

## "CHICAGO IS NOT ABOUT TO GIVE UP ON A BAD IDEA": THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HOUSING HIGH-RISES

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Chicago's first ghetto was a product of the great northward migration of southern Blacks, from 1890 to 1930, that ended with the Great Depression. Its Black population became intensely concentrated, and its borders on Chicago's south and west sides were "sharp and clear" (Hirsch, 1983). Chicago's second and greatly enlarged Black ghetto was formed during the three decades from 1940 to 1970. It too was the product of a great migration, one that began with southern Blacks streaming into the World War II factories of northern cities, and then continued during the quarter century that followed the war's close (Lemann, 1991b). Its borders too are clear; its population homogeneously Black (Massey, 1989).<sup>1</sup>

The second ghetto was, however, subjected to two developments that sharply distinguished it from its predecessor. First, in the 1950s and 1960s, legal and political breakthroughs made it possible for middle-class Blacks to make impressive gains in education and employment and to escape the ghetto's confines, with the result that the second ghetto was shorn of the stabilizing role models and economic activity that the middle class had earlier provided (W. Wilson, 1987). The second development was a dramatic shift of low-skilled jobs to the suburbs, negatively altering the opportunity ladder for those who remained behind (Kasarda, 1990). Both developments contributed to the creation of over-

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Lemann observes that the massive migration of Blacks who left the segregated, circumscribed life of the rural South between 1910 and 1970 for the cities of the North, particularly Chicago, was one of the largest internal movements of people in history, outranking the migration of any other ethnic group—Italians, Irish, Jews, or Poles—to this country (Lemann, 1991b).

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whelmingly impoverished urban neighborhoods, not organized around work and housing an "urban underclass" that now seems threatened with permanent severance from the American mainstream (W. Wilson, 1987).<sup>2</sup>

A notable feature of the making of the second ghetto was government sanction and support, including a massive public housing high-rise program. Now, a generation after they were built in the 1950s and 1960s, the public housing high-rises are wearing out. Instead of viewing this circumstance as a golden opportunity to dismantle a particularly pernicious feature of its Black ghetto and to provide high-rise residents with the same escape opportunities that were earlier offered to the middle class, Chicago is beginning to rebuild its public housing high-rise buildings. One is reminded of the adage that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. In a less elegant formulation, reportedly Yogi Berra's, it's *déjà vu* all over again. This chapter contends that we can and should change course and seize the golden opportunity.

## SYMBOL OF THE SECOND GHETTO

### *The Chicago History*

Restrictive covenants, the hostility of White neighborhoods, and the pervasive, segregatory "gate-keeping" of the real estate industry helped create Chicago's greatly enlarged second ghetto. In addition, the ghetto was fostered by government public housing and urban renewal policies, home insurance practices of the Federal Housing Administration, and federal highway building and homeowner tax subsidy programs that assisted city Whites to move to the suburbs (Polikoff, 1978; Hirsch, 1983).

Had the public housing been scattered, would it have ameliorated the severity of the second ghetto? Or would the weight of other government policies, as well as private hostility to Blacks, have been too great for scattered public housing to have made a difference? We will never know, for Chicago's postwar public

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<sup>2</sup> Though, more than anyone else, William Julius Wilson has helped legitimize the term "underclass," Wilson worries that some journalists and conservatives are now using the term pejoratively to contend or imply that the poor have created their own plight. He is considering the alternative, "ghetto poor" (DeParle, 1990). "Underclass" is used here, non-pejoratively, because of the widespread usage it has attained.

housing was deliberately concentrated in Black neighborhoods. Indeed, the first ghetto's symbol, the tenement, was replaced by what came to be the symbol of the second ghetto, the concrete and steel public housing high-rise. A brief recapitulation of this history will provide background for the present discussion.

In the aftermath of World War II, the nation readied itself to address housing needs that had been postponed during the war. In 1949, a new housing law signaled a huge expansion in the fledgling public housing program that had begun in the New Deal years. Before 1950, several aspects of public housing had not been clearly defined: the socioeconomic status of its tenants, the location of its developments, and their scale. These three key factors were now to be definitively addressed; the choices made determined the essential nature of public housing in Chicago.

Public housing had begun as a temporary way station for working families down on their luck because of the Depression. Families receiving public aid or having criminal records or other social problems were simply not accepted. During the war years, public housing served war workers who could not find other housing because of war-induced shortages. In the post-war years, however, the public housing clientele began to change. In Chicago and other large cities, public housing was given a "slum clearance" mission, and most slums were in Black neighborhoods. The obligation to house at least some of the displaced persons meant that public housing tenants would become increasingly Black and poor. By 1950, over a quarter of Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) families were receiving public aid, and a third were one-parent families. The CHA was becoming the landlord for hard-core poverty families (Bowly, 1978).

As to location, of the ten public housing developments built in Chicago before or during World War II, four were for Whites in White areas, four were for Blacks in Black areas, and two were intended for mixed occupancy. The CHA's policy followed the federal government's "neighborhood composition rule"—the racial occupancy of a public housing development should mirror the racial composition of the host area.

By the early 1950s, the location factor was also undergoing change. CHA's first executive director, Elizabeth Wood, made a strong effort to bring about some degree of racial integration in CHA's developments. But she lost her battle to the Chicago political establishment, and it became clear that the great expansion in public housing decreed by the 1949 Housing Act would take place in impoverished Black neighborhoods (Meyerson and Ban-

field, 1955). Years later, *Gautreaux v. CHA*, a racial discrimination lawsuit against CHA (BPI, 1991), formally established what was generally known during the 1950s and 1960s: "the locations for new projects were selected by CHA, and by the political leadership of Chicago, to contain and segregate the poor, black population" (Bowly, 1978, p. 112).<sup>3</sup>

As to the final factor, scale, the ten developments built in Chicago before or during World War II were all low-rise, mostly two-story, rowhouses, with a few three- and four-story walk-ups thrown in. Although density varied, even the larger developments, such as the Jane Addams Houses, were constructed on a "human scale" (Bowly, 1978, p. 20). In the post-war years, however, the design of public housing buildings came to reflect the ideas of the Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, whose architectural vision was a "vertical garden city" composed of blocks of apartments stacked atop one another. In the early post-war years, a few, relatively small, low-rise projects would still be constructed. But Le Corbusier's influence was about to become dominant.

Chicago's first elevator projects were of modest scale, six- to nine-story buildings. Then the buildings began to rise to fourteen and fifteen stories. In addition, because locations in White neighborhoods were unavailable to it by reason of its increasingly Black tenancy, CHA began the practice of "extensions." New projects were built cheek-by-jowl with existing ones in Black neighborhoods. Though the Jane Addams Houses initially had "only" about 1,000 apartments, two extensions soon doubled its size. In 1955, the Grace Abbott Homes added another 1,200 units, including seven sixteen-story buildings. What had begun on a "human scale" had grown to over 3,000 apartments, encompassing 26 city blocks. The overall feeling was now described as "forbidding, and the human scale is completely lost" (Bowly, 1978, p. 91).

In the dozen years from the mid-1950s to near the end of the 1960s, the great public housing construction years, CHA outdid

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<sup>3</sup> The *Gautreaux* case was filed in 1966 (with the author as lead counsel) on behalf of all CHA tenants and applicants against both CHA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After the discriminatory nature of CHA location policies was established in 1969, the case entered a long, still-continuing, remedial phase. Among other things, CHA was ordered to build low-rise, scattered-site public housing throughout Chicago, and HUD agreed to implement a rent subsidy program throughout the six-county Chicago metropolitan area (Polikoff, 1989).

itself in terms of scale. Henry Horner Homes, completed in 1957, had 920 apartments in nine buildings, seven of seven stories and two of fifteen. Four years later, CHA added the Horner Extension, with 736 more apartments in seven more buildings, three of eight stories and four of fourteen. Most of the Henry Horner apartments, and most of those to come, were three-, four-, and five-bedroom apartments; thus, the growing concentration of Black and poor families was also a growing concentration of large families with children.

Horner was followed by Stateway Gardens, Robert Taylor Homes, and others. Taylor Homes, renowned as the world's largest public housing development, added 4,400 apartments in 28 identical sixteen-story buildings right next to Stateway Gardens. At the end of the 1960s, CHA's last big development, Madden Homes, had only 450 apartments in three high-rises but was geographically a part of six other family developments. In its last high-rise gasp, CHA had not lost its ability to produce developments on an inhuman scale. And by that time, there were 20,000 apartments in 168 family high-rise buildings.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Chicago Consequences*

These enormous projects were in disadvantaged Black neighborhoods with predominantly low-income residents and a dearth of community services and facilities. Project tenants were virtually all Black, with incomes and job circumstances that placed them near the bottom of the social and economic ladder. The tenancy, segregated ghetto locations, and scale of the projects were a prescription for disaster.

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<sup>4</sup> Because of *Gautreaux* case court orders, only low-rise, scattered-site housing was built in the 1970s and 1980s, and—due to continuing litigation, and CHA's intransigence and incompetence—very little of that. Today, CHA public housing comprises about 40,000 apartments. Of these, some 9,500 are in 58 buildings for the elderly. The balance of the family apartments (other than the 20,000 in high rises) are in low-rise buildings, some in large, concentrated, low-rise "projects," some in sites shared with high rises, and others ("scattered sites") in dispersed, individual low-rise buildings. CHA's resident population is about 145,000 persons, just under six percent of the Chicago's total population.

In an oft-reprinted passage, Harrison Salisbury, fresh from years in Russia, described what he saw in New York City's public housing:

the broken windows, the missing light bulbs, the plaster cracking from the walls, the pilfered hardware, the cold, drafty corridors, the doors on sagging hinges, the acid smell of sweat and cabbage, the ragged children, the plaintive women, the playgrounds that are seas of muddy clay, the bruised and battered trees, the ragged clumps of grass, the planned absence of art, beauty or taste, the gigantic masses of brick, of concrete, of asphalt, the inhuman genius with which our know-how has been perverted to create human cesspools worse than those of yesterday (Salisbury, 1958, p. 75).

Similarly, not long after Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes project opened, an anonymous resident was quoted as saying: "We live stacked on top of one another with no elbow room. Danger is all around. There's little privacy or peace and no quiet. And the world looks on all of us as project rats, living on a reservation like untouchables" (M. Newman, 1965).

The ensuing years did not deal kindly with what Salisbury had seen. First, with the end of legal segregation in the 1950s and 1960s, working and middle-class Blacks fled the inner-city ghettos, weakening institutions and stripping the ghetto of its mainstream role models. In the 1940s, 1950s, and as late as the 1960s, according to William Julius Wilson, the presence of working- and middle-class Blacks in ghetto communities provided stability and reinforced and perpetuated mainstream behavior patterns: "Though they may have lived on different streets, blacks of all classes lived in the same neighborhood. Their kids went to the same schools and played in the same parks. Thus, their neighborhoods at that time were more stable" (W. Wilson, 1991, p. 26).

The departure of working- and middle-class Blacks left behind a much higher concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the Black population and removed an important "social buffer" that had helped keep alive the perception that education was meaningful, that employment was a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability was the norm, not the exception (W. Wilson, 1987, pp. 49, 56).

Second, during the 1970s and 1980s, northern cities lost dramatically large numbers of blue-collar and low-skilled jobs. Between 1972 and 1989, Chicago's loss of almost 134,000 jobs in-

cluded 48 percent of all its manufacturing jobs. During the same period, Chicago's suburbs lost only one percent of their manufacturing jobs while gaining over 700,000 total positions (Leadership Council, 1991). Simultaneously, the northern cities that suffered such job losses were also experiencing large growths in their populations of young Blacks with no education beyond high school, the offspring of those who had migrated to northern cities during the 1950s and 1960s when inner-city jobs that required only limited education and skills were far more plentiful. As the jobs dispersed to the suburbs, large numbers of young, unemployed Blacks were left in job-poor, inner-city locations, notably including public housing developments with heavy concentrations of children and teenagers.

By 1980, the impact of these two developments was of "catastrophic proportions," leading to socially isolated communities characterized by high rates not only of joblessness but also of teenage pregnancies, out-of-wedlock births, single-parent families, welfare dependency, and serious crime (W. Wilson, 1987, pp. 15, 22-26). Whereas in 1960, the overwhelming majority of adults were working even in poor Black neighborhoods, such neighborhoods came to house few middle- or working-class families, and the great majority of their adults were unemployed. Poor neighborhoods not organized around work, Wilson believes, constitute "the most fundamental and most significant change in the black community over the last several decades" (W. Wilson, 1991, p. 26). As Kasarda points out, the underground economy may be the only option for poorly educated youth anchored to such inner-city areas, an option that pushes their neighborhoods further along a downward spiral:

Large concentrations of those who have become dependent on the urban underground economy pose serious problems (crime, drug abuse, loitering, vandalism) that dissuade businesses from locating nearby and push out more economically stable families and others who eschew such behaviors. As a consequence, not only do local employment opportunities further deteriorate, reinforcing neighborhood economic decline, but also selective out-migration of more mainstream-oriented residents spatially isolates the most disadvantaged (Kasarda, 1990, pp. 82-83).

Calling Kasarda's "spatial isolation" by its rightful name of racial segregation, Massey makes the further point that "bootstraps" have been denied to Blacks who are born and grow up in such ghetto communities. Residential mobility, Massey says, has

been the crucial avenue of social mobility in America: "Some neighborhoods have good schools, strong ties to employers, excellent services, low crime rates and a youth culture that stresses educational achievement and delayed parenthood; other neighborhoods do not" (Massey, 1991, p. 33).

Moving to a more advantaged neighborhood is the central mechanism by which families improve socioeconomic prospects for themselves and their children. For most American ethnic groups, socioeconomic mobility is a cumulative process: economic advancement (a better job, a raise) is translated into residential progress (a neighborhood with better schools, peer influences, social contacts, etc.), which in turn leads to additional socioeconomic gains (children receive better education and get better jobs). This avenue for cumulative socioeconomic advancement is largely closed to Blacks because of racial barriers to residential mobility.

Massey supports his assertion with statistics and analyses that point to racial discrimination—not economics, Black locational preferences, or any other factor—as the primary explanation for Black residential segregation. But whatever the causal factors, racial segregation largely denies to Blacks America's normal avenue to socioeconomic advancement, and—because they live in isolated, impoverished neighborhoods—leaves ghetto Blacks uniquely vulnerable to economic downturns. Racial segregation, Massey concludes, is responsible for a "new, concentrated form of urban poverty," and is "a primary structural factor behind the creation of the underclass" (Massey, 1991, p. 33). This argument has special force in Chicago, where the *Gautreaux* case has judicially determined that public housing locations were deliberately selected to segregate the poor, Black population.

Beyond the formidable disadvantages of their segregation in impoverished neighborhoods, high-rise residents face the additional problem that their buildings seem particularly conducive to criminal activity (O. Newman, 1972). Newman tells of a Philadelphia project composed of a mixture of high and low buildings, two-thirds of the units in thirteen-story buildings, one-third in two-story rowhouses. Even though the social profiles of families in both building types were virtually identical, the high-rises experienced seven-and-a-half times the vandalism, robberies, and drug arrests as the rowhouses. Newman concludes that for low-income families with children, the high-rise is to be "strictly avoided" (O. Newman, 1972, pp. 191-193).

William Julius Wilson suggests that James Q. Wilson's critical mass theory may be especially relevant to inner-city neighbor-



hoods with large public housing projects. When a "critical mass" of young persons in a given community is reached, "a self-sustaining chain reaction is set off that creates an explosive increase in the amount of crime, addiction, and welfare dependency" (J. Wilson, 1975, pp. 17-18; W. Wilson, 1987). Similarly, as a research monograph observes, the "high density of many developments . . . has complicated the role of police. Preventive patrolling in cars, for example, does nothing to deter drug dealing that takes place in the stairwells or jammed elevators of high-rise buildings" (Weisel, 1990, p. 12.)

Such observations are punctuated by regular accounts in the daily press. In 1980, about 10 percent of Chicago's murders, rapes, and aggravated assaults were committed in Robert Taylor Homes, although the project housed only a little more than 0.5 percent of the city's population (Sheppard, 1980). In 1990, police beat 211, which is CHA's Stateway Gardens, was Chicago's most violent. None of the city's other 275 police beats had more murders or sexual assaults. Beat 211's 20 homicides were more than those reported in any of ten states. Only two other Chicago beats had more serious assaults, and only one had more robberies (Blau and Recktenwald, 1991). By the close of the 1980s, Chicago's public housing high-rises were largely controlled by gangs dealing drugs, while their residents engaged in bullet-dodging. CHA's vacancies—mostly in its high-rises—exceeded 5,000, although its waiting list numbered in the tens of thousands.<sup>5</sup>

Poignant witness to life in Chicago high-rises came from two books published in 1991. In *The Promised Land*, Nicholas Lemann described the lives of four generations of Mississippians in one of the "better buildings" in Robert Taylor Homes. Though it is now over 30 years later, there is an almost eerie resemblance to what Harrison Salisbury had seen—the broken windows, the missing light bulbs (now regularly shot out by gang members, making coming home after dark a "terrifying experience"), the

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<sup>5</sup> Vincent Lane, current chairman of the CHA, has been trying valiantly and innovatively to deal with CHA's crime problem, especially with coordinated, surprise "sweeps" of crime-ridden high rises by police and CHA personnel to evict gang members and drug dealers and "secure" the buildings for their legitimate residents. But the difficulties are great, the results uncertain. Despite sweeps of all eight high rises in CHA's Rockwell Gardens complex, serious crime there increased 17 percent in 1990 according to the CHA, more according to the Chicago Police Department (Barry, 1991).

stench, the surroundings barren of greenery. But there is also much that Salisbury had not seen—the drugs, the murders, gang recruitment beginning at eight years of age, 50 of 160 apartments vacant in the "better building," outsiders (firefighters, delivery people, social workers) declining to enter. Connie, one of the survivors in Lemann's chronicle, is, in the end, weary and depressed, "and what she wants more than anything is to get out" (Lemann, 1991b, p. 305).

*There Are No Children Here*, by Alex Kotlowitz, recounts a tale of two young brothers, Lafayette and Pharoah, who lived in Henry Horner Homes where, says Kotlowitz, violence is "one constant," where the surrounding neighborhood is a "black hole" with an infant mortality rate higher than in a number of Third World countries, where eleven-year-old Pharoah "sat on his bed one day and cried because he worried that he might never get out of the projects," where a friend of Lafayette's who was able to move out "knelt at his bedside before he went to sleep and prayed that God would not make him move back to Horner" (Kotlowitz, 1991).

It did appear, however, that society had learned its lesson regarding new high-rise public housing projects. In 1969, at the end of CHA's post-war building spree, the *Gautreaux* judge outlawed any more Chicago high-rises for families with children. At about the same time, Congress did likewise for the whole country, unless there was "no practical alternative." The reason, according to a congressional report, was that "high-rise, elevator structures provide an undesirable environment for family living" (U.S. House of Representatives, 1968, p. 2903). Never again, it seemed safe to say, would we build Le Corbusier-type family public housing.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It is sometimes argued that because middle- and upper-class families with children live quite satisfactorily in high-rise buildings, it cannot be the high-rise configuration, *per se*, that brings about the consequences Wilson, Massey, Newman, Lemann, Kotlowitz, and others describe. We may agree that if a single public housing high-rise building or two, with secure lobbies, sufficient numbers of elevators, an adequate maintenance staff, and the other familiar characteristics of middle- and upper-class residential buildings, were placed in a neighborhood possessed of good schools and jobs, excellent services, low crime rates, and the like, the public housing residents might fare well. We may also agree that the residents of large concentrations of low-rise public housing buildings in isolated, impoverished communities experi-

## REBUILDING THE SYMBOL

Although building anew has been outlawed, what about *rebuilding* the high-rises we already have as they wear out and must be replaced? That is where the "déjà vu" comes in. For fiscal year 1991 (ending September 30, 1991), CHA asked the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for \$218 million in "modernization" funding. Some of this money was for appropriate repair, maintenance, and other purposes, but nearly half of it was to rebuild high-rise buildings to extend their "useful" lives by 20 to 30 years. For example, three vacant high-rises in the Madden Homes area were proposed to be rebuilt at a cost of over \$80,000 per unit (Chicago Housing Authority, 1991). For fiscal years 1992-96, CHA requested nearly a billion dollars, much of it for similar rebuilding purposes (Quadel, 1991).

Why, knowing what we now know about life for families in public housing high-rises, would CHA propose to rebuild those structures? Why, if it is going to seek \$80,000 per apartment—enough to build single-family townhomes, rowhouses, or walk-ups, or to subsidize rents for its tenants in the private housing market—would CHA not jump at the chance to replace obsolete high-rises with low-rise construction or rent subsidies? Tracing the complex answer may help us chart a course out of present, nearsighted policies.

Although it was foreseeable that buildings not kept up would deteriorate, HUD's public housing funding formula provided no reserve for capital replacements. In 1968, HUD therefore initiated a public housing "modernization" program, and during the 1970s provided funding to public housing agencies for specific needs such as roof repairs, heating system replacements, and the like (Stegman, 1990, p. 342).

In 1980, Congress sought to rationalize this piecemeal activity by creating a Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program (CIAP), under which public housing agencies would develop comprehensive plans to maintain and upgrade their public housing

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ence many of the same problems their high-rise counterparts face, although the evidence, such as comparative vacancy rates in high- and low-rise projects sharing the same site, suggests there are differences of degree, if not of kind. But the high-rises are where they are; as regards architectural configuration they are what they are; and they are generally clustered with many others of their kind. Given these three circumstances, it is pointless to engage in the *per se* argument.

stock. Most recently, beginning with fiscal year 1992, CIAP has been changed to the Comprehensive Grant Program (CGP), under which public housing agencies will plan their modernization needs five years ahead.

Whatever its call letters, modernization has been a big-ticket item, \$5 billion between 1980 and 1985 alone. Notwithstanding this outflow of billions of dollars, needs seem to have outpaced expenditures. In 1989, based on detailed surveys by consultants, HUD took a comprehensive look at the public housing system's "backlogged" modernization needs. It concluded that between \$7.5 and \$9.2 billion in 1986 dollars was required just to meet HUD's mandatory building standards for health, safety, and building integrity. (HUD's consultants thought the figure should be a lot higher.) Of this amount, at least \$2 billion, and probably much more, must be attributable to the 20 percent of public housing units that are family high-rises because the backlogged needs of high-rises are likely to be proportionally greater than those of low-rises (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1990, p. 1-11). HUD's estimates are exclusive of additional amounts to "improve the quality" or enhance the "long-term viability" of public housing projects (especially needed in family high-rises, which frequently lack such amenities as ground-floor washrooms, sufficient elevators, and lobbies), and of what HUD terms "accrual" needs—funding additional modernization work to avoid future backlogs.

Given this financial picture, we may ask of HUD a question similar to the one asked of CHA. Why would HUD, society's agent in this matter, choose to rebuild obsolete family high-rises? While maintaining those that must be kept in service for a time, one would think that HUD, too, would grasp every opportunity to phase out and replace these mistakes of our past with low-rises and rent subsidies.

HUD does give lip service to some phasing out. It estimates that 73,500 "high-cost or problem" units (not exclusively but probably mostly family high-rise units) will not be modernized. Moreover, an additional 93,500 units that fail to provide "humane environments" for their residents—because, among other reasons, they "concentrate the very poor in isolation from the rest of the community"—may be "scheduled for retirement" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1988, pp. 9-10). And HUD rules are supposed to preclude high-rise modernizations that cost more than 69 percent of HUD's allowable costs for new construction of elevator buildings.

Nevertheless, the reality is that phasing out obsolete family high-rises is a problematic undertaking—witness CHA's current modernization applications to HUD and this statement from HUD's top official in Chicago: "We [HUD] feel, and I personally feel, committed to rehabbing those [CHA high-rise] developments . . . HUD Secretary Jack Kemp has often spoken of the fact that he wants to get those buildings rehabbed and get people back in. He does not want to be known as the secretary of demolition for public housing" (Jordan, 1991, p. 11).

The reasons for HUD's view on this matter are to be found in our public housing demolition and development policy. Congress addressed public housing demolition for the first time in 1974 and returned again to the subject in the 1980s. Although there have been some policy changes, since 1987 it has been the law that HUD may not approve proposed demolitions unless it determines that (1) the public housing agency has a plan to replace the units to be demolished, unit for unit, with new construction or rent subsidies, and (2) the project is "obsolete" (as to "physical condition, location, or other factors"), making it unusable for housing purposes, and no reasonable program of modification can return the housing to useful life, or, when demolition of a portion rather than the whole of a project is proposed, the demolition will "help to assure the useful life of the remaining portion of the project." Some other requirements must be met in addition to these two basic ones—for example, demolition proposals are to be developed in "consultation" with tenants, and displaced residents must be assisted in relocating to affordable housing.

HUD's interpretation, possibly erroneous, of the replacement provision gives an important twist to the application of these rules. HUD says that although funds appropriated for modernization may be used to pay for demolishing public housing buildings once the demolition criteria are met, modernization funds may not be used to pay for the statutorily required replacement housing. For that, HUD says, public housing agencies must turn to separate funds expressly appropriated for the development of new housing or the payment of rent subsidies.

On its face, HUD's interpretation seems questionable. Of two costs that must be borne in the case of demolition—wrecking and replacement housing—why would Congress, which itself imposed

the replacement requirement, permit modernization funds to be used for the first but not the second?<sup>7</sup>

HUD's interpretation would be less significant were it not for the fact that there is precious little new development or rent subsidy funding available. Modernization funding, and thus money to pay for wrecking costs, though inadequate in relation to true "modernization" needs, has been relatively abundant in absolute dollar terms. But in the last ten years, appropriations for new public housing have been below the level of 5,000 units per year. (Indeed, for some years HUD has sought *zero* funding for this purpose, and Congress has had to force a reluctant administration to take any new public housing funds at all.) Rent subsidy funding for replacement housing is likewise in short supply. Rent subsidies must be committed for fifteen years to qualify as replacement housing for demolished units, and in recent years Congress has appropriated most rent subsidy funding for shorter periods. Thus, given HUD's view that modernization funds cannot be used to pay for replacement housing, it makes little sense for public housing agencies to propose demolition when, absent replacement housing funding, their applications cannot be approved.

There is one final aspect to the problematic nature of demolition today—the understandable opposition of tenant advocates. Before a replacement housing requirement was imposed, demolition would result in a diminished supply of public housing units at a time when housing needs of lower-income families were growing rapidly. Even after the replacement housing requirement was put in place, HUD's enforcement was lax—paper plans were often not required to be implemented. History provides tenant advocates with ample reason to be skeptical of demolition proposals (National Housing Law Project, 1990). Even ghetto public housing may be viewed as better than no housing at all.

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<sup>7</sup> One answer is that HUD's interpretation may be mistaken. The same section of the law that establishes the demolition criteria provides, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary [of HUD] is authorized to make available financial assistance for applications approved under this [demolition] section using available contributions authorized under section 1437c of this title" (42 USC sec. 1437p(c)(1)). Section 1437c is the basic section that authorizes all sorts of funding for lower-income housing, including modernization. Thus, the "notwithstanding" clause may be read to say that HUD may use modernization funds to pay for all the required costs, *including replacement housing*, of carrying out approved demolition applications.

Historically, the views of tenant organizations have not been particularly influential with HUD, or even with Congress. But the HUD administration under Secretary Jack Kemp made tenant "empowerment" a key plank in its housing policy (Kemp, 1990). Tenant opposition thus helps to explain why Secretary Kemp wished not to become known as "secretary of demolition."

These several factors lie behind CHA's proposal to rebuild its high-rises. Vincent Lane, CHA's chairman, says: "If I had the dollars to build low-rise, scattered-site housing, I'd be the first one out there with a sledgehammer, knocking [the high-rises] down. It was a horrendous mistake building these buildings, the way they were designed. But I don't have the resources. And therefore I'm looking to how I can begin to at least make these places livable and begin to change the environment for these kids" (Abramowitz, 1991). Lane does have the dollars, or at least has applied for them, but since, under HUD's interpretation, they are "modernization" dollars, which cannot be used for replacement, Lane is constrained to use them to rebuild the "horrendous mistake" to which he would prefer to apply a sledgehammer.

That such a course leads to perpetuation of the public housing part of Chicago's second ghetto seems to be an acceptable, if regrettable, outcome to both CHA and HUD. Lane would like to use a sledgehammer but feels he cannot. HUD would perhaps prefer different arrangements but is committed to its view of the law and only hints at the desirability of change which, however, it does not seek from Congress. In its analysis of modernization needs, HUD speaks of projects that are not "viable" because of "fundamental flaws . . . including extremely high densities and isolation from the services and supporting networks of the surrounding community." The families in such projects, HUD candidly acknowledges, are receiving housing assistance "in inhumane circumstances of severe deterioration, high concentration, isolation or danger," and they should be relocated. But, HUD concludes opaquely: "Implementing this policy would require a change in the current statutory provisions governing the demolition and disposition of public housing" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1988, p. 9).<sup>8</sup> Thus, absent change that no

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<sup>8</sup> In Chicago, at least, "implementing this policy" may be the only course legally available to HUD and CHA. It having been judicially determined in *Gautreaux* that building the high-rise projects where they were located was deliberate and unlawful segregation, how could it now be legal to rebuild them in their still segregated locations?

one appears to be seeking, the door is open to rebuilding the high-rises.

### WHAT TO DO?

There is an alternative course, but before discussing it, we should examine two policies that are sometimes advanced as justifications for rebuilding. First, HUD has developed a sizable program to "empower" public housing residents to manage the developments in which they live. Tenant management is a good idea that deserves to be supported, but it can easily be oversold. It does not eliminate the problem of ghettoized housing that is isolated from jobs and from the services and supporting networks of a viable surrounding community. It does not do away with extremely high densities that concentrate overwhelming numbers of poverty families in a single location. It does not do away with buildings that are fundamentally flawed in design (e.g., lacking adequate elevators). In some instances, particularly where charismatic local leadership can be found, tenant management can significantly improve a troubled public housing project. But its record has been spotty; while more than a Band-Aid, tenant management hardly provides a reason for rebuilding failed high-rises. Moreover, its public-relations appeal risks diverting attention from the opportunities that aged high-rises afford to dismantle the ghettos created by huge public housing developments, while providing their residents with options to escape ghetto conditions.

The second justification advanced for rebuilding high-rises is called MINCS (Mixed-Income New Communities Strategy). MINCS is a new, congressionally authorized experiment to try to bring mixed-income tenancy to public housing and its environs. The complicated mechanism involves private development of market-rate housing in a public housing neighborhood, to which some public housing families can be transferred via leasing arrangements, and then moving lower-income but working families into the vacated public housing apartments, thereby producing mixed-income tenancy in both places.

This experiment, too, is good in concept, for it goes to the heart of the problem of so many large-scale public housing developments—their overwhelming concentration of poverty families isolated from the non-poor. Like tenant management, however, MINCS has serious limitations. For example, it cannot even be attempted in areas that will not sustain market-rate housing;



projects such as Robert Taylor Homes are not candidates for a MINCS experiment. And, like untried experiments generally, it may or may not work even in favorable circumstances. Although MINCS should be given every encouragement, it is not a reason to forego opportunities to replace instead of rebuild our high-rise mistakes of the past.

How then can we shift from a rebuilding policy? The answer is to change fundamentally our attitude toward demolition. In the appropriate circumstances, where rebuilding high-rises is costly and conditions are "inhumane," demolition should be *encouraged* as an opportunity to rid ourselves of past mistakes and do better by residents, not discouraged as a last resort alternative to what is viewed as the preferred course of physical rehabilitation.

There are two aspects to the required attitudinal change. First, justifiable fears that demolished housing will not be replaced must be addressed. Replacement housing *in fact*, not just in a plan, must be required. Congress plainly intended to allay tenant fears that demolished public housing would not be replaced; thus, HUD should interpret the replacement requirement as mandating a workable, assured replacement plan, not just a statement of good intentions. Alternatively, Congress should be more specific. If replacement housing is not actually provided before demolition occurs, sites for new construction must be acquired or rental units secured, funding must be assured, and enforceable arrangements must be entered into. The funding could come either from modernization appropriations (HUD modifying its present interpretation of the law or Congress clarifying its intent), or from separate appropriations. It simply makes no sense to throw good money after bad simply because we choose not to fund replacement housing while choosing to fund the rebuilding of obsolete high-rises.

Second, we need more flexibility in the *form* that replacement housing may take. An example is provided by the rent subsidy program operated under the *Gautreaux* case, which has enabled some 4,300 families to make rent subsidy moves (at a one-time cost, apart from the rent subsidy itself, of only a little more than \$1,000 per family). About half the families have left inner-city public housing and its environs for outlying city neighborhoods; the other half have moved to more than 100 suburban communities, predominantly White and middle-class. By and large, the families have "made it"; children are getting better educations, mothers are getting jobs (Rosenbaum, 1993). Lemann has described the program as an example of "successful class integration," one that moves the urban poor "out of the ghetto and into

the mainstream" (Lemann, 1991a, p. 35). The *New York Times* editorialized that the program "offers stirring lessons for all cities with isolated underclass communities" (*New York Times*, 1988).

The *Gautreaux* program illustrates the attractiveness of a rent subsidy approach to replacement housing. Properly run, it enables families to *leave* the ghetto. Particularly when the moves are to the suburbs, it gets people to where jobs are more plentiful, schools better, life safer, and mainstream role models present. One of the most poignant findings of *Gautreaux* family surveys is that mothers of families in CHA projects did not work because they feared for the safety of their children in their absence (Rosenbaum, 1993).

Of course, rent subsidies have their limitations too. For example, it requires hard, sustained work to find available apartments in adequate numbers, sensitive counseling for families moving to new communities, and some follow-up services once the moves are made. But as part of a replacement housing approach, a *Gautreaux*-type program holds great promise.

The *Gautreaux* case has also begun to produce scattered-site townhomes and rowhouses in non-ghetto neighborhoods, housing that is architecturally compatible with existing housing and is privately—rather than publicly—managed. Such a program, buttressed by acquisition and rehabilitation of privately owned dwellings, is another means of providing replacement housing that offers an opportunity to escape the ghetto.

These *Gautreaux* initiatives do not exhaust the possibilities. For example, so-called project-based subsidies might be used to encourage private developers to rehabilitate their buildings and rent apartments to the poor. The essential point is to foster techniques that turn our replacement housing policy toward encouraging mobility and reducing isolation. As Bowly says:

The most basic fault . . . of public housing was that it isolated poor families into enclaves containing only other poor families . . . The ideal of making the extremely poor population upwardly mobile, that was part of the original philosophy of public housing, would have best been achieved by getting them out into the general population where there is some interaction across class lines, some exposure to how the economy and the business world operate, and some exposure to persons with substantial education (Bowly, 1978, p. 224).

By "anchoring those with limited resources to distressed inner-city areas where there are few prospects for permanent or meaningful

employment" (Kasarda, 1990, pp. 84-85), our present bias in favor of rebuilding rather than replacing may have the effect of keeping public housing residents away from better employment and educational opportunities in non-ghetto areas.

Finally, for those who prefer to remain in their present neighborhoods, some low-density, low-rise construction could be provided on the very site of demolished high-rises. Oscar Newman notes that, within limits, crime rates correlate not with density but with building height and type (O. Newman, 1972, p. 195). It is testimony to the strength of Le Corbusier's influence that all the Robert Taylor Homes apartments could have been put in three-story buildings, and over 60 percent of the site would still have been left for parking, landscaping, and play areas (Bowly, 1978, pp. 126-27). Substantially the same is true of other Chicago high-rise projects. Newman's work tells us that even where we may be constrained to provide some replacement housing within the ghetto, we can significantly improve on high-rise living conditions. Although they do not provide ghetto escape opportunities, low-rise units are, after all, a step in the right direction, not only because of their greater safety but also because, in some places at least, they may open the door to community linkages that the forbidding high-rises keep closed.

Taking these steps would reverse our present policy of detering demolition. At no greater cost than rebuilding our high-rise mistakes (though greater cost *would* be warranted), we would begin to provide humane, non-ghetto housing opportunities. In the case of Chicago, we might begin to dismantle, instead of rebuild, the second ghetto.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the nation's public housing—1.3 million units managed by over 3,000 public housing agencies—is decent housing. It has played, and should continue to play, an important role in housing many of the nation's poor families (Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, 1988). The segregated, ghettoized, inhumane living environment of the inner-city high-rise is only part of the public housing whole. Indeed, as a matter of sound public policy—not addressed here because it is beyond the scope of this chapter—we should spend more money both on developing new, badly needed public housing (over three-quarters of a million people are on the waiting lists of the country's public housing

agencies) and on fixing up and maintaining the existing stock that merits modernization. Such a newly invigorated public housing policy should operate on a metropolitan base that could foster moves from high poverty areas of low job potential to low poverty, relatively job-rich communities.

However, because of the stereotyped image of public housing, the dysfunctional inner-city family high-rises cast a "long shadow" that threatens the entire program (Stegman, 1990, p. 346). Too many Americans think of Robert Taylor Homes when they hear "public housing," not of the hundreds of small, well-working developments that have long since found their useful places across the land. Eliminating the long shadow as rapidly as possible is in the long-term interest of public housing.

"As rapidly as possible" does not mean immediately. Supporters of rebuilding the high-rises frequently pretend that opponents are unrealistically calling for overnight demolition of all elevator buildings or peremptory termination of all spending on them. In fact, any reasonable plan will take time, and buildings not slated for prompt replacement and demolition should be maintained in the meantime. A few years ago, a prestigious Chicago committee, co-chaired by former Secretary of Commerce Philip M. Klutznick, suggested phasing out 800 Chicago high-rise units each year over ten years (Advisory Council, 1988). At the end of a decade, some 8,000 units, or 40 percent of CHA's high-rise inventory, would be phased out—a not insubstantial goal.

Is implementing such a recommendation feasible? The committee estimated modernization costs—not including any structural redesign—at \$42,000 to \$62,000 per unit. At the midpoint of the committee's range, over \$50,000 would be needed to rebuild and maintain a high-rise unit for 15 years. The committee also said that rehabbed family high-rise units would "undoubtedly require a second modernization in approximately 15 years" that would be "excessively costly" (Advisory Council, 1988, pp. 20-21). Bearing in mind that these estimates are several years old, that the estimates are averages and many individual buildings would cost more, that no redesign is involved (e.g., "modernized" high-rises would still lack sufficient elevators), and that density and location issues remain untouched, isn't our course absolutely clear on financial grounds alone?

Dollars are not the only measure of sound policy, however. Lemann calls the urban underclass "the principal problem in American domestic life—a problem that poisons not just race relations but also our attitudes toward education, law enforcement,

and city life itself" (Lemann, 1991a, p. 35). A *Newsweek* story, "A Crisis of Shattered Dreams," sounds the same theme. Decades of racial progress, the magazine says, have given way to growing resentments on both sides of the color line that are savaging our politics, our schools, our communities, our lives. First among the Black resentments is: "Much of this [Black] underclass lives all but penned up in projects and deteriorating ghettos . . . without any realistic prospect of escaping" (*Newsweek*, 1991, p. 30).

We will not solve the ghetto or underclass problem by what we do with public housing high-rises. We need new labor market policies, improved schools, comprehensive children and family services, and more. But our public housing high-rises are a part of the problem that we have the opportunity to tackle directly and promptly. They stand as living monuments to a monumental public policy mistake. It cannot make economic and social sense to spend our money (purely because of the label we paste on it) to perpetuate that mistake. It cannot make moral sense to consign the children about whom Lemann and Kotlowitz write, and *their* children if they survive to have them, to living out their lives on a reservation like untouchables. It *does* make good sense to view the aging of our public housing high-rises as a chance to help thousands of families to new life opportunities *off* the reservation, and simultaneously to improve our prospects of restoring to livability neighborhoods that today constitute a blight not only on our cityscapes but on our consciences.

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