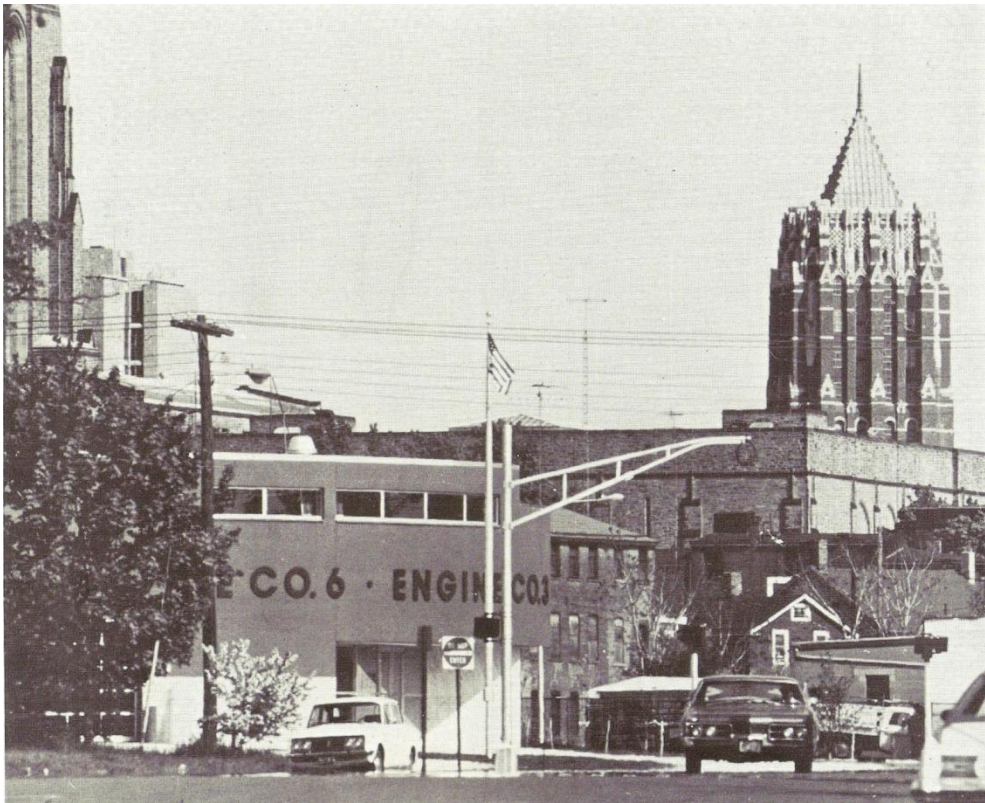


Figure 2.40: Dixwell Fire Station, Venturi and Rauch  
Source: *Venturi and Rauch: Public Buildings*



Figure 2.41: Central Fire Headquarters in Wooster Square  
Source: New Haven Colony Historical Society



Figure 2.42: Central Fire Station, New Haven, designed by Earl Carlin, completed 1962  
Source: *Progressive Architecture*



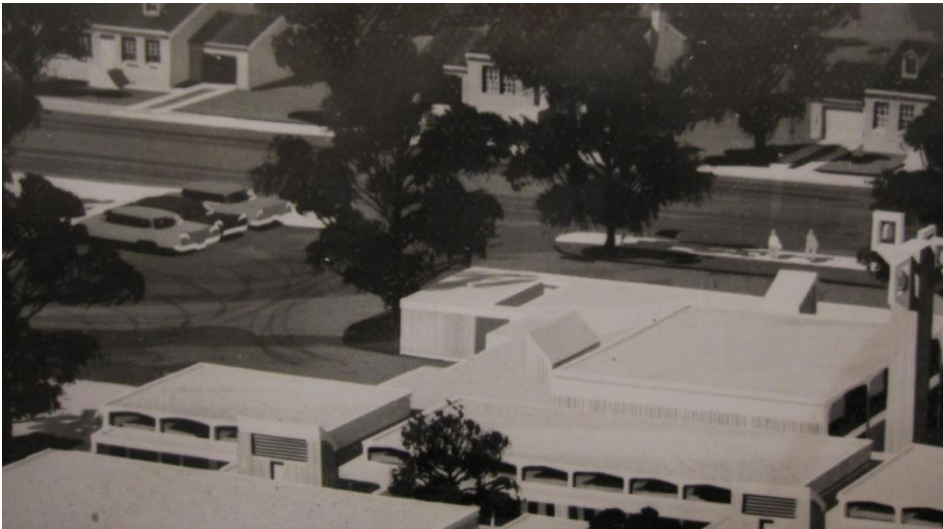


Figure 2.43: Helene M. Grant School, detail showing single-family houses along Goffe Street  
Source: John M. Johansen Archives, Columbia University



Figure 3.1: Map of Boston showing city neighborhoods  
 Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority

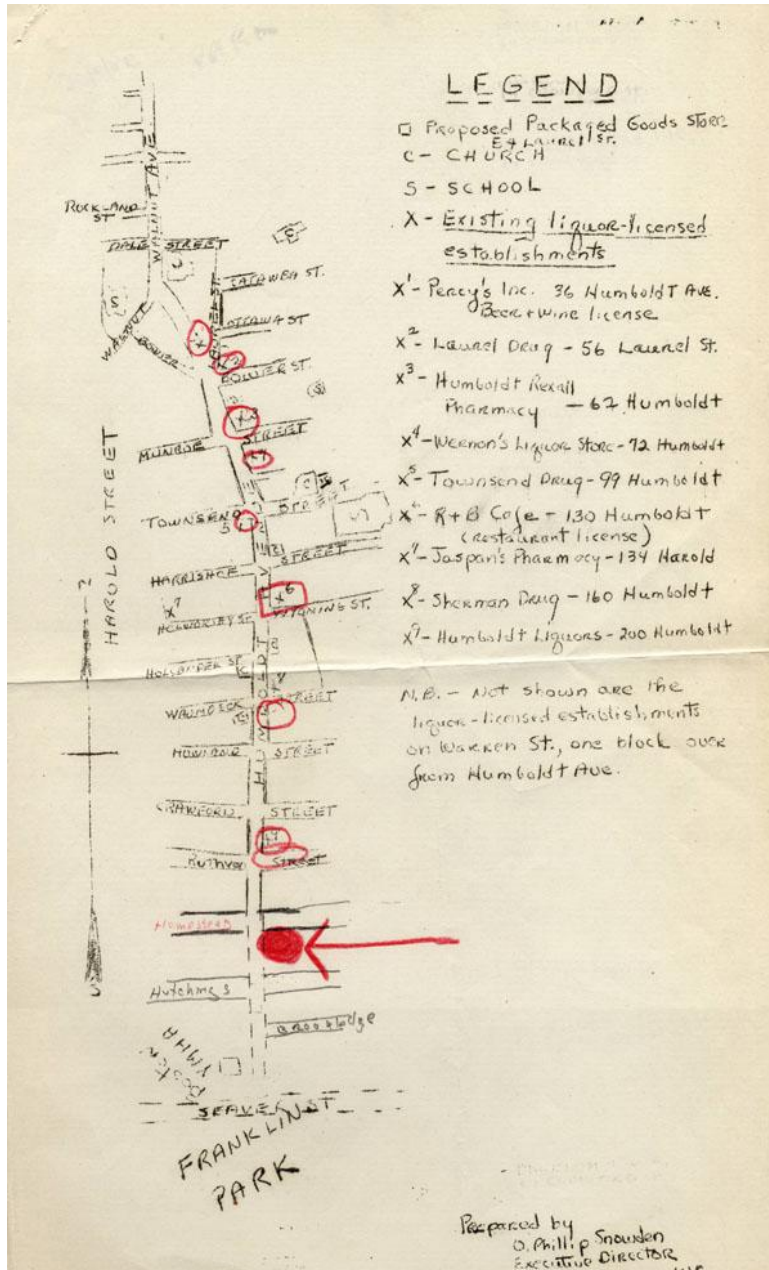
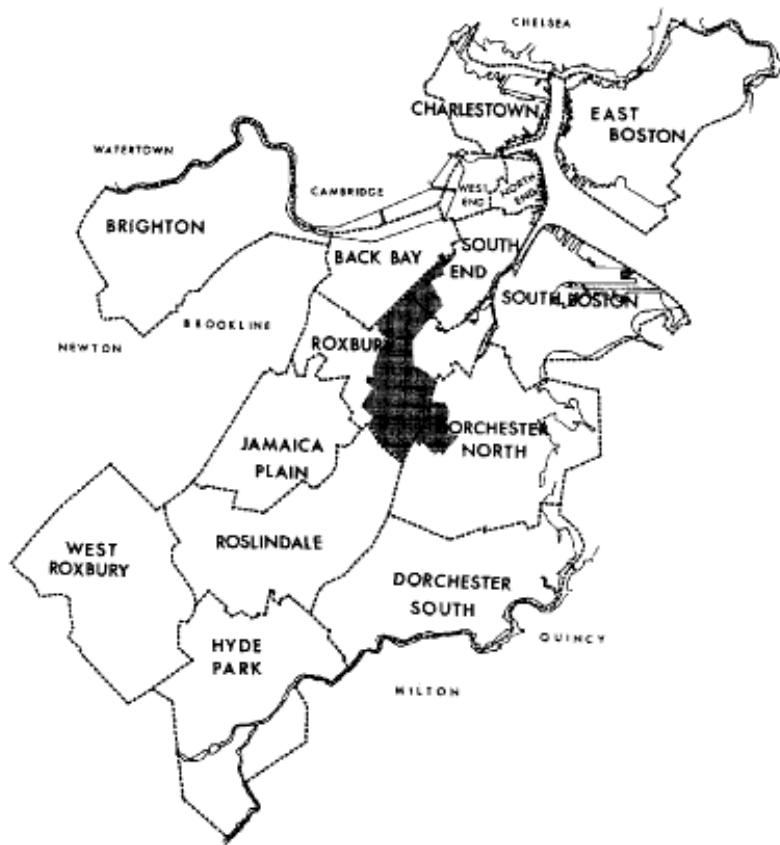


Figure 3.2: Map of liquor-licensed establishments along Humboldt Ave.  
Source: Freedom House Records, Northeastern University



Figure 3.3: Members of a block improvement group, early 1960s  
Source: Freedom House Records, Northeastern University



**CENSUS TRACTS IN WHICH NEGROES WERE  
50% OR MORE OF TOTAL POPULATION IN 1960**

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1960.

1. Prepared by Helen R. Kistin

Figure 3.4: "Census tracts in which Negroes were 50% or more of total population in 1960"

Source: Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Discrimination in Housing in the Boston Area*



Figure 3.5: Community meeting, c. 1962  
Source: Freedom House Records, Northeastern University

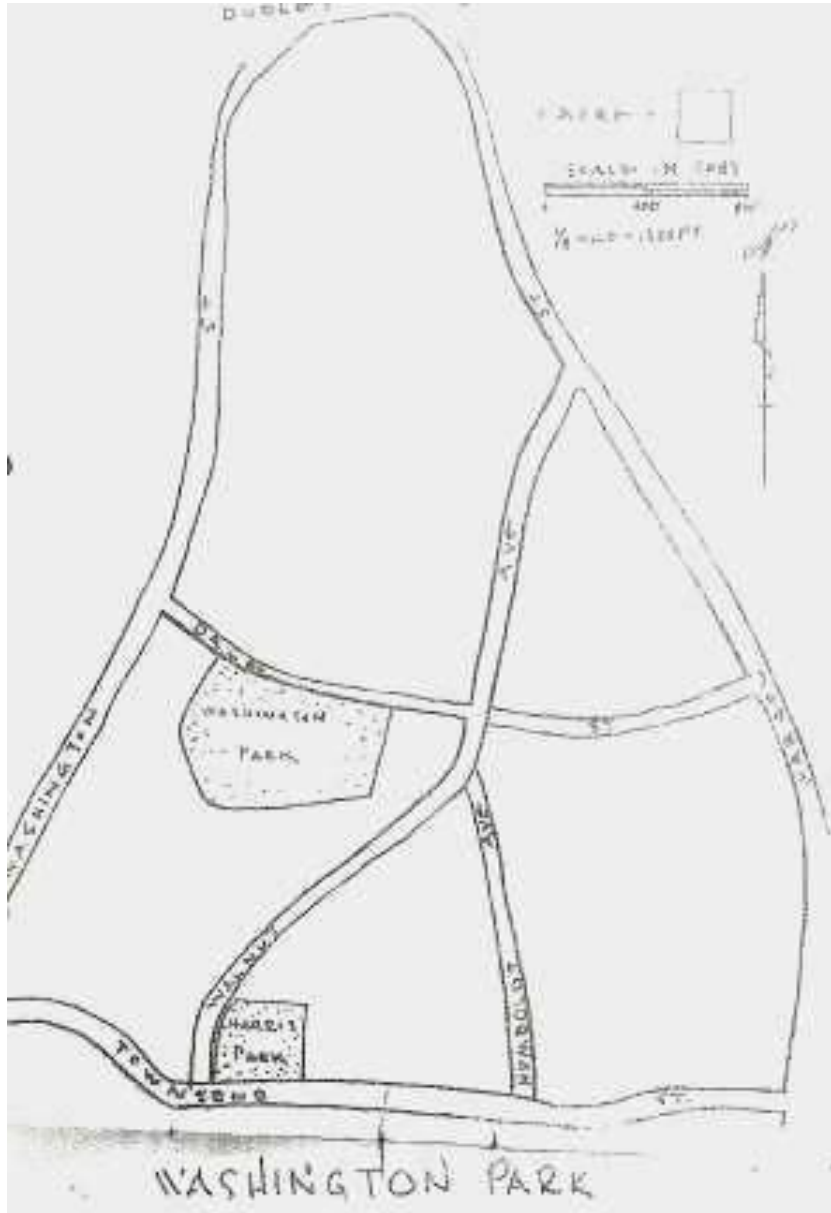


Figure 3.6: Handout from Steering Committee Meeting  
Source; Freedom House Records, Northeastern University

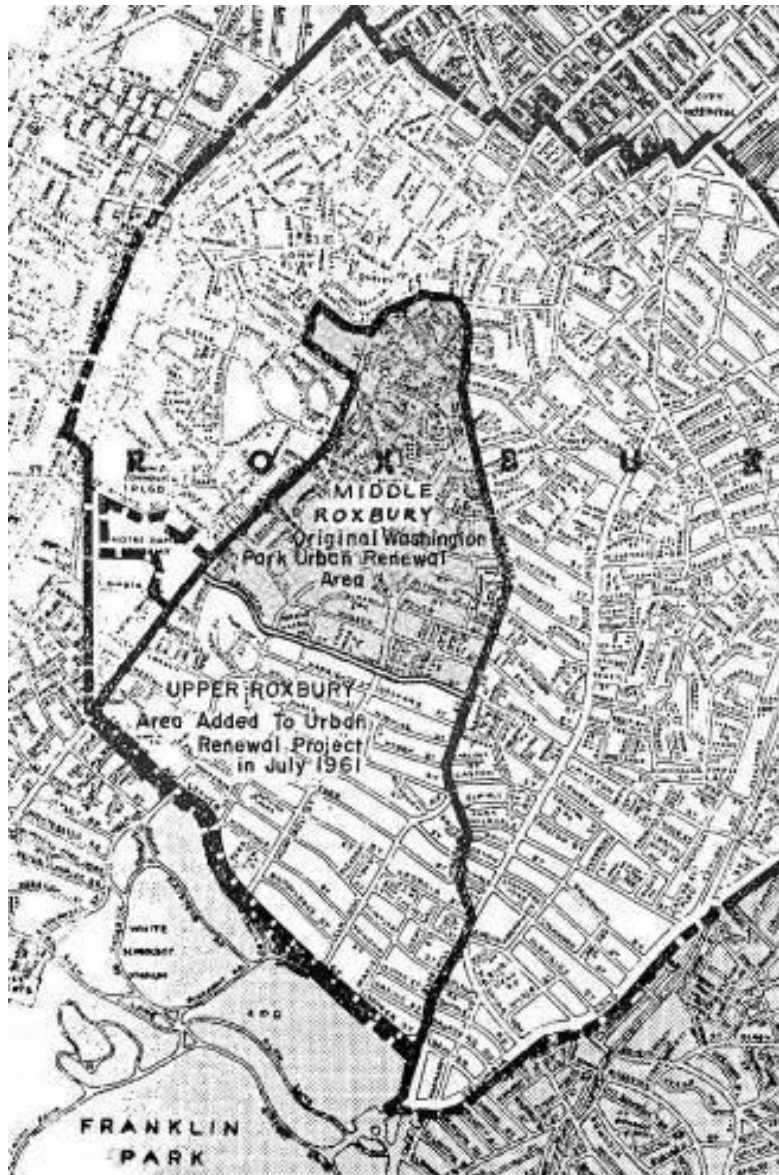


Figure 3.7: Map of Roxbury showing Middle Roxbury, the original urban renewal area, and Upper Roxbury, which was added to the project in 1961. Source: Chester Rapkin, *Washington Park Urban Renewal Area*





Figure 3.8: Presentation of the final plan at Freedom House, with Muriel Snowden, Otto Snowden Mayor John Collins, and Development Administrator Ed Logue in attendance  
Source: Freedom House Records

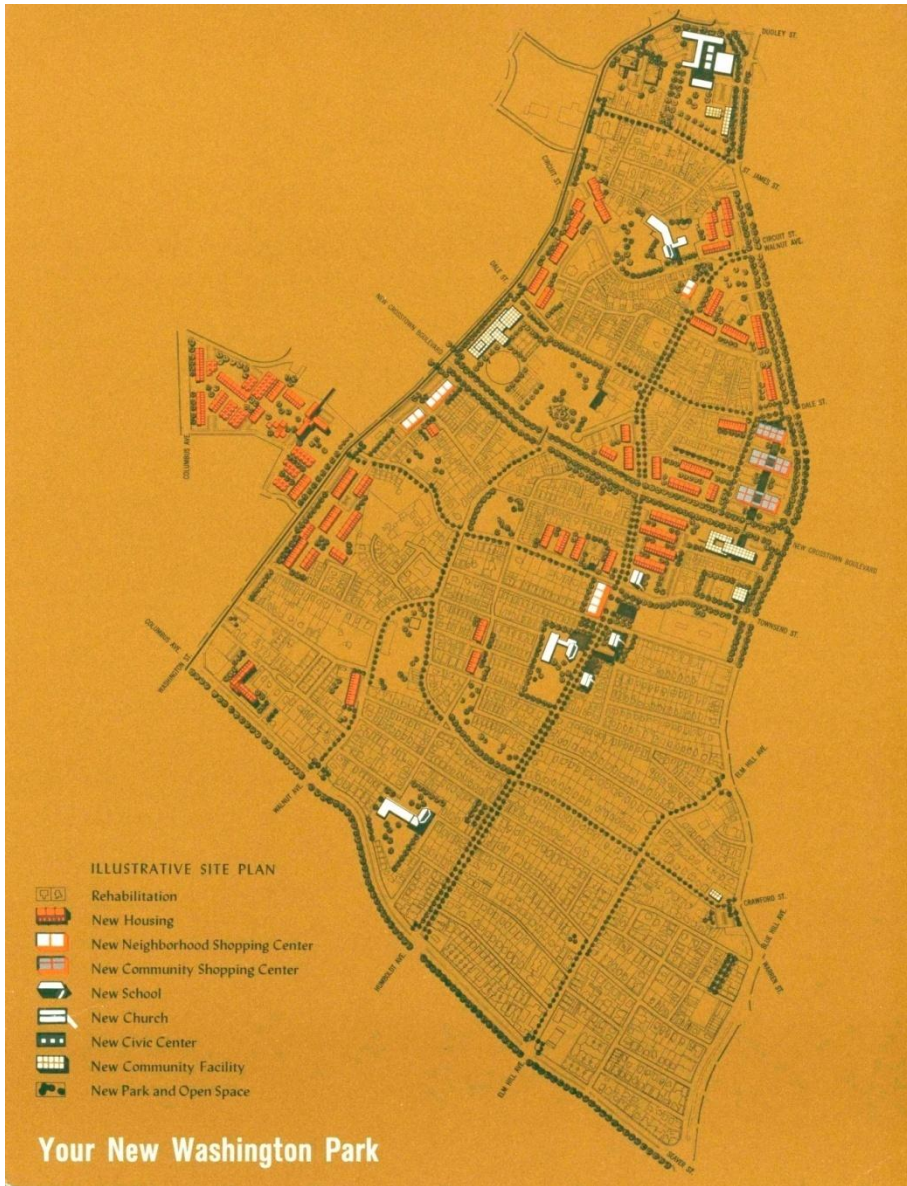
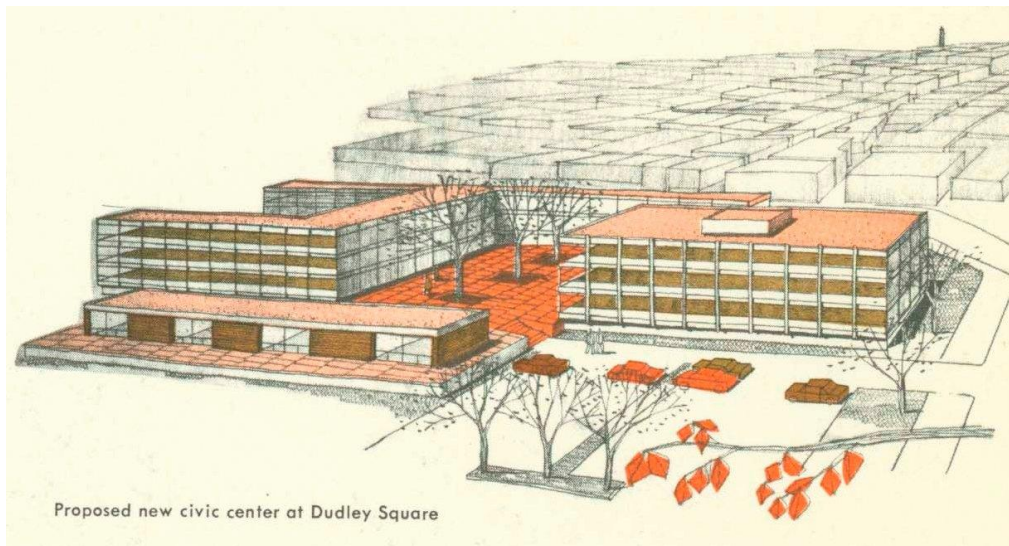
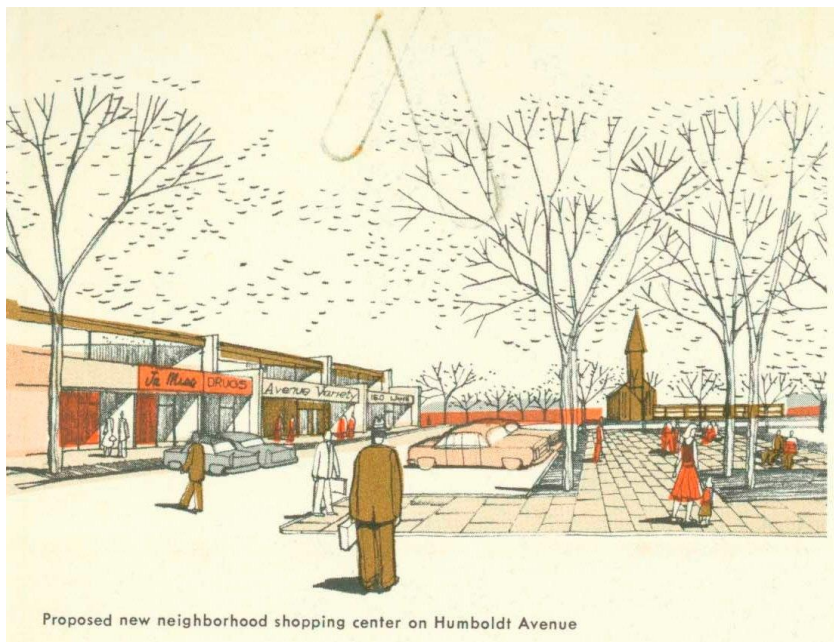


Figure 3.9: Illustrative Plan  
 Source: *Your New Washington Park*



Proposed new civic center at Dudley Square



Proposed new neighborhood shopping center on Humboldt Avenue

Figure 3.10: Presentation drawings from the final plan, including a proposed civic center in Dudley Square (top) and a proposed shopping center on Humboldt Avenue (bottom)

Source: *Your New Washington Park*

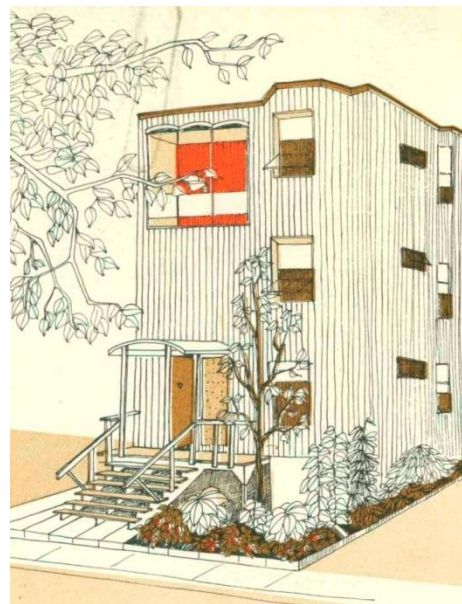


Figure 3.11: Photograph and presentation drawing from the final plan showing a triple-decker (left) and a “typical rehabilitated dwelling” (right)  
Source: *Your New Washington Park*

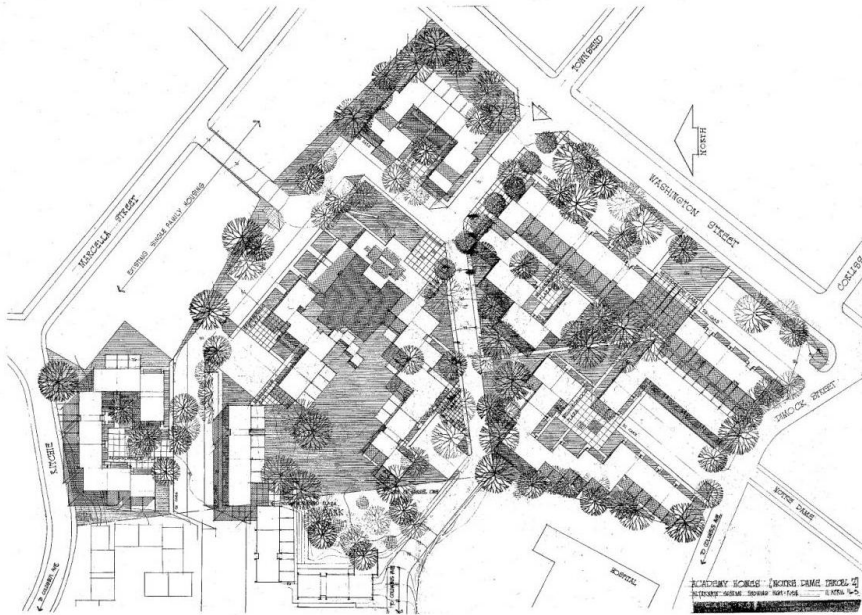
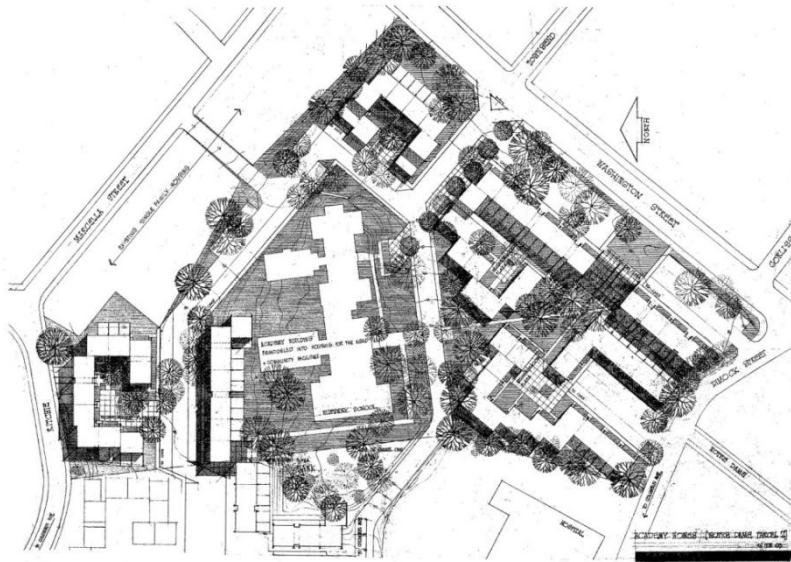


Figure 3.12: Two alternatives for private relocation housing in Washington Park. The first site plan, above, shows new housing arranged around the original academy building, remodeled into elderly housing and community facilities. The second, below, includes a cruciform high-rise tower at the center of the project.

Source: Carl Koch and Mark Waltch, *Housing Study for New Private Relocation Housing in the City of Boston*

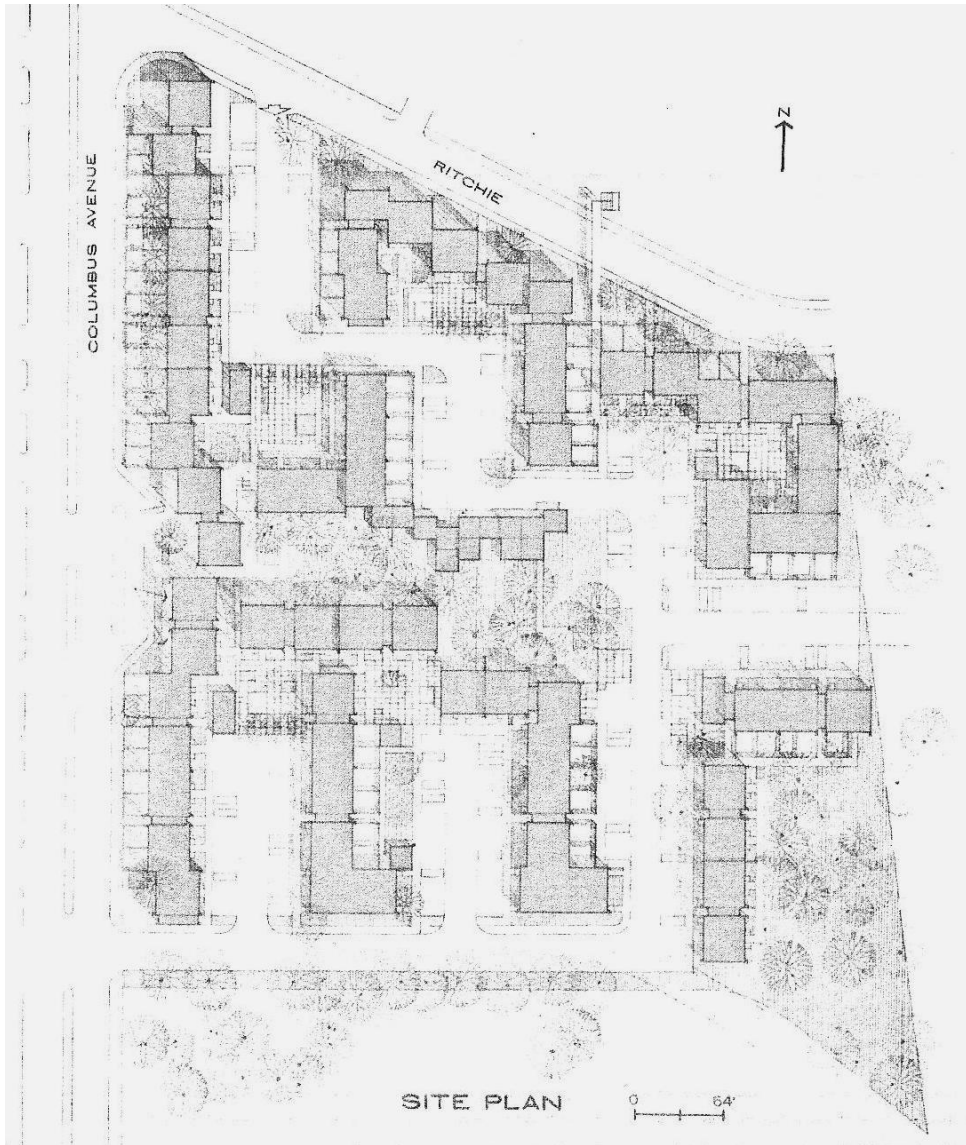
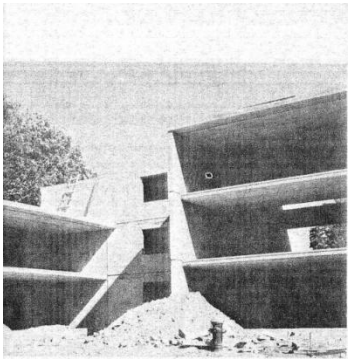


Figure 3.13: Site plan, Academy Homes I  
Source: Paul, *Apartments*



Right: Concrete side walls are left exposed and untreated. The non-bearing walls are a combination of steel curtain construction and brick veneer.

Above: This simple, fireproof, precast concrete structural system is free from maintenance and is competitive with other building methods. There is complete flexibility for placement of partitions within the frame.

Below: The modular structural system permits a variety of building heights.

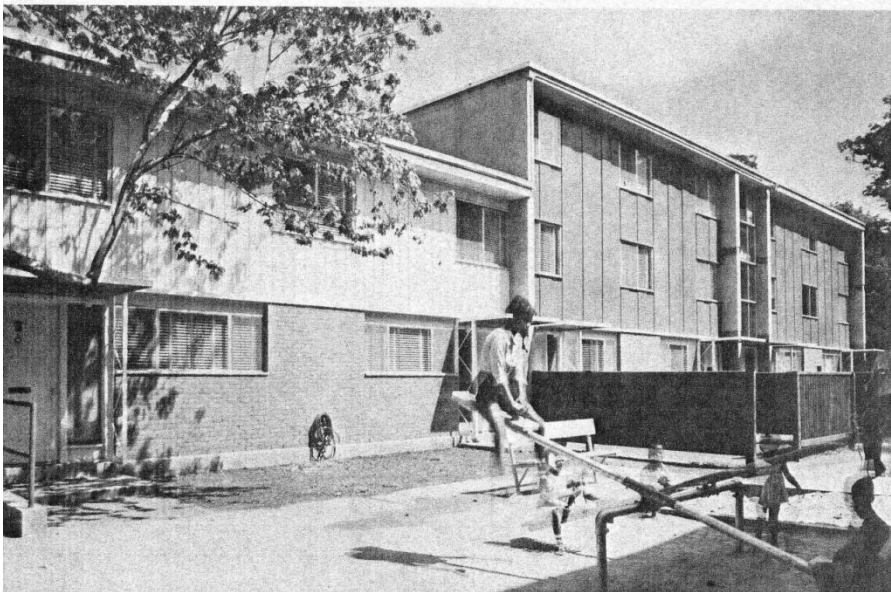
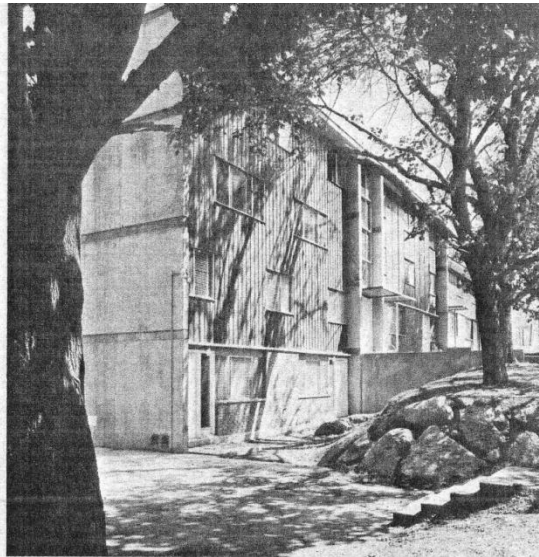


Figure 3.14: Academy Homes I under construction, showing structural system (upper left) and after completion (upper right and below)

Source: Paul, *Apartments*

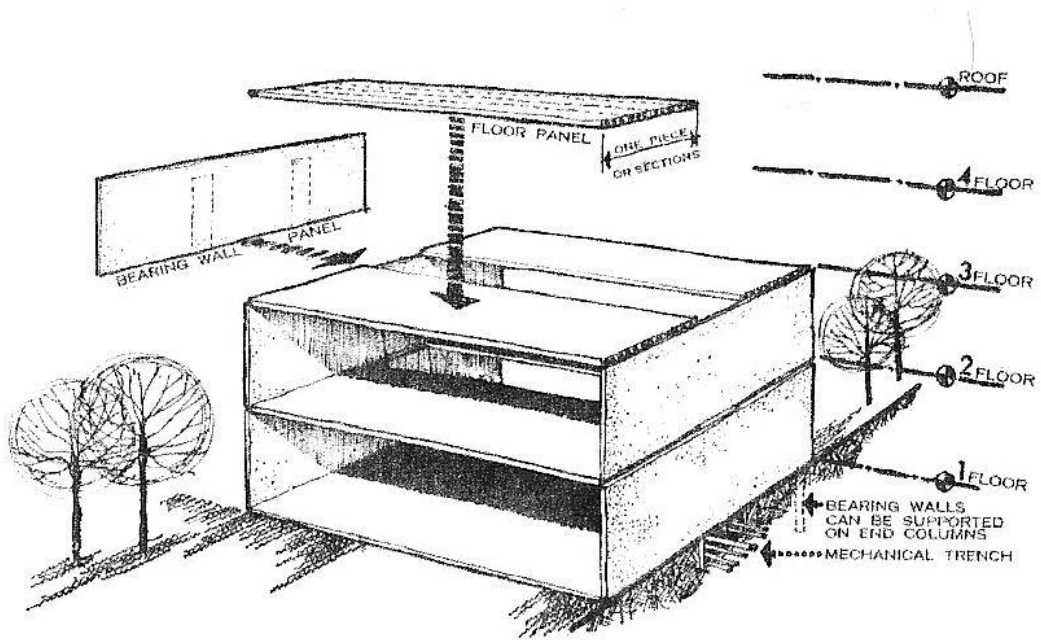


DIAGRAM OF THE STRUCTURAL SYSTEM

Figure 3.15: Academy Houses, diagram of the structural system  
 Source: Paul, *Apartments*





Figure 3.16: Academy Homes rendering, detail  
Source: Boston Public Library



Figure 3.17: Charlame Park Homes in 2006 (note that pitched roofs over entrances are a more recent addition; the original roofs were flat)  
Source: Photo by author

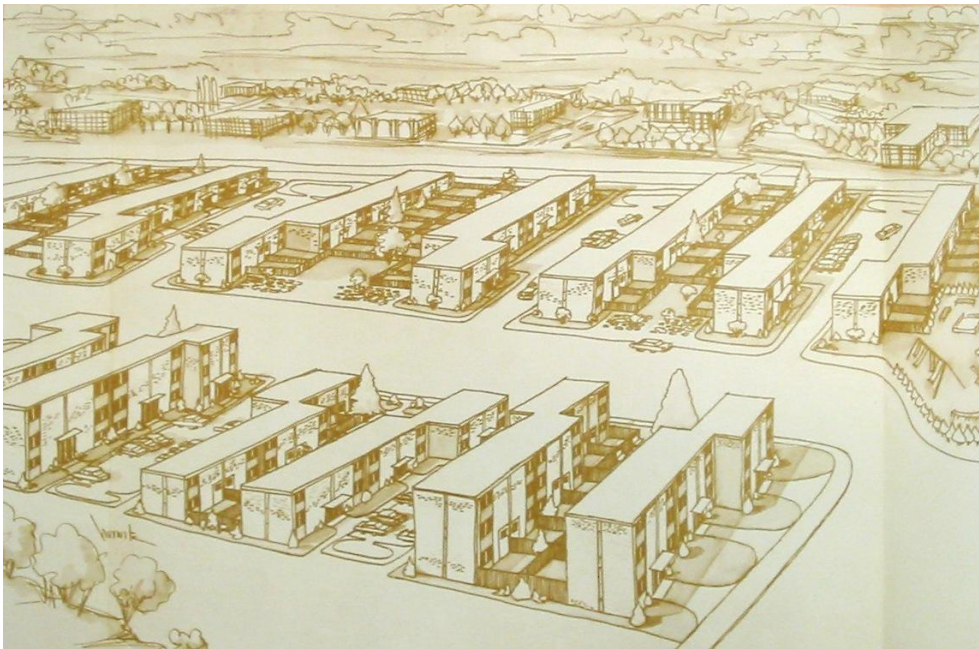


Figure 3.18: Bird's eye perspective of Charlame Park Homes, 1963  
Source: Charlame Park Homes Brochure, Boston Public Library

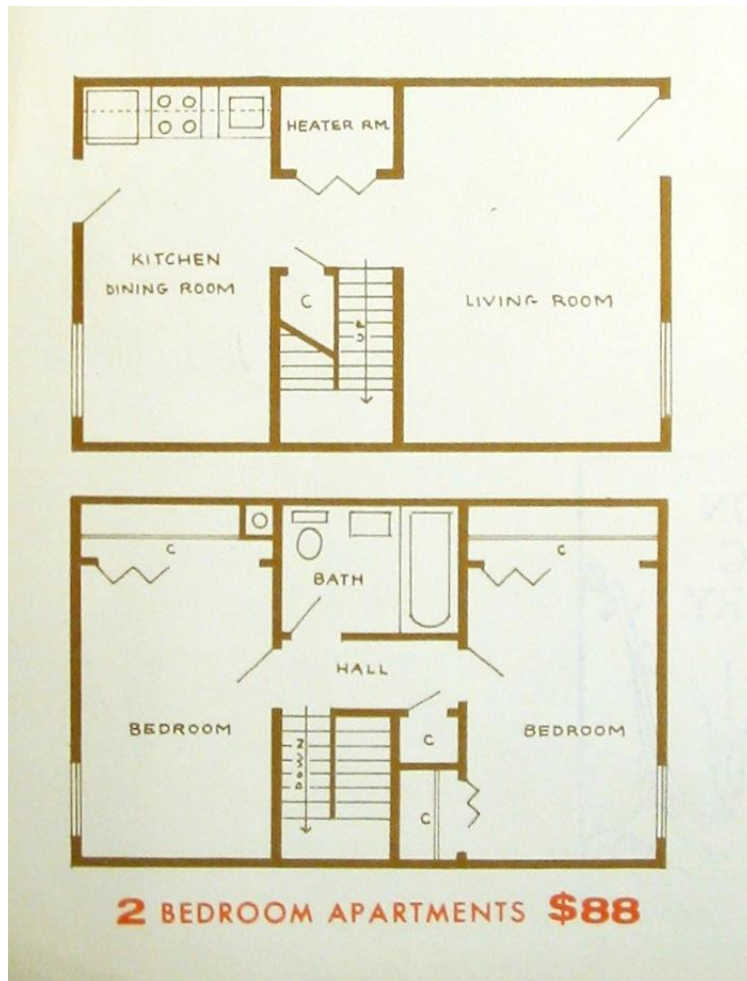


Figure 3.19: Floor plan for a two-bedroom apartment at Charlame Park Homes

Source: Charlame Park Homes Brochure, Boston Public Library



Figure 3.20: Marksdale Gardens in 2006  
Source: Photo by author

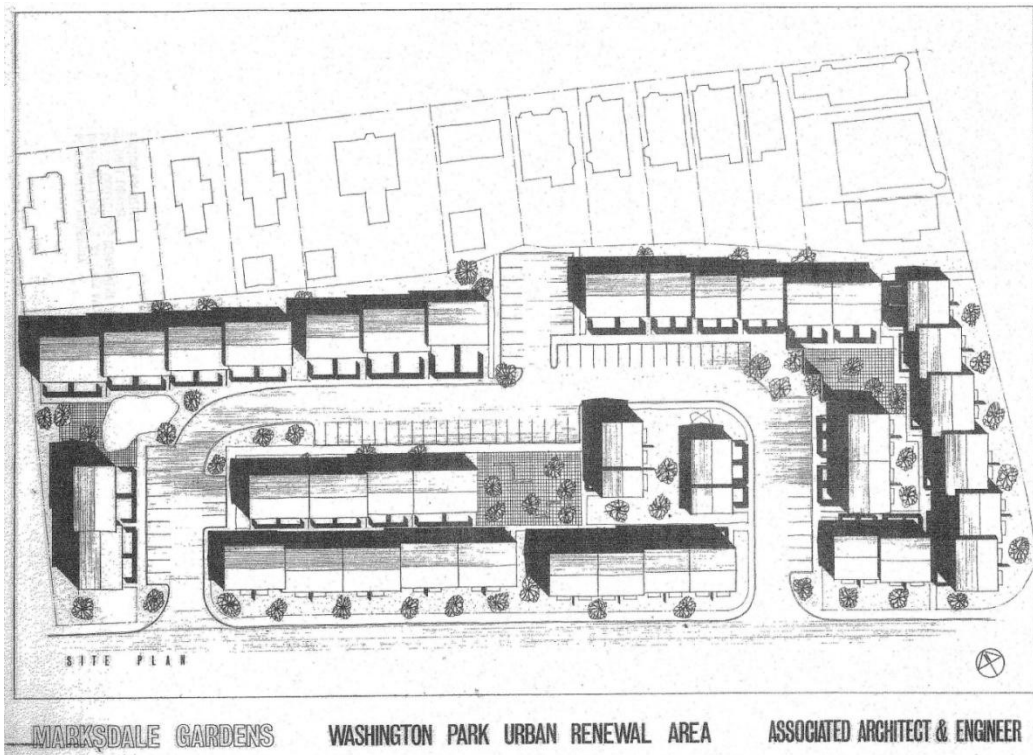
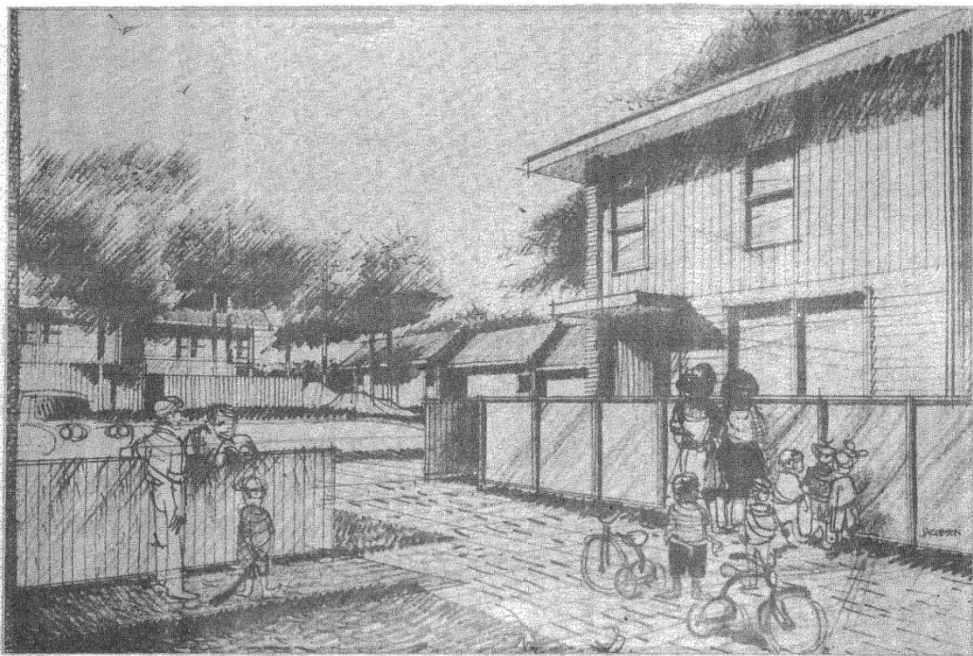


Figure 3.21: Marksdale Gardens site plan  
Source: Freedom House Records



MARKSDALE GARDENS

WASHINGTON PARK URBAN RENEWAL AREA

ASSOCIATED ARCHITECT & ENGINEER

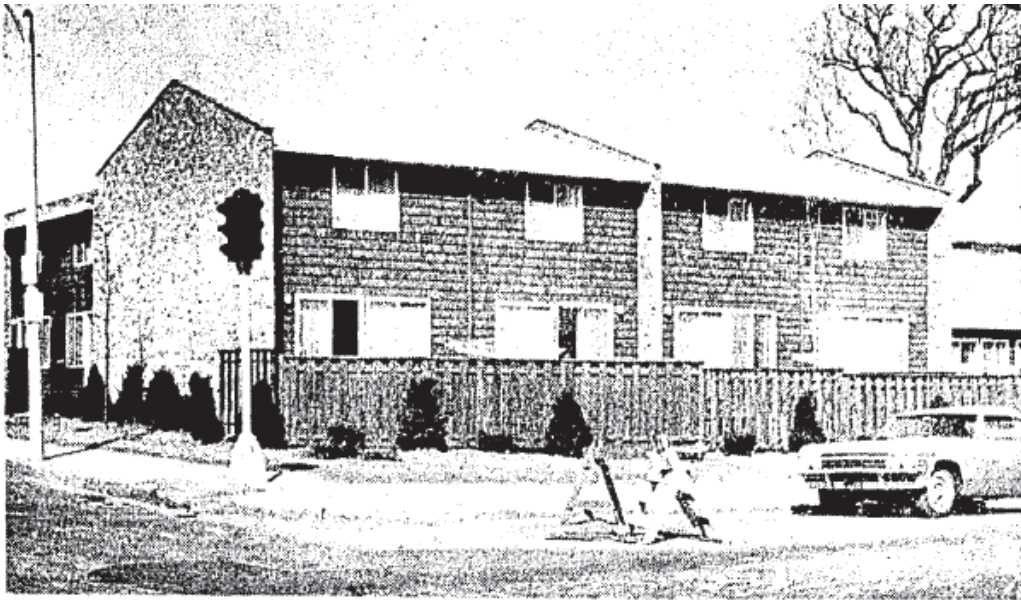
Figure 3.22: Marksdale Gardens presentation rendering, 1963  
Source: Freedom House Records



Figure 3.23: Marksdale Gardens and adjacent housing, as seen from Humboldt Avenue

Source: Freedom House Records





Example of Successful Public Housing

Figure 3.24: Illustration from “Housing Without Projects Visioned in Bay State,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1965.  
Source: *Boston Globe*

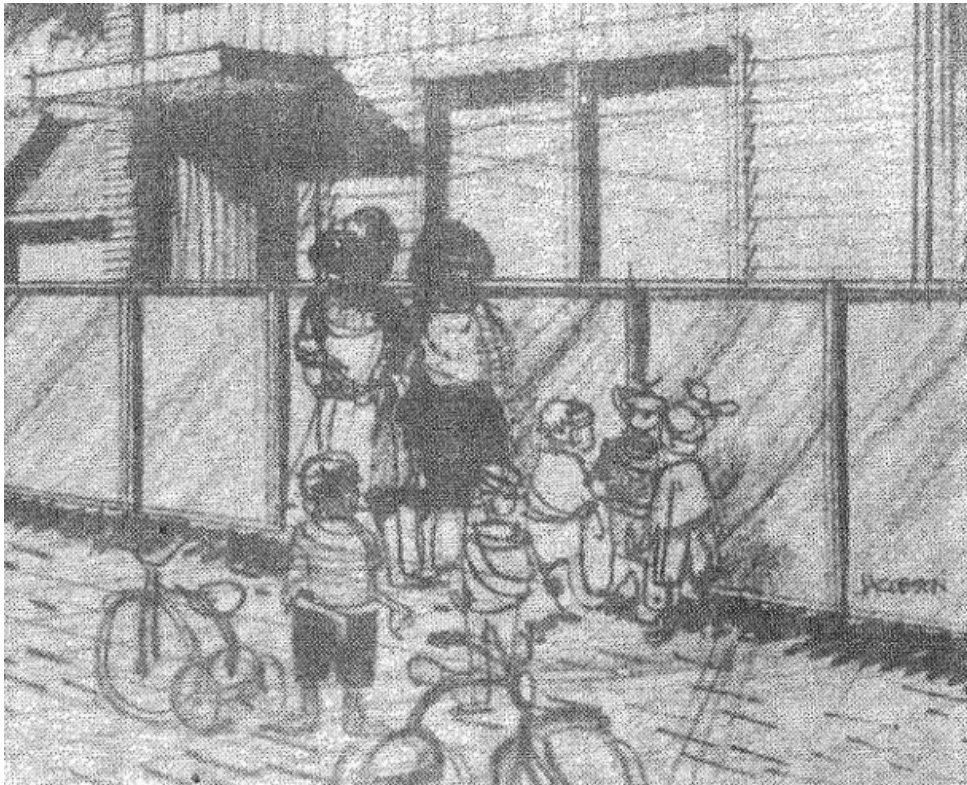


Figure 3.25: Detail, Marksdale Gardens presentation rendering, 1963  
Source: Freedom House Records



**Charlame Apartments** in Boston is a 92-unit development completed this spring under sponsorship of Charles Street A.M.E. Church. The two- and three-floor townhouses are of brick veneer construction, have two-, three- and four-bedroom units that rent for \$88, \$98 and \$108 monthly. The church's pastor, Rev. Walter C. Davis, talks with resident children.

Figure 3.26: Charlame Park, as illustrated in "The New Landlords," *Ebony*, July 1965

Source: *Ebony*

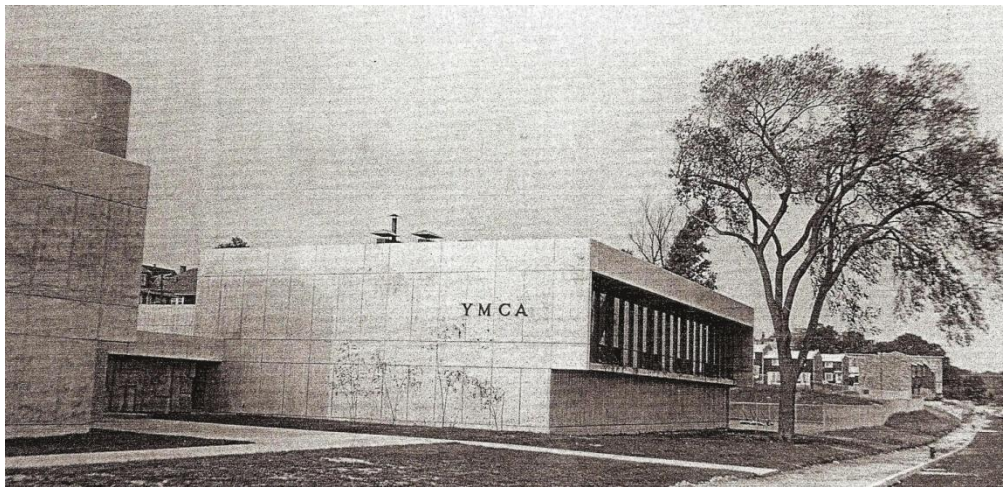


Figure 3.27: YMCA along Warren Avenue  
Source: Freedom House Records

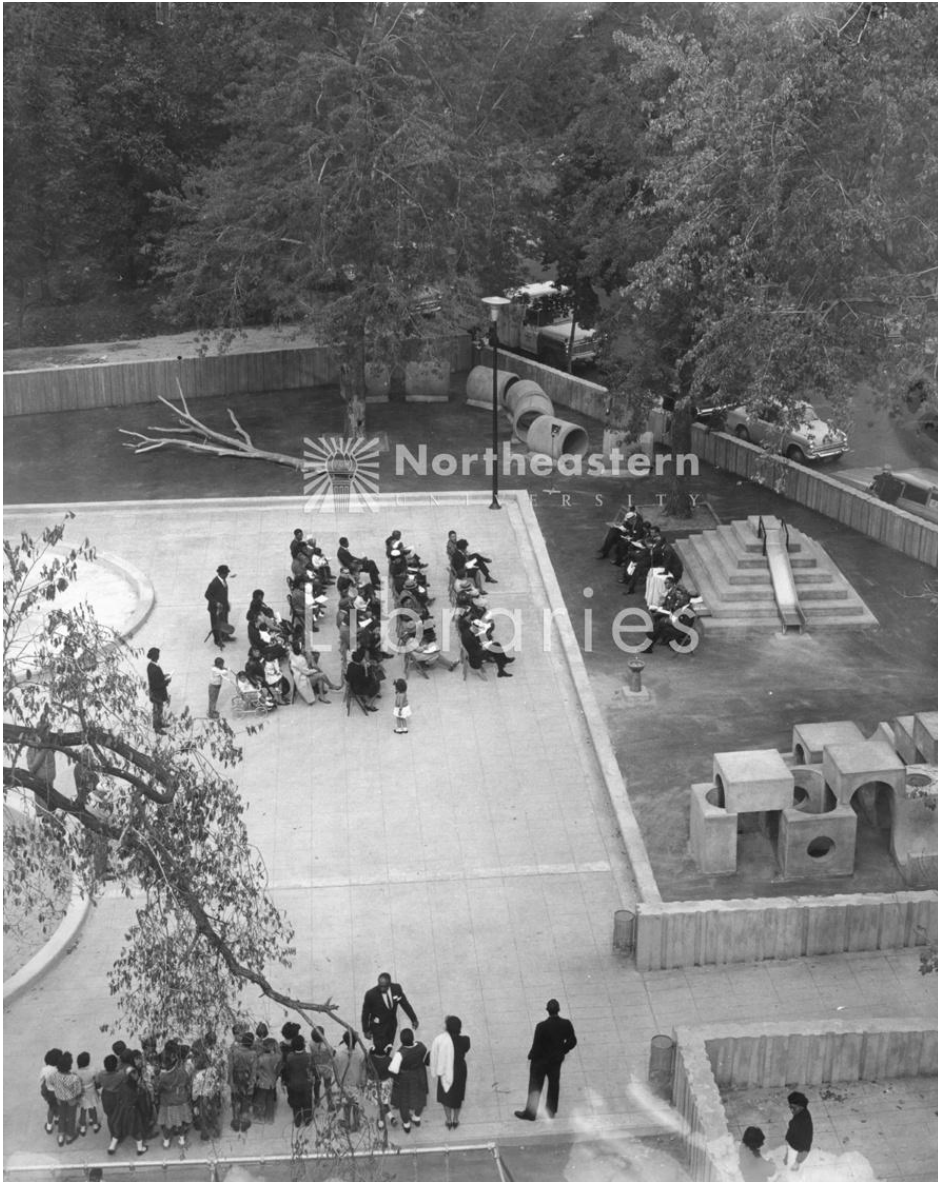


Figure 3.28: Dedication of the Walnut Avenue Tot Lot, September 1964  
Source: Freedom House Records



Figure 3.29: St. James Street Park  
Source: *Bay State Banner*

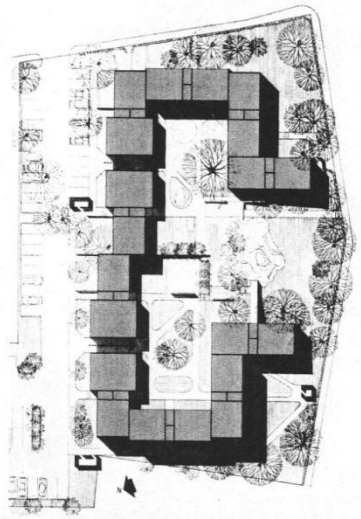
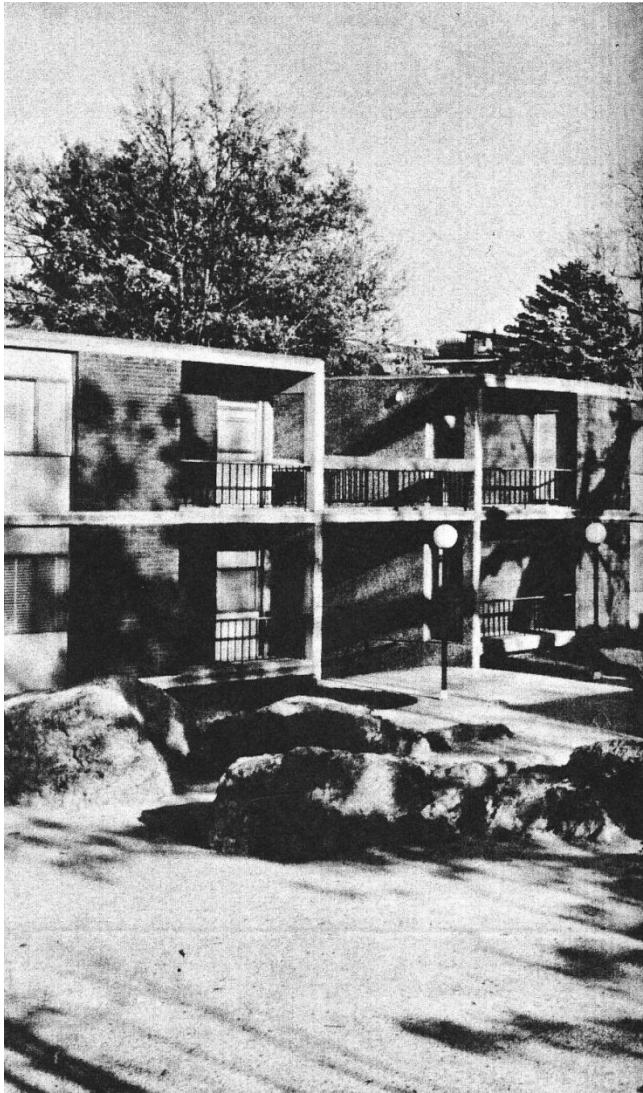


Figure 3.30: Westminster Court, exterior view and site plan  
Source: Schmertz, *Apartments, Townhouses, and Condominiums*



Figure 3.31: Renderings of the proposed Washington Park Shopping Mall  
Source: Washington Park brochure, Loeb Library Vertical Files



**Opening Late 1967**  
**The first Bi-racial Bank in New England**

**Unity Bank & Trust Co.**  
 "The Bank with a purpose"  
 Owned by the People.

**BANK POWER IS COMING TO BOSTON...**  
**UNITY BANK & TRUST CO.**  
*(in process of formation)*

For years, men have dreamed of the right kind of bank for Roxbury and its people. Soon, Unity Bank & Trust Co., New England's first bi-racial bank will open its doors qualified and staffed to offer our community all banking services.

**UNITY BANK & TRUST IS UNDERWRITING \$1,000,000 CAPITALIZATION**  
 The 100,000 shares, priced at \$10 each, are being offered directly by the bank. For all the facts and figures, return the coupon below and a full prospectus will be sent to you.

Figure 3.32: Advertisement for investors in Unity Bank and Trust  
 Source: *Ebony*



Figure 3.33: Interior, Unity Bank  
Source: "Black-White Duality," *Progressive Architecture*



Figure 3.34: Warren Gardens  
Source: Photo by author

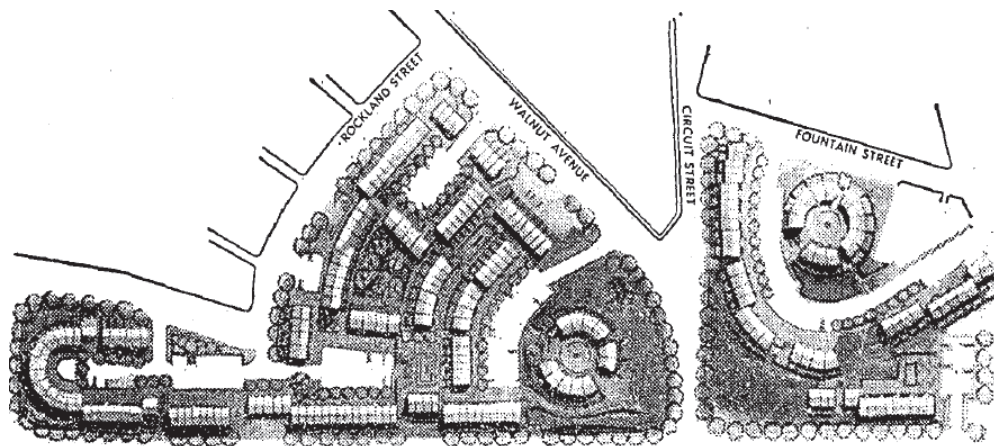


Figure 3.35: Site plan for Warren Gardens  
Source: "Housing for Middle Income," *Boston Globe*

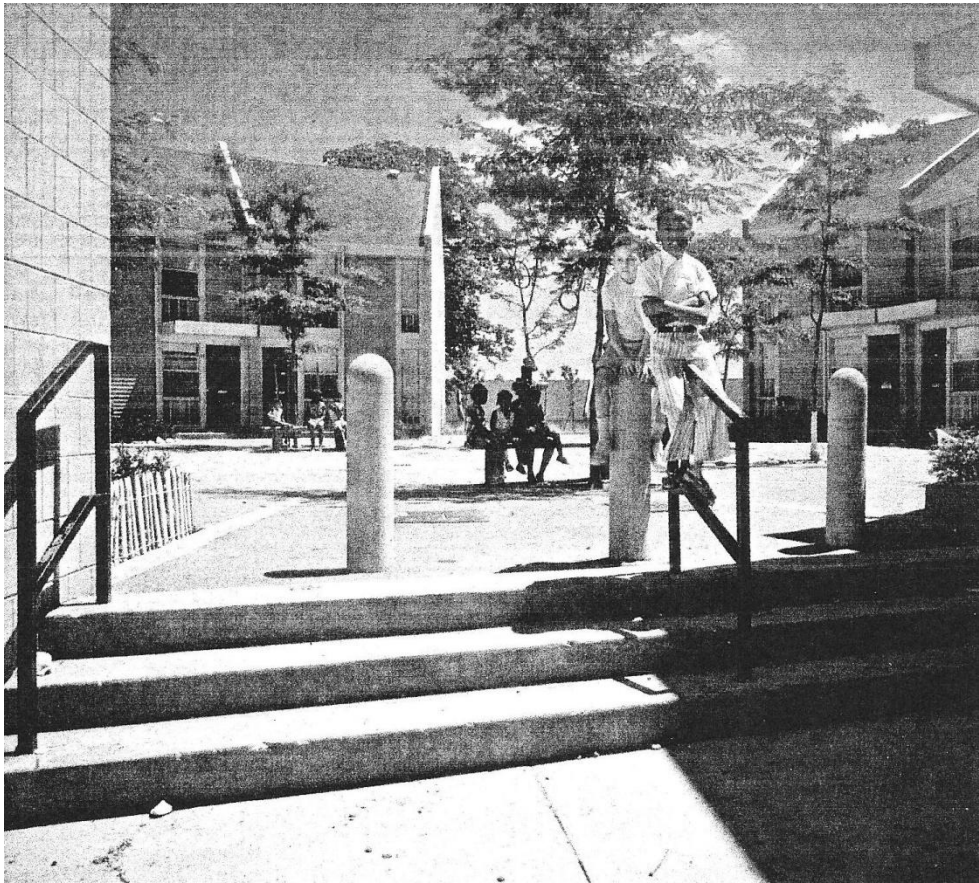


Figure 3.36 Warren Gardens  
Source: Paul, *Apartments*

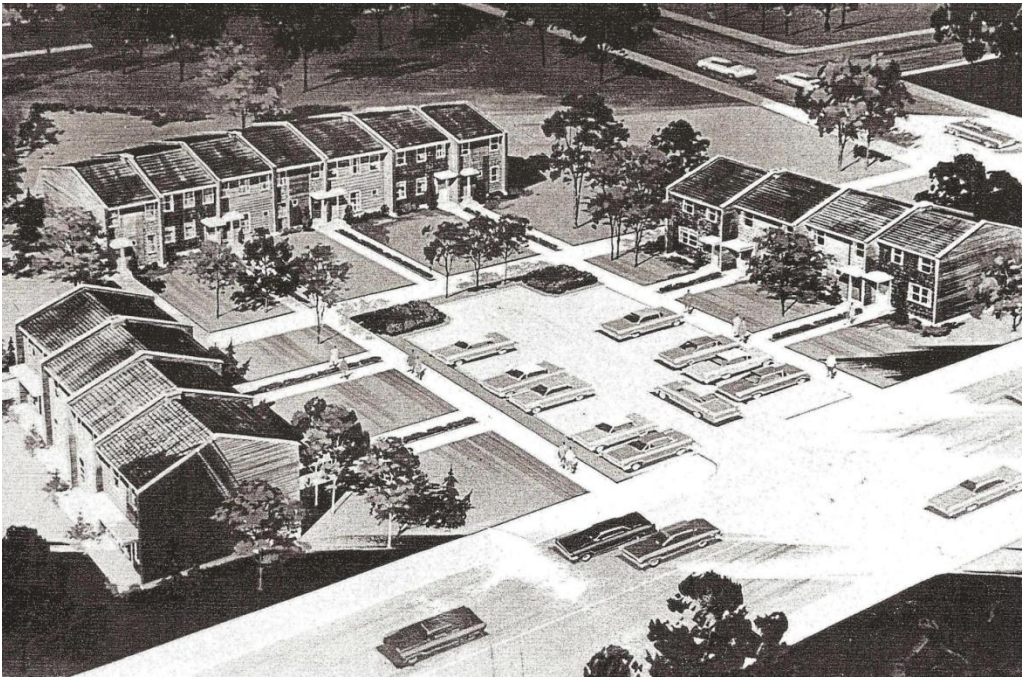


Figure 3.37: Hilton Terrace, rendering  
Source: Freedom House Records

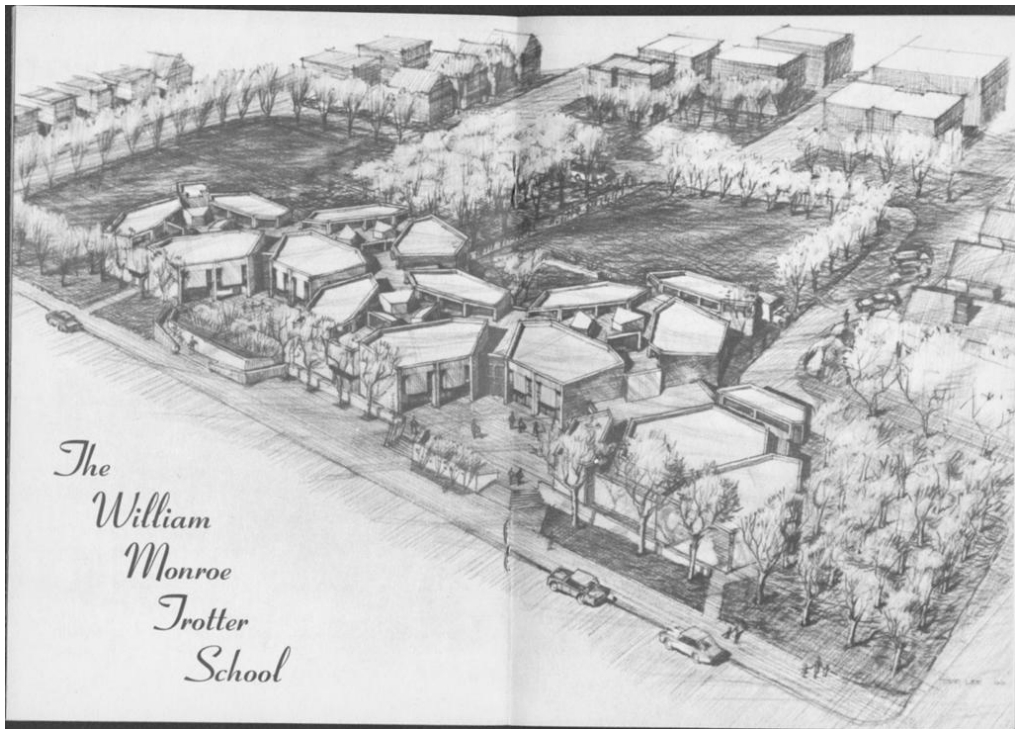


Figure 3.38: William Monroe Trotter School, as published in a Boston School Committee brochure in May 1969  
Source: Freedom House Records

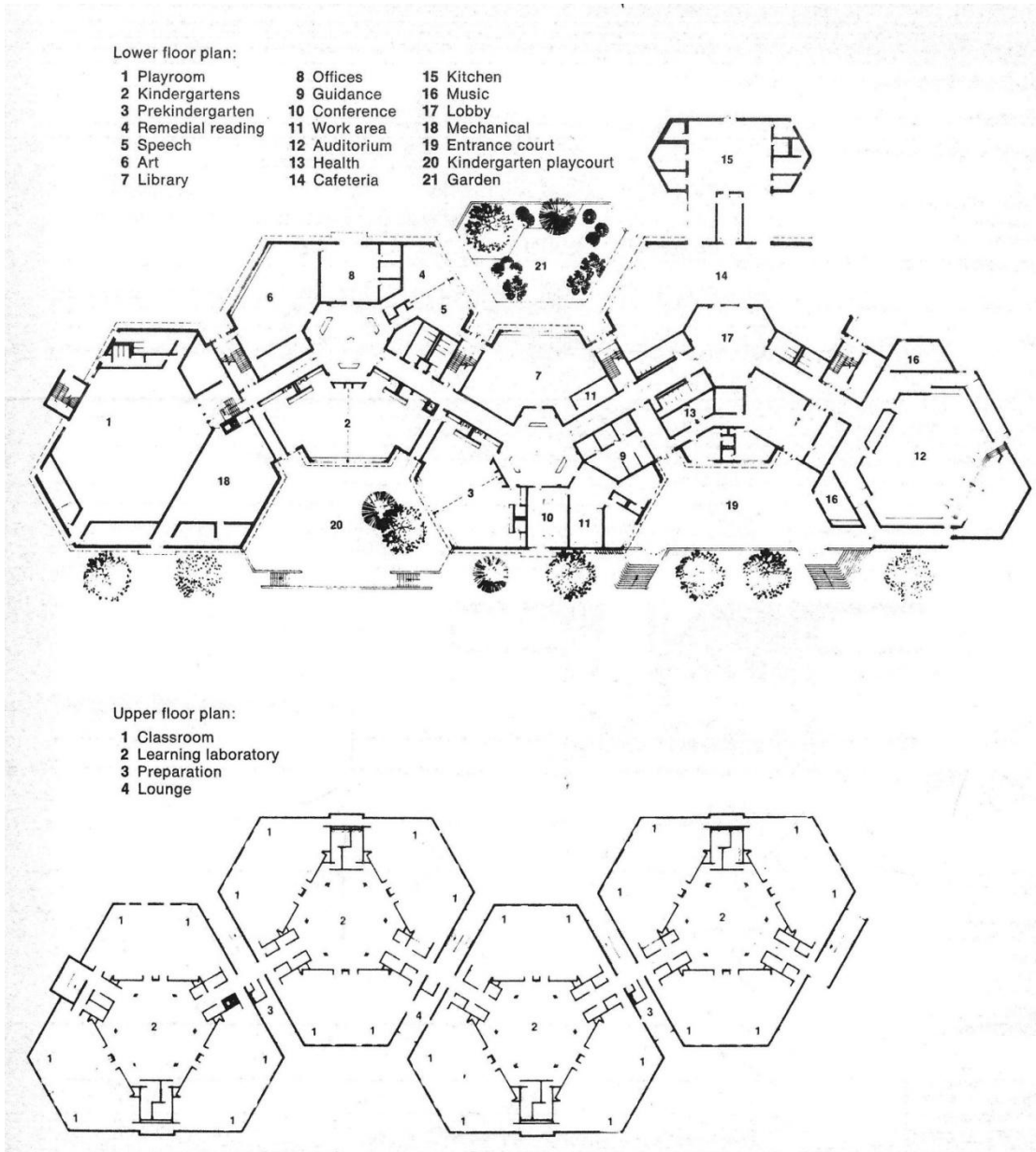
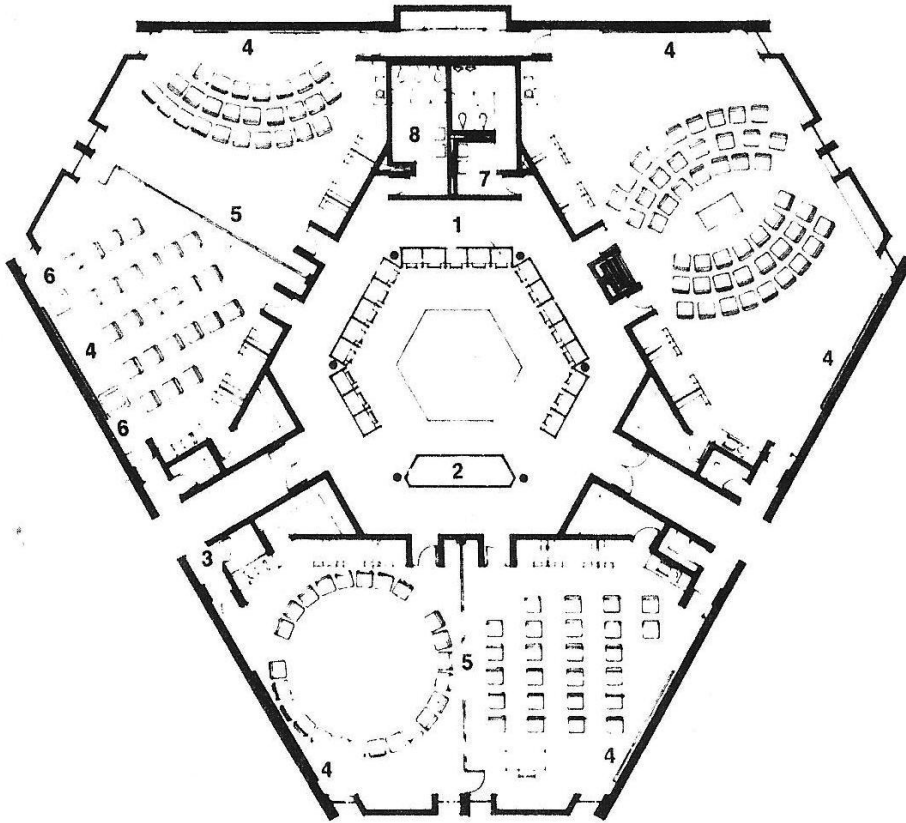


Figure 3.39: William Monroe Trotter School, plans  
 Source: Morriseau, *The New Schools*





Classroom pod:

- 1 Study carrels
- 2 Learning wall
- 3 Observation
- 4 Chalkboard
- 5 Operable wall with chalkboard
- 6 TV
- 7 Boys
- 8 Girls

Figure 3.40: William Monroe Trotter School, classroom pod plan  
 Source: "How They Did It In Boston"

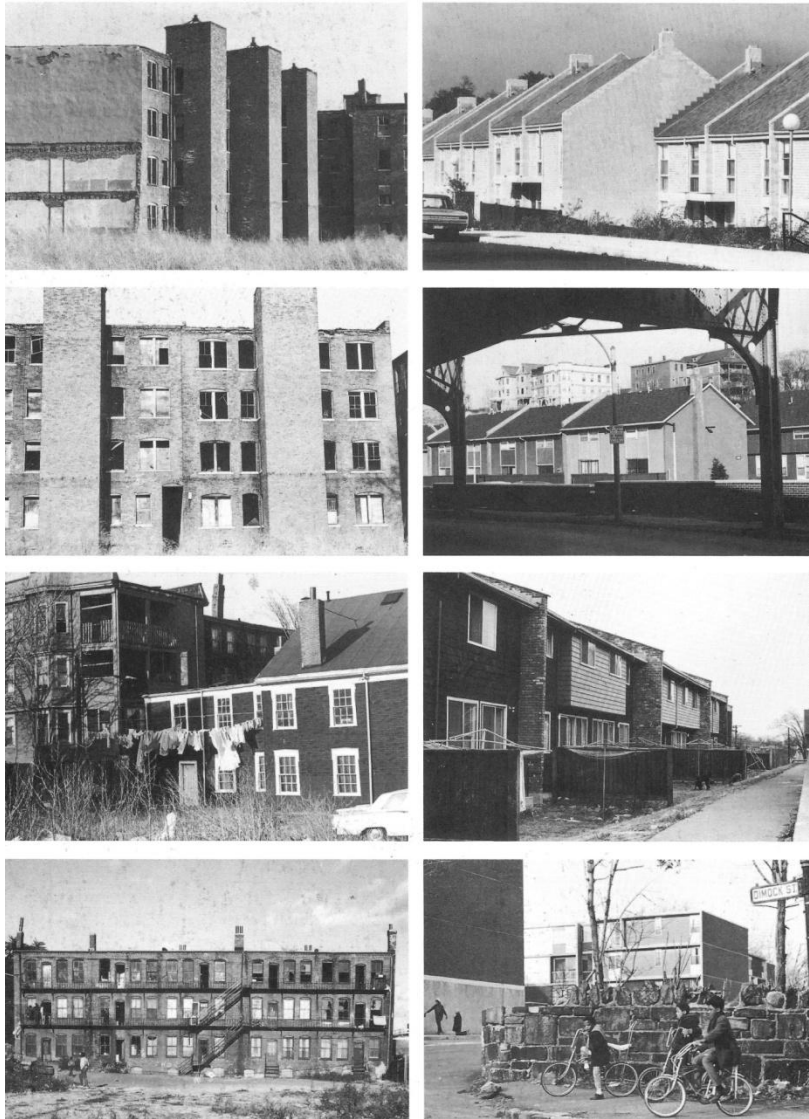


Figure 3.41: Images of Roxbury on both sides of the urban renewal area boundary , inside (right) and out (left)

Source: Boston Society of Architects, *Architecture Boston*

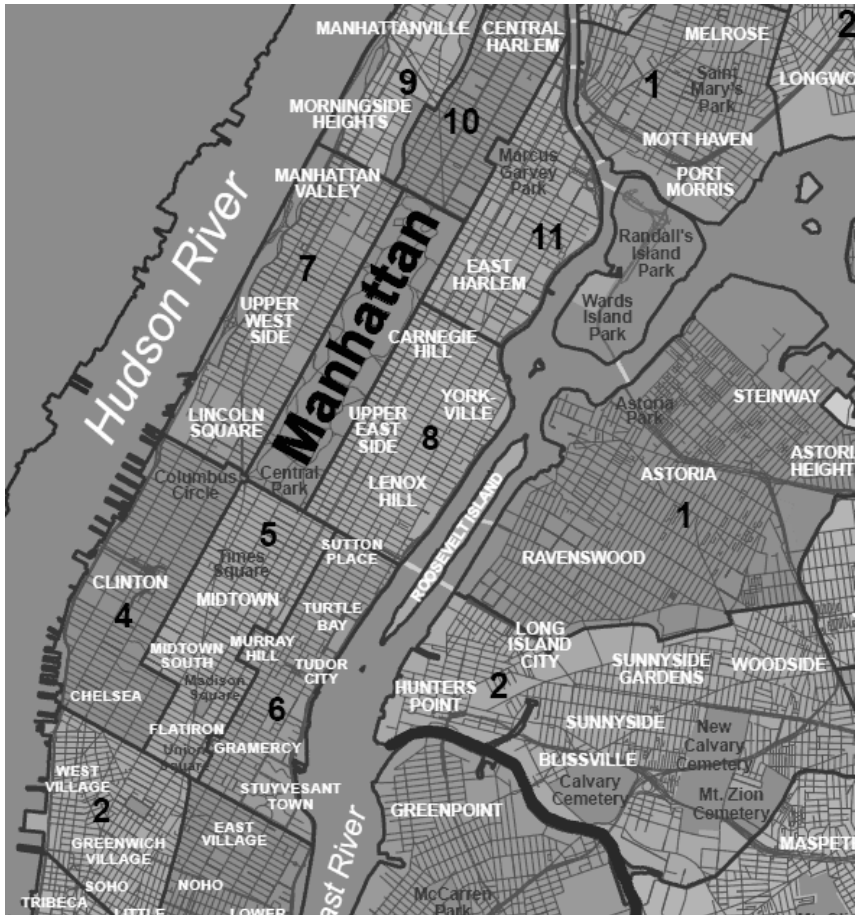


Figure 4.1: Map of New York showing the city's neighborhoods  
 Source: New York City Department of City Planning



Figure 4.2: Brownstones along West 93<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Source: New York City Department of City Planning

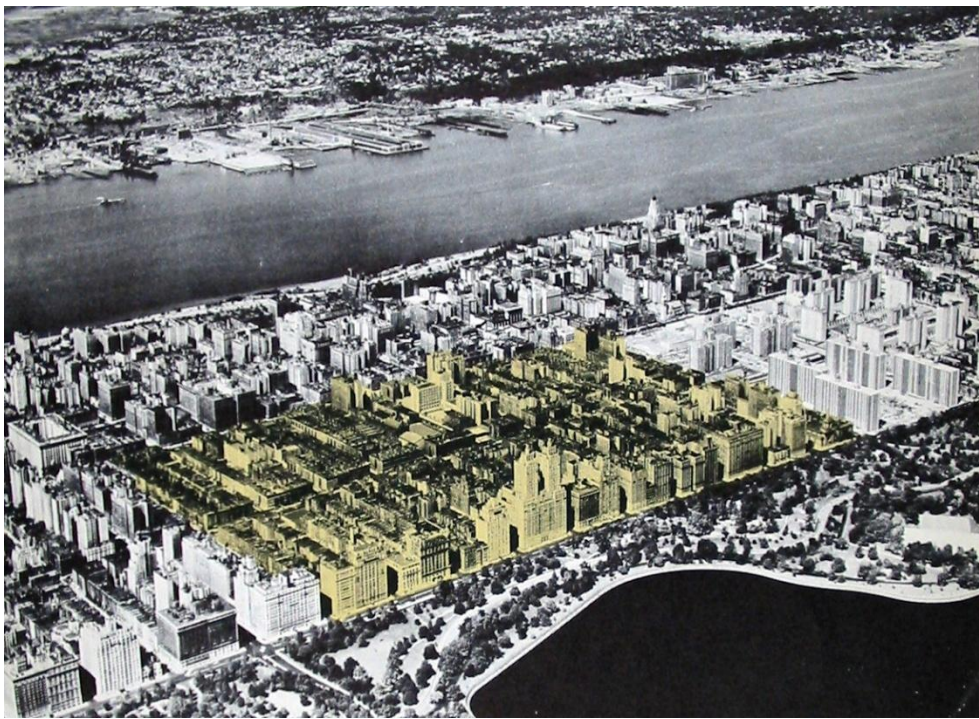


Figure 4.3: Aerial photograph of the West Side Urban Renewal Area on the eve of redevelopment.

Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*



Figure 4.4: Residential typologies on the Upper West Side  
Source: "West Side Urban Renewal Area" brochure

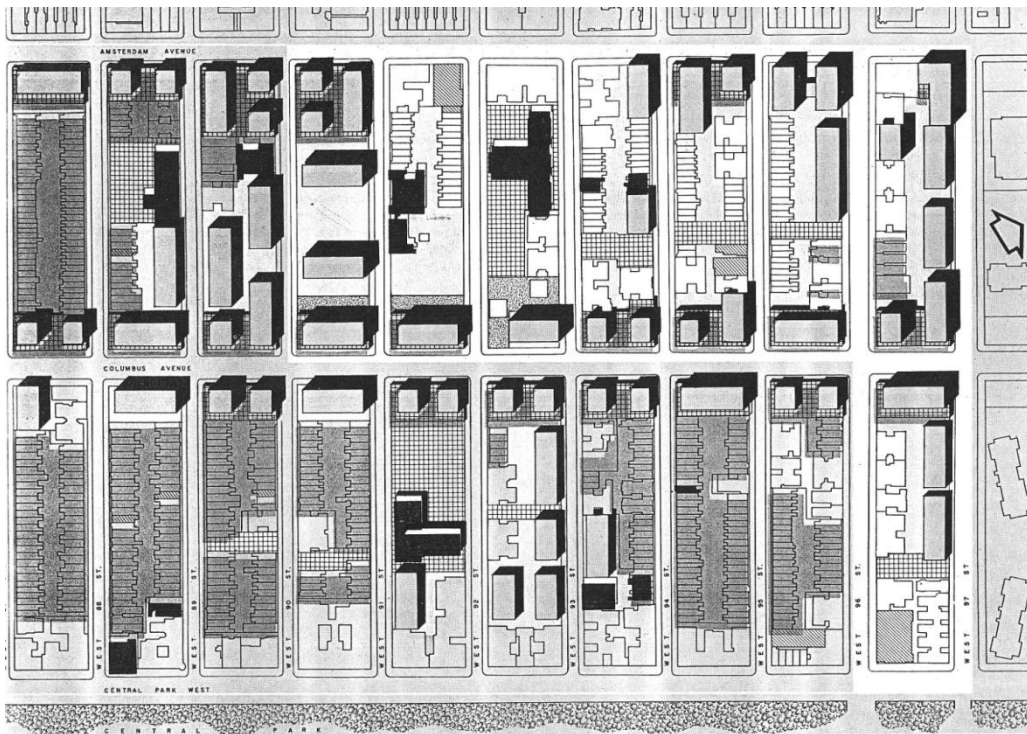


Figure 4.5: Proposal A for the West Side Urban Renewal Area  
Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*



Figure 4.6: Proposed high-rise housing along Columbus Avenue  
Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*





Figure 4.7: Proposed mid-block pathways  
Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*

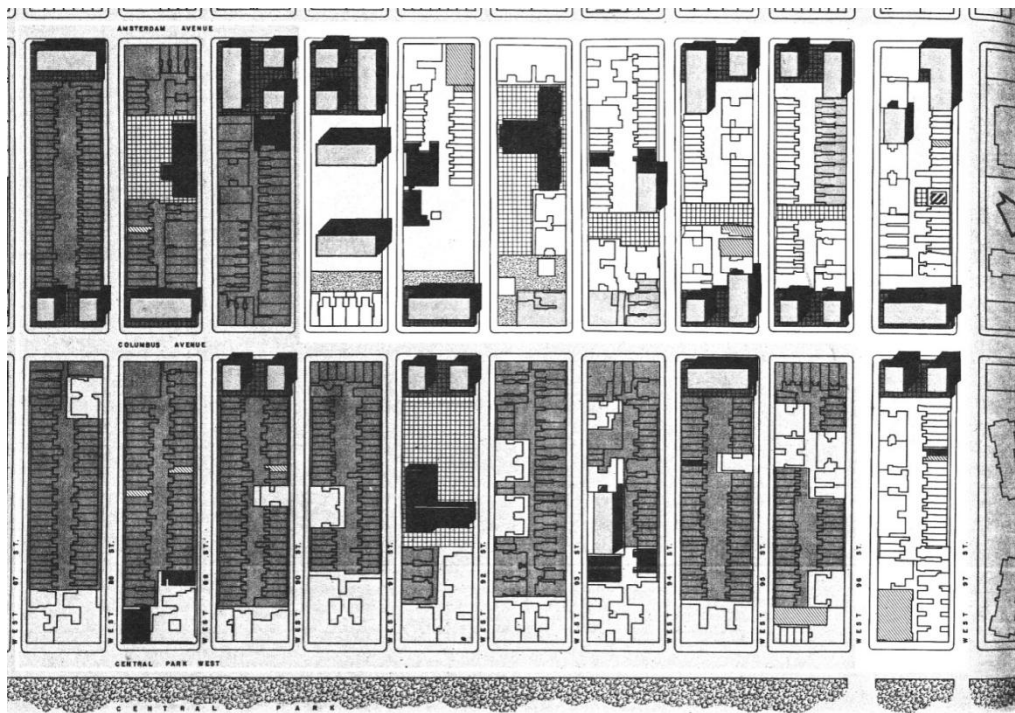


Figure 4.8: Proposal B for the West Side Urban Renewal Area  
Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*

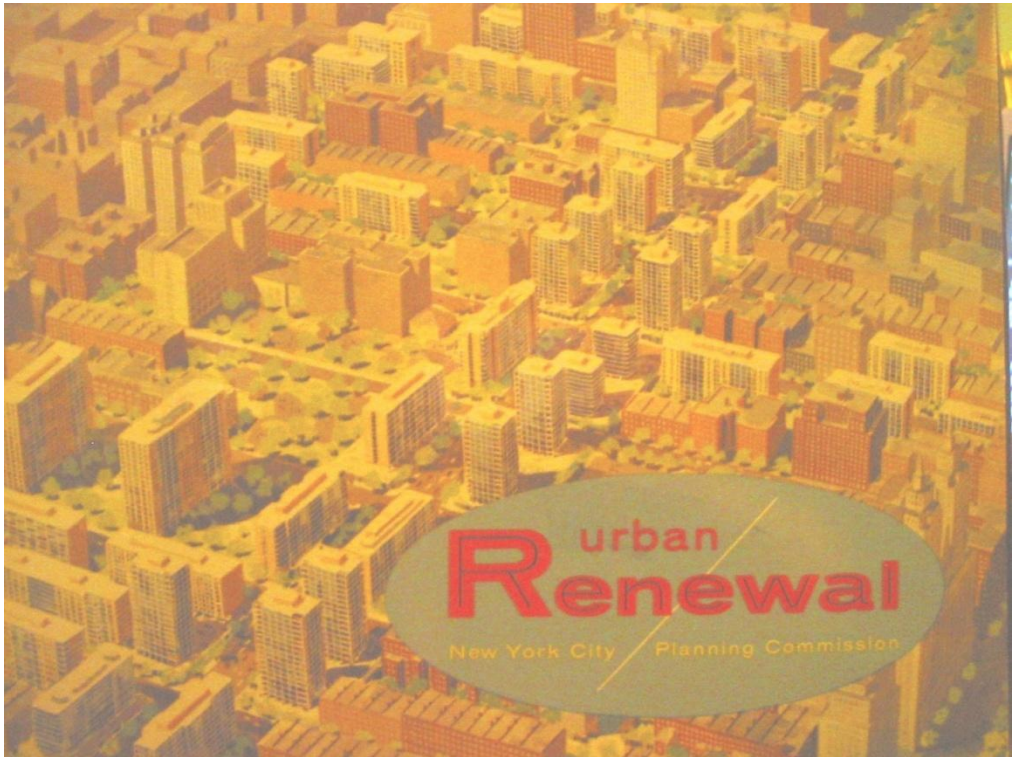


Figure 4.9: Aerial view of the renewed West Side  
Source: New York City Planning Commission, *Urban Renewal*

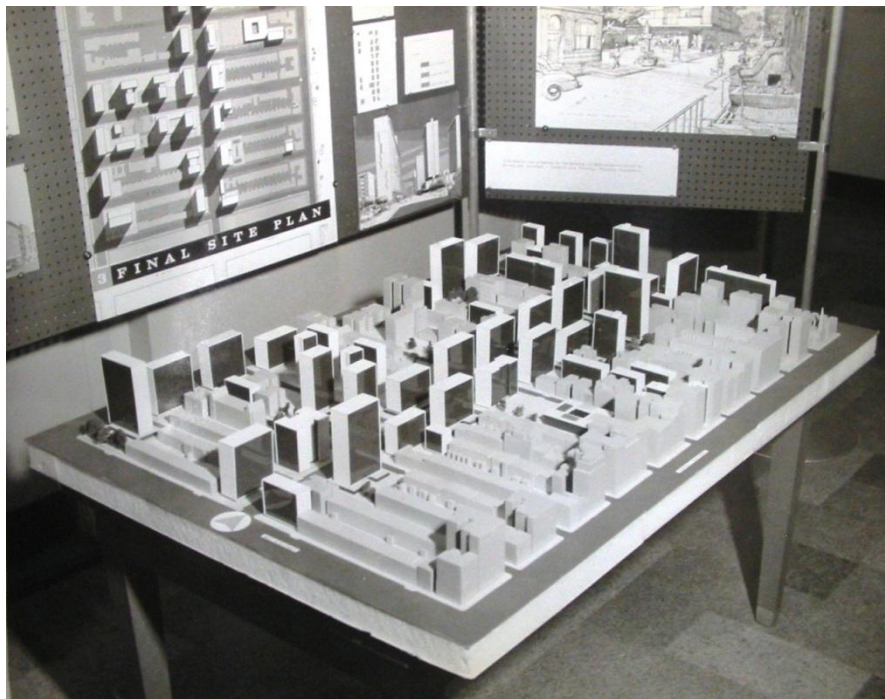


Figure 4.10. A model of the West Side Urban Renewal Area illustrative plan  
Source: Archives of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, New York City

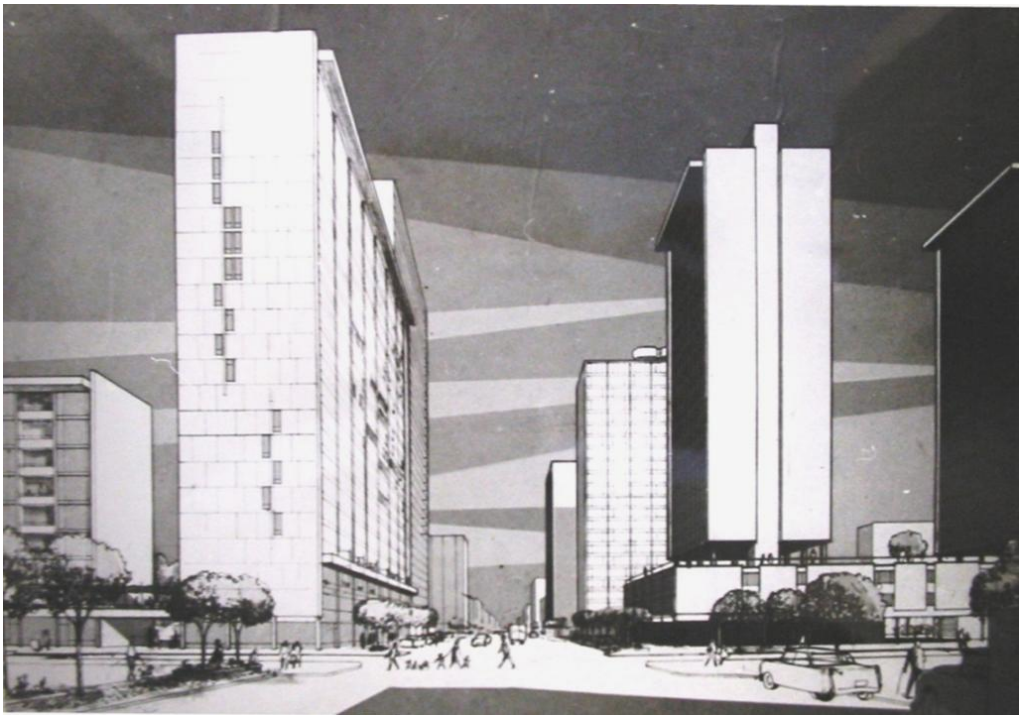


Figure 4.11. Presentation drawing illustrating the Avenue of Tomorrow  
Source: Archives of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, New York City



Figure 4.12: A proposed plaza and middle-income cooperative  
Source: "West Side Urban Renewal" brochure



Figure 4.13: Brownstones along the West Side's side streets  
Source: "West Side Urban Renewal" brochure



Figure 4.14: Project area residents discussing the plan  
Source: "West Side Urban Renewal" brochure





Figure 4.15: Stephen Wise Homes  
Source: *New York 1960*



Figure 4.16: Sculptural play horses at Stephen Wise Homes  
Source: Photo by author



Figure 4.17: Stryckers Bay Apartments  
Source: Archives of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, New York City



Figure 4.18: Goddard Tower  
Source: Archives of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, New York City



Figure 4.19: RNA House  
Source: *New York 1960*

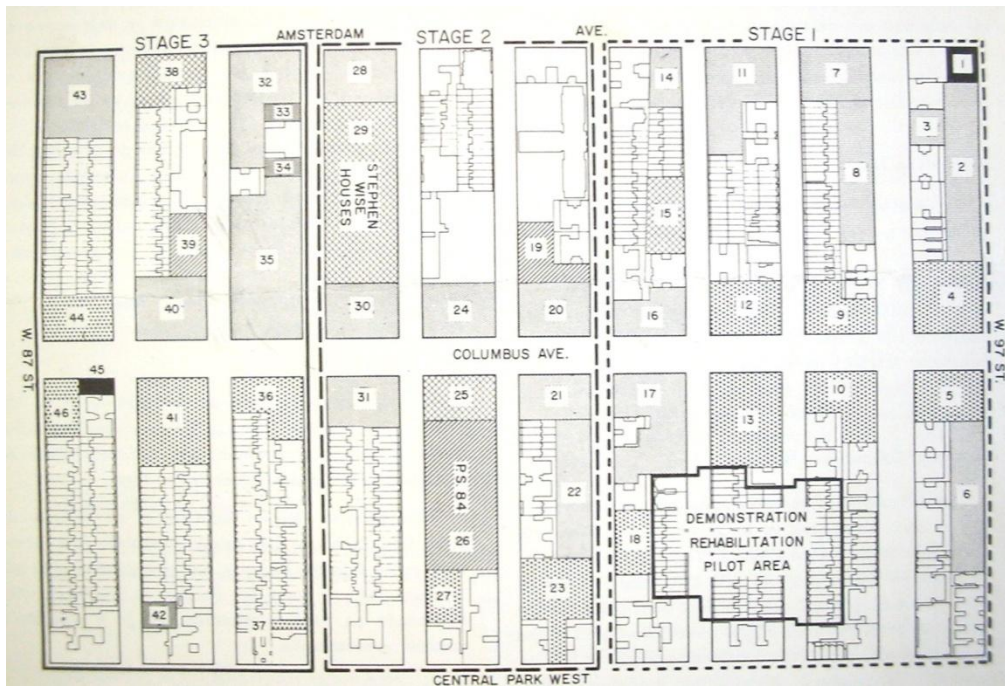


Figure 4.20: Demonstration Rehabilitation Pilot Area  
 Source: *West Side Urban Renewal Area* newsletter, 1962



Figure 4.21: 125-149 West 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, former SROs scheduled for rehabilitation as public housing  
Source: New York City Housing Authority

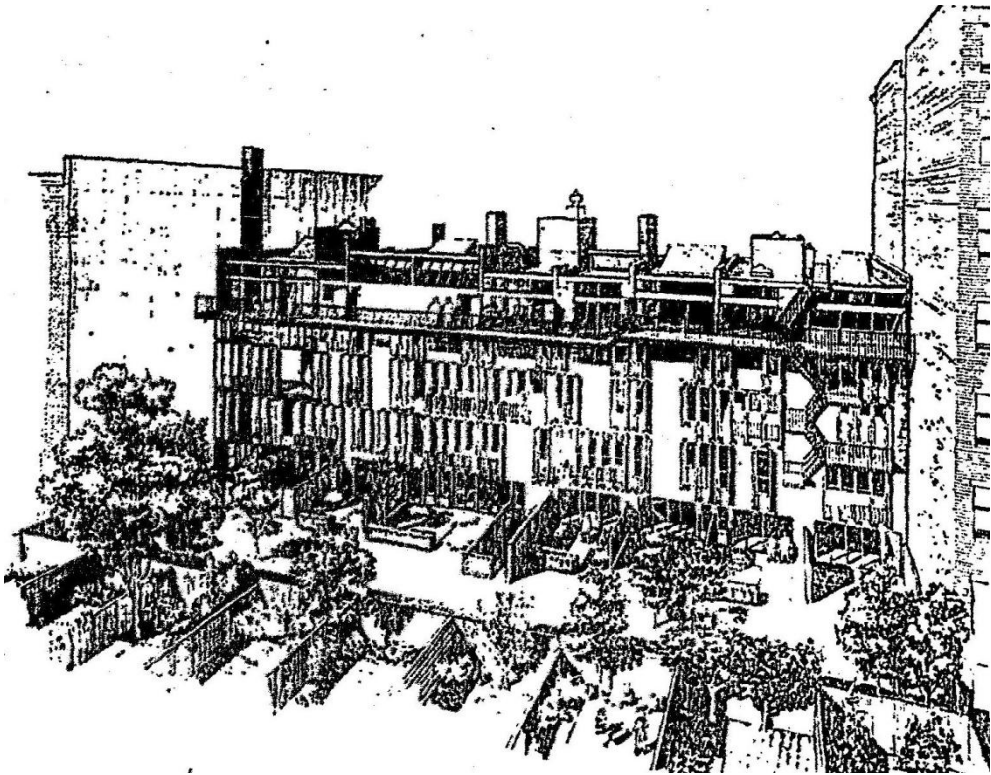


Figure 4.22: 9-G Cooperative, shared public space behind apartments  
Source: *New York Times*



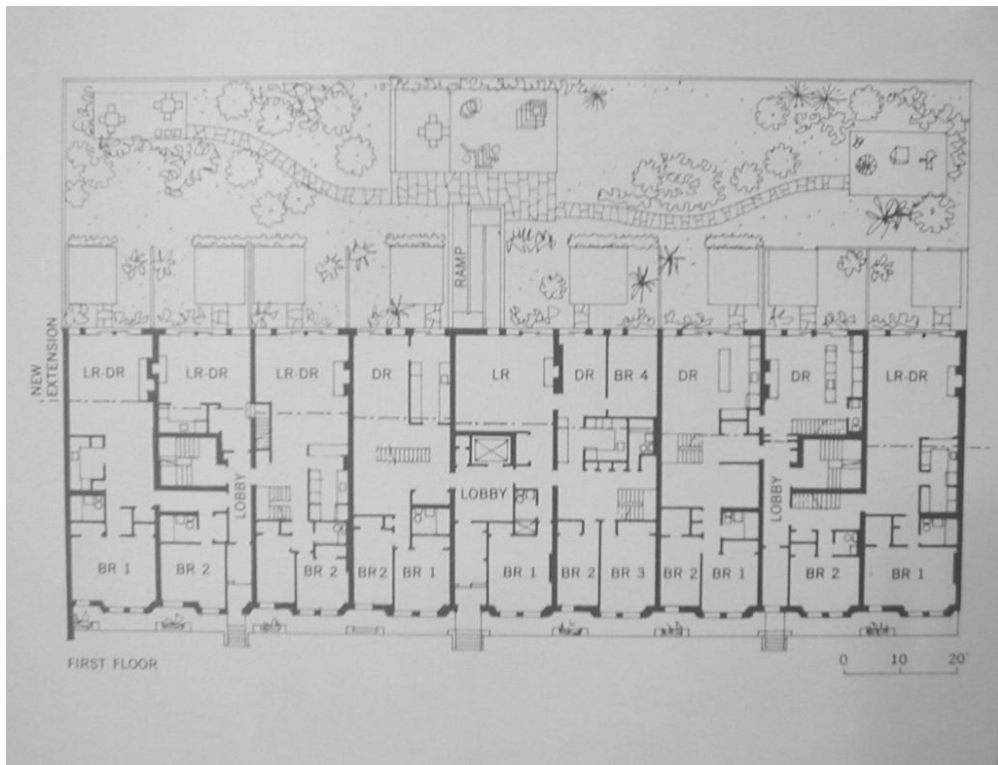


Figure 4.23: 9-G Cooperative, floor plan, ground floor  
Source: *New York Times*



Figure 4.24: Jimmy Santos' funeral procession  
Source: *New York Times*



Figure 4.25: Operation Move-In moving trucks in front of Site 30  
Source: *Broadway Local*



Figure 4.26: OMI Headquarters at Site 30  
Source: *Broadway Local*



Figure 4.27: A flyer for an Operation Move-In rally  
Source: Stryckers Bay Neighborhood Council

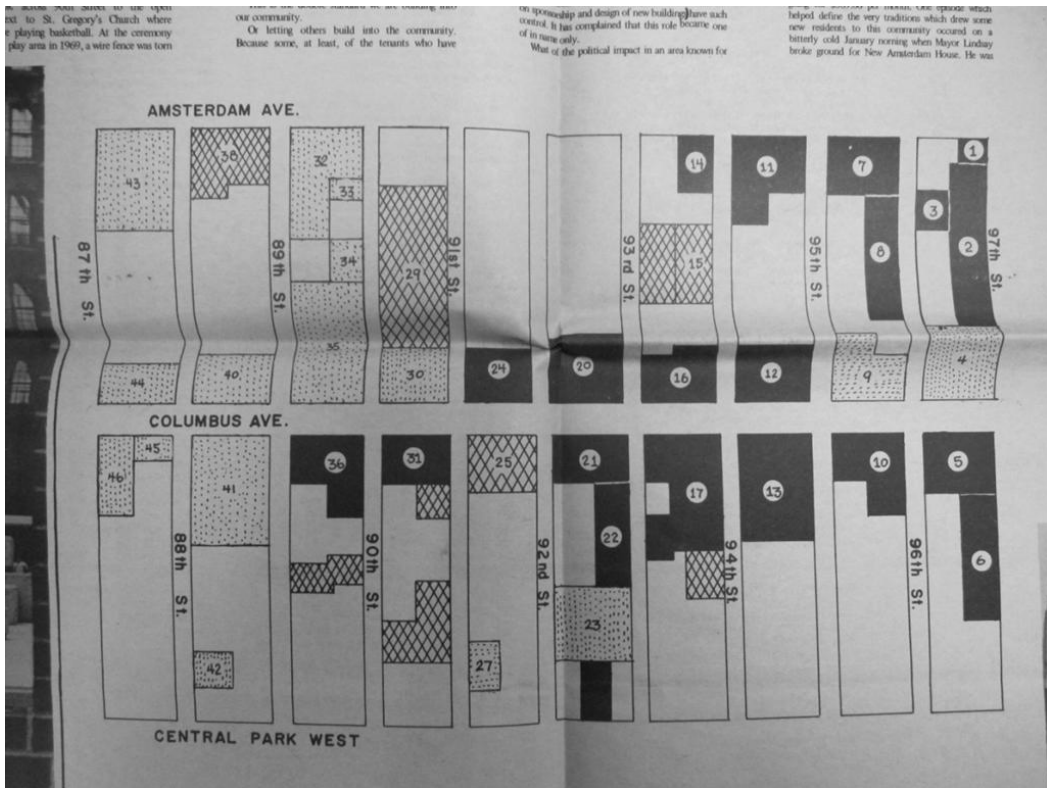


Figure 4.28: Urban renewal area plan showing parcels still uncommitted or undeveloped, 1973  
 Source: *Broadway Local*