

“The fact is, whether we like it or not, that [*sic*] our neighborhoods still are deteriorating. People are still fleeing to the suburbs. Racial tensions run high. National magazines ask whether cities have a future...Have we tried to create a beautiful façade of new lawns to cover an ugly interior?”¹ This excerpt was taken from Alderman Robert E. Merriam’s “Are We Saving Our Neighborhoods?” speech given to the City Club of Chicago, Illinois in 1953 in response to urban renewal. Merriam’s statements reveal the complexities of urban policy in Chicago following World War II. In an attempt to further social welfare programs, the federal government took an active role in addressing urban housing and development issues as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal welfare programs. New Deal liberalism was intended to aid the elderly, disabled, laborers, unemployed, and impoverished to establish a “decent” standard of living. Some of these initiatives were in the form of urban housing and renewal policies that aimed to rehabilitate city centers, remove substandard housing, and establish a minimum housing standard of living for disadvantaged residents. The federal government’s Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949 demanded that municipal governments identify blighted neighborhoods, rehabilitate the area, and provide alternative housing for residents. However, implementation of welfare programs by municipal governments and agencies often highlighted patterns of paternalism and discrimination towards urban residents in need of public assistance, notably the lower classes and African Americans.² The discrimination was the result of institutionalized neglect and devaluation of the

¹ Robert E. Merriam, “Are We Saving Our Neighborhoods?” (26 October 1953), in Lincoln Park Neighborhood Collection, DePaul Universities Digital Libraries Digital Collection, <http://digicol.lib.depaul.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/lpnc6/id/1783/rec/22> (accessed 18 September 2011), para 6 and 7.

² Lower class and African American populations will also be referred to as “marginalized.”

populations' needs, which resulted in the further marginalization, rather than improvement, of these lower class and African American residents.

An examination of the city of Chicago's execution of governmental urban housing policies in the late 1930s and into the World War II era reveals that a dichotomy developed between welfare programs intended to provide safe and affordable housing and the implementation of patterns of discrimination towards lower class and African communities. In 1940s Chicago, the dichotomy between the idealized goals of urban housing welfare policy and implementation emerged as a consequence of prioritizing urban redevelopment, the interests of the white middle class, and the city over the improvement of marginalized communities. The devaluation of the needs of underprivileged populations was manifested in segregated housing developments that were physically removed from city centers in isolated housing developments situated on less valuable, sometimes hazardous, land with limited accessibility to societal opportunities.

The dichotomy that emerged in policy implementation is most evident when examining the Chicago Housing Authority's management of federal urban renewal and housing policy from the late 1930s and continuing into the World War II era. Additionally, a brief examination of the Altgeld Gardens—one of the first public housing developments in Chicago constructed under the Housing Act of 1937—reveals the impact of white middle class and city interests on federally supported housing policy and the establishment of implementation precedents that would continue throughout the postwar period.

Due to the complexities of utilizing urban planning and policies addressing multiple societal and municipal needs, a great deal of scholarship is dedicated to understanding the numerous elements that influenced the emergence of urban policies in the 1930s and urban renewal initiatives that continued. The scholarship emphasizes the relationship between suburbanization and urban decline, the influences on urban space, and the identification of communities that were benefited and those that were hindered by governmental urban policies.

Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* details the emergence of the suburbs, including why this occurred and the racial and class homogeneity that characterized the suburbs. The work includes the influences on suburbanization: the development of the automobile culture, "white flight," and government funding. Jackson's work is constructed around a few defining features of suburbia: "Pervasive throughout is the notion that Americans have longed preferred a detached dwelling to a row house, rural life to city life, and owning to renting."³ He establishes that the suburban perspective shaped the desire to move away from cities, which was paralleled by the removal of value and capital investment in urban centers. Similarly, Eric Avila and Mark Rose's "Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal: An Introduction" analyzes the correlation between suburbanization and urban decline and the initiatives designed to combat the deterioration. The article first defined "urban renewal" as a historical trend beginning with suburbanization and continuing into the slum clearance efforts of the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Urban renewal was designed by the federal

³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 11.

⁴ Eric Avila and Mark H. Rose, "Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal: An Introduction," *Journal of Urban History* 35 (2009): 335.

government to combine "...slum clearance, handsome office towers, and great expressways [to] bring white middle-class people back to downtown."⁵ However, these authors argue that urban renewal programs were not fundamentally designed to improve the lives of marginalized populations.

Another work, Arnold Hirsch's, "With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States," addresses the racially motivated decision making in urban planning. Hirsch argues that in an effort to maintain racial segregation after Jim Crow laws were banned, federal urban housing policies "provided official sanction for existing racial patterns."⁶ His work emphasizes the physical isolation and minimal access to better housing, jobs, and transportation available to African Americans through the term "black ghetto."⁷ Hirsch analyses Chicago's urban history in *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960*. In an effort to maintain residential racial boundaries and ensure whites were afforded the most desirable land, the local and government sanctioned housing and urban development programs focused on the relocation and isolation of Chicago's African American population.⁸ Hirsch's scholarship establishes that urban housing and planning reveal a definite relationship between white power and control over the use of land space. He also argues that this relationship intentionally resulted in discriminatory housing policies.

The majority of these secondary sources establish a direct correlation between the emergence of suburbanization and urban decline, which motivated governmental urban

⁵ Avila and Rose, 338.

⁶ Arnold R. Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States," ed. Arnold Hirsch and Raymond Mohl, *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-71.

⁸ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 216.

renewal initiatives. The population most likely to have authority or influence over urban renewal priorities or implementation, the white middle class, was also most likely to move to the suburbs, avoiding the impacts of urban decline and renewal programs. The scholarship establishes that because lower class and African American communities were disproportionately recipients of public assistance, urban housing policies were intentionally designed to further isolate these populations from mainstream society and opportunities. Scholars place emphasis on the discriminatory design of the policies, while less emphasis is placed on the belief that the policies were intended to benefit those communities in which, upon implementation, discrimination occurred. For instance, in World War II era Chicago, the governmental policies provided the city with the resources and framework necessary to eliminate substandard housing and provide opportunities for residents. Yet, Chicago's implementation of these policies prioritized urban renewal at the expense of public assistance elements.

In President Roosevelt's 1937 Inaugural Address, he outlined the ideologies of the New Deal and federally-supported welfare initiatives. Roosevelt charged the government with the responsibility of establishing a minimum standard of living, intended to spread "...the volume of human comforts hitherto unknown, and the lowest standard of living can be raised far above the level of mere subsistence."⁹ Central to the New Deal welfare programs was the idea of a "cooperative commonwealth" because the American standard of living was so high, compared to other countries, that societal wealth should be invested to provide opportunities for those at the bottom.¹⁰ As a result, Roosevelt's New Deal

⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address" (20 January 1937), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15349>.

¹⁰ Alan Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope: The New Deal Response to Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 114-115.

established that the government create and partially fund “welfare” or public assistance programs that bridged the gap between individuals who could afford to maintain or improve their standards of living and those who could not. Roosevelt’s basis for measuring a minimum standard of living was based upon a capitalist perspective that used consumerism as a benchmark. Capitalism was simplified to mean those employed would have consumer power and could afford food, health care, and “decent” housing.¹¹ Those who would be in need of welfare programs would be those underemployed, unemployed, or unable to work. The establishment of a minimum standard of living was achieved through federally-supported programs that funded public works, provided financial aid to the elderly and disabled, and provided resources to individuals living below a poverty line.¹²

Prior to World War II and continuing into the World War II period, the city of Chicago already experienced more than thirty years of urban decline and housing deterioration. Chicago’s urban decline was caused by a combination of deficient and aged housing infrastructure and dramatic population increases. Population increases following World War II led to demand for additional housing. In addition, during the early twentieth century, American industrialization and the Great Depression resulted in a sudden population shift of African Americans from southern agricultural towns to northern industrial cities during the 1910s and 1920s—now referred to as the Great Migration.¹³ By 1930, Chicago’s overall population increased by more than 674,000.

¹¹ Roosevelt, “Presidential Statement upon Signing the Social Security Act,” see *The New Deal: A Documentary History*, ed. by William E. Leuchtenburg (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), 79.

¹² Lawson, 114-119.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, *The black population of Chicago, 1890-1960*, see *Making the second ghetto: Race and housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, Arnold R. Hirsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 17.

The remainder of the population increase can be attributed to Chicago's emergence as a major trade center due to the accessibility of railroads and ports.¹⁴ These population increases continued throughout the World War II period, as African American laborers migrated to Chicago to fulfill wartime industrial needs vacated by white draftees. The population and industrial workforce during the 1920s and 1930s increased by more than 124,000 African Americans, which placed additional strain on Chicago's already inadequate and overcrowded housing supply.¹⁵

By the postwar era, the housing that was culturally acceptable and financially available to the majority of African Americans and laborers was located in slum neighborhoods with the majority concentrated in an area of nine square miles along Lake Michigan—an area referred to as the “South Side.”¹⁶ The Housing Authority's 1944-1945 study of the South Side slum neighborhoods reported that of the 87 residential structures surveyed, half were constructed prior to 1885 and the other half before 1895.¹⁷ Of the surveyed units, 1,257 of the residents were African American, with the exception of one white woman.¹⁸ Robert Weaver, the first African American to hold a cabinet under the Roosevelt Administration as the U.S Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, published a 1947 report on the status of “negro” housing in which he discusses urban housing segregation patterns in northern cities, such as Chicago and New

¹⁴ Homer Hoyt, “Population of Chicago and Other Leading Cities in the Middle West, 1840-1930,” *One Hundred Years of Land Values: The Relationship of the Growth of Chicago to the Rise in Its Land Values, 1830-1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1933), 280-281, Table XXV.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *The black population of Chicago, 1890-1960*, Hirsch, 17.

¹⁶ This included the area between North 35th St., South 63rd St., Wabash Ave. on the west and Lake Michigan on the east. From Chicago Housing Authority (C.H.A.), *The Slum...is rehabilitation possible?* (1946), in Idea of Public Housing Collection (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), *The slum...is rehabilitation Possible?*, 2.

¹⁷ C.H.A., *The Slum...is rehabilitation possible?* (1946), in Idea of Public Housing Collection (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), 5, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

York City. Weaver illustrates that residential segregation patterns perpetuated further deterioration of already overcrowded African American neighborhoods:

The chronic overcrowding in Negro areas reached unprecedented proportions. Even when a few new areas and a little more space was added for Negro occupancy, they were rigidly limited, either falling just outside of the existing Negro ghettos, or forming a new ghetto. Meanwhile, and most important, all areas of housing not already in Negro occupancy and all vacant land outside the Black Belt were reserved for white occupancy only.¹⁹

In 1946, Chicago's Committee on Housing published *Housing Goals for Chicago*, which established some reasons for the city's housing shortage and deterioration:

...Most of the families who came to Chicago for wartime employment have apparently decided to remain...More veterans are returning every day; more marriages are taking place; and more industry and commerce are moving to Chicago. The combination of these factors has resulted in the greatest shortage of dwelling units Chicago has ever experienced.²⁰

Attempts to strengthen urban housing segregation only placed further pressure on Chicago's housing shortage and slum neighborhoods, which ultimately motivated white middle class residents to relocate in the suburbs.²¹ According to the Office of Housing and Redevelopment, an affiliate of the Chicago Housing Authority, "Slums are one great cause of that process of erosion which we call decentralization. Families and businesses have been leaving Chicago."²² Suburbanization provided the white middle class with alternative housing distanced from the perceived threats of slum expansion and lower class African American populations.

¹⁹ Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1948), 91.

²⁰ Committee on Housing, *Housing Goals for Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1946), 4.

²¹ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 3.

²² Chicago Office of Housing and Redevelopment, *Slum Clearance is Your Business!* (1947), in Idea of Public Housing Collection (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), 3.

Federally supported programs afforded the middle class the opportunity to participate in the newly emergent suburban-based consumer economy. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill) ensured that veterans who served in the military beginning in 1940 would be "guaranteed" mortgages with low interest rates, grants for higher education, employment counseling, and stipends in the event of unemployment.²³ Previously, private homeownership and purchasing power was reserved for the upper class, but the G.I. Bill and mass production afforded middle class families consumer opportunities and mobility. Additionally, as wartime industries were scaled back to prewar levels, the potential for residential home construction and consumerism (new homes, home goods, and automobiles) provided an alternative market for businesses and employment.

As white residents relocated, their economic investments were redirected to suburban businesses and property removed from the urban core. This shift perpetuated the continued decline of the city center, which was now characterized by blight, slum neighborhoods, minimal industry, and weakened property values. The economic investments dedicated to suburban development funneled resources from the already neglected urban businesses and housing of the city center. The Chicago Committee on Housing's established goals prioritized the development of vacant land surrounding Chicago, formerly zoned for industrial development, for residential subdivisions. The shift signified the value and power Chicago agencies and government associated with suburban residents—white and middle class—and made available land adjacent to the city, even if it was originally zoned for corporate use, to minimize the distance of

²³ U.S. Congress, *The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, Public Law 346 (Washington D.C.: 78th Congress, 2nd Session, June 1944).

suburban residents' purchasing power and investments from the city center. In Chicago, middle class whites characterized suburban populations, while lower class African Americans characterized urban populations.²⁴ This pattern was characteristic of "white flight," as it was the mass migration of middle class whites to the suburbs and away from lower class and African American concentrated city centers during this period.²⁵

The disparities between the suburban and urban standards of living in Chicago prompted a renewed urgency for addressing urban redevelopment and housing needs. Chicago's urban decline was characterized as physically deteriorated buildings, the growth of slum neighborhoods, and declining property and tax values.²⁶ Slum neighborhoods experienced disproportionate rates of mortality, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, crime, and disease.²⁷ Roosevelt specifically stated that "one-third of the nation was "ill-housed," and stated that public assistance programs also created a minimum housing standard to improve residents' overall standard of living.²⁸ The Housing Act of 1937 established "decent" housing opportunities for those who could not afford to invest in renovated or new housing. The Act called for the acquisition of substandard housing and the rehabilitation or replacement of that housing. It also created the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, so that a federal agency could allocate funding for public housing construction and assist local public housing authorities.²⁹

²⁴ Committee on Housing, 4-5.

²⁵ Avila, "Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 3(2004): 5-6.

²⁶ Committee on Housing, 69-71.

²⁷ Chicago Office of Housing and Redevelopment, 3-4.

²⁸ Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address."

²⁹ U.S. Congress, *Housing Act of 1937*, Public Law 75-412 (Washington D.C.: 75th Congress, 1937), Section 3 (b.2).

The Housing Act of 1949 specified urban renewal as a fundamental component in alleviating substandard housing. The Act's function is established in Section Two,

“Declaration of National Housing Policy:”

...[T]o remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities...³⁰

This housing policy aimed to eliminate blighted neighborhoods, provide replacement public housing, and rehabilitate declining urban areas. The presence of slum or blighted neighborhoods, federal officials believed, decreased surrounding property values, discouraged economic or business investment, and continued to spread unless removed or rehabilitated. In order to directly address municipal needs, a great deal of self-determination was written into both the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949, so that cities could target their specific urban renewal and housing needs. The Act of 1937 asserts that projects should be undertaken by public housing authorities (emphasis on city and states), but should not limit private involvement.³¹ Municipal governments and their housing authorities were to determine what neighborhoods were blighted and create a redevelopment plan that could be funded by a combination of federal, municipal, and private funding.

Following the passage of the Housing Act of 1937, the Chicago Housing Authority (C.H.A. or Housing Authority) was created to address Chicago's housing and urban redevelopment needs. The actions of the Chicago Housing Authority revealed the often-conflicting interests involved in urban redevelopment as the agency was often

³⁰ U.S. Congress, *Housing Act of 1949*, Public Law 81-171 (Washington D.C.: 81st Congress, 1st Session, July 1949), Section 2.

³¹ *Housing Act of 1937*.

forced to prioritize urban redevelopment over the welfare housing goals to reflect the interests of municipal politics, business, and the white middle class. Originally, Chicago's mayor, Edward Kelly (1933-1947), appointed several social progressives and even an African American to the agency's leadership to ensure that the federal social welfare programs were implemented to improve the lives of the lower classes and African American urban residents.³² However, despite Mayor Kelly's publicized commitment to welfare programs and progressive appointments, the C.H.A.'s communication to the city did not reflect the priorities of public assistance.³³ The Housing Authority published materials that focused on slum neighborhoods, their negative impact on the urban center, and the benefits of slum clearance. For instance, the C.H.A. most frequently communicated to the city and public through reports and pamphlets that were simply authored by the "Chicago Housing Authority," rather than by the agency's, sometimes progressive, leadership.³⁴ The C.H.A.'s decisions appear systematic and unbiased as decisions were based on reports, studies, and findings with little to no individual voice.

The municipal self-determination associated with the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949 enabled cities to determine their individual needs and priorities, which were often influenced by the varying interests of different community groups. Lawrence Vale, author of *From Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighborhoods a history of American public housing and a housing case study of Boston, MA*, established

³² D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 36-37.

³³ Thomas H. Wright, *Human Relations in Chicago* (Chicago: Mayor's Commission on Human Relations, 1946), 8.

³⁴ C.H.A., *The Slum...is rehabilitation possible?*

C.H.A., *Housing Today: Key to Chicago's Tomorrow: Annual Report of the Chicago Housing Authority to the Mayor of Chicago* (1950), in Idea of Public Housing Collection (Chicago: Chicago History Museum).

the diversity of interests in municipal implementation of the Housing Acts: "...business leaders hoped it would promote orderly expansion;...retail merchants favored the re-centralization of higher-income shoppers;...municipal officials coveted opportunities to have more areas that generated a revenue surplus..."³⁵ These interests valued the urban renewal and city center redevelopment aspects of the legislation over public assistance housing ones. Additionally, the most influential individuals in municipal politics and agencies (business owners, real estate investors, and city officials) were most likely to be white middle and upper class and residing in the suburbs.³⁶

The late 1930s rehabilitation of one C.H.A. housing development, Ida B. Wells, served as a symbol of weakening residential segregation, which prompted white middle class concern. Ida B. Wells was a slum neighborhood located in the South Side that C.H.A. decided to rehabilitate the existing housing, rather than construct new relocated housing. As Ida B. Wells was redeveloped, real estate and business investors simultaneously expanded a hospital and the Illinois Institute of Technology in this area.³⁷ However, as Ida B. Wells' residents, lower class and African American, were still associated with crime and blight, white residents viewed the housing developments' close proximity as a liability.³⁸ As a result, C.H.A.'s future implementation of urban housing policy was further politicized to safeguard against white concerns.

Due to controversy associated with the Ida B. Wells' rehabilitation implementation model, Chicago's municipal bodies established the city's housing goals

³⁵ Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 271.

³⁶ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 45-47.

³⁷ C.H.A., *Blighted Area Site FP2A-9, Ida B. Wells Area ("C" Area)* (1949), in Idea of Public Housing Collection (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), 19.

³⁸ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 10-13.

to include the need to remove substandard dwellings, provide replacement housing, and redevelop the urban center due to decreased property values caused by slum neighborhoods.³⁹ The demolition of the substandard buildings was considered an immediate priority, but no timeline for the completion of replacement housing was noted. The Committee reported that considerable progress had been made in the purchasing and clearing of blighted land and complete redevelopment of those areas was scheduled to take no more than twenty five years.⁴⁰ The lack of a timeline for replacement housing indicated greater emphasis on slum removal and urban redevelopment. This prioritization resulted in an environment that politicized the placement and location of new public housing. As the Housing Acts of 1937 and later 1949 did not mandate that replacement housing be provided in the slum area cleared, the Housing Authority's implementation allowed for placement of new housing to be removed from the urban center.

In an attempt to generate public support for the Chicago Housing Authority's implementation of urban redevelopment and housing policy, a 1944-1945 study was published to illustrate the substandard condition of urban housing and slum neighborhoods. The study outlined the C.H.A.'s preference for replacement—a method that would later be further supported by slum clearance and urban renewal initiatives in the Housing Act of 1949. The study addresses three questions that stemmed from the Housing Act of 1937's public housing initiatives:

1. Is rehabilitation of a slum area physically possible?
2. Is rehabilitation of a slum area under private ownership economically sound?

³⁹ C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 30-31.

⁴⁰ Committee on Housing, 5-7.

3. Will rehabilitation of a slum area by the Housing Authority provide housing for low-income families more economically than new construction?⁴¹

In order to best analyze these questions, the C.H.A. examined the most concentrated area of slum neighborhoods and lower class African Americans, the South Side. Much of the report is dedicated to describing the housing and substandard living conditions to illustrate the near impossibility of rehabilitation. The structures reviewed were originally constructed to house 135 families, but by 1945, these structures housed more than two and a half times that number.⁴² The layout and planning of slum neighborhoods is described as “crowded together with little or no space for light and ventilation” and occurring in “clusters.”⁴³ Due to the clustering and adjoining of buildings, 64 percent of residents had at least one room that was “always dark” and 69.3 percent had at least one room that was “dark, damp, or odorous.” The residents were found frequently to be without hot and cold running water (47.7 percent) and 70 percent of units were without a private bath and toilet.⁴⁴ Additionally, maintenance neglect left the neighborhood exteriors with broken or damaged gutters, porches, and windows, surrounded by “uncollected garbage, dead animals, and piles of horse manure.”⁴⁵ This study enabled the C.H.A. to review the status of slum neighborhoods and create definitions for “blight” and “substandard”. Blighted areas were defined as buildings constructed before 1895 and substandard housing was defined as structures that lacked private bathrooms or contained more than 1.5 persons per room.⁴⁶ The C.H.A.’s determination of blighted and

⁴¹ C.H.A., *The slum...is rehabilitation possible?*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

⁴⁶ Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, see Hunt, 69.

substandard housing resulted in the need for a nearly entire demolition of Chicago's South Side.

Due to the extensive renovations required to "modernize" and rehabilitate slum housing to a minimum standard of living, renovation was not deemed a viable solution. Remodeling of these buildings reduced the number of housing units because of the extreme structural changes required to bring slum buildings up to code, where as many as 40 percent of residents would have to find replacement housing.⁴⁷ Due to the complexity of the renovations required to make the substandard housing "decent" within municipal codes, renovations were anticipated to be extremely expensive and frequently required a reduction in occupancy. Because housing renovations would have decreased the number of residents in a housing complex and were partially funded through rent increases, rent levels were often projected to exceed existing residents' affordability.⁴⁸ As a result, the Housing Authority's implementation strategies for housing policies focused on, "Complete razing of the area, and erection of new dwellings..."⁴⁹ This report served as a justification for the C.H.A.'s preference for relocated public housing developments, as it established that rehabilitation was more expensive and did not adequately address the housing shortage. However, the report did not address the impacts of slum neighborhoods on residents outside of the substandard housing elements. As a result, the C.H.A. examined and reported the need for slum clearance, but not the barriers to improving residents' overall standard of living.

The Housing Authority's preference for a slum clearance and relocation model, simultaneously allowed for a prioritization of urban redevelopment within the city center.

⁴⁷ C.H.A., *The slum...is rehabilitation possible?*, 22-23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

Real estate and business investors realized an opportunity to acquire potentially valuable land and shape urban redevelopment, while the city government recognized an opportunity to regain lost land values. As suburbanization drew the white middle and upper classes away from the urban center, slum clearance was viewed as an opportunity to distance low income housing from the urban core and redevelop it with more valuable properties.⁵⁰ The C.H.A. justified this model in 1947 and stated, "...slums drain the city financially. They don't pay their own way..."⁵¹ The municipal resources (fire, police, and health) committed to slum neighborhoods far exceeded the tax revenue garnered from the areas, so redevelopment of the urban core presented a revenue opportunity for the city. C.H.A. stated that following slum clearance, the land was to be sold to real estate investors with "as much frequency as possible" to increase land and tax values with privately funded projects.⁵²

The successes of suburban developments in increasing property values, attracting businesses, and ultimately white middle class residents with consumer power shaped the city's image of urban redevelopment.⁵³ Though suburbanization alleviated a great deal of the city's housing shortages for the white middle class, by 1950 it was estimated that the city still required 292,000 dwellings. In order to meet Chicago's housing shortage and support urban redevelopment, the C.H.A. established an implementation pattern in which the agency developed public housing for the lower classes on removed vacant land, while real estate investors developed residential areas for the middle class on cleared slum

⁵⁰ Chicago Office of Housing and Redevelopment, 4.

⁵¹ C.H.A., *The slum...is rehabilitation possible*, 4.

⁵² C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 2-3.

⁵³ Chicago Office of Housing and Redevelopment, 4.

lands.⁵⁴ Middle income housing construction was intended to attract home ownership and businesses to the urban center to foster economic development. This strategy was reflected in *Housing Goals for Chicago*, which stated, “It is vitally important to the city that purchasing power be maintained in the central areas...A high percentage of home ownership is a stabilizing influence for a city...”⁵⁵ Real estate developers attracted middle class residents to the new urban properties by including some features characteristic of the suburbs: new construction, decreased housing density, outdoor space, and businesses. In 1949 approximately 15,000-17,000 private housing units were constructed in the city with at least thirty percent priced between \$10,000-\$13,000, comparable to the \$10,000 average middle income suburban home.⁵⁶

The C.H.A.’s prioritization of urban development, replacement and removed public housing was perpetuated by white middle class perspectives and racial tensions. The community viewed urban renewal initiatives as a possible threat to existing residential segregation patterns. Whites feared what slum neighborhoods represented, the threat of their relocation, and the possible weakening of segregated housing. The white middle class feared that proximity to African American communities implied proximity to blighted conditions and lifestyles. In 1946 the Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations published a study that examined the experiences of underrepresented communities in Chicago. Much of the report centered on various types of discrimination directed towards lower class African Americans, which included housing segregation as a frequent discriminatory practice.⁵⁷ The Commission reported that as traditionally African

⁵⁴ C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 4-5.

⁵⁵ Committee on Housing, 93.

⁵⁶ C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 5-7.

⁵⁷ Wright, 61-62.

American neighborhoods expanded or were relocated adjacent to traditionally white neighborhoods, white communities responded with hostility. The Commission reported that white hostility was often manifested through acts of violence, “There were 35 arson or attempted arson attacks on property of Negroes. All of these attacks grew out of resentment and hostility towards Negroes usually in areas where Negroes had recently moved. There were 19 assaults on individual Negroes or mixed groups of whites and Negroes.”⁵⁸ According to police reports, many of the acts of violence occurred in the South Side where slum clearance and urban renewal initiatives were starting to occur.⁵⁹

When the city of Chicago informed city residents of urban renewal initiatives through a brochure, a section entitled “The Problem of the Slum” detailed “slum environments.” The brochure states, “There is probably no way to state accurately the cost of slums in terms of broken homes and broken lives. It is hard to say in dollars what it costs a child to be raised in filth, disease and vicious moral surroundings...”⁶⁰ This excerpt reveals that city officials lead non-slum residents, the white middle class, to associate the slums not only with an understanding of substandard living conditions and overcrowding, but also with a conception of African American slum residents’ immorality, inferiority, and dirtiness. Therefore, desire of the white community to maintain distance from the African American community was to ensure that “slum” or “ghetto” lifestyles and conditions did not corrupt their neighborhoods or values.

Economic investments and racial tensions led business investors and the white middle class to pressure Chicago’s City Council to structure greater oversight in the C.H.A.’s projects. The white middle class often communicated their concerns through

⁵⁸ Wright, 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 63-70.

⁶⁰ Chicago Office of Housing and Redevelopment, 2.

neighborhood associations that had a great deal of access to the City Council either due to size or wealth.⁶¹ One such neighborhood association, the Oakland-Kenwood Property Owners, established “proper occupancy” standards, which communicated their belief that slum neighborhoods, public housing developments, and African Americans were a threat to their living standards.⁶² The “occupancy” standards banned non-white residents and communicated white residents’ segregation priorities with a sense of urgency. As previously noted, when white communities felt residential covenants were threatened, violence was often used to reassert traditional segregation patterns.

Real estate and business investors used partnerships and private funding to motivate the city and C.H.A. to implement a private urban redevelopment model. Real estate investors were able to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence on the City Council and C.H.A. as private investments would not have been secured if the housing implementation model favored slum rehabilitation rather than clearance. For instance, New York Life, a private developer, acquired an area following slum clearance and constructed 1,400 middle income housing units, which was estimated to be a 20 million dollar investment. If the city of C.H.A. had not prioritized a slum clearance and relocated housing development strategy, a 20 million dollar investment in urban redevelopment would have been lost or become the responsibility of the city itself.⁶³

As the City Council members were concerned with the overall economic development of the city, a more aggressive role was taken in influencing C.H.A.’s implementation decisions. The City Council pressured the C.H.A. to present all potential

⁶¹ Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 131.

⁶² Owners Association of Chicago, Editorial, *The Chicago Sun* (27 January 1948), see Weaver 347.

⁶³ C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 30-31.

slum clearance and public housing projects before finalization.⁶⁴ Arthur Lindell of the City Council's Committee on Housing was quoted in the *Chicago Defender* as saying that without more influence over C.H.A.'s projects, cooperation from City Council members would be unlikely, "I doubt the Council will ever pass such a 'cooperation ordinance' unless it knows where these low-cost houses will be erected."⁶⁵ As a result, the Council lobbied the Illinois General Assembly to pass a law that required housing authorities to propose public housing locations prior to final selection and construction.⁶⁶ This oversight was to ensure that the Housing Authority's projects reflected an implementation model that cleared slums, relocated public housing, and encouraged private investments in cleared areas.

The influence of business investors and the white middle class on the Housing Authority's implementation solidified a method that preferred both the relocation and isolation of replacement housing developments. The Housing Authority was pressured to select project sites that were outside the urban core, undesirable by private investors, and distanced from white middle class residents. White claims on land were prioritized, unless whites chose to relocate or vacate the land through suburbanization. Also, an association between white communities and valuable land emerged, which resulted in the notion that African American occupied land was less valuable. For instance, the Chicago Real Estate board stated that South Side land considered for slum clearance should be returned to white use and "reclaimed [for] higher use than low-cost housing for Negroes."⁶⁷ An implementation model that favored privately funded urban

⁶⁴ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 109-111.

⁶⁵ Arthur Lindell, 11 August 1929, *Chicago Defender*, see Hunt 41.

⁶⁶ Illinois State Senate, Senate Bill 423 (Springfield: 62nd General Assembly, 1941).

⁶⁷ Chicago Real Estate Board, "Re: Interview with Congressman Sabath," see Hunt, 39.

redevelopment and relocated public housing developments ensured that African American slum residents were to be removed from now desirable urban land.

The dichotomy between social welfare housing policy intended to create decent housing for residents and implementation priorities is further revealed in the location and design of replacement housing. The Housing Authority focused not on the housing needs of residents but on acquiring cheap land on which to construct replacement housing away from urban centers. This practice left relocated residents physically isolated from the urban core and mainstream opportunities. The housing developments were created to relocate displaced residents, but not create a sustainable public assistance program that valued the creation of community development and suitable living—as outlined in both the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949.⁶⁸

Due to the need-based nature of the welfare programs, federal urban housing policies set a maximum income level that residents could earn. In both the Housing Act of 1937 and the later 1949 Act, the maximum was approximately \$2,000.⁶⁹ This maximum income was included to increase public support by highlighting that public housing residents required government aid in order to achieve a minimum standard of living. In 1939, it was estimated that only 15,000 non-whites living in the urban center earned a median income of more than \$1,000.⁷⁰ Preference was given for white workers in employment, higher wages, and non-entry level positions, which often left African Americans unemployed or underemployed.⁷¹ As a result, African Americans were more

⁶⁸*Housing Act of 1937, Sec. 3.*

Housing Act of 1949, Sec. 2.

⁶⁹*Housing Act of 1937.*

Housing Act of 1949.

⁷⁰Weaver, 108.

⁷¹Wright, 10-11.

likely to live in slum neighborhoods, need replacement housing upon clearance, and thereby qualifying for relocated public housing.

The Altgeld Gardens public housing development was constructed as a solution to the Chicago's housing shortages and to prevent additional slum neighborhood expansion in Chicago during the World War II era. Altgeld Gardens consisted of nearly 1,500 units that developed from the C.H.A.'s relocation model, which was frequently used in later development of approximately 22,000 units created after World War II and to the 1960s.⁷² In 1945, the Housing Authority constructed Altgeld Gardens to house South Side African American laborers and war workers and their families. The development is located between East 127th St. and East 135th St. and bordered by State St. to the west and Interstate 94 to the east.⁷³

The 1945 construction of the Altgeld Gardens most clearly reflected the pattern of isolationism and welfare neglect emergent in the C.H.A.'s relocation model. The Housing Authority recognized—notably due to the controversial nature of the Ida B. Wells development—that rehabilitation of existing slum housing would likely result in backlash from business investors, the white middle class, and the City Council. As a result, the Altgeld Gardens was one of the first housing units that reflected the C.H.A.'s relocation model when implementing urban housing policy. This model favored selection of vacant land outside of and isolated from the South Side for development to avoid conflict with investors and the white middle class in the urban center.⁷⁴ In the case of Altgeld Gardens, this location was roughly five miles southwest of the South Side in

⁷² C.H.A., *Annual Report*, 1945, see Hunt, 67-71.

⁷³ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 57.

Hunt, 2.

⁷⁴ Weaver, 194.

Lake Calumet.⁷⁵ This area was an industrial district that made the land undesirable to business investors and distant from white middle class residents, but provided the C.H.A. with vacant, cheap, and less valuable land. The housing development itself was located on top of a former sewage landfill for the city of Chicago and nearby industries, which had been used for toxic disposal since the late 1880s. Surrounding the site location were Pullman factories, steel factories, shipbuilding industries, and additional landfills for the factories' waste. Proximity to these landfills and industries exposed residents to air, water, and soil polluted with sulfuric acid, arsenic, lead, and copper.⁷⁶ The decision to place housing developments within industrial areas illustrates a clear lack of priority for residential well-being and the intended social welfare meant to prioritize suitable living environments for marginalized populations.

In addition to its location by industrial facilities and waste landfills, Altgeld was physically isolated by a river and an interstate. It is bordered by the Little Calumet River to the south, which was used to move waste from factories to Lake Calumet.⁷⁷ The confinement was worsened in the 1950s with the construction of Interstate 94, which sought to provide suburban commuters with urban access, and created an additional barrier to the east.⁷⁸ The isolation of the Altgeld Gardens not only removed residents from the urban core, but from the resources associated with the city center. Residents were now miles from the South Side, with minimal public transit as the emergence of automobiles and highways almost completely stopped governmental investment in public transportation. Residents were therefore without their community resources (schools,

⁷⁵ Hirsch, *Making the second ghetto*, 57.

⁷⁶ Washington, 196-199.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 57.

⁷⁸ Jackson, 248-250.

grocery stores, shops, entertainment, churches).⁷⁹ In order to ensure that residents were provided with a minimal level of community resources, the C.H.A included a community center, grocery store, salons, and classroom space.⁸⁰ The Housing Authority provided services for the Altgeld Gardens that communicated that the housing development was self-sufficient and there would be minimal reasons to leave. However, residents did not necessarily use those stores out of preference, but out of necessity.

Selection of isolated sites for housing developments was standardized by the C.H.A. because of its undesirability to investors, affordability and vacancy. For instance, as noted in the C.H.A's site proposal for the Trumbull Park project, the only developments bordering the site were another public housing development, railroad tracks, and the rail yard.⁸¹ The Ashland Area project proposed site was described as only neighboring a brake shoe plant, another industry, and a drop forge.⁸² Similarly, interstates and highways were frequently constructed around these developments during the 1950s interstate expansion projects. The construction of highways and interstates that bordered or encompassed housing developments communicated that public housing and African American housing was fundamentally less valuable than developed white middle and upper classes' housing. Additional isolation from the urban core was not seen as detrimental to this demographic because the white middle class and investors established that the city center had been reclaimed for white uses. The interstates served as physical

⁷⁹ Jackson, 249-250.

⁸⁰ Washington, 198.

⁸¹ C.H.A., *Vacant Area Site FP2A-1 Trumbull Park Area* (1949), in *Idea of Public Housing Collection* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), 36.

⁸² C.H.A., *Vacant Area Site FP2A-11 115th and Ashland Area* (1949), in *Idea of Public Housing Collection* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum), 42.

boundaries that would prevent the expansion of the housing developments into the now more valuable urban core.

The physical design and construction of the Altgeld Gardens and other relocation projects by the C.H.A. needed to provide a great deal of improved housing cheaply. It was imperative that land purchases and construction costs would not result in rents that would be unaffordable to individuals or families with incomes less than \$2,000. The Housing Authority was able to maintain affordability by first utilizing undesirable industrial land removed from the urban center and creating high density public housing developments. As Altgeld Gardens was one of the earlier housing developments with 1,500 units, the Housing Authority attempted a two-story row house model. From the exterior these houses were a vast improvement from the slum neighborhoods. Each unit had bathroom facilities, windows, and outdoor space.⁸³ In other instances, the Housing Authority turned to high-rise models that enabled them to house high population densities on smaller plots of land. However, in order to provide enough housing units and maintain a level of affordability, the buildings were mass produced with low quality products. For instance, in postwar era Chicago it cost \$10,000 to construct a private middle-income home, while the Housing Authority was constructing a unit of 4.7 rooms for only \$8,600.⁸⁴ In many ways, the factors that contributed to the “slumming” of the slum neighborhoods were present in relocated public housing developments as the durability and life-spans of buildings were relatively short. The Housing Authority was legally obligated to provide replacement housing, but minimal attention was paid to ensuring that the buildings and construction could withstand the volume of residents.

⁸³ Washington, 198.

⁸⁴ C.H.A., *Housing Today*, 8-9.

The replacement and relocation model utilized by the C.H.A. did succeed in providing residents with housing that was no longer blighted or dangerous in the short term. However, the C.H.A did not prioritize the creation of a model that would elevate residents above mere subsistence and foster community growth—the stated purpose of New Deal welfare housing programs. Rather, a model was created that simply reestablished many of the initial causes of slum neighborhoods and blight in the replacement public housing developments.

African American and lower class residents previously segregated inside the urban core were now segregated peripherally. The continued pattern of isolation and segregation in urban planning and the failure to implement public assistance housing programs often resulted in public housing “ghettos,” rather than slum “ghettos.”⁸⁵ The impact of repeated cycles of segregation by marginalized communities has been described as:

Through prolonged exposure to life in radically isolated and intensely poor neighborhoods, this poverty will quite likely be passed to children in the next generation. When this point is reached, a well-functioning and efficient social structure for the creation and maintenance of an urban underclass will have been created.⁸⁶

The dichotomy that emerged between social welfare housing programs and paternalistic and discriminatory implementation following World War II revealed the delicate balance between the governmental policy intentions and action. The environment of post-war period America was such that racial and class imbalances and relations inevitably impacted social welfare policy applications. The marginalized communities most in need of social aid were also those communities that were seen as

⁸⁵ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

⁸⁶ Massey and Denton, 184-185.

the least valuable. As a result, to the majority, made up of white middle and upper classes, the availability of resources necessary to support a minimum standard of living did not influence their preference for relocation of residents. Though urban housing policy was not fundamentally designed to isolate marginalized communities, implementation resulted in a physical segregation from mainstream society and isolation from societal opportunities, such as education, jobs, and a healthy environment. The use of urban housing policy to create land and community value distinctions resulted in a housing precedent that segregated the least valued communities, leaving them caught in cycles of dependence, which ultimately resulted in the development of housing as an additional societal barrier for already marginalized populations to overcome.

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