

Assessments of Chicago's Mid-Century Public Housing

Introduction

From the 1950s - 1960s, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) constructed public housing on a massive scale. There were 11 high-rise sites, with just one location consisting of 28, 16-story buildings. Intended to improve quality of life for low-income residents, the projects soon had the opposite effect. By 1965, gang violence and unemployment were prominent. Concentrations of poverty and violence created tragedies for generations. CHA so poorly managed this crisis that HUD took over Chicago's public housing in 1996 and began demolishing the high rises. In 2011, all but 2 were razed.

Against this backdrop, authors of 3 different eras offer opinions on CHA's decision to construct these towers in their mission to provide refuge and relocation for low-income Chicagoans. Reception of this CHA public housing movement varies by when critiques were written. They follow 3 periods: pre- and early construction optimism (1950s – early 1960s), the crisis era (1970s – early 1980s), and the reflection of the tragedy that was CHA's public housing initiative (2000s – 2010s). Paradigms of each period such as positivism and structuralism influence the views of the authors, whose work is also colored by the cultural movements of their time. This reveals much about the nature of history itself.

The 1950s – Early 1960s

Authors of the 1950s – early 1960s argue that the city held good intentions to lift thousands of Chicagoans out of poverty. They note that the slum areas, whose residents became future CHA tenants, were unlivable. Not only did the slum dweller favor moving to public housing, the unaffected middle-class Chicagoan, spurred by local papers, neighborhood associations, and public figures, championed this clearance and relocation as an economic and moral imperative.

Elizabeth Woods, CHA's first director, carefully designed the sites for a high quality of life. She fought for integrated buildings and strong communities. As a result, the first years of high-rise occupancy was idyllic. Authors celebrated a mix of income and ethnicities in their praise of the Chicago public housing initiative. Tenants wrote to thank CHA for saving them from a housing shortage and providing paradisaical homes.

The northside, middle- and upper-class Chicagoans were sympathetic to those in poverty: religious and civic organizations championed the cause of destitute slum dwellers. Professors Martin Meyerson (University of Pennsylvania) and Edward C. Banfield (University of Chicago) argue in *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest* (1955) that the nonminority, wealthy residents here “had nothing to lose by a public housing program and no doubt many of them were anxious to see the lot of the slum-dwellers improved” (97). This was due to a connected, community-service sphere. “The spokesmen for numerous church and civic organizations lived on the North Side; they tended to take a community-regarding rather than self- or neighborhood-regarding view of it” (Meyerson and Banfield 97). Thus, the authors assert the

moral imperative of unaffected middle-class residents to promote slum dwellers' move to public housing.

Paul N. Zimmer of the Department of City Planning lauded this relocation in his 1960 report to Mayor Richard J. Daley, *ReHousing Residents Displaced from Public Housing Clearance Sites in Chicago, 1957-1958*. The report justifies the clearance through examining the slum-living conditions and shows the residents' new, public homes as improved. Overcrowding, home dilapidation, and high rent were quantified in 13 site-clearance areas (slums) in the near west and southsides. "The 13 site areas contained living conditions that could be considered the worst in the city. More than a fourth of the dwelling units had 1.51 or more persons per room in 1950; for the city as a whole, only 6 percent were in this category" (Zimmer 15). The author also argues that the residents lived in squalor. "The proportion of substandard dwelling units in 1950 for ... the sites ranged from 50 to 87 percent" (Zimmer 15). Yet, some tenants paid exorbitant rents. "The rent levels in the site-tracts as reported in the 1950 census data indicate the wide variation both above and below the city average despite the extremely poor quality of housing" (Zimmer 17). The report asserts the improved living conditions post-relocation. "In the transition of moving from the clearance sites, the proportion of all households in dwellings with good physical condition – those not dilapidated—increased from 20 percent before relocation to 81 percent after relocation. The households occupied generally larger dwellings, and ... the ratio of persons to rooms was lower, with the result that overcrowding was reduced" (Zimmer 29, 34).

Not only city departments, but slum-dwellers themselves favored relocation to public housing, according to Myerson and Banfield. This opinion was encouraged by civic figures who represented slum residents. "The ... Negro had much to gain by the destruction of the slum. It was indicative that in 1949 the vote on the redevelopment bond issue in two solidly Negro precincts showed 11 to one and seven to one majorities for slum clearance and redevelopment, whereas in the city as a whole it was only two to one" (Myerson and Banfield 100). A prominent African-American Alderman, Archibald Carey, encouraged the public housing movement.

Some Negro leaders who supported slum clearance and other measures that would break down segregation did so for ideological reasons. They wanted to know that they were free to live in any area. 'I want to be able to walk where I please' Alderman Carey once said. (Myerson and Banfield 102)

Compounding on the pro-public housing opinion of the pre- and early construction period, the *Sun-Times* ran an article in 1956 declaring slum clearance and relocation as both morally obligating and economically beneficial.

Public housing [is] no longer a matter of great controversy but is accepted generally as part of the normal pattern of urban living. The [slum] land on which the 3,250 units ... will be built paid only \$65,584 real estate taxes in 1954. When the present slum dwellings are torn down and replaced with modern, healthy, fireproof buildings, the

tenants will pay an estimated \$1,458,600 a year in rent, of which \$145,860 will go to taxes. Thus, twice as much money will be realized out of the land for school and other public expenses than is now being realized. (*Sun-Times*)

Not only did public housing projects pay more taxes than slum properties, the *Sun-Times* contended, they also were less upkeep.

In addition, the expense to the community of maintaining the slum area will be reduced. Slums cost a city more for police, fire and health protection than better areas. Public housing pays its own way and is a community responsibility. (*Sun-Times*)

Meyerson and Banfield argue that this felt community responsibility to provide housing for the poor ran up to top city officials. Elizabeth Woods, CHA's first director, meticulously planned the site design of the public apartments to promote quality of life; she wanted them to be in peaceful, traffic-free settings. She said that the sites should be planned "to relocate all transit and traffic in such a way that the ... areas are subdivided into superblocks averaging, let us say, 80 acres, through which no street car or other public transit passes, through which no traffic goes" (Meyerson and Banfield 157). While setting racial quotas (a certain amount of each ethnic group allowed per development) she also supported economic integration. "Public housing projects shall not result in large scale economic segregation. Public housing projects should, so far as possible, be developed co-incidentally with other private or semi-public developments" (Meyerson and Banfield 162).

This careful planning to enhance life satisfaction among public housing tenants led to idyllic conditions, according to CHA's *Monthly Report*, a collection spanning from 1952 - 1958. The periodical lists festivals, community organizations, and events at the public apartments. "Flowers from CHA low-rent housing developments throughout the city, from projects that once were slum sites or vacant lots, were brought together at Altgeld Gardens, July 29, to make



a colorful display for the 1951 CHA Flower Festival" (Chicago Housing Authority). Tenants even produced their own community newspaper. "A tenant-produced newspaper keeps residents informed of activities, which include baseball teams, social meetings, and square dancing" (CHA). Olander Homes, a 15-story high rise with 150 units, held an event for new tenants to meet each other:

The 'Let's Get Acquainted' party held at Olander Homes ... was a happy occasion for Olander Tenants and an object lesson in brotherhood for all Chicago to ponder. Tenants at Olander Homes represent sixteen different nationalities and races. They are Caucasians, Negroes, Filipinos and Asiatics. But they don't dwell on their

Let's Get Acquainted: Olander Homes

differences. Non-resident guests were impressed with the spirit of good fellowship as children and adults sang together, played games, and enjoyed refreshments. (CHA)

The *Monthly Report* argues that public housing was so desirable that prospective tenants even petitioned the federal government for additional public units. Due to a housing shortage, low-income communities advocated for group homes, and some moved into public apartments. One community leader stated that “moving from a stove-heated, cold-water flat on the Near West Side into the newly built Addams Houses was like stepping into paradise” (CHA). Also listed in the report are tables in support of public housing, such as one comparing purchasing power for Chicagoans’ buying and renting homes in relation to other cities. It shows Chicago realty as the most expensive among 10 other major U.S. cities, arguing for public housing to intervene in the private market, since ordinary citizens have greater obstacles purchasing or renting homes in the expensive Chicago real-estate market (see table below).

AVERAGE PURCHASE PRICE OR AVERAGE MONTHLY CONTRACT RENT BY RATIO OF PURCHASE PRICE OR RENT TO INCOME JANUARY-MARCH-1951 - BY METROPOLITAN AREA																								
-O- A R E A -O-	Number Purchase	Average Price	SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES Ratio of Purchase Price ¹ By Income Group										Number Contract	Average Monthly Rent	NEW RENTAL UNITS Ratio of Rent to Income ² By Income Group									
			Under 2000	2000 2999	3000 3999	4000 4999	5000 5999	6000 7499	7500 9999	10,000 & Over	Classes	Under 2000			2000 2999	3000 3999	4000 4999	5000 5999	6000 7499	7500 9999	10,000 & Up	Classes		
			2000	2999	3999	4999	5999	7499	9999			2000			2999	3999	4999	5999	7499	9999				
ATLANTA	815	\$10,365	-	3.3	2.4	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.7	1.3	2.1	1120	\$ 64	-	.27	.22	.18	.15	.13	.11	.12	.21		
BOSTON	1140	14,095	-	4.8	3.3	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.1	1.4	2.5	NR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
CHICAGO	4320	14,590	-	4.8	3.4	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.0	2.2	2.7	210	117	-	.58	.29	.29	.26	.21	.17	-	.23		
DALLAS	1600	11,405	-	2.4	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.6	2.1	2.0	285	99	-	.25	.31	.26	.23	.20	.18	.13	.20		
DETROIT	7215	11,115	-	3.7	2.7	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.8	2.3	2.3	NR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
LOS ANGELES	13040	11,425	-	3.9	2.9	2.3	2.0	2.0	2.1	1.6	2.4	2460	85	-	.31	.23	.22	.18	.18	.13	.12	.20		
NEW YORK-NORTH- EASTERN NEW JERSEY	12090	12,695	-	3.9	3.0	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.6	2.3	6615	115	-	.41	.30	.23	.21	.19	.16	.15	.21		
PITTSBURGH	380	12,230	-	3.9	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.1	-	2.1	2.8	360	110	-	.54	.34	.28	.24	.20	.18	.12	.25		
SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND	3500	12,650	-	3.8	3.0	2.4	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.9	2.4	625	99	-	.37	.27	.22	.21	.17	.16	.16	.21		
WASHINGTON, D.C.	1740	13,420	-	4.5	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.7	2.6	1030	86	-	.34	.25	.24	.21	.19	.10	.09	.22		

NR: No Report

¹The ratio for "all purchased houses" is based on the average annual income for families in income classes of less than \$15,000 and the average price of houses bought by these families. The ratio for an income group is based on the mid-point of the class, and the average purchase price of houses bought by persons in the income class.

²The ratio "All Dwelling Units" is based on the average annual contract rent for tenants having an annual income of less than \$15,000. The mid-point as in footnote ¹ was used.

NOTE: These data are based on a sample survey, and are subject to sampling variability.

SOURCE: Construction, August 1951, published by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Chicagoans’ Purchasing Power for Buying and Renting: Jan. – March 1951.

Influences on Authors of the 1950s – Early 1960s

In assessing the sources of the pre- and early construction era (all written between 1951 – 1960) there are clear biases due to paradigms and cultural values. The authors’ opinions are tied to the trends of postwar optimism, positivism, and modernism that were characteristic of this time. The postwar optimism told U.S. citizens that they can solve any issue through careful planning, even social problems. Positivism revealed itself in the belief that scientific analysis could create large-scale, social planning, such as the relocation of tens of thousands of Chicagoans from established neighborhoods to public homes. Individual preference and uniqueness are cast aside for common good.

Such bold actions were only possible through the values of modernism, which began in the early 1900s and reached its zenith in the 1960s. Modernist thinkers, civic leaders, and architects stressed large-scale social reform, such as solving income inequality and housing issues. The foremost modernist architect, Le Corbusier, advocated for tearing down slums and erecting high rises. His “tower in the park” design consisted of high rises that were removed from the street and surrounded by greenery. This influenced mid-century architecture and CHA’s Elizabeth Woods, who advocated for public housing to be set in superblocks, isolated from street traffic. The throngs of architects Le Corbusier influenced sought to create streamlined, functioning cities complete with concrete towers of unadorned fashion. His post-war style influenced the design of public housing high rises across the U.S. If one reviews his model for a utopian city (below, left), it’s easy to see a match to CHA’s 1950 Dearborn Homes (below, right):



Le Corbusier's Tower in the Park Model

PC: microgridknowledge.com

Chicago's Dearborn Homes

PC: businessinsider.com

The authors follow this paradigm. Myerson and Banfield stress that various Chicagoans, from middle-class to slum dwellers, were united in providing a better vision for the city through slum clearance and relocation. Even civic and religious leaders championed the idea. The *Sun-Times* evokes a collective-utopia when it argues that the social experiment of clearing acres of slums and relocating thousands of residents will be for the benefit of society. The report to the mayor, *ReHousing Residents Displaced from Public Housing Clearance Sites in Chicago*, reduces the forced, mass migration of slum dwellers to statistical analysis – a perfect example of modernism’s hubris and disregard for place, uniqueness, and individuality. The *Monthly Report* reflects on the perfect society that CHA has built through storytelling; residents are elated to live among neighbors of all nationalities and creeds.

The 1970s – Early 1980s

By the 1970s and through the 1980s, CHA realized it was in crisis. Gang violence, unemployment, and unlivable conditions were prevalent in public high-rise communities. Authors reflecting on the public housing movement in Chicago were affected not only by the onset of this crisis, but also by the cultural trends of their eras. Their attitudes were in direct

opposition to the praise of public housing by earlier authors on the same events. They reflect on the negative effects of slum clearance and relocation, how a racist and not an integration ideal drove public housing projects, and how the poor design of public housing buildings created a low quality of life.

A retrospective view of slum clearance shows a differing opinion than earlier sources. While Professors Myerson and Banfield describe arguments boldly in favor of slum clearance, Chicago journalist Mike Royko, writing *Boss* 16 years later in 1971, holds a varied opinion.

Urban renewal was the greatest deceit. [Slum property] wasn't being replaced by housing for those who were dispossessed. The poor were moved into other marginal neighborhoods, and highly profitable upper middle-class developments replaced the slums. (Royko 144)

Royko's argument stands in opposition to *ReHousing Residents Displaced from Public Housing Clearance Sites in Chicago*, which argued through statistical analysis that slum dwellers were overwhelmingly relocated to neighborhoods with a higher standard of living.

The societal propensity to help slum dwellers' conditions improve touted by Myerson and Banfield comes under attack by Royko. While the earlier authors assert the northside suburbanites' favoring of public housing to assist slum dwellers, Royko proposes a different climate. "The suburbs were not better, and maybe worse. In 1960, when a liberal real estate developer tried to put up an expensive, integrated housing development in the gracious North Shore suburb of Deerfield, ... where many of the residents sent yearly checks to the NAACP, the town condemned the land for use as a park" (Royko 133).

Royko speaks to this latent racism when he argues for the real motivations that influenced public housing projects. It was not the utopian ideal of the "16 nationalities" of Olander Homes living in brotherhood as shown by the *Monthly Report*, but societal preference for segregation.

Containing the Negro was unspoken city policy. Proposals to scatter public housing, thus breaking the segregation pattern, were killed by City Hall. Housing for the aged was kept out of white wards because it might attract some old Negroes. (Royko 133)

Not only was it city policy to maintain segregated neighborhoods through new public housing projects, but Royko contended that Mayor Daley's opinion was for the African American to lift themselves out of poverty, just as other ethnic-group migrants to the city had done. "To Daley, the blacks were merely going through the same onward and upward process of all other ethnic groups, huddling together and waiting for their chance to move up the American ladder. Daley was a firm believer in the bootstrap theory" (Royko 135). This "make-your-own fortune" attitude contrasted with support of providing subsidized housing.

Where Elizabeth Woods promoted the architecture of public housing as optimal for quality of life in the 1950s, by 1981 scholars recognized that these design features were conducive to crime. The *Public Housing Security Manual Planning for the City of Chicago* (1981), written by

the Housing Research and Development Department (HRD) at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, includes 296 pages on how to improve the initial design shortcomings of high rises that encouraged crime; specifically, vast open spaces, unsecured lobbies and hallways, and tower heights were concerns.

Elizabeth Woods encouraged open, park areas next to the high-rise structures for tenant health. HRD noted that this is attractive to criminals. “Features such as vast, unorganized open spaces or a lack of sufficient parking can limit the effectiveness of a basic security program” (HRD 23). Police had trouble patrolling such spaces, and residents’ ability to take ownership of the areas – a tenant of crime prevention – was difficult due to their size. “Many residential environments, particularly public housing, lack the appropriate design features which would be supportive of resident efforts to police their territory themselves” (HRD 7).

HRD argues that the original architectural features of open lobbies and hallways also promoted criminal activity.

For example, at Cabrini-Green none of the elevator buildings were originally constructed with enclosed lobbies. The ground access to elevators and stairwells was in open passageways, available to any one wandering through. It is extremely difficult for residents or management to exercise any control over who lingers in these open passageways and who travels the elevator or stairs to the upper floors. (HRD 7-8)

In a redesign of Cabrini-Green for improved safety, residents even told the architects to not install seating in open lobbies nor public spaces outside since these areas were thought to be unsafe. “The residents involved in the planning believed that these seating areas would increase loitering rather than encourage activity support and casual surveillance as envisioned by planners” (HRD 15).

Another architectural characteristic conducive to crime from the original design of high rises such as Cabrini-Green was the enormity of the height. There evolved a large problem with gang members using top floors to shoot rival members and, randomly, bystanders such as school children, on the ground floor outside. The designed height of the high rises was so encouraging to criminals that “the Chicago City Police Department also provided a ‘vertical’ patrol detail for periodic surveillance of the upper floors of the high-rise elevator buildings” (HRD 11). Crime exploded so exponentially in CHA high-rise towers that from 1989 to 1999 the city necessitated creation of an entire unit devoted to the buildings, called the Chicago Housing Authority Police Department.

Influences on Authors of the 1970s – Early 1980s

In summation, authors’ writing during the public housing turmoil of the 1970s – early 1980s had contrasting opinions to sources of the 1950s – early 1960s. While their views were affected by the tragedy of crime, poverty, and squalor that CHA high rises were becoming, they also are marked by the cultural trends of their time. By 1966, the Civil Right Movement had come to

Chicago. Martin Luther King, Jr. and activists shed light on the segregation of all facets of Chicago living. Mike Royko catalogues Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Chicago march in *Boss* and reflects on segregation in the 1950s – musings that were absent from authors of this era. “During the 1950s, most restaurants wouldn’t seat blacks, most hotels wouldn’t accommodate them, and the Loop was considered off limits” (Royko 135). The Civil Rights, which culminated in 1968, gave oppressed Chicagoans a voice and was a major topic in mainstream discourse in 1971, when Mike Royko penned *Boss*.

The Housing and Research and Development staff at UIUC had the gift of hindsight in 1981: at that time the public high-rises were notorious for violence, crime, broken families, and horrible living conditions. Thus, when they analyzed how the buildings were constructed in relation to providing tenants a good quality of life, they could not have been looking for silver linings. Nevertheless, their scholarship is affected by trending studies of crime prevention through the design of built environments. Beginning in the early 1970s, prominent architect Oscar Newman championed defensible space theory; how a building was constructed mattered greatly in how much crime occurred there. His 1972 work *Defensible Space* and a criminologist’s 1971 book *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* led to wide trials of their ideas. The UIUC staff would think along similar currents in their presenting a manual on crime prevention through physical design.

Also, paradigms of post-modernism and structuralism affected authors of this period. Post-modernism overtook modernism in the 1970s as the dominant philosophy and artistic movement. Modernists and positivists held that there were universal truths and normative ways of living that were equivalent across all people groups. Thus, creating large-scale plans for organizing societies was acceptable.

Post-modernism rejected these ideas. Place, setting, and context were important. While modernism created grand plans for utopian societies, post-modernism stressed uniqueness and that an individual’s aspirations and struggles mattered. Perhaps a city does not have the moral authority to relocate tens of thousands of citizens whose individual identities are tied to their neighborhoods and who have distinct needs from each other. Royko focuses on the needs of slum dwellers, minorities, and oppressed groups in *Boss*.

Mike Royko was working in a structuralist framework. Hidden motives such as racism created segregation in Chicago neighborhoods. The urban forms of concentrated slums and wealthy districts were created by social values: the city’s racist leanings caused it to concentrate new public housing projects in marginal areas, for example. Royko’s book is overwhelmingly about conflicts between city officials, the mayor, and various ethnic groups as they fight for control of Chicago. The city’s being a battlefield of competing groups is a central argument of structuralism.

The 2000s – 2010s

If the writers of the 1950s – early 1960s held promising views of CHA's public housing initiative, the authors of the 1970s – early 1980s stand in contrast to this optimism. Works from the last period, 2000s– 2010s, held a nuanced view of the projects. In *When Public Housing was Paradise* (2003), J.S. Fuerst catalogues stories of tenants who view their move in fondly. They stated that a corrosion of good policies doomed the towers. In *The Hidden War* (2000), Susan J. Popkin (the Urban Institute) and scholars argue that federal policies and city corruption set up CHA's initiative for disaster. In *Purging the Poorest* (2013) Professor Lawrence J. Vale (Urban Studies and Planning – MIT) looks at demographic issues and Chicago's mismanaged economic planning. Finally, humanist philosophy, cultural attitudes, and local Chicago events of this era affected authors' views.

J.S. Fuerst notes that tenants held great memories from the initial years of high-rise living. Andrew Thompson, who lived in Harold Ickes Homes, a 9-story building, from 1955 – 1962 was positive.

I'd say that Ickes was an improvement. Oh, I was pleased. Each floor would have one person responsible for keeping the hallways and windows clean every week. I could walk from my end over to the south end, and anywhere inside the project, and I was never threatened. Ickes was integrated ... we've got white friends that want to hang out with us sometimes, and they should feel welcome at our place. (Fuerst 109)

Fuerst's stories argue that this ideal environment eroded through CHA's relaxing tenant screening process. Vonsell Ashford, also of Harold Ickes Homers, reflected:

In public housing, the tenants have to be screened. When we applied ... they wanted a marriage license. What really started destroying things is when the family structure broke down. We got through the 1950s pretty good, then slowly through the 1960s things got worse. The CHA wasn't being careful, and they switched the criterion for how you pay your rent. Across the hall from you, they paid forty or fifty dollars for the same apartment that you paid five hundred for. A lot of the working people said, 'Well, I have to pay this much more, I'm going to move out.' And then they left. So what was left? The welfare recipients. The young girls who have their babies and get the apartment. If you choose a single mother with no husband, who has no concept of how to handle children and no concept of discipline, then you're going to have problems. You're going to have problems if you don't have accountability. (Fuerst 145-146)

Popkin and her cowriters blames the city administration for this lack of accountability. From the early 1960s, Charles Swibel led the CHA board with corruption. There was "ample evidence of malfeasance during his tenure, [and] under his stewardship, conditions in CHA housing rapidly deteriorated. Many observers regarded the high-rise developments as worse than the slum housing they had replaced" (Popkin et al. 13). Thus, the public housing paradise period was short-lived.

Popkin notes that federal policy made matters worse.

Legislation aimed at preventing homelessness required public housing authorities to adopt federal preferences in admission requirements to serve the poorest households. Ceiling rents were eliminated, which increased the rents that working families had to pay to live in public housing. With no financial incentives to pay, working families quickly abandoned public housing (Popkin et al. 14).

From these issues, Popkin argues CHA housing to be doomed early on. “A combination of federal policies and poor management drove out residents who had the means to live elsewhere; they left behind a younger, more dysfunctional population” (Popkin et. al 22).

Children became the majority in high rises, outnumbering adults 2-1. Professor Vale asserts that CHA mismanagement caused gang formation from this largest demographic. He catalogues a tenant’s theory:

The CHA attempted to minimize the problems of high-rise living for families with children by placing the largest apartments on the lowest floors. [There were] tensions among the large families on the low floors – some with 10, 11, 12, 13 kids and the smaller families above. One way to combat such numbers was for the kids in the smaller families to form gangs (Vale 227).

Thus, Vale asserts the CHA compounded on their skewed demographics problem with poor family placement.

Vale argues that Chicago also made poor economic decisions in the form of missed opportunities. The CHA noted that high-rises were more economically feasible than low-rise apartments as they needed to meet federal requirements. “The Public Housing Administration wanted local housing authorities to build at 50 units per acre and imposed per-unit cost ceilings that made it extremely difficult for housing authorities to build at lower densities on the relatively expensive land of centrally located slums” (Vale 218). Low-rise, row houses could have been an option, except for a missed opportunity. “The City of Chicago could have used federal redevelopment funds to purchase and clear slums and then transferred the site to the CHA instead of to a private developer. Presumably, the dramatic decrease in land cost would have then made it much more palatable to construct lower-density public housing in the form of row houses and walk-ups” (Vale 221). Thus, Vale contends that the horrors of high-rise living could have been averted except for poor decision making by the CHA.

Influences on Authors of the 2000s – 2010s

The authors of the latest period were influenced by the local events of their time. The continuing violence in high-rise homes such as Cabrini-Green was widely publicized. The downhill trajectory of CHA had been going on for decades – rampant violence, tragic stories, and the HUD takeover of the entire department in 1996. When demolition of the high rises began in the 1990s, authors such as Popkin and Vale had much to reflect. The tone of their

works is overwhelmingly negative towards the CHA. The purpose of their writings is to analyze the political and social decision making that led to such horrific situations. It's interesting that *When Public Housing was Paradise* was written during this time. Although the homes had a brief period of satisfactory conditions, this pales in comparison to the overall catastrophe that was Chicago's mid-century public housing initiative. Yet, if one reads further into this work, it can also be viewed as a reflection of a tragedy. The tenants' stories of when crime started to take over their homes are made more poignant when juxtaposed against their ruminations of lost paradise.

Cultural values of the 1990s also influenced the authors. The Rainbow PUSH Coalition, founded in 1996 by Jesse Jackson, was a continuation of the civil rights movement and its predecessor organization, the Rainbow Coalition, which was a reaction to Reaganomics. Reaganomics of the 1980s decreased government spending, and social spending programs such as public housing were under attack. In 1995, President Clinton declared affirmative action, a movement to select historically oppressed minorities for beneficial opportunities in the university and workplace, a program that the U.S. should promote and continue. These cultural trends were ingrained in thought processes of the authors of the 2000s when they analyzed CHA's public housing movement.

Reflection on Historical Authorship

History itself is seen through the lenses of the authors. Only when one reads multiple works by authors of different time periods can the reader get a sense of what really occurred for a movement such as CHA's public housing initiative. All sources are biased due to their contemporary influences and degrees to which each had access to knowledge of the situation. For instance, later authors possibly paint a more holistic picture as scandals and sources that were hidden from past audiences come to light. Thousands of lives were affected by poor decision making of CHA staff. A reflection of history can be a powerful tool for planners to learn from past mistakes in order to enact future, informed decisions that promote public wellbeing. It's the onus of historical authors to provide accurate reflection of the past in order to equip planners and decision makers with this knowledge.

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