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# Tenant Management Groups In Chicago Public Housing 1940-1990: 50 Years Of Struggle And Progress

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TENANT MANAGEMENT GROUPS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC HOUSING 1940-1990:  
50 YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND PROGRESS

Megan H. Ruffin

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This thesis analyzes the work and effectiveness of formal and informal resident management groups in public housing in Chicago, IL during 1940 to 1990 as reported by local newspapers. The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) is infamous for managerial neglect of buildings and, more importantly, its residents. It is for this reason that CHA residents throughout the city regularly came together on their own merit in an attempt to effect change and better their circumstances. This thesis evaluates the process in which Chicago public housing residents politicized themselves in order to create better living situations for themselves and their families in project buildings. Public housing in Chicago cannot be understood as a policy without evaluating the role that residents have played in policymaking. It has been easy to overlook their accomplishments because much of the strides residents made in bettering their lives were often limited to their own buildings. Residents often came together to assign each other building maintenance tasks that should have been taken care of by the CHA, but usually were not. Eventually, many of these groups became politicized and were able to effect change from within the CHA, all the way up to the federal level. This is evidenced in resident's successful campaign to gain resident management status through various programs after 1987. This process is

evaluated in this thesis by drawing on resources such as previously recorded interviews compiled by editors, and most importantly in reports from *The Chicago Defender* and *The Chicago Tribune*. Both newspapers provided a wealth of publications which provided insight into the activities of Chicago public housing resident lives by reporting activities in project buildings, and also exposing the shortcomings of the CHA in which residents continuously fought against.

TENANT MANAGEMENT GROUPS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC HOUSING 1940-1990:  
50 YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND PROGRESS

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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MASTER OF ARTS

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TENANT MANAGEMENT GROUPS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC HOUSING 1940-1990:  
50 YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND PROGRESS

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M.H.R.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I.    DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN CHICAGO	14
II.   TENANT ORGANIZING	40
III.  GOVERNMENT SANCTIONED TENANT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS	68
IV.  CONCLUSION: PUBLIC HOUSING IN NEW YORK: WHERE CHICAGO WENT WRONG	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	89

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to better understand the important relationship between the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and its residents in an attempt to further the historical conversation surrounding the failure of Chicago public housing. Along with an evaluation of the general history of the development of public housing in Chicago, the role that tenants played in attempting to change and better their living conditions is as important to understanding the program's shortcomings and successes, as is the study of agency and legislative decision making. Residents came together forming tenant groups for a variety of reasons from the very onset of public housing in Chicago. Over time, many of these groups transitioned into formal organizations that actively worked with city hall as well as the CHA and federal government to create policy. Some of these groups were decidedly less formal small groups that met regularly to address the immediate needs of CHA buildings. Others formed with the intentions of seeking federal funding in order to be a political force and others came in the form of gangs, many of whose initial reason for coming together was to effect positive change in their communities. Other tenant groups were actually formed and funded by the CHA or the government in order to establish a working relationship between the residents and their CHA landlords in an effort to make both parties more accountable and satisfied. The CHA is infamous for managerial neglect of buildings and, more importantly, its residents. It is for this reason that CHA residents throughout the city regularly came together on

their own merit in an attempt to effect change and better their circumstances. This thesis evaluates the process in which Chicago public housing residents politicized themselves in order to create better living situations for their families in project buildings. To understand how this process occurred, the voices of public housing residents become as important as those of governmental authorities. Whereas scholars have examined the history of Chicago public housing, few have assessed its success and failure through the lens of how journalists communicated the actions of involved people. The news reported by the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender* (the mouthpiece of African Americans) differed in important ways. The *Tribune* most often provided informative insight into public housing issues where it concerned resident interactions with the CHA and other civil agencies. The *Defender* served as a voice for Chicago public housing residents informing the public of meetings, important elections, and activities of different resident management groups throughout the city which helped create greater cohesion for the public housing resident community. Published oral interviews validate the *Chicago Defender* perspective. Thus, this thesis offers a connection to how social identity can influence the delivery of information and consequently highlight a need for action to change policies and systems. In the case of Chicago's public housing directives, stories in the *Chicago Tribune* emphasize the role of the CHA and other government agencies, whereas the *Chicago Defender* argued for change in destructive policies through exposing the important work of the active resident community.

Historians have long debated why Chicago public housing has proved to be such a disastrous failure. Many have also speculated on how the lack of success of a promising policy might have been prevented or avoided altogether. The tumultuous relationship

between the CHA and the residents of its housing projects is acknowledged, but few have effectively analyzed how this relationship systematically broke down over time and the ways that public housing could have thrived had this disunion been fostered into a more positive exchange. Also understudied is the heavy influence that CHA residents had on policy and the great deal of organizing among themselves that took place as soon as tenants began moving into project developments. The existing historical conversation regarding the failings of Chicago public housing revolve, in large part, around the actions and agendas of legislators and other civic leaders, or in other words, individuals in positions of power, whether white or black. What has not been given enough consideration is the critical role residents played in the political saga that is Chicago public housing. While government officials and CHA directors were debating policy and enacting legislation, CHA residents were right alongside them, attempting to influence policy as best they could.

To understand why Chicago public housing failed so miserably, the role of tenants needs to be critically evaluated on political, economic, social, and cultural levels. Public housing tenants are often assigned blame for the deterioration of buildings for simply being a part of a population who is stereotyped as being prone to unemployment, lacking education, being violence, embracing welfare culture and political apathy. It is clear from prior study and existing individual testimony that undeniably, tenants are often victims of their circumstances, unable to effect change because of an overall lack of power. However, it is also evident that countless public housing residents across the United States came together to seek solutions to the daily problems they faced. While individual stories from tenants are a crucial part of grasping the roles tenants played in trying to better their situation, residents efforts also need to be considered from their

collective voice to fully appreciate not only the effects of public housing policy, but the efforts residents took upon themselves to better their own conditions.

Chicago public housing is not a topic devoid of extensive analysis and review. Multiple experts have investigated possible reasons why Chicago's history with public housing has been an unmistakable failure. The question of why public housing has been so overwhelmingly unsuccessful is not new to urban history, neither is the idea that oppressed class's voice is the one of that needs to be exposed to understand why. However, the voice of the oppressed has more commonly been studied from the voice of worker rather than specifically the black single mother. In other words, the study of the wildly successful Worker's Rights Movement throughout 20<sup>th</sup> Century, led by notable figures like Martin Luther King Jr. who helped incite the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, overshadowed and overlapped the lesser known, less well organized, and more sporadic tenant's rights movement happening in various parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

One of the pioneers in the study of public housing in Chicago was Devereux Bowley Jr. who published *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago* in 1978. His work was one of the first to contend that serious attention needed to be paid to the status of public housing in Chicago and to discuss it from a historically preemptive perspective, citing the possibilities for further problems with the program. In the book's first edition, Bowley evaluates housing in Chicago during the years 1895 – 1976, looking at how the poor obtained housing before public housing was available and what led to the eventual creation of the disastrous high rise design. In the second edition of the book, which

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<sup>1</sup> Philip A. Klinkler with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 242.

Bowley published in 2012, focus on the years after 1980, into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and how the demolition of the high rises and the transition to rent subsidized housing policies has occurred. Bowley's work is comprehensive and informative. It also, unfortunately, lacks much critical analysis of the role that tenant's played in public housing's transformation and how their voice effected policy.<sup>2</sup>

In 1983, dynamic historian Arnold Hirsch published, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. Hirsch contends that ghettos in Chicago were created and solidified with government policy and makes very clear that the behaviors and actions of white policymakers in Chicago are to blame, owing to the fact that they wielded the actual power over housing decisions. Besides disagreements over various lesser issues, whites regularly and effectively came together across social and economic lines on the issue of racial housing segregation. As the Second Great Migration created an unprecedented need for black housing in Chicago, overcrowding led blacks to seek housing in white communities. Hirsch also goes into great detail about the violence blacks endured at the hands of white community members who sought to keep African Americans from living in their neighborhoods. The government and media effectively covered up and whitewashed much of the violence that was occurring in the city over issues of housing segregation during these years in particular, 1940 – 1960, in an attempt to make it seem as though the legislation they were passing in terms of housing was being well-received by all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Devereux Bowley Jr., *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago*: Second Edition. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940 – 1960*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

He asserts that African American politicians and civic leaders made attempts to intervene on their own behalf to help their housing situation but found their efforts to be in vain because of deep seeded racism already in place in Chicago. More importantly, Hirsch concludes, black politicians were ineffectual in terms of housing policy because they were, more often than not, unable to come to a consensus on a course of action, and even more problematic, their agenda was rarely able to get past the agenda of the cohesive white “Democratic Machine”. Generally more self-interested in maintaining their seats in office, than pushing for controversial change in housing policy, black politicians did not do much to help the dire housing situation that existed in the city.<sup>4</sup> Although Hirsch gives a succinct analysis of the weak role black politicians played in bettering the housing conditions of African Americans in Chicago from the period of 1940-1960, his lack of analysis of the efforts of the greater black population to advance their condition reduces African Americans to passive victims who simply withstood their conditions and waited for white policy makers to help them. Evidence reveals that this was certainly not the case.

In a historically ethnographical look at Chicago public housing, sociologist Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh evaluates the Robert Taylor Homes with an intimate focus on the individuals living in the projects in his work, *American Project: The Rise and fall of a Modern Ghetto*<sup>5</sup>. Spending a great deal of time in the housing complex with residents, Venkatesh seeks to understand the failings of public housing from the tenant’s point of view. Asserting that tenants came together very early on in project history, first to

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<sup>4</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and fall of a Modern Ghetto*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

address issues surrounding juvenile delinquency, he discusses the ways residents continued to convene over time to hold the CHA accountable for policing their dangerous neighborhoods and for maintaining their deteriorating buildings. Venkatesh acknowledges that while many of these resident groups worked, or at least attempted to work, with the CHA, by the 1980's many had become what we recognize today as street gangs that heavily influenced life in Robert Taylor Homes. His work is a worthwhile step towards understanding the importance and influence of tenant groups in public housing history but it leaves much to be discovered as it focuses narrowly on Robert Taylor Homes.

Rhonda Y. Williams provides the most in-depth look at tenant lives organizing in public housing in her work, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggle against Urban Inequality*<sup>6</sup>. Williams' monograph focuses more narrowly on gender, examining the role black women played in defining policy regarding public housing in Baltimore, Maryland. However, her input is important because it is reminiscent of the role of women in tenant organizing in project housing throughout the U.S. She contends that the government sponsorship of housing for poor people, a large percentage of whom were women, fostered a political domestic life in which tenants became inherently politically savvy. Although black women were marginalized and often provided no other choice but to live in substandard government housing, the conditions in which they survived provided them a political platform and a sense of empowerment. Williams does not seem to imply that black women's efforts at improving their housing conditions were

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<sup>6</sup> Rhonda Y Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggle against Urban Inequality*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

ever wildly successful, but she does infer that their experience in effectively organizing was invaluable to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. Conducting over fifty interviews and tapping into primary sources that gives black single mothers living in public housing the credit they deserve for their actions against injustice in housing, Williams' logic and arguments are sound and invariably apply to life in Chicago public housing. Williams' work is necessarily important because she is one of the first historians to shed light on the fact that many tenant groups were formed and organized by woman and mothers who lived in project housing. This trend was apparent across cities throughout the United States.

Like Rhonda Y. Williams, historian Annelise Orleck seeks to fight back against the "welfare queen" stigma of black single mothers in her work, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought their Own War on Poverty*.<sup>7</sup> With Ruby Duncan, "cotton picker, turned hotel maid and mother of seven", as the central figure of her study, Orleck evaluates the process in which southern black women began leaving heavy field labor jobs in the Mississippi Delta in the 1940's and traveled to Las Vegas in search of more promising work in the American West.<sup>8</sup> Facing discrimination in jobs, housing, education, and healthcare, black single mothers came together, with Duncan at the helm, to form Operation Life. Operation Life was successful in helping single mothers in Las Vegas get access to healthcare, food, and decent housing and their success resounded

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<sup>7</sup>Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Single Mothers Fought their Own War on Poverty*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*, 2.

throughout the United States and served as an example for other poor people's campaigns.<sup>9</sup>

In his work, *When Public Housing was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago* (2005), historian J.S. Fuerst seeks to understand Chicago public housing's transformation from a promising New Deal inspired social welfare program, to its early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Plan for Transformation designed to tear down high rise buildings and implement a voucher program.<sup>10</sup> Fuerst includes dozens of interviews with individuals involved with Chicago public housing from CHA board members and staff to residents and maintenance workers. His abundance of personal stories from public housing residents brings to light the importance of the lives of the human beings most effected by decisions made by high level management, and gives a voice to highly controversial strategies executed by the CHA and city government and the way tenants daily lives were affected.<sup>11</sup>

Fuerst and several of his subjects speak on the common theme of first CHA director, Elizabeth Wood, and her style of governance. Many discuss the early successes of public housing in Chicago, citing the heavy emphasis Wood put on strong relationships between the CHA and tenants as an important reason for initial positive feedback on the program. Most seem to agree that never again has the CHA had a director who could be considered a champion for tenant's rights. Fuerst, as well as several others interviewed, mention resident management programs. Although many

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<sup>9</sup> Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> J.S. Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 31.

were inspired by the government's willingness to concede power to residents, others felt that the CHA was simply handing off responsibilities that they could not handle to a group of people who were even more ill-equipped.<sup>12</sup> Fuerst alludes to the idea that a return to Wood's paternalistic style of oversight could be the solution to Chicago public housing's problems however, the climate of public housing is much different than it was when Wood was director. Most residents have been resistant to recent efforts by the CHA to increase surveillance and oversight.

D. Bradford Hunt, regarded as one of Chicago public housing history's foremost experts, places the blame on mismanagement at both the federal and local levels, poor building construction and management, and flawed admissions policies that led to serious problems with juvenile delinquency in his comprehensive work, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing*. He alleges that the first projects were only viable for a period of about twenty years for various reasons. Hunt makes the case, as most historians do, that early public housing residents moved in with a feeling of hope and saw their new apartments as "paradise" compared to the slums where they previously resided. But as early as the 1950's, families were being removed from housing projects for earning too much money. The overall decline in income along with gross mismanagement at the hands of the CHA, led to the decline and rampant deterioration of housing projects across the city of Chicago.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Bradford D. Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 5.

Hunt praises first CHA director Elizabeth Wood's, director from 1937 – 1954, hands-on style of management and cites her governing strategies as one of the reasons that public housing was initially successful in Chicago. Wood emphasized a positive and truly interactive working relationship between the CHA and its tenants, and evidence shows that although she imposed what some viewed as strict regulations and guidelines for project living, most residents were happy to comply and appreciated the attention given to their circumstances. Wood advocated for programs intended to educate low-income residents on how to better maintain their apartments and emphasized the importance of community rather than removing tenants who were causing problems and not taking care of their units. These policies proved unpopular amongst CHA leadership and led to her eventual firing and replacement with a series of directors who reached a budget mandate by cutting costs and creating maximum occupancy with little consideration for CHA-tenant relations. Hunt addresses the mismanagement of federal funds by the CHA and attributes this to the board of directors being unable to ever come to effective consensus on housing policy, on top of an element of corruption for which Chicago government agencies hold a reputation. Poorly constructed and dangerous high rise buildings continued to deteriorate and the CHA carried on neglecting tenant needs throughout the 1960's and 1970's. By the 1980's, this pattern created an environment that lent itself to gang activity, crime, and drug use in public housing projects throughout the city.

Hunt makes an important argument for continual problems in the buildings themselves. He contends that the high-rise buildings created a variety of problems in their very layout. They were built for larger families and the eligibility requirements

created a situation where children greatly outnumbered adults, this lack of supervision leading to a rise in juvenile delinquency. He ultimately makes the case that the design also made it very difficult to police the buildings, making them even more conducive to crime. High-rise building's aesthetics were unwelcoming and propagated an atmosphere of poverty where the residents perpetuated that mind-set, being constantly aware and reminded of the fact that they were living in government projects. Hunt also makes a compelling case for the deeply instilled racism in the city of Chicago during the early and mid-nineteenth century that led to the downfall of public housing. Racism was institutionalized at all levels which had serious implications for public housing. Projects were purposely built almost solely in black neighborhoods, further enabling the severe segregation that already existed and caused so much racial tension in the city. Hunt makes note of the different attempts at resident management made on behalf of the CHA. Residents of LeClaire Courts came together in the early 1980s and fought valiantly to get the chance to work with the CHA, via HUD funding, as primary managers of their housing complex. LeClaire Courts residents maintained management status from 1989 to 1995 when it was declared that they had become "ineffective and inefficient".<sup>14</sup> Without providing an overwhelming wealth of examples, Hunt describes other efforts on behalf of Chicago tenants to organize on their own behalf and their general lack of long-term successes. He attributes their ineffectiveness to underfunding and unwillingness to help and mentor resident managers, on the part of the CHA and acknowledges that, had the

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<sup>14</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 264.

CHA and HUD provided more support to tenant organizations, they very well might have prospered.

The topic public housing in America is worthy of continued study. There are still poor Americans in dire need of affordable, decent housing and the promise to provide it has yet to be successfully fulfilled by the United States government. Countless historians, sociologists, and journalists have explored the topic from various perspectives, but there is still more to consider. Considering the critical relationship between the CHA and its tenants could potentially lead to a better understanding of public housing's breakdown in Chicago, and further better interactions between the two parties in the future.

CHAPTER I  
DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN CHICAGO

Public housing in Chicago has a complicated and emotional history that originates in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the Great Migration when thousands of poor blacks left the South between 1910 – 1915 in search of work in Chicago’s steel factories, meat packing plants, and binderies.<sup>15</sup> The city’s housing projects are infamous for their rapid construction and arguably quicker deterioration. Unsanitary living conditions, mismanagement at the hands of the Chicago Housing Authority as well as the federal government, increasing poverty due to rising unemployment rates, and overcrowding, all emerged as serious problems facing public housing tenants and the CHA as early as the 1950’s. Tenants developed a reputation of being poor, unemployed, uneducated, and gang affiliated. A closer look at the history of Chicago public housing reveals the many tenants and tenant organizations that were heavily involved in the making of public housing policy. Resident roles do not get enough credit and are overshadowed by the major decision making entities like the CHA, the federal government, Mayor Richard J. Daley who served as mayor of Chicago from 1955 - 1976. The important role that

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<sup>15</sup> Horace R. Cayton and St. Claire Drake, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 58.

residents played in Chicago public housing's history cannot be understood without a comprehensive look at the history of public housing in general.

The need for public housing in Chicago was great in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as the Second Great Migration of the 1940's and after brought hundreds of thousands of southern blacks looking for work in northern cities. Large metropolises like New York, Detroit, and Chicago were booming with jobs to support the war effort. Beginning with the establishment of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) in 1937, supported by the Federal Housing Authority, the city was able to construct dozens of high and low-rise apartment buildings throughout the city, although most were concentrated on the South and West Sides. All public housing developments constructed in Chicago have been built under the auspices of the CHA. Bowley explains that the CHA, "is a municipal not-for-profit corporation" and that, "It has a dual purpose (1) to provide safe, decent, sanitary housing to poor families and individuals who live in substandard dwellings and cannot get adequate housing in the private housing market, and (2) to remove slums and blighted areas."<sup>16</sup> Finding land to build public housing proved to be problematic early in the process and it quickly became apparent that the easiest solution for legislators was to clear out existing slums where the poor already lived, and build housing on those locations.

Race was a key factor in determining where complexes would be built and who would be eligible to live in them. The Ida B. Wells Homes, located in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago's South Side and constructed in 1939, represented the first predominately black public housing complex in the city due to the neighborhood

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<sup>16</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 16-17.

composition rule. The neighborhood composition rule reinforced racial segregation by ensuring that the construction of any public housing would not change the existing racial makeup of the neighborhood for example, building black housing complexes in already established black neighborhoods, a policy supported by the CHA and federal government at the time.<sup>17</sup> There had been attempts at integration prior to government public housing, which were usually failures, by and large. Whites were unwilling to live in buildings with a large black population and furthermore, segregationists did not support this kind of integration and put pressure on the city to stop it from happening in the form of protests and even riots. Harold Ickes, Secretary of Interior to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, oversaw much of the construction of public housing at the federal level. Ickes allowed for the “neighborhood composition rule” as a way to appease anyone who feared that the government was forcing integration on the American public and to uphold the theory of “separate but equal” when it came to housing and race. However, as the first public housing complexes were being built, the CHA’s director at its inception, Elizabeth Wood, pushed for some integration, proving to be a very progressive policy for her time, as most all public housing projects in other cities were rigorously segregated. In an attempt to integrate, as well as to allow tenants to have a voice, Wood requested that CHA applicants choose the apartments in which they would live. Responding to the 1919 Chicago race riot, Wood allowed for applicants of different races to choose the apartments in which they preferred to live, finding that the races segregated themselves which made for minimum racial tension.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 55.

Wood is known for being a progressive leader with visions of integration and a strong advocate of good relations between the CHA and its tenants. She also holds a great legacy for being an advocate for the residents of the housing units and for being incorruptible in a city where corruption thrived as a means for progress. She was noted for implementing strict rules for CHA residents to maintain building safety and up-keep. In the beginning, there were various criticisms of the CHA being overly paternalistic, but generally, residents of the housing projects felt as though the rules and regulations were for the best, and valued the fact that the city invested so much attention to the well-being of their communities. Wood continually advocated for racial integration within public housing, but was often met with adversity by most others involved in the agency who felt integration was the source of racially charged violence. She was eventually pushed out of her role as CHA director because her agenda consistently clashed with that of city hall's. Her exit from the CHA caused a great deal of protest from the black community, who viewed her as one of their great supporters.<sup>19</sup>

With the allotment of federal funds for the building of housing projects, the CHA set out to find building sites throughout the city where the developments could be constructed. A slew of problems resulting in political setbacks arose concerning this venture. The city was unwilling to allow the CHA to build projects on land that was undeveloped and urged slum clearance and building in those areas instead. Finding white neighborhoods to build projects in was extremely difficult, as in the case of the Francis Cabrini Homes on the Near North Side. In the early 1940's, this neighborhood was predominantly Italian-American when the CHA proposed the building of the Francis

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<sup>19</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 3-5.

Cabrini Homes on the site. There was a great deal of resistance on the part of the residents of the neighborhood to the building of the projects, as well as interest in the land from other government departments, such as the highway department. By the time construction got underway in 1941, the CHA had only a small portion of the land on which they had originally proposed to build. Because of this instance, it was made clear that slum clearance in white neighborhoods was an extremely difficult and lengthy task and that doing so in black neighborhoods in the form of slum clearance proved to be much easier.<sup>20</sup> The difficulties that arose in attempting to acquire land on which to build in more desirable white neighborhoods prompted the CHA to solely seek more easily obtainable land in black neighborhoods where land was less developed. Black homeowners in these areas attempted to defend their land from this kind of sweeping slum clearance, however they usually lacked the funds or political power to stop the building projects.<sup>21</sup>

This building pattern is what helped sustain the already existing “Black Belt” in Chicago. Whites had the resources and political power to defend their neighborhoods against the building of public housing developments, and blacks simply did not have the same influence. Because of the location of housing projects, it would solidify the racial segregation of the buildings and ensure that more blacks were living in public housing than any other race. The implications of race concerning the building of public housing had been clearly defined in the city by this time. During wartime, when projects were built in white neighborhoods to temporarily house black war workers and veterans, there

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<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 42-43.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 43.

were massive protests staged and initiated by the white residents of those neighborhoods. The biggest obstacle that the CHA and the city of Chicago routinely faced was figuring out how to compromise on where exactly public housing projects would be built, while appeasing all involved parties and also residents of the neighborhoods in which they were being built. This proved to be no easy task.

Proposals to build housing projects in any area with a large concentration of whites, or land that was undeveloped, was met with mighty, often violent resistance from white residents of those areas. The CHA's 1946 policy of allowing returning black war veterans to move into public housing buildings in certain white communities prompted violent resistance in areas like Trumbull Park Homes, Airport Homes, and Fernwood Park Homes, all CHA projects.<sup>22</sup> In 1951, the National Guard had to be summoned to the city after over a span of several nights a mob of nearly five thousand whites in the Cicero area ransacked and burned an apartment building with all black residents.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of the controversy surrounding the construction of public housing developments, the first public housing residents of the 1940's and 1950's moved in with a feeling of hope. The belief that the government had finally stepped in to help the city's poor and provide them with clean and sanitary housing was alive and well, and most tenants were thrilled with their apartments. Alex Kotlowitz captured the excitement of a woman who moved into Henry Horner Homes, a West Side housing project, with her

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Biles, *Richard J. Daley: Politics, Race and the Governing of Chicago* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 10.

Trumbull and Fernwood Parks homes are both located on the far South Side, and Airport Homes were located on the Southwest Side of the city.

<sup>23</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 53.

children for the first time, “They were struck by the apartment’s immensity; the hallway seemed to go on forever, one room following another and another and another. What’s more, the freshly painted walls shone a glistening white; even the brown linoleum floors had a luster to them. The youngest children found the coziness of the door-less closets inviting.<sup>24</sup>” Most CHA residents felt this way about the projects but these feelings of hope and excitement were soon replaced with feelings of despair as the poorly constructed buildings began to deteriorate not long after residents moved in. The 1940 census revealed that over 55,000 units of Chicago housing projects housed more than the recommended amount of people and that well over 200,000 either lacked a working bathroom or needed extensive repairs.<sup>25</sup>

The CHA was wrought with conflict within management, and was quickly exposed as a young agency managed by individuals with staunchly opposing views on how public housing ought to be managed. These conflicts within the CHA led to gross mismanagement at the ground level, resulting in the tenants being the group suffering the most. CHA staff was unable to handle the amount of complaints coming through their offices and leadership had a very difficult time collaborating with city government. This led to a rapid decline in housing conditions and problems emerged with public housing that no one predicted. Insect and rat infestations, broken appliances and elevators, cracked ceilings and walls, inferior plumbing and electrical systems were among the problems that emerged early on.

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<sup>24</sup> Alex Kotlowitz, *There are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc, 1991), 23.

<sup>25</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 30.

The Federal Housing Act of 1937, which provided the majority of funds to the CHA, was the first major attempt on the part of the federal government to address the housing crisis in America. There was a shortage of sanitary housing, an abundance of sordid slums, and a severe need for government intervention in most major cities in the United States. The idea that the federal government would work with the local government to construct public housing, and allot funds for the buildings in order to help the city's poor and despondent, was a noble and necessary one. Before the Second World War, four public housing complexes were built in Chicago. After the war, during the 1950's and 1960's, the majority of public housing in Chicago was built. At the onset, public housing was developed specifically to meet the needs of the city's poor, but the CHA had to temporarily utilize their housing complexes to accommodate war workers and veterans during and after WWII. This period of time was the most integrated public housing complexes in Chicago ever were.

The Second Great Migration occurred beginning in 1941 with the onset of World War II, bringing black workers from the South to Northern industrial cities in search of work, which was plentiful. This provided for a rapid influx of African Americans in the city of Chicago in the 1940's and 1950's and also put great strain on housing availability. Overcrowding became a serious issue. Racial tension in public housing was at its highest shortly after World War II, when the CHA and the city agreed to allow black war veterans to live in complexes that were situated in white communities, temporarily abandoning the "neighborhood composition rule". This rule stated that, "occupants of completed projects should conform to the 'prevailing composition of the surrounding

neighborhood' that existed before its redevelopment."<sup>26</sup> Robert Taylor, director of the CHA at the time, used the issue of housing black war workers and veterans as an opportunity to exploit the system and construct more housing projects where blacks could reside. Taylor had success in the building of Altgeld Gardens in 1943, on the Far South Side, which was further from the "black belt" than most projects that were being constructed. Taylor advocated for the building of several temporary housing projects during wartime to cater to black war workers and veterans. He was routinely met with resistance by not only the city government and the white community, but the black community as well, which did not want projects being built in their more well-off neighborhoods for fear of devaluation of property. Besides Altgeld Gardens, Taylor saw little more success in his ventures to build temporary housing for black war workers and veterans.

The history construction of public housing in Chicago is wrought with violence. As the CHA scouted locations for building sites and legislators and white residents pushed back, violent protest emerged as a means for demonstration. Historian Arnold Hirsch discusses the time period of the 1940's and 1950's in Chicago, describing it as a time of "hidden violence"<sup>27</sup> This period was previously believed to be a time of relative racial peace in Chicago and other large cities due to a decline in black militancy, comparative to the decades preceding and following (the 1930's and the 1960's), but Hirsch brilliantly dispels this view, demonstrating the rise in violent crimes committed against blacks, regularly over the issue of housing. As overcrowding in the Black Belt

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<sup>26</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 40.

continued to increase, black residents had no choice but to seek housing in other areas of the city in which they had not traditionally been able to live. This led to a spike in violence as blacks infiltrated white neighborhoods with the assistance of the CHA as they proceeded to build public housing facilities in areas like the far South Side's Trumbull Park Homes, where white residents protested violently against black "intruders".<sup>28</sup> This was the sentiment in communities all over the city of Chicago in the early 1940's. The killing of a black teenager by a Chicago policeman in the spring of 1943 and the grand jury's refusal to indict the officer, along with the eruption of the deadly Detroit race riot that same spring, ushered in an era of violence in Chicago. Public housing played a highly controversial and central role in that violence.<sup>29</sup>

Angela Willuweit, a white resident of Cabrini Green in the 1940's discusses the fact the when her and her husband first lived in the initially integrated projects, a sense of community existed and she felt very safe. Willuweit explains that once the racial quota that ensured a racially mixed community in Cabrini was lifted in early the 1950's, the projects became increasingly dangerous.<sup>30</sup> She recalled, "My husband worked nights, and he came home around two in the morning. He was attacked a couple of times. It started getting rougher and rougher in the surrounding area. Every year I felt worse and worse, you know. I wanted to move out but we had three boys and the housing was scarce."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 120 – 121.

<sup>31</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 121.

Besides the protests coming from white residents of prospective building areas, the Chicago Housing Authority faced a bureaucratic block in furthering their building plans. In 1949 Congress passed the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Housing Act, providing a significant amount of funds to be spent on developing public housing complexes nationally, including Chicago. The CHA initially proposed a plan that would build 40,000 units over several different sites throughout the city. The city, as well as private groups that had power and influence over city hall, rejected the proposal and offered to build about 13,000 units on lands that were slum-cleared instead of vacant. Historian Roger Biles explains, the CHA accepted the proposal out of fear that the “perpetual stalemate” would halt the project. When federal approval was given in November 1951, the project reformers learned how resistance could seriously jeopardize a “timely amelioration of the housing crisis”.<sup>32</sup> The CHA, and ultimately the city, now faced the problem of having roughly 13,000 units being built where the need for housing was far greater than that number. The building plans provided that slums be cleared rather than new land developed, which also did nothing to address the issue of segregation. Rather, it helped to reinforce segregation because the projects were being built in predominantly black neighborhoods.

The CHA has always been the key figure in the development of all public housing in Chicago, but the role of Chicago’s city hall plays a very significant role as well. Some Chicago politicians were better than others at working with the CHA utilizing federal funds to see that housing projects were actually built. Arguably, Mayor RJD, 1955-76 had the most influence and oversaw the most progress in the development of housing

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<sup>32</sup> Biles, *Richard J. Daley*, 15.

projects in the city. Thousands of units were built between 1949 and 1962, mostly in black neighborhoods, with the consent and guidance of Mayor Daley and the CHA's compliance. Politics has played a very important role in the construction of public housing in Chicago. Although some controversy surrounds the locations in which Mayor Daley consented on which public housing was built, it was during his time in office that the majority of public housing was built. Prior to the Daley regime, Mayor Martin Kennelly, in office from 1947-1955, was "disinclined to intrude in city council affairs", and "rhetorically supported the attempts of alderman to exclude public housing from their wards."<sup>33</sup> This resulted in a minimal amount of public housing developments being constructed during Kennelly's time in office. Kennelly even spoke out against a bill that would have prevented discrimination in public housing at the time.<sup>34</sup>

Although a great deal of public housing construction occurred under Daley, many argue that Daley purposefully worked to sustain Chicago's "Black Belt" with his public housing plans because it benefited him politically. Biles states, "For Daley, the use of public housing to concentrate the black population in ghettos made sense for several reasons; it pleased the liberals, who saw the large-scale construction of public housing as a commitment to sheltering the poor; it maintained segregation, which pleased his white constituency in the neighborhoods threatened by racial change; and it preserved the means by which black votes could be controlled."<sup>35</sup> Daley tried his best to appease both sides and ended up perpetuating the racial status quo, rather than addressing the mounting racial problems that had begun to surface. By the end of Daley's term in office, drugs

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<sup>33</sup> Biles, *Richard J. Daley*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Biles, *Richard J. Daley*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Biles, *Richard J. Daley*, 91.

and gang violence had started to emerge as major problems within public housing projects, along with the obvious racial tensions that had always existed.

Understandably, many Chicagoans felt that Daley did not properly address the public housing issues; rather he pacified each side as best he could to provide a temporary solution to help ensure his terms in office, without providing any real long-term solutions. Projects were built in Bridgeport, where Daley was born and raised, and numerous accusations arose claiming that the CHA discouraged blacks from living in these homes, and that Daley wanted to keep the Bridgeport Homes white, keeping blacks concentrated in the “Black Belt”. Articles in the *Chicago Defender*, the foremost black daily newspaper at the time, regularly contended that Mayor Daley and the CHA actively worked together to maintain the racial status quo of the neighborhoods. In an article published by the *Defender* on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1964, George Weber, director of rentals for the CHA at the time, stated “We inform all applicants of vacancies and they make their own selections. Most Negroes just seem to choose certain Southside areas in preference to projects at Division or other sites.”<sup>36</sup> Neither the CHA nor Mayor Daley willingly admitted to purposefully maintaining segregation within public housing, although it was common knowledge that this was the general practice, if for no other reason than to maintain peace among blacks and whites during a time when racial tension was high. Among blacks in Chicago, it seems to have been the general consensus that Mayor Daley was not willing to work for the Civil Rights cause and that the issue of public housing

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<sup>36</sup> “CHA Homes in Daley’s Backyard Still Jim Crow: Live in Daley’s Neighborhood? Just try it”. The *Chicago Defender*. 1964. Accessed 23 March 2015.  
<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpchicagodefender/docview/494053976/13AE7599A6D3FB1A520/1?accountid=11578>

was no exception. Any attempts at integration that the CHA pursued during his time in office, Mayor Daley ultimately put to rest.

Mayor Daley's policies of discouraging racial integration were not new to public housing in Chicago. Ultimately, he sought to avoid violence caused by racial tension in which he believed racial integration was at the heart of. It was custom, though, that the CHA and city hall had different agendas on the matter of race. The CHA made the decision to support open occupancy in 1953 after the major racial conflict in the Cicero neighborhood, yet city hall refused to allow the implementation of these policies because of their controversial nature. A disturbing pattern emerged of blacks moving into public housing complexes and whites subsequently moving out making housing projects less and less integrated as time went on, until they became almost one hundred per cent populated by African Americans around the early to mid-1960's. Biles explains that, Daley's administration facilitated this configuration by "fully exploiting federal resources", citing that, "in 1955 when approximately two-thirds of the people residing in CHA projects were black, nonwhites constituted 73 percent of the families moving into public housing units. By 1959 the proportion of blacks in CHA projects had risen to 85 percent."<sup>37</sup> Rather than pushing for building projects on undeveloped land, Daley allowed for and encouraged slum clearance as a means for rapid construction.

As important as location of projects is to public housing history, arguably so is building design. Historians generally agree that the architectural design of most of the public housing in Chicago plays a major part in what led to its downfall. The high-rise design, the CHA's go-to choice for public housing construction after 1950, has been the

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<sup>37</sup> Biles, *Richard J. Daley*, 89.

subject of a great deal of criticism. Historian Devereux Bowley devotes an entire chapter of his work to this issue because of its controversial nature. He acknowledges that the high-rise design provided for an increase in the amount of available housing and at the same time brought about some of the worst sociological issues for which Chicago public housing is known. Some of these issues include juvenile delinquency due to lack of supervision, deterioration, and crime due to difficulties policing the buildings.<sup>38</sup> Hunt also makes note of the dangerous trend of children far outnumbering adults in high-rises buildings and the problems that arose. Because high-rise units often had four or five bedrooms, large families were generally among the majority population. Hunt argues that, “When coupled with high-rise building forms, public housing’s youth-adult demographics undermined the collective efficacy of adults, caused extensive social disorder, overwhelmed community partners, and eventually sent the buildings themselves into a death spiral form which the CHA never recovered.”<sup>39</sup> However, high-rises were chosen as the blueprint for public housing because they were cheap to build, and allowed for a massive amount of units in buildings that did not take up space by having to spread out. As is evidenced, finding building locations proved to be difficult, and building up was a logical solution. There is a great deal of evidence to support that fact that before, during, and after the building of the high-rise structures, the CHA was well aware of the negative impacts for individuals and families who lived in these structures, but their attempts at trying to push for row-housing as an alternative, were stifled by the federal government who were ultimately funding the building of the projects. Even Mayor Daley

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<sup>38</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 98-99.

<sup>39</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 147.

lobbied in Washington DC against building so many high-rise public housing in Chicago, knowing the kinds of dangers involved, such as juvenile delinquency, and difficulty maintaining building upkeep. Compromises had to be made that proved to be detrimental.<sup>40</sup> For example, in order to cut costs, in the Robert Taylor Homes, in one building there were two elevators to accommodate almost one thousand residents.<sup>41</sup> Monsignor John Egan, director of Chicago archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs in the 1950's, reflected in 1985 on the negative of the Cabrini-Green project:

When Cabrini Extension was being planned in the 1950's, it seemed like a good idea. The people who planned it were high-minded people who wanted to put up decent housing, and, for a number of reasons, high-rises seemed to be the way to go. The problem is, we didn't learn from our mistakes. We should have stopped the massive high-rise developments as soon as we saw what was going wrong in Cabrini. But we didn't. We kept doing it over and over again. The city has paid a price for that, and it will continue to pay a price for all the social, psychological, familial and human problems that come with packing a very large number of very poor people into one small space.<sup>42</sup>

CHA and city planners were aware of the issues that might come with the high-rise developments, but for lack of a better plan, or option, they proceeded to build these kinds of projects all throughout the city. The CHA pushed on building high-rise apartments until the federal government stopped funding the construction of this style of building in

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<sup>40</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 140.

<sup>42</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 142.

1968. Bowley reports, “During the period from 1957 to 1968, the CHA completed 15,591 family units, of which all but 696 were in high-rise buildings.”<sup>43</sup>

Safety and sanitation issues with high-rise buildings themselves, coupled with high racial tensions, the culture of the low-income individuals living in the projects, and an increased apathy on behalf of the city and the CHA, bred an environment of violence, drug prevalence, juvenile delinquency, and gang activity, that quickly deteriorated the public housing communities that were meant to provide families with a sense of hope and new beginnings. The sense of community that existed in the early days of public housing disappeared quickly. Starting with the hostility surrounding the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s and carrying over into the hasty introduction of drugs into project communities in the 1980’s, public housing complexes earned their reputation as dangerous places. Names like Robert Taylor and Cabrini Green became synonymous with crime and violence. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1986, the *Chicago Tribune* printed an article about a 22-year old Cabrini Green resident, who was murdered during a dispute over drugs: “Police said Wallace went to the Greenview Avenue location reportedly to purchase drugs but became involved in an argument with the seller. Wallace then drove back to Cabrini Green where he enlisted the aid of up to four other men. They returned to the neighborhood where gunshots were fired and Wallace was killed, police said.”<sup>44</sup> Into the 1970’s and 1980’s the crime, drug, gang, and violence situation in public housing units in Chicago only worsened. This particular article was only a paragraph long, which

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<sup>43</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> “Cabrini Resident Killed Over Drugs” *Chicago Tribune*. 1986. Accessed 23 March 2015. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/176396340/13AD409702563268027/7?accountid=11578>

helps demonstrate the lack of sensitivity and the commonplace of these occurrences by the 1980's on the part of mainstream media publications like the *Chicago Tribune*. Another article in the *Chicago Tribune* discusses how gang violence and crime had become a part of daily life for most people living in the Robert Taylor Homes. "When asked to write compositions about their daily lives, children attending the nearby Beethoven Elementary School write almost exclusively about gangs and drugs. Of eighteen 6<sup>th</sup> graders asked to write spur of the moment accounts of their lives Friday, sixteen students mentioned crime."<sup>45</sup> Residents of public housing began to learn how to live and survive in this type of environment at an early age.

An incident that took place in May of 1988 highlighted the stark differences between the lives of children living in the Chicago suburbs and the Chicago public housing projects. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, a deranged woman went into an elementary school in the affluent neighborhood of Winnetka, IL and shot and killed several students. Two days later on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, nine-year old Alonzo Campbell was walking outside his building in Henry Horner Homes where he was shot and killed by a bullet intended for someone else. The community of Winnetka mobilized to help the neighborhood school cope with the tragedy. The students were provided counseling, and the governor rallied for more security in the school. But at Henry Horner, there were no counselors for the children, and no extra security was called for; the murder was part of life as usual.<sup>46</sup> Many Henry Horner residents believed that only reason Alonzo Campbell's murder received press

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<sup>45</sup> Casuso, Jorge and Blau, Robert. "Fear Lives in CHA's Robert Taylor Homes" *Chicago Tribune*. 1989. Accessed 30 March 2015.  
<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/1016042912/13AD4151B7925393021/2?accountid=11578>

<sup>46</sup> Kotlowitz, *There are no Children*, 105.

coverage was because it exposed the stark differences between how the Chicago area and press treated the two communities.<sup>47</sup>

Alex Kotlowitz's 1991 journalistic ethnography, *There Are No Children Here*, provided one of the first detailed looks into what daily life in Chicago public housing was really like for its residents. Kotlowitz spent two years starting in 1985, tracking the lives of two young brothers, Lafayette and Pharaoh Rivers, and their family who were residents of Chicago's Henry Horner Homes. This compelling book not only helped to shed light on what was going on in public housing at the time, but provided an in-depth personal story that newspaper articles and statistics did not offer. The Rivers boys, friends with the murdered Alonzo Campbell, had lived their whole lives in public housing, along with their mother who had also spent the majority of her life in public housing. Both boys were intelligent and good-hearted, with the desire to do well in school and make their mother proud, but often fell victim to their circumstances and were sucked into the project lifestyle, despite trying to avoid it as best they knew how. They regularly saw their friends and family members murdered and each boy attended numerous funerals before the age of thirteen. Their drug addicted and alcoholic father moved in and out of their home throughout their childhoods. Their older brother, whom they looked up to as a father figure, ended up in prison for a term of years for armed robbery. Their mother, LaJoe, the most constant figure in their lives, did her best to care for them on the welfare check that she received, subsidizing it with money she earned gambling. Their single family apartment often housed nearly triple its suggested occupancy due to family members who needed places to stay temporarily at different

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<sup>47</sup> Kotlowitz, *There are no Children*, 105.

times. The boys took all of these situations in stride and adapted to these strange scenarios, almost too easily.

For the rest of their lives, Lafayette and Pharoah dealt with the ramifications of growing up in this type of environment; each struggled to finish high school and each man endured incarceration during their adult lives. The *Chicago Tribune*, reported in 2011 that both men were parolees, Pharoah for a drug-related conviction, and Lafayette on separate drug, drunken-driving, and handgun possession charges. Lafayette lived on the South Side and worked in a laundry, while Pharoah regularly joined Kotlowitz for speaking engagements regarding the book. Kotlowitz and Pharoah remained close, Pharoah even being a part of the author's 1993 wedding.<sup>48</sup> Neither of the boys could fully escape the lifestyle of the projects, despite the exposure to the world outside of public housing to which Kotlowitz was able to expose them. Both boys were able to travel the country with Kotlowitz to help promote the book and see parts of the United States they may not have if they would not have been involved in the project, but their lives remained mostly unchanged from those experiences. Many historians agree that Kotlowitz's book was groundbreaking in beginning efforts to fix the problems that were abundant in Chicago's public housing communities, however, nothing about the Rivers boy's story is unique for children who grew up in Chicago public housing. The question is, how did public housing in Chicago go from being communities filled with hope for the

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<sup>48</sup> Daniels, Serena Maria. "Plight of Urban Poor Still Moves Author: Oak Park Writer Pushes Campaign Against Violence – 20 Years After 'There Are No Children Here'". *Chicago Tribune*. 2011. Accessed 19 March 2015. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-08-14/news/ct-met-interrupters-0814-20110814\\_1\\_public-housing-chicago-housing-authority-town-houses](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-08-14/news/ct-met-interrupters-0814-20110814_1_public-housing-chicago-housing-authority-town-houses)

future, to communities that the residents themselves feared for their lives in on a daily basis?

Racial discrimination led to most of the segregation and subsequent deterioration in public housing. Not only was the public housing situation in Chicago's "Black Belt" harrowing, but barriers to obtaining housing outside that area, like restrictive covenants (legal contracts that allowed landlords refuse to rent or sell to blacks), existed allowing houses to be sold to African Americans in many neighborhoods. J.S. Fuerst provides insight into the deterioration of public housing by providing first-hand accounts of people who lived in public housing in the early days and then continued to live there throughout their life, rather than leaving. Many of these people felt that managerial abandonment was a primary of the reason for the decline of public housing.<sup>49</sup> The CHA under Elizabeth Wood called for a great deal of responsibility on behalf of the residents to maintain their apartments and their buildings. As the screening process for families living in public housing became less strenuous and the CHA provided increasingly less oversight for the upkeep of buildings, rapid deterioration occurred.

Most of the residents who have lived in public housing from its onset throughout their old age agree that with more intervention on behalf of the CHA, the projects could possibly be transformed back to the state they were when they were first constructed. Hattie Calvin, a resident of Cabrini Green since childhood, noted, "To bring Cabrini back to what it was, you would have to clear out about a fourth of the families who live here. If the CHA would come in and do what they were supposed to do and move the undesirables out, the project would be in a condition where they wouldn't have to knock

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<sup>49</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 179.

it down.”<sup>50</sup> Each person interviewed by Fuerst, who had decided to remain in the projects, spoke on a common theme of where they believed the CHA went wrong. They required less screening for families moving in, which brought a number of people into the communities who brought with them drugs and gang activity, which led to public housing’s ultimate demise in many cases. Each individual discussed the importance of the community and how over the years, this sense of community was broken down due to the failings of the CHA and the residents who were allowed into public housing.

One major reason for this was the decline of monthly income, in general, for most public housing tenants. Management budgets were based on residual fees paid for by tenant incomes, and as these incomes declined, so did the budgets for upkeep.<sup>51</sup> The CHA attempted to offset this trend by switching from first-come first-serve selection to an income-based selection process. As a result, families with higher incomes were more able to afford the newer public housing developments and poorer families were banished to the older projects, where upkeep was less of a priority.<sup>52</sup> In general though, the CHA had an increasingly difficult time effectively utilizing money in the budget for the maintenance causing continued deterioration. The new regulations for eligibility based on income began to cause the same kinds of segregation among tenants along class lines as race had in public housing’s earlier days.

Throughout the late 1980’s and 1990’s, different government agencies attempted to fix the serious and mounting problems that faced public housing in Chicago. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took over the operations

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<sup>50</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 181.

<sup>51</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 190-191.

<sup>52</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 193-194.

of the Chicago Housing Authority in 1995.<sup>53</sup> The CHA was viewed by most as a slumlord with little to no control over its properties, and little concern, for that matter. By this time, many public housing developments were under the authority of street gangs and a large percentage of the populations dealt with drug and alcohol addiction, as well as unemployment and widespread poverty. The CHA continuously tried to make efforts to alleviate the problems faced by residents in their communities. These efforts included a proposal in the late 1980's that attempted to determine whether HUD should take over the CHA's dealings, whether the conditions of the buildings could ever be restored to what they were when originally constructed, and also if the city and the police could successfully take back control of public housing developments where gangs were the authority.<sup>54</sup>

HUD ultimately did take over most CHA dealings, although the city of Chicago worked to regain control of the CHA eventually. After HUD's takeover, one of the agency's main priorities was to tear down high-rise buildings where crime and gang activity were most prevalent and make a return to detached dwellings, which were easier to maintain and where, historically, residents felt and were, safer. During the Reagan Administration, Section 8 housing, where government funding was provided to private property owners to rent to low-income families, was favored although there were not a great deal of budget cuts made to HUD.<sup>55</sup> Other avenues for alleviating management burdens were explored by government agencies, like resident management, in the late 1970's. After acknowledgment of the successes of certain resident management groups,

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<sup>53</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 264.

<sup>54</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 265.

HUD and the CHA even allowed for residents to take control of their housing projects with funding and support from the government for a period of time.

As gangs and drugs became heavy influences in public housing developments in the late 1980's and 1990's, attempts were made to halt these problems as well. Vincent Lane, who became director of the CHA in 1987, felt it necessary to return to the "paternalistic" ways of Elizabeth Wood in an effort to restore order and authority in the projects.<sup>56</sup> He called for frequent sweeps of apartments and an enforcement of a curfew. This was seen as highly controversial and referred to by the residents as an invasion of privacy. Due to corruption, gang members were often tipped off as to when the sweeps would occur and would clear out before the police could conduct raids. There was a consistent push and pull between residents, who felt that these kinds of practices were unconstitutional, and other residents and members of the community who felt that they were necessary in order to fix major issues faced in the projects.<sup>57</sup>

Efforts on behalf of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and Lane were overwhelmingly unsuccessful in seeing any substantial decline in crime or gang activity in public housing. Lane continuously tried to work with the CPD, but corruption persisted, as well as the overwhelming authority of gang leaders by this time. A July 1988 article in the *Chicago Tribune* explains, Lane met with CHA managers to try to and address the issue of corruption among managers: "The emotions were very high among the managers that attended because of a statement he (Lane) had made saying the managers of some developments had working relations with street gangs and drug

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<sup>56</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 268.

<sup>57</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 270-272.

dealers,' the source said... Lane made the gang and drug charges last week, after a proposed major revamping of the problem-plagued CHA. The plan would reshuffle the managers of 19 of the agency's 23 developments."<sup>58</sup> Lane made continuous attempts to fight corruption within the CHA and rid the projects of the gang leadership that controlled most of the projects and residents activities. Despite his noble attempts, he failed to make so much as a dent in the problems that the public housing developments faced.

The final conclusion by the CHA and HUD was that the high-rise buildings needed to be torn down, which is exactly what happened in the 1990's. No attempt at curbing the various issues that plagued public housing developments had been successful. Only the fact remained that row-housing complexes were in much better condition than high-rises and that the high-rise developments needed to be torn down and replaced with row-housing. One of the greatest issues with this plan was where to house all of the displaced residents who could not be accommodated without the high-rise style apartments. Mayor Richard M. Daley took back the reigns of the CHA under his administration and proposed his "Plan for Transformation" of public housing in Chicago, which included the demolition of high-rise complexes.<sup>59</sup>

Daley's plan worked in conjunction with Washington D.C.'s plan called HOPE VI, which is similarly a return to the way public housing was managed in its beginnings. This meant a more rigorous process to determine eligibility in an attempt to bring in more

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<sup>58</sup> Thorton, Jerry and Casuso, Jorge. "Managers Challenge CHA Chief Over Gang, Drug Accusations". *Chicago Tribune*. 1988. Accessed 19 February 2015. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.ilstu.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/882636851/13ADC7A41802DB96793/3?accountid=11578>

<sup>59</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 294-295.

working class families to balance the amount of welfare recipients, and setting higher standard for maintaining public housing units for residents that resided in them.<sup>60</sup> The plan called for relocating residents of these public housing units to other neighborhoods in the city and the state of Illinois, as well as redeveloping the land on which the buildings had been torn down. The re-evaluation of the eligibility process for residents of the new complexes that were to be built in order to integrate the homes with a mixture of races and classes. The part of HOPE VI that allowed housing authorities to establish separate housing for the elderly and disabled was a progressive and necessary step for public housing. However, HUD Secretary at the time, Jack Kemp, discouraged parts of the legislation that perpetuated the difficulties for the country's poor in obtaining Federal Housing Authority Mortgage loans, a problem that persists today.<sup>61</sup> The consensus between all government authorities and residents, who had worked to re-establish public housing in Chicago as a viable and worthwhile option for housing, was that there must be a return to public housing's core values and ideals. Government needed to be better involved as managers of public housing, complexes must be viewed and treated as communities, residents should be held accountable for a good deal of upkeep and maintenance, and there must be open communication between management and residents. The "Plan for Transformation" and HOPE VI both sought to establish these values once again.

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<sup>60</sup> Bowley, *The Poorhouse*, 244.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban American and the Federal Government, 1945- 2000*. (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 314.

## CHAPTER II

### TENANT ORGANIZING

Resident activism is an essential component to understanding how Chicago public housing changed in the 1950's and 1960's. Many cultural groups in the city, like poor ethnic whites and Mexican Americans, experienced similar difficulties obtaining decent housing, however, African Americans were the group most specifically targeted by property owners, landlords, and eventually the CHA in terms of discrimination and racist housing practices. Due to their long standing battle with marginalization and mistreatment in most all aspects of their lives, blacks were familiar with the idea of needing to organize to fight against racist practices, most notably in the fight for equality in the workplace beginning in the 1940's. This struggle is evidenced in important works like *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*, by historian Harvard Sitkoff, as well as *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Inequality in America*, by historians Philip A. Klinker and Rogers M. Smith.<sup>62</sup> Convening on the issue of housing was no exception. Before the existence of public housing, blacks in Chicago neighborhoods regularly worked together to help one another find decent housing as well as for other reasons like seeking passage

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<sup>62</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Years*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).  
Philip A. Klinker with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

of laws against restrictive covenants, contracts that allowed landlords and property owners to explicitly not rent or sell to African Americans, in which they were ultimately successful. Public housing and the right to a decent place to live became yet another issue for which blacks in America fought. As informal resident groups continuously effected meaningful change over the span of several decades, government agencies began to formally recognize and fund particular groups. Many tenant management organizations saw a great deal of success during their tenure however, none have lasted into the present day, mostly due to a lack of funding and support. To understand public housing's history, resident activity must be evaluated and considered as a key factor in project housing policy's development.

Segregation and race are at the forefront of the reasons why housing in Chicago specifically has been so troubling. Even prior to the construction of public housing complexes in Chicago, there was a tendency for the black community to organize around the issue of housing. The formation of the Black Belt, aided by the use of restrictive covenants by property owners, as well as the powerful push back from white residents to neighborhoods to which blacks sought to move, prompted discussion of the serious need for housing for black Chicagoans. The deadly Chicago Race Riot of 1919 further indicated the intense division between the races, with housing often being at the center of the discussion. Because of the resistance from whites to allowing blacks into their neighborhoods, the Black Belt became remarkably overcrowded.

Choosing to focus on the Bronzeville area, a thriving all black South Side Chicago neighborhood, historians Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake analyzed the area as a microcosm for the greater black society in Chicago. Their work is considered a

prolific and landmark study of black migration to Chicago in the 1940's and its effects on city overall. In the 1940's Bronzeville was where black business, churches, and culture thrived the most in the period leading up to World War II and after and it served as an example of greater black community organizing in the city as a whole. The authors analyze the important role of churches in the black community for organizing and fundraising purposes. The church was the foremost institution for individuals to organize and fundraise, even if they were not necessarily religious. Cayton and Drake state, "Bronzeville's churches are centers of entertainment as well as worship," and also allowed, "Large masses of people to function in an organized group, to compete for prestige, to be elected to office, and to exercise power and control."<sup>63</sup>

Beyond the church, blacks in Bronzeville regularly came together in social clubs. Some of these clubs were merely for the purpose of socializing and entertainment, but others acted with intention to "advance the race". This included helping black business thrive, bringing culture to the community, and assisting individuals with needs that were not being met because of lack of job opportunity and education. Drake and Cayton define "advancing the race" as, "creating conditions under which lower-class traits will eventually disappear and something approaching middle class way of life will prevail."<sup>64</sup> They describe an instance where a man living in Bronzeville expressed displeasure with the amount of his rent, "He doesn't blame the Negro doctor from whom he rents, because he believes that all rents in Bronzeville are "rigged". He wonders why the Government doesn't build more projects, 'because if anybody's gonna be fair to the colored people,

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<sup>63</sup> Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, 423-424.

<sup>64</sup> Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, 710.

you'd think it would be the Government.”<sup>65</sup> Drake and Cayton provide a compelling analysis of how class plays a leading role within the issue of race. The need for blacks to come together in order to effect change seems to be at the root of their solution for what would uplift the black community. However, divisions among the upper and lower classes are what kept the black race at odds. Leaders of the black race were most often times upper class individuals who did not share the same goals as the lower class. This point is further emphasized on the issue of housing where the authors concluded, “Competition for space is a basic ecological process which, in a city where race and ethnic segregation occurs, is interpreted by nearly everyone as a competition between ethnic groups”.<sup>66</sup> The severe overcrowding of the Black Belt and subsequent encroachment of blacks into white neighborhoods compounded the race issues in Chicago. Drake and Cayton note:

In 1910 there were no communities [in Chicago] in which Negroes were over 61 per cent of the population. More than two-thirds of the Negroes lived in areas less than 50 per cent Negro, and a third lived in areas less than 10 per cent Negro. By 1920, 87 per cent of the Negroes lived in areas over half Negro in composition. A decade later 90 percent were in districts of 50 per cent or more Negro concentration. Almost two-thirds (63 per cent) lived where the concentration was from 90 to 99 per cent Negro!<sup>67</sup>

The authors attribute the rapid growth of the Black Belt to white resistance to blacks moving into predominately white neighborhoods, whether by legal or violent means.

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<sup>65</sup> Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 713.

<sup>66</sup> Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 758.

<sup>67</sup> Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 176.

The solution to this problem was government-funded public housing. The early days of public housing promised to provide decent housing and a new chance at life for those who were living in the slums of Chicago. With the introduction of the Federal Housing Act of 1937, public housing construction got under way. The Chicago Housing Authority oversaw all construction of housing projects and served as landlords to all tenants living in CHA buildings from that point forward. Understanding the relationship between the CHA and its residents is vital to making sense of public housing legislation. Under the progressive guidance of Elizabeth Wood, first director of the CHA, tenants were encouraged to speak directly with CHA staff to voice their concerns.

During this era, the CHA generally reacted accordingly and the staff very best to meet tenant needs. Wood oversaw the building of several early housing projects and staff members who worked under her fondly remember her commitment to bettering the lives of the individuals living in CHA buildings and her strong emphasis on family. Although Wood was the source of much criticism from her peers at the time, today her governing tactics are much more highly praised as being the reason early CHA programs were more successful. Wood was committed to running the CHA as an agency that truly served the people it promised to uplift. Former colleague, Emil Hirsch, recalled that the issue of public housing, “‘was not just a brick and mortar thing’, and that, ‘she was very determined to try to get any kind of resource into a project to help the family life and help these people who were living there.’”<sup>68</sup> In explaining her communication style Hirsch noted, “Elizabeth had ongoing communication with the people in citizen’s organization and church groups that had an interest in or, as she felt, should have an interest in the

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<sup>68</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 63.

whole public housing program. She constantly built on that.”<sup>69</sup> A solid foundation for a respectful relationship between the CHA and its residents was of the utmost importance, with satisfied tenants at the core of Wood’s vision.

Elizabeth Wood is an important figure in CHA history, therefore her background is worth exploring. She was born in Japan, but raised in Bloomington, Illinois where she eventually went on to study biology at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1916.<sup>70</sup> Receiving both a BA and an MA in Education from the University of Michigan, Wood spent time teaching before moving on to a career in the social welfare field.<sup>71</sup> Throughout the 1930’s Wood worked various jobs in agencies that worked closely with New Deal programs that sought to provide relief for Americans that desperately needed housing and other assistance. From 1934 to 1937 she served simultaneously as the first executive director of the Metropolitan Housing Council and the executive secretary of the Illinois State Housing Board where she assisted in composing the legislation that established the CHA in 1937.<sup>72</sup> This wealth of experience of the field of housing is what prompted her election as first director of the CHA.

Many cite Wood and her term, 1937-1954, as director of the CHA as the only time in Chicago public housing’s history that tenant and CHA relations were relatively peaceful. However, there were still thousands of Chicagoans, most notably black, who were displaced due to the CHA’s inability to house every person in need. In the immediate postwar period, whites in Chicago were greatly affected by the housing

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<sup>69</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Susan Ware and Stacy Braukman, ed., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 698.

<sup>71</sup> Ware and Braukman, *Notable American Women*, 699.

<sup>72</sup> Ware and Braukman. *Notable American Women*, 699.

shortage and being that whites were most often given priority in housing in general, this crisis left blacks that much more desperate for places to live. Predominantly black neighborhoods became increasingly more crowded and dangerous. Thousands of blacks from the South continued moving to Chicago in the postwar period looking for work that was still readily available, yet with no housing to accommodate their arrival.

Black communities saw a rise in fatalities due to dangerous living conditions. For example, there was a spark in deadly apartment fires due to the grave state of affairs. Not only were fires a problem because of dangerous living conditions, but that Chicago landlords were notorious for setting fires themselves in an effort to collect insurance money; usually a more lucrative tactic than obtaining what little rent they could from their low-income tenants.<sup>73</sup> In May, 1941, 8-year old Albert Brown, home alone at night with his siblings, managed to rescue three of his four younger brothers from their burning Southside apartment. Neighbors struggled to hold him back from returning into the burning apartment and rescuing his baby brother because he had been in the building for a dangerously long time and the flames had begun to take over. Firemen finally arrived and retrieved the baby, getting him to the hospital, but his injuries were fatal. Investigators found that an overheated coal stove's flames reached nearby clothing and caught fire, causing the apartment to burn down.<sup>74</sup> Albert had been babysitting for his parents and it is difficult to imagine the kind of guilt felt by Albert and his parents alike. Albeit heartbreaking, these kinds of incidents were hardly isolated, especially in Black

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<sup>73</sup> Helgeson, Jeffrey, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago's Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 120

<sup>74</sup> "Boy, 8, Rescues 3 In Burning Building: Young Hero Carries Brothers To Safety, Little Hero of Fatal Fire" *Chicago Defender*. 1941. Accessed 2 May 2015.

<http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/492666376?accountid=11578>

Belt houses and apartments where landlords were known for not maintaining their property. The *Chicago Defender* reported this incident while the *Chicago Tribune* makes no mention of the tragedy. Another deadly fire in October 1947, killed six children and four women in an apartment on Chicago's West Side. A jury found the landlord totally at fault for the deaths of these individuals because his complete disregard for apartment safety and proper maintenance is what caused the fire. Neglecting to take the jury's recommendation, the city made no progress in improving housing regulations at that time.<sup>75</sup>

As management became more difficult for the CHA due to budget constraints, disagreements between board members, physical deterioration of their ill-constructed buildings, and unhappy tenants, other options for managing tenant concerns needed to be explored. Many felt that Wood's style of oversight was overly paternalistic. Others felt it was necessary in order to maintain the integrity and property of public housing complexes. As public housing continued to grow as a mechanism and the CHA became increasingly unable to handle all tenant issues and concerns, resident management was an obvious next step, as many tenants had begun to organize effectively on their own already. Most residents felt empowered by responsibilities given to them through tenant management efforts, rather than allowing a board of directors at the CHA make decisions on their behalf when, in fact, those individuals were wholly unaware of what it was like to actually live in project housing communities. Many CHA members agreed that implementing tenant management programs was a positive idea, with the belief that residents, due to their physical closer proximity to the issues, more than any other

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<sup>75</sup> Helgeson, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment*, 119-120.

deciding body, knew better on what to spend government dollars in their specific buildings and communities.

With so many common issues facing public housing residents in Chicago, it makes sense that those with similar problems living in such close proximity came together to address their concerns and seek solutions. Before the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began to support policy that funded tenant management programs in public housing projects in Chicago and across the country in the late 1970's, residents frequently and effectively came together to solve daily problems they faced that the CHA could not, or would, not sort out, beginning at public housing's inception. Residents volunteered to take shifts watching and policing dangerous hallways to make buildings more secure they took it upon themselves to make sure the grounds were well-kept and held one and other responsible for proper maintenance. Tenants, on their own accord, created babysitting and after-school care programs to help curb juvenile delinquency. Public housing residents in neighborhoods all over the city of Chicago took it upon themselves to become resident managers on their own, effecting major change in their communities, long before the federal government or the CHA sanctioned these efforts.

Throughout the 1960's, residents of public housing complexes often worked with agencies outside of the CHA in order to get their needs met. The Clarence Darrow Community Center located nearby the Leclaire Courts projects opened under the leadership of Irene Smith, a well-known Leclaire Courts resident leader and activist, in early 1960 with the hopes of providing assistance to underprivileged children in the

neighborhood.<sup>76</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* reported that nearly twenty thousand people received services from the center every year ranging from education, social, to recreational assistance. Sports clubs, dances, and vocational classes were among the many services provided.<sup>77</sup> In a project neighborhood where children often went unsupervised because their parents worked either two jobs or irregular hours, these kinds of programs were vital to curbing juvenile delinquency. Rita Lewis-Perry, former Leclaire Courts resident, fondly remembers the Clarence Darrow Center as a part of her childhood, “Through my adolescence, Leclaire was generally a pretty decent place to live. There were always community things going on. They had the Leclaire Community Center, and they used to have the schools open in the evenings. I remember going there and skating in the gym, playing pool, tennis, Ping-Pong. The kids had a place to go where there was adult supervision and they could be off the streets.”<sup>78</sup>

Like the Leclaire Courts tenants, the residents of Robert Taylor Homes (RTH) first came together to address the issue of the copious numbers of unsupervised children living in the complex, without anywhere to play. This was troublesome because it left a large number of children playing outside, either on the one available playground on the property, the alleys and train tracks near the building, or worst of all, the frequently non-working elevators that had proven more than once to be deadly. Elevators were used like amusement park rides for children living in the complex and being that by 1970, seventy-

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<sup>76</sup> “Settlement House takes Darrow Name”. *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 1960. Accessed 11 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/182455882?accountid=11578>

<sup>77</sup> Darrow Community Center to Gain from Event: Neighborhood Project Was Established in Memory of Lawyer. *Chicago Tribune*. 1963. Accessed 11 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/182693081?accountid=11578>

<sup>78</sup> Fuerst, *When Public Housing was Paradise*, 129.

five per cent of RTH elevators were out of commission, they were of top concern for parents.<sup>79</sup> Eddie Leman, former resident of Robert Taylor Homes from 1968-1982 recalls the dangers of the elevators:

Even when the elevators were working, the lights were out half the time. They used to call them death traps. People got their arms or their body caught up in there. The elevator closed tight, like a clamp. You'd have to hold it with both hands and try to open the door if it was shutting. There was no safety sensor. People were routinely stuck, hurt, trapped in there. They had on red button bell in there to ring, but that didn't do anything. The only way to open the elevator safely was to use this long six-inch key. It was like a stick and you'd open the elevator with that, but those keys weren't never around, so you'd have to pry yourself out. And when you climb out, you've got to jump down or climb up. You'd be stuck between floors. You get on the elevator, you risk getting stuck, you risk getting hurt, you risk getting robbed. And I lived in the fifteenth floor, so you know I had my exercise on.<sup>80</sup>

Venkatesh notes that the, "CHA formed 'elevator committees' consisting of 'volunteer mothers' who would operate the elevators during periods of heavy use," to help curb some of the dangerous activity on the machines.<sup>81</sup> Beyond the numerous children that had been injured on the elevators, as well as reported deaths, paramedics were unable to reach individuals on top floors in need of treatment because of the non-working elevators.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 26.

<sup>80</sup> Petty, Audrey, comp., *High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing*. (San Francisco: McSweeney's and Voice of Witness, 2013), 99-100.

<sup>81</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 26.

Truancy and juvenile delinquency were quickly becoming a problem in RTH and public housing complexes throughout Chicago in the 1960's. With the majority of parents working varieties of shifts, it was difficult to monitor children at all times. Single parent homes, usually headed by mothers, dominated public housing complexes. These single mothers were often unable to attend to their children after school and during their work hours. Parents of RTH attempted to resolve issues via communication with the CHA and initially concerned mothers sought help from the agency through phone calls, meetings, and letters. The dynamic between the CHA and residents in the early 1960's was seemingly peaceful and the residents were able to voice their concerns to an empathetic agency that generally expressed its desire to assist as best it could. Residents were able to call CHA management offices to voice concerns and meetings were held (or promised to be held) where tenants could have open dialogue with CHA staff.

Although interaction between the CHA and residents at this time was seemingly peaceful, little was usually done to effect real change. Small offices with individuals that existed worked as liaisons for resident concerns responsible for thousands of residents, making it very difficult to be available to any one individual's needs.<sup>83</sup> Because of the difficulties that RTH parents met in trying to create a better environment for their children with the help of the CHA, a groups of mothers came together and called themselves "Mamas Mafias". Their purpose was to monitor each other's children while others were at work to deter children from getting swept up in gang activity, provide

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<sup>83</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 27.

counseling services, and to serve as general neighborhood watch groups.<sup>84</sup> Ottie Davis, who grew up in RTH in the 1960's, describes his mother's "Mafia",

What made Robert Taylor better back then? People was more together. If I saw your kid out, nine or ten o'clock at night, I'm taking his ass home! And I knew better to call my neighbors a liar. Nine or ten o'clock at night, I better not be downstairs. I lived on the fourteenth floor. My range was the thirteenth and fourteenth floor, and I better not get past it. And sometimes it was just the fourteenth floor. So I got the whole fourteenth floor to roam and I cross that fourteenth floor, go in the hallways or the elevator and my mother not with me, she gonna call my neighbor and that neighbor gonna kick my ass all the way back to the fourteenth, and I gonna get another ass-whupping 'cause my mother will be waiting at the fourteenth floor."<sup>85</sup>

"Mama's Mafias" existed in different RTH buildings and managed to help increase security in dangerous hallways that were beginning to be taken over by gangs and other criminal activity. These informal support networks, some evolved into formal organizations, were essential to resident life and safety in RTH, as well as other Chicago public housing projects throughout the city.

Avenues for communication between the CHA and residents were still only just being established in the early 1960's, because there was hardly a precedent to follow. Early public housing residents understood that voicing their concerns, and seeing solutions carried out, was going to be a difficult task. This politically inexperienced

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<sup>84</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 30-31.

group had a confusing, stubborn, and often unresponsive bureaucracy to navigate if any progress were going to be made.

Into the 1960's and 1970's, the CHA witnessed surges in applicants and individuals in need of immediate housing as recessions hit the United States economy and unemployment and homelessness reverberated throughout the city. With this increase in demand, the CHA became increasingly lax in its requirements for occupancy and began allowing more welfare families into public housing, prompting many working class families to move out and seek housing outside of project homes. Public housing was becoming less about helping working class families find affordable and decent housing, and more about housing the city's most poor individuals. Chicago public housing became increasingly poor, overcrowded, and disproportionately African American. The already strained relationship between the CHA and tenant organizations was further irritated by this trend, offset by the fact that the CHA was progressively less able to address tenant concerns. All of this compounded by indifference on the part of the city government and widespread mismanagement and corruption amongst CHA leadership.

As public housing projects began to physically deteriorate throughout the city due to their poor and rapid construction, as well as the failure of the CHA to address tenant needs and their inability to maintain their buildings properly, residents inevitably became less satisfied with their living conditions and more prone to organizing around the issue of their right to decent housing. The Building Council system was put into place by the CHA in the early 1960's as a way to establish more formal communication between the agency and residents who showed leadership capabilities. Individuals, most often older

females, were either appointed or elected by the CHA and building tenants to be on the Building Council and represent their building.<sup>86</sup> Venkatesh reports that RTH residents recalled that, “Elections were not ubiquitous, and the process of determining membership was not systematic. Not all tenants participated or perceived the councils to be an important collective voice. In any building, a tenant might be self-appointed as a council president or appointed informally by other tenants or by a CHA staffer who had observed her leadership in other venues; residents typically volunteered to be floor representatives, but they may also have been chosen by the existing council president.”<sup>87</sup> Venkatesh explains the Building Council, more commonly known as Local Advisory Councils, election process:

In each housing development, tenants within a building would elect a “building president” to a Local Advisory Council, the board that offered input into the CHA’s policies for that complex. And in each development, tenants would also elect a separate “LAC president” who would sit on Chicago’s Central Advisory Council (CAC), the board made up of the LAC presidents of each public housing complex across the city. The president of the CAC would actually be a board member of the Housing Authority with full privileges to attend meetings of the CHA Board of Commissioners and vote on budgetary and management decisions.<sup>88</sup>

The CHA created the Building Council system as a hierarchical organization, appointing residents based on a display of aptitude towards leadership, assigning the lowest level

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<sup>86</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 34.

<sup>87</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 60.

elected or appointed members to menial tasks like cleaning and scheduling the use of the building's laundry facilities. The higher level members existed to delegate tasks and the top level council members worked with the CHA and Building Councils of other public housing projects to cooperate on social services projects to benefit all project residents.<sup>89</sup>

Most public housing residents of the 1960's have positive things to say about the Local Advisory Council (LAC) system and the benefits it provided for their daily life. Developments with council members that exhibited strong and effective leadership skills recall the various benefits they received from this system. Council members were able to contact CHA managers directly to repairs done to apartments that may have previously been put off indefinitely. There were also perks of being a council member. Edna Harris, council president in RTH in the 1960's recalls, "Our apartments was always the first taken care of, 'cause we'd just call up managers and they knew to make sure we was happy or else we could make their lives hell."<sup>90</sup> Harris explained that residents understood the power that building council members had and if a building was well taken care of, it meant that their building council managed effectively and was to be respected.<sup>91</sup>

However, not all building councils were as effective. Paulina Collins, who was a resident of several RTH buildings throughout the 1960's noted the difference between strong and weak resident leadership under the LAC system:

We here [at the 205 building] have always been kinda funny, you know, kinda different than 210 or 218... We had Ms. Walton [a Building Council president]

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<sup>89</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 34.

<sup>90</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 36.

fighting for us for thirty years now. Right from the start, when the CHA wouldn't pay [this part of the housing development] no attention, Ms. Walton made sure that we'd had gardens, our lobbies ain't had no piss all over them, we'd had our trash picked up, our apartments was real nice... so, no, I don't have no complaints about raising my family in Taylor. But maybe that's because I did it in this building and not in some of the others [close by].<sup>92</sup>

Because of the varying successes of Building Councils throughout public housing developments in the city, this system remained as an avenue for communication between residents and the CHA until formal resident management programs came into effect in the late 1980's.

It is important to note that Chicago public housing resident management groups, formal and informal, were often not terribly diverse. They were commonly African-African, female-dominated organizations. The bulk of public housing families were headed by single parents, most often mothers. The weight of daily project living often fell on the women living in those projects, motivating social clubs that frequently evolved into informal resident management groups. In her intensive study of black women's history in public housing in Baltimore, Maryland, historian Rhonda Y. Williams states, "The federal government's subsidy of low-rent housing implied a right to decent living conditions for U.S. citizens. From the beginning, this implied right highlighted poor people's low citizenship status and politicized groups of tenants. For poor women, in particular, subsidized housing created a sense that the previously private sphere of home

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<sup>92</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 36.

had become public and political space.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, government being at the center of project living, even providing guidelines and rules for daily life was the catalyst for politicizing black women living in the projects.

Due to their sometimes daily interaction with government agencies, women across the United States living in public housing became very familiar with public policy and the ways to navigate bureaucracy. The value of the work that women were doing in public housing complexes across the nation was clear. There was a natural progression from informal groups that met to delegate such tasks as trash duty in the hallways, babysitting, and gardening to name a few, to a transition into government sanctioned resident management organizations. Many events occurred within this transition, and many individuals fought hard in order for residents to have a political voice in policy that effected them so directly. The forces behind this movement certainly were not entirely female, but the resident management movement was without a doubt female driven.

For example, Delores Wilson, an African American woman and long-time resident of Cabrini Green beginning in 1958, described her time living there and participating in tenant management programs. Her husband worked as head janitor of an entire complex, 1230 N. Burling, allowing them to live there without paying rent, an obvious perk of participating in the program. Her husband was a well-respected man and most people treated the building with respect during his tenure as head janitor, she recalls. After his unexpected passing in 1981, Delores took on the role as President of the

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<sup>93</sup> Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*, 6.

Building Council for ten years, also placing her on the Local Advisory Council and official tenant management program.<sup>94</sup> Wilson explains,

Every building had a Building Council but in the late eighties, the residents of 1230 N. Burling started taking resident management courses. We pulled together and handled everything except the electricity and plumbing. The residents had jobs – work order clerk, janitors, maintenance men, secretary, treasurer, everything. We even collected the rent. Eventually our building was rehabbed after we went into resident management. I believe 1230 N. Burling was the first building in Cabrini Green that went into resident management. The first President Bush, Daddy Bush, named us “a model for the nation.” We met with Jack Kemp and then Henry Cisneros in Washington, D.C. And our building was incorporated in 1992.<sup>95</sup>

Delores Wilson’s husband had worked and been paid by the CHA as head janitor of their building and acted as a manager long before federal funds were provided for him to do so. Delores stepped up as Building Council President, as did hundreds women living in public housing complexes across the United States.

Although most tenant organizers were black women, owing to the fact that public housing residents were disproportionately populated by African Americans, white women living in project housing also tended to get involved in tenant groups. Irene Smith, long-time white resident of LeClaire Courts, was a well-respected tenant organizer in Chicago. She earned her position as head of resident management at LeClaire and actively worked

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<sup>94</sup> Petty, *High Rise Stories*, 36.

<sup>95</sup> Petty, *High Rise Stories*, 36.

to better tenants lives through education and job aid programs. Smith worked closely with a nearby social service organization, the Clarence Darrow Center, to create programs that benefited the community, like the local thrift shop. Providing affordable clothing and household items, as well as jobs for individuals in the community, the thrift shop afforded LeClaire Courts residents opportunities to thrive in their neighborhood where those opportunities did not previously exist. Smith sat on the women's board that created the thrift shop and helped provide other necessary services to neighborhood residents.<sup>96</sup> She was regularly recognized for her unrelenting efforts to bring desperately needed social services to the LeClaire Courts community. The *Chicago Tribune* regularly reported on Smith and the work that she did for public housing, while failing to report on important black figures like the notable Chicago Housing Tenant's Organization (CHTO). At the ten year celebration of the Clarence Darrow Center in May 1963, Smith was honored as being at the center of "helping in daily solution of personal, social, and family problems confronting residents".<sup>97</sup> Smith relied on her diligent volunteer staff of women and mothers to facilitate her work as director. Activists like Delores Wilson and Irene Smith were hired by the CHA to work in their complexes and paid for their duties, however most resident activists worked on a volunteer basis.

Stories regarding the women of LeClaire Courts and Delores Wilson's, help challenge the contention that public housing residents were complacent victims, willing

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<sup>96</sup> "Center Seeks Items for Thrift Shop". *Chicago Tribune*. 1966. Accessed 3 April 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/178931104?accountid=11578>

<sup>97</sup> Darrow Community Center to Gain from Event: Neighborhood Project Was Established in Memory of Lawyer. *Chicago Tribune*. May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1963. Accessed 11 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/182693081?accountid=11578>

to not only accept their circumstances, but to actively aid in making them worse by being lazy and prone to crime and violence. Digging deeper into the more well-known historical conversation of black activism centered on the 1960's era Civil Rights Movement, an underappreciated story of black women fighting for basic housing needs emerges. Many assert that the changes effected by ground level tenant management groups were unremarkable because they did not produce sweeping change across the board. Truer to reality is the fact that even without grand scale change in public policy, informal tenant management groups created a great deal of positive change in the daily lives of many residents.

In early 1968, the CHA sought more inclusive policies for residents who so clearly desired, and were capable of management responsibilities. Appropriating them the title of ombudsmen, the CHA began the process of hiring nearly 200 residents to work in their respective buildings in a variety of jobs ranging from janitorial work, to being part of the welcoming committee for new residents to foster a sense of community between residents. In 1969 G.W. Master, CHA Director of Management explained to the *Chicago Tribune* that, "For too long the CHA has been playing 'big brother' to its 145,000 residents of its 1,100 buildings. We are dealing with people, not items. When people are grouped together, they usually form a neighborhood or some sort of social order. This has not always occurred in the 37 years of CHA's history. So we are out to encourage the residents to help create their own neighborhood."<sup>98</sup> The article goes on to explain the assorted jobs hired residents were to take on. A Cabrini Green resident made

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<sup>98</sup> "CHA Residents Aided by Ombudsmen" *Chicago Tribune*. 1969. Accessed 22 March 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/175942355?accountid=11578>

clear that the program stemmed from the ideas of residents asserting their skills and abilities as managers, rather than coming down from CHA thought and leadership. He explained that many residents were fearful that if they made their complaints known to CHA staff, they would be removed from their buildings, which is why residents began handling building concerns on their own in the first place. The CHA, refuting this claim, stated that all complaints were anonymous and that fear of eviction was unnecessary. Dollars appropriated from the federal government were provided to the CHA at this time to conduct wide spread building updates and repairs and also to implement programs of this kind.<sup>99</sup>

By the 1970's, the notion that resident involvement in housing decisions, along with the understanding that residents were capable of management responsibilities, was in full-force, not only amongst residents, but many liberal policymakers as well. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society had inspired many Americans to fight for their basic rights as citizens, and housing was no exception. "Resurrection City", an extension of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, was a shanty town of more than three thousand individuals that created a temporary settlement outside of the Lincoln Memorial in the spring of that year. Historian Annelise Orleck remarks, "They were determined to show that they could care for the poor more effectively than the so-called experts; that, in the words of a group of welfare activists from Nevada, some of whom were among the crowds in Resurrection City, 'We can do it and do it better'".<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> "CHA Residents Aided", *Chicago Tribune*. 1969.

<sup>100</sup> "The War on Poverty and the Battle for Community Control". *Reviews in American History*, no. 42 (2013), 513-518.

Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*.

Responding to the political environment of the times and to the efforts made by residents to create an atmosphere of cooperation between themselves and the CHA, the agency began making more valiant attempts to allow residents management organizations to be included in public housing policy decision making. They did this by including established resident leaders in policy meetings and discussions. This was a return to first CHA director Elizabeth Wood's style of governance and residents were initially hopeful towards the thought of a more hands on role in CHA policy making. Meeting together to decide on varying resolutions for the first time in many years, the CHA and resident managers of multifarious housing projects convened in 1970 to address the topic of tenant management cooperation with the housing authority. The motion made known that, "Elected tenant councils have no desire to 'take over the operations of the CHA' but that it is the 'overall opinion that neither management nor the public housing community can work effectively together where there is distrust.'"<sup>101</sup> This statement was in direct contrast with the Chicago Housing Tenants Organization's (CHTO) agenda. The CHTO, one of the most powerful tenant organizations in Chicago at the time, was actively seeking a direct decision making role within the CHA, one that would allow them part of the financial control of housing funds.

Other tenant groups sought to effect change on a grander scale, beyond their individual buildings. In May 1971, an article in the *Chicago Defender*, informed the public that the (CHTO) was preparing to hold an election that upcoming July to create

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<sup>101</sup> CHA Councils, Board Confer on Problems *Chicago Tribune*. September 25 1970. Page 5. Accessed 19 April 2015.  
<http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/169875158?accountid=11578>

new resident councils in the CHA. The sitting CHA advisory council allowed the elections as a sign of democratic faith. The incumbents were members of the existing council. The article states:

The CHTO has been working for a year on means to guarantee that the 165,000 residents of CHA projects have a voice in housing policies, and has finally gotten the means – in the form of a veto power over the CHA’s intended expenditure of over \$8 million dollars in federal modernization funds.<sup>102</sup>

The veto power that the CHTO sought would allow resident council members the power to veto decisions regarding the federal dollars allotted for money that was to go directly to update severely in need public housing complexes, money that the CHA often found loopholes to spend on other ventures. The article goes on to explain that the overall goal of these elections was to ensure that tenants were finally afforded political power in decision making in public housing matters. In an article published by the *Defender* a day before the election, it is explained that the CHTO members seeking to replace the sitting advisory council were individuals representing all nineteen of the city’s housing projects.<sup>103</sup> A hard earned victory ensued after the elections when the CHTO won a clear majority of the CHA advisory council seats. A small number of the sitting advisory board retained their seats. Although their leader, Jerome Hunt, was defeated, and their

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<sup>102</sup> “Tenant’s Group Schedules Elections”. *Chicago Daily Defender*. 1971. Accessed 1 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/494298996?accountid=11578>

<sup>103</sup> “CHA Future Hinges on Elections” *Chicago Daily Defender*. 1971. Accessed 1 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/493460527?accountid=11578>

majority did not ensure cooperation, it was an obvious sign that tenant power was real and effective not only on the ground level but politically.<sup>104</sup>

The CHTO is cited as the first truly politically effective tenant body in Chicago. Formed in 1970 as a collaboration of activists groups, the CHTO sought to work together as CHA insiders in order to have a tangible say in policy-making regarding public housing.<sup>105</sup> Demanding improvements in public housing projects like daycare centers, and recreation halls where community members could congregate and develop jobs programs, the organization was systematically shut out of CHA decision making and financial control. Turning to HUD for support, the CHTO was able to win an election securing them voting rights within the CHA, transporting them from an informal tenant management group to a politically viable organization.<sup>106</sup> Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender* reported on these vital elections, however the *Chicago Tribune* reported a much more positive image of the CHA and a less desirable image of the CHTO and their intentions.

In yet another example of tenants seeking management power due to substandard living conditions and the residents' belief that they, themselves, could better manage their property, tenants of the Jane Addams Homes, located on the West Side, came up with a solution of their own. In March 1973, tenant representatives proposed the idea to the CHA of leasing the entire project complex from them in an effort to gain control of the project. Although some tenants feared conditions would worsen without CHA oversight, a majority were very interested in the idea. The CHA, although never admitting to

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<sup>104</sup> "CHA Future", *Chicago Daily Defender*. 1971.

<sup>105</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 215.

<sup>106</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 215-219.

seriously considering the idea, did disclose that they were, “entirely neutral on the idea of leasing,” this was until, “a specific proposal is presented and until all tenants have been heard from.”<sup>107</sup>

Again, these kinds of incidents were hardly isolated. In November 1975, residents of ABLA Homes, a CHA development made up of four different complexes including the Jane Adams Homes, Robert Brooks Homes, Loomis Courts, and Grace Abbott Homes, joined forces to protest new leases being enforced by HUD. These leases left the CHA with discretion to make any necessary changes that were unfair to residents or favored management however, the CHA opted not to make any changes. The reason for protest, as it frequently was, came down to the issue of building maintenance. The new leases allowed for repairs to be made within a ‘reasonable amount of time’. This vague language left the time allotted for repairs to be made to already deteriorating buildings open to even further interpretation, likely leading to further decline in conditions. The CHA acknowledged that it would take residents suggestions into consideration, but it is unclear whether their efforts were successful this time.

Prior to being chosen to participate in a HUD pilot program (to be discussed in the next section), in which select public housing complexes around the country were chosen to be given resident management status and provided direct federal funds for an allotted period of time, Leclaire Courts residents of their South-West Side neighborhood, had formed several tenant organizations to address resident needs. This is, in fact, a

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<sup>107</sup> “Tenants Seek Takeover”. *Chicago Daily Defender*. 1973. Accessed 1 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/493990671?accountid=11578>

primary reason why they were chosen for participation in the program. Irene Johnson, LeClaire Courts resident management president in 1989, had spent six years in her crusade to get the CHA to allow resident management status to the complex, prior to being accepted to HUD's program.<sup>108</sup> LeClaire Courts was an ideal candidate to transition into the program because of the established tenant management organizations already in place. Working with an established local social service agency, the Clarence Darrow Center, LeClaire Courts residents created various programs to aid troubled youth in the neighborhood. Residents of LeClaire Courts faced a particularly difficult obstacle in that they lived in a highly diverse neighborhood. Their housing complex was located in a largely all white neighborhood. It was essential that residents of the project came together to uplift each other because white residents of the community regularly organized around the issue of excluding LeClaire Courts families from community activities, especially black youth.

LeClaire Courts residents not only came together on the issue of juvenile delinquency, but they sought to aid adult tenants in becoming skilled members of the workforce. For example, in 1969, using what little resources they had, resident leaders created a program that taught women living in the complex how to type. In order to fund the program the women who wanted to participate made and sold jewelry from old marbles. A *Chicago Tribune* article provides insight into the project saying: "The only materials needed for the project are clear marbles of varying colors, jewelry mountings

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<sup>108</sup> Marx, Gary. "CHA lets Tenants take Charge of their Homes." *Chicago Tribune*. 1989. Accessed 1 May 2015.  
<http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/282633299?accountid=11578>

such as keychains, or cufflinks, a little heat, and a glass of cold water. “The task is fun and the product is bright, but the goal is serious,” the coordinator said. Money from sale of the jewelry will be used to rent typewriters.”<sup>109</sup> By the late 1960’s, the CHA had begun to provide less and less funding in the way of social services for residents due to budget constraints and general lack of resources. CHA money desperately needed to be spent on building maintenance and upkeep, and social service programs often fell to the wayside. It was not uncommon for residents, like those of LeClaire Courts, to come up with ways to fund projects like these on their own. Early CHA leaders had visions of implementing programs like this that helped its residents become more skilled and find jobs however, these plans were thwarted by lack of funding and support, the need for focus on the most basic of resident needs, and sometimes overall apathy. Public housing residents throughout the city of Chicago took it upon themselves to implement these sorts of programs.

The various successes that informal resident management groups achieved in Chicago and other cities throughout the United States, prompted the federal government to strongly consider and begin working towards building federally endorsed tenant management programs by the 1980’s. For decades, residents had attempted to display their skills and abilities to the appropriate government bodies in order to put themselves in a place to be considered for management roles and to be the allotted fair and necessary funding to make their programs that much more successful.

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<sup>109</sup> CHA Tenants Produce Fried-Marble Jewelry to Start Typing Class” *Chicago Tribune*. 1969. Accessed 2 May 2015.  
<http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/168936955?accountid=11578>

## CHAPTER III

### GOVERNMENT SANCTIONED TENANT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Unmistakably, tenants were not always successful in their efforts to organize and have a voice. Often, tenant management groups were at odds among themselves over how to most effectively address their issues. Most tenant groups recognized the need to work directly with government agencies to see their demands met. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), were also regularly in disagreement over the role that tenant managers were to play in decision making; HUD endorsing more tangible tenant power and the CHA envisioning tenant management roles as more advisory than one of concrete authority. Regardless of their opposing views, each agency, recognizing the increasing power tenant organizations had gained, as well as the many benefits of turning management power over the hands of public housing residents both began considering ways to include tenants in decision making regarding public housing policy.

HUD has seemingly always supported the idea of resident management programs, although it did not begin funding them directly until well into the 1980's. Assessing what little progress had been made in the way of tenant management on behalf of public housing authorities across the nation, the federal government felt it was time it intervene

and work directly with resident management groups, sidestepping local housing authorities in an unprecedented way. HUD's mission states:

HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. HUD is working to strengthen the housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers; meet the need for quality affordable rental homes; utilize housing as a platform for improving quality of life; build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination, and transform the way HUD does business.<sup>110</sup>

Twice the word inclusion is used, but is inclusion of residents really reflected in HUD policy and action? HUD cites 1971 as the first year of formal resident management incorporation in public housing. It was the year residents of the Bromley-Heath housing complex in Boston came together to address mismanagement and maintenance issues.<sup>111</sup> At the time when Bromley-Heath residents came together, Jack Kemp was Secretary of HUD and well-known for his endorsement of resident management programs. Kemp was quick to encourage collaboration between their organizations. A series of other official requests by resident management organizations in public housing projects in different parts of the country almost immediately followed, seeking partnership with HUD. These events seemed to finally spark the federal government to take into consideration policy that would allow residents control of funds and direct oversight of their respective housing complexes.

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<sup>110</sup> "HUD Mission Statement" <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/about/mission>

<sup>111</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management in Public Housing" (US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. December 1992). <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/HUD-006093.pdf>, 1.

Pressure from HUD to increase the amount of tenant participation in management in 1971 prompted the CHA to create the Local Advisory Council (LAC) system, an idea stemming from the Building Council system. The LAC system was designed to make resident managers a more meaningful part of management and decision making. The CHTO was essential in the creation of this system, working closely with HUD to make sure their role within the organization was no longer just symbolic, but one that allowed them actual decision making authority.<sup>112</sup> The tense relationships between public housing resident management groups, namely the CHTO and its CHA director at the time Charles Swibel, are evidenced in the 1971 election held by CHA occupants in an effort to appoint over 2,000 residents to the tenant advisory council of the CHA. Part of the agreement that led to the creation of the LAC system was that elections were held that placed residents on their respective LAC's.<sup>113</sup>

This election was the first of its kind in CHA history, allowing residents access to CHA decision making on issues such as the budget and building maintenance policies. Although the idea of resident cooperation with the CHA was headed by public housing resident leaders, the CHA's cooperation with the elections was an undeniable great step toward further tenant management programs. The election was postponed indefinitely in late 1970 because all parties were unable to agree on the role the tenant advisory board was set to play within the CHA. HUD and the CHTO felt that resident advisors should be afforded a more substantial say in CHA decision making, while the CHA and current

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<sup>112</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 60.

<sup>113</sup> Venkatesh, *American Project*, 60.

tenant board were satisfied with the advisory role currently held.<sup>114</sup> Finally, in July 1971 a platform for the elections was agreed upon by all parties, and the election was set to be held. Eligible CHA residents were to elect 916 tenant advisors to 19 CHA tenant councils. These councils were set to have a say in the \$8.2 million dollars that had been on hold for nearly a year, allotted for modernizing Chicago public housing projects.<sup>115</sup> This was the first time that the CHA was actively relinquishing any sort of real decision making and financial power to public housing tenants, rather than appeasing them with their previously held inconsequential advisory role.

HUD continued its attempts to intervene in the dire public housing circumstances in Chicago throughout the 1970's and into the 1980's however, the Reagan Administration halted much of the progress and funding for public housing programs across the country.<sup>116</sup> Enacting "market solution for urban problems", Reagan sanctioned heavy tax cuts and emphasized private sector solutions and housing vouchers as a solution.<sup>117</sup> These cuts were what many considered, "a wholesale abandonment of cities," on behalf of the federal government. To make matters worse, it later came to light that HUD, under the Reagan Administration, was rigging the housing bidding process by awarding housing funds to supporters of the Republican Party and Reagan's campaign. Besides scandals occurring within HUD, housing trends in general in the United States were declining in the 1980's. Homeownership was down, availability of affordable

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<sup>114</sup> "Sunday's CHA Residents Vote Is Postponed Indefinitely" *Chicago Tribune*. 1970. Accessed 1 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/169919024?accountid=11578>

<sup>115</sup> "Tenants Group Picks Slate, Platform for CHA Election". *Chicago Tribune*. 1971. Accessed 1 May 2015. <http://proxy.lib.ilstu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/docview/169145816?accountid=11578>

<sup>116</sup> Biles, *Fate of Cities*, 251.

<sup>117</sup> Biles, *Fate of Cities*, 251.

housing had declined, and quality of available housing was poor, on top of rising costs in rent and the federal government's response was to cut housing assistance policies by nearly seventy five per cent.<sup>118</sup> Political Scientists Charles Moore and Patricia A. Hoban-Moore explained at that time, "While the percentage of the population that is poor has grown from 11 to 15 per cent (and is now above 13 per cent) during the 1980's, overall budget authority at HUD fell from \$36 billion in 1980 to \$15 billion in 1989, the largest drop of any federal department."<sup>119</sup>

These destructive policies ensured minimal progress for public housing in the 1980's. Once again, the residents of public housing developments across the country were of last priority. But with the CHA in disarray itself, President Reagan sent a HUD advisor to the city in 1982, tasked with the firing of the entire board of the CHA and realigning its leadership in an effort to overhaul corrupt staff members.<sup>120</sup> HUD made these demands at the expense of providing federal funding to the CHA until they were met. CHA director, Charles Swibel, and Chicago mayor at the time, Jane Byrne, pushed back in an attempt to maintain control over the agency, claiming HUD's demands were in line with Reagan's attempt to reduce federal support for public housing across the board. The agencies finally agreed that the unpopular CHA director could retain his position for the next ninety days and the CHA board was expanded to allow for more members.<sup>121</sup> The ultimate agreement among HUD, the CHA, and Byrne in this dispute was reflective of greater public housing policy at the time; government entities squabbled over

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<sup>118</sup> Moore, Charles and Patricia A. Hoban-Moore. "Some Lessons from Reagan's HUD: Housing Policy and Public Service." American Political Science Association, Vol. 23 No. 1, p 13-18 (March 1990), p. 14 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/419770>

<sup>119</sup> Moore and Moore, "Some Lessons from Reagan", 14.

<sup>120</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 232.

<sup>121</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 243.

bureaucratic nuances, disregarding the wants and needs of residents, at the expense of residents who had to live with their decisions.

In a 1992 executive summary submitted to HUD's board of directors and the Office of Policy Development and Research, "Evaluation of Resident Management in Public Housing", researchers documented their findings on the history and effectiveness of resident management programs in the United States, after federal policy was enacted and tenants had spent a worthwhile amount of time engaged in the programs. HUD had decided to provide its stamp of approval on government sanctioned resident management programs with intentions of evaluating their effectiveness compared to the efficiency of their respective city's public housing authority. Residents of public housing complexes throughout the United States had been lobbying since 1987 for the chance to participate in a federally funded resident management program and were finally successful in securing support.

The purpose for federal backing of resident management programs was to gain insight as to whether residents could more successfully manage building maintenance and upkeep and immediate tenant concerns than their respective city's housing authority. A wide variety of services fell under these categories. Public housing complexes all over the country were deteriorating and most residents were unhappy with their unsanitary and often dangerous living conditions, a plight not at all exclusive to Chicago public housing. Up until the 1970's, most housing authorities were unable to handle the volume of complaints and issues brought to them by residents. Putting the financial and decision making power to address these changes into the hands of tenants was an obvious next

step, as tenants had begun forming groups, fundraising, and taking care of problems in their respective units on their own for several years.

The Housing Act of 1937 was amended in 1987 to include resident management programs and to begin funding Resident Management Corporations (RMC's) throughout the country as soon as possible. Leclaire Courts was Chicago's site chosen for participation in HUD's program as a full-service RMC, meaning that residents were in charge of building maintenance as well as financial responsibilities (managing-agent RMC's were generally only help responsible for building maintenance and left out of any financial affairs).<sup>122</sup> Sites chosen to be full-service were given that distinction because of volatile history with their city's housing authority as well as some kind of an established history of tenant organizing. These sites, Leclaire Courts being no exception, also generally needed extensive rehabilitation of their building infrastructure.<sup>123</sup> The report recognized residents of Leclaire as formal participants in tenant management affairs as of 1973 in the form of their Local Advisory Council (LAC), although informal styles of tenant management had been going on for some time.

Conceding the CHA as a housing authority wrought with corruption and highly "troubled", the study points out the revolving door of CHA directors and continuous mismanagement of funds. The CHA, at that time, was in full support of resident management programs and was working with several other housing projects besides Leclaire Courts on development of programs. Representatives from each department of

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<sup>122</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 3.

<sup>123</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 4.

the CHA came together to form a group that worked for the purpose of assisting resident management groups in a first step towards having a successful program.<sup>124</sup>

Leclaire Courts residents were the first public housing residents granted full tenant management status in Chicago, coming together in 1983 to request this distinction and being granted RMC status by 1987 under HUD's resident management funding program. The board was provided with nearly \$1 million dollars and an extensive training program to get its appointed board and staff members prepared to manage. The resident managers put a great emphasis on their desire to receive extensive training prior to taking over, as their aim was to make their program as successful as possible. The United Way and other local organizations agreed to provide this necessary training. By 1989, the Leclaire Courts RMC was fully operating on its own, with the option to request assistance from the CHA if there were issues beyond their capabilities.<sup>125</sup>

As previously acknowledged, the Leclaire Courts RMC worked closely with the Clarence Darrow Center (CDC), a nonprofit organization that had been based in the Leclaire neighborhood since the early 1950's, providing social services to community members. The RMC worked with the CDC, allowing it to continue to provide many of the social services it had been affording because it was a well-established organization in the community. These social services included daycare programs, after-school programs, food, and employment programs. Allowing the CDC to continue to head these programs meant that the RMC was able to devote its time and funds to other vital concerns in the housing project like building maintenance.<sup>126</sup> This is unique to many other RMC's that

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<sup>124</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 37.

<sup>125</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 38.

<sup>126</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 39.

lacked a social service partnership and needed to devote larger portions of their time and budget to social services.

The Leclaire Courts RMC board, like the other full-service RMC's evaluated, had committees for the oversight of maintenance; personnel and grievances; social services and economic development; financing and fundraising; redevelopment and rehabilitation; training; and planning.<sup>127</sup> There were board members, paid staff, and volunteers who carried out all decisions that were made. Leclaire Courts had CHA staff members on the payroll for a time to help ease the transition into managing on their own; out of 35 RMC staff members, 23 were actual residents at the time of the study.<sup>128</sup>

The study breaks down the responsibility of staff into seven different categories: personnel; resident screening; lease enforcement; financial management; security; property management; and procurement. Leclaire Courts' RMC was responsible for all management functions with the exception of income certification of residents and billing duties at this time.<sup>129</sup> It was typical that most RMC's left billing up to their local housing authority.

The study then evaluated the effectiveness of the various RMC's put in place. Their success was assessed by looking at outcomes of each public housing authority, barring any work done by the participating RMC, and then evaluating the performance of cooperating RMCs. The performance indicators were as follows: work order processing;

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<sup>127</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 3-7.

<sup>128</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 3-10.

<sup>129</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 3-13.

maintenance staffing; annual HQS inspection; resident turnovers; vacancy rates; resident recertification; and tenant accounts receivable.<sup>130</sup>

In contrast to all other participating RMC's, Leclaire Courts underperformed its public housing authority (PHA) in respect to work order processing, but the study attributes this to the extensive backlog the CHA had, compared to other public housing authorities in the program. In all other categories, RMC's either performed as well or better than their corresponding PHA, including Leclaire Courts, regardless of the fact that its staff was tasked with taking the reins of the PHA that was considered to be in the worst shape of all PHAs in the program.<sup>131</sup> Leclaire Courts significantly outperformed the CHA in annual unit inspection rates at seventy-seven percent with the CHA inspecting only thirty four percent. By the end of the study, Leclaire Courts saw a one percent vacancy rate, while the greater CHA had a vacancy rate of sixteen percent<sup>132</sup> With the exception of the subgroup, tenant accounts receivable, the Leclaire Courts RMC outperformed or did as well as the CHA.

It is also worth noting that the Leclaire Courts RMC spent significantly less on maintenance in general per unit, as well as administrative costs, than did the CHA throughout the duration of this program, as they continued to outperform them in most evaluated categories.

Ultimately, this important HUD research project found that, in general, residents surveyed at the completion of the program on a variety of categories were more satisfied with RMC run housing complexes than with complexes controlled by PHA's.

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<sup>130</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 4-1.

<sup>131</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 4-2.

<sup>132</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 4-7, 4-10.

Researchers concluded that RMC's were beneficial in that they: built strong communities; nurtured future leaders; equipped residents with necessary skills; and helped develop a solid working relationship with the PHA.<sup>133</sup>

The survey indicates HUD's desire for future support of RMC programs. So why, when the program was so seemingly successful, did the federal government and CHA cease sponsoring programs like this one? HUD has continued to sponsor different kinds of tenant management efforts and initiatives, providing millions of dollars of funds to RMC's around the country, but there has been no formal sweeping policy or HUD funded wide-scale evaluation of resident management programs since the report in 1992 of HUD's collaboration with PHA's to implement and support RMC systems.

Resident management exists formally today in what is known as The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, or Section 3, although it is not what resident management looked like in its previous form. Section 3 seeks to provide jobs and training to public housing residents within their housing projects. More specifically it is,

HUD's policy for providing preference for new employment, training, and contracting opportunities created from the usage of covered HUD funds to low- and very low-income residents of the community where certain funds are spent (regardless of race or gender), and the businesses that substantially employ these persons.<sup>134</sup>

It provides the opportunity for public housing tenants to hold a variety of jobs in their complexes, several leaning towards tenant management responsibilities. Some of these

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<sup>133</sup> "Evaluation of Resident Management" HUD, 9-1.

<sup>134</sup> "For Recipients of HUD Housing and Community Development Funding". Section 3 Overview. <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=12sec3overviewhcd.pdf>

jobs include payroll, work order processing, janitorial work, drywall construction, landscaping, and many more. Residents must go through a thorough screening process and meet a set of eligibility guidelines in order to be able to obtain these jobs.

Not surprisingly, the CHA has been cited for failing to comply with Section 3 guidelines and not appropriating the program's funds to the hiring of resident's to available jobs. In January 2012, HUD released their findings that the CHA had not complied with Section 3 regulations exposing the fact that "from 2008 to 2010 CHA did not award any Section 3 covered contracts to 'Section 3 business concerns'."<sup>135</sup> Resident complaints that low-income tenants were not being awarded jobs sparked the HUD investigation into CHA practices. By March 2013, the CHA and HUD came up with a voluntary compliance agreement that the CHA would begin hiring low-income residents for positions, as intended by Section 3, under the strict supervision of HUD. The CHA is no stranger to having to hand its leadership over to HUD. Section 3 also states that at least \$200,000 in funding are to be spent each on "economic development" for each project. Most interpret this to mean that these funds are meant to be used on creating jobs and helping individuals find existing jobs. However, there are contingencies that allow for these funds to be accounted for under the category of "economic development" so long as they are spent on "housing construction, demolition, rehabilitation, or other public construction (i.e., roads, sewers, community centers, etc."<sup>136</sup> This provides a possible explanation for one way that the CHA has found a work around for hiring

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<sup>135</sup> "HUD, Chicago Housing Authority Arrive at Section 3 Voluntary Compliance Agreement". National Low Income Housing Coalition. Online Resource Library. 22 March, 2013. <http://nlihc.org/article/hud-chicago-housing-authority-arrive-section-3-voluntary-compliance-agreement>

<sup>136</sup> "For Recipients of HUD" <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=12sec3overviewhcd.pdf>

residents. With further oversight from HUD, there is hope that residents of Chicago public housing will continue to be a part of managing their buildings, as they have proved to be ever so capable of doing.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION:

#### PUBLIC HOUSING IN NEW YORK: WHERE CHICAGO WENT WRONG

Public housing in the United States is considered a failure, by and large. However, other cities ventures into public housing were not quite as disastrous as Chicago's. Sadly, Chicago public housing tells arguably the worst version of public housing's history in the United States. Other cities, like New York, saw greater success with the program for reasons unique to that city. Analyzing the history of New York City (NYC) public housing allows for a comparative look between public housing programs and insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the housing authorities of both NYC and Chicago. Other factors beyond each city's housing authority have contributed to successes and failures in NYC and Chicago as well. Factors like race and segregation, and major differences in each city's local government's interworkings led to variations in public housing between Chicago and NYC. One thing remains constant though, each city saw a wealth of public housing tenants coming together to fight for better living conditions and make their voice heard in a system where policy maker decisions dominated their daily lives.

A comparative evaluation of New York City (NYC) allows for a greater understanding of Chicago's failings. New York City is known for having fairly decent,

well-maintained public housing complexes that provided countless residents with affordable living spaces. Many attribute the success of NYC's public housing to its commitment to dedicated management, starting with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), down to its well-incorporated system of tenant management. Managers of the NYCHA are trained and expected to maintain an emphasis on building maintenance, stressing the importance of making sure tenants are at least safe in their environments.

Historian Nicholas Dagan Bloom speaks of his experience visiting NYCHA buildings in all five New York boroughs:

The results of this watchfulness are evident today. I have found well-maintained brick buildings, mature plane trees and green lawns, active community and recreation programs, and first-class play equipment. Developments also frequently adjoin city parts and public transportation. During the day these public housing developments have significant numbers of staff cutting grass, fixing elevators, cleaning graffiti, and collecting trash.<sup>137</sup>

The picture Bloom paints of NYCHA housing projects in the early 2000's is a far cry from circumstances in the majority of Chicago public housing developments.

Bloom further highlights the important role administrators of public housing placed in competent and involved management. He attributes their understanding of the importance of this to the fact that prior to the construction of public housing, New York

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<sup>137</sup> Bloom, Nicholas. *Public Housing that Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3.

had long operated with “multi-family housing”. Having experienced rapid population growth and a desperate need for housing, complexes built to house many large families had been in existence for decades in the city and provided a wealth of experience for policy makers. Bloom cites the most important element of the experience New York housing administrators had acquired was the understanding that strong management was key to sustainable housing. He contends that other housing authorities, namely the CHA, operated under the assumption that simply constructing buildings, and focusing on management and maintenance issues later, was sufficient enough to solve the housing crisis.<sup>138</sup>

Many of NYCHA’s early policies regarding public housing mirror CHA policy under the directorship of Elizabeth Wood. However, Wood was regularly at odds with city hall and other CHA staff who felt her style of management was overly paternalistic. These same claims were made against the NYCHA however, leadership understood that in order for public housing to remain a viable program, this kind of oversight was necessary. It seems that the experience New York City housing administrators had in large family style housing is what best prepared them for successful public housing policy. It is also important to note that the NYCHA used significantly less federal funding than the CHA, giving them the ability to implement policy unique to, and necessary for, NYC specifically, without as much federal oversight.<sup>139</sup>

Most of the NYC’s public housing successes are attributed to its housing authority’s tightly controlled management style throughout its tenure. Not only has the

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<sup>138</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 3-4.

<sup>139</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 7.

NYCHA historically always been considered to be highly involved in project housing daily management, the authority regularly allowed for resident management as a means for operation in buildings where showed aptitude for administration. Since the early 1940's, the NYCHA kept a larger staff than most other housing authorities to maintain buildings and grounds to emphasize the importance of upkeep.<sup>140</sup> From its onset, NYCHA leaders maintained this comparatively sizable staff as a means to ensure that public housing projects would be properly cared for. Administrators emphasized beautification so that residents would feel a sense of pride in their surroundings and treat the buildings as their homes and communities. Strict guidelines were set in place in terms of maintaining individual property, and they were rigorously enforced. Individuals who did not adhere to the guidelines and who were found not to be sufficiently caring for their units were ultimately removed from their residences. These rules mirrored early CHA guidelines, however, the CHA became incredibly lax in its enforcement and allowed individuals to remain living in their units even if they were not being cared for because it lacked the ability and resources to police every unit.

NYCHA made administrative visits to every unit on a regular basis a priority and often did regular apartment inspections. Early on, it also established a somewhat controversial rent collection system in which residents were required to come to their local NYCHA office on a monthly, or sometimes weekly, basis to pay their rent. At these offices, social workers, on NYCHA staff, collected rents and also worked with tenants to get them enlisted in what social service programs they may have needed at the time. This system saw a great deal of success and positive feedback for a period of time,

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<sup>140</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 93.

although many believed it was paternalism in raw form. Other housing authorities attempted to implement similar systems but did not achieve the longevity of the NYCHA.<sup>141</sup> These kinds of policies made for a tightly managed housing system that was unpopular in other cities, but was highly effective in NYC in terms of building upkeep and maintaining a working relationship between the NYCHA and the resident population.

Another reason that the NYCHA saw much greater success than the CHA is due to its resident screening processes. The NYCHA never abandoned its mission to house not only low-income welfare families, but middle-income families as well. By the late 1960's, the CHA was almost exclusively housing welfare families, collecting very little rent to aid in their ability to maintain buildings. With concern that support for public housing would suffer if it became solely populated with welfare recipients, the NYCHA sought to ensure that working class families remained eligible for the program. The agency viewed public housing, "as a municipal service, rather than a social welfare program."<sup>142</sup> Wanting the class and racial make-up of public housing to reflect NYC as a whole, legislators enacted policy to ensure working class families remained a part of the program well into the 1960's, where as other cities, like Chicago had begun allowing nearly all of their developments to become completely occupied by welfare families by as early as the 1940's.<sup>143</sup>

Chicago's project housing high rise's design are often cited as part of the reason for so many of public housing's problems in the city. New York also had a great deal of

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<sup>141</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 94-100.

<sup>142</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 81.

<sup>143</sup> Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 77.

high-rise public housing buildings, but did not experience the same level of difficulty in their structures. Hunt explains:

When the NYCHA's postwar high-rises experienced social disorder because of youth vandalism in the mid-1950's, the city instituted an aggressive policy strategy, including vertical patrols, in an effort to control crime. Fortunately, New York built significantly fewer bedrooms per apartment than Chicago, housing only 1.8 minors per unit versus Chicago's average of 3.1, aiding the social control effort.<sup>144</sup>

The overall difference between public housing in New York City and Chicago is New York's willingness to spend money and staff the program accordingly from administration to ground level workers. The CHA regularly looked for ways to cut costs, which came at the expense of the tenants. Its unwillingness to invest in the program caused rapid deterioration. Along the way, different leaders, visionaries, and organizations attempted to step in to implement policy to get the system back on track, but the CHA was never able to obtain longevity with any strategy to see real positive results, thus its subsequent federal take overs.

Residents of Chicago public housing have worked tirelessly since the program's inception for their right to live with just the basic necessities, working appliances, crime and drug-free environments, places without animal and insect infestations, and basic plumbing and electrical needs. As the Great Depression swept the United States in the 1930's, President Franklin Roosevelt and his administration rolled out progressive New Deal programs that Americans so desperately needed. Public housing policy was met

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<sup>144</sup> Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 292.

with great enthusiasm and as the first residents began moving into newly constructed housing complexes in Chicago, they felt hopeful that their lives were taking a step in a positive direction. Having a safe, clean place to live was a basic need that many had never experienced.

However, the Chicago Housing Authority succeeded in thwarting many of these individual's plans through poor building construction and planning, substandard maintenance, and neglect of tenant needs. However, there are more underlying motivations that must be evaluated in order to better grasp Chicago public housing's downfall, including resident involvement in managing their complexes.

Public housing in Chicago cannot be understood as a policy without evaluating the role that residents played in policymaking. It has been easy to overlook their accomplishments because much of the strides residents made in bettering their lives were often limited to their own buildings. Residents often came together to assign each other building maintenance tasks that should have been taken care of by the CHA, but usually were not. Eventually, many of these groups became politicized and were able to effect change from within the CHA, all the way up to the federal level. This is evidenced in resident's successful campaign to gain resident management status through various programs after 1987.

Chicago public housing residents generally have a reputation of being lazy, prone to drugs, violence, crime, as well as uneducated and apolitical. However, a closer look at their lives reveals a different story. As the CHA continuously attempted to shut residents out of any decision making processes, residents valiantly fought back to have their voices heard. Today, resident groups exist as a constant figure in Chicago public housing

complexes. Thanks to the efforts of those residents who worked to have a say in the direction of public housing policy in Chicago, current residents now are able to sign up to be a part of Local Advisory Boards, and programs are in place that allow residents to work in their complexes and receive job training. The CHA continues to have issues meeting compliance standards set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development across the board however, residents are steadfast in their fight to demand that these standards be upheld and that their right to decent and affordable housing is met.

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