THE TOLERANCE POINT: RACE, PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE FOREST HILLS CONTROVERSY, 1945-1975

by

DANIEL A. WISHNOFF

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

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by

Daniel A. Wishnoff

Advisor: Professor Thomas Kessner

This dissertation examines New York City's efforts to establish a racially integrated public housing program from 1945 to 1975. It focuses on the struggle against the city's 1966 plan to construct a low-income project (housing mostly poor African American and Puerto Rican families) in Forest Hills, Queens (a Jewish, middle-income neighborhood). I argue that the protests and political compromises that punctuated the Forest Hills controversy symbolized the failure of the city's integration policies and contributed to the decline and fall of its public housing program.

This study also examines the efforts of the housing reformers who created the nation's first public housing program in New York. Housing reformers initially backed the city's early racial policy that strictly segregated individual housing projects. During the 1940s, as the black population in a handful of projects that were located in white neighborhoods increased, housing reformers argued that through careful management public housing could promote inter-racial living and possibly end segregation.

After World War II, racial barriers lifted, but the inter-racial vision for public housing was postponed. Robert Moses, who dominated the city's public housing program, built the majority of the city's low-income projects in poor neighborhoods experiencing racial transition. Moses' placement of the projects combined with the simultaneous

migration of thousands of poor African American and Puerto Rican families to the city created a public housing program that by 1960 was predominantly minority. Refusing to live in projects with large minority populations whites fled public housing.

The dissertation also examines efforts of housing reformers and the New York City Housing Authority to create more racially balanced projects. After failing to attract more whites to predominantly minority projects, housing reformers lobbied for what would later be known as scatter-site housing: the construction of low-income projects in predominantly white, middle-income neighborhoods to promote integration. The scatter-site housing policy was implemented by Mayor John V. Lindsay in 1966.

Angry protests by ethnic whites against scatter-site projects slated for their communities forced the Lindsay administration to scale back the number of projects. In 1971, with only a few scatter-site projects built, construction began on the project in Forest Hills. The protests in Forest Hills, fueled by a mixture of racial intolerance, middle-class backlash, a rising fear of crime and Jewish militancy, forced the Lindsay administration into an embarrassing compromise that drastically altered the size and scope of the scatter-site project.

The Nixon administration considered Forest Hills an example of government mandated "forced integration" and froze all Federal funding for public housing in 1973. The cut crippled the city's public housing program. After Forest Hills, the Housing Authority focused its efforts on maintaining its existing stock of housing and built very few new projects. My dissertation demonstrates that the struggle to integrate public housing effectively hastened the decline of public housing in New York.

Acknowledgements

Like most people who have written a dissertation, I have been looking forward to this moment for years: sitting down and writing thank you to those who helped me to finish. There are at least a hundred people I could thank. Don't worry I've pared down the list.

My first job in the history field was as a document processor at LaGuardia and Wagner Archives at LaGuardia Community College in Queens. In 1996, I asked the Archives' director, Dr. Richard K. Lieberman, what I should do for my dissertation and he recommended I write about the Forest Hills controversy. I knew nothing of public housing and thought that people only played tennis in Forest Hills. The Archives provided an excellent education in all these topics including the history of New York. I learned not only from Dr. Lieberman, but also a host of talented archivists and historians who worked at the Archives over the years. These included Dr. David Osborn, Dr. Nancy Robertson, Rob Dishon, Susan Landaira and Eduvina Estrella.

Since I worked at the Archives for five years it is the institution closest to my heart, but there are other facilities that provided invaluable resources. These include the New York City Municipal Archives whose curator Ken Cobb generously granted me access to the unprocessed papers of the Mayor John V. Lindsay administration. Ellen Kastel at the Jewish Theological Center, John Hyslop at the Long Island Division of the New York Public Library Jamaica Branch, Dr. Andrew Beveridge and Susan Weber of Queens College, the staff of the Tamiment Library at New York University and the staffs at the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at Columbia University and the Center for Jewish History.

My research benefited from the financial generosity of several institutions. These include the Department for Housing and Urban Development whose doctoral dissertation research grant made life for a struggling graduate student with a family much more secure. Also, the CUNY Graduate Center for the Alexander C. Naclerio award and a host of special programs designed to help graduate students financially.

I come from a family of teachers, but the place where I really learned how to teach was at John Jay College. I had the privilege of teaching there for four years and owe a debt of gratitude to my wonderful colleagues in the history department. They provided me with moral support, encouragement, editorial suggestions, great stories and jokes. My friends in the department include Professors Gavin Lewis, Gregory "Fritz" Umbach, Scott G. Knowles, Edward Paulino and Itai Sneh. Without them I don't think I could have finished my dissertation.

My fellow students from the history department, Drs. Evelyn Burg, Carol Quirke and Michael Spear were there with me from the beginning and provided a warm support system and excellent commentary during our years at the CUNY Graduate Center. Many of them experienced personal losses while writing their dissertations, but persevered until their works were completed. I learned from their example and hope I can live up to their dedication.

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Having attended public schools all my life I have benefited from dozens of imaginative and dedicated teachers. At Hunter College, Professor Barbara Welter encouraged me to take classes at the Graduate Center. This led to several classes with Professor Jack Diggins whose teaching influenced my decision to become a historian. My dissertation advisor, Professor Thomas Kessner taught me that the keys to good writing are persistence and multiple drafts. His magisterial biography of Fiorello LaGuardia was an inspiration. I can only hope to emulate his writing style and pass on to my students his generosity and honesty as a teacher. I also appreciated the comments and encouragement of Professor Judith Stein, as well as my other dissertation readers Professors Gerald Markowitz, Joshua Freeman and Blanche Cook.

I am proud to say that my father Sid taught history at San Lorenzo High School in California and it is from him I acquired my love of history. My Mother Sylvia had the courage to go back to school in her forties, take a degree in voice and make a career for herself as one of a handful of women Cantors in the country. It is from her I learned that nothing is impossible. My mother-in-law Barbara Feinberg provided endless encouragement. She always believed in me.

While attending graduate school life happened: My son Matthew and daughter Ana were born. They have provided me with endless joy, support and patience during these years of writing. My wish for Matthew and Ana is that they will pursue their dreams the way I have been able to pursue mine. My wife Nanci inspired me to pursue my dream and I dedicate this dissertation to her.

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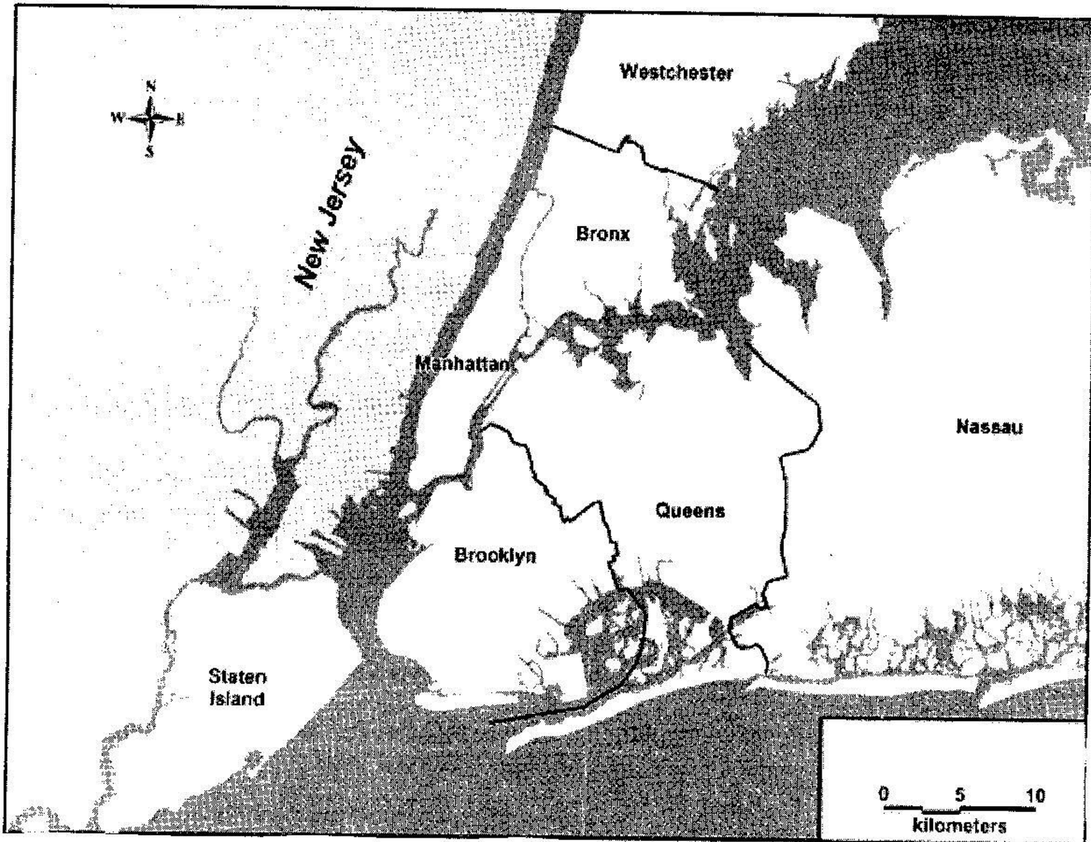
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EAST ELMHURST
JACKSON HEIGHTS
WOODSIDE
FLUSHING
MURRAY HILL
AUBURNDALE
BAYSIDE
EAST FLUSHING
HUNTERS POINT
SUNNYSIDE
NORTH CORONA
ELMHURST
CORONA
QUEENSBORO HILL
MASPETH
KEW GARDEN HILLS
UTOPIA
FRESH MEADOW
OAKLAND GARDENS
BELLEROSE FLORAL PARK
REGO PARK
FOREST HILLS
MIDDLE VILLAGE
HILLCREST
JAMAICA ESTATES
RIDGEWOOD
KEW GARDENS
BRIARWOOD
QUEENS VILLAGE
HOLLIS
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FOREST PARK
RICHMOND HILL
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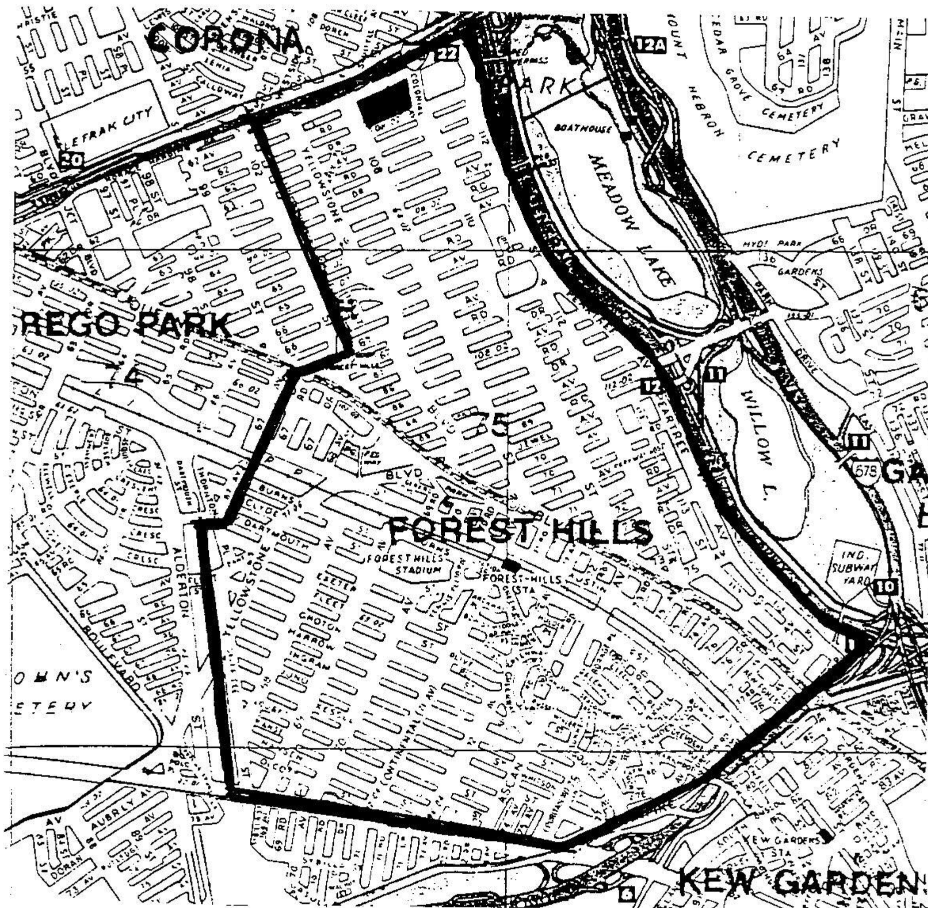
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WILLOW L.
CEMETERY
BOATHOUSE
IND. SUBWAY YARD
KEW GARDENS

INTRODUCTION

The "Tolerance Point"

On the evening of November 18, 1971, hundreds of residents from Forest Hills, a predominantly Jewish, middle-class, neighborhood in Queens, poured out of a raucous rally held at the headquarters of the Forest Hills Residents' Association. The group was opposed to the city's plan to construct a low-income housing project in their neighborhood. Armed with torches and picket signs, the protestors marched to the corner of 108th Street and 62nd Drive, where a chain link fence surrounded the site of the new project. The mob hurled rocks over the fence through the windows of the construction trailers. Some yelled to burn the trailers down and hurled the torches. The torches burned out without starting fires, but the police had to call in reinforcements before the crowd dispersed.

The project in Forest Hills was part of the scatter-site housing plan implemented by the administration of Mayor John V. Lindsay. The plan was controversial. The tenants would be predominantly African American and Puerto Rican while the majority of neighborhoods targeted for scatter-site projects were Italian and Jewish. Mayor Lindsay argued that the plan would promote racial and economic integration and improve the quality of life for poor minorities by providing them the better educational and social facilities found in middle-income areas.

The Forest Hills controversy exacerbated the racial, ethnic and political divisions that had been tearing at the city for seven years. The Lindsay administration, the New York City Housing Authority and civil rights organizations accused the opponents of scatter-site housing of racism, while the protestors, who were predominantly Jewish,

accused Mayor Lindsay of anti-Semitism and hostility towards the middle-class. The protests signified what the Housing Authority would euphemistically refer to as a "tolerance point," a shifting in the political balance of the city and nation. After Forest Hills the city never again launched a large-scale public housing or integration initiative. The federal government, wanting to placate middle-class whites, cancelled funding for public housing. I argue that the Forest Hills controversy symbolized the failure of the city's integration policies and contributed the decline and fall the city's public housing program.

This dissertation broadens the scope of the Forest Hills controversy by framing it within the history of the city's public housing program. It traces the development the city's efforts to integrate its public housing projects and how those efforts would eventually lead to the decline of public housing itself. From its inception in the 1930s, public housing was one of the city's most successful social programs. By tearing down slums and replacing them with new housing, the public housing program attempted to create a new environment for the poor that would help ameliorate the problems of crime and disease. The generation of reformers that established public housing in 1930s, however, refused requests by the NAACP and other civil rights organizations to accept more African American tenants. While aware of the miserable housing conditions faced by blacks in the 1930s, housing reformers who headed the Housing Authority preferred to maintain the city's segregated framework by constructing a few projects in black areas and allowing only a token number of blacks into projects built in white areas.

My research builds on the work of the political scientist Jewell Bellush whose article "Housing: The Scattered-Site Controversy" remains one the best studies of the

Forest Hills controversy and Mario Cuomo's *The Forest Hills Diary*. Bellush's article, written in 1971 at the height of the controversy, examines Mayor John V. Lindsay's decision making process in the framing the scatter-site plan and the Housing Authority's implementation process. Through records from the public hearings of various City Planning Commission and Board of Estimate meetings, Bellush is able to create a composite sketch of the varied ethnic make up of the opponents of scatter-site housing. Bellush's treatment, however, is written while the Forest Hills controversy is happening and does not assess the political and social impact of the event.

In *Forest Hills Diary*, Cuomo recounted his appointment by Mayor Lindsay to broker a compromise satisfactory to both the Lindsay administration and neighborhood residents. Violence threatened as protestors opposing the project, mostly white and Jewish and supporters, mostly African American, demonstrated behind police barricades. Cuomo's compromise plan to cut the size of the project by half (from 24-stories to 12-stories) and increase the number of units set aside for the elderly and veterans, provided the back bone of the compromise plan eventually adopted by the city. Cuomo concluded that the racial hysteria generated by the project in Forest Hills was the result not of racism, but of class and status anxiety. Cuomo, however, ignored the impact of Jewish militancy and the racial overtones in the efforts of Donald Manes and other local politicians who altered his compromise plan after it was presented to the Board of Estimate for approval. Manes, the Borough President of Queens, wanted to ensure that the project would not be a magnet for poor minority families and altered the plan from a low-income project to a low-income cooperative. The cooperative plan would have a co-op board to screen potential tenants and formulate a tenant ratio that would be majority white.

Just as earlier generations of reformers viewed public housing as the panacea to crime, disease and delinquency, housing reformers during World War II envisioned a public housing program that would promote interracial living. During the War, some NYCHA projects in white neighborhoods began allowing higher percentages of black families than previously. This proved to reformers like Charles Abrams that inter-racial public housing could succeed. After the War, the reformers vision of inter-racial housing was overruled by Robert Moses. Moses, who headed the city’s public housing development for the next twenty years, concentrated low-income projects in minority neighborhoods or areas experiencing racial transition. Projects for higher income families were constructed in more economically stable areas and housed mostly whites. By the end of the 1950s, public housing instead of leading the way to inter-racial housing was segregated. The over whelming majority of low-income projects housed black and Puerto Rican families, while higher-income projects funded by the city housed mostly whites.

Since the 1930s, housing reformers lobbied the Housing Authority to implement policies to create a more racially and economically diverse public housing program. Starting in the 1950s, the Housing Authority attempted to entice white families to move into low-income projects with predominantly minority populations by offering them the most desirable apartments. Civil rights organizations launched educational efforts to convince white families in the areas surrounding planned projects to remain in the neighborhood and welcome minority families moving into project. These efforts succeeded in the short run, but failed to maintain racially balanced projects. Housing Authority officials estimated that when the population of a project reached nearly one-third minority tenants, white families moved.

In the 1960s, with the growing assertiveness of the civil rights movement, housing reformers changed tactics. Instead of trying to convince white families to move into minority inhabited projects, reformers accepted that public housing was predominantly black and Puerto Rican and demanded that the city construct projects in middle-income areas with predominantly white populations. Housing reformers had fought for this reform for decades, but they found a champion for their program in Mayor John V. Lindsay who campaigned on a promise of a more effective civil rights program. After his election, Lindsay implemented the program eventually known as scatter-site housing in 1966. Protests and demonstrations by white residents of neighborhoods slated for scatter-site developments forced the Lindsay administration to scale back its developments.

After a series of bureaucratic delays the city went ahead with the construction of the scatter-site project planned for Forest Hills. Unlike earlier studies of the Forest Hills controversy, my dissertation examines the demographic, economic and social development of the Forest Hills neighborhood. When it was established in the early twentieth century, Forest Hills was an exclusive suburban development that barred blacks and Jews. Twenty years later Jewish developers would construct single family homes and apartments that catered to the aspirations of their middle- and upper-middle class clients. By the 1950s, Forest Hills was synonymous with the growth of the Jewish middle-class in New York. The neighborhood's apartment complexes expressed the desire of Jews to live in close proximity to each other, while its elaborate Jewish Centers catered to the social and spiritual needs of the community.

From the 1930s to the 1950s Jews moved to Forest Hills from older neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx to enjoy a middle-class life style. By the 1960s,

however, many Jews were fleeing neighborhoods that experienced an influx of Puerto Rican and African American families. Forest Hills would provide a haven for these families and form the basis for racial animosity when the project was constructed. Concurrently, New York experienced several racial incidents pitting African Americans against Jews. The 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes weakened strained relations between black and Jewish civil rights organizations. Lindsay's handling of the strikes poisoned his relationship with the city's Jewish community who saw the Mayor as hostile to Jewish interests. Divisions within the Jewish community over the rise of black anti-Semitism, affirmative action policies and civil rights contributed to the emergence Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League and the rise of Jewish militancy

When construction on the project commenced in 1971, these tensions within the Jewish community boiled to the surface in Forest Hills. The violent and often racially tinged demonstrations by Jewish residents against the project shocked the city. Lindsay's attempts to avert another Ocean Hill-Brownsville situation by secretly brokering a compromise between Jewish and black leaders failed in the wake of constant demonstrations sponsored by Jerry Birbach the leader of the Forest Hills Residents Association. Birbach's demagoguery intensified racial tensions in the neighborhood raising the fear of the project to the level of hysteria.

Finally, my study demonstrates the impact of the Forest Hills controversy on national housing policy. President Richard M. Nixon publicized Forest Hills and other public housing controversies to demonstrate his opposition to government sponsored integration. Nixon's stance on Forest Hills appealed to middle-class whites who opposed affirmative action and other programs they believed served the interests of minorities at

their expense. Shortly after his re-election Nixon froze all spending for new public housing start ups to show his to opposition to Great Society social welfare programs.

Nixon's attempt to stop construction of new public housing was too late to stop the Forest Hills project from being completed, but it was a victory for conservative forces opposed to federal housing integration initiatives. It also cemented in the minds of the public that public housing was a minority program and should be treated as such. The subsequent fiscal crises weakened the city's resolve to continue an expansive public housing program and its efforts to promote integration. After Forest Hills, the city constructed only a few new public housing projects nearly all them next to existing public housing projects. The Housing Authority concentrated instead on rehabilitating existing buildings in poor neighborhoods.

In many ways the Forest Hills controversy marked the final chapter of public housing. The arc of public housing, from its rise in the 1930s to its demise in the 1970s, corresponded with the rise and fall of the city's experiment with liberalism, integration, civil rights and the progressive impulse for social reform. The Forest Hills controversy also marked a conservative turn in the city's political history. Edward I. Koch and Mario Cuomo, the politicians who dominated New York City and State in the 1970s and 1980s, learned from Forest Hills that to win elections they must play to the aspirations of white middle-class at the expense of a more activist liberal agenda. Forest Hills proved to be city's tolerance point, marking the shift in balance from liberalism and integration past to its more conservative political future.

CHAPTER ONE
"To Clean Up and Make Light In the Dark Corners:"[1] The Housing Reform Movement and theB irth of Public Housing, 1890-1945

The Housing Reformers

The idea of public housing (government financed housing for the poor) evolved from the struggle of Progressive Era housing reformers to improve conditions in New York City's sprawling slums. Jacob Riis, in his ground breaking 1890 expose *How the Other Half Lives*, reported that life in the congested slums of the Lower East Side had worsened since the 1850s. The number of squalid tenements was growing, as was the population of slum dwellers. "Today three-fourths of . . . [the] people [of New York] live in the tenements," Riis claimed. "And the nineteenth century drift of the population to the cities is sending ever-increasing multitudes to crowd them" [2]

Riis, a Danish immigrant who worked his way out of poverty, became the most influential housing reformer in American history. *How the Other Half Lives,* with its vivid anecdotes and photographs, described slum life and its denizens and raised public awareness of tenement conditions. Legally defined as any building housing three or more families, the tenements described by Riis lacked fresh air, light, heating and running water. There were no private toilets, shared toilets were located in the hallway and outhouses in alleys, making for appalling sanitary conditions. The tenements, according

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[1] Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), 212.
[2] Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 5.

to Riis, served as the incubators for crime, drunkenness, poverty, disease and a host of social problems that afflicted the lives of the urban poor.[3]

To attack the problem of the slums, Riis advocated the targeted slum clearance of the Lower East Side's worst neighborhoods. The tenements, Riis claimed, should be replaced with playgrounds and parks to reduce population densities and offer slum children healthful recreation. While European nations launched bold government sponsored slum clearance and working-class housing programs, Riis opposed government intervention in housing. "The business of housing the poor," Riis wrote, "if it is to amount to anything, must be business." Riis encouraged philanthropic developers to construct low-rent model tenements that offered limited profits, but conformed to the reformers strict guidelines regarding light and air. Model tenements, Riis argued, offered the best hope to improve housing conditions for the poor.[4]

Riis, and other housing reformers of his day, differentiated between "the poor" and "the worthy poor." The worthy poor, those who despite their poverty demonstrated the values of frugality, hard work and ambition could be salvaged, but "the poor" particularly those in the grips of alcohol dependency or criminal behavior were beyond redemption. The housing reformers shared the notion that the physical environment of the tenement neighborhoods contributed to the moral degeneracy of the slum dwellers. The clearance of tenements and rookeries would not only improve the sanitation and health of the poor, they reasoned, it would also improve their moral character.[5]

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[3] Roy Lubove*, The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 50-56; Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 321-323.
[4] Riis, 212; Lubove*, The Progressives and the Slums*, 104.
[5] Lubove, 59, 67, 71

Riis' work inspired a new generation of young housing reformers, who during the 1890s, became active in the settlement house movement. The settlement houses, located in some of New York's most notorious slums, allowed housing reformers to experience the squalid conditions of the tenements for themselves. By living in the slums, the settlement house workers learned what the poor needed, and provided them with health care, educational programs and social clubs. Housing reformers active in the settlement houses collected data detailing life in the slums of the Lower East Side. What they found confirmed Riis's dire picture of worsening slum conditions. The surge in immigration during the 1890s pushed the population densities to unheard of levels. In 1894 the Tenement House Committee reported that some districts in the Lower East Side were the most crowded on earth.[6]

The reformers first efforts to improve housing in the slums consisted of a series of building codes, mandating progressively higher standards for the construction of new tenements to give each apartment more access to light and air. Lawrence Veiller, a housing reformer active in the College Settlement, spearheaded the drive for stricter tenement building standards. As the head of the Tenement House Commission, Veiller wrote and successfully lobbied for the passage of the Tenement House Act of 1901, the most effective restrictive building code to date. This landmark legislation, effectively banned the future construction of "old-law tenements"---"rookery" and "dumb-bell" style tenements built before 1901---that lacked proper sanitation and ventilation.[7]

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[6] Anthony Jackson, *A Place Called Home: A History of Low-Cost Housing in Manhattan*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 143; Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 169-170.
[7] Lubove, *Progressives and the Slums*, 129-139; Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner-City,* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 7.

The new restrictive building code, however, was not retroactive and could not eradicate the 83,000 old-law tenements still standing in the Lower East Side. To clear out existing tenements, housing reformers lobbied for the passage of laws allowing the city tear down tenements that threatened the public's health. Armed with this legislation, Jacob Riis in 1895 successfully pressured the city for the clearance of Gotham Court and Mulberry Bend, the Lower East Side's most notorious slums. This early form of slum clearance had a mixed impact on the lives of slum residents. While the new parks that replaced Mulberry Bend served as the "lungs for the poor," they also spurred real estate investors to tear down the adjacent tenements and replace them with middle-income apartment houses. The slum clearance displaced over 10,000 slum residents, who, unable to afford rent in the new apartments, were forced to find shelter in nearby tenements.[8]

The displacement of the poor, Riis argued, was a price worth paying for purging the slums of its most corrupting elements: the rookeries, brothels, sweat shops and the ubiquitous saloons. Riis regarded many of the immigrant Jewish, Irish and Italian slum dwellers as racially inferior and believed that most were beyond the reach of reform. "The causes that operate to obstruct efforts to better the lot of the tenement populations are, in our day, largely found among the tenants themselves," Riis wrote. "This is true particularly of the poorest. They are shiftless, destructive and stupid; in a word, they are what the tenements have made them."[9]

Riis publicized the success of the model tenements in housing the poor. In an article extolling the efforts the developer Elgin R.L. Gould, Riis claimed that Gould's homes sheltered thousands of families. He estimated that between 1870 and 1900 model

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[8] Schwartz, 7-9.
[9] Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 169-170, 213.

tenements provided as many as 2,000 dwelling units accommodating about 10,000 people. Despite the impressive numbers, model tenements rarely helped the truly disadvantaged slum dwellers. Even the small profits private developers sought resulted in rents higher than poor families could afford. Tenants for model housing tended to be the families of clerks, tradesmen and engineers who fit the "worthy poor" criteria for cleanliness, morality and work ethic. Housing reformers, hired by the private developers to screen prospective tenants, ensured that only families with husbands who held steady jobs and wives who kept clean homes were chosen.[10]

The Early Years of Public Housing

By the turn of the century, it was clear to the younger generation of housing reformers that private approaches to housing the poor could do no more than accomplish symbolic changes. Middle-class and college educated, many of the younger housing reformers had studied abroad in Europe where they encountered successful government sponsored low-income housing programs. England's Housing of the Working Classes Act increased the amount municipalities could borrow for slum clearance and the construction of low-income housing. Between 1890 and 1914, London sponsored the construction 15,000 low-income units, while in Germany, Belgium and France state banks furnished low-interest loans for the construction of low-income housing for workers. Europe's wage earner housing, like America's model tenements, housed mostly skilled workers and could not house the "truly poor." Still, to the younger generation of

[10] Schwartz, 6.

American housing reformers, the European model was better suited to establishing a large scale low-income housing program than the largesse of private developers.[11]

Mary K. Simkhovitch, one of the founders of the public housing movement, was emblematic of the new generation of housing reformers. In 1898, after studying economics in Germany, Simkhovitch, made her way to the College Settlement House located in the slums of the Lower East Side. In 1907, while director of the Greenwich House settlement in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, Simkhovitch served on the Committee of Congestion of Population in New York. To break the cycle of overcrowding of wage earning families and the escalating rents of dilapidated tenements on the Lower East Side, the Committee recommended that the city adopt zoning regulations similar to those in Germany and England that forced the dispersal of factories and sweat shops from lower Manhattan to other parts of the city where land costs were cheaper. The Committee even investigated the feasibility of the city purchasing undeveloped land in the outer-boroughs and allowing planners to design separate districts for industry and low-density working-class housing.[12]

The Committee's zoning proposals failed, but the application of government solutions to the problem of the slums by the younger housing reforms marked a departure from the more conservative generation of Riis and Veiller. The younger reformers' attitudes towards the poor, however, were often similar to those of the earlier generation. As director of Greenwich House, Mary K. Simkhovitch led a successful campaign for the clearance of the Minettas, a group of streets housing several rookeries, brothels and the

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[11] Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998): 187-190; Lubove, 178.

[12] Mary K. Simkhovitch, *Here is God's Plenty: Reflections of America's Social Advance*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 14-15, 26-27; Rodgers, *The Atlantic Crossings*, 182-183; Lubove, 231-238.

area's remaining 2,000 African Americans. When faced with the dilemma of choosing between neighborhood improvement through slum clearance versus the displacement of tenement families, Simkhovitch and other housing reformers often sided with real estate developers who claimed it was better to let the market determine the "highest and best use" of the land. The clearing of the Minettas displaced 5,000 residents for the development of the IRT Subway and rental apartment houses that no immigrant family could afford.[13]

Simkhovitch was baffled by local opposition to her slum clearance efforts. "It seemed to us," she wrote, "that our neighbors did not realize the deterioration and danger to the community a nearby group of buildings exhibited." The conditions of the tenements threatened some of the "hard-working" families who lived there. One such family consisted of a mother, who became a laundress after her husband died, who was raising her children in the "best traditions of behavior and character," Simkhovitch observed. "But she was the exception in that old rookery." She never mentioned where the woman and her family would live once the tenement was demolished. Most dislocated families simply relocated to tenements in nearby slums.[14]

Edith Elmer Wood, the wife of a U.S. Navy officer, was one of first housing reformers to call for a permanent government housing program. Increasing the supply of decent housing that slum families could afford, Wood argued, required housing programs similar to those in Europe. By the 1910s, America lagged far behind other industrial nations in government funded housing for workers. By 1914, a total of less than 200 units of municipally funded housing had been built in the United States. In contrast, public

[13] Schwartz, 17.
[14] Simkhovitch, *Here is God's Plenty*, 32-33.

authorities in Britain constructed 24,000 units, Berlin 11,000, Frankfurt 5,500 and Paris 2,500.[15]

During World War I, Britain launched a comprehensive wartime workers' housing program that at the end four years, produced 10,000 units of well designed permanent housing. Edith Wood and other housing reformers promoted the British model as the type of housing program the United States should adopt for its wartime workers. Launched in 1917, the Emergency Fleet Corporation and the United States Housing Corporation constructed 15,000 units of government financed housing in only ten months. The quality of the housing, which consisted of small brick single-family and attached row-houses in semi-suburban settings, surpassed expectations, and proved that government financed housing worked. After the War, the Federal government cancelled the program and sold the housing to private interests.[16]

During the housing boom of the 1920s, private developers added tens of thousands of new housing units to the New York market, but most of them were out of reach for wage earning families. The well disposed developers, who in past decades had invested in the construction of model tenements, effectively turned their backs on low-income housing. The profits were too small especially amidst the building boom of the 1920s. During this period, the debate raged between housing reformers over the direction of low-income housing policy.[17]

The debate fell along generational lines. Edith Wood, advocated for a housing program similar to the one implemented by the Federal government during World War I.

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[15] Schwartz, 16; Rodgers, 197-198.
[16] Rodgers, 286-290; Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggle in the New Deal Era*, (Chicago, The University Chicago Press, 1996), 17, 38.
[17] Schwartz, 23; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontiers: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219-220.

Lawrence Veiller, shunned government intervention in the housing market. He argued that direct government subsidies provided an unfair competition to private real estate investment. Government's only role, according to Veiller, was to enforce strict housing and construction codes. Restrictive legislation, Wood countered, only prevented bad housing from being built and did nothing to promote the construction of decent housing affordable to low-income families.[18]

Throughout the 1920s, both the State and Federal governments stayed out of the low-income housing field. "Municipal housing or municipal slum clearance, or any form of government aid (including loans at low cost) were taboo and anathema," recalled Wood. "They are un-American. They were something pertaining to the effete monarchies of Europe." The onset of The Great Depression drew many housing reformers over to the idea that a government low-income housing program was a necessity. One of them was Mary K. Simkohvitch. In 1931, she was still the leader of the Greenwich House and had spent nearly half of her 63 years in the settlement house movement. After visiting a local encampment of hundreds of unemployed men living in makeshift homes, she was convinced that conditions had grown desperate and needed to be addressed. "The cumulative impressions of the housing picture I had witnessed . . .," she recalled, "resulted in my conversion to the necessity of government housing for persons unable to pay commercial rents."[19]

That same year, Simkhovitch, Edith Elmer Wood and the social worker Helen Alfred formed the Public Housing Conference. The Conference lobbied the New York State Legislature to allow municipalities to establish housing authorities funded by the

[18] Jackson, 220; Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums*, 179 181.
[19] Jackson, *A Place Called Home*, 204; Simkhovitch, 38-41.

state to conduct large scale slum clearance and the construction of low-income public housing. In 1931, the bill to establish a housing authority for New York City died in Albany. As the Depression deepened, the demand for government intervention in the housing crisis increased. In 1932, over 186,000 New York families were displaced from their homes because they could not pay the rent. Popular resistance to these evictions was widespread. Mobs forced the police to stop eviction proceedings and restore up to 77,000 evicted families to their homes. [20]

Conditions in New York's slums continued to deteriorate. The population in the Lower East Side had decreased dramatically during the 1920s, as more prosperous families moved out of the neighborhood to lower-middle income areas of the Bronx and Queens. The onslaught of the Depression, however, left many of the remaining families unable to pay rent. Landlords, who could not afford renovations to meet new safety laws, allowed buildings to deteriorate or simply abandoned their properties. Housing reformers from the Henry Street Settlement reported that the Lower East Side neighborhood of Corlears Hook was the worst slum in the city. The neighborhood featured 949 dilapidated old-law tenements and hundreds of abandoned, vacant and boarded up buildings and 71 vacant lots. Figuresalso demonstrated t hat neighborhood families experienced high rates of mal-nourishment, crime, juvenile delinquency as well as a district-wide mortality rate that was 4% above the city's average.[21]

During the winter of 1933-1934, several fires raged through the fire trap tenements killing entire families. After a blaze that killed seven children, hundreds of

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[20] Jackson, 203; Peter Marcuse, "The Beginnings of Public Housing in New York," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (August 1986), 355-356.
[21] Ann L. Buttenwieser, "Shelter for What and For Whom? On the Route Towards Vladeck Houses, 1930 to 1940," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (August 1986), 405.

children marched in front of City Hall with placards reading "We Don't Want To Burn." While running for mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia promised a program of publicly supported slum clearance and low-income housing projects to replace the squalid tenements and rookeries of the slums. Once he took office in 1934, La Guardia took swift action. He appointed the former New York State Senator and housing reformer, Langdon Post to head the Tenement House Commission. Wasting no time, Post in his first two years in charge of slum clearance boarded up 10,000 tenements and between 1934 and 1937, tore down 20,000 slum units.[22]

In 1933, Simkhovitch and other members of the Conference successfully petitioned the incoming Roosevelt administration to include public housing as part of the public works program written into the National Industrial Recovery Act. The new legislation directed the Public Works Administration (PWA) to provide federal funding to local housing authorities to clear slums and construct low-income housing. With federal funding for public housing forthcoming, the reformers still needed new state and city agencies charged to receive federal funds and manage the housing and slum clearance operations. After six months of political wrangling in Albany the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) was established in February, 1934. The Housing Authority was authorized to continue the city's slum-clearance program and replace the slums with low-income public housing. The Authority could raise money through the sale of bonds and seize private property by eminent domain, that is, take over land that was to be improved for the benefit of the general public.[23]

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[22] Kessner, *Fiorello La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York*, 323; Jackson, *A Place Called Home*, 209-210.
[23] Jackson, 204-205; Schwartz, 33-34.

Three out of the five members Mayor La Guardia appointed to the Housing Authority, Mary K. Simkhovitch, Louis Pink and Chariman Langdon Post (also the head of the Tenement House Commission) were housing reformers who had connections to the settlement house movement. Their vision for the public housing program favored large scale slum clearance coupled with the construction of public housing projects on the sites of the former tenements. Imbued with the moral ethos of the housing reformers, Post and Simkhovitch believed that replacing the slums with clean, modern and affordable housing reduced crime, disease and delinquency and reinforced the values of cleanliness, sobriety and provided moral uplift for the poor.[24]

Critics of this vision argued that projects should not be constructed on cleared slum sites, but on vacant land on the outskirts of the city where land costs were cheaper. Catherine Bauer, a well known housing reformer and ally of Simkhovitch in the effort to garner federal funds for public housing, argued that slum clearance was favored by real estate interests and landlords who stood to gain by the sale of their formerly un-sellable property to the government. Building in the inner city also meant conforming to the existing street grids and density patterns would prevent good planning for the public housing developments.[25]

Simkhovitch, Post and other housing reformers, however, argued that building on former slum sites benefited slum dwellers by keeping the social networks already established by the settlement houses in tact. Helen Hall, one of the directors of the Henry Street Settlement in the Lower East Side, claimed, somewhat paternalistically, that the settlement house workers could help the slum dwellers make the transition to their new

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[24] Rosalie Genevro, "Site Selection and the New York City Housing Authority, 1934-1939," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (August 1986), 342-343.; Kessner, 321.
[25] Genevro, *Journal of Urban History,* 340.

more modern and spacious homes and manage their affairs more frugally. Post asserted that building in outlying areas diverted housing from where it was needed and that the relocating the population of the slums would "drain the city of its very heart."[26]

Bauer's view was favored by the urban planners who advised the Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, the director of the PWA, the Federal authority authorized to allocate funds for the first public housing projects. Robert Kohn, the head of the PWA's housing division favored the construction of large scale, low-density projects in outlying areas of the city where land was less expensive. Kohn, aware that financial support for public housing on the Federal level would never have been authorized if it did not create more jobs, also argued that developing outlying areas of city produced more jobs. New sewers, water pipes, schools and other social infrastructure would need to be constructed. Behind some of the arguments for not building in the outskirts of the city, was unstated belief that housing built near the slums would be contaminated by the degradation of the surrounding area.[27]

In the end, cost considerations out-weighed all other factors in determining where NYCHA would build. With the promise of $24 million in Federal grants from the PWA, the Housing Authority launched an extensive investigation into land costs and the best sites to build public housing. Building on the Lower East Side, the most logical site for the first project, proved too expensive. Forced to look for cheaper land on the outer boroughs, the Authority chose a slum site in Williamsburg, Brooklyn containing 2,000

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[26] Marcuse, 380; Buttenweiser, 407; Genevro, 342.
[27] Genevro, 342.

dilapidated apartments in several tenements to be demolished, that was eventually purchased for $4.20 per square foot.[28]

When the money expected from the PWA was delayed, the Housing Authority focused its attentions once again on the Lower East Side. Vincent Astor volunteered to sell a family owned slum property at Avenue A and Third Street. Embarrassed by a newspaper article connecting Astor family to the slum, Astor was willing to unload the property for the below market value of $3.50 per square foot. NYCHA chairman Langdon Post purchased the Astor property and two more adjacent slum parcels with money loaned to the Authority by the City and $500,000 Post accrued on behalf of the Authority through the sale of salvaged bricks and other materials gleaned from the over the 1,000 tenements demolished as part of NYCHA's slum clearance program.[29]

It was there in 1935, on the site of the Astor property, that the Housing Authority constructed the first public housing in the United States. Appropriately named First Houses, the project was small, only 122 units and was funded almost exclusively by the city. While construction of First Houses was under way, the money that the PWA director Harold Ickes had promised New York more than a year before finally came through to finance the project in Williamsburg. The Williamsburg Houses, completed in 1938, consisted of 1,622 low-income apartments. Slum clearance for the project tore down 2,034 tenement units, but so many of the apartments were vacant that it only displaced 1,279 families. The project actually added to the population of the area.[30]

Race as well as site-selections was a crucial element in the creation of public housing. The housing reformers serving on the Housing Authority were well aware of the

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[28] Ibid., 344.
[29] Marcuse, 356-358; Bernard Taper, "A Lover of Cities, Part II," *The New Yorker*, 11 February 1967, 76.
[30] Marcuse, 365.

housing problems facing African Americans. In 1939, 280,000 African Americans lived in Harlem's 530 square blocks. Years of segregation had taken its toll. Between 1914 and 1939, the African American population of Harlem increased by 600%. By 1935, neighborhoods in Harlem had replaced those of Lower East Side for the dubious distinction of being considered the most densely populated on earth. Overcrowding in Harlem translated into high-rents. This, coupled with low wages and chronic unemployment suffered by African American workers, forced families to double-up in one room apartments.[31]

While sympathetic to the needs of African Americans, housing reformers who directed the Authority were unwilling to promote integration in public housing. Their concern was that if African Americans were allowed to move into projects built in white areas, the public would see public housing as an experiment in integration and turn against it. While not adverse to an African American presence in public housing, the housing reformers on NYCHA designed the program to up hold the prevailing American racial conventions. This meant that projects built in white neighborhoods would have white tenants, and project built in black neighborhoods would have black tenants.[32]

Still, when leaders of the NAACP requested that the Housing Authority construct a public housing project in Harlem, Authority members initially demurred. The high cost of land in Harlem would make any project in the area prohibitively expensive, Authority members argued. They were also concerned that slum clearance in Harlem would force the relocation of African American families across the racial boundary of West 96th

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[31] City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Housing of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," May 1942, folder Housing 42-62, box 103 (AJC 347.17.10, Gen 10), American Jewish Committee Papers, The Jewish History Center, New York, 1; Jackson, *A Place Called Home*, 210.

[32] Marcuse, 368.

Street into white neighborhoods. The impetus for building public housing in Harlem occurred on March 19 and 20, 1935, when violent riots broke out in Harlem. Two months after the riots, Mayor La Guardia promised that the next public housing project would be in Harlem. The site for the Harlem River Houses pleased everyone. Construction would be completed in 1937, on vacant land in the northwestern corner of Manhattan, far north of 96th Street.[33]

In 1935, with three projects underway, Housing Authority Chairman Langdon Post, believed that the time to establish a permanent, more comprehensive public housing program (what he called as a "real new deal" in housing) was at hand. Through his connections Post was granted an audience with President Roosevelt and laid out his plan. It called for $2 billion over ten years to finance a massive slum clearance and building program that would eliminate New York's worst slums and replace the tenements with modern, affordable public housing. Indifferent to public housing, Roosevelt turned down the program. Roosevelt envisioned the nation's future housing developments as single-family homes in suburban settings rather than apartment complexes in the cities.[34]

Rexford Guy Tugwell, one the President's closest advisors, told Roosevelt that New York and other urban areas were on an inevitable decline and in the near future would cease to be the centers of economic growth. If the Federal government wanted to fund low-cost housing, Tugwell advised, it should avoid renovating the urban centers and build new planned cities in undeveloped areas and populate the new towns with the urban poor. Many of these so-called "greenbelt towns" were constructed in the countryside of Maryland, West Virginia and Wisconsin. To the Roosevelt administration, which spent

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[33] Ibid, 369.
[34] Kessner, 333-336; Jackson, 218-219.

lavishly on the greenbelt towns before the program was halted by Congress, building new housing in decaying cities was simply throwing money away.[35]

Housing reformers continued to fight for a comprehensive public housing program without the support of the President. Mary K. Simkhovitch leader of the National Public Housing Conference drafted legislation that was introduced by New York Senator Robert F. Wagner in 1935, that would establish a Housing Division in the Department of the Interior to allocate $800 million for the construction of public housing. The money would be distributed to local housing authorities who would fund slum clearance and the construction of projects specifically targeting low-income tenants.[36]

The legislation failed to pass, but the following year the Labor Housing Conference, led by Catherine Bauer and the American Federation Labor, worked with Senator Wagner on another more ambitious public housing bill. The LHC bill would not only fund the construction of public housing for low-income families, but for middle-income families as well. The AFL claimed that there was a demand for moderately priced single-family shelter by many union families who could not afford most privately developed housing. The Wagner housing bill failed to pass in 1936, but Wagner would reintroduce the legislation in 1937.[37]

La Guardia meanwhile was convinced that any permanent public housing program eventually established by the Federal government would fall well short of the housing reformers expectations. La Guardia believed the city would have to make the most of modest funding from Washington and embrace a more limited approach to public

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[35] Kessner, 334; Rodgers, 454-455.
[36] Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 184-185.
[37] Ibid.

housing. Housing Authority Chairman Langdon Post, however, refused to adopt La Guardia's attitude. Post continued with the city's massive slum clearance program, despite La Guardia's warning that the demolitions reduced the city's low-income housing stock. In the early years of the Depression there was a surplus of vacant apartments in tenements. Many working class families who could no longer afford to pay rent simply moved out and landlords, unable to attract tenants at higher rents, often boarded-up and abandoned their buildings rather than make expensive repairs. The continuation of the Depression coupled with the years of feverish slum clearance created a shortage of low-income apartments. In 1933 20% of all apartments in New York were vacant, but by 1939 the percentage dropped to only 3%.[38]

Post also used his position at the Housing Authority as a bully pulpit to raise awareness of declining housing conditions and to pressure La Guardia to lobby the Federal government for a comprehensive public housing plan. In the winter of 1936, Post issued a new set of guidelines requiring landlords to make fire safety improvements or face the immediate foreclosure of their properties. Ignoring threats from landlords that they would throw out their tenants rather than comply, Post instead scheduled a series of public hearings on landlord abuses. The hearings would provide tenant groups a platform to denounce the real estate interests and pressure the city to construct more public housing. When La Guardia requested that the hearings be cancelled Post refused.[39]

Concerned that the new safety regulations would further reduce low-income housing units, La Guardia negotiated a compromise with landlords that allowed them to skirt the new safety regulations and keep their tenements open. La Guardia's intervention

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[38] Kessner 323-324; 429-430; Jackson, 221.
[39] Ibid., 430.

brought howls of resentment from housing tenant activists who accused the Mayor of siding with landlords. Embarrassed and angered by Post, the incident marked La Guardia's parting of the ways with the housing reformers. The amount of money and social engineering required to achieve the grandiose goals of the housing reformers, La Guardia believed, was unrealistic. Post and the others on NYCHA, the Mayor complained, were more interested in campaigning for a public housing than in building it.[40]

In September 1937, Congress ratified the Wagner housing bill, also known as 1937 United States Housing Act. The Act established the United States Housing Authority and promised at least $500 million in grants and loans for the construction of low-income public housing projects. The Act was regarded as a major victory for housing reformers, but lobbying groups sponsored by the real estate industry pressured Congress to make several alterations to the final draft. Complaining that government intervention in the housing market was unfair competition to private developers, Congress attached a spending cap to the cost of any public housing unit subsidized by Federal government. The cap severely limited the architectural design and quality of projects. According to the housing historian Gail Radford, the 1937 bill permanently reduced the standard of federally funded public housing to that of "poor people's housing."[41]

After his re-election in November, La Guardia fired Post, serving notice to Mary K. Simkhovitch and the other housing reformers at the Housing Authority that they needed to lower their expectations of what Federal funding could realistically accomplish. Since the 1937 Housing Act prohibited any single state from receiving more than 10% of

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[40] Ibid., 431.
[41] Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996), 189-192; Lee E. Cooper, "Housing Act Will Open New Era in Slum Clearance," *NYT*, 5 September 1937.

the United States Housing Authority's total funding, the city would receive a little over $50 million. Still, the Mayor expected quick action to improve on the Authority's record of only two projects completed, one under construction and none in the "pipeline." La Guardia appointed the real- estate developer Alfred Rheinstein to replace Post as NYCHA chairman. Rheinstein believed that only private construction could produce enough housing to relieve New York's low-income housing shortage. In his market oriented approach, Public housing would fill the gap with a few low-income projects that conformed to the limited resources the Federal government was willing to spend.[42]

The first projects constructed under the new Federal program reflected the austerity of the 1937 Housing Act's spending cap. Both Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn and Queensbridge Houses in Queens were constructed with far less money than Williamsburg or Harlem River Houses, but the design of both projects was condemned by architectural critic Lewis Mumford as "barracks-like." To keep costs below the Federal spending cap rooms in the new projects were smaller, some closets lacked doors, elevators did not stop at all floors and the interior wall construction was flimsy.[43]

The equivalent domain clause of the 1937 Act was another controversial measure that had long term implications for the city's public housing program. The clause required that for every unit of low income public housing built, an equivalent number of slum units must also be torn down. At the time the clause was thought to be a victory for housing reformers who favored slum clearance combined with the rebuilding the slums with public housing, but it was also a victory for real estate interests. Private developers would face no competition for choice vacant-land sites in outlying areas of the city,

[42] Radford, 189-192; Jackson, 222.
[43] Radford, 192.

because the slum clearance provision put them off-limits to public housing. Commercial landlords feared that the increase of available apartment units produced by the construction of public housing would drive down rents in low-income housing. The slum clearance provision, by mandating the removal of tenements, would prevent an increase in the supply of apartments and protect the investment of landlords. Finally, the 1937 Act's spending cap, limiting the cost of Federally-funded public housing to $1,000 a room per unit, coupled wih the slum clearance provision and inflated land values in New York would severely limit the number of Federally-funded public housing units the city could produce.[44]

For all its faults, New York's early public housing program succeeded in constructing clean, modern housing for rents that were far below what tenants paid in the private market.[45] The families provided with public housing were by no means poor. NYCHA's exhaustive screening process guaranteed that only stable, working-class families would be allowed into public housing. For its early projects NYCHA also carefully screened its applicants. Social workers interviewed prospective tenants and issued points for "cleanliness," "good character" and the "tidiness" of their current residence. Financial need was also factored into NYCHA's tenant evaluations. To rent an apartment in First Houses, however, the tenant had to earn at least $100 per month, the national average salary for a full time employee in 1935. High rents were required to repay the incurred debt and operating costs for the project.[46]

To ensure that "problem families" would be excluded from its show-case housing project, unemployed and single-parent families, families on relief or families with

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[44] Ibid., 190; "Housing Act Steps Sped to Get Loans," *NYT*, 24 September 1937.
[45] Marcuse, 354.
[46] Radford, 166.

members that had criminal records were also excluded. Tenants were also expected to show proof of insurance policies and modest savings in the bank. Federally funded projects completed after the 1937 Housing Act were less expensive. Rents at Vladeck Houses, which opened in 1940, were $6.55 per room, but tenants still had to meet the same rigid social qualifications that often excluded the neediest families.[47]

Despite its limited tenant selection policies, the legacy of the early public housing program was impressive. By 1941, twelve projects housing 13,187 low-income families were constructed. The housing reformers running NYCHA were deeply influenced by the settlement house ethos of social up lift. They believed that public housing was more than a program to re-house the poor; it was also intended to make the poor into more socially responsible citizens. All of NYCHA's early projects featured day care and health centers, playgrounds, and communal meeting rooms. The Williamsburg Houses featured a kindergarten and a nursery where mothers could be counseled on proper childcare techniques.[48]

NYCHA often hired social workers connected to settlement houses to aid public housing tenants make the adjustment to life in their new surroundings. Helen Hall of the Henry Street Settlement advised new tenants on how to properly furnish their new apartments in the Vladeck Houses and also organized a nursery school and a cooking class. Sometimes housing reformers' attempts to make slum residents into better people crossed the line of patronization. NYCHA often sent social workers to question public housing tenants and make sure that tenants would be able to pay their rent on time.[49]

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[47] Marcuse, 364; Kessner, 330; Buttenwieser, 408.
[48] Kessner, 332; Marcuse, "The Beginnings of Public Housing in New York," *Journal of Urban History*, 336.
[49] Schwartz, JUH, 424.

Housing Reformers, Integration and Public Housing

NYCHA also remained committed to upholding racial segregation throughout the early years of public housing. Fearing that local whites would reject public housing in their midst (leading to a general backlash against public housing) the Housing reformers at NYCHA were unwilling to house a significant number of African American families in projects located in predominantly white neighborhoods. By 1941, only three of the 12 original projects had sizable African American populations. These were Harlem Houses in Manhattan, with 100% occupancy of black families, South Jamaica Houses in Queens at 69.8%, and Kingsborough in Brooklyn at 39.2%. Of the remaining nine projects only one had African American population of over 10%.[50]

In 1937, Mayor La Guardia won the approval of three new housing projects: Queensbridge in Queens, Red Hook in Brooklyn and Vladeck in Manhattan. It was taken for granted that these projects would be set aside for white tenants. To keep African American families from applying to the new projects, the Housing Authority instructed all African Americans to apply at Harlem River Houses and all white families to apply at NYCHA headquarters at 14th Street. Organized protests by African American leaders in 1938, led to housing officials to plan African American projects in South Jamaica, Queens and Brownsville, Brooklyn.[51]

1938 also marked the year that New York State became involved in public housing. To supplement the Federal government's paltry allowance for public housing

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[50] Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 57-59; NYCHA, "Number of Families at Federal Projects Shown by Racial Composition at Initial Occupancy on February 1, 1953," 7 January 1954, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, New York, 10.
[51] Schwartz, 56.

construction, housing reformers successfully lobbied the state government in Albany for a housing amendment to the new state constitution that would provide $300 million to build low-income housing. The following year, the housing reformer and lawyer, Ira S. Robbins, who had crafted the original state housing legislation, was working on the final draft of the Public Housing Law that would be ratified by voters. In section 223 of the Law, Robbins inserted the following line: "For all the purposes of this chapter, no person shall, because of race, creed, color or national origin, be subjected to any discrimination." "The addition did not meet with any objections," recalled Robbins years later, "probably because it had no teeth."[52]

Without a state commission authorized to bring discrimination cases before the courts, the law, as Robbins stated, could not be enforced. The law represented a new activism by housing reformers and civil rights advocates to address the Housing Authority's "dual system" in choosing tenants. In 1939, representatives of the Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) met with NYCHA officials to ask when black applicants would be allowed to live in predominantly white projects. The civil rights leaders were rebuffed. Mary K. Simkhovitch told them that nearly 18.5% of all public housing projects were completed or under construction in African American neighborhoods. Considering that the percentage of blacks in public housing was more than three times their percentage of the city's population, she argued, NYCHA was in fact serving the African American community. At a later meeting with Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Simkhovitch asked for Wilkins' patience. "We have to be practical about it, and that is why we feel we have to

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[52] Schwartz, 50; Ira S. Robbins with Gus Tyler, introduction and epilogue, Roger Starr, *Reminiscences of a Housing Advocate*, (New York: Citizens Housing and Planning Council of New York, 1984), 105-106.

strike a happy balance," Simkhovitch argued. "We want to be just and at the same time we know that after all the colored population is only 4.7% of the whole population . . . What we feel is the Housing Authority must think of Housing first."[53]

By not promoting integration, Wilkins warned, the Housing Authority laid the foundation for a public housing system that reinforced the patterns of racial segregation. "There is this behind the whole policy as far as our organization is concerned," Wilkins responded. ". . . that the government in these housing projects shall cement into the morass of the country any more separation ideas of segregation than there are already existing. That is a great danger." Wilkins' observation proved prescient. Years later, during the 1950s and 1960s, segregation in public housing did become entrenched. During the 1940s, however, public housing established several carefully managed integrated projects. Despite early resistance, the Housing Authority seemed to be moving in the direction of establishing more. Managers in most public housing projects operated their buildings without discriminating against African American families. Maintaining integrated projects, however, often required management to keep down the minority population to a level that would not discourage white families from moving in or prompting those currently living in the project from moving out.[54]

The 1940s marked the emergence of a new generation of housing reformers who came to link public housing with the early civil rights movement. In November 1941, activists from the city's leading white civil rights groups, the Ethical Culture Society and the American Jewish Committee joined with activists from the NAACP and the Urban

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[53] Schwartz, 57; New York City Housing Authority, "Meeting: South Jamaica Advisory Committee," 6 November 1939, folder 7, box 56B2, New York City Housing Authority Papers (hereafter NYCHA), LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College CUNY, New York.
[54] NYCHA, "Meeting: South Jamaica Advisory Committee," NYCHA Papers; Robbins with Tyler, *Reminiscences of a Housing Advocate*, 146.

League to form City Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem. The goal of the CWCCH was to bring together "leading citizens"---black and white---and "fulfill the promise of equality of opportunity and true democracy for Negro people and "to try to make up for the neglect and mistakes of the past in relation between Negro and white communities."[55]

For the NAACP's Walter White, the more immediate goal of the CWCCH was to improve the worsening social conditions in Harlem. White believed this was the only way to avoid a riot similar to the one that occurred in Harlem in 1935, from happening again. Since the 1935 riots, however, conditions in Harlem continued to deteriorate. The outbreak of World War II and the drafting of thousands of Harlem's young men into the segregated armed forces exacerbated the resentment African Americans felt towards segregation. Harlemites believed the Federal government short changed them on both relief payments and food rations. In 1942, the "Double V" campaign was launched, calling for the victory over fascism abroad and Jim Crow at home. The "Double V" campaign impressed liberal whites who began to view the War as an opportunity to remake New York into an inter-racial democracy.[56]

The CWCCH debated strategies for eradicating Jim Crow and producing a series of reports, pamphlets, radio shows, and conferences ultimately succeeded in raising the consciousness of New Yorkers to the role segregation played in the lives of African Americans. The heightened awareness of racism, however, was not enough to prevent the outbreak of the Harlem riot of 1943. At an early CWCCH meeting, the participants found

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[55] City-Wide Citizen's Committee of Harlem (hereafter CWCCH), "The Story of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," folder CWCCH City Wide Harlem Week 1943, box 8, Algernon Black Papers (hereafter Black Papers), Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 4.
[56] Unpublished memoirs by Algernon Black, "First Meeting of CWCCH November 11, 1941," n.d., folder CWCCH The Beginnings, box 7, Black Papers; Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 96; Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*, (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 1990), 52.

that one of the key problems facing the African American community was housing. Segregation in Harlem led to a massive shortage of reasonably priced housing. African American families paid rents that were far higher than those paid by white families in apartments that were often structurally un-sound. High rents eroded the ability of blacks to purchase other necessities and often forced families to "double up" or take on borders that in turn led to overcrowded conditions and substandard living conditions.[57]

Aretha McKinley knew first hand the difficulties of finding decent housing. An African American resident of Harlem, McKinley spent several weeks looking for a reasonably priced apartment large enough to accommodate her husband, six-year-old daughter and elderly mother. "In every decent building occupied by colored," she wrote,

> vacancies practically never existed, and when any did occur one almost had to be right on the scene at the time to obtain it. Vacancies observed in 'non colored' houses were so numerous that we applied at many of these. In spite of our respectable appearance and our courteous manner, at every one of these, with one notable exception, we were abruptly refused. . . . It was a deep and humiliating rebuff an underserved penalty for being colored.

When she did find vacant apartments in "colored houses" the apartments were small and the rents expensive. In apartments where whites had recently moved out, the rents were "jacked up" when African American families moved in. Landlords rarely required references in apartment houses renting to blacks, and would take on renters "indiscriminately" as long as they could afford to rent. "In houses occupied by white persons," McKinley continued, "even when fifty percent empty, the best type of colored applicants are not considered."[58]

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[57] Unpublished memoirs by Black, "Organization of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," n.d., folder CWCCH The Beginnings, box 7, Black Papers.
[58] Aretha McKinley to NYCHA, 15 April 1943, folder 4, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

McKinley's story spoke of the experiences of tens of thousands of African American families in New York. African Americans paid higher rents than whites, in overcrowded apartments that were often structurally unsound. Public housing was often the best housig available to middle -income African American families. The Housing Authority's practice of limiting the number of blacks in public housing projects constructed in white areas, and the paucity of public housing in general severely limited the housing choices available to African American families.[59]

To investigate the housing problems faced by African Americans, the long time housing reformer Charles Abrams joined the CWCCH to lead the group's subcommittee on housing. Abrams would emerge as one of the leaders of the struggle to end segregation in housing. Abrams, a real estate lawyer who also owned modest properties in Greenwich Village, made his reputation promoting interracial living as way to break the segregation in New York. In 1933, he was appointed by Mayor La Guardia to the team of lawyers drafting a bill to the State Legislature that established the New York City Housing Authority. Abrams was later hired as legal counsel to the Housing Authority and worked closely with the Authority chairman Langdon Post.[60]

While working for NYCHA, Abrams successfully argued on behalf of the Authority in the Muller case, which established the city's right of eminent domain to acquire private buildings for public housing sites. Post and Abrams devised the Housing Authority's aggressive slum clearance policy that tore down thousands of fire traps and other tenements that land lords refused to bring up to code. Like Post, Abrams supported

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Unpublished memoir of Algernon Black, "Subcommittee on Housing of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," n.d., folder CWCCH Housing Subcommittee, box 8, Black Papers; Bernard Taper, "Profile: A Lover of Cities, Part One" *The New Yorker*, 4 February 1967, 60.

a large scale, comprehensive program of slum clearance and public housing that La Guardia believed was unfeasible. Denouncing Abrams as "pettifogging lawyer" and blaming him for the lack of progress in public housing construction, La Guardia forced Abrams from the Housing Authority along with Post in 1937.[61]

A 1942 report issued by Abrams, as chairman of CWCCH's Housing Committee, argued that interracial public housing could alleviate the shortage of moderately priced housing for African Americans in Harlem. "The Housing Authority has accommodated thus far only 1,500 Negro families," Abrams wrote. "The pace, though reflecting credit to the Housing Authority in light of its limited appropriation, is hardly encouraging to one looking toward an early solution of the Negro housing problem." NYCHA's current policy of limiting blacks to public housing in black enclaves, Abrams maintained would not alleviate the problem. Harlem's high land costs and overcrowding prevented the Housing Authority from purchasing and clearing slum areas and building the housing required to relieve the shortage.[62]

Abrams advised that the Housing Authority drop its racial qualifications for tenant selection in low-income housing. This was only part of a broader solution, argued Abrams that included the dispersal blacks in Harlem and other black enclaves to other parts of the city including white neighborhoods:

> Re-housing . . . must be an expensive, and extensive plan and when fulfilled it will be cheaper in the end than the cost of tolerating the condition under which Negroes presently live. Long-range planning, therefore, demands starting now, by increasing Negro opportunities in war production, by building housing in all

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[61] Anthony Jackson, *A Place Called Home*, 223; Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello H. La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York*, 429-432.
[62] CWCCH, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Housing of the City Wide-Citizens' Committee on Harlem," May 1942, folder CWCCH Housing Subcommittee, box 8, Black Papers, 5.

> communities, by raising the standard of living as well as the standard of shelter throughout the country.[63]

To Abrams and other housing reformers public housing offered the brightest example of successful inter-racial communities. By 1944, eight of NYCHA's twelve projects housed African American populations above 3%. Projects like Red Hook (4.1% African American) and Queensbridge Houses (3.8% African American) coupled with Harlem (100% African American) and South Jamaica Houses (86.1% African American) were hardly exemplars of "integration." During the early 1940s, however, NYCHA began loosening its strict quotas on African American applicants, and allowed more blacks into projects built in white areas. In 1939, for example, blacks made up only 1% of the public housing population, limited almost exclusively to Harlem River and South Jamaica Houses. By 1942, African American constituted 11.4% of the total population in public housing.[64]

One of the reasons the Housing Authority was willing to admit more blacks was because the number of white applicants dropped during the War years. As more whites took advantage of the improving economy and accepted jobs as defense workers their incomes often exceeded the eligibility limits for low-income housing. Black defense workers, who earned less than whites, rarely exceeded low-income limits.[65] The Housing Authority was also responding to continued pressure by civil rights groups. Instead of

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[63] Ibid. 7.

[64] Franklin O. Nichols, Industrial Relations Field Secretary National Urban League to Charles Abrams, Chairman Committee on Housing CWCCH, 30 January 1942, folder CWCCH Housing Subcommittee, box 8, Black Papers; Edmond B. Butler, Chairman NYCHA to Julia Waxman, 6 June 1944, folder 4, box 71B5, 2; Mary K. Simkhovitch, Acting Chairman NYCHA to James H. Hubert, Chairman NYCHA Advisory Committee, 21 November 1939, folder 4, box 71B5; Memorandum by May Lumsden, "Negro Tenants," 2 March 1942, box 71B5; Maxwell H. Tretter to Mary Sklar, "Negro Occupancy;"18 December 1942, folder 4, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

[65] May Lumsden to M.H. Tretter, "Fort Greene Houses Negro Population," 10 March 1943, folder 4, box F1B5; Naudin J. Oswell to Lumsden, "South Jamaica Management Office," 12 April 1943, folder 4, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

raising the issue of NYCHA's discriminatory practices to officials, NAACP members complained directly to the managers of individual projects, who would often concede to their demands and accept more black applicants. In reports to NYCHA headquarters, the project managers seemed much more sympathetic to integration. To promote integration, however, the project managers had to carefully manage the numbers of black and white tenants in its projects. In the newer projects, this most often meant keeping the numbers of African Americans in projects to a point that would not discourage white families from moving in.[66]

Fort Greene Houses, a State funded project to house defense workers near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, opened in 1943. Based on a demographic survey of the surrounding neighborhood, the Housing Authority had estimated that the African American population at Fort Greene Houses would be 17%. A few months after the project opened for occupancy, NYCHA statisticians reported that 19% of the families housed in the project were African American. By the end of the year, the population had increased to 21.5%. "It is becoming difficult to limit the colored families we accept for occupancy," wrote the manager of Fort Greene Houses. "Many white families have refused apartments because of our colored occupancy and a number of families have moved out because of it. We find that colored families, because of their need for housing, have seldom refused an apartment regardless of price or size."[67]

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[66] Clarence De Hart to Edmond B. Butler, "Staten Island Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," 4 May 1943, folder 3, box 71B5; Lester B. Granger, National Urban League Assistant Executive Secretary to May Lumsden, NYCHA Director of Tenant Relations, 9 October 1941, folder 2, box 71B4, NYCHA Papers; Robbins with Tyler, 146.
[67] Frank Dorman to May Lumsden, "Colored Application and Tenancy," 24 September 1943, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

NYCHA was having similar problems in its attempts to keep down the African American population of Markham Houses on Staten Island. The project, which opened in 1943, had an 8% African American occupancy. The NAACP complained to the Housing Authority that the manager of the Markham project, W.L. Poulson was purposely steering black families away to keep their numbers in the project as low as possible. In a memorandum to Housing Authority headquarters, Poulson maintained that if "we had assigned an apartment to every eligible Negro applicant in our files when we began renting, we would have inadvertently created that which we are trying to avoid---the semblance of a Jim Crow wing." To avoid having individual buildings occupied by separate races, black families were carefully distributed throughout the project. To reach proper racial balance the manager often had to hold vacant apartments open until a white family could be found.[68]

Even with its careful placement policy it was difficult to attract white applicants to Markham. "We have been calling in white applicants as fast as applications are received," Poulson claimed. "We have not been able to build up any reserve pool of white applications any room size save the six-room units." The lack of white applicants at Markham might also have been due to the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood. Markham was constructed on the edge of a mixed neighborhood where African Americans made up 33.5% of the surrounding population. "The pressure of Negro tenants in and around our project is causing . . . resistance," Poulson wrote. "This resistance, however, would be the same whether we had one or more Negro families in

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[68] W.L. Poulson to Maxwell H. Tretter, Assistant Chairman NYCHA, "Negro Tenancy at Edwin Markham," 13 May 1943, folder 3, box 71B5; Naudin J. Oswell to Lumsden, "South Jamaica Management Office," 12 April 1943, folder 4, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

Edwin Markham." The high percentage of Negro applicants, Poulson argued, was because it was "impossible for Negroes to rent decent quarters on the Island."[69]

The Housing Authority did not operate under a strict quota system. Poulson believed that raising the number of black families at Markham to 36 (10% of the total population) would satisfy the demands of the NAACP. While this ratio seems low, it should be noted that project managers did not limit the number of African American families due to increased racial tensions. In fact, project managers at South Jamaica Houses, where black families made up nearly 83% of the tenants in 1943, reported that white and black tenants "live together in the same project in an amiable fashion." While only a handful of racial incidences occurred among tenants at Fort Greene Houses, a number of serious racial disturbances broke out between blacks from the project and whites from the surrounding neighborhood.[70]

While the area surrounding the project was composed of separate Italian, Irish and black enclaves, some whites resented the influx of African Americans from the project into their neighborhood. A few attacks by gangs of local white teens against black teens from the project escalated into a full scale riot in June 1944. According to Fort Greene tenants, during one attack a group of white teenagers was joined by a group of sailors and some police officers in assaulting black teens and vandalizing the project. Tenants met with community representatives and civil rights groups to discuss the disturbance. The group adopted a plan to hold a mass meeting and organize a permanent neighborhood

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[69] Poulson to Tretter, 13 May 1943; Oswell to Lumsden, 12 April 1943, NYCHA Papers.
[70] Memorandum Frank Dorman to May Lumsden, "Racial Incidences," 6 July 1943, folder 3, box 71B5; Frank Dorman to M. Lumsden, "Special Report---Inter-racial Problem," 15 February 1944, folder 3, box 71B5; Frank Dorman to Lumsden, "Racial Problem," 4 May 1944, folder 3, box 71B5; Memorandum, Frank Dorman to M. Lumsden, "Racial Problem—Supplementary Report," 13 May 1944, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

committee to plan strategies to relieve racial tensions. The Tenants Association also agreed that a letter should be sent to residents of Fort Greene reassuring black tenants of the steps being taken to prevent future violence.[71]

Despite the riot, the manager of Fort Greene noted that tenant relations within the project itself demonstrated "the ability of white and colored families to live together in the same project in amicable terms." Similar reports by the manager of South Jamaica Houses emphasized several instances of interracial friendships. Black and white families would take care of each other's children, eat dinner and do the laundry together and even hold a "progressive New Year's Party, going from one family's house to the other."[72]

NYCHA succeeded in creating stable inter-racial environments with in the confines of its housing project. The goals of integration and fulfilling black housing needs often conflicted. To make inter-racial housing work, the Housing Authority had to carefully manage the percentage of African-Americans families in the projects. Since NYCHA received more applications from black than white families, NYCHA project managers reported that once the projects reached a certain percentage of African American families it was difficult to attract whites. To prevent projects from turning predominantly African American and turning into segregated enclaves, project managers had to turn away black families.[73]

The Housing Authority, however, could not control the sometimes hostile response of white residents living in the surrounding neighborhoods to African American tenants inside the project. NYCHA appeared unable to deal decisively with racial

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[71] Memorandum, Frank Dorman to May Lumsden, "Report," 26 June 1944, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.
[72] Memorandum, Dorman to Lumsden, 6 July 1943; Memorandum by Naudin Oswell to Mrs. Lumsden, "South Jamaica Management Office," 6 February 1941, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.
[73] Poulson to Tretter, "Negro Tenancy at Edwin Markham," 13 May 1943, NYCHA Papers.

disturbances at the Fort Greene Houses. Frank Dorman, the NYCHA representative who attended the community meeting discussing the disturbance, viewed the incident as a problem for the surrounding neighborhood and seemed opposed to the involvement of Fort Greene tenants in a community response. "It is quite apparent to me also," reported Dorman, "that there must be some community council developed to counteract and solve this serious local problem. [NYCHA] Management did not take a more active part than was necessary at the meeting, and refrained from voting." The aloofness of NYCHA officials to opposiiton by local whites became a growing problem as the minority population of its projects increased.[74]

Housing Reformers and Stuyvesant Town

In 1943, while housing reformers promoted public housing as the template for inter-racial communities, they joined with civil rights activists to fight discrimination in Stuyvesant Town, a middle-income housing complex to be built and managed by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Stuyvesant Town was not a public housing project. It was part of the "limited dividend program" the brainchild of Robert Moses, the imperious power broker. Moses was looking for ways to get insurance companies and banks to invest in clearing slums and redeveloping the areas for middle income housing. LaGuardia supported the program. There was already a severe shortage of low- and middle-income housing in New York, and LaGuardia was concerned that returning GI's and their families would have few places to live when the war ended.[75]

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[74] Memorandum, Dorman to Lumsden, 6 July 1943, NYCHA Papers, 3.
[75] Henderson, *Housing and the Democratic Ideal*, 127-129; Kessner, *Fiorello La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York*, 528-529; Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 84-85.

Under Moses' plan, the city would use its power of eminent domain to condemn slum areas and sell them to the redevelopers at cost. In return for constructing and managing the housing and keeping the rents low enough for middle income tenants, Metropolitan Life was given a tax exemption on the land for 25 years.[76] Metropolitan Life already had a reputation for discrimination within the African American community. African Americans held over 100,000 life insurance policies with Metropolitan Life, yet the insurance giant refused to hire black workers, not even for the most menial position.[77]

When asked if Stuyvesant Town would discriminate against African American applicants, the Chairman of Metropolitan Life, Frederick H. Ecker replied that it would be for whites only. "Negroes and whites don't mix," Ecker stated. "Perhaps they will in a hundred years, but not now. If we brought them into this development, it would be a detriment to the city, too, because it would depress all the surrounding property." Stanley Isaacs, the City Councilman and City Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem member---who dubbed Stuyvesant Town a "Walled City"---fought against Stuyvesant Town in the City Council and Board of Estimates, but the contract was still ratified.[78]

Charles Abrams led the fight against Stuyvesant Town. In a 1943 speech to the New York State Conference on Social Work, Abrams argued that public housing in New York demonstrated that integration worked. Even though the numbers of African Americans in public housing were modest, the fact that "groups of varying races living together as neighbors, without friction, with respect for one another" in public housing projects throughout the city proved that interracial housing worked. Abrams went even

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[76] Simon, *Stuyvesant Town USA*, 22-23.
[77] Kessner, 528.
[78] Henderson, 128; Simon, 32.

farther, suggesting that with "care, good management and patience the substructure under lying race prejudice can be rebuilt and prejudice diminished or even eliminated."[79]

Abrams broke down New York's public housing projects into four categories: projects that housed only white families; projects that housed all African American families; "mixed projects" where the number of black and white families was roughly equal or slightly in the majority for black families; and "mixed projects" where black families were in the minority. Abrams tempered his optimism for interracial public housing by emphasizing the importance of site selection, arguing that racial mix for the individual projects should reflect the demographic make up of the neighborhood where the project was built. "The projects in which the [racial] proportion of tenants are about equal are peculiar in the following respects," Abrams observed. "They are built in areas in which Negroes and whites previously lived. The projects, in other words simply continue a condition formerly existing." Abrams warned, however, that the Authority should not "load Negro families" into projects built in neighborhoods where white and blacks already lived. Abrams claimed that such a policy could lead to "difficulties," but he was clearly referring to the possibility of racial turn over in the surrounding neighborhood [80]

Abrams was more impressed by projects such as Williamsburg Houses, where African American families were in the minority, but which were constructed in predominantly white areas. Although this proved to Abrams that public housing promoted integration in white neighborhoods, black families in Williamsburg Houses made up less than 1% of the population. Whether or not such a small percentage of

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[79] Speech by Charles Abrams, "Mixed Projects in New York City," 18 November 1943, folder CWCCH, Stuyvesant Town, Box 8, Black Papers, 1.
[80] Ibid., 2; Schwartz, 165.

African Americans in white project constituted “interracial” living is debatable, but to Abrams and other reformers this was progress. Metropolitan Life’s segregation in Stuyvesant Town was not only morally wrong, Abrams argued, but also illogical because the Housing Authority’s projects proved that inter-racial housing worked:

> I believe that Metropolitan had ungrounded fears when it excluded Negroes from the project. It would not have affected the soundness of the investment one iota if the project were five or six percent Negro occupied . . . Where the project is a self contained unit, creating its own environment, the existence of any small Negro minority in the project will not hinder successful operation any more than any other minority. That, if anything, has been sustained by New York City’s public housing policy.[81]

Abrams and City Councilmember Stanley Isaacs drafted legislation for the City Council to bar discrimination from limited dividend projects and force Metropolitan Life to allow black families to live in Stuyvesant Town. The law ratified by the City Council in May 1944 banned discrimination in all future limited dividend projects, but was not retroactive and did not cover Stuyvesant Town. To discourage civil rights groups from challenging Metropolitan’s discriminatory policies in the courts, the company announced the construction of the Riverton a 1,200 unit limited-dividend development in Harlem. Abrams decried Metropolitan’s move as establishing a “Jim Crow” pattern for limited dividend housing.[82]

The Riverton issue, however, divided housing reformers. Several African American leaders supported Riverton even though Metropolitan Life clearly meant the development to house only blacks. At a meeting hosted by the CWCCH to discuss

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[81] Abrams, “Mixed Projects in New York City,” 4; Schwartz, 165.
[82] “Statement from Charles Abrams, Chairman Housing Committee,” 1943, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town; box 8, Black Papers; “City Bill Bars Bias Towards Tenants,” *NYT*, 16 May 1944; Ira S. Robbins and Gus Tyler, *Reminiscences of a Housing Reformers*, 107; Charles Abrams, “The Walls of Stuyvesant Town,” Reprinted from the *The Nation,* 24 March 1945, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town, box 8, Black Papers.

Riverton, the NAACP's Walter White and Charles Abrams wanted reformers to unite in their opposition to Riverton. "The Riverton project violates no fundamental issue, but it will be a Negro project because of its location," Abrams argued. "It has been proven that Negroes and whites can live together. The question is whether the Negro wishes to accept a favor from a corporation that with one hand helps the Negro and with the other smacks him under the chin."[83]

Goode Harney of the Urban League supported the Riverton project. "It will house 1,200 families. There has not been housing in that community at $12.50 per room in the last 20 years," he argued. Although the Housing Authority planned a State funded project (the Abraham Lincoln Houses) in Harlem after the War, Harvey doubted that it would attract many white tenants. "What is the difference between the Abraham Lincoln public projects and Riverton?" Harvey asked. "Race discrimination will not be practiced in Abraham Lincoln but it does not assure that the project will be mixed."[84]

The African American City Councilmember Benjamin Davis, of the Communist Party, also supported Riverton. Reasonably priced housing needed in Harlem, he argued, and since the passage of the new local law banning discrimination in limited dividend projects, there was nothing stopping white families, who wanted to prove the benefits of integration, from moving into Riverton. The majority of African American leaders concurred that while the fight against discrimination in Stuyvesant Town should continue the need for slum clearance and new, reasonably priced housing in Harlem was badly needed whether or not Metropolitan Life meant the Riverton to be segregated.[85]

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[83] CWCCH, "Informal Meeting of Riverton Project," 25 October 1944, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town, box 8, Black Papers, 1-2.
[84] Ibid., 2.
[85] Ibid., 4-5.

The launching of the legal battle over Stuyvesant Town marked the beginning of the Jewish and black coalition to fight discrimination in housing. Jewish housing conditions were not as dire as those facing the African American community, but they both faced a common enemy in white gentiles whose formal and un-formal covenants barred both black and Jewish families from renting or buying homes or apartments in middle-income and upscale neighborhoods. Charles Abrams was part of the coalition of Jewish and black lawyers representing the NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union and American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee who filed three separate lawsuits to halt construction on Stuyvesant Town.[86]

Abrams' main argument against the development was that since Metropolitan Life received state and municipal assistance in the form of eminent domain and tax abatements to build Stuyvesant Town it was a public, not a private entity and did not have the right to ban African Americans. After these suits failed, a final legal action, launched in the New York State Supreme Court in 1946, charged that Metropolitan Life had discriminated against three African American war veterans when it refused to admit their families into Stuyvesant Town. The judge once again sided with Metropolitan Life's lawyers who argued that as a private landlord, Metropolitan Life had the right to rent to whomever it chose. After the appeal to this decision was denied in 1949, the ban on African Americans in Stuyvesant Town was upheld. The same coalition of Jewish and black lawyers, however, convinced the Supreme Court in *Shelly v. Kraemer*, that local

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[86] Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," *Tikkun* 3, July-August 1988, 42-94; Henderson, *Housing and the Democratic Ideal*, 140.

governments could not enforce racial covenants that forbid the sale or renting of a home to anyone outside of the Caucasian race.[87]

Both Riverton and Stuyvesant Town were completed in 1947. Riverton received over 50,000 applicants for 1,232 units and became a fashionable residence for the middle-income African Americans in Harlem. All 25,000 of the residents selected for Stuyvesant Town were white. In an unsuccessful attempt to quell the opposition to its discriminatory practices, Metropolitan Life allowed a handful of African American families to move into the development. Housing reformers and civil right activists eager to continue the battle against Stuyvesant Town founded the New York State Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD). Algernon Black, who had been one of the founders of CWCCH, and Shad Polier of the American Jewish Congress and Ed Newman of the American Jewish Committee, formed NYSCAD to continue the "unfinished business" of housing discrimination. NYSCAD would serve as a forum where lawyers for the leading Jewish and African American civil rights groups would strategize how to eradicate discrimination in housing.[88]

In January 1949, NYSCAD was officially launched. After the legal challenges to Stuyvesant Town failed, NYSCAD housing reformers sought to end housing discrimination through the City and State Legislatures. The focus of the group would be to write and lobby for legislation that banned discrimination in housing. "Housing for the poor, low income, and minority population would have to be provided by government through public housing," Algernon Black wrote in describing the mission of NYSCAD.

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[87] Henderson, 140; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Post War New York*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2003), 124-125.
[88] Unpublished memoir by Algernon Black, "The New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing: The Beginnings---Part I," n.d., folder NYSCDH The Beginnings, box 8, Black Papers.

"The role of government would have to be controlled in order to assure that the people's power should not be used to perpetuate or expand the patterns of racial discrimination, segregation and the inequalities of the past."[89]

The struggle over Stuyvesant Town initially appeared to be a setback for housing reformers, but it led to alliance of black and Jewish civil rights activists who would launch the fair housing movement. The anti-housing discrimination laws championed by NYSCAD marked the first significant victories for the early civil rights movement. The battle over Stuyvesant Town also marked the emergence of the housing reformers' idealistic vision for public housing. During the 1940s, housing reformers believed public housing could solve two social problems facing New York: segregation and the shortage of decent, affordable housing. Constructing integrated public housing projects, some in less densely populated areas, argued Charles Abrams, would disperse the African American population forced to live in segregated and overcrowded neighborhoods like Harlem.[90]

Despite its history of segregation, the Housing Authority was poised, Abrams claimed, to take the lead in the promotion of inter-racial housing. Armed with statistics from the Housing Authority, Abrams criticized segregation in Stuyvesant Town arguing that NYCHA managed several stable, integrated public housing projects and that Metropolitan Life could easily do the same. In the three years following World War II, the trend towards integration in public housing continued. Only two new public housing projects, Elliott and Brownsville Houses were constructed, but the number of African

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Abrams, "Mixed Projects in New York City;" Abrams, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Housing of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," May 1942, Black Papers; Arthur Simon, *Stuyvesant Town, U.S.A.: Patterns for Two Americas,* (New York, New York University Press, 1970), 125-126.

American families in all thirteen of the city's public housing projects grew to 16.8% (an increase of 5% in four years). As the city debated its post-War redevelopment plans, housing reformers were confident of their future success. "The housing program must be fought for, persevered and continued," Abrams proclaimed. "For in the housing program lies the hope for the attainment of the greater goal, for the achievement of a progress that is lasting because it is real."[91]

[91] NYCHA, "Racial Occupancy in Operating Projects, for 12 Months Ending July 31, 1948," 11 August 1948, folder 3, box 71B3, NYCHA Papers; Abrams, "Mixed Projects in New York City," Black Papers, 8.

CHAPTER TWO
Competing Visions: Integration and Public Housing During the Post-World War II Era

After World War II, housing reformers assumed that the post-war public housing program undertaken by the city would reflect their ideals. The reformers believed public housing should provide a new environment for the poor, where they could live healthier and safer lives, free of the deprivation of the slums. The projects built before 1945, while not housing the poorest New Yorkers, reflected this vision. “When the first projects were built everyone was delighted to have them,” wrote the housing historian Peter Marcuse. “WPA art decorated the community rooms, brochures showed the happy children playing in the wading pools and on the climbing bars, day care and health centers were provided in almost every project, tenants and tenant organizations were proud of their new quarters.” The early public housing projects reinforced the housing reformers’ belief that better housing made better people. “Managers reported, with amazement, that they could see the difference in the children after a few months of living in the homes,” wrote one housing reformer. “School teachers reported it. Police officers reported it.”[1]

Housing reformers emerged from the war years, confident that public housing could provide affordable shelter for African American families and also promote the ideals of inter-racial living. Charles Abrams’ post-war vision for housing called for the construction of integrated public housing not only on slum cleared land in inner-city

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[1] Peter Marcuse, “Robert Moses and Public Housing: Contradiction In, Contradiction Out,” lecture, 13 March 1996, School of Architecture, Columbia University, New York; Ann L. Buttenwieser, “Shelter for What and for Whom? On the Road to Vladeck Houses 1930 to 1940,” *Journal of Urban History* 4 (August 1986), 409; Anthony Jackson, *A Place Called Home: A History of Low Cost Housing in Manhattan*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1976), 225.

neighborhoods, but in neighborhoods throughout New York. Constructing integrated public housing projects in less densely populated neighborhoods, Abrams believed, would disperse the African American population forced to live in segregated and overcrowded ghettos.[2]

In 1946, the demand for more affordable housing was led by the tens of thousands of returning veterans. To protest the housing shortage in New York, veterans threatened to pitch tents in Central Park unless the government took immediate action. The city estimated that between 187,000 and 268,000 new housing units would be required for the tens of thousands of returning veterans and their families. To meet the shortfall the state and city launched massive government sponsored housing programs. To direct the city's post-war housing program, the recently elected Mayor William O'Dwyer turned to the city's Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, a man with a reputation for accomplishing the most difficult public works projects. After appointing Moses Chairman of the Emergency Housing Committee, Mayor O'Dwyer chose him as the City Construction Coordinator with the power to "schedule public works, allocate priorities, survey material and labor costs and negotiate for the removal of all obstacles in the way of letting necessary contracts."[3]

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[2] Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 108-109; The City Wide-Citizens' Committee on Harlem (hereafter CWCCH), "Report of the Sub-Committee on Housing of the City Wide-Citizens' Committee on Harlem," May 1942, folder CWCCH Housing Subcommittee, box 8, 5-6; Charles Abrams, "Mixed Projects in New York City," speech, 18 November 1943, 305, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town, box 8, 3-4; Franklin O. Nichols, Industrial Relations Field Secretary National Urban League to Charles Abrams, Chairman Committee on Housing CWCCH, 30 January 1942, folder CWCCH Housing Subcommittee, box 8, Algernon Black Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York; Wendell Pritchett, "From One Ghetto to Another: Blacks, Jews and Public Housing in Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1945-1970," (Ph.D. Dis., Princeton University, 1997), 125-128.

[3] Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1974), 762-764, 758; Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and the Redevelopment of the Inner City*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 108; Warren Moscow, "Moses Emerges as 'Strongman' of O'Dwyer Administration," *NYT*, 8 January 1946; Paul Crowell, "O'Dwyer Sees City $6,000,000 'in Red,'" *NYT*, 10 January 1946.

With the new posts, Moses was the head of all the city's construction programs and had complete control of post-war redevelopment. Over the next twelve years Moses dominated the city's public housing program. During this period, he was responsible for an enormous surge in public housing construction. When Moses took over the public housing program in 1946, there were fourteen projects housing over 17,000 families. By the time scandal forced Moses to resign the last of his city posts in 1960, there were over 90 public housing projects housing over 100,000 families. Under Moses, the housing historian Peter Marcuse noted, the city constructed enough public housing to shelter a population larger than the cities of Albany, Tallahassee or Pasadena.[4]

Moses was not interested in building public housing to promote the housing reformers' social theories, nor was he concerned with integration. Moses had supported Metropolitan Life's discriminatory policies and criticized the housing reformers' protests against Stuyvesant Town. "Those who insist upon making projects of this kind a battleground for the vindication of social objectives, however desirable," Moses wrote ". . . are looking for a political issue and not for results in the form of actual slum clearance." Moses' "bulldozer approach" to the construction of Stuyvesant Town had ominous implications. It established the pattern of large-scale slum clearance that would become prevalent during the post-war era. The Stuyvesant Town slum clearance destroyed a low-income, predominantly white tenement neighborhood (known as the "gas house district") and displaced some 10,000 families.[5]

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[4] Moscow, "Moses Emerges as 'Strongman' of O'Dwyer Administration," *NYT*, 8 January 1946; Caro, 2; Peter Marcuse, "Robert Moses and Public Housing: Contradiction In, Contradiction Out," lecture, Urban Planning Department, Columbia University, New York, 14 March 1996, 1-2.

[5] "Stuyvesant Town Approved by Board," *NYT*, 4 June 1943; A. Scott Henderson, *Housing & the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 126-127.

Most of the displaced could not afford the higher rents charged for Stuyvesant Town. Moses promised that the displaced would be re-housed in public housing or in low-income private developments, but most of the families had to "re-house" themselves. "Slums are more than crumbling stones and rotting timber; they are homes to thousands of people," Charles Abrams wrote of the city's slum clearance for Stuyvesant Town. "If these people's homes are destroyed and they are scattered abroad to seek other shelter, left to their own resources, they cannot help but settle in other slums or substandard areas, thus aggravating and perpetuating conditions in those areas." [6]

Abrams, and other housing reformers, did not oppose slum clearance, but favored a more gradual approach that would allow for the re-housing of displaced families in new low-income projects. For Moses, public housing construction would take a back seat to slum clearance. Moses would tear down slums near central business districts and turn them over to private developers for the construction of middle- and upper-income housing complexes, cultural facilities such as Lincoln Center and the Pratt Institute and medical research centers. While Moses reclaimed these areas for "higher" purposes, he would also clear slums near existing public housing projects in the Lower East Side, Harlem and Brooklyn and construct more projects. By expanding existing public-housing sites, Moses created dense conglomerations projects in some of the city's poorest areas. Moses also chose to site groups of projects in low-income predominantly white areas

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[6] Charles Abrams, "The Walls of Stuyvesant Town," reprinted from *The Nation*, 24 March 1945, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town, box 8, Black Papers; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Post-War New York City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 125.

experiencing racial transition. These projects reinforced existing patterns of segregation and fostered new slums.[7]

The Segregation of Public Housing: 1945-1951

In the twenty years after World War II, the economy of New York shifted from manufacturing to service industries, and half of all the manufacturing jobs left for the surrounding suburbs. The slum clearance policies of Robert Moses exacerbated the decline of manufacturing. The historian Joel Schwartz estimated that in the ten years following the war, Moses demolished hundreds of buildings housing manufacturing firms that provided between 18,000 to 30,000 jobs for workers. The exodus of manufacturing corresponded with the massive migration of African Americans and Puerto Ricans. Between 1940 and 1960, as 630,000 blacks and 535,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the city over 500,000 whites moved out. Discrimination limited the new comers to housing in neighborhoods of Harlem, East Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and a handful of low-income white neighborhoods that bordered black and Puerto Rican enclaves. As unskilled workers, many of the newcomers had a difficultly finding work and discrimination made it nearly impossible for them to find housing near jobs in the suburbs.[8]

Between 1945 and 1950, the growing population of minority families in public housing reflected the broader demographic shift rather than housing reformers' demands for integration. By order of Congress, the Housing Authority was forced to evict thousands of families whose incomes had risen during the war years and exceeded the

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[7] Peter Marcuse, "Robert Moses and Public Housing: Contradiction In, Contradiction Out," lecture, Urban Planning Department, Columbia University, New York, 14 March 1996, 17; Schwartz, xv-xviii.

[8] Schwartz, 238-239; Freeman, 144-149; Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, (1967 edition, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1963), 319 (Table 3), 93-94.

$3,000 low-income ceiling. In 1947, NYCHA evicted 2,000 "middle-income families," to make room for the 200,000 plus low-income families on the waiting lists. These evictions created vacancies in several projects that had been overwhelmingly white to be filled by African American families. By 1948, blacks constituted 16.8% of the nearly 20,000 families housed by NYCHA (an increase of 5% in four years) and by 1950 approximately 2.65% of the families were Puerto Rican.[9]

With Federal monies for public housing deadlocked in Congress, Moses financed his slum-clearance and public housing program with city and state funding. Public housing sponsored by the city was part of the Housing Authority's "no cash subsidy" program. Unlike earlier NYCHA projects which were all financed (at least partially) by the Federal government to serve low-income families, the no-cash-subsidy projects charged higher rents and housed middle-income families. No cash subsidy developments accommodated the families of upwardly mobile veterans whose yearly earnings exceeded the income ceiling for Federally-funded low-income projects, but were too low for private developments. Between 1947 and 1951, the Housing Authority constructed twenty such projects housing over 19,000 families. [10]

At the same time, New York State funded the Housing Authority's "low-rent" housing program. The state "low-rent" program housed families whose incomes exceeded the ceiling for low-income housing, but who could not afford the rent in no-cash-subsidy or private housing. While brochures publicized state-funded projects as

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[9] Joel Schwartz, "Tenant Unions in New York City's Low-Rent Housing, 1933-1949," *Journal of Urban History* 4, (August 1986), 425 -430; NYCHA, "Racial Occupancy in Operating Projects, for 12 Months Ending July 31, 1948," 11 August 1948, folder 7; NYCHA, "Number of Families at Projects Shown by Racial Composition at Initial Occupancy and on February 1, 1953," 7 January 1954, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

[10] Marcuse, "Robert Moses and Public Housing: Contradiction In, Contradiction Out," 6; Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 109.

"low rent" housing, it was not aimed at poor families. The rents for state funded projects were higher than those in existing low-income Federally-funded projects. The State funded program constructed thirteen public housing projects housing over 14,000 families between 1948 and 1952.[11]

The two programs created what the historian Joshua Freeman observed was a "two tiered" public housing system: city funded projects for middle-income families and state funded projects for lower–income families. City and state projects were also divided by race. While white families made up the over-whelming majority of city's no-cash-subsidy projects, African American and Puerto Rican families made up 59% of those residing in state funded projects. Most of the no-cash-subsidy projects were built in outlying areas of the city on vacant land sites. State projects were preceded by massive slum clearance in heavily populated, black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods or low-income white neighborhoods experiencing racial transition.[12]

With incomes well below those of average New Yorkers and the strict enforcement of Federal income ceiling limits, far more black and Puerto Rican families would be eligible for "low-rent" housing than white families. Moses' post-war public housing policies intensified the racial transformation in the projects and the surrounding neighborhoods. His plan called for the construction of thirteen new public housing

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[11] Herman T. Stichman, New York State Commissioner of Housing, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing to Governor and the Legislature*, (New York, 1946), 20; Herman T. Stichman, New York State Commissioner of Housing, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing for the Year Ending March 31, 1947*, (New York , 1947), 47; NYCHA, *23rd Annual Report 1955* (New York, 1955), 18: "Public housing is expected to become available in New York City at average admission rents per room of $7 to $14 monthly in Federally-aided projects, $9 to $16 monthly in State-aided projects, and $17 to $21 monthly in City no-cash-subsidy projects."

[12] Freeman, 109; NYCHA, "Public Housing Projects Built or Operated by New York City Housing Authority," ca. 1953, folder 3, box F71B5, NYCHA Papers, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives; Racial statistic culled from memorandum, "NYCHA Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1960 All Programs," manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers; News Syndicate Co., Inc., The New York Times Co., The Daily Mirror, Inc., comps., *New York City Market Analysis*, (New York, 1943).

projects added to the fourteen already built by NYCHA. In the Lower East Side, the Governor Smith and Lillian Wald Houses would be constructed next to the existing Vladeck Houses, creating a solid wall of public housing stretching along the East River from 14th Street to Grand Street. In Harlem, the James Weldon Johnson and Abraham Lincoln Houses would be built just north of the existing East River Houses. Groups of projects were also planned near the existing Fort Greene Houses in Brooklyn's Navy Yard and another adjacent to the Brownsville Houses in Brooklyn. Housing reformers complained that by grouping projects together Moses would create economically and racially segregated ghettos.[13]

Herman T. Stichman, a well known housing reformer and Commissioner of the State Housing Division, regulated the funding of state's "low-rent" housing developments. Arguing that private developments should be encouraged in slum-cleared land adjacent to existing public housing, Stichman vetoed Moses' plan to construct a third project, the state-funded Madison Houses, on the Lower East Side. "Construction of private housing adjacent to public housing is essential if the occupants of public projects are to have the opportunity to mingle with other income groups," Stichman claimed.

> Such social and neighborhood organization is essential to the perpetuation of our way of life. Children whose parents can provide only the necessities of life should be able to attend the same schools, belong to the same clubs and play in the same teams with children of other income groups.

In response to Stichman's charges, Moses made "vague promises" to intersperse middle-income and private developments amongst the swaths of State funded low-rent projects

[13] Schwartz, 113-119; Pritchett, 125.

he was planning. Under pressure from the governor and the mayor, Stichman dropped his objections to Moses' grouping together of public housing projects.[14]

When Moses started slum clearance on projects planned for Harlem, housing reformers on NYCHA's board questioned the adequacy of the city's system of re-housing displaced families. Counsel to the Housing Authority Maxwell Tretter, estimated that slum clearance in Harlem and other NYCHA projects increased the total of displaced families to 18,000. NYCHA Chairman Edmond Borgia Butler warned that the lack of existing housing in Harlem made re-housing difficult and advised a temporary postponement of slum clearance until projects to re-house dislocated families were constructed on vacant land sites. Building on vacant land reduced the number of families that would have to be removed by slum clearance. Frank Crosswaith, the head of the Harlem-based Negro Labor Committee and the first African American appointed to the Housing Authority, also opposed the concentration of public housing sites in Harlem. He favored the construction of projects on vacant land sites in where the African American population could be dispersed.[15]

When Moses ignored the warnings over relocation problems and refused to slow slum clearance, the Housing Authority, led by Crosswaith and Mary K. Simkhovitch, voted to temporarily halt Moses' slum clearance plans. In response to the revolt by housing reformers at NYCHA, Moses convinced Mayor O'Dwyer to have the "unstable" members ousted and replaced with bankers, engineers and developers beholden to Moses. The new NYCHA commissioners followed Moses' directives in all decisions concerning public housing. To assuage his critics, Moses promised to re-house dislocated families in

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[14] "State, City Split on Housing Sites," *NYT*, 10 March 1946; "Stichman Outlines State Housing Aim," *NYT*, 24 October 1946; Schwartz, 120 -121.
[15] Schwartz, 123, 125; Freeman, 108.

projects nearing completion and backed a plan to pay the relocation costs directly to the families. He also agreed to construct two low-rent projects on vacant land sites. Despite these efforts, relocation would remain the Achilles heel of public housing construction. The majority of displaced families ended up finding housing through their own efforts. As slum clearance and public housing construction intensified in the 1950s, the number of dislocated families increased and their plight became a public issue.[16]

The completed projects in Harlem, Abraham Lincoln and James Weldon Johnson Houses, never maintained racially balanced populations. Completed in 1949, Lincoln Houses near 135th Street and Fifth Avenue, never attracted significant numbers of white families and remained exclusively African American. Johnson Houses was built in East Harlem a predominantly Italian area that was transformed into the center of New York's growing Puerto Rican population during the 1940s. The population of Johnson Houses was more diverse, with 58% African Americans, 25% Puerto Ricans and 16% white. In the years following its opening in 1949, the white population of Johnson Houses shrank as the minority population in the surrounding neighborhood grew.[17]

In 1948, the Authority completed a project in Brownsville, Brooklyn a predominantly Jewish neighborhood with a large African American population. The Brownsville Houses would the first of many projects targeting white neighborhoods undergoing racial transition. The residents of Brownsville had lobbied the Housing Authority for public housing in their neighborhood before World War II. They welcomed

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[16] Schwartz, 125; "Vacant Sites Held Keys to Housing," *NYT*, 18 April 1947; William Farrell, "Housing to Proceed Clearing of Slums," *NYT*, 8 August 1947; State of New York Division of Housing, *The Ten Year Look in State Housing: Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing to the Governor and Legislature, 1949*, (Albany, 1949), 34-35.

[17] Schwartz, 123; New York State Division of Housing, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing to the Governor and Legislature 1951*, (New York, 1951), 5-7; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1960 All Programs," 18 January 1961, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

the slum clearance that would get rid of several run down tenements and the new housing that they hoped would revitalize their economically depressed neighborhood. The Housing Authority, however, had another vision for Brownsville. Alfred Rhienstein, the NYCHA chairman in 1939 viewed Brownsville as a "colored slum." This outlook persisted when Moses took over the Housing Authority.[18]

According to the historian Wendell Pritchett, Moses viewed changing neighborhoods like Brownsville, the South Bronx and Jamaica, Queens as "likely locations for the expansion of the black ghetto" and targeted them for "colored" projects. Brownsville bordered Bedford-Stuyvesant, the city's second largest black neighborhood. As the population of Bedford-Stuyvesant increased during the 1940s and the area became more overcrowded, black families moved into Brownsville in greater numbers. During 1940s, the black population of Brownsville grew from 6% to 22%. The Jewish residents of Brownsville developed a reputation for racial tolerance simply because they did not meet the influx of blacks with violent resistance, as was often the case in Irish and Italian neighborhoods. Moses, his staff and even NAACP officials all viewed the racial transition of Brownsville from "Jewish to black" as inevitable. When the Brownsville Houses was completed in 1948, planning was under way on two more projects in the area: Van Dyke Houses, a massive project consisting of twenty-two high-rise buildings with 1,603 units, and Howard Houses, a ten-building project holding 815 apartments. [19]

Moses targeted other white neighborhoods adjoining minority enclaves for concentrations of public housing. The South Bronx experienced an influx of African Americans when black population of Morrisania (the neighborhood where the majority of

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[18] Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of a Ghetto*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 84, 108; Pritchett, "From one Ghetto to Another," 129-130.
[19] Pritchett, 130.

blacks in the Bronx lived) expanded during the 1940s. Other areas of the South Bronx experienced an influx of Puerto Rican families moving across the Bronx River from the over-crowded tenements of East Harlem. Between 1945 and 1950, 50,000 blacks and 75,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the South Bronx. In staff memos Moses targeted the South Bronx with a "colored" project near St. Mary's Park. By 1951, the Authority constructed Melrose Houses (1,022 units) near St. Mary's Park and Patterson Houses (1,791 units) only a few blocks away. Three more projects were eventually built in the area: Forest (1,349 units), St. Mary's Park (996 units) and Mill Brook (1,250 units) Houses.[20]

Recognizing that with the influx of African Americans and Puerto Ricans New York was becoming more segregated, housing reformers continued to lobby for the construction of racially balanced public housing projects. Charles Abrams repeated his argument that integration could be achieved within "self contained" public housing projects:

> In the many projects where the minority ranges from 10% to 30%---sufficient to give the minority the self-assurance and security it needs, and not so large as to spell 'inundation' to the majority---tensions subside and racial harmony is soon attained.

Placing integrated projects in segregated neighborhoods, he maintained, could begin to "break down" the pattern of segregation in a given area.[21]

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[20] Pritchett, 126; Schwartz, 113-115; Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 112 (Map 7.1); New York State Division of Housing, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing to the Governor and Legislature 1951*, (New York, 1951), 5-7; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1960 All Programs," 18 January 1961, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers..

[21] Black, "On September 12th . . .," Black Papers, 1; "State Group Asks Housing Bias Bans," *NYT*, 3 December 1949; Charles Abrams, "The Segregation Threat in Housing," *Commentary* 2 (February 1949), 128-129; Memorandum, "Report on Conference with Charles Abrams," 6 April 1949, folder NYSCDH, 1949, The Introduction of 3 bills 1) TIC 2) Scanlon-Schupler 3) Wachtel-Jack, box 9, Black Papers, 1.

It was naïve of Abrams and other housing reformers to believe that segregated neighborhoods could be broken up by integrated projects. The experience of public housing in New York demonstrated that maintaining racially balanced projects required careful management. Project managers often had to keep minority families out of a project to maintain racial balance and usually the population of a project reflected that of the surrounding neighborhood. Local whites often viewed state-funded low-rent projects with minority tenants as the city's effort of bringing minorities into their neighborhoods. To combat the exodus of whites, housing reformers launched a comprehensive educational program to convince local whites to accept integrated public housing.[22]

In 1950, housing reformers affiliated with the American Jewish Committee and the New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD) worked with the Bronx chapter of the Urban League to form the Temporary Committee on Equality in Housing. The mission of the group was to lay the groundwork for the acceptance of minority public housing tenants in predominantly white neighborhoods of the Bronx. The group would hold public meetings, distribute pamphlets that discussed public housing and race relations and would "educate" local residents of the value of integrated living. The educational effort would test the housing reformers belief in the transformational quality of inter-racial living, that racial prejudice could be overcome by positive contact with African American families.[23]

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[22] Schwartz, 198-203; W.L. Poulson to Maxwell H. Tretter, Assistant Chairman NYCHA, "Negro Tenancy at Edwin Markham," 13 May 1943; Clarence De Hart to Edmond B. Butler, "Staten Island Branch NAACP," 4 May 1943, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers; "Our Changing City: New Faces in the Lower Bronx: Shifting Population Often Raises Tense Problems in Housing," *NYT*, 11 July 1955.

[23] Memorandum, "Summary of Projects and Activities," n. d.; "Report to the Executive Committee," 17 November 1950, folder "Committees and Officers New York Chapter Housing, 47-62," box 31 (Gen-13 347.17.13), The American Jewish Committee (hereafter AJC) Papers, The Jewish History Center, New York; Schwartz, 167.

The Bronx would prove a difficult challenge for housing reformers. In 1950, the borough was still an overwhelmingly white borough. Only 11.1% of the population was African American and Puerto Rican. State funded projects with higher concentrations of minority tenants often met with resistance in predominantly white neighborhoods. In June 1951, local residents in the Throgs Neck neighborhood formed the Property Owners Welfare Association (POWA) to protest plans to build the low-rent Throgg's Neck Houses. "These people are bent on excluding Negroes, Jews and other from their community," reported an AJC member who attended the POWA's meetings. "Several persons took to the floor and did make anti-racial remarks . . . a priest who came from the area said that if this was the approach of the residents here they could no longer count on his support." The AJC reported that their education efforts were successful and that "no incidents" in connection with the opening of any Bronx projects occurred. NYCHA reports contradicted the view that there were no racial incidents. In the Melrose Houses, a "predominantly Negro and Puerto Rican" low-rent project "located in a white neighborhood" in the South Bronx, a series "race fights" broke out when "gangs of white boys . . . descended upon the Negro tenants and beaten [*sic*] them up at night."[24]

While there was no chance of establishing integrated projects in Harlem, housing reformers opposed the concentration of low-income projects. Three of the four projects Moses constructed in Harlem, Lincoln (1,271 units), Johnson (1,309 units), and East River Houses (1,166 units) were low-rent. In 1951, he completed the slum clearance on

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[24] Anonymous memorandum, "Throggs [*sic*] Neck (Bronx) Meeting for Wednesday Night January 17 and the Story Around it . . . The Housing Plan and the View of the Residents of Throggs Neck," 15-20 January 1951, folder Communal Issues New York, New York Chapter 1941-1962, box 34, AJC Papers; Housing Committee AJC, "Committee on Discrimination in Housing, Summary of Projects and Activities," no date, folder Committees and Officers New York Chapter Housing, 47-62, box 31 (Gen-13 347.17.13), AJC Papers; NYCHA, "Memo from L. Malinowitz to W. Poulson," 25 July 1952 folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers; New York Mirror, New York News, New York Times, eds. *New York Market Analysis: New York City & Suburbs Population and Housing*, (New York, 1963).

another five projects (St. Nicholas, Foster, Triborough, Washington, Carver and Jefferson Houses), four of which would be low-rent. When Moses announced his plans for Harlem, State Housing Commissioner Stichman angrily threatened to cut off state funding if the city did not alter its site selection practices. At a speech before the Baptist Ministers Conference of Greater New York, he accused the city of building the majority of its low-rent state-funded projects in Harlem. "Discrimination is taking a new turn in New York City." Stichman proclaimed. "The state cannot make its slum clearance and housing funds available under any plan that will foster discrimination or segregation and prevent progress under a true democracy."[25]

Stichman never acted on his threat, but he blasted Moses' slum clearance and site selection policies. In a 1951 State Housing Division report, Stichman argued that the city had placed an "over-concentration" of public housing for lower income families in Harlem and the Lower East Side. Without a concurrent plan to establish manufacturing plants or other "large scale places of employment" adjacent to public housing sites, he claimed, the city was creating isolated pockets of low-income families that had to travel great distances to places of employment. A caption accompanying a map in *The 1951 Annual Report of the Division of Housing* that depicted the band of projects on the Lower East Side and East Harlem as "The 'East Wall' of Public Housing on Manhattan Island:"

> This map of the current status of projected and completed government-aided housing shows the extreme concentration on the east side of the City. Such planning isolates economic groups, defeats the principle of democratic integration and precludes the possibility of developing true neighborhoods.

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[25] New York State Division of Housing, *Annual Report . . . 1951*, 7; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution . . . on December 31, 1960 All Programs," NYCHA Papers; "State May Bar Slum Funds to City Over Bias," no date, folder NYSCDH 1950-December Buffalo Conference, box 9, Black Papers.

Unless the city altered its planning methods and "dispersed" slum clearance and public housing construction throughout the city, Stichman warned, the public housing program would reinforce the patterns of economic and racial segregation.[26]

Despite his threats, Stichman had little success in reforming the city's site-selection policies. He "rejected" two projects slated to adjoin Marcy and Brownsville Houses in Brooklyn, claiming that the projects would create "too great a concentration of public housing." Less than a month later, however, Stichman proposed new sites for the cancelled projects only a few blocks from where they were originally proposed. Instead of withholding state funding and forcing Moses to disperse public housing sites and build low-rent housing on vacant land, Stichman boasted of spending $311,973,400 for twenty state-funded projects and committing another $10,311,042 to keep rent costs low. Instead of vetoing Moses plans to site Carver Houses in Harlem and Forest Houses in Morrisania next to groups of existing projects, Stichman lauded the plans proclaiming that "approximately fifty-three acres of some of the worst sub-standard insanitary [*sic*] housing in the city will be razed to make way for these state-subsidized developments."[27]

Stichman also stopped challenging Moses on the relocation issue. "Twelve thousand families have already moved from public housing sites since the end of the war," the State Division of Housing reported in 1949. "Up to 75,000 more will have to be moved from new public housing sites to be acquired under the increased program." Despite these daunting figures, Stichman proclaimed that the state's program of re-housing site families in rehabilitated tenements was "fairly successful" even though it provided only 2,391 apartments. In 1950, to limit the number of displaced families,

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[26] State Division of Housing, *Annual Report . . . 1951*, 5-7.
[27] "State to Finance New Housing Here," *NYT*, 20 February 1950; "Way Now Cleared for 3 Housing Units," *NYT*, 13 March 1950.

Stichman convinced Moses to construct two low-rent, state-funded projects (Bronx River and Albany Houses) on "nearly vacant" land in the Bronx. This compromise, like the others, had virtually no impact on lowering the number of displaced families. Overwhelmed, the state stopped keeping figures on the number of families it was re-housing by the early-1950s.[28]

It was clear to Stichman that Moses' slum clearance and site selection policies reinforced segregation, but there was nothing he or anyone could do to stop him. According to the historian Joel Schwartz, Moses dismissed Abrams' calls for planned integration and the dispersion of ghetto populations as "quixotic blather." Moses concluded that there was little public support for these social experiments. Stichman's failure to arouse public concern over Moses' policies confirmed his observation. Housing reformers like Stichman faced a moral dilemma when confronted by Moses' policies. By compromising on displacement, site selection and integration, they achieved the goal long cherished by housing reformers: the establishment of a permanent and comprehensive slum clearance and public housing program. Throughout the 1950s, Moses' hold over public housing and slum clearance as well as the problems of segregation increased and housing reformers would struggle with the choices they made.[29]

". . . New and Worse Slums:" Public Housing in the 1950s

[28] A.H. Raskin, "State Offers Loan for Housing in City," *NYT*, 27 July 1950; New York State Division of Housing, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing for the Year Ending March 31, 1948*, (New York, 1948), 28; New York State Division of Housing, *The Ten Years Look in State Housing: Annual Report of the Commissioner of Housing to the Governor the and the Legislature for the Year Ending March 31, 1949*, (New York, 1949), 28-29; "Low Rent Housing Set Record in 1949," *NYT*, 19 March 1950.

[29] State Division of Housing, *Annual Report . . . 1950*, 33; "3 Sites Are Chosen for New Housing," *NYT*, 14 October 1950; Schwartz, *The New York Approach,* 122.

During the 1950s, the racial composition of public housing changed dramatically. In 1950, African American and Puerto Rican families made up less than 30% of the public housing population. By 1960, the ratio increased to 57%. The Housing Authority noted privately, that as the percentage of minority families increased in a specific project and reached the "tolerance point" whites moved out. During the 1950s, whites increasingly associated public housing with blacks and Puerto Ricans. "Most of the whites who were displaced by urban renewal and were poor enough to be eligible for public housing refused to apply," the poverty scholar Leonard Freedman wrote. [30]

In addition to race, the class of public housing tenants changed as well. In the early days of public housing, NYCHA carefully screened its tenants allowing only the "deserving poor," families with fathers working steady jobs at low wages, with no criminal records and a solid credit history, to be admitted. After the war hundreds of families were evicted from public housing because their incomes were too high. These evictions had a negative impact on those remaining. "Those evicted were often the leaders in their community, organizing tenant councils pushing for repairs and maintenance of the projects and providing an atmosphere of stability," the historian Wendell Pritchett observed. "These people set the standard to which others aspired." With the exodus of manufacturing jobs, the low-income families left behind would likely never earn incomes high enough to move out of public housing and lacked the skills to make the projects into cohesive communities. As upwardly mobile families moved out, a

[30] Freedman, *Public Housing and the Politics of Poverty*, 140; Memorandum Harry N. Fialkin, "Integration---Tolerance Points," 9 June 1959, folder 8, box 85D3, NYCHA Papers.

new group of tenants moved in. They were poorer and faced more entrenched social problems.[31]

These changes altered the character of public housing. Under Moses, NYCHA had abandoned the housing reformer's ethos that public housing could improve lives. Instead, the sole purpose of projects was to house families dislocated by Title I slum clearance. In recognition of the problems in re-housing, the Housing Act of 1954 mandated thatthe displaced be given first priority to all public housing units that became available for occupancy. "Where in the past most tenants were the 'working poor,'" Wendell Pritchett claimed, "by the mid-1950s new admittees [*sic*] were the poorest of the poor." To admit the new families, the Housing Authority abandoned its stringent screening process that was designed to keep "problem families" out. By the end of the 1950s, public housing sheltered some of the city's most disadvantaged families. [32]

Even with these problems NYCHA's waiting list swelled and in 1955 there were four applicants for every available unit. To keep pace with relocation demands, NYCHA had to build projects as quickly and cheaply as possible. It was less expensive to construct high-rise projects on a limited amount of acreage than to build low-rise projects spreading over several blocks. High-rise projects over twenty stories tall first appeared in 1955, with the construction of the General Grant Houses in Manhattan and St. Mary's Park in the Bronx. Shoddy construction techniques and cheap building materials used on

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[31] Marcuse, "Contradiction In, Contradiction Out," 1, 9; Pritchett, 133.

[32] Pritchett, 132; Leonard Freedman, *Public Housing and the Politics of Poverty*, (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 118; Joel Schwartz, "Tenant Unions in New York City's Low-Rent Housing, 1933-1949," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (August 1986), 436.

the high rises led to many becoming physically dilapidated. NYCHA management reports noted that "serious vandalism" was "a common situation in most projects."[33]

Critics attacked NYCHA's massive high rise tower designs that eventually dominated the public housing architecture. They were cold, antiseptic and institutional. Some critics believed thatthe design invited the type of vandalism and crime that many projects were becoming known for. In 1958, the journalist Harrison Salisbury, described public housing as a social experiment gone awry. Noting the "stench of stale urine" in the elevators, the broken windows, falling plaster, drafty corridors and ragged children, Salisbury concluded, that the Housing Authority created a slum far worse than those that existed in the past, Salisbury concluded. "Visit Fort Greene with its 3,400 families, possibly seventeen thousand people," Salisbury wrote. "It is described as the world's biggest housing project. It is better described as a $20,000,000 slum."[34]

The majority of NYCHA projects were not as deteriorated as Fort Greene Houses, but the housing program was in trouble. By 1956, housing reformers were alarmed that the public housing idea had been transformed from a program that provided decent housing for the needy into a system for warehousing the poor in slum neighborhoods. Senator Herbert H. Lehman, who had volunteered in Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement and who had served as governor of New York during the establishment of NYCHA in 1934 was one of those who spoke out publicly. "We have cleared some slums

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[33] NYCHA, *Twenty-Second Annual Report 1955*, 25; Marcuse, 9, 11, 15; "Memo from L. Malinowitz to W. Poulson," 25 July 1952, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.
[34] Harrison E. Salisbury, *The Shook Up Generation*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 75.

only to create new and worse slums," Lehman stated. "We have constructed housing projects which were, by their location, forced into a pattern of racial segregation."[35]

At the root of the decline of public housing was relocation. Housing reformers on the NYCHA board had complained in 1946 that the city lacked the facilities to re-house the thousands of families displaced by slum clearance. Robert Moses and his staff could safely ignore the problem in the late 1940s, but with the ratification of the 1949 Housing Act slum clearance and relocation issues would take center stage. The bill funded a massive slum clearance program and the construction of 800,000 units of new low-income public housing nationally. Title I, the main provision of Housing Act, allowed cities to clear centrally located slum sites and sell the land to private interests for the development of middle-income projects where the poor once lived. The reaction of housing reformers to the Housing Act was positive. The bill's generous provision for public housing construction, outweighed their concerns over the negative impact of the Title I slum clearance provisions. "[We] were interested in getting rid of slums," remembered Algernon Black, the chairman of the New York State Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD). "We were excited at the prospect of getting rid of substandard housing and overcrowding. We were hopeful that this new law would . . . make for progress in getting rid of racial ghettos."[36]

At a meeting to discuss the implications of the 1949 Act, NYSCAD officials raised several questions. How many Title I sites would be cleared in New York? How

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[35] Joel Seldin, "City Scored By Lehman on Housing, Sees New Slums and Segregation," *The New York Herald Tribune*, 4 June, 1956.

[36] A. Scott Henderson, *Housing & the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 194; Charles Abrams, "The Walls of Stuyvesant Town," reprinted from *The Nation*, 24 March 1945, folder CWCCH Stuyvesant Town, box 8, Black Papers; Unpublished memoirs of Algernon Black, "The Housing Act of 1949, 'Title One,' and Redevelopment," 28 January 1975, folder NYSCDH 1949 Housing, box 9, Black Papers, 1.

many families would be displaced by the slum clearance? Who would be responsible for their re-housing? No one had any answers to these questions. In a speech at a NYSCAD conference, Nathaniel S. Keith, a Federal housing official, tried to clarify the Title I provision for housing reformers. It was clear from Keith's speech that Title I slum clearance in New York would target minority neighborhoods and it would be the responsibility of local housing authorities to provide "decent, safe and sanitary dwellings" for the displaced. Families would not be re-housed on Title I sites, but would instead be given "first preference" for admission in low-rent public housing projects. The Federal government would "encourage" that the housing be built in parts of the city where minority families had been traditionally excluded.[37]

Despite Keith's assurances, Title I would realize the housing reformers' worst fears. Under Moses, Title I would be a vehicle to dislocate thousands of minority families. The displaced would have first priority on vacant low-rent units, but it would take years until enough projects were built to absorb them all. And instead of dispersing neighborhoods of racial concentration Title I slum clearance would intensify economic and racial segregation in neighborhoods throughout the city. Despite their reservations about Title I, housing reformers did not oppose the program and even worked as "racial relations advisors" for the city preparing minority residents for displacement from their homes.[38]

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[37] Unpublished memoirs by Algernon Black, "On September 12th . . .," 28 January 1975, 1; Speech, "Address by Nathaniel S. Keith, Director of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Before the new York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, 35 West 32nd Street, New York City, December 2, 1949," folder NYSCDH 1949 Housing, box 9, Black Papers, 3-4.

[38] Schwartz, 190; "Housing Bias Curb Pushed at Albany," *NYT*, 7 March 1950; "Governor Signs Bill to Bar Housing Bias," *NYT,* 1 April 1950; "Bias Parley Gets a Plan on Housing," *NYT*, 15 December 1950.

In 1951, a group of racial relation advisors from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and NYSCAD were dispatched to the city's first major Title I redevelopment site on the Upper West Side. The new development that would be known as Manhattantown, involved the clearance of six square blocks of 3,600 tenements to be replaced by 2,700 units of middle-income privately developed housing. The neighborhood was populated by low-income African American and Puerto Rican families, who were informed by Moses' Slum Clearance Committee that displaced families would be given priority to apartments built on the site and those not able to afford the new apartments would be relocated in public housing. The overwhelming majority of site families, the racial relations advisors reported, could not afford the new rentals and would have to wait months for open public housing units that had waiting lists of over 100,000 families. In this situation, displaced families would be forced to seek housing in overcrowded slum areas adjacent to the Title I sites.[39]

Alarmed by the scale of the displacement, housing reformers informed Moses of their concern and demanded that he accommodate site tenants with a low-income projects constructed adjacent to the Manhattantown site. When Moses refused to commit to the housing reformers' request, they lobbied local politicians to support the plan. Local residents outraged by the planned displacements and lack of an adequate re-housing strategy militantly opposed the Manhattantown project. With organizational help from the American Labor Party local residents formed a Save Our Homes Committee chapter and sponsored petition drives, pickets and mass meetings. Eventually, Grant Houses

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[39] Schwartz, 190-191; Pritchett, 136-137; Black, "The Housing Act of 1949, 'Title One,' and Redevelopment," Black Papers, 3.

(1,940 units) a low-income public housing project, was constructed just north of the Manhattantown site.[40]

The Manhattantown controversy confirmed the worst fears of Algernon Black and other housing reformers, that under Title I slum clearance "discrimination and segregation might be increased instead of lessened" when displaced families moved into neighboring slums. When Moses refused to supply NYSCAD members with accurate figures on how many families would be displaced and where they would be re-housed, housing reformers launched their own studies. In 1953, a report entitled "What Price Slum Clearance?" by Frances Levenson and Hortense Gable of NYSCAD was released. It estimated that at least 45,000 families (150,000 to 180,000 people) would be displaced due to public housing, Title I redevelopment and other public works projects over the next three years and that 60% of the dislocated families would be African American and Puerto Rican. Where were the displaced to go? Most would be forced to seek housing in overcrowded slum areas adjacent to the Title I sites.[41]

Other reports described that once the slums filled up, displaced families would move into substandard housing in adjoining blocks. Thousands of displaced families made their way from Title I sites to rundown tenements in Brownsville and the South Bronx. Decades earlier these low-income white neighborhoods were characterized by Moses and other housing officials as "slum neighborhoods" that would experience racial turnover and were targeted for low-income public housing. By the end of the 1950s, the combination of slum clearance, public housing construction and the influx of displaced

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[40] Schwartz 191; Marcuse, 15.
[41] Frances Levenson and Hortense W. Gabel, "New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, Memorandum," 17 February 1953; Memorandum by Levenson and Gabel, "What Price Slum Clearance?" 24 February 1953, folder NYSCDH 1953, box 9, Black Papers; Pritchett, 139.

families would transform these neighborhoods from working class white to impoverished African American and Puerto Rican.[42]

The strategies of housing reformers to promote integrated public housing projects proved ineffective. In 1952, members of the AJC and NYSCAD formed the Committee for Balanced Communities (CBC), another group that would promote inter-racial housing. Along with their educational efforts in white areas receiving public housing projects, the CBC's goal was to work with the Housing Authority to promote "balanced communities . . . by building housing on peripheral, fringe or border neighborhoods." CBC members believed that if the Housing Authority used its tenant selection power to create racially balanced projects, the surrounding areas would remain integrated. They focused their efforts on Forest Houses a Federally-funded low-income project planned on the edge of the Morrisania neighborhood in the South Bronx. Morrisania contained the majority of the borough's blacks. Instead of preventing white flight the CBC hoped to attract white families to live in the project.[43]

Finding white families to move into Forest Houses would be difficult. Four low-income public housing projects housing mostly minority families were already located in the Morrisania area. In 1954, the CBC announced that Forest Houses was part of a larger program to break up the African American "ghettos" of Harlem, Jamaica and Bedford Stuyvesant. Public housing would be used to establish white bulkheads within black communities as a catalyst for an increased white presence. The experiment to use public housing to integrate Morrisania produced disappointing results. Social workers recruited

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[42] Pritchett, 141.
[43] Minutes of the Housing Committee, New York Chapter AJC, 23 February 1952, folder Housing Committee on Discrimination 1947-1960, box 28, AJC Papers; New York Mirror, New York News, New York Times, eds., *New York Market Analysis*, (New York, 1943).

only 99 white families out of a total of 1,349 to reside at Forest Houses. When it opened in 1955, 60% of Forest Houses tenants were black and 30% Puerto Rican. The Housing Authority decided to discontinue the experiment, claiming it was unfair to minority families to hold open vacant apartment until willing white families could be located. There was disagreement amongst NYCHA officials, however, on the efficacy of the CBC's efforts. "Some key members of the Authority feel that going beyond the question of need to inject the question of integration based on color is arbitrarily setting up a 'quota' in reverse," a CBC staffer noted.[44]

While NYCHA press releases and articles claimed that Forest Houses was the first successfully "desegregated" project, in reality public housing only hastened racial transition in the South Bronx. By 1950 the neighborhood was roughly 89% white (37% Jewish, 52% Irish, German and Italian) and 11% black and Puerto Rican. Over the next ten years, four out of the five projects concentrated in the South Bronx were low-rent state funded developments. During that time 121,439 blacks and Puerto Ricans migrated to the area. By 1960 over 76% of all blacks and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx resided in the South Bronx. The racial transition in the neighborhood mirrored that of its public housing. The first project in the area Patterson Houses, which opened in 1950, had a population that was 46% white, 43.1% black and 10.1% Puerto Rican. Six years later the white population had decreased by over 20%, while the black population grew to 52% and the Puerto Rican population to 29.5%. The Melrose Houses, which was 31.9% white, 48.2%

[44] Murray Illson, "Interracial Move in Tenancy Begun, Bronx Group Aims Blow at 'Ghetto Living' by Suasion in Three Housing Projects," *NYT*, 16 July 1954; Schwartz, 202; Memorandum, "Racial Distribution in Operating Project at Initial Occupancy and On December 31, 1960 All Programs," 18 January 1961, Manuscript Box IVB, NYCHA Papers; American Jewish Committee, "Report for the New York Chapter for the Month of February, 1956," folder Reports New York City Chapter, 1952-3-4, box 32 (Gen-13, Geographic-Domestic), AJC Papers.

black and 19.7% Puerto Rican when it opened in 1952, experienced a similar shift. In 1956 the ratio was 51.9% black, 29.9% Puerto Rican and 18.6% white.[45]

Public housing failed to halt racial turnover in the South Bronx. Whites continued to leave the neighborhood joining the exodus of some 200,000 whites who left the Bronx during the 1950s. When housing reformers explained to whites in the South Bronx , many of whom were home owners, that public housing was part of a much needed experiment in interracial living, local residents became resentful. "They bring minorities to us," a white resident said of the city's public housing program, "how can they expect anything except hostility and suspicion?" To local whites public housing was linked not only to the racial transformation of their neighborhood, but also to increased crime and poverty. Gang wars, teen violence and muggings raged in the South Bronx during the 1950s claiming the lives of youths and also elderly residents. By 1960, nearly a quarter of the population of the neighborhood was on welfare. "They built Mill Brook projects," Clara Rodriguez, a long time South Bronx resident remembered. "These ominous brick towers rose. They were huge; they were ugly and they were, most importantly, unsafe."[46]

A similar pattern emerged in Brownsville, Brooklyn. By 1954, its residents grew concerned with the speed in which their neighborhood was experiencing racial transition. About 10,000 African Americans had moved into the area since 1950, crowding

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[45] Philip J. Cruise, "Interracial Housing Succeeds*," Interracial Review, A Journal For Christian Democracy*, (April, 1955), 59-62, folder 12, box 67E2; Thomas F. Farrell, "Object Lesson in Race Relations," *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 February 1950, folder 2, box 71B5; The Forest Neighborhood Committee, "New York's First Desegregation Project a Success," 21 December 1956 in folder 6, box 65C8, NYCHA Papers; Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110 (Table 7.1); Jill Jonnes, *We're Still Here: the Rise, the Fall, and the Resurrection of the South Bronx*, (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 223; *NYT*, 11 July 1955; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1958," 24 July 1958, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

[46] *NYT*, 11 July 1955; Robert Jensen, *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx*, (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1979), 50.

tenements near the public housing complexes. Moses had always envisioned Brownsville as a neighborhood where dislocated families would move. African Americans moving into Brownsville were refugees from Moses' slum clearance projects from the nearby Farragut Houses. During the 1950s, thousands of blacks and Puerto Ricans would migrate to Brownsville. Their influx was followed by the rapid exodus of the neighborhood's Jewish population. The racial composition of the projects reflected that of the surrounding neighborhood and quickly became overwhelmingly black and Puerto Rican. The black and Puerto Rican population of Brownsville Houses grew from 47% 1948 to 83% in 1958. Only three years after opening, the black and Puerto Rican population of Van Dyke Houses grew from 66% to 92%. Neighborhood community groups that in the past had lobbied NYCHA for low-income public housing now charged that the Authority's tenant selection policy was "un-American and harmful to the entire community."[47]

Brownsville residents were not opposed to minorities living in their neighborhood. Blacks had resided in Brownsville for decades and the local community groups supported civil rights causes and included black as well as white members. But by the mid-1950s, even white residents who had vowed to stay and fight for their community left. As the number of racial incidents and violent crimes increased, local activists told NYCHA that the concentration of poor blacks and Puerto Ricans in the public housing projects was detrimental to the community. To counter this trend, local activists requested that NYCHA construct a project for middle-income tenants. "We do not want economic ghettos in our community," wrote Irving Tabb the president of the Brownsville Neighborhood Health and Welfare Council, "and we are in danger of having Brownsville

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[47] Pritchett, 140.

become such a ghetto." In 1960, the Samuel J. Tilden Houses opened next to the low-rent Brownsville and Van Dyke Houses. Together, these projects created the largest housing complex in the city containing nearly 4,000 units. Rents at Tilden Houses were higher than adjoining projects to attract more white and middle-income tenants to the neighborhood. At first Tilden Houses was racially integrated, but after a few years it too became predominantly black and Puerto Rican.[48]

Integration and thePhase Program Controversy , 1956-1964

In response to the transformation of public housing, housing reformers advocated that the city's site and tenant selection policies be reformed. In 1954, Charles Abrams maintained that the Housing Authority needed to be more active in promoting integration in its projects. In projects where the population was predominantly white or predominantly black and Puerto Rican, Abrams argued, the Authority should select only those tenants that would enhance the racial balance. "Where, despite the authorities' efforts, project occupancy heads towards homogeneity---either [white] majority or [black and Puerto Rican] minority," Abrams explained, "an effort to keep the project in workable balance is desirable." Abrams supported the adoption of a system where the representation of minority tenants between 6% and 30% was maintained. "There may be some who would call this a 'quota system,' but a quota system is a devise to exclude people, not include them, to effect segregation, not break it down."[49]

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[48] NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1970 All Programs," 1 August 1970, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers; Pritchett, 142-143, 152-153.
[49] Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 311-312.

In the mid-1950s, it was still possible for Abrams' integration plan to succeed. In 1954, while the racial transformation of public housing was in full swing, the majority of public housing projects (46 out of 66) were still predominantly white. African Americans and Puerto Ricans made up only 33.25% of the total public housing population. In nearly all of the higher rent city-funded projects (21 of 24), whites made up over 75% of the population. Whites also maintained a majority in over half (18 of 32) of the low-rent state and Federally-funded projects. If the Housing Authority could maintain the present racial balance in its existing projects, attract more white families to newly constructed low-income projects and attract more black and Puerto Rican families to city-funded high-rent projects the Housing Authority might have achieved a more racially balanced program.[50]

In 1959, when NYCHA finally implemented an integration plan similar to Abrams' it was too late. The racial balance in public housing was nearly the inverse of what it had been only five years previously. Whites made up only 42.9% of public housing tenants, while black and Puerto Ricans made up 56.8%. The overwhelming majority of families in higher-income city funded developments were still 75% white, but minority families made up 68% of the tenants in low-rent state and Federally funded projects. Any successful integration plan implemented by the end of the 1950s would have to attract large numbers of whites to its low-rent projects that were overwhelmingly black and Puerto Rican. The integration experiments in the Forest Houses of the South

[50] NYCHA, "Number of Families at Federal Projects Shown by Racial Composition at Initial Occupancy and on February 1, 1953," 7 January 1954, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1959 All Programs," 18 January 1960, NYCHA Papers, manuscript box IVB.

Bronx demonstrated the failure of housing reformers' attempt to maintain white populations in predominantly minority projects.[51]

A 1956 report released by New York State Commission On Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD) claimed that site selection was just as important as tenant selection in maintaining racial balance:

> Despite the mandate of the law prohibiting racial discrimination in public and publicly-assisted housing, the objective of non-segregation is often frustrated at the outset by the location of the site. Placing a project within a ghetto area assures the failure of any attempt at integration.

Other reports noted that no city in the nation was able to maintain a substantial white population in any project constructed in a heavily African American neighborhood. If the Housing Authority wanted to promote racially balanced neighborhoods and disperse "ghetto" populations, the city would have to refrain from slum clearance projects in densely populated minority areas, and build projects "in undeveloped areas or in neighborhoods not hitherto occupied by a high concentration of members of minority groups."[52]

In 1955, Abrams was appointed by Governor W. Averell Harriman as head of the State Commission Against Discrimination. The State Commission or SCAD, as it became known, was formed in 1945 to "investigate complaints" of racial discrimination in the hiring and firing of employees. During the 1950s, housing reformers had lobbied to expand the powers of SCAD to investigate discrimination charges in publicly assisted

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[51] NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1959, All Projects," 18 January 1960, NYCHA Papers; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Project at Initial Occupancy and On December 31, 1960 All Programs," 18 January 1961, NYCHA Papers, Manuscript Box IVB; American Jewish Committee, "Report for the New York Chapter for the Month of February, 1956," folder Reports New York City Chapter, 1952-3-4, box 32 (Gen-13, Geographic-Domestic), AJC Papers.
[52] The New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, "Report on the Relationship Between Racial Integration and Site Selection," 19 April 1956, folder State and Cities Housing, New York State Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, box 106 (347.17.10), American Jewish Committee Papers, Jewish History Center, New York, 1-3.

and publicly insured housing: these would include public housing, publicly assisted housing (like Stuyvesant Town) and privately funded developments receiving state and federal insurance guarantees. Months before Abrams' appointment, Republicans, who controlled the State Legislature, allowed only for expansion of SCAD's power to investigate discrimination charges in publicly assisted housing. After lobbying by both Abrams and Governor Harriman, SCAD's jurisdiction was later expanded to include private developments insured by Veterans and Federal Housing Administration loans.[53]

In his three years as chairman, Abrams attempted to expand the powers of SCAD so that it could launch its own investigations and prosecutions of discrimination cases. Under state law, SCAD could only investigate after formal charges had been filed and only the alleged victim was allowed to pursue the matter in the courts. With increased powers for SCAD, Abrams hoped to achieve racial balance in public and private housing in New York, by forcing developers to open housing to minority families and compelling NYCHA to reform its tenant and site selection procedures for its public housing projects. Abrams failed to strengthen the power of SCAD, but used his position of chairman as a bully pulpit to promote his plans for the integration of public housing.[54]

A few months after taking over SCAD, Abrams called for NYCHA to reform its site selection process, arguing that the construction of public housing on vacant sites in the outer boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island would promote racial integration. He also accused Borough Presidents of blocking public housing construction to prevent minority families from moving into predominantly white neighborhoods. To

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[53] "Aid Asked in Fight on Bias in Housing," *NYT*, 26 November 1956; Bernard Taper, "Charles Abrams Profile: A Lover of Cities, Part II," *The New Yorker*, 11 February 1967in NYCHA folder 1, box 100A2, 104-106A. Scott Henderson, *Housing & the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2000), 159-161.
[54] Henderson, *Housing & the Democratic Ideal*, 161-163.

integrate individual housing projects, Abrams called for white applicants to be steered towards projects where African Americans and Puerto Ricans predominated, and for minority applicants to be offered vacant units in projects where whites predominated. Abrams' integration plan, later known as the Phase Program, was rejected outright by Warren Moscow the executive director of the Housing Authority.[55]

Moscow was the most influential member of the Housing Authority not beholden to Robert Moses. He was appointed by Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. to serve as the Mayor's eyes and ears at the Authority. Denouncing the Phase Program as a "quota system" that promoted "planned integration," Moscow claimed that the plan would violate the state's 1950 Wicks-Austin law banning discrimination in publicly assisted housing. "The Housing Authority will continue to rent apartments to tenants on the basis of need for public housing, and will not pick them on the basis of race, color or creed," Moscow proclaimed. "To do otherwise would involve us in a program of setting up 'black' apartments, and 'white' apartments, and 'brown' apartments in our projects . . . We never have done this, and we will resist any and all efforts to make us do this."[56]

Moscow's opposition might also have been based on the fear that the integration plan could backfire and prompt more whites to move out of public housing. NYCHA demographics demonstrated that by 1956 the overwhelming majority of whites lived in city-funded middle-income projects. It is likely that Moscow believed that the integration plan would fail to attract white families to predominantly minority low-rent

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[55] "Bias Issue Stirs Housing Debate," *NYT*, 14 May 1956; Ira S. Robbins to Mrs. Frederick H. Rubel, 1 November 1960, folder 10, box 60E7, NYCHA Papers.
[56] Caro, *The Power Broker*, 706-707; Edward Rutledge Housing Director State Commission Against Discrimination (hereafter SCAD) to Warren Moscow, Executive Director NYCHA, 17 April 1956; Warren Moscow to Edward Rutledge, 19 April 1956, folder 3, box 71B5, NYCHA Papers.

developments. But if the plan succeeded in admitting of more African Americans and Puerto Ricans into the predominantly white city-funded projects, it could produce an exodus of the remaining white families in public housing. The debate between Moscow and Abrams over the dilemma of racial segregation in public housing continued. Despite meetings among Moscow, Abrams and other members of SCAD and NYCHA the issue was never resolved.[57]

In 1957, Mayor Wagner appointed the City Comptroller Charles F. Preusse to conduct a study of the Housing Authority and make recommendations for reform. After two months, Pruesse produced a one-hundred page report that highlighted both the successes and failures of NYCHA. The report noted the deterioration of several NYCHA projects, a backlog of maintenance jobs, and a host of management issues. The decline in public housing, according to Preusse, was due to changes in the tenant population. "We find the entrance of undesirable families into the projects creating a hard-core of problem tenants, which while small in number are the root of the deep troubles both to their neighbors and to the Authority." Managers reported that most of the problem tenants were displaced families who previously lived at the project site. Without adequate relocation facilities the managers felt compelled to offer the "undesirable families" units in the project rather than force them to move into neighboring slums.[58]

"While the report did not make the connection explicit," the historian Wendell Pritchett noted, "Preusse's opinion was clearly that the increase in minority tenants was directly related to the increase in 'problem families.'" Nearly all the slum clearance sites

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[57] "Number of Families . . . on February 1, 1953," NYCHA Papers; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1958," 24 July 1958, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers; "2 Housing Agencies Heal Race Dispute," *NYT*, 20 June 1956..
[58] Pritchett, 153-154.

were in areas of racial concentration, Preusse claimed, and displaced families had priority for units in new projects. The report also maintained that the recent migration of minority families to New York was reflected in the increase of minority families in Housing Authority projects. To prevent the concentration of "problem families," Preusse recommended that the Housing Authority improve its screening procedures. Claiming that in the past the Housing Authority had taken only income level into its consideration of tenants, Pruesse now advised that Authority also consider race to develop a tenant population that was racially as well as economically balanced. NYCHA had recently launched a program of constructing middle-income projects next to low-income developments to promote economic diversity. While lauding the effort, Pruesse advised that a position of Race Relations Consultant be created to advise the Authority on racial aspects of all public housing operations, including site and tenant selection policies.[59]

Pruesse's report was an internal document that was never released, but a year later NYCHA was ready to implement the reforms. A series of scandals involving the city's Title I programs forced the resignation of Robert Moses from the Slum Clearance Commission and loosened his grip on the Housing Authority. Acting quickly to consolidate his power over NYCHA, Mayor Wagner appointed William D. Reid, a long time public housing advocate as chairman. Ira S. Robbins, a former legal advisor to the Housing Authority and the head of the City Housing and Planning Council was appointed vice chairman. Through Robbins, the Housing Authority took steps to develop polices that would create a more racially diverse tenant population. Robbins hired Madison Jones, an African American who was the special assistant for housing to the NAACP as the Special Consultant on Race Relations. Robbins also strengthened NYCHA's ties to the

[59] Pritchett, 155-156.

NAACP, the Urban League and other civil rights groups, beefed up its social work apparatus and established an inter-group relations department. Secretly and without public notice, the Housing Authority in 1959 adopted a policy to achieve Pruesse's recommendation for more racially balanced projects. [60]

The integration plan known as the Phase Program was similar to the "benign quota" system advocated by Charles Abrams five years earlier. The program was divided into four categories or phases. In Phase I projects, where black and Puerto Rican tenants predominated, white applicants would be given priority for vacant units over black and Puerto Rican applicants. The vacant apartments would go to a black or Puerto Rican applicant only if it was first turned down by a white family. In Phase II projects, where black and Puerto Ricans made up the overwhelming majority of tenants, apartments would be held until an eligible white applicant emerged. In Phase III projects white tenants predominated, so non-white applicants were given first priority in half of all the available units. Phase IV, attempted to reduce Puerto Rican segregation in some projects and increase their presence in others by giving Puerto Rican first priority for open units.[61]

In 1960, an article appearing in the periodical *The New Leader*, by Bernard Roshco a former Housing Authority employee was critical of the Phase Program. According to Roshco, the main purpose of the program was to reduce community opposition to public housing construction. NYCHA reported that white families were reluctant to move into any public housing project that was not predominantly white. Opposition to projects built in white neighborhoods was intensifying, NYCHA noted, and

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[60] Ibid., 156; Caro, *The Power Broker*, 805; Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 291.
[61] Bernard Roshco, "The Integration Problem and Public Housing," *The New Leader*, 4-11 July 1960 in folder 8, box 85D3, NYCHA Papers, 11, 13; Pritchett, 157-158; William Reid, NYHCA Chairman to Elmer A. Carter, Chairman State Commission Against Discrimination (hereafter SCAD), 19 July 1960, folder 10, box 60E7, NYCHA Papers.

it was becoming more difficult for the Authority to find decent vacant sites to build on. The black community also rejected the construction of additional projects in their neighborhoods. By 1956, 18 projects with over 22,000 units were built in the Harlem alone. Many in the black community argued that the Housing Authority's site selection policy reinforced the pattern of racial and economic segregation in black neighborhoods.[62]

Roshco maintained that the Phase Program allowed the Authority "to appease both white and non-white groups." By allowing more black and Puerto Rican families in the predominantly white projects, Roshco claimed, the Authority was demonstrating to civil-rights organizations that it was committed to the goals of integration. To reassure whites that the racial balance in projects built in their neighborhoods would be maintained, NYCHA openly solicited local families to apply for the projects. Despite the secretive nature of the Phase Program NYCHA's efforts to build racially balanced projects in white neighborhoods was widely publicized. The Race Relations Consultant Madison Jones was quoted in *The New York Times* arguing, "We're trying to kill the idea that public housing is minority housing. If we can get into this thing sensibly with the community groups, we can reverse the tendency towards segregation."[63]

Roshco argued that the Phase Program was only marginally successful. The lack of white families willing to take available apartments in Phase II projects located in Harlem forced the Housing Authority to drop them from the program. The only projects

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[62] Roshco, "The Integration Problem and Public Housing," 11; New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, "Report on the Relationship Between Racial Integration and Site Selection," 19 April 1956, folder States and Cities, Housing NYSCADH, box 106 (347.17.10, GEN 10), 2; Pritchett, 158.
[63] Roshco, 11; Charles Grutzner, "City Housing Unit Bars Race Quotas," *NYT*, 5 July 1959.

the Housing Authority successfully integrated through the Phase Program were newly opened projects constructed in predominantly white neighborhoods. It was also difficult to convince non-white applicants to accept units in the overwhelming white Phase III projects, many of which are built in predominantly white neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. Minority families were reluctant to move into Phase III projects partially in response the hostility they might encounter and also due to higher rents. Almost all of the Phase III projects were city-funded, middle-income developments that charged higher rents than state and federally funded low-rent projects.[64]

Roshco observed that that the Housing Authority often held apartments vacant until a suitable white family could be found to move into a predominantly black and Puerto Rican project. “Apartments have been held vacant, sometimes for months,” Roscho claimed.

> In other instances, four-room apartments, which normally go to families with one or two children, have been rented to childless white couples willing to accept them. The white applicants who have accepted apartments where the majority of tenants were Negro and Puerto Rican have usually been older couples who have no children living with them.

By giving white families the first choice in vacant units in Phase I and Phase II projects, Roshco argued, penalized minority applicants who had far fewer opportunities for housing in the private sector and were in greater need of affordable housing.[65]

In response to Roscho’s charges, NYCHA chairman William Reid defended the Phase Program. In the past, Reid argued in a letter to new SCAD Chairman Elmer A. Carter, NYCHA had to do very little encourage integrated projects. After World War II, the increased migration of blacks and Puerto Ricans, the displacement of families due to

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[64] Roshco, 12.
[65] Ibid..

slum clearance and the "unrealistically" low income limits placed on families applying for low-rent projects led to many projects becoming "substantially segregated." "Segregated occupancy, if uncorrected," Reid declared, "defeats the City's efforts to develop integrated schools and to create an open city in which families of all racial groups can live alongside each other."[66]

Reid's defense of the Phase Program, the historian Wendell Pritchett observed, amounted to an important admission by the Housing Authority that their past site-selection policies contributed to the racial composition of its projects. During the Moses years, NYCHA purposely constructed its low-income projects in black or Puerto Rican areas or in white areas experiencing racial change and turned a blind eye to the warnings of increasing segregation. Echoing the arguments housing reformers had made for years, Reid acknowledged that site selection could promote racial balance:

> It is our feeling that open land sites, away from minority and ethnic concentrations, offer the best possible opportunity for integration. Sites in fringe and peripheral areas also lend themselves this way.

In response to Roshco's charge that NYCHA's policy of setting aside apartments for white families in some of its projects was discriminatory, Reid argued that only 65 units out of thousands were reserved.

> Race does not take priority over the criterion of housing need. There has been no reduction in the number of apartments available to non-whites. No apartments are restricted to whites only. There are no quotas on the number of families in any racial group which may be admitted to any project.[67]

Roshco's article created a storm of controversy. When he asserted that leaders of various civil rights organizations should oppose the Phase Program, the Authority released a petition signed by the leaders of twenty-sit major civil rights groups including

[66] Reid to Carter, 19 July 1960, 3.
[67] Pritchett, 161-162.

the Jewish American Committee, the NAACP and Urban League. "We fully support the objectives of the New York City Housing Authority . . . in its efforts to achieve actual racial integration in the housing facilities it operates," the petition read. "We have worked with the Housing Authority to advance that objective in the past and will continue to do so in the future."[68]

While publicly supporting the Housing Authority's stand on the Phase Program, privately some members of New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD) and the American Jewish Committee expressed ambivalence about affirmative action and benign quotas. Should civil rights groups support programs that promote integration, but are technically in violation of the anti-discrimination laws they helped create? "Until now we have informally agreed with other agencies to 'look the other way,'" wrote Executive Chairman of the AJC Edwin J. Lukas, to a friend in 1961. "On the theory that since the ultimate goal is open occupancy or integration, there should not be pressure for a rigid enforcement of the law against discrimination, especially since much more than a token number of Negroes are being absorbed."[69]

In 1961, leading members of the New York Committee on Discrimination in Housing sought to mediate the dispute between the State and the Housing Authority. Algernon Black and Frances Levenson both leaders of NYSCAD wanted to settle the issue. They believed that further exposure of the Phase Program would raise public criticism and hurt the cause of integration. While supportive of the goals of the Phase

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[68] The American Jewish Committee, "The New York Chapter's Support of New York City Housing Authority's Integration Policies," 21 December 1960, folder AJC Housing Chapters (workshops, etc.), 48-61, box 103 (347.17.10, Gen 10), AJC Papers, 3; Pritchett, 163; "Bias Laid to City in Choice of Tenants on Ethnic Basis," *NYT*, 4 July 1960.
[69] Edwin J. Lukas to Louis Rugenstein, Jr., 30 January 1961, folder Benign Quotas, Housing 1957-61, box 104 (347.17.10, GEN-10, AJC Papers; *NYT*, 24 September 1960.

Program, Levenson admitted that there was disagreement over the use of quotas among NYSCAD members. “We don’t question the Authority’s purposes,” an anonymous critic and NYSCAD member stated. “But we do question whether the methods are legal. If one person entitled to an apartment is kept from it because of race the law has been violated. If that’s the case why not admit it then get on with the business of seeking legal ways to achieve the objectives they want. Or even changing the law.”[70]

In response to Roshco’s allegations, SCAD, now staffed with appointees of the Republican administration of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, launched an investigation in 1960. Elmer Carter, the new chairman of SCAD, said that if the Phase Program used race as a basis for tenant selection then the Housing Authority was in violation of State and City anti-discrimination laws. Three years later, the state found that NYCHA’s Phase Program violated state anti-discrimination laws. Despite the support of leading housing reformers and civil rights leaders the Authority was forced to scrap the Phase Program in favor of a compromise plan negotiated with the state officials. Details of the new plan were never made public, but instead of affixing apartments to prospective tenants by race, the Housing Authority would simply try to “encourage” applicants to move into projects where their presence would promote racial balance.[71]

Conclusion

The cancellation of the Phase Program marked the failure of housing reformers to improve the racial and economic balance in public housing. Their efforts to integrate the projects could not overcome fifteen years of NYCHA policies dictated by Robert Moses

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[70] Lawrence O’Kane, “Citizens’ Panel Seeks to Settle Racial Dispute in City Housing,” 7 January 1961.
[71] Peter Kihss, “Housing Policy of City Changed,” 27 January 1964; Bernard Katzen, “Report on Informal Investigations of Tenant Selection Practices and Policies of New York City Housing Authority,” 1962, folder 6, box 100A2, NYCHA Papers; Lawrence O’Kane, “State Inquiry Criticizes City on Housing,” The New York Times, 21 April 1963;

that virtually promoted segregation. Moses' placement of massive conglomerations of projects in poor, racially changing neighborhoods coupled with slum clearance policies that displaced thousands of low-income black and Puerto Rican families who had first priority for vacant units permanently altered the public housing system. It was Moses' vision of public housing, as the housing of last resort for poor minorities that reverberated in the minds of most New Yorkers. Amongst the city's whites public housing became virtually synonymous with minority housing.[72]

The rejection of the public housing program by whites was a growing concern for NYCHA. Housing Authority statistics from 1960 showed that a year after the Phase Program was implemented it was succeeding in increasing the number of white families in public housing by 12%. The number of African American and Puerto Rican families in predominantly white projects increased by 12.5%. "The program has failed," the report explained, "to reduce the number of [white] tenants who continue to move out of the projects." When a public housing project reached a 30% ratio of minority families, what NYCHA euphemistically referred to as the "tolerance point," white families began to move out. For NYCHA staff members getting more white families to apply, move into and remain in public housing was vital not only for better racial balance, but also to "improve the image of public housing."[73]

Attracting more white families to public housing was not the Housing Authority's only attempt to improve its public image. In response to the outcry against the construction of conglomerations of high-rise projects, the Authority announced that it

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[73] NYCHA, Statistics Division, "Phase Program," 27 April 1960, folder 8, box 85D3, NYCHA Papers; William R. Valentine, Director of Inter-group Relations, NYCHA to Harry Fialkin, Chief of Statistics, NYCHA, "Possible Recommendations in the Interests of the Authority's Attempted Integration," 12 May 1964, folder 10, box 60E7, NYCHA Papers.

would build smaller projects. In 1961, the architectural critic and community activist Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* blamed the city's high-rise projects for "cataclysmic" changes to the surrounding neighborhood. Constructing several high-risers in a single tenement neighborhood she contended, not only dislocated poor families, local stores and businesses, but also prevented mothers from observing children as they played outside. The interior courtyards, a major design element of nearly all projects, cut off public housing dwellers from the surrounding area and interrupted the flow of interpersonal relationships that had developed naturally in older neighborhoods for generations. Jacobs called for smaller public housing developments that were less disruptive to local neighborhoods.[74]

In 1962, the Authority launched the "vest-pocket" housing program. Designed to be smaller, vest-pocket projects often consisted of only one or two buildings and occupied less than a city block. The Authority announced that 32% of all future projects to be vest-pocket projects scattered in various neighborhoods throughout the city. Between 1962 and 1965, fourteen vest pocket projects were in operation (2,957 units) with another 24 projects under construction or in the planning stages. Early vest-pocket projects, however, were by no means smaller in terms of height. The first two vest-pocket projects, Audubon Houses (167 units) in Harlem and Stephen Wise Towers (399 units) on West 90th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, were twenty and nineteen stories respectively.[75]

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[74] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (Random House, New York: 1961), 321-337

[75] "Vest Pocket Program," report, 9 June 1966, in folder 27, box 3, General Correspondence, Official Correspondence, Office of Mayor John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives; "City Plans Housing in Small Projects," *NYT*, 8 April 1962; "'Vest Pocket' Project Ready," 12 April 1962; ; "West Side Ground Broken for Low-Income Housing," *NYT*, 19 November 1962; NYCHA, "Development Data Book," n.d., listed on NYCHA web page, www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/home.html.

The Housing Authority also attempted to reform its site-selection policies. NYCHA's efforts to reduce the concentration of low-income housing in minority neighborhoods by constructing projects in predominantly white neighborhoods produced disappointing results. Sensitive to the negative image whites held of public housing, the Authority often compromised with white community groups opposed to local projects. In 1959, when the Castle Hill Houses was planned for the East Bronx, home owners formed several opposition groups. They complained that their area had already been inundated with low-income projects that were responsible for an influx of Puerto Rican and African American families. In the East Bronx area three Federally-funded and one state-funded low-income project had been constructed in a one-mile radius, housing 3,935 families (45% of which were African American and Puerto Rican) between 1953 and 1955.[76]

When faced with stiff resistance to the Castle Hill project, the Housing Authority quickly acquiesced to the local residents' objections to the influx of minority families. The monthly rent for the project was set between $18 to $23 per-room, the highest rent possible allowed by a State funded project. Although it never officially stated its rationalization, the Authority hoped that the higher rents would discourage minority families from renting in the project. The plan succeeded admirably. When the project opened in 1960 only 20% of the families were African American and Puerto Rican.[77]

Madison Jones, who headed the Authority's Inter-group Relations Department, argued that Castle Hill symbolized the city's efforts to build low-income public housing in predominantly white neighborhoods. Without mentioning the higher rent classification for the project, Jones instead emphasized the efforts by Housing Authority staffers

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[76] "Top City Rent Set for Castle Hill," *NYT*, 15 January 1959.
[77] Ibid.; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1970 All Programs," 1 August 1970, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

working with local schools and churches to educate local residents about public housing and dispel its negative image. According to Jones, many of the residents who objected to the project were now among the applicants for the 1,613 unit project. “We explain our program and tell them how they fit in as management representatives,” Jones claimed. “We are getting more inquiries for the projects, which shows they are becoming alert the situations and problems of whose significance they had been unaware.”[78]

Despite the Housing Authority’s efforts to repair its sagging public image, public housing’s unpopularity, especially among whites, persisted. During the early 1960s, as public housing continued to be stigmatized as warehouses for poor minorities and incubators for crime and poverty, ballot initiatives funding public housing failed. In 1962, voters state-wide turned down the Low Income Financing Experiment or LIFE, a ballot initiative that would have allocated funds to subsidize the rent of low-income families to move into middle-income rental housing. The ballot initiative went down to defeat with heavy opposition from upstate voters and for the first time a ballot initiative for public housing failed to win the majority of voters in New York City.[79]

In 1964, a New York State bond issue for $165 million to fund the construction of 4,000 to 5,000 new low-income public housing units was also voted down. *The New York Times* editorialized that heavy upstate opposition to the bill contributed to its defeat, and that only 57% of New York City voters supported the measure. In the past, New York voters supported public housing referendums in large majorities. Why had the ballot initiatives failed? “Opposition has arisen because some New Yorkers resent public housing as an instrument for breaking neighborhood walls of racial separation,” *The New*

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[78] Ibid.; “City Housing Unit Bars Race Quotas,” *NYT*, 5 July 1959.
[79] John M. Clapp, “The Formation of Housing Policy in New York City, 1960-1970,” *Policy Sciences* 7 (1976), 81; “Opposition Rising to Low-Rent Aid,” *NYT*, 6 December 1964.

York Times editorialized. "Others are upset because many projects have become totally Negro and Puerto Rican, despite the best efforts of housing officials to integrate them."[80]

The perception that public housing favored minorities undoubtedly contributed to its unpopularity amongst many whites. In the midst of the city's burgeoning civil rights movement, the debate surrounding public housing shifted. Instead of trying to integrate public housing by attracting more whites, it was taken for granted that the projects would remain predominantly minority. Government funding for public housing was required, housing reformers would argue, to provide poor minority families with decent living conditions. As the 1960s progressed, public housing would become a vital component of the civil rights movement.[81]

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[80] *NYT*, 6 December 1964.; "End of Low-Cost Housing," *NYT*, 7 December 1964.
[81] *NYT*, 7 December 1964.

CHAPTER THREE

Civil Rights and Public Housing: The Origins of Scatter-Site Housing

Despite the increasing segregation of public housing, housing reformers in the early 1960s believed that the program was on the road to recovery. Members of the New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD) lauded the Authority's integration efforts in the face of the growing controversy surrounding the Phase Program. "The New York City Housing Authority . . . has established a race relations department---the first such in the nation within a housing authority—and has developed programs to encourage integration," a 1960 NYSCAD memo read. "We applaud the . . . Authority's placing racial integration as one of the goals which it is seeking to achieve." NYSCAD also supported the Housing Authority's vest-pocket initiative of constructing smaller projects and its efforts to build projects outside of areas of racial concentration. The feeling amongst NYSCAD members was that the Authority had done everything that could be done to improve racial and economic balance in public housing.[1]

To continue the fair housing movement and achieve "the concept of full housing opportunity" NYSCAD members turned their attention towards private housing. Three years earlier, NYSCAD had successfully spearheaded the city-wide campaign for the passage of the Brown-Isaacs-Sharkey Bill, the first city law in the nation to ban discrimination in private housing. The City Commission on Inter-group Relations (later

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[1] Unpublished memoir of Algernon Black, "Our Busiest Year," n.d., folder NYSCDH 1963, box 11, Algernon Black Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 6 -7; New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing (hereafter NYSCAD), "Proposed Statement Regarding the Integration Program of the New York City Housing Authority," September 1960, folder NSCDH SCAD, box 11, Black Papers.

renamed the City Commission on Human Rights) was established to prosecute violators, but it was notoriously understaffed. The difficulty of enforcing the city law prompted NYSCAD to expand its lobbying efforts to include state legislation banning discrimination in private housing. If discrimination in private housing were banned, they reasoned, low-income Puerto Rican and African American families would not be restricted to housing in areas of racial concentration.[2]

In 1961, NYSCAD members successfully lobbied the state legislature for the expansion of the 1955 Metcalf-Baker law (banning discrimination in all publicly-funded housing) to include privately built multiple-dwellings, including cooperatives with three or more units and houses in developments with ten or more units. Frances Levenson of NYSCAD reported that the 1961 anti-discrimination law was mired in "cumbersome enforcement procedures." The number of minority families pressing discrimination charges was "disappointingly small," Levenson claimed, due to the unwillingness of minority families to pioneer integration in potentially hostile communities. Out of the handful of discrimination cases that emerged almost all were settled by conciliation between the minority tenant and the landlord. Only a few landlords were ever convicted of discrimination.[3]

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[2] Alfred J. Marrow, *Changing Patterns of Prejudice: A New Look at Today's Racial, Religious and Cultural Tension*, (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1962), ?; "Long Term Impact of Bias Law Seen," *NYT*, 8 December 1957; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Post-War New York*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 229; Planners for Equal Opportunity (New York Chapter), "Background Paper on Publicly-Aided Housing," July 1967, folder NCDH 1967 Faraday Wood Materials, box 14, Black Papers.

[3] "Means of Enforcing Housing Act Sought," *NYT*, 6 October 1963; Thomas W. Ennis, "Anti-Bias Laws Held Effective," *NYT*, 25 June 1961; American Jewish Committee (hereafter AJC), "Report of the New York Chapter for the Period of September 1, 1957 to October 31, 1957; "Discussion Group Committee," folder Reports, New York Chapter 1957-58-59, box 32 (AJC 347.17.13, Gen 13, Geographic-Domestic); AJC, "Report December 1, 1961, February 1962, March 1962," folder Chronological File, December 1961 to March 1962, New York Chapter, box 3 (RG 347.4.CSD-124), AJC Papers, Jewish History Center, New York.

Another problem with the 1961 law was that it covered only 15% all the housing in New York State. After two years of lobbying by NYSCAD, the State Legislature amended the law to cover discrimination in all housing, except for rentals in owner-occupied one- and two-family dwellings. "This represents the culmination of a fifteen-year campaign for fair housing legislation in New York State," NYSCAD proclaimed. "Under this law, discrimination will be barred in 95% of the State's housing supply."[4]

Despite the most comprehensive fair housing statutes in the nation, racial segregation in New York intensified during the 1960s. Housing reformers would argue that the laws needed more time to be effective, but according to understaffed state and city Human Rights Commissions the laws proved difficult to enforce and were easily evaded by real estate agents and landlords. By the 1960s, segregation in New York was so entrenched that the new laws might have been too little, too late. In 1963, data collected from the 1960 census revealed that nearly 70% of the city's African American population resided in a handful of areas containing a 50% or more black population. These areas included Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, Morrisania, the Bronx and Corona and Jamaica, Queens. Bedford-Stuyvesant grew to rival Harlem as the center of the city's black population. While 400,000 of the city's 1,100,000 blacks lived in Harlem, 300,000 resided in Bedford-Stuyvesant. By the end of the 1960s, Bedford-Stuyvesant's black population would surpass Harlem's. While the city's growing Puerto Rican population was more dispersed, it also experienced increased segregation. At least 15%

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[4] Black, "Our Busiest Year," Black Papers, 6-7.

of Bedford-Stuyvesant's population was Puerto Rican and the South Bronx had replaced East Harlem as the home to most of the city's Puerto Ricans.[5]

During the 1960s, housing and economic conditions in areas of racial concentration continued to decline. In 1960, blacks and Puerto Ricans earned one- to two-thirds less than white workers and were more likely to live in substandard housing and pay higher rents than white families. Over the next four years, the city lost thousands of manufacturing jobs (86,000 between 1958 and 1964). The loss of manufacturing coupled with the increase in industrial automation, made it more difficult for low-skilled black and Puerto Rican newcomers to find decent paying jobs. There was also a growing shortage of adequate housing. Between 1960 and 1965, nearly 200,000 units of new rental housing were constructed. The majority, however, was privately funded housing, at rents most low-income families could not afford. The new housing also consisted mostly of one- to two-bedroom units, apartments that were smaller than required by most low-income, minority families that contained five or more members. Coupled with the demolition of 50,000 units (most likely low-rent tenements) the number of vacant apartments in the city continued to decline while severe overcrowding increased.[6]

By the 1960s, observed the political scientist Jewell Bellush, "a poverty- stricken population larger than the total population of the average American city lived in deteriorating housing pressed within slum neighborhoods." The majority of residents in

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[5] Thomas Buckley, "Negro Segregation in the North: Barriers Relaxing, but Slowly," *NYT*, 2 June 1963; "Skirting Bias Bans: Curbs on Discrimination in Housing Prove Easy to Evade in Most Areas" *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 June 1967 in folder NCDH 1967. box 14, Black Papers; Community Renewal Program, *New York City's Renewal Strategy, 1965*, (New York, 1965), 26-27; Bellush, 100; Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland,* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 39; Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*, (New York: The New Press, 2000), 183-185; "Negro Populace Rises In Bedford-Stuyvesant," *NYT*, 12 August 1963.

[6] *New York City's Renewal Strategy, 1965,* 13, 17-18; Bellush, 100.

Bedford-Stuyvesant earned less than $5,000 a year and, except for Harlem, no other neighborhood in the city housed more unemployed men. That same year, the NAACP reported that the increased geographic segregation of minority families in New York resulted in segregated schools that were as educationally inferior as segregated schools in the South. With limited choices, poor African Americans continued to move to the neighborhood. As one Bedford-Stuyvesant resident who had moved from the North Carolina explained, "It's a choice between living in Harlem or living in Bedford-Stuyvesant." Harlem's poor reputation prompted him and many others to choose Bedford-Stuyvesant.[7]

The failure of anti-discrimination statutes marked the end of an era for New York's civil rights movement. Since the 1940s, the strategy to end discrimination in housing revolved around the efforts of predominantly middle-class civil rights groups like the Urban League, the NAACP, and the American Jewish Committee to formulate and lobby for legislation banning discrimination. During the 1960s, the civil rights movement would be dominated by a younger generation who replaced the legislative template with a more protest oriented activism. In response to deteriorating housing conditions in segregated slums, civil rights activists organized a series of rent strikes that forced housing reformers to once again reevaluate the role of public housing. By the early 1960s, housing reformers would argue that the public housing program should be reformed to meet the needs of low-income blacks and Puerto Ricans living in areas of racial concentration. As public support for the construction of new projects continued to

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[7] Bellush, 100; *NYT*, 2 June 1963; Jerry Miller, "Housing Worsens In Brooklyn Area," *NYT*, 10 November 1963; Jerry Miller, "Housing Worsens In Brooklyn Area," *NYT*, 10 November 1963.

wane, housing reformers would argue that government funding for public housing was essential to the struggle for racial equality.[8]

The Civil Rights Movement and the 1963 Rent Strikes

By 1961, declining conditions combined with a growing militancy in the African American community provided fertile ground for a more activist civil rights movement. At least a dozen "black nationalist" groups had emerged in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem. Malcolm X, of the Nation of Islam, denounced the integration strategies of mainstream civil rights groups as "begging for integration" and calling for "segregation" in the formation of a separate black nation. While black-nationalists represented only a fraction of black opinion in New York and their protests were relegated to street rallies in Harlem, they surprised many white observers. After all, *The Times* noted, "efforts for community betterment have provided more than $350,000,000 in housing and other capitalist improvements" in Harlem. "The surprise" expressed by whites, according the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, "illustrates how far our white public is from realizing the repression and the treatment of the Negro in this country."[9]

In the wake of the rise of black-nationalism, the New York chapter of the NAACP reported that 3,000 members had quit the group. Percy Sutton, a Harlem lawyer and chapter president of the NAACP, believed that the growth of black-nationalism marked the emergence of "a new Negro," perhaps less inclined to accept the slow pace of the city's efforts to desegregate schools and improve housing and job opportunities. "Many persons have criticized the NAACP for what they term a lack of militance," admitted

[8] Layhmond Robinson, "New York's Racial Unrest: Negroes' Anger Mounting," *NYT*, 12 August 1963;
[9] Peter Kihss, "Negro Extremist Groups Step up Nationalist Drive," *NYT*, 1 March 1961; Robert L. Teague, "Negroes Say Conditions in U.S. Explain Nationalists' Militancy," *NYT*, 2 March, 1961.

Sutton. "We intend to press harder the spirit of militancy, other wise we will not be accepted by the new Negro."[10]

The summer of 1963 marked the emergence of Sutton's "new Negro" as thousands of African Americans took to the streets to protest racial segregation and discrimination in New York. Several civil rights organizations including the Urban League and NAACP participated in the demonstrations, but the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was the driving force orchestrating the protests. CORE gained popularity in the North after successfully organizing Freedom Rides and lunch counter demonstrations against Jim Crow discrimination in the South. CORE led demonstrations in New York included siti ns, hunger strikes, selective buying campaigns, boycotts and freedom marches. The protests focused on job discrimination and targeted businesses that only hired limited numbers of blacks.[11]

Several demonstrations took place simultaneously as CORE volunteers joined arms to block cars from entering Jones Beach and picketed White Castle Hamburgers in the Bronx, claiming that out of 126 employees the hamburger chain only employed four blacks as porters. CORE Pickets demonstrated at several construction sites including the Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, Rochdale Village, an integrated cooperative housing development in Queens, and the site of the Rutgers Houses a low-income housing project in the Lower East Side. CORE members also staged a hunger strike and sit-in blocking the entrance to Mayor Robert F. Wagner's office at City Hall until he agreed to issue an executive that forced building trade unions to hire more blacks. The

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[10] *NYT*, 2 March, 1961; Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else's House: America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1998), 52-54.
[11] *NYT*, 12 August 1963; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study of the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 141-150.

participation of the Urban League and NAACP in the CORE sponsored demonstrations marked the acceptance of the new more activist approach to civil rights. Noting the dramatic transformation in the city's civil rights movement, *The Times* observed that "the protest movement has arisen in a region that has more laws to protect civil rights of Negroes and other citizens than other place in America."[12]

Coinciding with CORE led demonstrations against job discrimination was a series of massive rent strikes in slums throughout the city. The first of these rent strikes occurred in 1959 when the charismatic African American tenant activist Jesse Gray led tenants in several squalid Harlem tenements to withhold paying rent until their landlord took action against rat infestation and repaired damage from a fire that had fatally burned a two-year-old-boy. Gray's warning to Mayor Wagner of a wider rent strike never materialized. The protests subsided when the city sent health inspectors to investigate the conditions in the buildings. During the strike, however, Gray established a grassroots Harlem tenant organization later known as the Community Council on Housing.[13]

Gray, a former radical, had organized tenant councils for the American Labor Party (ALP) in the 1940s. The ALP tenant councils, which were established in working class neighborhoods throughout the city, trained tenants to improve building conditions by pressuring landlords to paint, make repairs, collect the garbage and, if a landlord was particularly intransigent, organize rent strikes. As post-war prosperity and suburban housing developments siphoned working-class whites away from their traditional

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[12] "Bronx Youth is Wounded in Second Racial Clash," *NYT*, 8 July 1963; Peter Kihss, "200 Racial Pickets Seized at Building Protest Here," *NYT*, 23 July 1963; Peter Kihss, "Race Sit-Ins Begin at Mayor's Office in Job Protest," *NYT*, 10 July 1963; *NYT*, 12 August 1963.

[13] Mark Naison, "Rent Strikes in New York," in Stephen Burghardt, ed., *Tenants and the Urban Housing Crisis*, (Dexter, MI: The New Press, 1972), 19; Edith Evans Asbury, "Agent for 2 Harlem Tenements is Fined $75 for 99 Violations," *NYT*, 2 July 1959.

neighborhoods, the ALP tenant movement weakened. Growing anger over worsening housing conditions in Harlem enabled Gray to keep his tenants' council together, but his group did not have the influence during the 1950s to spark city-wide strikes until the advent of the civil right movement in the early-1960s.[14]

After establishing several offices in New York in 1961, CORE members found that the biggest problem facing black and Puerto Rican families was deteriorating housing in slum neighborhoods. The following year, CORE established housing clinics in its Harlem and the Lower East Side offices and began organizing tenant associations. The first of the 1963 tenant strikes, however, was not organized by Jesse Gray's Community Council on Harlem or CORE, but by another civil rights group, the Northern Students Movement. A spokesman for the students insisted that they took no direct action on behalf of the tenants and had advised them on how they could help themselves. In July, families of a five-story tenement in Harlem announced the rent strike and stopped paying rent to protest minimal service and rat infestation. On a tour of the building, Granville Cherry, the leader of the tenant council showed reporters the falling plaster, broken windows, and toilet that leaked water on the apartment below. "When a reporter asked him if there were many rats, Mr. Cherry snapped off the lights. Within two minutes, four rats appeared on the kitchen floor." The strike ended when the City Housing Court reduced the tenants' rent to $1 a month.[15]

In October, after the Community Council on Housing led 200 Harlem tenants on a march on City Hall, Gray announced a rent strike for 16 Harlem tenements. "We expect

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[14] Joel Schwartz, "Tenant Power in the Liberal City, 1943-1971," in Ronald Lawson and Mark Naison, eds., *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 174, 150.
[15] McCandlish Phillips, "Harlem Tenants Open Rent Strike," *NYT*, 28 September 1963; "Harlem Rents Cut to $1 After Strike," *NYT*, 12 October 1963.

to have 100 buildings on strike by December 1," he declared. A few days earlier, the New York University CORE chapter announced a rent strike by 120 Puerto Rican tenants who lived in six tenements on Eldridge Street in the Lower East Side. The strike coincided with the announcement by another group, the Harlem Action Group, that two Harlem tenements housing 15 tenants launched another rent strike. Over the next months thousands of tenants in hundreds of buildings in Harlem, East Harlem, the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, Brownsville and the East Bronx joined the strikes. Jesse Gray's CCH, several CORE chapters, the Mobilization for Youth, in addition to dozens of African American and Puerto Rican activist groups orchestrated the protests that lasted throughout most of 1964.[16]

Recognizing the rent strikes as the most vocal civil rights demonstrations in the city, the Wagner administration acted quickly to meet the striker's demands. Mayor Wagner ordered the city to redouble its rat abatement, health inspection and emergency repair units, and promised striking tenants that if conditions in their buildings did not improve that their rents would be lowered. By meeting these basic demands and forcing some landlords to make superficial repairs, the city managed to settle the cases of striking tenants quickly, but failed to noticeably improve conditions in the slums. By the spring of 1964, Jesse Gray called off the last of the CCH sponsored rent strikes. At the same time, CORE's volunteer legal staff overwhelmed by striking tenant cases notified the national CORE offices that it could no longer continue without more trained volunteers. By

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[16] "150 Harlem Tenants Picket City Hall in Slum Protest," *NYT*, 29 October 1963; Martin Gansberg, "110 Tenants Begin Rent Strike Here," *NYT*, 2 November 1963; "Harlem Boycott on Rents Spreads," *NYT*, 5 November 1963; Schwartz, "Tenant Power in the Liberal City, 1943-1971," 175-176.

August 1964, most of CORE's tenement organizing activities ceased and the rent strike movement faded.[17]

After the strikes ended, however, many of the tenant organizations established by CORE, the Mobilization for Youth (MFY) and Gray's CCH remained active in their communities. Instead of mobilizing "the people" in direct action against landlords, the duties of the housing activists had been reduced to mundane requests to investigate rent overcharges and building violations. According to the housing scholar Joel Schwartz, the housing activists spent most of their time helping tenants fill out applications for public housing and counseling project managers on how to improve community relations and social services. After the rent strikes, the most important demonstration sponsored by the MFY was a sit-in in the Housing Authority offices to demand a speed up in the processing of public housing applications.[18]

By organizing tenants in local public housing projects, housing activists increased their influence in decisions made by project managers. The activists at East Harlem CORE, for example, intervened on behalf of evicted families from the local project the Robert F. Wagner, Sr. Houses. The organizational base for Jesse Gray's CCH was Harlem's Stephen Foster Houses. Although the Foster Houses was "menaced by youth gangs and problem families," compared to the crumbling tenements surrounding the project it provided an improvement in housing conditions for most local residents. "While radicals carped at the Authority's 'sterile,' 'institutional' façades," Joel Schwartz

[17] Schwartz, 178-179; 183.
[18] Ibid., 177, 180.

observed, “the sheer magnitude guaranteed a wide variety of apartments, locales, and neighborhoods, an alternative housing mobility within its domain.”[19]

The Met Council on Housing: A “Transformed Public Housing Program”

The end of the rent strikes illustrated the dependence of low-income minority families on public housing. In the years leading up to the rent strikes, however, housing reform and civil rights groups that had once been the staunchest allies of the city’s public housing program began to openly criticize the projects as promoters of economic and racial segregation. During the early 1960s, the construction of low-income projects in areas of racial concentration continued. Despite promising to alter its site-selection policies, NYCHA located its low-income projects adjacent to existing projects in Brownsville, Brooklyn, the South Bronx, the Rockaways, Queens, Harlem and East Harlem. The most vocal critic of the Housing Authority was the Metropolitan Council of Housing. The Met Council, more than any other group re-shaped the public housing debate during the early 1960s. Advocating for a “transformed public housing program,” the Met Council demanded that projects provide adequate housing for poor minorities while at the same time promoting integration. To accomplish these goals housing reformers with the Met Council believed it was inevitable for the city construct the majority its low-income projects in predominantly white areas of the city.[20]

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[19] Ibid., 174, 180.

[20] Ibid., 180; Wendell Pritchett, “From One Ghetto to Another: Blacks, Jews and Public Housing in Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1945-1970,” (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1997), 167; NYCHA, “Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1970, All Programs,” August 1970, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers; NYCHA, “Racial Distribution of Families and Person Projects Completing Initial Occupancy, 1963-1964,” 21 December 1964, box 85D4, folder 8; Brochure, “A Transformed Public Housing Program---The Answer to New York’s Housing Shortage,” October 1962, folder 2, Metropolitan Council on Housing Holdings, Tamiment Library, New York University, 2.

Established in 1959, the Met Council was an alliance of tenant and neighborhood activists from all over the city who organized local opposition to Title I renewal programs. Unlike housing reformers with the New York State Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NYSCAD) who accepted Title I as a necessary evil and worked to shrink the size of the program, Met Council activists demanded an immediate moratorium on all renewal projects. "We have lived in areas where we have seen such rehabilitation," proclaimed Jane Benedict, one of the Met Council's founders, "we know that its ultimate purpose . . . is to get rid of low-income people living there." The Met Council organized conferences featuring tenant organizations, academics and politicians and produced a series of pamphlets and reports to promote alternative agendas to the city's planning and housing policies. [21]

To compensate poor minorities for renewal policies that displaced more low-income families than it housed, the Met Council recommended that the city "improve and expand" its public housing program. "Under the current program, the low-income families most in need of housing are being cheated," a Met Council fact sheet declared. "Instead of building on vacant or badly used commercial land, the Housing Authority selects a site on which tenants are living, evicts them, or relocates them elsewhere and builds new apartments which are then occupied by others needing housing." The Housing Authority should "open up the whole city to public housing," the Met Council activists argued, by building "tens of thousands" of public housing units in Staten Island and Queens, where open land sites still existed.[22]

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[21] Schwartz, "Tenant Power in the Liberal City," 170-171.
[22] Brochure, "A Transformed Public Housing Program---The Answer to New York's Housing Shortage," October 1962, folder 2, Metropolitan Council on Housing Holdings, 1.

The Met Council also advocated for better treatment of both public housing applicants and tenants. “The Housing Authority must relax its rules for tenant selection,” a Met Council brochure read. “The red tape and bureaucratic methods to which applicants for public housing are subjected are intolerable. Why must an applicant re-file three or four times and never know why he has been rejected?” They also called on the Authority to allow tenants to keep pets and allow evicted tenants to have court hearings. “Public housing tenants should be made to first-class, not second-class tenants, and should have the same rights and obligations as private housing tenants.”[23]

In 1962, the Met Council joined the NAACP and NYSCAD in criticizing the Housing Authority’s plan for yet another low-income project for Harlem. The project, consisting of four, 30-story buildings with 1,600 units, would replace the Polo Grounds, an abandoned baseball stadium. Since the project would be built on an uninhabited site, it would not displace any families. The Met Council maintained, however, that the Polo Grounds project would reinforce “de-facto” segregation, like other projects planned for “ghetto neighborhoods,” unless it was re-designed to “break down segregation” by “attracting white families.” To attract white families to “minority neighborhoods” the Met Council recommended that the Authority employ

> imaginative design, small buildings, attractive architecture, excellent community facilities, good schools . . . The Housing Authority should also permit a wide range of incomes there . . . We believe that in this way, white families can be attracted to good, new housing in minority areas. [24]

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[23] Ibid., 3.

[24] Martine Arnold, “Harlem decries Ghetto Housing,” *NYT*, 23 March 1962; Brochure, “A Transformed Public Housing Program---The Answer to New York’s Housing Shortage,” October 1962, folder 1961-1965, Metropolitan Council on Housing Holdings, 2.

Given the city's heightened racial tensions during the early 1960s, it is doubtful that the Met Cuncil's recommendations would have succeeded in attracting white families to Harlem. Housing reforms from the American Jewish Congress failed to attract whites to projects constructed in Morrisania, the Bronx during the early 1950s. When NYCHA's controversial Phase Program failed to promote integration in existing projects, the Authority concluded that whites would not live in projects where high ratios of minorities resided.[25]

The NAACP also opposed the Polo Grounds plan on the grounds that it would promote segregation in Harlem. The project was another attempt by the city to "foist" off more low income projects in Harlem, charged the Harlem Neighborhood Association (an umbrella group representing seventy Harlem civic groups including the NAACP). With twenty-six low-income projects already built, under construction or planned for Harlem, the HNA maintained, more projects would reinforce "economic" as well as "racial" segregation. The HNA announced its own plan for the Polo Grounds site that added some 800 middle-income units, a new elementary school, a theater, sports arena, jazz institute and other institutions devoted to African American culture. The HNA was not concerned with integrating the project by attracting more whites, but wanted middle-income blacks to live in the project. Robert C. Weaver, the administrator for the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, gave a speech lauding the HNA's plan.[26]

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[25] Memorandum, "Racial Distribution in Operating Project at Initial Occupancy and On December 31, 1960 All Programs," 18 January 1961, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers; American Jewish Committee, "Report for the New York Chapter for the Month of February, 1956," folder Reports New York City Chapter, 1952-3-4, box 32 (Gen-13, Geographic-Domestic), AJC Papers; NYCHA, Statistics Division, "Phase Program," 27 April 1960, folder 8, box 85D3, NYCHA Papers.
[26] "Weaver Says Racial Harmony Rests on Free Choice of Homes," *NYT*, 6 June 1963; Martine Arnold, "Harlem Decries Ghetto Housing," *NYT*, 23 March 1962.

In response to the criticism, NYCHA proposed to make 400 of the 1,600 low-income units into middle-income units. Despite this compromise, NYSCAD still opposed the project. In a letter to the Housing Authority, Algernon Black, the NYSCAD chairman, argued that due to its location in Harlem, the project would remain overwhelmingly black even if middle-income units were constructed . The Authority's plan for four buildings at thirty-stories a piece was simply to tall and not in line with NYCHA's promise to build smaller projects. The site should be entirely middle-income, Black argued, and part of a comprehensive urban renewal program for the entire area of North Harlem surrounding the Polo Grounds. A series of middle-income developments "could well be the opening wedge for the renaissance of the whole North Harlem complex," Black maintained.

> Harlem should be looked on as a whole, and planning be undertaken to try to develop a kind of 'pincer' movement working from the north starting with the Polo Grounds, and from the south around 110th Street, to bring about renewal at both edges. [27]

The opposition to the Polo Grounds project illustrated the divisions amongst the various civil rights groups. The Met Council and NYSCAD, groups dominated by whites, envisioned a project that could be racially integrated, while HNA was more concerned with the project's economic balance. There were also divisions amongst black civil rights groups. The only supporters of the original plan for the low-income project were Jesse Gray's Community Council on Housing. Several CCH demonstrators picketed outside the luncheon where the HNA was announcing its plan for more middle-income apartments and told reporters thatHarlem was still in dire need of low-income housing.[28]

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[27] Algernon Black, Chairman NYSCAD to William Reid, Chairman NYCHA, letter, 15 February 1963 in folder 1, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers.
[28] *NYT*, 6 June 1963; *NYT*, 23 March 1962.

While many low-income blacks viewed public housing as a step up and out of squalid tenements, many middle-income blacks, like their white counterparts, viewed the projects as inundating their neighborhoods with the poor. In 1963, middle-income blacks in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn protested the planned constructions of two low-income housing projects. Several Bedford-Stuyvesant homeowners, testifying before a Board of Estimate hearing, claimed that the city had consulted with the community before announcing the projects and that slum-clearance for the projects would destroy several black-owned homes. "Our purpose is not to fight public housing," said Arthur Bramwell of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Community Improvement Association. "We feel that it has a place in modern society. We are asking that a new approach which would take in more than the bulldozer approach be considered." Several members of CORE also testified against the project, stating that destroying black-owned homes reinforced the perception that the city was limiting blacks to reside only in public housing [29]

The emotional response against the projects in Bedford Stuyvesant prompted Brooklyn Borough President Abe Stark to postpone the projects sending the plans back to the Housing Authority for further review. The protests had little impact on the Housing Authority's plans for the Polo Grounds. Construction commenced on the project in 1965, with little alteration to NYCHA's original plan. When the 1,614 unit low-income project opened its doors for occupancy in 1968, less than 2% of the families were white.[30]

The protests against public housing in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant demonstrated that the Housing Authority could no longer take for granted the unconditional support of African American civil rights groups for public housing. The

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[29] Alexander Burnham, "Negroes Protest Put Off Housing," *NYT*, 14 June 1963.
[30] Ibid.; Joseph F. Fried, "In the Shadow of Coogan's Bluff a New Era Begins," *NYT*, 29 November 1967; "Old Polo Grounds Sees a New Opener, Housing," *NYT*, 17 April 1968.

opposition coupled with the hostility of whites to public housing in their neighborhoods severely limited where the Authority could build. The feeling amongst housing reformers in both black and white civil rights groups was that since black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods had already been inundated with low-income projects it was now time for white neighborhoods to share the burden. "We sincerely hope that there will be increased attempts to plan for public housing in good neighborhoods," Algernon D. Black of NYSCAD wrote to the Housing Authority, "particularly Queens, where such housing has heretofore not been constructed."[31]

In a 1964 report titled *A Citizens' Survey of Available Land*, the Met Council outlined a plan that they believed would make low-income projects in middle-income neighborhoods more palatable to local whites and promote integration. In the report, Met Council researchers advocated for the construction "vest pocket" projects on vacant land sites. There were at least 122 vacant land sites throughout the city, the researchers maintained, enough for the city to construct thousands of units of affordable low-income housing "without displacing a single family" through slum clearance. The use of vest pocket projects, "relatively small apartment houses which fit into or add to existing residential neighborhoods," would avoid the construction of high-rise projects that often destroyed local businesses, interrupted traditional street layouts and local gathering points, often permanently disrupting the communal integrity of neighborhoods.[32]

Many of the vacant sites surveyed by the Met Council lay in predominantly white, middle-income areas where "integration could easily be advanced" while simultaneously reducing the overcrowding "pressures on minorities in the ghetto areas."

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[31] Algernon Black to William Reid.
[32] Metropolitan Council on Housing, *A Citizens' Survey of Available Land*, (New York, 1964), 4-11.

> It has been extremely difficult to introduce public housing into some parts of the city, particularly in middle-income areas. It has been rejected primarily out of fear, fear of low-income groups generally as well as of minorities, fear of falling land values, fear of the mammoth size and the institutional appearance of the projects. . . . The intensity of these fears are undoubtedly related to the size of the projects and to the number of people who will 'inundate' a given area.

The smaller size of vest pocket projects, the Met Council argued, could dispel the fear and opposition to public housing in middle-income and white neighborhoods and make public housing more acceptable. Acknowledging that "the civil rights movement is on the march," the report contended that vest-pocket projects could be offered to progressive neighborhoods that wanted to promote residential and school integration:

> New York City has an unparalleled opportunity to advance the cause of integration by giving communities a chance to fight their own battles. If vest-pocket housing is offered such communities, public housing will gain growing local support; and integration and public housing will find greater acceptance in the all-white communities.[33]

The Wagner administration had already launched an ambitious vest pocket program. Between 1962 and 1966 fourteen vest pocket projects (2,957 units) had been built with an additional twenty-four projects (5,222 units) under construction or in the planning stages. Rather than promoting integration, however, the Housing Authority viewed vest-pocket housing as a strategy for reducing the impact of low-income family displacement and constructed the majority of vest-pocket projects in Harlem and other high-density neighborhoods. While the Met Council chided the Housing Authority on the slow progress of its vest-pocket developments, NYCHA officials argued that the problem with vest-pocket housing was not finding vacant lots, but rising construction costs that made building low-rise projects less cost effective than high-rise developments.[34]

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[33] Ibid., 14-15.
[34] "Vest-Pocket Program," report, 9 June 1966, folder 27, box 3, General Correspondence, Official Correspondence, Mayor John V. Lindsay Papers; NYCHA, "Site Selection and New Program,"

The Met Council's vest-pocket program was a major departure from the Housing Authority's traditional approach of rehabilitating slums through clearance. As one supporter of the plan wrote to *The New York Times*, "The term 'vest-pocket housing' as represented in this report is thus no longer merely a description of size; It has become a philosophy of housing which attempts to provide for urgent existing and future needs of the people of this city." A confidential memo revealed that NYCHA officials were not ready to abandon their commitment to slum clearance. At a meeting discussing the Housing Authority's site-selection policies, Ira Robbins the Vice Chairman of NYCHA announced his opposition to selecting sites solely to prevent the dislocation of site residents. "Renewal of a slum area cannot proceed unless the necessity for relocation is realized and accepted," Robbins argued.[35]

A few months after the report was released, representatives of the Met Council requested a meeting with William Reid the chairman of the Housing Authority, to press the case for vest-pocket housing. Instead, the Authority arranged a meeting with William R. Valentine NYCHA's director of Inter-group Relations. Valentine's notes of the meeting made it clear that the Housing Authority was not treating the Met Council's plans seriously. Valentine simply noted that the Met Council representatives "expressed their concern" that the Housing Authority was not doing enough to "aid integration in the

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memorandum, 15 November 1965, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers; Metropolitan Council on Housing, *A Citizens' Survey of Available Land*, (New York, 1964), 4; "City Plans Housing in Small Projects," *NYT*, 8 April 1962.

[35] John C. Devlin, "Housing is Urged on Rundown Lots," *NYT*, 9 June 1964; Raymond S. Rubinow to the editor, *NYT*, 18 June 1962.

City" and believed that the Authority should "take more positive steps" by building smaller housing projects in peripheral areas of the city.[36]

When Met Council representatives raised the issue of integration in existing NYCHA projects, Valentine recounted the Authority's continuing effort to attract white families to public housing, but "for the most part," Valentine wrote, "white families will not accept accommodations in areas where the schools appear segregated." Valentine also asserted that the Authority's integration efforts also hampered by the lack of minority families willing to move into projects built in areas where whites predominated. "I told them," Valentine recalled,

> of the difficulties encountered in our efforts to achieve integration in Claremont Village; of the difficulty of interesting Puerto Rican families to accept accommodations in Hamilton Houses; of our vigorous efforts to find minority elderly families for Haber Houses; of the difficulties encountered in trying to interest minority families to accept units in projects located in outlying areas such as Coney Island, the Rockaways, etc.[37]

Valentine failed to mention in his meeting with Met Council representatives that the Wagner administration had attempted to construct a few low-income projects in predominantly white, middle income areas. Aside from the inevitable resistance from white residents in the community the Housing Authority encountered resistance from local politicians as well. The site-selection procedure was dominated by the Borough Presidents, each of whom had a single vote on the Board of Estimates, the body which made the final decisions on the site selection for all public housing. A tradition on the Board of Estimate known as the "borough courtesy" allowed a Borough President to veto

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[36] William R. Valentine, NYCHA Director Inter-group Relations to William Reid, Chairman NYCHA, memorandum, "Conference with Representatives of the Metropolitan Council on Housing," 25 February 1965, folder 4, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 1.
[37] Ibid., 3.

any plan in his borough he opposed. Once a Borough President's objections were made known to the others, they voted as a group to kill the offending project.[38]

The Queens Borough President, Mario J. Cariello, was accused by Roger Starr, executive president of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, of blocking several projects slated for middle-income predominantly white neighborhoods. By rejecting the projects, Starr charged, Cariello was bowing to community fears that low-income housing tenants were "undesirables" who would overwhelm middle-income communities. Cariello's actions, Starr continued, sabotaged the City's efforts to "break down the walls" of Harlem and other areas of racial concentration by preventing the redistribution of ghettoized minority groups to non-segregated areas throughout the City. Starr's charges had merit, but Cariello also rejected projects due to "community pressure" from African American homeowners in Baisley Park, an African American enclave near South Jamaica .[39]

Class as well as race was often a motivating factor in neighborhood opposition to public housing. A low-income project planned for the Springfield Gardens section of Queens was opposed by both white and African American residents. The project was to be constructed near Rochdale Village a massive, middle-income housing complex of twenty buildings and 5,000 units, built on the site of what had been the Jamaica Racetrack. Developed by Robert Moses and planned as an inter-racial cooperative, Rochdale was unusual in that it lived up to its idealistic billing. Although whites made up the majority of Rochdale's tenants, 10% to 15% of the population was African American

[38] Steven V. Roberts, "City Hall Ends Veto by Borough Presidents Over Housing Sites," *NYT*, 5 November 1966; Jewel Bellush, "Housing: The Scattered-Site Controversy," Bellush and Steven David, eds. *Race and Politics in New York*, (New York: Praeger, 1971), 104-105.
[39] Samuel Kaplan, "Queens Borough Head Accused of Balking Low-Income Housing," *NYT*, 6 April 1965.

and the majority of the white tenants were Jewish. The area surrounding Rochdale, Springfield Gardens was described as a predominantly "lower-middle class" African American neighborhood of "mostly one- and two-family homes."[40]

In describing relations between Rochdale Village and the surrounding black community, a local political activist noted that there was "some friction and very little intercourse between the community and Rochdale." Opposition to the Springfield Gardens project, however, seemed to unite the two groups. When a mass protest meeting was scheduled at the Rochdale Traditional Synagogue, the organizer boasted that more than thirteen community groups "both inside and outside of Rochdale Village" would participate. The federation of civic groups opposed to the project formed the Baisley Civic Federation which was led by Leonard Vaughan, a member of the Jamaica, Queens NAACP branch, and included tenant groups from Rochdale Village and the predominantly black neighborhoods of South Ozone Park and Springfield Gardens. [41]

Although the 500 unit project was small by NYCHA standards, the litany of complaints against the project (that it would add to overcrowded schools and overburden transportation and sanitation systems) echoed those of middle-income residents opposing public housing in other parts of the city. "For these reasons," the NAACP's Vaughan explained, "we are not in favor of any apartment projects being built on the proposed site. We prefer one or two family homes." Vaughan was part of a delegation of NAACP representatives who met with NYCHA officials to express their opposition to the

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[40] Steve Berzon to Don Elliott, hand-written memorandum, "Rochdale Village & 21st A.D.," n.d.; Memorandum, "Fact Sheet: Rochdale Village, 21st A.D," n.d., folder7, box 060188, Milton Mollen Donation, Robert F. Wagner Papers, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, New York, NY.

[41] Memorandum, "Fact Sheet: Rochdale Village, 21st A.D," n.d., folder7, box 060188, Mollen Donation, Robert F. Wagner Papers; Myron Becker, "City Housing Project Plan Stirs Up Rochdale Village," *The Long Island Daily Press*, 11 April 1965; "Housing Project Opposed," *LIDP*, 30 April 1965.

Springfield Gardens project. According to a NYCHA memorandum, the NAACP representatives argued that the project's racial make up would intensify segregation in the local schools and surrounding area.[42]

William R. Valentine, the director of NYCHA's Inter-group Relations unit, tried to convince the NAACP representatives that the project would be both racially and ethnically balanced and promised that the Authority would take special steps to make sure a sizable contingent of white families resided in the project. He also pointed out that a private developer "who will sell to any qualified buyer and will have no concern whatever about the desirability of an integrated community," had put a bid on the site. The private development, argued Valentine, would have a much more divisive impact on the racial make up of the school than the housing project.[43]

Vaughan and the other NAACP representatives, refused to be moved by Valentine's arguments, and insisted that they and many others in the NAACP members would only support public housing in areas of Queens where "it would provide racial integration" and would oppose any site "which will have the effect of aggravating existing ghettos and extending the boundaries of such areas." Vaughan also maintained that future developments not planned for integrated areas should not be built. The only support NYCHA would receive from the NAACP representatives was in the construction of public housing built in predominantly white, middle-income areas.[44]

Valentine informed the NAACP representatives that the Springfield Gardens project was one of two presently being planned. The other was slated for a predominantly

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[42] William R. Valentine, Director NYCHA Inter-group Relations to William Reid, Chairman NYCHA, "Meeting with Representatives of the NAACP," memorandum, 24 May 1965, folder 4, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 1, 2.
[43] Ibid., 1.
[44] Ibid., 2-3.

middle-income, white neighborhood on Linden Street in Flushing, Queens. “I reminded them that the opposition to the Linden site might be even stronger than that which was expressed in connection with the [Springfield Gardens] site,” Valentine wrote. “If both sites are lost in the face of community opposition, the result would be the denial of urgently needed public housing for low-income families.” The NAACP representatives could not be swayed and, eventually, the Springfield Gardens project was killed.[45]

By 1965, Housing Authority officials seemed resigned to the failure of city’s integration efforts for public housing. In a letter to Paul E. Bragdon, executive secretary to Mayor Wagner, William F. Reid, the chairman of the Housing Authority discussed the impact of the civil rights movement and War on Poverty programs on public housing. While lauding the efforts of the anti-poverty workers in employing and educating needy public housing youths and providing services for mothers and children, Reid admitted that “neither the civil rights movement nor the war against poverty has had any appreciable effect upon the problems of segregation in public housing projects.” While noting that some civil rights organizations have protested against public housing sites that they believed perpetuated segregation and have called on the Authority to strengthen integration in new projects. Reid believed that “civil rights movement and New York City has not yet undertaken the problem of segregation as a major target.” Furthermore, Reid maintained, that Federal regulations regarding discrimination in housing will serve to “hamper, if not prevent, local housing authorities from instituting affirmative programs to achieve integration.”[46]

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[45] Ibid., 2; Memorandum, “Fact Sheet: Rochdale Village, 21st A.D,” n.d., folder 7, box 060188, Mollen Donation, Robert F. Wagner Papers.

[46] William F. Reid, Chairman NYCHA to Paul E. Bragdon, Executive Secretary to the Mayor, 25 October 1965, folder 6, box 68B5, NYCHA Papers.

John V. Lindsay and Scatter-Site Housing

When John V. Lindsay announced his candidacy for mayor in the spring of 1965, white Americans' support for the goals of civil rights movement had reached the high water mark. Millions of white Americans were outraged by the dramatic televised images of African Americans beaten by police during a non-violent march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., while trying to cross a bridge in Selma, Alabama. Liberals in Congress acted quickly to capitalize on the moment by introducing the Voting Rights Act. Lindsay interpreted these events as signposts that the political winds had shifted. The country and city, Lindsay believed, were ready for a new more activist brand of reform in which the Mayor would be the main advocate for the poor, the disenfranchised and the minorities.[47]

Lindsay promised to make civil rights the centerpiece of his mayoralty, but he understood that the laws promulgated by the government would not be enough to bring equality to the City's African American and Puerto Rican families. The journalist Tamar Jacoby observed that Lindsay would respond to the civil rights challenge by attempting to "manage it personally---with charisma, caring and more effective government." Lindsay viewed race as "the foremost issue of our time," and himself as the leader in the struggle for civil rights in the urban north. "I deeply believe," Lindsay declared in a campaign speech, "that the vast majority of the people of New York want an end to discrimination. [They] had themselves lived through prejudice of other kinds and they know New York must solve this dilemma or die."[48]

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[47] Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else's House: America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration,* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1998), 75, 77; Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1118.
[48] Jacoby, *Someone Else's House*, 75;

Racial unrest in New York had tarnished the image of Mayor Robert F. Wagner. In 1964 the city's public schools system was forced to shut down in the face of a massive student boycott to protest school segregation. During the summer, after a black teenager was shot and killed by a white off-duty detective, riots raged in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant for five days. Wagner was criticized by civil rights activists for mishandling the school boycotts and refusing to appoint civilians to the board that reviewed police brutality complaints after the riots. "Wagner was our principle antagonist of the civil rights movement in New York City," recalled Val Coleman, the head of public relations for CORE in New York. "I'm not saying that he was a segregationist bigot. I'm not even saying he was a bigot. He opposed our civilian police review board."[49]

Lindsay moved to capitalize on Wagner's perceived failures by accentuating his civil rights credentials. His first major speech was in support of appointing civilians to the police complaint review board. "It is time for a change" in the relations between citizens and the police, Lindsay declared. "But this will not happen until all of the people of our city feel . . . that they are being treated fairly, equally and courteously, and . . . have a fair opportunity to have their complaints heard." Lindsay also vowed to empower minorities by bringing them into the decision making process of his government and introduced a program in Harlem designed to prevent racial unrest. "We must recognize that the tensions in our slums truly constitute a crisis," he declared. "To meet it we must have nothing less than an ambitious and extensive program." These included a job program aimed at disaffected minority youth, tutoring clinics at city schools and the appointment of mayoral assistants in neighborhoods to warn the Mayor of rising tensions

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[49] Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 198-199; Fred C. Shapiro and James W. Sullivan, *Race Riots, New York 1964*, (New York: Crowell, 1964), ?; Val Coleman, Oral History Interview, 16 May 2001, in author's possession, 8.

and avert race riots. Several New York civil rights leaders including James Farmer of CORE, James Booth of the NAACP and Wyatt T. Walker, a former aide to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. embraced Lindsay's candidacy.[50]

Many white Democrats and reform minded liberals gravitated to Lindsay's candidacy hoping he would provide the leadership on race that they believed Wagner lacked. Specifically they wanted Lindsay to promote integration in schools and neighborhoods as well as improve the economic status of minority families. During the campaign, Lindsay and his supporters articulated only the rough outlines of a plan regarding integration and housing. From their writing and public statements, however, Lindsay and his some of closest advisors viewed public housing was the key to integrating New York.[51]

The journalist Woody Klein, who would serve as Lindsay's first press secretary, argued that the city's public housing policies contributed to the economic and racial segregation in the slums of East Harlem. Klein's book, *Let in the Sun* chronicled the decline of the new law tenement at 311 East 100th Street located in what Klein described as the "worst block" in the city. In the early 1950s the area was a poor but racially mixed neighborhood of Italians, Puerto Ricans and African Americans. By replacing the tenements that surrounded 311 East 100th Street with fifteen public housing projects, "perpetuated East Harlem's reputation as a poor community for minority groups. As the

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[50] Thomas P. Ronan, "Lindsay's 'Yes' Is Awaited by Jubilant G.O.P. Chiefs," *NYT*, 13 May 1965; Richard Witkin, "Lindsay Proposes Adding Civilians to Police Board," *NYT*, 21 May 1965; Richard L. Madden, "Politicians Study '61 Mayoral Race," *NYT*, 24 May 1965; Thomas P. Ronan, "Lindsay Suggests A Minorities Plan," *NYT*, 12 June 1965; Jacoby, *Someone Else's House*, 79; Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 68.

[51] Cannato, 48; Alexander M. Bickel, "Liberals and John Lindsay," *The New Republic*, 3 July 1965, 18.

big projects went up, more and more white families left for middle-income neighborhoods in other parts of the city."[52]

Klein blamed Housing Authority's policy of pumping "more public housing into the area" for making East Harlem in to a "low-rent Negro and Puerto Rican ghetto." He also chided Mayor Wagner and other city officials for refusing to build public housing on vacant land in Queens and conspiring with Queens politicians to keep blacks and Puerto Ricans out of their borough. Housing in New York continues to be erected in a pattern which perpetuates racial and economic ghettos," Klein wrote. "Officials in charge pay little more than lip service to the goal of an 'open city' or and integrated city." Klein offered no new strategies, but repeated the demands of housing reformers that integration of existing projects and the building of more low-income projects in middle-income areas should be a priority of the city's future public housing policy.[53]

Another journalist, Barry Gottehrer, who would lead Lindsay's Summer Task Force to monitor troubled neighborhoods in an attempt to avert race riots, wrote a series of articles focusing on the problems with the city's public housing program. Gottehrer attacked the Housing Authority as a bloated bureaucracy that spent millions of dollars lavishly furnishing its new downtown office space while the city's poorest residents lived in rotting, rat infested slums. He blamed the Authority's more rigid screening process for keeping up to 300,000 poor families out of public housing. The new eligibility requirements called the Desirability Standards for Admission of Tenants was adopted by

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[52] Woody Klein, *Let in the Sun*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964), 14.
[53] Klein, *Let in the Sun*, 116-117, 238; Memorandum, Jim Flood to Miss Kempton, "Abstract of Woody Klein's Book for Mr. Mollen's Taping-Dec. 15," 14 December 1964, folder 12, box 060188, Mollen Donation, Wagner Collection.

NYCHA in 1961, and according to Gottehrer, it excluded a single working mother and a family whose housing keeping standards were deemed unfit by NYCHA social workers.[54]

The worst of the Authority's sins, according to Gottehrer, was its inability to bring integration to its projects. Whites fled from projects when the minority population rose above 40% and by 1964 the white population in all state and Federally funded projects had dropped to 31.6%, while the black and Puerto Rican populations rose to 43.7%, and 22.7% respectively. The racial breakdown for individual projects was even more skewed as the majority were mostly black and Puerto Rican or mostly white. "This is an overwhelming problem but [NYCHA] can't afford to admit the program has failed and try to do something about it," an anonymous project manager admitted to Gottehrer. "Like a great many other things in this city, the low-income housing program has become a political matter where department heads are forced to speak only of success and are not allowed to face reality."[55]

Gottehrer demanded that the Housing Authority alter its tenant screening process so that poorer applicants once denied admission into NYCHA projects could be admitted. He also called for the reorganization and streamlining of the Housing Authority bureaucracy to increase the number of low-income units planned and to expedite their construction. To end racial segregation in the projects, Gottehrer recommended that the city embrace "new approaches to low-income housing including the expansion of a State program that funneled "rent supplements" directly to low-income families. The

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[54] Cannato, 22-23; Barry Gottehrer, "City Housing---A Myth in a World of Luxury," *The New York Herald Tribune*, 22 March 1965; Gottehrer and Tim Hutchens, "The Public-Housing Problem: Officials Who Turn Their Heads," *TNYHT*, 26 March 1965; Gottehrer, "Among 'Ineligibles'---A Working Mother," *TNYHT*, 26 March 1965; "The Indictment and the Aftermath," *TNYHT, 21 June 1965* in folder 13, box 92B4, NYCHA Papers.

[55] Gottehrer, "City Housing---A Myth in a World of Luxury," *TNYHT*, 22 March 1965; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on December 31, 1959," 18 January 1960, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

supplements would subsidize rent for families displaced by slum clearance and urban renewal allowing them to afford the higher rents of middle-income apartments.[56]

To reform the city's troubled public housing system, both Klein and Gottehrer believed that a decisive, activist Mayor of Lindsay's stature and civil rights record was required. This outlook was also shared by Alexander M. Bickel in an article in *The New Republic.* According to Bickel, Lindsay had the "energy . . . imagination, enthusiasm, and temperament" to successfully implement President Johnson's Great Society initiatives in New York. After a meeting with Lindsay, Bickel noted that although the candidate could not articulate specific plans he demonstrated a deep understanding of the city's housing, segregation and poverty crisis. "Communities must be integrated economically as well as racially," Bickel wrote of Lindsay's formative views. "Lindsay would build attractive housing to draw the middle class into ghettos (as has been done in some measure), and low income housing outside the ghetto." Lindsay's early ideas on housing corresponded with those of the Met Council on Housing. As a Congress member, Lindsay was a warm supporter of the Met Council and appeared as a featured speaker at Met Council's 5th Annual Conference on Housing in 1963.[57]

The early housing policy observations offered by Klein, Gottehrer and Lindsay, lacked any recognition of NYCHA's failed attempts integrate its projects, construct public housing outside of areas of racial or the vehement opposition of middle-income blacks and whites to low-income housing constructed in their neighborhoods. Simply building more low-income projects and making them accessible to a greater number of

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[56] Gottehrer and Hutchens, "The Public-Housing Problem; Official Who Turn Their Head;" *TNYHT*, 26 March 1965.

[57] Cannato, 44, 48; Bickel, "Liberals and John Lindsay," *The New Republic*, 3 July 1965, 18; Bulletin, "5th Annual Conference on the Freedom to Live Anywhere in Decent Housing at Fair Rents," Metropolitan Council on Housing Papers.

poor families, as Gottehrer suggested would do little to promote integration and would have no impact on segregation in existing projects. It was well known that whites would not live in projects with high numbers of minority families and often refused to live in public housing when available units were offered.[58]

A month before the election, the Lindsay campaign released its first written housing policy statement. Lindsay's white paper on housing chastised the Wagner Administration for focusing on the construction of middle-income housing at the expense of low-income housing and called for a dramatic increase in the number of public housing units to be constructed. Lindsay proposed the construction of 100,000 low-income apartments within four years. 50,000 would be constructed as public housing by NYCHA with state and Federal funding and 50,000 would be built by private developers subsidized by a new Federal rent supplement program. During the 1960s, Federal funding for public housing continued to diminish while state funding dropped off after voters turned down a 1964 ballot initiative to fund new construction. The Lindsay campaign believed, however, that funding for an expanded public housing program would be provided by the passage of two state-wide initiatives on the ballot in November and the Housing Act of 1965.[59]

To Housing Authority officials, however, Lindsay's white paper estimates were unrealistic. "The [White] Paper contains some grievous errors," wrote NYCHA's chief statistician, Harry N. Fialkin, in a confidential memo. "These errors are so serious as to cast doubt on the program set forth." Instead of the 50,000 low-income units promised by

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Thomas P. Ronan, "Lindsay Assails Hospital Flaws," *NYT*, 15 October 1965; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "$7.5 billion Bill, With a Rent Subsidy Proviso, Signed by Johnson," *NYT*, 11 August 1965; Gottehrer, "City Housing---A Myth in a World of Luxury," *TNYHT*, 22 March 1965.

Lindsay, Fialkin projected that even if additional state funds were allocated by the two ballot initiatives, NYCHA could build only 38,000 units during the next four years. In November Lindsay was elected Mayor, but state voters rejected the two ballot initiatives to fund public housing. "Mr. Lindsay promised that his administration would construct [5]0,000 low income units," said Roger Starr, the housing reformer who headed the Citizens Housing and Planning Council. "But now how is he going to do it?"[60]

With the failure of the state ballot initiatives public housing program would be almost completely dependant on Federal funding. At first, both the Lindsay campaign and the Housing Authority were confident that the 1965 Housing Act, signed into law by President Johnson in August, would provide funding for an expanded low-income housing program. The Housing Act established the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and provided several innovative housing programs that included the leasing and rehabilitation of existing buildings for low-income families. The most promising was the rent supplement provisions that would reimburse private developers to rent a proportion of their new buildings to low-income families. The rent supplement option, however, had already proved unpopular with the public. In 1962, New York State voters had turned down a ballot initiative to subsidize rents for low-income families in middle-income buildings. Even with the new provisions, the 1965 Housing Act fell far short in providing enough housing for the thousands of low-income families living in substandard housing in New York.[61]

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[60] Harry N. Fialkin, NYCHA Chief of Statistics to Ira S. Robbins, NYCHA Vice Chairman, memorandum, "John Lindsay's White Paper on the City's Housing Crisis," 13 October 1965, folder 4, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 1; Samuel Kaplan, "5 Amendments and Constitutional Convention Win Approval of Voters in the State," *NYT*, 4 November 1965.
[61] Bellush, 101, 102; John M. Clapp, "The Formation of Housing Policy in New York City, 1960-1970," *Policy Sciences* 7 (1976), 80-82.

In public, the Housing Authority optimistically estimated that even without the state funding it could construct about 30,000 units of low-income housing over the next four years. Privately, however, NYCHA officials conceded that due to "lack of funds" the amount of housing units actually built would probably be far less. In a confidential memorandum entitled "The Housing Crisis," unnamed NYCHA officials realistically assessed how the Authority could respond to the shortage of low-income housing. They estimated that two-thirds of 325,000 families living in substandard housing needed subsidized low-rent housing. Despite the dire need for low-income housing,

> more than 80% of all housing which has been produced in the City over the past ten years has been at rentals which only families of middle or high income can afford. During these ten years, a total of 60,747 low rent units have been produced compared with 323,784 units of middle and high income housing.

NYCHA officials concluded that "from funds previously allocated the city," the Authority could construct "only about 12,000 low-rent apartments."[62]

Two months before he was sworn in as Mayor, Lindsay's promise to revitalize the city's flagging low-income public housing program was already in deep trouble. Having concluded that Lindsay's goal for low-income housing units was financially impossible, NYCHA officials discussed other areas of the program open for mayoral reform. Although they never stated so explicitly, NYCHA officials viewed Lindsay and his advisors as naïve amateurs, unfamiliar with the politics of the public housing bureaucracy. If the Housing Authority could set the guidelines for Lindsay's reform agenda, they reasoned, the new Mayor could still appear as a reformer while implementing changes that would benefit NYCHA.[63]

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[62] NYCHA, "The Housing Crisis," 5.
[63] Ibid.; Memorandum, "Site Selection and New Program," 15 November 1965, folder 4, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 1, 2.

Even before the election of Mayor Lindsay, NYCHA was aware that Robert C. Weaver, the Secretary of HUD, was committed to strengthening public housing policies that promoted integration. The 1965 Housing Act was surprisingly weak in this regard and only encouraged local housing authorities to provide projects located "outside of areas of [racial] concentration." At a conference on the 1965 Housing Act, William R. Valentine, NYCHA's director of Inter-group Relations, reported that "it is Bob Weaver's hope that developments built under the rent supplement program will be built . . . in areas . . . which are predominantly white . . . in which a degree of integration can be achieved," Weaver planned to amend HUD regulations to require that minority families make up at least 30% of the tenants in developments constructed under the rent supplement program.[64]

Valentine, however, believed that such a program would not succeed. Most of the applicants would be minority families, Valentine maintained, and if developers rejected a number of applicants based on "social desirability" criteria there was likely to be a host of racial discrimination charges filed against the developers. "Should this happen," Valentine wrote, "prospective sponsors might be discouraged from building under the rent supplement program." On the other hand, Valentine feared that if developers were barred from rejecting families based on "social desirability," than the rent supplement apartments would be overwhelmed by

> problem families . . . which might create the same image of rent supplement developments that public housing now suffers. In this case, utilization of the program by sponsors might become more and more limited to existing areas of

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[64] Memorandum by William R. Valentine, NYCHA Director of Inter-group Relations to Ira S. Robbins, NYCHA Vice Chairman, "Conference at HHFA, Washington," 20 August 1965, folder 1, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 1.

> minority group concentration and therefore the program would not lend itself to the achievement of racial integration.[65]

To promote integration through public housing, NYCHA officials would instead focus on the problem of site selection. Since no one wanted public housing built in their communities, NYCHA officials conceded, site selection was the most pressing obstacle to building low-income housing. City regulations stipulated that Board of Estimate approval was required for any public housing site. This allowed the Borough Presidents, who sat on the Board, to delay any project within their borough indefinitely. To avoid delays, Housing Authority officials presented lists of sites to each Borough President for approval before the sites came to a vote before the Board of Estimate. After bartering with the Housing Authority the Borough President of each borough would approve or disapprove of individual sites. "This local official's decision is based on a provincial viewpoint," NYCHA officials argued, "rather than the overall consideration for city-wide needs."[66]

The site selection process should be altered, NYCHA officials maintained, to allow the Mayor to make the final decisions for the location of project sites. Granting the Mayor this authority would expedite the site-selection process and promote integration by allowing more public housing projects to be constructed in predominantly white neighborhoods. A Housing Authority memo described how Borough Presidents rejected several public housing sites in white neighborhoods between 1964 and 1965. The most uncooperative Borough Presidents were from Queens and Staten Island, the two boroughs which had highest percentage of white residents. The Borough Presidents deemed the

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[65] Ibid., 2.
[66] "Site Selection and New Program," 2.

choicest sites for housing---those on vacant land---as “too good for public housing” and awarded them to firms developing middle-income apartments.[67]

Once the Mayor “resolved or minimized” the site-selection problems, Housing Authority noted, NYCHA would promote “a new-construction program” for low-income housing that emphasized vest-pocket developments. During the 1960s, the Authority avoided constructing clusters of high-rise projects that displaced large numbers of families and instead concentrated smaller developments that consisted of single buildings or small groups of low-rise buildings that the Authority referred to as “vest-pocket” projects. NYCHA’s vest pocket plan was similar but not as far reaching as the vest pocket plan advocated by the Met Council on Housing the year before. Larger projects would still be constructed on vacant and slum sites consisting of one or more blocks. The Housing Authority wanted to publicize its vest pocket effort in response to attacks by architects who criticized the poor design of high-rise projects, and, although never mentioned in NYCHA memos, on the belief that outer-borough whites would be more accepting of smaller low-income projects housing smaller numbers of minority families.[68]

Lindsay was probably informed of the Housing Authority’s agenda in early December days before the Mayor Elect and his staff scheduled meetings for the Housing and Urban Renewal Task Force. The Housing Task Force was one of several organized

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[67] Ibid.; New York Mirror, New York News, New York Times, et. al., eds., *New York Market Analysis: New York City & Suburbs Population and Housing*, (New York, 1963): 1960 U.S. Census data indicated that whites made up about 90% of the population of Queens and 94% of the population of Staten Island; Joseph J. Christian, Director of Program Planning, “Site Selection Procedure,” memorandum, 15 February 1966, folder 4, box 70D6, NYCHA Papers, 1; Memorandum, “Memo of Conversation with Ira Robbins,” 6 December 1965, folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, reel 23, Charles Abrams Papers, Department of Manuscripts, Cornell University Archives, Syracuse, NY, 1, microfilm.
[68] NYCHA, “Site Selection and New Program,” 2; “The Housing Crisis,” 4; Metropolitan Council on Housing, *A Citizens’ Survey of Available Land*, (New York: Metropolitan Council on Housing, 1964), 14.

by the incoming Lindsay Administration to devise policy recommendations to tackle the city's toughest problems. Acknowledging the "current limited resources available to the City" Lindsay wanted the Housing Task Force to prioritize the various proposals offered by the Lindsay campaign so that the new Administration could decide which should be implemented first. Lindsay and his advisors wanted to implement new policy initiatives quickly to capitalize on public support for the reform city government.[69]

To serve on the Housing Task Force, Lindsay invited fourteen of the city's and the nation's most well known housing and urban renewal experts. Lindsay directed the Task Force to invigorate the city's faltering public housing supply and develop new approaches to "planned integration." These concerns reflected the expertise of Charles Abrams who was appointed by Lindsay to head the Task Force. Abrams had advocated for the use of public housing to promote racial integration for decades. While chairman of the New York State Commission on Discrimination in the 1950s, Abrams was an early advocate for the Phase Program (a quota system designed to promote racial diversity in some of NYCHA's most segregated projects) and called for the city to break the cycle of segregation in public housing by constructing more projects outside of areas of racial concentration.[70]

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[69] The Office of Mayor-Elect John V. Lindsay, "For Release," press release, 27 November 1965 and John V. Lindsay to Charles Abrams, letter, 4 December 1965, folder Task Force on Urban Renewal, Reel 23, Charles Abrams Papers; Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 505..

[70] Memorandum, "Suggested Outline for Saturday Sessions Housing and Urban Renewal Task Force Morning Session," n.d.; Memorandum, "Working Papers for Mayor-Elect John V. Lindsay's Panel on Housing and Urban Renewal-December 10-11, 1965," n.d., folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Reel 23, Charles Abrams Papers, 6, microfilm; New York State Commission on Discrimination in Housing, "The Relationship Between Racial Integration and Site Selection," draft memorandum, 8 May 1956, folder 8, box 85D3, NYCHA Papers, 1; "Bias Issue Stirs Housing Debate," *NYT*, 14 May 1956; A. Scott Henderson, *Housing & the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 160-161

During their meetings, Task Force members seemed to agree with Abrams view and suggested that more projects should be built in underdeveloped areas on the fringes of the city and in neighborhoods "where it will help integration." Without saying so explicitly the Task Force was suggesting that the city construct public housing in white neighborhoods to promote integration. "Integration is not self creating," Abrams reminded the Task Force. "It must be part of official policy." While Task Force members agreed that the city needed to implement a more activist integration policy, there was virtually no discussion of whether public housing in white areas would succeed in promoting integration. This was a major omission considering the failure of NYCHA's past efforts to construct projects in white neighborhoods.[71]

During their discussions, the Task Force members assumed that whites would be more accepting of smaller projects in their neighborhoods. An experimental housing plan in Philadelphia, however, contradicted this assumption. In Philadelphia, the city purchased existing single family row houses in working class neighborhoods, renovated them and rented them out to families qualifying for low-income housing. By buying up these "small parcels scattered" throughout the city, Philadelphia avoided the concentration of public housing projects in single neighborhoods and large-scale slum clearance that dislocated urban families. "[Traditional] public housing has been abandoned," claimed William L. Rafsky, a Philadelphia housing official. "If we built a

[71] Memorandum, "Rough Minutes of Mayor-Elect Lindsay's Task Force on Housing Meetings," 10 December 1965, 20; Memorandum, "Recommendations of Mayor-Elect John V. Lindsay's Task Force on Housing and Urban Renewal," folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Reel 23, Charles Abrams Papers, 2-3, microfilm.

project of more than 200 units there are problems of delinquency, maintenance, [and] ghettoization."[72]

During the meeting, Abrams asked if Philadelphia had any success in providing this type of scattered, low-income housing with black tenants in white neighborhoods, "No, so far they have all been Negro areas," Rafsky replied. "This is because the City Council has only approved such projects in Negro areas." Despite the efforts of housing reformers to try to end the City Council's power to review the placement of public housing, local politicians in Philadelphia, as in New York, often opposed public housing in white areas in recognition of community fears of an influx of low income blacks.[73]

If the experiment in promoting integration through public housing failed to get off the ground in Philadelphia, what chance did it have of succeeding in New York? While never asking this question, Task Force members dismissed white opposition to such a plan as the price to be paid for progress. "Middle income ghettoes are even more dangerous than low-income ghettoes," Jane Jacobs, the architectural critic and community activist observed. "[Conservative mayoral candidate William F.] Buckley's biggest vote came from the middle-income ghettoes. It was a bigot vote, of those afraid of the poor, the black, the Spanish." [74]

The final report issued by the Task Force on January 10, 1966, was a compendium of recommendations that provided the foundation for the Lindsay Administration's housing policy. By emphasizing that the city could do more to improve housing conditions for the economically and racially segregated minorities, the document

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[72] Memorandum, "Rough Minutes of Mayor-Elect Lindsay's Task Force on Housing Meetings," 10 December 1965, folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Reel 23, Abrams Papers, 2-4, microfilm.
[73] Ibid., 4.
[74] Ibid., 4, 22.

reflected the ideals of the Great Society introduced by President Johnson the year before and symbolized the confidence of the city's liberals. The report recommended that a single administrator be appointed to supervise a department consolidating the Housing Authority, the Housing Redevelopment Board and Department of Rehabilitation into a single entity. This would reduce overlap of the agencies involved in public housing development and expedite that planning and construction of projects. Another recommendation was to scale back the city's slum clearance an urban renewal plans by not allowing the rehabilitation of slum neighborhoods until the number families displaced could be re-housed in newly constructed public housing. Instead of building projects that physically overwhelmed the existing neighborhood, the report suggested that the city construct smaller "vest pocket" type projects that blended into the surrounding area.[75]

The report also maintained that though New York boasted the "most comprehensive anti-bias laws in the nation" it was still a segregated city. Anti-discrimination laws, however, would not be enough to eliminate segregation and the city needed "to move directly" to promote integration in areas where segregation existed. To prevent segregation in public housing projects the city should be allowed to implement race-based initiatives to promote integration, the report stated, and that public housing construction should "encourage and reinforce integration where it already exists."[76]

An earlier draft of the Task Force report was more forceful in its language regarding public housing construction and integration: "Publicly assisted new construction should be planned with the objective of aiding integration." This declaration

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[75] Bickel, "Liberals and John Lindsay," 17; Housing and Urban Renewal Task Force, "To Mayor John V. Lindsay Report of Housing and Urban Renewal Task Force," 10 January 1966, folder 10, box 62E3, NYCHA Papers, 1, 4-5, 7-8.
[76] Ibid., 6, 8.

more accurately reflected the opinions of Charles Abrams and other Task Force members who advocated building the public housing projects in white areas to promote integration. The line was probably edited out of the final report because of the uproar the recommendation would have caused. Still, it was the more forceful recommendation from the earlier draft that established the rough outline for what eventually would become known as the "scatter-site" approach to public housing.[77]

Initiated by the Lindsay Administration in the June 1966, scatter-site housing was engineered by the Lindsay staff members Donald Elliott, who was later appointed chairman of the City Planning Department, Eugenia Flatow and Edward Robin. All three worked together in the Reform Democratic Party, but Elliott, who had worked at Lindsay's law firm, was charged with leading the team of reformers to develop a public housing policy that achieved the goals of the Housing Task Force report. Scatter-site housing approach was a fusion of several of the ideas appearing in the Task Force report and discussed at the Task Force meetings which were attended by Elliott and Flatow. Scatter-site housing emphasized the construction smaller, less obtrusive projects on vacant land sites "scattered" throughout the city instead of "massive projects" concentrated in black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Scatter-site housing was also intended to promote the racial and economic integration of middle-income, predominantly white areas in the city's outer boroughs.[78]

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[77] Task Force on Housing and Urban Renewal, "Recommendations of Mayor-Elect John V. Lindsay's Task Force on Housing and Urban Renewal," draft memorandum, n.d., folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Reel 23, Abrams Papers, 3, microfilm

[78] Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 505; "Report of Housing and Urban Renewal Task Force," 8; Bellush "Housing: The Scattered-Site Controversy, 109-110, 114; Memorandum, "Rough Minutes of Mayor-Elect Lindsay's Task Force on Housing Meetings," 10 December 1965, folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Abrams Papers, 16-18, microfilm; John V. Lindsay, Mayor to Members of the Board of Estimate, "Subject: Public Housing Program," memorandum, 16 June 1966, folder 937, box 61, Subject Files, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York Municipal Archives, NY, 2..

The triumvirate of Elliott, Flatow and Robin viewed scatter-site housing as a "moral imperative." NYCHA officials had informed the group that the greatest stumbling block to implementing scatter-site housing was the ability of the Borough Presidents to veto public housing sites. NYCHA advised that the site-selection laws should be amended to eliminate the veto power of the Borough Presidents and grant the Mayor sole power in approving public housing sites. The Lindsay reformers, also wary of Housing Authority officials, sought to bypass not only the Borough Presidents but the Housing Authority as well and consolidate the site-selection process in the hands of the Mayor. Ed Robin and Eugenia Flatow descended on the Housing Authority offices and attempted to learn everything they could about NYCHA's role in the site-selection process. [79]

Roy Metcalf, who served on the public relations staff for NYCHA wrote vividly of the fervor of the Lindsay reformers. Metcalf wrote of a

> definite feeling among liberals of being on the offensive . . . the leading spirits in the early days were [Euginia] Flatow, Ed Robin and Don Elliott with Elliott the only voice of moderation . . . our Atlas maps . . . were commandeered and . . . Flatow and Robin would point to vacant spaces and say 'build there.' When our people deferentially suggested that certain measures might be against the law, the reply was, 'We'll change the law.' This was the atmosphere. Jim Messina [a NYCHA official] swears the story of Ed Robin gesturing magniloquently to the Alexander's [a department store] Parking lot and saying, 'We'll take that,' is true.

The inexperience and zealousness of Flatow and Robin created friction with the NYCHA staff, but they still managed to organize a group of housing officials from NYCHA and other city agencies involved in planning into a group whose advice they could trust. The group of advisors was also sympathetic to the new guidelines dictated by the Mayor. "The Lindsay Administration's scatter-site program," Metcalf observed, would "see to it

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[79] Cannato, 505; Bellush, 110; Memorandum, "Conversation With Ira Robbins," 6 December 1965, folder New York City Task Force on Urban Renewal, Abrams Papers, 1, microfilm; NYCHA, "Site Section and New Program," memorandum, 15 November 1965, folder 4, box 64B5, NYCHA Papers, 2.

that not all public housing in the city would be built in ghetto areas and that the goal of racial and economically integrated housing would not be abandoned and indeed be advanced at greater strides than ever before."[80]

In May, the Lindsay Administration ended the "borough courtesy" tradition and presented a list of public housing sites directly to the Board of Estimate without the prior approval of the individual Borough Presidents. By submitting the entire package of project sites to the Board, the Lindsay Administration wanted to avoid compromising with the individual Borough Presidents, which often resulted in a reduced number of public housing sites. "The Borough Presidents have a legitimate knowledge and concern about their boroughs and we intend to consult with them regularly," Donald Elliott announced. "But they can't override our final decisions. Public housing has citywide implications and we have to have an over-all plan for its development."[81]

In early June, Lindsay unveiled his new public housing program. Declaring that the era of high rise low income projects was over, Lindsay proclaimed that the majority of new projects constructed would average in height between six- to eight stories, half the size of most old housing projects. Scatter-site housing projects, however, would be part of a larger housing program that included the construction of "vest-pocket projects" and rehabilitated private apartments (subsidized for low-income families) in five slum areas, constituting nearly 7,000 units. Only ten of the fourteen low-income projects originally planned by the city fit the Lindsay Administration's scatter-site objectives. These ten projects (two more would be added later for a total of twelve) would be constructed on

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[80] Roy Metcalf, "Forest Hills---Rego Park Memo," memorandum, n.d., in author's possession, 1; Bellush, 113.
[81] Steven V. Roberts, "City Hall Ends Veto by Borough Presidents Over Housing Sites," *NYT*, 11 May 1966.

vacant sites in "stable and strong," predominantly white areas "well serviced in terms of community facilities." The size of the scatter-site projects, however, varied. Some consisted of one to six buildings between eight to ten stories high. Others, consisting of just one to two buildings between 13 and 20 stories high, seemed to contradict the scatter-site objective of promoting smaller, non-high-rise developments.[82]

The scatter-site formula, however, was a significant departure from public housing policy of the past. Plans for the few low-income projects the city attempted to construct in predominantly white areas during the Wagner years, proceeded quietly, almost secretly, so as not to arouse the anger of local politicians and residents. During the rare occasion when a Borough President approved of a project site in white neighborhood, the Wagner Administration allowed Housing Authority to barter with local civic groups to reduce the numbers of minority families in the project. NYCHA could accomplish this by imposing a State statute allowing those living with in a mile of the site to receive priority for available apartments in the project. Fewer applications from those living outside the neighborhood made integration more difficult. The Housing Authority also could raise the number units in the project to be set aside for elderly residents. This had the effect of lowering the overall population of a given project by excluding families with children.[83]

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[82] "Subject: Public Housing Program," 16 June 1966, folder 937, box 61, Subject Files, John V. Lindsay Papers, 2, 3; Department of City Planning, *Newsletter*, August-September 1966, folder 1, box 66C2, NYCHA Papers, 1, 2; Bellush, 114; Steven V. Roberts, "Housing in Slums to Avoid Towers," *NYT*, 8 June 1966.

[83] The State Legislature finally overturned the law in March of 1964. "State Senate Defeats Measure Allowing Billboards on Thruway," *NY*T, 12 March 1964; "Memo of Conversation with Ira Robbins," 6 December 1965, Abrams Papers; New York State Commission on Housing, *1957: Report of the Commission on Housing: Housing Legislation in New York State*, (New York: 1957), 58 in reel 87, Subject Files 1954-1965, Mayor Robert F. Wagner Papers, New York Municipal Archives, microfilm at La Guardia and Wagner Archives, 2102; Charles Grutzner, "City Housing Unit Bars Race Quotas," *NYT*, 5 July 1959.

Lindsay officials believed that Wagner's integration efforts failed because of his lack of political leadership. They viewed Wagner as bumbling and incompetent, a machine politician who was too willing to back down to the demands of local politicians and residents. Lindsay's public declaration of scatter-site housing demonstrated that he would not compromise on integration and was committed to improving housing and social conditions for the city's black and Puerto Ricans. Lindsay's "bold and vigorous leadership" on scatter-site housing would burnish his image as a fighter for racial equality and solidify his popularity. Many Lindsay Administration officials believed that middle-income neighborhoods would have a beneficial impact on the poor by providing them with better schools, recreational and social facilities. If the scatter-site plan proved successful, they reasoned, it would lead to the integration of predominantly white neighborhoods and slow the expansion of racial ghettos by dispersing the minority population.[84]

The Lindsay Administration's ambitious objectives for scatter-site housing, while noble, were hardly feasible given the modest Federal funding for public housing and only twelve scatter-site projects in the planning stages. A Planning Commission report released only months earlier, cast doubt on the feasibility of the scatter-site program. The report concluded that while small projects built on "scattered vacant tracts" in the outlying areas of the city could "serve as a magnet for families living in the crowded core," the number of such sites was rare and could only provide a small fraction of the low-income housing needed. The report also found that the lack of dependable public transportation in outlying areas would make it difficult for low-income employees to

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[84] Bellush, 110, 114-115; Samuel Kaplan, "Queens Borough Head Accused of Balking Low-Income Housing," *NYT*, 6 April 1965; "Public Housing Program," Mayor John V. Lindsay Papers, microfilm.

commute their jobs in city's center. It made more sense, the report argued, to construct housing in the outlying areas for people with jobs nearby or who could afford cars.[85]

Lindsay Administration officials seriously underestimated the fury of the opposition to scatter site housing by badly misjudging the political climate in New York. Lindsay, like many white liberals, was over confident of white support for the goals of civil rights in New York. The Lindsay critic and biographer Vincent Cannato, noted that the Mayor embraced the civil rights movement just as many white New Yorkers were growing more "ambivalent" about the struggle for racial equality. A 1964 *New York Times* poll showed that 54% of whites questioned "believed that the Negro civil rights movement had gone too far." While the poll also demonstrated that there was little evidence of an emerging "white backlash" against politicians supporting civil rights, 40% of those questioned said they did not want "a number of Negroes" living in their neighborhood. "That's one thing I wouldn't want," a Brooklyn repairman said. "As soon as they move into a neighborhood the place turns into a slum."[86]

Conclusion: Backlash

Lindsay's heavy handed attempt to circumvent the Borough Presidents angered local politicians, while his implementation of scatter-site housing alienated thousands of white middle-income homeowners who viewed the scatter-site housing as the Mayor's attempt to force them to flee their neighborhoods. Rather than submitting a list of individual projects to be constructed in each borough to the appropriate Borough

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[85] New York City Planning Commission, *New York City's Renewal Strategy 1965*, (New York: New York City Planning Commission,1965), 53; Bellush, 115, 119, 131; Department of City Planning, *Newsletter,* August-September 1966, folder 1, box 66C2, NYHCA Papers, 2, 4. The Lindsay memo announcing scatter-site housing lists ten scatter-site projects. Bellush claims that after that memo, two more scatter-site projects were added to the list for a total of twelve projects.

[86] Cannato, 68; Fred Powledge, "Poll Shows Whites in City Resent Civil Rights Drive," *NYT*, 21 September 1964.

President for review, Lindsay submitted a comprehensive list of scatter-site projects to the Board of Estimate. Lindsay wanted to demonstrate that the Mayor and not the Borough Presidents would be in charge of choosing public housing sites. The list called for four projects in the Bronx, four in Queens, three in Brooklyn and one in Staten Island. Lindsay's strategy had the unintended consequence of uniting the various neighborhoods and civic associations hostile to scatter-site housing. Hundreds of angry "homeowners" chartered buses and jammed into the public hearings held by the Board of Estimate and Planning Commission to protest scatter-site housing.[87]

At the hearings, protestors representing Howard Beach and Corona in Queens and Kingsbridge in the Bronx cheered for their own speakers and lustily heckled City officials and others supporting scatter-site. The demonstrators carried signs reading "Lindenwood Says No" and a suitcase with "Will See You in Arizona---New York Stinks" scrawled on the side. The testimony of scatter-site opponents focused on how the project would overwhelm already overcrowded transportation, school and shopping facilities. Opponents also expressed the fear that low-income tenants would lower-property values, undermine standards of living and force whites to flee to the suburbs. Although the protestors denied race was motivating their opposition to scatter-site projects, the prejudice of some homeowners came to the surface. "We improved our lot by struggle," Theresa Bria asserted. "The Negroes want everything for free. How much

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[87] Bellush, 114-115, 125; New York City Planning Commission, *New York City's Renewal Strategy 1965*, (New York: New York City Planning Commission,1965), 53; Steven V. Roberts, "City Hall Ends Veto by Borough Presidents Over Housing Sites," *NYT*, 11 May 1966;. Steven V. Roberts, "Public Housing in Middle-Class Areas Assailed," *NYT,* 2 June 1966.

can we take? How much can we pay? We're better off on relief." *TheNew York Times* reported that Bria's comments received the loudest applause.[88]

While acknowledging the probability that scatter-site housing would cause an exodus of white families from middle-income neighborhoods, Lindsay Administration officials argued that allowing poor families to escape the "ghettos" was worth the trade off. "Certainly some people may move," Planning Commission chairman William F.R. Ballard intoned. "After all the city has grown by the movement of population. And some will flee---as some have always fled from strangers of a different ethnic group or religion or color, or 'class.'"[89] Eugenia Flatow, one of the architects of scatter-site housing, saw the flight of middle-class whites as inevitable. "Some will move," Flatow stated bluntly. "But while our policies won't reverse the pattern we are hopeful they won't accelerate it either." Flatow viewed the possibility of white exodus as a necessary risk to achieve the goal of dispersing the African American and Puerto Rican ghettos and promoting racial integration in predominantly white neighborhoods.[90]

While Ballard and Flatow reflected the Lindsay Administration's commitment to the goals of integration, they were dismissive of the plight of middle-income whites. Lindsay Administration officials tended to view the dozens of middle-class, white ethnic enclaves in outer boroughs, not as individual neighborhoods with their own unique personalities, but simply as "white" areas requiring integration. "I feel sorry for the homeowner in Queens who has to accept a public housing progress," an anonymous City

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[88] Steven V. Roberts, "Housing Projects in Queens Scored," *NYT*, 16 June 1966; Steven V. Roberts, "Planners Defend Public Housing," *NYT*, 22 June 1966.
[89] Steven V. Roberts, "Planners Defend Public Housing," *NYT*, 22 June 1966.
[90] Steven V. Roberts, "Housing and Integration," *NYT*, 4 July 1966.

official commented. "But I feel a lot sorrier for the Negro in Bedford-Stuyvesant who wants to get out of there."[91]

This attitude intensified the level of hostility of scatter-site opponents towards the Mayor and unified ethnic groups that had traditionally been at odds. Jewish and Italian protestors from the Lindenwood section of Howard Beach and Corona in Queens testified in opposition to scatter-site housing at public hearings. Perhaps the most vociferous opponents to scatter-site emerged from the beleaguered Italian American enclave of Corona, Queens. A year earlier, Corona civic groups banded together and forced Borough President Cariello to cancel plans for a low-income project near the Queens Hall of Science. Now Corona residents faced a battle over a scatter-site project. The project was to be built on a vacant lot at Lewis Avenue and 100th Street which was near several modest single family homes owned by Italian Americans and adjacent to Lefrak City (a sprawling 5,000 unit middle income cooperative) and the Sherwood Village (a high-rise apartment complex), both with predominantly Jewish populations. Jewish residents from Lefrak City and Sherwood Village formed tenants association and joined their Italian American neighbors to demonstrate against the scatter-site projects. [92]

After months of protests by Corona residents, the Lindsay Administration announced that a compromise had been brokered between Borough President Cariello and Mayor Lindsay. A much needed high school would be built at the Corona site and the scatter-site housing project would instead be constructed at a vacant land site in Forest Hills. Although Corona and Forest Hills bordered each other the two neighborhoods could not have been more different. While Corona was predominantly Italian American

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Bellush, 122-123.

and lower-middle class, Forest Hills was predominantly Jewish and upper middle-class. Over the next four years, the united front of various neighborhoods and ethnics groups in Queens would evaporate and the opposition to scatter-site housing would be centered on the Jewish neighborhood of Forest Hills.[93]

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[93] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

Forest Hills and the Rise of the Jewish Middle-Class

From an 'Exclusive' to a Jewish Neighborhood

In 1966, the struggle against scatter-site housing was marked by ethnic solidarity. Jewish, Irish and Italian residents from neighborhoods throughout Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx united in opposition to the city's effort to integrate their neighborhoods through the construction of low-income public housing. In Forest Hills, however, residents viewed the controversy not only as an assault on the middle-class, but as an attack against a Jewish community. By 1960, the population in Forest Hills was overwhelmingly Jewish. Jews had been migrating to the area since the 1920s to enjoy a more suburban atmosphere while living in close proximity to other Jewish families. By the 1950s, their apartment houses and Jewish Centers symbolized the aspirations of a generation of middle-class Jewish families. To understand the level of feeling against the project in the neighborhood it is important to examine the ethnic, economic and demographic transformation of Forest Hills.

Forest Hills began as an exclusive suburban enclave. Like other developments in Queens in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Forest Hills sprang up alongside a Long Island Rail Road Station. The rail line linked Long Island City---the industrial and urban hub of Queens and the depot for ferry transportation to Manhattan---with the various townships throughout Queens, Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island. During the nineteenth century, the area that would become Forest Hills was

known as Whitepot in the rural township of Newtown. When the Long Island Railroad was constructed in the 1860s it ran through Whitepot but the neighborhood did not have a station. In 1898, when Whitepot was incorporated into the Borough of Queens and Greater New York City, it was still very rural. Whitepot, according to Forest Hills scholar Michael V. Gershowitz, "consisted of six farms, a few hundred acres of low-lying marshland, and one road, a narrow country lane that ran from Jamaica, a railroad and market center a few miles south east, to Long Island City."[1]

In 1905, the Cord Meyer Development Company bought 600 acres of farmland in Whitepot and constructed 340 suburban-style homes for upper-income families. To increase the prestige of the new community and attract upscale buyers, Meyer named the development Forest Hills. In 1911, Cord Meyer sold 160 acres of farm land across the railroad tracks from Forest Hills to the Russell Sage Foundation. The Foundation planned to construct a model suburban community for working-class families on the site which was later named Forest Hills Gardens. Cost overruns, however, forced the Foundation to abandon its original philanthropic goals and sell the completed homes to a wealthier, upper-middle-income clientele.[2]

Forest Hills Gardens was described by the historian Jeffrey Kroessler as the "highest expression of the railroad suburb." The design of Forest Hills Gardens was meant to evoke the feel of an English country village with a green, an Inn and a brick-paved town square in front of the train station that featured a town clock. Adding to the suburban exclusivity of the development was the private West Side Tennis Club

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[1] Michael V. Gershowitz, "Neighborhood Power Structure: Decision Making in Forest Hills," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974), 25; Jeffrey Kroessler, "Building Queens: The Urbanization of New York's Largest Borough," (Ph.D. diss., City University New York, 1991), 355.

[2] Gershowitz, 25-26; Kenneth Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of New York*, XXth ed., s.v. "Forest Hills."; "Cord Meyer First," *Queensborough*, Vol. X, No. X, September 1961, 9.

constructed near the Inn and the Queens Valley Golf Club. The West Side Tennis Club was the site of U.S. Open tennis tournament until 1978.[3]

After the completion of Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens, the transportation facilities linking the two upscale, suburban housing developments to Manhattan improved. In 1910, the Forest Hills Railroad Station opened and the country lane that divided Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens was widened and renamed Queens Boulevard. Queens Boulevard was significant because it connected to the Queensboro Bridge, which opened in 1909 and linked Queens with Manhattan. By 1913, a streetcar-line ran along Queens Boulevard and over the Queensborough Bridge connecting Manhattan to Forest Hills and several other neighborhoods in Queens.[4]

The advent of the streetcar lines ushered in the era of inexpensive public transportation in Queens and led to a boom in the construction of housing for middle-class families of more modest incomes. Only wealthy commuters could afford both the gracious suburban home and Long Island Rail tickets. Near the streetcar lines, however, small single- and two-family homes as well as garden-style apartment complexes, offered suburban housing to families of more modest incomes. In the wake of the streetcar lines near Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens, a host of garden style apartments were constructed during the 1920s. The Continental, constructed in 1927 by the Cord Meyer Company in 1927, was the first garden-style apartment complex in Forest Hills. Like the dozens of other garden style apartment complexes constructed throughout central Queens, the Continental provided pastoral suburban surroundings for middle-income renters who

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[3] Kroessler, 356; *Encyclopedia of New York City*, s.v., “Forest Hills,” “Forest Hills Gardens,” “West Side Tennis Club.”

[4] Gershowitz, 26.

could not afford to purchase high-priced single-family homes in the Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens developments.[5]

For example, the Continental featured spacious lawns where children could play and families could picnic and enjoy croquet and horseshoes tournaments. The grounds of the Continental also provided space for flower gardens that were converted to vegetable gardens during World War II. Cord Meyer constructed three other garden-style apartments in Forest Hills: The Kelvin, The Livingston and The Lexington. These apartment houses were also constructed in the same pastoral settings as other garden-style apartments of the 1920s, but unlike the Continental they were six instead of four stories and featured elevators.[6]

During the 1920s, Forest Hills, Forest Hills Gardens and many garden-style apartment developments in Queens were restricted to non-Jewish tenants. The Russell Sage Foundation, which operated Forest Hills Gardens, required that prospective homebuyers supply references regarding their "character and business." According to the local historian Jeffrey Gottlieb, this requirement kept most prospective Jewish and Catholic tenants out of the development for decades.[7]

Despite these restrictions, a few Jewish families had moved into Forest Hills Gardens during World War I and the 1920s. These early Jewish families were "quiet Jews" who did not wish to bring their religion to the attention of their neighbors. Most Jewish families moving to the Forest Hills neighborhood during the 1920s congregated in the area south of Forest Hills Gardens near Metropolitan Avenue where several Jewish

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[5] Gershowitz, 26-27; *Queenborough*, September 1961, 9.
[6] *Queensborough*, September 1961, 9-13.
[7] Plunz, 131; Jeffrey Gottlieb, "The Apartment Buildings of Forest Hills Gardens," in *Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens* an unpublished collection of published an unpublished articles at Queens Borough Public Library, Long Island Division.

owned stores catered to the well-heeled gentile residents. Most of the early Jewish settlers were businessmen, lawyers and professionals who migrated from urbanized Jewish neighborhoods in Brownsville, East New York and the Bronx to a more pastoral Forest Hills that still featured dirt roads and unpaved sidewalks in some places. By the end of the 1920s, over 1,200 Jews moved to Forest Hills making up 5.2% of the population.[8]

These early Jewish settlers established the beginnings of Jewish life in Forest Hills, but it was Jewish real estate developers who built the homes that would help transform Forest Hills into a Jewish neighborhood. During the 1920s, Jewish developers, many of whom already lived in Forest Hills, saw the need for more homes for upper- and middle-income Jewish families. Between 1929 and 1931, Leon Wolosoff, a developer who also resided in Forest Hills, built the first development of single-family homes for Jewish families in Forest Hills. Wolosoff went on to construct Virginia Village, a community of attached homes and several garden-style apartment complexes throughout Forest Hills area. Other Jewish builders followed, constructing luxury apartment houses throughout the area and establishing their firms as the top builders throughout New York. Joseph Kalikow, a resident of Forest Hills, constructed several apartment buildings in Forest Hills including the Mayflower and the Normandy.[9]

While upper-income Jews formed the vanguard of Jewish settlement in Forest Hills, other Jewish developers focused on constructing apartment buildings for Jewish families of more modest means.[10] Harry Lefrak developed several middle-income

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[8] Gottlieb, Apartment Buildings of Forest Hills Gardens, 10, 11; C. Morris Horowitz and Lawrence J. Kaplan, *The Jewish Population of the New York City Area, 1900-1975*, (New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, 1959), 94.
[9] Gottlieb, "Forest Hills Notables," 46.
[10] Jeffrey Gottlieb, "The Early Years: A Clearer View of Early Jewish Life in Forest Hills," 2.

apartment buildings throughout Forest Hills and central Queens all of which were named after states. His son Samuel took over the business and established Lefrak as one the East Coast's largest real estate developers. Hyman Muss one of the founders with his brothers of Muss Development Company, built the Forestall apartment complex and several other modestly priced developments throughout Forest Hills.[11]

The advent of the Great Depression ended the construction boom in Queens. The Depression also marked an era of high vacancy rates for rental units throughout the borough. Although members of the Queens Chamber of Commerce would argue that the glut of un-rented apartment units in Queens was due to over building, the historian Jeffrey Kroessler blamed the vacancies on high rents that drove the families of many unemployed breadwinners to share apartments with friends or families. In response to the vacancy crisis, local real estate interests formed the Forest Hills-Kew Gardens Apartment Owners Association, to promote the area and lobby the City for transportation improvements such as the widening of Queens Boulevard and the extension of the 6th and 8th Avenue subway lines to central Queens.[12]

In 1936, the city completed three major transportation arteries that dramatically improved the accessibility of Forest Hills to Manhattan. The Triborough Bridge and the Grand Central Parkway, the major automobile arteries between Manhattan, LaGuardia Airport and Long Island, became Forest Hill's major automobile link to Manhattan. The IND Subway line, making several stops on Queens Boulevard including Forest Hills, provided fifteen minute service to Manhattan. The new IND line was much faster than the streetcar lines and was still only a five-cent fare. The proximity of the IND subway

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[11] Ibid., 23, 27, 36.

[12] By 1932, only 69% of the apartments in Forest Hills and the adjoining neighborhood of Kew Gardens were rented. After two years, the occupancy rate reached 80%. Kroessler, 387; *Queensborough*, 9-13.

line on Queens Boulevard would contribute to the explosion of housing and population in Forest Hills.[13]

Despite the building slowdown in Queens during the Depression, Forest Hills experienced an apartment building boom during the 1930s. Although the U.S. Census Bureau did not record the number of housing units constructed in Forest Hills during the 1930s, the area's population grew by over 49% and by the end of the decade the majority of families residing in Forest Hills were renters. Since homes in Queens were generally owned by the families living in them, apartment units in Forest Hills probably outnumbered single- and two-family homes. Anecdotal evidence from residents also attests to the rapid construction of apartment complexes in Forest Hills.[14]

In 1938, a group of Forest Hills homeowners formed the Forest Hills Property Owners Committee to "stop the unrestricted erection of apartment buildings which has grown so visible in the last year." The new apartments lacked the high rents, spacious lawns and other suburban amenities of the expansive garden-style apartments of the previous decade. Most of them were six-story buildings with plain-faced brick facades that housed 100 families a piece. Photographs accompanying an article about the protests in Forest Hills showed a single family home "hemmed in" on three sides by apartment

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[13] Gershowitz, 28.

[14] The U.S. Census data shows that the population of Forest Hills rose from 18,323 to 27,371 during the 1930s. By 1940, the earliest year that the number of housing units in the neighborhood was recorded, there were 9,878 housing units in Forest Hills, 65.8% of which were rentals. 1940 census tracts compiled by Susan Weber, Sociology Department, Queens College, CUNY from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census Tracts for Queens County, New York, 1920-1970.* For 1920 and 1930 U.S. census tracts also see the table in Gershowitz, 29, 30. "Queens Homeowners Wage War to Curb Apartment Buildings," *Long Island Star*, 28 October 1938 in vertical file "Forest Hills 1938," Queens Borough Public Library, Long Island Division, Queens, NY.

buildings. One caption that accompanied a photograph of a street lined with neat rows six-story apartments read “brick canyons like this bring protests.”[15]

The homeowners claimed the new apartments constructed on vacant land crowded out play areas and lead to the tearing up of streets for the construction of larger sewage lines. The added population from the new apartment dwellers increased traffic, parking problems and lead to a decline in the area’s standard of living. “The streets don’t present quite the same peaceful, suburban atmosphere they did when we bought our property here,” lamented Mrs. Earl French who lived in Forest Hills for 17 years. “We are not trying to impede progress but we believe it questionable at best to call transforming a residential community of well-kept homes and gardens into cliffs of bricks, ‘progress.’”[16]

City officials promised the residents to change zoning laws to limit apartment construction in the area. Considering the influence of real estate interests in Queens, coupled with the jobs created by apartment and sewerage construction during the Depression, it seems unlikely that the zoning movement would have gained city-wide support. Many of the families renting the new apartments were Jewish. While the population of Forest Hills increased by over 8,000 during the 1930s, at least half these new residents were Jewish. By the end of the decade, Jews made up 22.1% of the neighborhood’s population. The homeowners opposed to the new apartment construction never made overt references to the increased number of Jewish families moving into the area, but Parks Commissioner Robert Moses came the closest when he commented that Forest Hills was in danger of becoming like the Bronx, a borough “despoiled by greedy

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[15] *Long Island Star*, 28 October 1938.
[16] Ibid.

apartment house builders who crammed buildings on every square foot of land they could get away with."[17]

The Bronx had become a haven for Jewish families by providing affordable apartments that were a step up from the tenements of the Lower East Side. By 1930, apartments made up the overwhelming majority of housing constructed in the borough. The Bronx became known as "the borough of apartments" and as the number of apartments increased so did the Jewish population. The number of Jewish residents in a given borough or neighborhood was directly proportional to the number of apartment houses. "Jews were characteristically apartment renters rather than homeowners," claimed the sociologist Marshall Sklare. "And true to the urban perspective, Jews tended to regard real estate as a commodity to be traded rather than as an economic good to be consumed." Jews also derived a sense of security and satisfaction from living in a Jewish community, and apartment living, allowed middle-income Jews to step up the economic ladder while maintaining their ethnic and religious cohesiveness.[18]

By 1940, Brooklyn was the home to most of the city's Jews, but the Bronx had the highest proportion of Jewish residents at 38.6% and Queens, with Jews making up only 8.9% of the total population, had the lowest. The housing historian Richard Plunz suggested that the relatively small Jewish population of Queens reflected the suburban development of the borough. Single- and two-family houses made up the majority of

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[17] According to the estimates of the Jewish population figures for Forest Hills-Rego Park neighborhoods, the Jewish population increased between 1930-1940 by 8,419 (1,364 to 9,783), see Table 1 "Estimated Jewish Population in New York City by Borough and Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties, for Selected Years, 1923-1975," Horowitz, 274-275; *Long Island Press*, 28 October 1938.

[18] During the 1920s, one- and two-family homes made up only 18% of all the housing constructed in the Bronx, see Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 131-132; Marshall Sklare, "Jews, Ethnics, and the American City," April, 1972, *Commentary*, 72.

homes in Queens. The apartment construction boom in Forest Hills and the corresponding rise in the Jewish population of the neighborhood ran counter to the suburban pattern of development in Queens. Most non-Jews, as exemplified by the homeowners in Forest Hills and the rest of Queens, preferred single-family homes to apartments.[19]

The construction of automobile links to Manhattan and the expansion of the IND subway line sustained the building and population boom in Forest Hills throughout the 1940s and 1950s. During this twenty year span, as most of the remaining vacant land filled up with over 20,000 new apartment units, Forest Hills became less wealthy and more Jewish and middle-class. By the 1950s, almost 84% of the families in the neighborhood earned incomes above the median average of $5,000 per year, while only 10.9% earned in the highest income bracket of $7,000 and higher.[20] Between 1950 and 1957, the Jewish population of the neighborhood more than doubled, to 73,462. By the end of the decade, the highest concentration of Jews in Queens (66.2%) resided in Forest Hills. The central Queens neighborhoods adjoining Forest Hills, Rego Park, to the west, and Kew Gardens, further east, were similarly populated by white middle-income Jewish families. The Jewish population of Queens in the post-War years doubled. By 1960, the borough housed the second highest Jewish population the city behind only Brooklyn.[21]

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[19] See table 2A "Total and Estimated Jewish Population for the Five Boroughs of New York, 1930-1970" in Horowitz, 96; Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, 132; Sklare, 72.
[20] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census Tracts for Queens County, New York, 1920-1970.* Census data compiled by Susan Weber, Sociology Department, Queens College, CUNY; *The New York Mirror, New York News, New York Times*, et. al., comps., *New York Market Analysis, New York City & Suburbs Population and Housing*, (1953); Sklare, 72; Gershowitz, 33.
[21] Horowitz, 275; Walter Goodman, "The Jewish War Veterans: Kew Forest Post 250: They Served," *Commentary*, June 1956, 564; "Rego-Forest Area Has Most Jews in Queens, Says Federation Study," *Long Island Post*, 3 March 1960.

As the Jewish population of Queens grew, the proportion of Jews living in the Bronx and Brooklyn shrank. In 1930, the Jewish population of the West Bronx, Morrisania, Tremont and Hunts Point sections of the Bronx (where 65% of the borough's Jews lived) dropped by 34% (130,701) in 1957. In 1930, 40% (347,327) of Brooklyn's Jews lived in the neighborhoods of Brownsville, Williamsburg and East New York. By 1957, over 118,000 Jews left those neighborhoods. The Jewish neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn experienced racial transition during the 1940s and 1950s, but many these areas fell into decline long before significant numbers of blacks and Puerto Ricans arrived. Upwardly mobile Jews had been leaving these older neighborhoods since the 1930s to escape aging housing, overcrowded schools and lack of other social amenities. The Jewish exodus increased during the post-War years due to the availability new suburban developments in parts of Brooklyn, the northern Bronx and Queens. It would not be until the 1960s that Jews would cite racial concerns for leaving. [22]

The Jewish migration to Queens was part of larger demographic reshuffling of New York after World War II. Thousands of white families moved from their traditional ethnic haunts to newer suburban communities in Westchester County and Long Island's Suffolk County. According to the historian Joshua Freeman, most of the "working class" families who not afford the pricier suburbs relocated with-in the city, especially to Queens. Freeman's definition of working class was not limited blue-collar workers, but to white-collar civil service employees, teachers and mid-level clerical workers. Queens

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[22] See Horowitz, 49; "Table 7B Bronx, " "Table 8B Brooklyn," "Table 9B Queens," in Horowitz, 115-119 and "Study Areas No. 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 42, 52, 53," in Horowitz, 175-209; Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 150-151.

became a "haven" for white families with middle-class aspirations who attracted to the borough's wide variety of middle-income housing options.[23]

For many Jewish families, however, moving to Forest Hills, Rego Park or Kew Gardens, was more than an expression of their upward mobility. They moved to these neighborhoods to live near other Jewish families and be part of a Jewish community. "For many Jewish families, settling here seems to have involved a new adventure in Jewishness," the writer Morris Freedman observed, "expressing itself in formal affiliation, for the first time in their lives, with a Jewish community institution." The "Jewish community institution" in central Queens was the Jewish Center.[24]

The Jewish Center served not only as the place where Jewish families worshipped but also as a central meeting place for leisure and educational activities in the suburban Jewish community. The religious significance of the Jewish Center, the historian Deborah Dash Moore observed, was secondary to the social and cultural activities it offered. Those moving to central Queens were second generation Jews who were more Americanized than their immigrant parents. The Jewish Center served as a touchstone to their Jewish ethnicity and as a sort of "bulwark" against complete assimilation into to mainstream middle-class lifestyles. Aside from the traditional religious and Hebrew schools, the Jewish Centers provided dozens of athletic and social activities for children as well as adults.[25]

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[23] Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*, (New York: The New Press, 2000), 172.
[24] Morris Freedman, "New Jewish Community in Formation: A Conservative Center Catering to Present Day Needs," *Commentary*, January 1955, 36.
[25] Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 237, 124.

By 1955, there were four new Jewish Centers in central Queens. In an article describing the Jewish Center phenomenon, Morris Freedman recognized the centrality of Queens Boulevard in the growing suburban Jewish communities in Queens. Queens Boulevard ran through Rego Park, Forest Hills and Kew Gardens, featured several new luxury apartment complexes and was where the Rego Park and Forest Hills Jewish Centers were constructed only blocks from each other. The Rego Park Jewish Center was a "great white building looking somewhat like a bank, with a huge Jewish Star of David on one blank wall and flanked by some stores," Freedman wrote. "A little further east is a substantial building, recently completed, reminiscent of a modern college auditorium---plain, high, out thrust front with row of steps leading up---which houses the Forest Hills Jewish Center."[26]

The Forest Hills Jewish Center had humble beginnings. The neighborhood's early Jewish settlers held the first services in private homes in 1924 and as the Jewish community grew held services in rented storefronts and a local movie house. In 1929, the group of worshipers purchased what original members of the congregation called a "wooden shack" that would become the first home to the Forest Hills Jewish Center. Services were led by rabbis hired on a temporary basis from the Jewish Theological Seminary, a Conservative Jewish university in Manhattan. Rabbi Solomon Landman, the first rabbi hired by the Center in 1932, graduated from a reform seminary, and his approach to Judaism proved too non-traditional to congregation members, who were raised in Orthodox Jewish homes.[27]

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[26] Freedman, 36.
[27] Jeffrey Gottlieb, "Origins—The Forest Hills Jewish Center," 2-3. Gottlieb, "Early Jewish Life in Forest Hills," 4-5.

In 1934, the Center hired 27-year-old Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser. A Conservative Rabbi who graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary, Bokser would serve as Rabbi until his death in 1984. Bokser became one of the intellectual leaders of the Conservative Jewish movement, authored fourteen books and would guide the congregation as it grew into the largest Jewish Center on Long Island. As Rabbi, Bokser was an outspoken liberal voice on civil rights and other issues, but he also had a knack for keeping the congregation together. "He came to a congregation that had no tradition," a tribute to Bokser's twenty-fifth anniversary as Rabbi read.

> Our members had come from all boroughs of New York and beyond. There were men of strict observance and orthodox background, some from reform congregations, and some with little or no religious background. It was a real challenge to mold these diverse elements into a harmonious whole.[28]

In 1946, groundbreaking ceremonies for the new Synagogue drew 1,500 and the dedication ceremony a year later drew another 500 who heard an address by Mayor William O'Dwyer. During the dedication Rabbi Bokser offered a prayer to the six-million Jews "who died in sanctification of the name of God." The Holocaust and the struggle for Israeli independence played prominently in the thoughts of Jewish residents of Forest Hills. "The state of Israel became a main issue in the drama of world events," a note in the synagogue's bulletin *The Message* read. "Daily it is becoming apparent to the world that the Jewish people have reserves of courage rare among men, and they have capacities for self government rare among nations."[29]

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[28] Bernard Rabin, *The New York Daily News*, "The Golden Years of a Jewish Center," 29 May 1981; "Obituary," *TNYDN*, 31 January 1984; Forest Hills Jewish Center, "Anniversary Tribute," 28 March 1955, Archives of Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Collection, Jewish Theological Center, New York, 7.

[29] "O'Dwyer Speaks at Rites Dedicating Jewish Center," *TLI Post*, 10 June 1946; "Ground Broken for $1,000,000 Jewish Center," *Long Island Star*, 10 June 1946; "Forest Hills Jewish Center Stone is Laid," *Long Island Star-Journal*, 22 September 1947; David Oppenheim, "Center's Dedication Culminates 18 Years of Community Activity," *TLI Post*, 15 September 1949 in "Forest Hills" vertical files, Long Island

These events raised the sense of urgency in the fund raising efforts for the new synagogue. "We cannot default on our commitments," a note in *The Message* read when it appeared that a shortfall in pledges from congregants would jeopardize payment to the contractor. "It would hurt our pride in the new building. It would hurt our honor as Jews." The congregation raised $1 million for the new synagogue, which was completed in 1949, and immediately began fund raising efforts for a new youth center. "Our Temple has become a source of pride for Jewry everywhere," Rabbi Bokser declared in a sermon. "Now we face the challenge of completing our goal, by building a Youth Center, to give us the facilities for educating and guiding thousands of our children and young people toward a wholesome self acceptance as Jews."[30]

The appeals for funding of the new youth facilities focused on the need for more space for the children's Hebrew and Sunday school classes. There were not enough rooms in the new synagogue to accommodate the children of the "thousands" of new Jewish families moving to Forest Hills. After raising another $1 million the new youth center was completed in 1952. The new synagogue and youth center could seat almost 1,500 worshipers and housed classrooms, meeting rooms, as well as a swimming pool, a gymnasium and several auditoriums. The cost and opulence of the Center was point of pride for the Jewish residents of Forest Hills and the Center's membership grew to over 1,500 dues paying families with another 1,000 families who used the synagogue's facilities. On the High Holidays 4,000 worshipers attended services.[31]

Division, New York Public Library, Jamaica Branch, New York; *The Message*, 28 January 1949, Archives of Conservative Judaism, Forest Hills Jewish Center Collection, The Jewish Theological Center, New York.

[30] *The Message*, 29 April 1949, FHJC Collection; Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, "Message," folder Miscellaneous Drafts, box 9, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Collection, Archives of Conservative Judaism, Jewish Theological Center

[31] "Forest Hills Center to Celebrate," *The Long Island Press,* 14 September 1957; *The Message*, 29 April 1949, The FHJC Collection.

The new youth center was put to good use. At least thirty Jewish social clubs for boys and girls met in the new meeting rooms and basketball, swimming and boxing leagues made use of the new pool and gym. The main reason families joined the Jewish Center, however, was to raise their children in the Jewish tradition and the new Synagogue accommodated these aspirations. At least 700 children attended the weekly religious and Hebrew schools and several Bar and Bat Mitzvahs a week were announced in *The Message.* In one bulletin, a young girl named Rohda Schect, described the satisfaction of performing her first “Aliyah” in front seventy congregants attending the “Junior Congregation” that met on Saturday mornings.[32]

While young Jewish couples often claimed they joined the synagogue for the benefit of their children, the Center offered dozens of social events popular with the adults. Hundreds of couples dressed formally to attend the annual “Gala Purim Party,” the “Spring Dance” and the “Annual Dinner Dance” (that featured live music), and fund raiser dinners, auctions and bazaars held at the synagogue. Aside from the parties dozens of congregants attended the weekly Sisterhood meetings and Minyan Club breakfasts. A photograph in *The Message* depicted over fifty men and women attending a breakfast for the “Journal Committee.”[33]

These events, however, were important bonding rituals that brought members of the suburban Jewish community closer together. A bulletin in *The Message*, recounted the experiences Hattie Gussow, the Sisterhood’s membership chairperson.

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[32] *The Message*, 29 March 1949.

[33] Freedman, “New Jewish Community in Formation: A Conservative Center Catering to Present-Day Needs,” *Commentary*, January 1955, 46; *The Message*, 10 December 1948, 11 March 1949, 18 March 1949, 22 March 1952, FHJC Collection; *The Message*, n.d., folder Papers and Drafts of Articles, box 9, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, Jewish Theological Center.

> She related the experiences that were encountered in her early days in Forest Hills. The unfriendly and biased attitude of some of her neighbors created the depressing feeling of being lost and alone. After many disheartening days, a message came to Hattie over the phone. A cordial voice was saying, 'This is a member of the sisterhood of the Forest Hills Jewish Center. We wish you very good luck in your new home and you are invited to the next meeting.'

No matter how Americanized and assimilated, many second and third generation Jews felt like outsiders except in the company of other Jews. The social events offered at the Center gave these men and women a sense of security and belonging and in some cases made them feel more Jewish.[34]

The local branch of the Jewish War Veterans (JWV), who met weekly at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, used their prestige as veterans to serve the Jewish community. Although the group boasted eighty members only a handful of regulars attended the meetings. Most were veterans of World War II, shop owners, lawyers and salesmen, who moved to Forest Hills from older Jewish neighborhoods like Brownsville, and whose parents were immigrants. The veterans claimed to have joined the JWV for reasons that included camaraderie, charity, patriotism, but most importantly, to show their solidarity with Jewish causes. Herman Jaffe, a printing salesman and Forest Hills resident who started the chapter, argued that the most important role of the JVW was to speak out against local anti-Semitism and publicly support for the state of Israel. "With our honorable discharges to back us up," explained Herman Jaffe, "we've taken on the responsibilities of representing American Jewry."[35]

There was clearly a tension between the spiritual and social needs provided by the new synagogue. Several bulletins in *The Message* descried the lack of

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[34] *The Message*, 19 November 1948; A member of the Hillcrest Jewish Center claimed that attending social events at the Center was "an expression of my Jewishness." See Freedman, 47.
[35] Walter Goodman, "The Jewish War Veterans," *Commentary*, June 1956, 564-565, 569.

religiosity at the Jewish Center. “The lack of Jewish culture is no where more apparent than in the names popular among Jews,” an angry congregant wrote regarding lack of Jewish first names amongst the synagogue’s children. “And the pity is there are so many beautiful Hebraic names . . . We have to condemn this tendency as vulgar, uncultured and un-Jewish.” Another complained that few synagogue members had actually read the Bible. “Through all the agitation over Zionism and Palestine, no more than a handful of these college educated men and woman had ever bothered to find out what lay between the covers,” the congregant wrote. “Our children, I hope, will be better informed, thanks to our religious school and the attractive environment of the Temple.”[36]

The materialism of some of the synagogue members was also condemned. The Sisterhood president claimed that when she asked a group of women to cancel their shopping trip to the City and volunteer for a synagogue fundraiser she was turned down. “‘Once we have our new building on the Boulevard,” one of the women replied, “‘you won’t even have to ask us; we will all be there.’” Rabbi Bokser sermonized about the corrupting influences of materialism in “American life.” Claiming to have been offered bribes to recommend a wedding band and children’s camp in his sermons, the Rabbi argued that Jews needed to make economic sacrifices to preserve their Jewish ideals. “There are Jews, who in their callousness ignore the High Holidays,” Bokser declared. “There are Jews who if they just willed it, can close for the Holy Days, but are indifferent and remain open. Their actions implicate all of us.” The attacks against materialism, however, often appeared in *The Message* with advertisements for fur coat shops in

[36] *The Message*, 18 March 1949, 4 March 1949, FHJC Collection.

Manhattan and bulletins announcing formal dinners, dances and a fund raiser that auctioned "a Dodge and a Studebaker sedan."[37]

The middle-class values of Jewish Center's congregants also clashed with those of their Orthodox Jewish neighbors. During the 1950s, hundreds of parents affiliated with the Forest Hills Jewish Center and other Conservative synagogues sent their children to Jewish day schools all of which were run by Orthodox synagogues. According to Rabbi Bokser, parents preferred the Jewish day schools to public schools for their emphasis on Hebrew and Jewish studies, the smaller class sizes and the high standards in the general curriculum. "The leading Yeshiva in Queens . . . has a majority of students from Conservative congregations," Bokser claimed. "This is not surprising. In the Queens area . . . the preponderant number of Jewish families are affiliated with Conservative congregations."[38]

Many Conservative Jewish parents, however, complained about some of the social policies of the Orthodox Yeshivas. "Parents who are affiliated with Conservative synagogues . . . desire a more liberal approaches to Jewish education," Bokser wrote in a private memorandum. "The recently introduced segregation of the sexes at the Yeshiva of Central Queens not only in the class room, but also in the dining room and playground has been especially resented by parents. The resistance of parents was so great that the policy of segregation in the school was finally abandoned." The friction between Orthodox and Conservative outlooks prompted Bokser and other leading members of the

[37] *The Message*, 31 December 1948; 18 September 1959; 27 November 1959, FHJC Collection.
[38] Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, "The Solomon Schechter Day Schools," reprinted article from the United Synagogue Review, in folder Solomon Schechter School of Queens, box 20, Ben Zion Bokser Papers.

Forest Hills and Rego Park Jewish Center to invest in the creation of the Solomon Schechter Day School, the first Conservative day school in the area.[39]

At least two Orthodox synagogues emerged in Forest Hills. The largest was the Queens Jewish Center, which was formed in 1943 and moved to a more opulent space on 108th Street in 1954. Other Orthodox synagogues included the Young Israel of Forest Hills, established in the 1953 and the Synagogue of Dov Revel and Congregation Tifferath Israel, established in the 1960s.[40] Other Orthodox synagogues opened in the Forest Hills area as well, but with the exception of the Queens Jewish Center, the Orthodox Synagogues were small and served fewer than 100 families. Their prevalence in Forest Hills demonstrated that many in the community preferred traditional Jewish customs. For many years the area's largest yeshiva, Yeshiva Dov Revel, was housed in the Queens Jewish Center. In fact, the only Reform synagogue in the area, Temple Sinai, was one of the last major synagogues in the area when it was established in 1955.[41]

During the 1950s, the Jewish community of Forest Hills managed to strike the difficult balance between the middle-class lifestyle and preservation of Jewish heritage. The balance would not be altered by conflicts between Orthodox and Conservative Jews. Instead, the physical alterations to the Forest Hills neighborhood in the early 1960s would threaten to undermine the suburban status of the area and force the community to grapple with the problems of urbanization and overcrowding.

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[39] Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, "Jewish Day Schools," n.d., memorandum, folder Solomon Schechter School of Queens, box 20, Ben Zion Bokser Papers.
[40] *LI Press*, 22 April 1966.
[41] For a listing of synagogues in the Forest Hills area see Jeffrey Gottlieb, *Forest Hills and Forest Hills Gardens,* n.d, a collection of published and unpublished articles at the Queens Borough Public Library, Long Island Division.

The "High-Rise" Building Boom of the 1960s

During the 1960s, Forest Hills was the center of third building boom to hit Queens in the twentieth century. Changes in the city's zoning regulations made it possible for developers to construct high-rise apartment complexes in the outer boroughs. Forest Hills became the magnet for many of the most prominent high-rise apartments in New York. The construction boom began in the mid-1950s in Rego Park and soon spread to neighboring Forest Hills, Kew Gardens and Corona. The new high-rises represented another step up the economic ladder for urban Jewish families. Instead of moving from their Forest Hills apartments to single-family homes in Long Island, Jewish families marking their ascent from the "middle class to the upper class" could move to the high-rise "luxury apartments" being constructed by Jewish builders along Queens Boulevard.[42]

The high-rise towers brought in thousands of new, well-heeled residents to the area. Singing the praises of the high rise towers, the pages of The Queens Borough Chamber of Commerce monthly magazine *Queensborough*, dubbed the tracts around Queens Boulevard in Forest Hills the "Golden Area," where "21 and 27-story department developments are the rule." The magazine ran out of laudatory adjectives to describe Forest Hills and the other neighborhoods in central Queens where the developments had taken root. "The 'miracle belt' can be considered the product of steadily increasing land values in the city's largest borough," gushed the *Queensborough*. "Because of this, apartment developers are finding it financially impossible to construct high-riser homes at less than skyscraper dimensions." The high-rise apartment complexes of Forest Hills

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[42] *Queensborough*, September 1961, 8; Sklare, 72.

replaced the single-family home and the garden-style apartment as the symbols of Queens housing and forever changed the "skyline in the city's 'homeowner' borough."[43]

The first high-rise development was the Park City Estates. The $40 million complex consisted of 18 buildings at 16-stories and 4,000 units. When Park City was in its planning stages in 1955 it was the largest privately sponsored development in the United States. In its advertising, Park City promised tenants "Park Avenue luxury, without paying Manhattan rentals." Within less than a decade several other high-rise developments surpassed the grand scale of Park City. The Jack Parker, a $25 million development called on Yellowstone and Queens Boulevards in Forest Hills, completed in 1962, consisted of three 21-story buildings with 1,330 apartments. By 1964, Gerard Towers, a 25-story $10 million tower with 563 units, went up across the street from the Jack Parker. Even the venerable Continental, the first garden-style apartment complex in Forest Hills, built by the Cord Meyer Company in 1927, was torn down and replaced with a 14-story luxury high rise.[44]

In 1962, Samuel J. Lefrak opened the first section of the gigantic Lefrak City in Corona. The building housing over 1,000 tenants was just one of the five, 18-story towers that would constitute the development. When completed in 1967, Lefrak City housed 5,000 families (some 25,000 residents in total) and remains "the largest single private development in New York." "Our market is the middle-income wage earner," declared the developer Samuel J. Lefrak, "the forgotten man of housing." True to his word, Lefrak's three- and four-bedroom apartments were much larger than average New York

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[43] *Queensborough*, September 1961, 7-8.
[44] *NYT*, 6 July 1955; *Queensborough*, September 1962, 10-13.

apartments and the rents were reasonable. With amenities such as swimming pools Lefrak City attracted droves of middle-class families. [45]

The high-rises were designed after the "tower in the park" concept of French architect Le Corbusier. High-rise buildings took up less space on the ground, affording developers an opportunity to profit from building more apartment units on less land. The space around the high rises was used for amenities that defined the apartments' luxury status. One complex on Queens Boulevard advertised a "magnificent country club, swimming pool and kiddies' wading pool in a park like setting." Other amenities included fully modern kitchens with appliances, doormen and a maintenance staff. A shopping mall was constructed east of the developments on Queens Boulevard to satisfy the shopping tastes of the tenants. Stores in the mall included Macy's, Gimbel's and Bloomingdale's. The high-rises began attracting young couples and seniors back to the City from Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Queens offered a shorter, more inexpensive commute to Manhattan and lower property taxes than suburban Long Island. "I like it better than a house," a new resident and former homeowner commented. "The view is nice, the air is nice, the [apartment] is run right and I'm satisfied."[46]

The explosion of apartment construction throughout Queens during the 1950s and 1960s rivaled the number of apartments constructed in Manhattan during the same period. By 1963, according to *The New York Times*, apartment dwellers in Queens would soon overtake homeowners in "the borough of houses."[47] The population growth in Queens

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[45] Ibid., 6-8; Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, 285; *Queensborough*, September 1962, 6, 8, 31, 34.
[46] Plunz, 184-192, 282-294; Peter Kihss, "Queens Troubled by Growing Pains," *NYT*, 29 November 1963; Philip H. Dougherty, "Urban Togetherness: Queens Boulevard Becoming Mishmash of Stores and Tall Apartment Houses," *NYT*, 10 March 1965.
[47] *NYT*, 10 March 1965.

due to the surging development was staggering, and Forest Hills was the epicenter of the growth spurt. In 1961 alone, according to the Chamber of Commerce, the population of Queens grew by 40,500. Between 1955 and 1962, Forest Hills surpassed all other neighborhoods in Queens in the amount of units constructed and in population growth. During this period no fewer than 54 apartment buildings went up in Forest Hills containing 6,006 units of housing. By 1962, Forest Hills was the fourth most populous neighborhood in all of Queens with 82,536 residents.[48]

In Forest Hills, the high-rise apartment boom had created an acute overcrowding problem that seriously threatened the neighborhood's "quality-of-life." Increased traffic, lack of parks and open spaces, overcrowding of the public schools and subway stations were the most visible consequences of the uncontrolled building. These problems also plagued other communities throughout central and north eastern Queens who had experienced the rapid urbanization. Forest Hills residents, like residents in other communities, organized various civic associations to protest the construction of high-rise buildings, new roads and to advocate for the construction of new schools.[49]

The results of these protests were sometimes successful, but for the most part, community efforts proved to be too little, too late. In 1960, Forest Hills residents fought the Cord Meyer Development Corporation which was petitioning the City Planning Commission for changes to the zoning laws that would permit them to construct a string of high rise apartment developments along 108th Street in Forest Hills. Hundreds of residents filed petitions and testified against the buildings citing the construction was

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[48] *Queensborough*, September 1962, 12-17.
[49] *NYT*, 29 November 1963; *NYT*, 29 November 1963; *NYT*, 10 March 1965; Gene Gleason, "Forest Hills: How it Grew," *New York Herald Tribune*, 24 November 1963 in vertical file "Forest Hills, Misc.," Long Island Division, Jamaica Branch, New York Public Library.

being driven by corporate greed. The protestors represented single-family homeowners and apartment renters that had been in the area for decades. The new construction, the protestors argued would "blight one of the most beautiful areas of the city." The City Planning Commission sided with local residents and ignored Cord Meyer's attorney's argument that there were already apartment complexes constructed throughout the area.[50]

Many of the leaders of the protest movement against development and for the construction of public schools were housewives. They are pictured in local newspapers, picketing in their dresses, patent leather heels and hand painted signs. The most hard-fought battle in Forest Hills during the early 1960s was over the construction of new public schools. By 1962, acute crowding forced area junior high and high schools into double and triple sessions. Parents complained to local newspapers that the planned development of new apartment houses in the area over the next two years would add another 22,800 pupils to the schools and threatened to continue their pickets at the Queens Borough and City Hall if politicians did not respond to their demands.[51]

"Jewish Flight" to Forest Hills

For some Jewish families arriving to the area in the 1960s, the conditions in Forest Hills were disappointing. "Forest Hills offers nothing," commented one of two young mothers walking their baby carriages along Continental Avenue in March, 1965. "We're from the Grand Concourse [in the Bronx]," her friend offered. "This is just a beautified Concourse and Rego Park is Fordham Road. The subways are too crowded and

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[50] "Proposed Zoning Shift Stirs Old Forest Hills," *LI Post*, 24 March 1960; "Down-zoning Plan is Denied in Old Forest Hills Section," *LI Post*, 24 March 1960.

[51] *LI Post*, 5 April 1962; *LI Post*, 5 July 1962

where are the parks?" During the 1950s, Jewish families moved out of their old neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn for a higher standard of living. As blacks and Puerto Ricans moved into apartments abandoned by Jews, racial transition in Jewish neighborhoods accelerated. During the 1960s, Jews still flocked to Forest Hills for economic mobility and to raise their children in a Jewish environment, but many also cited the influx of African Americans and Puerto Ricans to their old neighborhoods as reasons for moving. "This is still a nice neighborhood," explained an elderly woman who recently moved from Crown Heights, Brooklyn. "We had no alternative, either come here or live in the jungle."[52]

Despite its overcrowding problems, Forest Hills was a haven of stability to Jews fleeing Crown Heights and other Jewish neighborhoods such as Brownsville, East New York, and the Grand Concourse. "Many fled because they believed the shifting racial composition of the neighborhood threatened their homes, schools and children," wrote the sociologist Jonathan Rieder. "Often racism and less than perfect information inflated nervousness into hysteria." The fear and hatred aroused by racial transition in Jewish neighborhoods was unjustified, but even those who accepted blacks and Puerto Ricans as neighbors felt as though they were being pushed out by the physical deterioration and the rise in poverty and crime engulfing their old neighborhoods.[53]

The most dramatic Jewish flight occurred in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The neighborhood had always been a poor ghetto and was declared a slum by the 1930s. During the 1950s Jewish families moved on to better neighborhoods. Although low-

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[52] *NYT*, 10 March 1965; Pritchett, 151.

[53] Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 21.

income black and Puerto Rican families replaced the Jewish families, the majority of the neighborhood was still white by 1960. The Jews of Brownsville were known for being racially tolerant and would not move simply because the neighborhood was changing. "Many of these residents were raised as socialists and taught to identify with blacks and other exploited minorities," explained Wendell Pritchett. "While significant numbers of whites remained, many of those who prided themselves on their liberal attitudes felt themselves forced out as they saw their neighborhood turning into what they considered to be a war zone."[54]

Crime was the major factor spurring Jewish flight. The police precinct for the Brownsville area reported that 4,015 crimes (including 8 homicides, 8 rapes, 147 assaults, 73 robberies and 166 burglaries) occurred during the first six months of 1962, the fourteenth highest number out of 38 precincts in the city. Brownsville ranked number one in the City for juvenile crime. Innocent by-standers were sometimes victimized as black, Puerto Rican and white gangs fought over turf. Local whites blamed the rise of crime on the conglomeration of three public housing project, Van Dyke, Tilden and Brownsville Houses. They also charged that the projects, which housed nearly 4,000 families, made the neighborhood a dumping ground for minority welfare families.[55]

The rise in crime in Brownsville was steep, but it was commensurate with the increase in crime that plagued all of New York during the 1960s. And while the three projects housed a significant number of welfare families (14%), the majority of tenants were working poor, black and Puerto Rican families. While NYCHA could accurately claim that the crime rate in all of its projects was lower than the c ity's average, the

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[54] Pritchett, 150.
[55] Pritchett, 127, 153-156.

Brownsville projects ranked amongst the city's most crime ridden. When it opened in 1955, the Van Dyke House was fully integrated, but as conditions in the project deteriorated whites moved out. The few Jewish residents remaining in Van Dyke Houses in the early 1960s reported of being harassed and attacked by black youths and asked the city to be transferred to different projects. Many families, including blacks and Puerto Ricans, moved out of projects in Brownsville because they were too dangerous.[56]

The exodus of whites from Brownsville's public housing projects mirrored what was happening in the rest of the neighborhood. By 1960 whites made up over 60% of the population of Brownsville. By 1965, 80% of the neighborhood was black and Puerto Rican. During the same period nine synagogues closed and were sold to various Christian congregations. By the late 1960s Brownsville's Jewish population, which had numbered in the hundreds of thousands thirty years earlier, had dwindled to 5,000 mostly elderly residents.[57]

The adjoining neighborhood of East New York experienced a similar exodus of Jewish families. A 1963 report issued by the City Commission on Human Rights, recounted the role "block busting" played in accelerating the movement of white residents from East New York. By the 1960s, "block busting" became a common practice in Jewish neighborhoods. Profiteering real estate speculators would panic white homeowners to sell their properties and then resell the homes to desperate black and Puerto Rican families at rates far above market value. In East New York, Jewish and Italian homeowners were already worried that the recent influx of African Americans

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[56] Pritchett, 156-159. When it opened, Van Dyke Houses racial breakdown was 29.6% white, 54% black and 16.3% Puerto Rican. See NYHCA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1961," manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.
[57] Pritchett, 152; Canatto, 120.

would lower property values. The neighborhood was saturated with flyers and postcards promising cash for those who sold their homes quickly and phone calls warning that African American families would soon move into the neighborhood and force property values to drop. Speculators marched groups of black home buyers down the streets to increase the pressure on white homeowners to sell.[58]

Despite community efforts to resist panic selling, many homes in East New York were sold to African Americans and Puerto Rican families for 73% more than the market value. Paying the high premiums required many minority home owners to borrow money and become trapped on a “debtor’s treadmill.” Failed attempts at refinancing often led to foreclosure, the reselling of the home to another family and the continuing cycle of debt and foreclosure. Without stable ownership, many of the homes fell into disrepair and became the targets of arson. By the end of the 1960s, an American Jewish Committee report, described East New York as an “urban Appalachia,” “blighted . . . barren, empty and deserted.” The report noted that as the neighborhood declined Jews fled. In 1960, East New York was 85% white. By 1967, it was 80% black and Puerto Rican.[59]

In Crown Heights, a violent crime wave in 1964 sparked fear throughout the community. Jews made up at least 52% of the white population of the neighborhood which served as the home base of two major Hasidic sects, several Orthodox synagogues and Yeshivas. By 1960, the area’s black population more than doubled to 24% from a migration of African Americans from neighboring Bedford-Stuyvesant. Some Jewish

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[58] The Jewish population of East New York was estimated at 60.6% in 1957 and was described in *The New York Times* as being predominantly a Jewish and Italian neighborhood. See Horowitz, 241 and “City Hearing Due on Block-Busting,” *NYT*, 16 September 1962; Pritchett, 151; The City Commission on Human Rights of New York, “Report by the City Commission on Human Rights of New York on Blockbusting,” 29 October 1963, folder 5, box 100A2, NYCHA Papers, 3-4.

[59] In 1957, it was estimated that 63.4% of the white residents of East New York-Jamaica Bay area were Jewish. See Horowitz, 241; “Report by the City Commission on Human Rights of New York on Blockbusting,” 29 October 1963, 4-7; Cannato, 127.

residents blamed the influx of blacks for a series of high profile rapes, muggings and a murder in the neighborhood. "I've lived here for nearly 40 years and, now, I'm afraid to go out at night," an elderly woman explained. "It's the *schwarzes*. They're not all bad, but there are so many of them here now." Residents who were careful not to blame African Americans for the crimes, noted a change in the neighborhood. "It changed a lot now," explained a Hasidic man who lived in the area for 17 years. "It used to be that no one was afraid. Now everyone is. It's lawless kids, white and Negro, who have changed the neighborhood."[60]

In response to the attacks, the Hasidic Rabbi Samuel Schrage organized a group known as the Maccabees consisting of about 120 unarmed volunteers who patrolled the neighborhood at night in radio-equipped cars to provide added protection. The Maccabees angered several African American civic organizations who charged the group with vigilantism. Schrage denied the charges, insisting that the Maccabees stopped all suspicious looking characters "regardless of color or creed" and that eight members of the group were African American. Still, according to *The New York Times*, many Jewish residents of Crown Heights blamed African Americans from Bedford-Stuyvesant for the attacks and were "bitterly anti-Negro." Some feared the attacks were committed by a group of anti-Semitic blacks. An investigation by the City Commission on Human Rights, however, found that the attacks were committed not by gangs, but by opportunistic loners, both black and white, from outside the area, some from as far away as New Jersey.[61]

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[60] Census information from 1957 demonstrated that 52% of Crown Heights white residents were Jewish and that 24% of the total population was African American. *The New York Times*, probably using 1960 Census data, noted that 25% of the population in 1964 was African American. See Horowitz, 227 and Charles Grutzner, "Negroes Deplore Hasidic Patrols," *NYT*, 28 May 1964; "Suspect in Second Rape Sought As Slayer of Brooklyn Teacher," *NYT*, 2 June 1964.

[61] Douglas Robinson, "Hasidic Jews Use Patrols to Balk Attacks," *NYT*, 27 May 1964; Bernard Weinraub, "Night Watch in Crown Heights; Hasidic Patrols Search Shadows," *NYT*, 28 May 1964; *NYT*, 28 May 1964;

After five weeks of Maccabee patrols, Rabbi Schrage announced that crime in the neighborhood had decreased by about "90%" and that the group might be disbanded at the end of the summer. Mike Murphy, the New York City Chief of Police, indicated that if crime in Crown Heights had increased at all, the crime rate was still low in comparison to the rest of the city. "On our scale of rating, the incidence of crime there isn't very high," Murphy argued. "It's about average." In fact, during the 1960s, crime increased everywhere in New York City, in all boroughs, in white as well as minority neighborhoods. In 1961 there were 483 murders in New York. By 1964 the number of murders rose by over 30% to 637. In 1957 173,830 felonies and misdemeanors were committed in New York. By 1964, the figure more than doubled to 375,155.[62]

Police department statistics indicated that most of the violent crimes in New York were committed in minority neighborhoods, but that the overwhelming majority of the victims were African Americans not whites. Sociologists noted that the pervasive fear among whites that African Americans were likely to attack and murder them was unfounded. For example, according to police statistics, less than 8% of all murders in the city in 1966 were perpetrated by blacks against whites. "The white people yell the loudest when somebody gets raped or killed in the neighborhood," a veteran policeman explained. "But it's the Negroes that are getting hurt the most, and that's not because they're colored but just that they are living in the slums." Despite the evidence, fear of black crime seemed to capture the imagination of the city's white residents. [63]

"Suspect in Rape Sought As Slayer of Brooklyn Teacher," *NYT*, 2 June 1964; "Hasidim May Drop Roving Patrol Cars, *NYT*, 29 May 1964; "Racism Minimized in Crown Heights," *NYT*, 9 June 1964.

[62] R.W. Apple, Jr., "The Chief Policeman Talks About His Beat," *NYT*, 21 June 1964; Pritchett, 153.

[63] Sidney E. Zion, "Interracial Assaults," *NYT*, 18 April 1967.

Crime also played a role in the exodus of Jews from the Grand Concourse, a middle-income, predominantly white and Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx. By the early 1960s, after an influx of Puerto Rican and African American families from the surrounding neighborhoods that made up the South Bronx (Morrisania, Hunts Point, and Mott Haven), many Jewish families moved. By 1965, as the membership of local synagogues declined and several Jewish butcher and Kosher shops closed. Remaining residents blamed the exodus on the rise of crime and the influx of minority families. "A lot people moving away are simply afraid of integration," explained Edith Bigman, who was described by *The New York Times* as a young, married social worker. "Negroes are moving into the side streets and a lot of people who aren't admitting it are just plain frightened." Several elderly residents told of being afraid to go out at night and rushing back to the safely of their apartments as night descended. Some Jewish families, however, moved out for a higher standard of living. "The status for people my age group is to move to suburbia," explained Bigman. "The trend nowadays is to move to Kew Gardens," claimed Juliet Bublitsky, 21-year-old neighborhood resident. "You see, the girls don't want to live near his parents and he naturally doesn't want to live near hers. So . . . they move to Queens. Nowadays everyone's moving to Queens." [64]

A report issued by the American Jewish Congress in 1967, argued that white population was "overreacting to the Negro and Puerto Rican occupancy and is needlessly in a panic." According to the report, the African American population constituted only 15% of the 150,000 total residents. Many of the Puerto Rican and African American residents were not impoverished but were in the "small to stable income range." To halt

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[64] Bernard Weinraub, "Once Grand Concourse," *NYT*, 25 February 1965; Steven V. Roberts, "Transition Felt to Be Posing Threat to Stability of Area," *NYT*, 21 July 1966.

the out-pouring of Jewish residents, the report suggested, landlords needed improve and maintain the buildings of the neighborhood.[65]

Scatter-Site Housing Comes to Forest Hills

It is impossible to know how many Jewish families from these neighborhoods ended up in Forest Hills. During the 1960s, however, the population of Forest Hills increased by 15% while the Jewish identity of the neighborhood remained intact. A demographic study by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies estimated the Jewish population of the Forest Hills area at 66.5% by 1970. The relative safety and religious and economic homogeneity of the community must have attracted Jewish residents fleeing deteriorating neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn. By the 1960s, Forest Hills was also an overwhelmingly white neighborhood. Only .4% of 78,201 residents were African American and only 1.2% of the residents were listed as "other," which often denoted Puerto Ricans.[66]

One of the reasons for the neighborhood's racial insularity was its geographic boundaries that served as demographic moats making it difficult for those in lower economic levels and non-whites to cross over and establish roots in the neighborhood. The neighborhood resembled a triangular shaped strip in the center of Queens. The base of the triangle---forming the northern border---consists of the Long Island Expressway.

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[65] *NYT*, 21 November 1967.

[66] U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Census Tracts for Queens County, New York, 1920-1970*. Tracts included (for 1960) are numbers 707, 709, 711, 713, 713.011, 719, 721, 725, 727, 729, 731 733, 735, 737, 739, 741, 743, 745, 747, 757, 769.01, 771. In previous and later censuses, the tract numbers are different and in some cases tracts were consolidated, but the tracts are consistent to the street boundaries determined by Kenneth Dinin in *Queens Community Boundaries*, (Unpublished manuscript, Long Island Division, 1978) in the Queens Borough Library, Long Island Division, and in a joint project by the Queens Borough Public Library and the Sociology Department of Queens College to determine exact boundaries of Queens neighborhoods and the census data for those areas. The statistics cited in this dissertation were compiled by Susan Weber of the Sociology Department of Queens College; Census data the 1.2% figure is listed under "other" which was often used to denote the Puerto Rican population for a particular area.

The Grand Central Parkway---running parallel to Flushing Meadow Park---forms the neighborhood's eastern border, while Metropolitan Avenue and Union Turnpike form the border---at the tip of the triangle---in the south. To the west, Forest Hills is separated from the Rego Park neighborhood by a corridor created by 99th Street, Queens, Yellowstone and Woodhaven Boulevards.[67]

When Mayor Lindsay's scatter-site housing program was announced in 1966, Corona and not Forest Hills was the central Queens neighborhood slated for a low-income housing project. Corona was middle-class Italian American neighborhood of one- and two-family homes that bordered Forest Hills. Many of the simple wood frame and brick homes had been built after World War I by the owners, Italian immigrants, many of who were in the construction business. Corona remained a tight-knit Italian community, with many homeowners still living in the homes they built fifty years earlier. The oldest section of Corona, known as East Elmhurst, housed a sizable middle-income African American population. Although East Elmhurst was predominantly black, the area bordering East Elmhurst and Corona was racially mixed. "A real measure of integration exists here," a local newspaper intoned, "presenting possibly an integration model for the entire city."[68]

Whites in Corona, however, were vehemently opposed to public housing. In 1965, when the Wagner Administration proposed a small low-income project near the site of the Queens Hall of Science residents argued that the ten-story building was incompatible

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[67] Kenneth Dinin, *Queens Community Boundaries*, (Unpublished manuscript, Long Island Division, 1978) in the Queens Borough Library, Long Island Division. The boundaries listed by Dinin conform to those accepted by the City Planning Commission except for the southern boundary which follows the one used by the Queens Chamber of Commerce.

[68] "What Urban Renewal Means to Queens," *LI Post*, 22 July 1963; Deborah Orin, "Where We Live---Part II," *LI Post*, n.d., vertical file "Corona," Long Island Division, New York Public Library, Jamaica Branch; David K Shipler, "Queens Neighbors Trying to Stop Bulldozer," *NYT*, 28 May 1969.

with a neighborhood of one- and two-family homes. “These developments cater to a certain type of people,” Robert Tomeo explained. “We’re afraid they are going to bring crime and other things.” At the heart of the opposition, however, was the fear that an influx of low-income black and Puerto Rican families would trigger, in the words one resident, “exodus from Corona like you’ve never seen.” “People will just give up and move out,” argued Mrs. George Tamburrelli. “The projects would disrupt everything they’ve been trying to do to improve appearances.”[69]

The city cancelled the project near the Hall of Science, but a year later residents were fighting against the city’s scatter-site housing proposal. The project consisting of four 14-story buildings to be constructed on a plot of semi-vacant land on 100th Street and Lewis Avenue, in the heart of the Italian section of Corona, was much larger than the earlier project. In their opposition local residents argued that the project would lower property values, burden over crowded schools and that the plan for four ten-story buildings was incompatible with a neighborhood of one- and two-family houses. It was clear, however, the opponent’s real concern was the influx of African American and Puerto Ricans to the neighborhood. “We improved our lot by struggle,” Theresa Bria asserted. “The Negroes want everything for free. . . . We’d be better off on relief.”[70]

Corona residents’ fear that the project would launch the racial transition of their community was not unfounded. Most white New Yorkers viewed public housing as a disaster that inevitably brought in its wake welfare, crime and racial minorities. Racial distribution figures compiled by the Housing Authority for Corona indicated that 23.5% of the households surrounding the project site were occupied by African American

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[69] John Winocur, “Corona Project Opposition Grows,” *Long Island Star Journal*, 9 March 1965.
[70] New York City Planning Commission, “CP-19402,” 21 June 1966, in author’s possession; Steven V. Roberts, “Housing Project in Queens Scored,” *NYT*, 16 June 1966.

families. This factor contradicted the goal of scatter-site housing to build public housing in predominantly white areas that did not have the potential of triggering racial transition. A large African American presence near the proposed housing site, raised the possibility that if whites surrounding the project site moved out, African Americans would move into the vacated homes potentially creating an new area of racial concentration.[71]

While Corona residents attended Board of Estimate hearings at City Hall to protest the project, local politicians led by Borough President Cariello feverishly lobbied the Lindsay Administration to cancel the plan. They recommended that the City build a much needed high school at the Lewis Avenue site instead of the scatter-site project. The proposal was overwhelmingly supported by hundreds of members of local civic groups who attended a mass meeting to discuss the plan at the Queens High School auditorium. After weeks of negotiations Borough President Cariello and Mayor Lindsay brokered a compromise in November to construct a high school at the Lewis Avenue site in Corona and move the scatter-site project to a parcel of vacant land a few blocks away at 108th Street in Forest Hills Queens.[72]

Moving the project to Forest Hills made sense on several levels. To truly accomplish the goals of scatter-site a middle-income neighborhood that was more solidly white than Corona was needed and Forest Hills fit the bill. "[The compromise] locates the new North Queens High School in an area which will provide all the space necessary," Cariello said of the compromise. And it offered, "complete integration with the predominantly Negro Corona and Elmhurst neighborhoods and predominantly white

[71] NYCHA, "Population of Queens by Community and Color," n.d., folder 4, box 66B2, NYCHA Papers.
[72] "City Hosing Plan Stalled by Board," *LI Post*, 23 June 1966.

Forest Hills and Rego Park Neighborhoods, and it relieves the overcrowded Forest Hills and Newtown High School."[73]

Many in Forest Hills, however, believed that Lindsay's decision to move the project was based on the assumption that Jews, being more liberal than other white ethnics, would not protest as vocally as did their Italian American neighbors in Corona. While there is no evidence that Mayor Lindsay moved the scatter-site project to Forest Hills because it was Jewish, it was generally thought of as a liberal neighborhood. Pollsters attributed Lindsay's 1965 mayoral victory to strong support from liberal, middle-income Jews. Forest Hills voters, for example, supported Lindsay over Abraham Beame (who was Jewish) by over 6,000 votes.[74]

Jews rarely protested the influx of African Americans and Puerto Ricans to their neighborhoods. The racial tolerance of the low-income Jews of Brownsville, for example, was well known and probably contributed to the city's decision to construct several low-income projects there. Middle-class Jews were still the most prominent white activists in the civil rights movement. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), for example, lobbied for anti-discrimination legislation, published pamphlets extolling inter-racial living and sent dozens of inter-group relations counselors to changing neighborhoods to convince whites to remain and accept incoming blacks and Latinos as neighbors. Ten years before

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[73] "School Fight Victory, Shift Housing Site," *LI Post*, 3-6 November 1966 *LI Post*, 23 26 June 1966.
[74] Jewel Bellush, "Housing: The Scattered-Site Controversy," in *Race and Politics in New York,* Jewel Bellush and Steven David, eds., (New York: Praeger, 1971): 123; Metcalf, 22; Wendell Pritchett, "From One Ghetto to Another: Blacks, Jews and Public Housing in Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1945-1970," (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1997), 130; Peter Kihss, "How Voter Swings Elected Lindsay," *NYT*, 4 November 1965.

scatter-site housing was implemented by the Lindsay Administration, the AJC was pressuring the city to construct low-income projects outside of ghetto areas.[75]

During the 1960s, however, Jews grew increasingly divided in their attitudes on race. In 1963 to 1964, when the city attempted the integrate New York's public schools, Jews in Queens and Brooklyn joined with other whites to form Parents and Taxpayers (PAT) a group opposed to busing. With a membership almost half a million strong, PAT staged a series of well-attended pickets, sit-ins and boycotts that forced the city to scrap plans for all but four of the nineteen neighborhoods scheduled for school desegregation. While many of the leaders of local PAT chapters were Jewish, Jews also headed local organizations supporting school integration. The sociologists Kurt and Gladys Lang estimated that in Jackson Heights, Queens, a predominantly white neighborhood with a large Jewish presence, Jews made up the majority of activists in the groups that supported as well as those that opposed the integration plan.[76]

The split in Jewish attitudes towards race was also evident in the 1966 ballot initiative to weaken the civilian complaint review board, which investigated charges of police brutality. African Americans opposed the measure and demanded greater accountability of the police department for their often violent treatment of blacks. For most New Yorkers, the vote on the review board was a referendum on civil rights. Many Jews, who already associated the influx of African Americans into their neighborhoods with the rise in crime, supported the initiative fearing that strengthening the review board

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[75] Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," *Tikkum* 3, July-August 1988, 92; Bellush, 123; Pritchett, 130.
[76] Jerald E. Podair, "The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis: New York's *Antigone*," (paper presented at the annual Gotham Center Conference, New York, NY, October 2001), 6; David Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 32-33, 91; Leonard Buder, "Boycott of Schools is Still Being Planned," *NYT*, 21 January 1964; Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, "Resistance to School Desegregation: A Cast Study of Backlash Among Jews," *Sociological Inquiry*, 35, (Winter 1965), 99.

would limit the response of police. Journalists attributed the passage of the initiative to a "Jewish backlash," as traditionally liberal Jewish voters sided with their conservative Italian and Irish neighbors in opposing the review board. The majority of Jews from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens supported the measure, while the majority of Jews from Manhattan opposed it.[77]

Privately, the leaders of the American Jewish Committee fretted about the growth of anti-black feelings and conservatism amongst "outer borough" Jews. In a 1966 letter, AJC member Marjorie Stein suggested that the organization launch a major study of the growing division in Jewish racial attitudes. "Beyond the problems of identity and/or integration are the unbelievably complex problems of serious differences among Jewish groups religiously, internally economically, politically," Stein wrote.

> In this City with its huge Jewish population, there is no Jewish community. Much needs to the known about the un-connected Jews in Queens, for example, who form one of the mainstays of Parents and Taxpayers. The flight of Jews in the Concourse area of the Bronx . . . needs analysis and understanding. A survey of attitudes of New York Jews is sorely needed. Are some of them becoming increasingly conservative politically? How deeply rooted are anti-Negro feelings?

Stein's patronizing attitude towards "un-connected" outer-borough Jews typified that of the AJC leadership. The AJC was justified in condemning the racist attitudes expressed by some Jewish residents, but they conveniently ignored the complaints of crime and deteriorating living conditions that residents of declining Jewish neighborhoods had complained of for years.[78]

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[77] Rieder, 76-77; Podair, 5-6; Sidney E. Zion, "'Sleeper Issue' on Police Referendum Wakes Up," *NYT*, 30 October 1966; Paul Hofmann, "Review Board is a Central Issue as Candidates Court Minorities," *NYT*, 6 November 1966; "The Fight Goes On," *NYT,* 9 November 1966; "Eisendrath Finds More Jews Taking Part in White Backlash," *NYT*, 4 December 1966.
[78] Marjorie Stein to Israel Laster, "Suggestions for New York Chapter Program, Jewish Communal Affairs," 26 April 1966, folder Program 65-68, box 10 (347.4.125), American Jewish Committee Papers, Jewish History Center, New York.

The response to scatter-site housing in Forest Hills would once again reveal the divisions of racial attitudes in the Jewish community. The overwhelming response in opposition to scatter-housing reflected the attitudes of Jews who feared that the project would bring the kind of crime and social chaos they escaped when they moved to Forest Hills. A few days after the project was announced, dozens of Forest Hills housewives picketed in front of the Queensborough Hall offices of Borough President Mario Cariello. "People have fled from other areas to come here," declared Betty Spark, a local resident. "I was a social worker for the Department of Welfare for 25 years. There are a lot of good people on relief, and a lot of people I wouldn't care to associate with. When they urinate on the stairs and in the elevators, I don't care to know them."[79]

Four days later hundreds of Forest Hills residents chartered buses to the City Planning Commission meeting at City Hall where the plan for the project was to be reviewed. At the meeting, opponents alluded to over-development that reduced the neighborhood to a "concrete jungle" lacking parks and playgrounds and attacked the overcrowding in schools and subways the new project would cause. The local Assemblyman Herbert Miller, patronizingly repeated the claim that the city's plan would be unfair to low-income minority families because the "cost of food was atrociously high" in the neighborhood. "Before we moved to Forest Hills, we lived next to a low income project in Brooklyn," recounted Rose Entner. "One of my teen-age daughters was stabbed there. Let Mayor Lindsay build a low-income project next to his home . . . not in Forest Hills."[80]

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[79] Peter Kihss, "How Voter Swings Elected Lindsay," *NYT*, 4 November 1965; "Neighborhood Fights Back, Buses to City Hall Again," *LI Post*, 8-11 December 1966.
[80] George Douris and Hal Shapiro, "Housing Project Ignites Hot Debate," *LI Press*, 1 December 1966; *LI Post*, 8-11 December 1966.

Ethnic parochialism also affected the response against the project. Many believed that the project was being foisted onto Forest Hills because it was a Jewish neighborhood. At a Board of Estimate meeting held on a Friday, Board members postponed the vote finalizing the placement of the project in Forest Hills until that evening. The Board's move forced many of the Jewish protestors from Forest Hills---who had waited most of the afternoon to testify against the project---to leave the meeting early in order to arrive home before sundown to observe the Sabbath. Several protestors considered the Board's delaying tactic an attempt to silence Jewish opponents to the project, and the New York Board of Rabbi's considered requests to investigate the incident to determine if any anti-Jewish bias was involved in the Board's decision.[81]

The journalist Murray Kempton dismissed the complaints as thinly veiled racism and treated scatter-site housing as an extension of the city's integration efforts. "I felt for these women a hatred that cast out pity. Make no mistake: It was because they were Jewish," Kempton wrote of the protestors.

> It is not only that more has been done to Jews than to any other people in history, but that more is expected of them. These poor women are cast into a Forest Hills bricked over by real estate hustlers, thinking they're in the upper middle class and bawling like fishwives, thinking they're in the suburbs . . . They have been swindled and closed into a ghetto . . . I have never known a bigot who was not Jewish who was not disgusted to hear a Jew talk like a bigot.

Embarrassed by the demonstrations by Jews against scatter-site housing, the AJC, and several other Jewish groups including the American Jewish Congress, Hadassah and the Jewish Labor Committee, issued a resolution commending the city for approving scatter-site housing in Forest Hills. "The approval of the site constituted an endorsement by our

[81] Roy Metcalf, "Rego Park-Forest Hills," unpublished memorandum, ca. 1971, in author's possession, 8; *NYT*, 10 December 1966; "Board of Rabbis Considering Plea," *LI Post*, 15-18 December 1966.

City of the concept that the occupants of low-rent public hosing shall have the same opportunities available to the more fortunate residents of our community."[82]

While the overwhelming majority of Forest Hills residents opposed the scatter-site project, some supported the project and the goals of integration. Members of the American Jewish Congress pledged their support for Lindsay's scatter-site plan. At one of the Planning Commission meetings Judith Tuller, an AJC member and Forest Hills resident, spoke out in support of the project and was heckled by protestors. The most influential supporters of the project were the Rabbis of the area's Conservative and Reformed synagogues. The most eloquent and outspoken of the Rabbis was Rabbi Bokser of the Forest Hills Jewish Center. When the city announced the construction of the project in Forest Hills, Rabbi Bokser spoke out publicly in support of the project through his sermons and writings in the synagogue's bulletin.[83]

Copies of his 1966 sermons could not be obtained, but letters from the few congregation members who supported Bokser's controversial stand, made it clear that Bokser viewed scatter-site housing as a civil rights issue and believed that the Jewish community had a moral obligation to embrace the goals of integration. "It requires considerable determination for a Rabbi to speak on moral issues when bitter opposition exists in his own congregation," wrote Muriel Block Sonnenfeld. "The smokescreen of objections, are cloaked in a mask of racial hatred and prejudice. Rabbi Bokser spoke out

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[82] Murray Kempton, "The Women from Queens," *New York Post*, n.d., box 27, folder 4, Ben Zion Bokser Papers; "Resolution of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York," 12 December 1966, folder Forest Hills Materials, box 6 (347.4.125), American Jewish Committee Papers.

[83] This letter also appeared in the Forest Hills Jewish Center bulletin as an editorial. Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser to Borough President of Queens Mario J. Cariello, 28 November 1966, Folder 5, Box 27, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, Jewish Theological Seminary (hereafter JTS).

against this injustice in a magnificent sermon which provoked a storm of enraged phone calls and even obscene dissent."[84]

In a draft of an essay published in the synagogue's bulletin *The Message* titled "Integration is Coming" Bokser urged the congregants to support the goals of integration. "We shall be exposed to more contact with Negroes, in our places of business, in our schools in our home neighborhoods." Bokser wrote, without referring to the directly project.

> The initial impact will produce many incidents of tension, but in the fullness of time this will be a source of blessing to all of us. Integration will do more than solve a national problem of fierce urgency. It will give each of us unanticipated opportunities to widen our own understanding of life.

Despite being bombarded with letters and phone calls from outraged members of the synagogue opposing the project, Bokser urged Borough President Mario Cariello, not to submit to community pressure by having the project transferred out of Forest Hills. "The fears," wrote Bokser, "some of them the residue of old myths, which are the substance of all racial prejudice . . . must be combated wherever they arise. If we cannot overcome these obstructive forces to our essentially sound and progressive measures of public welfare, then I am saddened for what this means to our country . . ."[85]

The early stages of the Forest Hills controversy illustrated the deep divide in racial attitudes of Jewish New Yorkers. If the Lindsay Administration hoped that the support of the "liberal" Jews in Forest Hills would dampen opposition to the scatter-site project, they badly miscalculated. During the 1960s many of the Jewish families moving to Forest Hills blamed African Americans and Puerto Ricans for the increased crime and

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[84] Muriel Block Sonnenfeld to Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, 11 December 1966, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[85] Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, "Integration is Coming," n.d., folder "Miscellaneous Drafts," box 9, Ben Zion Bokser Papers; *New York Post*, n.d., box 27, folder 4, Ben Zion Bokser Papers Bokser to Cariello, 28 November 1966, Bokser Papers, JTS.

physical decline of their old neighborhoods. Combined with the consequences of uncontrolled high-rise apartment construction and the overcrowding of areas schools and public transportation facilities, Forest Hills residents viewed the scatter-site housing as the further erosion of their middle-class haven.

The city's initial response to the protests in Forest Hills laid the foundation for future discord. By attributing the opposition to scatter-site housing to racism, the Lindsay Administration and their allies, failed to consider the legitimate concerns of the majority of local residents and made it harder for the city to forge a consensus for a possible compromise. Five years later, when construction on the project finally started, the ethnic and political landscape of New York had been fundamentally altered. The political momentum behind the scatter-site housing initiative had ground to a halt while the relations between the Jewish community and the Lindsay Administration grew worse.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jewish Militancy and Protest In Forest Hills

Despite the overwhelming opposition to scatter-site housing, the Lindsay administration extended the program in 1967. In July, Mayor Lindsay announced that in addition to 11,000 units of public housing planned for slum areas under the Federal Government's new Model Cities program, another 3,500 units of low-income scatter-site projects would be constructed in several predominantly white, middle-income areas: three in Queens, two in Staten Island, two in Brooklyn and four in the Bronx.[1]

In announcing the expansion of the scatter-site program, the Mayor ignored the advice of his staff who recommended that the announcement be made by the Housing Authority. They wanted to avoid a repetition of the previous year, when angry protests by residents whose communities were selected for scatter-site projects, made the Mayor appear out of touch with middle-class whites. In making the announcement himself, Lindsay reiterated his commitment to the goals of integration and civil rights.[2]

As the ground work was being laid for the expansion of the scatter-site program, some Lindsay staffers questioned the wisdom of continuing the construction of low-income projects in middle-income neighborhoods. "No single program of the Mayor's has so deeply offended people as this one has," wrote Lewis M. Feldstein, an assistant to the Mayor. "The physical presence of the housing program provokes a visceral reaction against the Mayor that no amount of argument or soothing can erase." While advocates of

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[1] Steven V. Roberts, "8,000 Apartments in Slums Planned," *NYT*, 16 July 1967.
[2] Eugenia M. Flatow to Robert Sweet, "'67 Scatter-Site Program," memorandum, 16 May 1967, box Robert Sweet, Deputy Mayor, John V. Lindsay Papers (unprocessed), New York City Municipal Archives, New York.

the scatter-site plan assumed the program would disperse the overcrowded "ghetto" population, Feldstein argued that the scope of scatter-site housing was too small to accomplish this goal. The political costs of the scatter-site program were so great, Feldstein maintained, that the popular support the administration might receive in "ghetto areas" would not counter the resentment amongst outer-borough whites. "We are talking about changing peoples' style of life, not merely their housing," Feldstein wrote. "The political disadvantages are so great that we should proceed only if we really feel that this program is a meaningful way to destroy the ghetto."[3]

The Mayor and other Lindsay staffers ignored Feldstein's warnings. In a letter to a local Bronx politician Lindsay defended the scatter-site plan from the accusation that the projects would exacerbate white flight. "I only wish that the so called exodus of middle-class families was a problem unique to the Bronx community," Lindsay wrote. "Unfortunately . . . those residents who can will continue to flee to the suburbs." Lindsay also maintained that scatter-site housing was vital to improving the lives of low-income families. "I am sure I do not have to call your attention to the desperate shortage of decent housing for low-income families in New York City," he continued. "Unhappily, much of the existing public housing has been concentrated in a few areas. We believe that it is better planning to integrate our public housing, both economically and racially."[4]

In August, 2,000 demonstrators gathered at City Hall to protest scatter-site projects scheduled for Middle-Village, Queens, Riverdale, the Bronx and Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. The most vocal of the protestors hailed from Middle Village. Many were

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[3] Lewis M. Feldstein to Robert W. Sweet, "4/19 Meeting with Robin," memorandum," 18 April 1967, box D-H, Robert Sweet, Deputy Mayor, John V. Lindsay Papers (unprocessed), Municipal Archives.
[4] Mayor John V. Lindsay to State Senator Archie A. Gorfinkel, letter, 11 May 1966, folder 937, box 51, Subject Files, John V. Lindsay Administration Papers, Municipal Archives.

off-duty police and firemen and pictured holding up signs reading "Middle Village Does Not Want Low Rent Housing," "Keep Low Rent Project Out of Middle Village" and "Public Housing is Immoral." Inside the City Planning Commission Hearing, 304 speakers testified for fifteen hours. As the opponents of scatter-site echoed that the projects would lead to more overcrowded schools and transportation facilities, supporters of scatter-site retorted that the opponents' arguments were a cover for their racism. [5]

"None of these people protested when middle-income buildings went up in their neighborhoods," claimed the Urban League's Gladys Burger. "We are dealing here with plain bigotry, and we should recognize it as such." Responding vigorously to the accusation, a woman from Queens maintained, "What we don't want is the lower-class Negroes. We wouldn't be bothered by middle-class Negroes." "We worked and saved to get the money to buy our homes here and get out of the slums," another woman from Queens maintained. "Now the mayor wants to bring the slums back to us."[6]

In the face of widespread community outrage, the Housing Authority began to postpone or cancel several of the scatter-site projects. Of the fourteen original projects introduced in 1966, four were cancelled or delayed and two were tied up in litigation and two would be redesigned to accommodate less low-income families. Out of the eleven scatter-site projects introduced in 1967, only seven were new projects and three of these were eventually cancelled.[7] While the Housing Authority claimed that the cancellations and postponements had nothing to do with the protests, the Lindsay administration in

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[5] *Newsweek*, 14 August 1967, 22; Steven V. Roberts, "Charges of Bigotry Fly at Hearing on Housing for Poor," *NYT*, 3 August 1967.
[6] *Newsweek*, 14 August 1967, 22; *NYT*, 3 August 1967.
[7] Four of the eleven scatter-site projects introduced in 1967 had been originally introduced in 1966, but were postponed and re-introduced in 1967. See Edward Robin to John McGarrahan, "Scatter Site Program," memorandum, 30 August 1967; Department of City Planning, *Newsletter*, September 1967, 4, in folder Scattered Site Housing, box John G. McGarrahan, Housing Files P-T, 1967-1969 (unprocessed), John V. Lindsay Papers, Municipal Archives; .

1967 showed much more willingness to make compromises than they had the year before. In the Riverdale area of the Bronx, three scatter-site projects had been planned. After intense pressure from liberal Democratic clubs and local politicians loyal to Mayor Lindsay, all three of the Riverdale projects were cancelled. The Lindsay administration arranged for one of the projects to be replaced by a Mitchell-Lama middle income development. They also agreed that any future projects in the area would be limited to 100 units and "would be negotiated with planning and community groups, as well as the Borough President."[8]

Interregnum: Delays in Forest Hills

As the momentum of scatter-site housing began to slow, local real estate developers in Forest Hills worked behind the scenes to delay the project. Traditionally, developers in Queens opposed government funded housing on the grounds that it was unfair competition to private builders. The vacant lot that was the site of the Forest Hills project was highly coveted by local developers. Vacant lots that did not require the clearing of existing buildings had grown exceedingly rare in Queens and developers wanted to fight the precedent of government financed housing receiving the choicest lots. The developers also had financial motives for opposing the project. If the project was built and the neighborhood's whites fled, the value of their properties would decrease. The Lefrak Organization which operated the newly completed Lefrak City complex (only

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[8] Joseph P. Fried, "City Agency Drops Plans For Housing," *NYT*, 9 September 1967; Eugenia M. Flatow to Joseph Christian, "Scatter Site Program," memorandum, 7 December 1967; John G. McGarrahan, to Robert W. Sweet, memorandum, 5 October 1967; Richard Streiter, Director, Mayor's Special School Task Force to Albert A. Walsh, Chairman, New York City Housing Authority, "Lindenwood Public Housing Project," memorandum, 28 October, in folder Scattered Site Housing, box John G. McGarrahan, Housing Files P-T, 1967-1969 (unprocessed), John V. Lindsay Papers, Municipal Archives.

a few blocks north of the Forest Hills project site) and the other developers had invested heavily in several high-rise luxury and garden-style apartments throughout the area.[9]

In the case of the 108th Street site in Forest Hills, three local developers, Lefrak, Carol Management and Muss Development had all attempted to build on the property at one time, but found that wet subsoil conditions made the cost of constructing apartments unprofitable. Wet subsoil forced builders to construct more cement pilings at deeper levels to provide a solid foundation and drove up construction costs exponentially. Local developers exploited the subsoil issue to delay the project until the city lost its will or Federal funding for its completion. Samuel J. Lefrak, of The Lefrak Organization, argued that the opposition to the project stemmed not from "bigotry or prejudice," but the risk to "taxpayer money" for a project "that could never materialize." According to Lefrak, Federal law prohibited the Authority from building a project where wet subsoil conditions could cause "cracked foundations, sinking, etc.," on the project.[10]

In order to sort out the "discrepancy" over the subsoil debate, Borough President Cariello called a meeting of all the interested parties. Samuel J. Lefrak, representatives from Carol Management, Charles J. and Hyman Muss of Muss Development, the developer Jesse Segal, plus representatives from the Housing Authority and the Lindsay Administration attended the meeting at Cariello's office at Queens Borough Hall. The

[9] Jewel Bellush, "Housing: The Scatter-Site Controversy," in Jewel Bellush and Steven David, eds. Race and Politics in New York City, (New York: Praeger, 1971), 101; Sylvie Murray, "*Suburban Citizens: Domesticity and Community Politics in Queens, New York 1945-1960*. (Ph.D. dis., Yale University, 1994), 222.

[10] For examples of Queens real estate developers resisting public housing in Queens see, Sylvie Murray, "Suburban Citizens: Domesticity and Community Politics in Queens, New York, 1945-1960" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1994), 217-249; For references to local developers concerns for wet subsoil conditions at the 108th Street site see, "B.P. to Hear 108 St. Site Experts on Soil," *Long Island Post*, 24-27 November 1966; Metcalf, "Forest Hills-Rego Park," 3-5; Samuel J. Lefrak to Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, letter, box 27, folder 4, Ben Zion Bokser Papers, Jewish Theological Center, New York; Engineers from Carol Management seemed back up Lefrak's claim, stating that their company had attempted to construct an apartment complex at the site, but that the subsoil condition would have increased the cost of construction by several million dollars. See *LI Post*, 24-27 November 1966; Metcalf, 3.

evidence of subsoil costs presented at the meeting varied. Lefrak claimed foundation construction would approach $12 million. A separate report, however, filed by Carol Management put the figure at approximately $2 million. The Muss brothers, who were the current owners of 108th Street site, also disputed Lefrak's bloated figures and accused Lefrak of attempting to undermine the value of their property by making false claims about the subsoil conditions.[11]

Undaunted, Lefrak requested that Careillo call for the project to be delayed until a definitive study on the subsoil conditions be completed. Cariello, who was due to vote on the project at Board of Estimate public hearings the following week, announced that there was not enough evidence of unusual subsoil conditions for him to vote against the project. The data shared at the private meeting in Cariello's office demonstrated that most of the accusations of poor subsoil conditions were sketchy at best. This fact did not stop opponents of the project from raising the subsoil issue for the remainder of the dispute.[12]

Lefrak was believed by many supporters of the project to be the main financial backer to the civic associations and other local organizations working against the project. A few months following the meeting with Cariello, information regarding the possibility of wet-subsoil conditions was made available to officials at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In March 1967, the Housing Authority received word from Herman Hillman Assistant Regional Administrator for HUD---which provided federal funding for the project---expressing concern that abnormal subsoil conditions would mean that the project could not be brought under Federal cost limitations. By September, after the Housing Authority submitted a fresh battery of subsoil tests to HUD,

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[11] Metcalf, 4.
[12] Ibid., 5.

the agency demanded that any cost over runs in the foundation costs due to poor subsoil conditions be absorbed by the city and not the Federal government. The Housing Authority was forced to delay construction of the project and pay a private soil consultant to determine the costs of additional cement pilings. The consultants estimated that cost over runs to be $540,000; a figure well within Federal cost limitations.[13]

By October 1967, HUD approved the contract for the project with the additional cost overrun estimates and construction was slated to begin on June 7, 1968. More delays followed, however, when negotiations stalled over the purchase of the land for the construction site. The Housing Authority was negotiating with the Charles J. and Hyman Muss of Muss Development the firm claiming rights over the property. Although an independent land appraiser had estimated the value of the property at $2.3 million, the Muss Brothers estimated the value to be nearly $4 million. According to the Housing Authority, the company refused to negotiate in the expectation that the courts would award them a settlement closer to what they estimated to be the value of the property. The legal actions by the Muss Brothers forced the Housing Authority to obtain the property through condemnation proceedings, which resulted in further delays and the failure of the Housing Authority to meet the 1968 construction deadline for the project.[14]

More delays occurred during a controversy surrounding Ulrich Franzen, the architect chosen by the Housing Authority to design the project. Upon his hiring Franzen complained that to provide a "thoughtful" design for the project he would require more time. After missing deadlines, Franzen asked the Authority to request that the Board of Estimate modify the zoning for the project so that it would be a better fit with his design

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[13] Ibid., 11-13; Bellush in Bellush and David, 126, 133;
[14] Metcalf, 16.

concept. When Joseph Christian, the Authority's general manager, refused Franzen's request, he also reminded the architect that it was his responsibility to design a project with in the regulations already in place. The cost estimates for Franzen's final design exceeded the Housing Authority's budget by $5,000 to $8,000 per apartment unit. Franzen was fired in 1969 and a new architect was chosen to begin the design process from scratch.[15]

The Rise of Jewish Militancy

While the Forest Hills scatter-site project was delayed, relations between Mayor Lindsay and the city's Jewish community deteriorated. By 1969, many in the Jewish community openly disparaged Lindsay for exacerbating African American and Jewish tensions and for failing to denounce anti-Semitic statements promulgated by black activists. At the heart of Jewish anger was Lindsay's handling of the 1968 teacher's strike. The strike pitted the predominantly Jewish teacher's union the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) against African American advocates of community control of neighborhood schools. The strike broke out in Brooklyn's black Ocean Hill-Brownsville section, when the local school board, one of the first established under the city's experimental school decentralization program, attempted to fire ten white teachers, nine of who were Jewish. The UFT leadership, which had opposed the community control

[15] Memo from Albert A. Walsh , Chairman NYCHA to John G. McGarrahan, Assistant to Mayor Lindsay, "FHA Acquired Properties---Sherwood Village Apartments," 22 July 1969, in Box Assistant to Mayor John G. McGarrahan, Housing Files A-C 1967-69, Folder HUD, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives; Metcalf, 16-17.

experiment, eventually launched a series of city wide strikes to reinstate the fired teachers.[16]

Mayor Lindsay's support for the school decentralization experiment and his opposition to the UFT strike angered many of his Jewish supporters, who perceived him as opposing Jewish interests in favor of those of African Americans. The strikes, which heightened tensions between the black and Jewish communities, became more volatile when the UFT publicized the distribution of anti-Semitic leaflets at schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and other black neighborhoods. African American teachers at Ocean Hill-Brownsville who supported the community control movement accused Jewish teachers of committing "mental genocide" against black students. At schools throughout the city, picketing Jewish teachers reported of incidences of assault and anti-Semitic slurs from black parents. At a demonstration in front of the UFT headquarters picketers carried a coffin with a Menorah mounted on top threatening to punish striking teachers.[17]

Alarmed, the leaders of several Jewish civil rights groups including the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League, met secretly with Mayor Lindsay on two occasions in the Fall of 1968 to voice their concern over his "insensitivity" to the anti-Semitism expressed during the teachers strikes. When the Mayor was asked by Jewish leaders to release an official statement denouncing specific acts of anti- Semitism instead of issuing a general statement, he refused. When Eugene Victor, representing the Jewish Labor Committee, accused the Mayor of

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[16] For the best treatment of the teacher's strikes of 1968 and the issues defining the positions of striking Jewish teachers and African American community control advocates see Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Black, Whites and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). For conflicting interpretations of the meaning of the strikes see Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 301-351 and Joshua B. Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*, (New York: The New Press, 2000): 215-227.

[17] Bill Kovach, "Racist and Anti-Semite Charges Strain Old Negro-Jewish Ties," *NYT*, 23 October 1968; Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 223; Podair, 121, 124; Cannato, 328-329, 356.

rewarding "trouble-makers" like Rhody McCoy and other figures involved in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy, the Mayor, according to notes taken at the meeting, "became rather cold."[18]

A report appeared in *The Long Island Press* claimed that at the meetings Lindsay had demanded thatJewish leaders use their influence to "control" UFT President Albert Shanker and declared that he could not appeal to African American leaders on behalf the Jewish community because, "You Jews have made me use up all my Negro credit cards." *The Long Island Press* stories were soon denounced by Jewish leaders who attended the meetings as "grossly distorted," but the distrust between Mayor Lindsay and Jewish leadership was indisputable. [19]

> The American Jewish Committee's director Haskell Lazere claimed that Lindsay's behavior at the meetings was hostile and impatient. Will Maslow, the executive director of American Jewish Congress, who also attended the meetings, accused the Mayor of "whitewashing" the anti-Semitism expressed during the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy. "Lindsay," Maslow commented, "is unsophisticated in his dealings with members of the Jewish community for not realizing that they do not like to be addressed as 'you Jews.'"[20]

Barbara Chertock of the American Jewish Congress, in a letter to Deputy Mayor Jay Kriegel, observed that "some 'leaders' in the Jewish community" felt that "the city has been particularly insensitive to Jewish interests." These included problems with the city's anti-poverty program, which Jewish leaders believed excluded Jewish elderly and

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[18] Report from Ted Ellenoff, Re: Meeting at Gracie Mansion with John V. Lindsay, 12 August 1968, Folder: Mayoralty 1961-1973, American Jewish Committee Archive, Box 9, XXX, New York.
[19] "Lindsay Told Jews: 'Control Shanker,'" Martin Gershen, *LI Press*, 17 October 1968; "Behind the Story," James A. Wechsler, *The New York Post*, 24 October 1968 in Folder 1027, Box 57, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
[20] Notes by Haskell Lazere, Director of the New York Chapter of the AJC on a 16 September 1968 meeting between John Lindsay and the leadership of New York's Jewish community, Box X, NYC School Decentralization (Ocean Hill) 68-69 Folder, AJC, XXX, also quoted in Cannato, 372; Barbara Chertock to Jay Kriegel, 11, November 1968, in Folder 1022, Box 56, Reel 28, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.

Orthodox families; and the city's disinterest in providing financial restitution to Jewish small-business owners in Harlem and other African American enclaves who were looted during riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.[21]

In an October appearance at the East Midwood Jewish Center in Brooklyn, it would become clear that Mayor Lindsay had underestimated the Jewish community's rage over his handling of the teachers strike. Many of the 1,700 in the audience, who appeared to be United Federation of Teachers members, booed and jeered the Mayor when he claimed "that there had been acts of vigilantism by both" striking teachers and school decentralization activists. When theRabbi Harry Halpern tried to calm the audience by asking rhetorically, "Is this the exemplification of the Jewish faith?" he was greeted with shouts of "Yes! Yes!" As the heckling continued, Lindsay, still wearing a yarmulke exited the synagogue through a side door only to find a crowd estimated at 5,000 chanting "Lindsay must go!" When Lindsay got into his car the crowd surged past a wall of police spitting and screaming epithets. Some in the crowd threw garbage at the car as it pulled away.[22]

The alliance between black and Jewish civil rights groups was another casualty of the school strikes. While the refusal of black civil rights activists to denounce "black anti-Semitism" angered Jewish leaders, black leaders maintained that the charges were exaggerated. "There's not nearly the anti-Semitism in the black community that is suggested by they daily press," Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton claimed. They pointed out that half of the teachers hired by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school

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[21] Ibid.
[22] "Mayor Jeered at Jewish Center As He Speaks on School Crisis," *NYT*, 16 October 1968; Cannato, 370; Podair, 129; "Lindsay Booed by Whites in Brooklyn," *The Daily News,* 16 October 1968 in Folder 1027, Box 57, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.

district to replace strikers were Jewish. There were also widespread reports of striking teachers hurling racial slurs at black students and parents crossing picket lines to enter schools. Meetings between black and Jewish leaders sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and other groups failed to produce a meaningful dialogue on the issues of anti-Semitism and racism. It was decided that the meetings should be postponed until the school strikes ended.[23]

When the strike was settled in November 1968, Jewish leaders continued to blame Mayor Lindsay for exacerbating the conflict between blacks and Jews. Judd I. Teller, the sociologist and advisor to Jewish civil rights groups, accused Mayor Lindsay of exploiting the school strike for his own political gain. "Jews and Negroes, caught up in the throes of urban conflict, must be on the alert against white Anglo-Saxon Protestant attempts to regain political power in the cities by acting as brokers between Negro and Jew at the expense of both groups," Teller claimed. "Mayor Lindsay['s] . . . 'WASP' effort at mediation . . . resulted in driving Jew and Negro further apart."[24]

During the winter of 1968-1969, more charges of black anti-Semitism surfaced. James M. Hester, President of New York University, refused to fire Professor John Hatchett, who he had appointed to head the University's new African American affairs department, after it was disclosed that Hatchett published an article charging Jewish school teachers with the "educational castration" of black pupils. Leslie Campbell, a teacher at an Ocean Hill-Brownsville school and leader of the community control movement, read an anti-Semitic poem on the radio station WBAI. And the director of the

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[23] *NYT*, 23 October 1968; Irving Spiegel, "Jews Troubled Over Negro Ties," *NYT*, 8 July 1968; Maurice Carroll, "Reform Leader Fears Some Jews are Overreacting to Slurs by 'Hate-Mongers," *NYT*, 3 Febrary 1969; "Jewish Aide Says Black Leaders Ignore U.S. Negro Anti-Semitism," *NYT*, 7 January 1969; Freeman, 223.

[24] "Negroes and Jews Warned on Power," *NYT*, 10 November 1968.

Metropolitan Museum of Art Thomas Hoving, the former Lindsay administration Parks Commissioner, allowed the publication of anti-Semitic statements in an essay by a black school girl that appeared in the program for the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibit.[25]

In the midst of the controversies, two reports on bias and the teachers' strike were issued. The first, sponsored by the Lindsay administration, condemned the "appalling amount of racial prejudice" during the school strikes, evenhandedly admonishing black and white extremists for anti-Jewish and racist statements. The second report, issued by the Anti-Defamation League, claimed that anti-Semitism was at "crisis level in New York" and castigated city officials for failing to condemn it. Despite the wide chasm between the Jewish and Lindsay administration perceptions of the school strikes, Lindsay realized that in order to get re-elected he would need the vote of the city's Jews whose support in 1965 lifted him to victory.[26]

In a political about face, the Mayor swiftly condemned the "Harlem on My Mind" program as anti-Semitic. William Booth, an African American who chaired the New York City Human Rights Commission, who was chastised by Jewish leaders for his failure to investigate charges of black anti-Semitism during the school strike, raised the ire of Jewish leaders by publicly praising the exhibit. After intense pressure from leading Jewish organizations to oust Booth, Lindsay reluctantly allowed Booth's term as chairman to expire. Lindsay appointed Simeon Golar as head of the City Human Rights Commission. Golar, who was also African American, would later be chosen by Lindsay to head the Housing Authority, was a political ally of Alex Rose the head of the Liberal

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[25] Cannato, 359-360; Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York*, 143.
[26] Podair, 204.

Party. During his tenure at the Human Rights Commission, Golar made the improvement of Jewish African American relations his priority.[27]

The teachers' strikes brought out what the historian Joshua Freeman called the "mood of fear and assertiveness" that swept through the Jewish community during the late-1960s. "Urban riots and demands for greater black political power frightened many Jewish New Yorkers, who saw them as endangering their own recently achieved economic and political standing," Freeman explained. At the same time, the shorthanded victory by the Israeli Army over the combined Arab forces during the 1967 Six Day War filled Jews with a new sense ethnic pride. The Six Day War helped banish the stereotype of the "brainy but wimpish professional . . . scholar . . . [and] peace loving liberal" with the new of the image of Jews as fighters. The Israeli military victory put to rest the fear, perhaps in the recesses of the Jewish consciousness, of another Holocaust and the assumption that Jews would not fight back.[28]

Meir Kahane, a 37-year-old, itinerant Orthodox Rabbi, would try to harness the new sense of "fear and assertiveness" amongst the city's Jews for his political and financial gain. In the midst of the black anti-Semitism controversies of the teachers' strikes, Kahane established the Jewish Defense League (JDL). The goal of the JDL, according to Kahane, was to "fight anti-Jewish manifestations," and "physically defend Jews" who were either "too old or too poor" to move out of "changing neighborhoods." Black anti-Semitism, Kahane claimed, would embolden African American and Puerto Rican street criminals to increase their attacks against defenseless Jews. The JDL trained

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[27] Cannato, *The Ungovernable City*, 359.

[28] Freeman, 223-224; Jonathan M. Zeitz, "'If I am not for myself . . . :' The American Jewish Establishment in the Aftermath of the Six Day War," *American Jewish History* 88, (2000), 254-256.

in self defense tactics and threatened violence “if necessary to defend the Jewish community.”[29]

When a black militant group threatened to storm a Manhattan synagogue, Kahane and forty JDL members dressed in military fatigues and carrying chains and baseball bats stood guard at the entrance. In the wake of condemnation from Rabbis who opposed the JDL’s message of violence, Kahane responded, “We are a group that believes Jewish defense is not a thing to be ashamed of.” Kahane and the JDL were also implicated in violent attacks against Palestinian activists, Soviet attaches to the United Nations, and even the fire-bombing the Soviet’s Areoflot Airline offices. By 1970, it was estimated that the JDL had 4,000 members in the New York area and another 3,000 nationally.[30]

The historian Vincent Cannato observed, that Kahane viewed the JDL as a vehicle to challenge traditional Jewish civil rights groups as the leading voice in the Jewish community. He believed groups such as the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, were more concerned about the rights of blacks than those of their fellow Jews. He disparaged the leadership of these groups as “establishment Jews” who turned their back on the Jewish community by moving to the wealthy suburbs of Long Island and Westchester and leaving their less prosperous co-religionists behind in decaying inner city neighborhoods.[31]

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[29] Walter Goodman, “Rabbi Kahane Says: ‘I’d Love to See he JDL Fold Up. But---,’” *NYT*, 21 November 1971; Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane, From FBI Informant to Knesset Member*, (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 83-84. Janet L. Dolgin*, Jewish Identity and the JDL*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1977), 16-18; Irving Spiegel, “Rabbi Urges U.S. to Guard Worship,” *NYT*, 19 May 1969; McCandish Phillips, “Jewish Militants Step Up Activity,” *NYT*, 25 June 1969.

[30] Thomas F. Brady, “Three Arabs Beaten Near U.N. After Bus Is Attacked in Israel,” *NYT*, 23 May 1970; Alfonso A. Narvaez, “Bomb Damages Russian Offices Here,” *NYT*, 26 November 1970; Michael T. Kaufman, “Jewish Activists See Ranks Growing,” *NYT*, 25 May 1970.

[31] Cannato, 366-367.

To achieve his goal, Kahane was willing to exploit the racial fears of "outer-borough Jews," many of whom already viewed the liberal agenda of Jewish civil rights organizations with skepticism. "More and more we are being accused of losing touch with the rank and file of the Jewish community;" observed the American Jewish Committee's Selma Hirsh. "Of not serving the immediate needs of Jews in local communities; of being more concerned about the welfare of Blacks and other than we are of Jews."[32] In 1969, at meeting to discuss black and Jewish tensions, an AJC representative suggested that money be raised to assist local blacks in purchasing Jewish businesses located in minority neighborhoods. "I was annoyed to be challenged . . . as to why we were so concerned about helping blacks when Jewish agencies had as their primary function to assist Jews," an anonymous AJC member claimed. "The reaction from those present . . . [was] strong applause." [33]

Behind the Kahane's ethnic pride façade, lurked a deep racism. One the goals of the JDL, was to keep blacks Puerto Ricans out of Jewish neighborhoods. Kahane's own neighborhood of Laurelton, Queens, bordered South Jamaica, the borough's largest African American enclave, and had experienced a large influx of black families starting in the 1950s and continuing through the 1960s.[34] The idea for the JDL was conceived on the grounds of the Laurelton Young Israel Synagogue, where Kahane was a Rabbi. The journalist Robert I. Friedman, reported that Kahane was more threatened by the influx of African Americans into the neighborhood, than by African American anti-Semitism.

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[32] Selma Hirsh, "Memo: Jewish Militancy Roundtable," n.d., Box 8, Folder Jewish Defense League 69-70, New York Chapter 1955-1975, American Jewish Committee Archive.
[33] "Memo: New York Jewish Community Relations Council Annual Meeting 'Brotherhood in Action,'" 16 June 1969, Box 8, Folder Jewish Community Relations Council of NYC, NY 69-70, New York Chapter 1955-1975, American Jewish Committee Archive.
[34] The Community Council of Greater New York, *Queens Communities*, *Population Characteristics and Neighborhood Social Resources, Vol. 2* (New York: Bureau of Community Statistical Services, Research Department, 1958), 116-117.

"Laurelton homeowners didn't want Blacks in," claimed Morton Dolinsky, one of the JDL co-founders. "We knew what would happen to property values."[35] The typical JDL member was a middle-aged, lower- or middle-class, male Orthodox Jew who resided in a neighborhood experiencing a large influx of minority families.[36]

While almost every major Jewish religious and social organization condemned the JDL and Kahane, his message struck a chord in the Jewish community. Through his weekly column in *The Jewish Press*, Kahane attacked Mayor Lindsay, who he accused being indifferent to black anti-Semitism. The JDL's influence was felt even in liberal Jewish enclaves like Forest Hills, Queens. In February, 1969 when Lindsay was to speak at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, the JDL distributed leaflets to 1,000 residents who came out to confront the Mayor. The leaflets were a reprint of a Kahane article that accusing the Mayor of being soft on anti-Semitism. The low-income scatter-site project that was introduced by the Mayor three years ago was not an issue. In fact, most Forest Hills residents assumed that the city had given up its plans for the project. The issue concerning those who were gathering at the Forest Hills Jewish Center was what they perceived as Lindsay's unwillingness to confront black anti-Semitism associated with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy.[37]

At the meeting, the Mayor claimed that several black leaders had repudiated anti-Semitism and audience members stood to heckle. One man, Jack Newfield of *The Village Voice* wrote, "leaped up to shout 'liar' with such violence that his yarmulke fell off." Reading from leaflets distributed by the JDL, the audience demanded that Lindsay fire

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[35] Freidman, *The False Prophet*, 85.
[36] Dolgin, 20.
[37] Jack Newfield, "The Jewish Backlash & the Embattled Mayor," *The Village Voice*, 6 February 1969 in Folder 1022, Box 56, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.

William Booth, the African American chairman of the Human Rights Commission, and activists on the Ocean Hill Brownsville school board who had been accused of making anti-Semitic statements. To Newfield, the episode demonstrated the deep seated hostility towards blacks even amongst liberal Jews, as well as the destructive influence of Kahane and the JDL.[38]

But the fall-out of the teachers' strike only slightly damaged Lindsay's standing amongst Jewish voters during the 1969 election. Running in a three way race, Lindsay won the election with 41% of the total votes, and managed to receive 45% of the city's Jewish votes. In lower-income Jewish neighborhoods, Lindsay lost to the conservative Democratic candidate Mario Procaccino, but polled better in upper-middle income Jewish neighborhoods. Ironically, in Forest Hills Lindsay garnered 56% of the vote. Why did so many Jewish voters support Lindsay? Perhaps his opponent Procaccino was viewed by many Jews as too conservative and reactionary. Lindsay managed to mend fences with Jewish voters by speaking out strongly for Israel and making a public appearance with the charismatic Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. The impact of Kahane on the Jewish vote was minimal, but the strains of Jewish militancy would re-surface in Forest Hills again.[39]

Lindsay won the majority of voters in Forest Hills due to the delays with the scatter-site project. Residents assumed that the city had simply dropped the project, as it had done with several others in Queens. Years later, Queens politicians would argue that the Lindsay administration purposely slowed the progress of scatter-site housing to win hotly contested votes in Queens. The rumors, however, proved unfounded. The various

[38] Ibid.
[39] Cannato, 425-426.

bureaucratic delays experienced by the Housing Authority caused the postponement of the project's construction, not a calculated conspiracy. "Had Franzen [the architect of the Forest Hills project] delivered a usable set of designs," wrote the Housing Authority publicist Roy Metcalf, "the project would have been started on schedule." Mayor Lindsay benefited from the unintended mistake.[40][41]

The Housing Authority's plans for the project in the neighborhood were still very much alive. In 1970, the Housing Authority announced that 14,000 new units of public housing units would be constructed in 1971. This was a record number of new start ups for the Authority and it also marked the Lindsay administration's renewed commitment to increasing the number of subsidized housing units for the city. [42]

When Owen Moritz, a reporter for the *New York Daily News,* reviewed list of projects for the Housing Authority's ambitious 1971 agenda, he recognized the 108th site as the project that had caused so much tumult in Forest Hills in 1966 and 1967. In the story on the Housing Authority's construction goals, Moritz wrote, "the largest site is in Forest Hills, Queens, at 108th Street and 62nd Drive where 840 units are planned. The Forest Hills proposal touched off a hue and cry in that predominantly middle class area two years ago when Forest Hills was suggested by the Lindsay Administration as one of several areas needing economic integration."[43]

The Moritz article reopened the flood gates of community unrest in Forest Hills. Local residents and community leaders were shocked that the city still intended to construct a project they believed had been cancelled years before. "We thought it was a

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[40] Steven R. Weisman, "Public Housing Fought in Forest Hills," *NYT*, 21 February 1971.
[41] Richard Reeves, "Lindsay, Garelik and Beame Victors," *NYT*, 5 November 1969; Metcalf, 17.
[42] Metcalf, 15.
[43] Ibid.; *The Daily News*, 6 January 1971.

dead issue," claimed the leader of a local civic group that had attempted to halt the project during the 1960s. The debacle over the scatter-site housing project in Forest Hills would engulf the neighborhood and the city for the next two years.[44]

Forest Hills and the Scatter-Site Redux

The community protest movement that emerged in Forest Hills in 1971 was led by Jerry Birbach. A heavy-set man with thick sideburns and a loud booming voice, Birbach would become the most divisive figure of the Forest Hills controversy. He owned a home in Forest Hills four blocks from the project site and had lived in the neighborhood since 1956. A small-time real estate developer in Manhattan, he owned several apartment houses in Harlem and Chelsea. "He buys old tenements buildings, evicts the tenants, renovates the buildings and rents them at a higher rate," wrote Michael V. Gershowitz, a scholar of the Forest Hills controversy. "Enemies have branded him a 'slumlord.'" Charges of Birbach's unlawful real estate practices would surface later in the controversy, when he was tied to suspicious fires set in buildings he owned in which tenants were fighting their evictions.[45]

The 41-year-old Birbach claimed, perhaps disingenuously, that until he received a flier about a community meeting in January 1971, he had never heard about plans to construct the project. Birbach grew up in the once thriving Jewish ghetto of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Like many families who moved from older Jewish areas to Forest Hills,

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[44] "Selection of New York Housing Site Comes as Shock to Forest Hills," *LI Press*, 10 January 1971; Metcalf, 18.

[45] "Angry Families Hit Housing Plan," *LI Press*, 23 January 1971; James F. Clarity, "A Reluctant Militant in Queens: Gerry Birbach," *NYT*, 22 November 1971; Michael V. Gershowitz, "Neighborhood Power Structure: Decision Making in Forest Hills," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974), 48; Ron Hollander, "Tenants Call Fires Eviction Notice," *New York Post*, 27 April 1970; Fire Department New York City, "Bureau of Fire Investigation," 15 April 1970, copy of report in author's possession.

Birbach moved as Williamsburg was deteriorating and experiencing racial transition. According to Michael Gershowitz, Birbach's opposition to the project grew from of his experiences in Williamsburg and in the real estate business. Birbach was convinced that the project would lower property values and lead to the decline of the neighborhood.[46]

At the meeting residents were reminded of the "Fighting 69," the 69 Italian-American families in neighboring Corona who fought against city's the city's condemnation of their homes for a new high school and won. The Jewish protestors were told that if they fought as hard as their Italian American neighbors the city could be beaten. As local Assemblyman Herbert Miller denounced the project as "welfare housing," and recounted that he had opposed the project since 1966 he was interrupted by an angry Jerry Birbach. "Look Mr. Assemblyman, I don't care about 1966," Birbach boomed. "What are you going to do now? Lead us!"[47]

A small group of opponents to the project began to coalesce around Birbach. A week later, Birbach and his followers attended a meeting at a local Democratic clubhouse where he again castigated local politicians for failing to keep the community apprised of the project. At a chaotic meeting of the Queens Community Planning Boards, Birbach emerged for the first time as a public figure. When he and his group were declared out of order, Birbach rose and, claiming to be speaking for the rights of everyone in Forest Hills declared, "Let's go, we have no representation on Community (Planning) Board 6," and stalked out of Queens Borough Hall with his group of demonstrators.[48]

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[46] Gershowitz, "Neighborhood Power Structure: Decision Making in Forest Hills," 49.
[47] *LI Press*, 23 January 1971; Metcalf, 19; Gershowitz, 49.
[48] Gershowitz, 49; Metcalf, 20; "100 Protest Low-Income Housing in Forest Hills," *NYT,* 4 February 1971; John Franz, "XXX of Project," *LI Press*, 4 February 1971.

Birbach and his followers regrouped in the hallway, where they exchanged phone numbers and founded the organization known as the Forest Hills Residents Association (FHRA). Birbach was a charismatic leader, with a flair for political organization and a tight rein over the activities of the group. The role of the FHRA, according to Birbach, was to pressure Queens politicians to work against the project. To convince them that FHRA spoke for the entire Forest Hills community, Birbach's group canvassed the streets of the neighborhood, and in a few weeks, collected 23,000 signatures on a petition opposing the project.[49]

Perhaps Birbach's greatest political skill was his ability to bring media attention to his cause. "In order to command coverage, [Birbach] did things that were newsworthy," wrote Michael Gershowitz.

> Not a week passed without a Birbach-inspired parade, demonstration, rally or disruption. Every week, there would be something new. And every week, Birbach made the six o'clock and eleven o'clock television news reports and the front pages of the metropolitan dailies.[50]

The picketing of events hosted by Mayor Lindsay became a tactic perfected by Birbach and the FHRA. One of their first Lindsay pickets was at a reception the Mayor hosted at the Terrace on the Park Restaurant in Flushing Meadow Park, Queens. According to *The Long Island Post*, "protestors . . . drove to the gates of the restaurant, set up picket lines and began shouting chants at the many invited guests who were making their way into . . . the exclusive restaurant." Although Lindsay was not in attendance, his stand-in, Deputy

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[49] Gershowitz, 51; "Angry Foes of Housing Project Told City Isn't Delaying Plans," *LI Press,* 26 March 1971.
[50] Gershowitz, 51.

Mayor Richard R. Aurelio observed that despite the protests "we need housing in this city wherever we can find it and we've just got to live with that fact."[51]

Birbach estimated that the FHRA consisted of about 2,000 dues paying members. Considering that the population of Forest Hills was over 80,000, this is not a lot, but the ability of the group the produce 200 or more protestors at a given site once or several times a week gave the appearance that FHRA represented the entire neighborhood. Birbach and the FHRA had a powerful impact on local politicians. Within a few months of the establishment of the FHRA almost every local politician, including several throughout Queens and other boroughs were on record opposing the project in Forest Hills.[52]

In the early phases of the 1971 protests, Birbach, members of the FHRA and local politicians never explicitly referred to race when voicing opposition to the project. Race, however, was clearly an issue. The opponents were well aware that most of the tenants of low-income public housing were African Americans and Puerto Ricans, but in public statements they emphasized class not race as the major issue. "Subsoil conditions," "increased costs" and "overcrowded schools" remained vital to their rhetoric, but their comments focused on the rights of the "middle-class." According to State Assemblyman Herbert J. Miller the scatter-site program "victimized" the city's middle-class.[53]

Miller and other opponents also emphasized the incompatibility of having poor people placed in the center of middle-income neighborhood. "This whole project is a tremendous disservice to everyone," Miller claimed. "It's a disservice to the people who live here and to the ones who'll be brought in." City Councilman Donald R. Manes

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[51] "Foes of Housing Picket Lindsay Reception," *LI Press*, 13 February 1971; Metcalf, 21.
[52] Gershowitz, 54.
[53] *LI Press*, 23 January 1971.

termed the project "a fraud on the poor of this city," while another Councilman from Queens, Edward Sadowsky, speculated that a low-income project in the neighborhood might create conflicts between "low-income residents and those now living there."[54]

Although local opponents of the project substituted "white" and "black" with euphemisms such as "middle-class," "poor" and "low-income," to supporters of the project, the anti-project forces were clearly motivated by their opposition to integration and the prospect of having African American and Puerto Rican families for neighbors. Soon after the emergence of Birbach and the FHRA, the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development resurfaced to voice their support for the project. The Council, representing 21 different community, religions and civil rights organizations throughout Queens had been vocal supporters of the project since its inception in 1966. "Building of the development has been stalled for more than five years and it is long overdue," declared Herb Kahn, the Chairman of the Council. "Opposition to the development stems largely from a handful of petty politicians, who are willing to exploit bigotry and fear for their own selfish needs."[55]

A few weeks later, at a public hearing on the city's construction budget, Alvin Frankenberg, a Liberal councilman-at-large from Far Rockaway, Queens, confronted Assemblyman Miller, a vocal opponent of the project. Frankenberg asked Miller, who had been testifying for the construction of a school at the site, if opposition to the project in Forest Hills was motivated by the African American families moving into the development rather than overcrowded schools. Miller could only retort that the charges

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[54] Howard Reiser, "Manes Attacks Housing Proposal," *LI Press*, 11 February 1971; "Angry Families Hit Housing Plan," *LI Press,* 23 January 1971; "Low-Income Housing Projects Meet More Resistance," *LI Press*, 31 March 1971.
[55] "Civics Panel Praises Forest Hills Project," *LI Press*, 10 February 1971; Metcalf, 19.

were "absolutely false." To the opponents of the project, the charge of racism was trumped-up by the city to make them feel guilty. "I am a little guy," explained Judah Klein, president of the Mid Queens Community Civic Association. "We never raised the issue of unwanted poor families. It's the city that did---they're trying to shame the community into accepting something it doesn't want."[56]

In response to the controversy over the project and its undertones of racial bias, the Lindsay administration called for an "information session" to be held at the Rego Park Jewish Center. The Mayor's Urban Action Task Force, a group of Lindsay staffers dedicated to intervening in situations of racial unrest, was dispatched to Forest Hills to host the meeting and quell community fear. When the Task Force Chairperson, Bess Meyerson, informed the 900 residents crammed into the synagogue that, "As far as I know the city is determined to move ahead with the low income . . . apartments," the meeting almost turned into riot. Birbach and his group shouted down local supporters of the project who tried to speak and eventually commandeered the microphone. "This meeting is absolutely terrifying . . . it's become a mob scene," Meyerson exclaimed. "This kind of craziness divides the country." Eventually Birbach and 100 of his supporters stormed out in protest.[57]

The Housing Authority had taken a low key approach to convince Forest Hills residents that the project would not threaten the stability of the community. In an interview about the project that appeared in *The Long Island Press*, a Housing Authority spokesman outlined the Authority's positions to answer community fears. The subsoil

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[56] Howard Reiser, "XXXXX XXX" *LI Press*, 25 February 1971; "Civics Panel Praises Forest Hills Project," *LI Press*, 10 February 1971; Metcalf, 22-23; Steven R. Weisman, "Public Housing Is Fought in Forest Hills," *NYT*, 21 February 1971.

[57] "Angry Foes of Housing Project Told City Isn't Delaying Plans," *LI Press*, 26 March 1971.

conditions would not pose problems. Housing Authority engineers and an outside consultant determined that the design of the project---three 24-story towers and two smaller community buildings---would be physically and economically viable. Two community buildings, a childhood center and community center would be open to the entire community. The project would be designed to fit into the existing neighborhood and would feature plenty green spaces, trees and sitting spaces.[58]

The project would be integrated, but 340 of the 840 units would be for elderly tenants. “It is expected that overwhelming majority of the elderly tenants will be white,” the spokesman argued. The project would “improve the community in every way,” the Authority spokesman claimed. “We’re bringing social services, good architecture and rational integrated housing . . . It can only have a positive effect, both socially and economically.” Under the Housing Authority’s plan, the massive infusion of minority families would not occur. The ratio of minority families would be decreased by a high number of white elderly tenants. Also, the Housing Authority in earlier projects near predominantly white neighborhoods, would give priority to families living near the site of the project, which in the case of Forest Hills, was overwhelmingly white.[59]

The Housing Authority’s effort to reassure residents that the project would not trigger white flight was undercut by the vocal protests of Birbach and the FHRA. In an attempt to perhaps negotiate a temporary cessation to anti-project protests, the Housing Authority chairman Simeon Golar held a private meeting with Birbach, Joseph Walderman and other leaders of the FHRA. According to the Housing Authority public information director Roy Metcalf, the meeting did not go well:

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[58] Howard Reiser, “Low Income Housing Job to Start Soon,” *LI Press*, 10 February 1971.
[59] Ibid.

> Walderman's unctuous manner in dealing out racial insults [was] apparently too much for Golar to bear. When Walderman at one point said, 'But you don't know me,' Golar replied, 'I've known you all my life.' And that was the end of that, as far as behind the scenes conciliation went.

The meeting reinforced the view to Golar and other Housing Authority officials that the protests in Forest Hills were fueled by racism. Subsequently, the tactics of the Housing Authority became more aggressive. The project in Forest Hills would be promoted as a struggle between the forces of racial justice and of racial intolerance.[60]

To launch the new public relations campaign, Golar met with twenty Queens community leaders at the Latimer Gardens housing project. The project, which was slated to open in the summer in Flushing, Queens, was touted by the Housing Authority as an example of interracial public housing that worked. At the meeting, Golar announced that the community leaders had formed the Forest Hills Community Advisory Committee and would work to spread the word in Forest Hills that the project "would help rather than destroy" the community. The community leaders represented several churches, synagogues and civil rights organizations throughout Queens, including the NAACP and the Urban League.[61]

The following week, in an interview in *The Long Island Press*, Golar announced that "Come July we will start building the project, no matter what further obstacles are placed in our way." He also reassured the community that residents from the immediate area would have first priority to open apartments and that crime with public housing projects was less than in the surrounding neighborhood. Despite these facts, Golar charged, opponents to the project exuded "fear, misinformation and intolerance."

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[60] Metcalf, 23.
[61] "Coalition Formed to Support Low-Income Housing Project," *LI Press*, 6 May 1971.

> Leadership can take the high road of calling on the best in us and moving us toward creative enterprise for the common good, or the low road of fear and lack of knowledge. Some of the leadership has taken the low road. [62]

The Housing Authority followed up the series of interviews by distributing 10,000 copies of a broad-sheet in local newspapers, informing Forest Hills area residents of the facts regarding the size, design and population of the project. The supplement included a detailed rendering of the 108th site showing the community center, childhood center and playgrounds that would constructed on the grounds of the project. To promote a positive message of integration the supplement also included testimonials from local clergy and other community groups that pledged their support for the project. A drawing depicting an African American and white boy sharing a ball in the shadow of the project demonstrated the benefits of integration to the local community.[63]

The Housing Authority's public relations strategy seemed to provoke the opponents of the project to take a more militant posture. Birbach, angered by Golar's statements, accused him of fraud for allegedly covering up the high expense of the Forest Hills project and demanded Golar resign from the Housing Authority. "What bothers me," Birbach continued, "is that the city consults the community in places like Bedford-Stuyvesant and East New York about low-income housing but in Forest Hills they don't consult." Birbach's statement was the first reference to the theme that the city was more accommodating to African Americans than middle-income whites. It was a crude attempt to accuse Golar, who was African American, of reverse racism: favoring blacks at the expense of whites. Birbach's statements were followed by a protest march outside the

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[62] Seymour Marks, "Housing Project for Forest Hills, 'No Matter What,'" *LI Press*, 10 May 1971.
[63] Metcalf, 26; The New York City Housing Authority, "Special Supplement, The Housing Authority Journal," May-June, 1971, in author's possession.

Housing Authority offices in Manhattan. He had threatened a huge demonstration but only about thirty protestors showed up.[64]

A week after Golar's proclamation that the project would be constructed "no matter what," Birbach and members of the FHRA disrupted a City Planning Commission meeting held at a Junior High School in Forest Hills. Birbach marched into the auditorium that was packed with an audience of 500, with shopping bags full of what he claimed was a petition signed by 35,233 members of the community against the project. He then berated Planning Commissioner Donald Elliott and when Elliott refused to answer his question, half of the audience rose up and marched out of the room on Birbach's command. The group returned minutes later marching around the auditorium chanting, until scuffles erupted and police intervened.[65]

Joseph DeVoy, chairman of Community Planning Board 6 in Queens, and an opponent of the project told the Commission that opposition to the project was not based on prejudice, but rather the overcrowded conditions in the middle-class community. In reference to Golar, DeVoy added that he "resents anyone coming into our community and telling us something will be done no matter what the obstacles are." DeVoy's argument that local residents are not opposed to integration they simply are opposed to the idea of it being forced on them was an argument that opponents would use more often in the future.[66]

Another example of the Authority's effort to win the hearts and minds of New Yorkers to favor the Forest Hills project was at the formal dedication of the Latimer

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[64] Michael Iachetta, "Demand Golar Quit Housing Post," *Daily News*, 14 March 1971.
[65] Vito Turso, "Anti-Project Demonstration Jolts Forest Hills Meeting," *LI Press*, 21May 1971; "Forest Hills Homeowners Seize Control of a Planning Hearing," *NYT*, 21 May 1971.
[66] *LI Press*, 21 May 1971; Metcalf, 30.

Gardens project. Although the project was not part of Lindsay's scatter-site program, it was constructed in a predominantly white, middle-income neighborhood in Flushing, Queens. The complex of low-rise buildings, ten-stories high consisted of only 423 units. Although the project was a Federally-financed low-income development, more than half of the units would be set aside for elderly tenants, cutting the number minority tenants to only 30%. Considering the neighborhood was predominantly white, the overall impact of the project on integration would be minimal.[67]

In his dedication speech, however, Golar cited the "Flushing Remonstrance," a 1687 proclamation issued by the citizens of Flushing announcing their refusal to obey a mandate from the colonial authority to discriminate against a Quaker sect that had moved to Long Island:

> The citizens of Flushing of all religious denominations, rose up in a single voice, defied the government and risked imprisonment and even death to protect their Quaker neighbors. Now in 1971, in the nearby community of Forest Hills, the voice of discrimination is heard again. More subtle this time. . . . Some of those who raise their angry voices against a public housing project, not unlike the one we dedicate today are the very voices to which the Flushing Remonstrance was addressed many generations ago."[68]

When asked to respond to Golar's remarks, Jerry Birbach replied that "Mr. Golar is trying to create an issue of racism that doesn't exist." Joseph R. Waldman, one of the leaders of the FHRA countered that, "It is completely unjustified on his part to imply discrimination. What about Forest Hills, with its overburdened buses and schools?"[69]

Golar's attack on opponents to the project continued through the summer. In July, Golar appeared on the CBS television show "Newsmakers" and was asked if resistance to the project was racially motivated. "Oh, certainly some of it is," Golar replied. "I think

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[67] "Golar Quotes colonial Document in Defending Forest Hills Project," *NYT*, 13 June 1971.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Discrimination Denied in Housing Opposition," LI Press, 11 June 1971.

that a lot of it is fear, and many of the fears are unfounded. I think what we're seeing, to some extent, too is the results you can get with destructive and negative leadership." As the July deadline for the start of construction for the project loomed, a flurry of Federally sponsored investigations and lawsuits sponsored by the FHRA succeeded in postponing the construction of the project until November. [70]

Jewish Militancy in Forest Hills

Local politicians grumbled that Mayor Lindsay's decision to move the scatter-site project in Forest Hills was prompted by the belief that the Jewish neighborhood was politically liberal and would not protest the scatter-site housing projects as violently as had other ethnic groups in Queens. One anonymous local politician argued that the reputation of Jews as "bleeding heart liberals" was the reason the city had not cancelled the project in Forest Hills as it had done in other Queens neighborhoods:

> When the Germans squawked in Ridgewood they got their way with Lindsay, and the Italians in Corona won, too. The Jews, though, were the only ones to fail. Lindsay knew the sentiment was split in Forest Hills. The other ethnic groups got their way but the Jews were used.[71]

The assumption that many Forest Hills residents (if not the majority) were politically liberal was not inaccurate. In the 1965 mayoral elections, the majority of Forest Hills voters supported John V. Lindsay, despite his running against a Jewish candidate, Abraham D. Beame.[72] Despite the introduction of scatter-site housing in Forest Hills in 1966, Forest Hills was one of the few middle-income neighborhoods in Queens

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[70] Metcalf, 32; Metcalf, 30-32; John Franz, "Forest Hills Project Reviewed by Buckley," *LI Press*, 15 April 1971; "Forest Hills Unit in Secret Meet," *Daily News*, 27 May 1971; Michael Iachetta, Forest Hills Project to Start Despite Loss of a U.S. Loan," *Daily News*, 16 June 1971; Micheal Iachetta, "HUD 'Explains' About Rego Park," 23 June 1971.

[71] Jewel Bellush, "Housing: The Scattered-Site Controversy," in *Race and Politics in New York,* Jewel Bellush and Steven David, eds., (New York: Praeger, 1971): 123; Metcalf, 22.

[72] Bellush, in Bellush and David, 120.

to have a majority vote to reelect Mayor Lindsay in 1969.[73] In trying to explain the contradiction of how a neighborhood could support the Mayor in 1969 and yet protest so violently against the scatter-site housing project under construction in 1971, State Assemblyman Herbert J. Miller---a vocal opponent of the project---argued that Mayor Lindsay had tricked local residents. “It’s purely political,” contended Miller. “When the Mayor was running for reelection in 1969, he lulled these people into security and squelched any talk of this project. Now all of a sudden he starts it up again.”[74]

Despite their support of Mayor Lindsay, the overwhelming majority of Forest Hills residents opposed the scatter-site project. The most influential support for the project came from the Rabbis of the area’s Conservative and Reformed synagogues. The most eloquent and outspoken of the Rabbis was Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser of the Forest Hills Jewish Center. At over 2,000 families, the Jewish Center was the largest synagogue in Forest Hills and one of the largest Conservative congregations in Queens. When the city announced the construction of the project in Forest Hills in 1966, Rabbi Bokser spoke out publicly in support through his sermons, writings in the synagogue’s bulletin, as well as at public hearings and meetings.[75]

To make the project more palatable to local residents Bokser, suggested in a 1966 letter to Mayor Lindsay, that the city select a group of local citizens to advise the city on all aspects of planning the project including the “physical plans for the buildings” as well as the social planning that would assimilate the low-income tenants into the middle-

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[73] Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*, (New York, Basic Books, 2001), 438.
[74] Steven R. Weisman, “Public Housing Fought in Forest Hills,” *The New York Times*, 21 February 1971.
[75] This letter also appeared in the Forest Hills Jewish Center bulletin as an editorial. Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser to Borough President of Queens Mario J. Cariello, 28 November 1966, Folder 5, Box 27, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, Jewish Theological Seminary (hereafter JTS).

income neighborhood so they would gain "greater acceptance" in the community.[76] The chairman of the Housing Authority, Walter E. Washington responded to Bokser's request for local input positively. "With the active support of and ready acceptance by the responsible community leaders," Washington wrote, "the tensions and prejudiced opposition are greatly minimized."[77]

By 1971, however, Bokser was convinced that Housing Authority had ignored the efforts local leaders, like himself, who supported the project. "Several years ago this project was brought to our community. It aroused serious opposition," Bokser wrote to the new Housing Authority chairman Simeon Golar.

> Some of us, who supported the project and testified on its behalf at various hearings, eventually established a committee which sought to gain greater acceptance for the project in the community. For two years the project was dormant. Our committees became inactive and we assumed that the city authorities had decided to abandon the project. Now it has again been revived, but what disturbs us is to note that no provision has been made for a consultation of community representatives.[78]

Rabbi Bokser was particularly disturbed by the final design of the project, which emerged in 1970. The original design in 1966 called for a cluster of 6 buildings between ten to 12 stories and one 22-story tower to house 828 families. The new design, consisting of three towers at 24-stories, housing 840 families, seemed to Rabbi Bokser and opponents of the project to be too tall for the surrounding neighborhood.[79]

Bokser's complaint that the design of the project would overwhelm the neighborhood had some merit. The housing immediately surrounding the project site consisted of several six- and four-story private apartment complexes. But at 840 units, the

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[76] Bokser to Mayor John V. Lindsay, 4 December 1966, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[77] Walter E. Washington to Bokser, 12 December 1966, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[78] Bokser to Simeon Golar, 23 February 1971, Folder 6, Box 27, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[79] New York City Housing Authority, "Plan and Project for a Public Housing Project: 108th St.-62nd Drive Area, Queens, NY," 9 November 1966, in author's possession.

project would not be as densely populated as several private owned “luxury” high-rise apartment already built in the area. Rabbi Bokser’s frustration with NYCHA might have reflected his own inability to calm community fears that project would spur an exodus of Jewish families from the neighborhood. This fear had special resonance in Forest Hills. Many residents associated public housing with the influx of minorities, crime and the deterioration of Jewish neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn from which they fled.[80]

Rabbi Bokser received dozens of letters criticizing his support for the project and expressing those fears. “We, as fairly educated and experienced city dwellers, know that low-income and welfare people are known for housing a tremendous, appalling crime rate,” an anonymous Forest Hills resident wrote to Rabbi Bokser. “Many of us come from formerly Jewish communities in the Bronx and Brooklyn where an influx of low-income people meant that our children could not play safely in the street and grown men were afraid to go out after dark.” [81]

Max Behr, a long time resident of Forest Hills who had moved to the neighborhood in the 1940s, expressed similar fears to Rabbi Bokser. “In 1940 . . . there was no Forest Hills Jewish Center, nor Rego Park, nor any of the other small ‘shuls’ in this area,” Behr explained. “As the years went on Forest Hills became a very Jewish neighborhood. Many people bought their own little houses, so they can bring up their children properly and with some ‘Jiddishkeit.’ the area is now over crowded, the schools are on triple sessions, crime is all over, and you dear Rabbi you favor to bring into this neighborhood an element of people, who do not fit in here at all. It seems to me, that this

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[80] Bokser to Simeon Golar, 23 February 1971.
[81] Anonymous to Bokser, 25 October 1971, Bokser Papers, JTS.

area will be the next Jewish area on the way out, like Crown Heights, or all the other Jewish neighborhoods."[82]

"You foolishly remarked that there is no flight yet from our area," a distressed Forest Hills resident Sol Stein wrote. "Wait Rabbi, until the very first building is occupied and the beatings, the muggings the rapes and burglaries start and Forest Hills will become another Brownsville, East New York, Lower East Side or the Bronx where my family and I fled after several vicious muggings which one of my children has still not recovered from."[83]

The letters reflected the growing number Jews in Forest Hills and Queens who expressed their opposition to the project in the Jewish context. While Birbach and the Forest Hills Residents Association viewed the project as an attack against the "middle-class," to many Jews the project was a conspiracy to "destroy" the Jewish community. In June 1971, the city announced the construction of a long dormant, scatter-site, low-income project in Howard Beach, Queens. The project was dubbed "Lindenwood" because of its proximity to Lindenwood Village, a predominantly Jewish, garden-style apartment development. With the resuscitation of the Lindenwood project, there were three scatter-site housing projects under consideration (including Forest Hills and Flushing-Hillcrest), located in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods in Queens. [84]

The Queens Jewish Community Council (QJCC), a group that emerged during the 1968 teachers' strike, protested to the Housing Authority that scatter-site housing unfairly targeted Jewish neighborhoods and would prompt a mass exodus. The QJCC represented some 53 synagogues of all denominations, but the leadership was made up primarily of

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[82] Albert Behr to Bokser, 7 June 1971, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[83] Sol Stein to Bokser, 10 December 1971, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[84] *NYT*, 21 November 1971.

Orthodox Rabbis and community leaders. During the summer, several Rabbis and other representatives of the QJCC, met with Mayor Lindsay's Deputy Mayor Richard R. Aurelio, to explain the fears that scatter-site housing was arousing with in Jewish communities in Queens. The QJCC leaders left the meeting dismayed by the Lindsay administration's failure to recognize the seriousness of the situation. "[Aurelio] was surprised at the idea that people will run and communities will be broken up," Rabbi Elias Lauer, of the Orthodox congregation Young Israel of Briarwood, Queens claimed. "He said, 'As rabbis and leaders, can't you hold your people?'"[85]

Orthodox, more so than Conservative or Reform, congregations would suffer from an exodus of neighborhood Jews. To maintain their, lifestyle, Orthodox Jews required stores that supplied products in accord with Jewish dietary laws. Orthodox synagogues had to be within walking distance for congregants who were forbidden from operating machinery, such as automobiles, on the Sabbath. The Forest Hills area had a large Orthodox Jewish community. The neighborhood supported several Orthodox synagogues and Jewish religious schools or Yeshivas. The largest of the Orthodox synagogues in Forest Hills was the Queens Jewish Center. While Conservative and Reform synagogues in the area boasted more members, the Queens Jewish Center---located at 108th Street --was the closest synagogue to the low-income public housing site in Forest Hills. "The Orthodox Jews of Forest Hills do have a special problem," claimed the American Jewish history scholar Judd Teller. "In the past decade they invested heavily in building a network of institutions, and may even have over expanded. Perhaps,

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[85] Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, sermon, n.d., box 9, folder Papers and Drafts of Articles, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, JTS; "Jewish Council Blasts City on Low-Income Housing Sites," *LI Press*, 18 September 1971.

unlike other sections of American Judaism, they do not have the financial means to reconstruct these institutions elsewhere."[86]

In September, the Queens Jewish Community Council (QJCC), charged the Housing Authority with conspiring to destroy Jewish neighborhoods by targeting them for scatter-site housing. "Queens has the last large viable Jewish community in the City of New York," wrote Dr. Alvin Lashinsky, a Holliswood, Queens dermatologist and president of the QJCC. "And . . . we are concerned to see that this community, its synagogues, yeshivas and Jewish institutions shall not be destroyed as were the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn Jewish communities." Lashinsky warned that several new Yeshivas planned for Forest Hills, including the $5,000,000 Yeshiva High School, as well as a new synagogue planned for the Lindenwood neighborhood, could be jeopardized by the scatter-site projects.[87]

At the October Planning Commission hearing for the consideration of the Lindenwood scatter-site project, the QJCC and several other speakers representing Jewish community groups, denounced the project and spoke passionately of the "fear" Jewish residents felt living near housing projects predominated by African Americans. In a letter read before the hearing, Rabbi Maurice Simckes of the Howard Beach Jewish Center (one of the synagogues near the site of the project) charged that the project would destroy the Jewish community of Lindenwood. The neighborhood, insisted Simckes,

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[86] Michael V. Gershowitz, "Neighborhood Power Structure: Decision –Making in Forest Hills," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974), 54; Judd L. Teller, "The Forest Hills Controversy: Observations," *Congress Bi-Weekly*, September 24, 1971, 21-24.

[87] *LI Press*, 18 September 1971.

consisted mostly of "refugees who have fled from other parts of the city" that experienced a large influx of African American families.[88]

Simeon Golar the Housing Authority chairman, angrily denied the charges that Jewish neighborhoods were targeted for scatter-site housing. The QJCC claimed that out of the original eleven scatter-site projects announced by the Lindsay Administration in 1966, eight of the original sites were canceled by the city and the three sites remaining were all scheduled for middle-income Jewish neighborhoods in Queens. The full scatter-site housing record shows that Jewish neighborhoods in Queens were not targeted for scatter-site projects. In fact, by the end of 1971 there were a total of 19 scatter-site projects in various stages of planning in various ethnic neighborhoods all over the city. Two of projects, for example, were slated in the predominantly low-income, African American and Puerto Rican East Tremont section of the Bronx and another for the middle-income African American enclave of Baisley Park, Queens. Other projects were slated for Irish neighborhoods in the Bronx and an "integrated" lower-middle-class area in East New York Brooklyn.[89]

City Planning Commission members Gerald R. Coleman and Chester Rapkin, who identified themselves as "Jewish" members of the Commission, denounced Simckes charges as paranoid and ridiculed the Rabbi's suggestion that there was a conspiracy by the city to destroy Jewish communities.[90] The QJCC continued its attack, accusing Housing Authority chairman Golar of deliberately selecting only Jewish neighborhoods for low-income housing. Lashinsky also condemned the public housing program in

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[88] Maurice Carroll, "Planners Denounce Rabbi," *NYT*, 17 October 1971.
[89] Ibid.; Jonathan Kandell, "Opposition to Scatter-Site Housing Transcends Racial and Economic Lines," *NYT*, 6 February 1972.
[90] Ibid.

Queens, charging that low-income projects in Astoria and the Rockaways led to an increase "mugging, vandalism and terror" to the surrounding communities.[91]

Lashinsky's charges turned the spotlight on the QJCC and brought angry condemnations from Rabbis in the Forest Hills area who supported the project. Rabbi I. Usher Kirshblum, of the Kew Gardens Jewish Center, resigned from the QJCC stating that Lashinsky's rhetoric was fanning community fears. Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, of the Forest Hills Jewish Center, released a letter condemning the QJCC's campaign of encouraging Queens Rabbi's to speak out against the project in their High Holiday sermons. "If you had any concern for the facts you could easily have ascertained that low-income housing projects have existed for some years in Flushing (Latimer Gardens) and in Kew Gardens (the Pomonok Houses) and they have not had any negative effects on the communities," Bokser wrote to Lashinsky.

> . . . Among the people housed in these projects are Jewish families who attend local synagogues and whose children study in local religious schools . . . the peril represented by the low-cost housing projects stems very largely from the panic which is agitating some people in the neighborhood. Your communication is a contribution, not to calming the public, but to inflating the panic. Unless it is quieted, this panic may indeed precipitate the flight of people from our neighborhoods. Not the projects, as such, will be responsible for such flight, but irresponsible fear mongering to which your organization is contributing."[92]

Bosker also questioned the legitimacy of the QJCC to serve as the representative voice of Queens Jewish community. "You know very well that you represent but a small fraction of the organized Jewish community," Bokser charged. "I am sure that the vast numbers of responsible Jewish leaders must look with repugnance on your program of

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[91] "Jewish Divisions Deepen Over Low-Income Housing Projects in Queens," *JTA Community News Reporter,* 22 October 1971 in Folder 4, Box 27, Bokser Papers, JTS.
[92] Bokser to Dr. Alvin Lashinsky, 27 September 1971, Bokser Papers, JTS.

activity and reactionary ideology by which it is guided."[93] Lashinsky, however, refused to tone down his rhetoric, and claimed that the QJCC was a special interest group focused on the concerns of Queens Jewry, similar to the way CORE and the NAACP advocated for African American concerns, and that "the QJCC makes no apology for its partisan Jewish advocacy."[94]

> At the Anti Defamation League of B'nai B'rith's annual meeting, the national chapter voted overwhelmingly to pass a resolution in support of the low-income project in Forest Hills and its goal of integration. When the Forest Hills chapter of the ADL began to protest the resolution, the ADL leadership dismissed their fears and had them silenced. The ADL chairman Lawrence Peirez claimed that the Forest Hills residents had been "agitated out of all proportion into baseless fears that their neighborhood will be destroyed. "High crime and violence," Peirez continued, "are problems for the police, not for housing developers."[95]

Peirez's remarks further polarized the Jewish community, giving rise to host of more militant organizations that promised to take action in defense of the Jewish community. Peirez's remarks, gave rise to number of militant groups throughout the city. A group calling itself the National Jewish Defense Committee, which later changed its name to the Jewish Rights Council (JRC), claimed its aim was to aid Jewish communities under "pressure and threat." Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, a spokesman for the JRC, claimed that traditional Jewish civil rights organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee the Anti-Defamation League, "publicly supported the opposition to Jewish concerns."[96]

Another group, the National Jewish Community Security Council, claimed that it embraced "ethnic self consciousness" and wanted to "help preserve the security and

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[93]Ibid.
[94] Queen Jewish Community Council, *Newsletter*, November 1971, Bokser Papers, JTS.

[95] *NYT*, 25 November 1971.
[96] Jewish Rights Council, *"Community,"* newsletter, October 1972 in folder 3, box 27, Bokser Papers, JTS; "Wiesel Adds Name to New Defense Body," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, 17 December 1971.

character of Jewish communities and neighborhoods." In its statement of principles, the NJCSC also charged with traditional Jewish civil rights groups with demonstrating more interest in maintaining the image of "liberalism" than fighting for the needs of the Jewish community. Despite the extremism of the NJCSC's rhetoric its supporters included the famous writer and activist Elie Wiesel, who accepted the honorary presidency of the group.[97]

These groups did not espouse violence, but their message was similar to that of the Jewish Defense League and marked the re-emergence of Kahane's message of Jewish militancy. Bertram Zweibon, a JDL leader, pledged his support for the Jewish Community Security Council. And in a *New York Times* interview, Kahane claimed that the city's scatter-site housing effort was increasing Jewish militancy. "It's easy for the Jew in Forest Hills to be liberal with Mississippi," Kahane declared. "When a low-income housing project comes into Forest Hills, suddenly all these Jews that used to get up in the Forest Hills Jewish Center and say that JDL uses violence and they're bad, come over to me and say, 'Listen, if that housing project goes up, can you blow it up?'"[98]

Alarmed by the growing militancy of groups opposed to the project, Rabbi Bokser continued to speak out publicly in its support. In a sermon, he castigated the groups for making the false claim that the project would damage the Jewish community and for accusing public officials who supported the project of anti-Semitism. "Regardless of what happens to the project itself . . . the Jewish community will be the loser," lamented Rabbi

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[97] National Jewish Security Council, "Statement of Principles Adopted on 26 December 1971," and reprint of membership application for NJCSC, *American Examiner-Jewish Week*, 13 January 1972, 6, both documents in Folder 2, Box 27, Bokser Papers, JTS; Jean Herschaft, "Wiesel Adds Name to New Defense Body," *The Jewish Post*, 17 December 1971.

[98] Walter Goodman, "Rabbi Kahane Says: 'I'd Love to See the JDL Fold Up. But---,'" *NYT*, 21 November 1971.

Bokser. “For the extremist passions which have been aroused will linger on and grow more intense; and the hostility and dissension will plague us, not only here but throughout the country for years to come.”[99]

On the evening of November 18, 1971, the mixture of Jewish militancy and anger over the scatter-site project exploded. Earlier that day, the city announced that construction on the project would begin. After a raucous meeting held at the headquarters of the Forest Hills Residents Association, hundreds of protestors poured out of the meeting hall. Armed with torches and picket signs they marched to the corner of 108th Street and 62nd Drive, where a chain link fence surrounded the site of the new project. The mob hurled rocks over the fence through the windows of the construction trailers. Some yelled to burn the trailers down and hurled the torches. “If this was Harlem these trailers would have been burned long ago,” a protestor shouted. The torches burned out without starting fires, but the police had to call in reinforcements before the crowd dispersed.[100]

The story on the front page of *The New York Times* the day after the protest featured a photograph showing a man in a yarmulke throwing a torch. The image telegraphed to New Yorkers, was that the Forest Hills protests against scatter-site housing had eclipsed the parameters of white, middle-class backlash and was in some sense a Jewish issue. The image was also a strong reminder of the depths of Jewish militancy. For the next year, thousands of opponents and supporters of scatter-site housing demonstrated at the project site. It had become a powerful symbol representing either the

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[99] Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, sermon draft, n.d., folder Papers and Draft of Articles, box 9, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, JTS, 3.

[100] Murray Schumach, “Angry Crowd in Forest Hills Protests Housing Project,” *NYT,* 19 November 1971.

struggle for integration, racial and economic equality or the city's misguided attempt to promote the racial and economic transformation of a Jewish neighborhood.[101]

Local branches of the NAACP denounced the demonstrations as "racist in nature." Mayor Lindsay declaring the protests "deplorable," vowed that the construction of the project would continue despite community opposition. "The disturbances put this city to the test," the Mayor intoned.

> Of whether we have the power of our own convictions; whether we shall obey the law or whether we shall defy it; whether, finally, we will guide ourselves by rationality and truth, or whether we shall permit ourselves to be misled by misunderstanding and fear.[102]

Pledging that future FHRA protests would be non-violent, Jerry Birbach declared that demonstrations against the project would continue. Ten days after the riot, the FHRA staged its largest demonstration to date. Over 1,500 demonstrators surrounded the construction site carrying signs reading, "We Won't Let Lindsay Bury the Middle Class," "Too Much For Tax Payers to Bear" and "We Won't Let Adolf Lindsay Kill Forest Hills." Local papers described the FHRA not as a Jewish group of protestors, but as a protest group consisting mostly of Jews. The distinction was important, because the rhetoric of the FHRA tended to focus on middle-class issues such as high taxes, government waste and diminished living conditions. Groups such as the Queens Jewish Community Council argued that scatter-site housing was a Jewish issue and that the city

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Murray Schumach, "Housing Protest in Forest Hills Termed 'Deplorable' by Mayor," *NYT*, 21 November 1971.

by purposely targeting Jewish neighborhoods with projects would destroy Forest Hills and other Jewish communities.[103]

When the construction on the project started, however, the two groups seemed to merge. Fliers distributed by the FHRA calling for a mass rally in opposition to the project listed the names of the QJCC and several Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical organizations as co-sponsors. Another FHRA flier featured a re-print of an article profiling the Queens Jewish Community Council with a large headline reading "Jewish Council Blasts City on Low-Income Housing Sites." The protestors against the project clashed with marchers supporting the project at the construction site. Members of the Progressive Labor Party confronted the anti-project demonstrators by chanting "Racists!" FHRA members, who often marched behind American flags responded by singing "God Bless America." A few days later, anti-project forces attacked members of the Youth Against War and Fascism, who sported long hair and marched with raised fists chanting, "Decent housing the right of all the people!" No one was hurt in the scuffles, but police on horseback had to keep the two groups separated behind wooden barricades.[104]

In response to the violence in Forest Hills, the city's Board of Estimate voted to kill the scatter-site project slated for the Jewish enclave of Lindenwood in Howard Beach, Queens. The confrontations also galvanized civil rights supporters. A coalition of local Queens NAACP chapters and religious leaders organized a series of counter

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[103] "Of Picketing and Peace," *LI Press*, 29 November 1971; Fliers, n.d., folder 1, box 27, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers.

[104] Forest Residents Association, Flier with reprint of article published in *LI Press*, 18 September 1971 in Folder 2, Box 27, Bokser Papers, JTS; Vito Turso, "Forest Hills Confrontation: Tempers Flare, Fists Fly," *LI Press*, 6 December 1971.

demonstrations at the project site. Fliers announcing the demonstration called for a “Vigil of Welcome,” proclaiming that

> Now is the time to join together.
> Not in anger, but to welcome those who come to us for
> A decent place to live!
> A decent place to raise a family!
> A decent place to retire![105]

The threat of the Forest Hills controversy breaking out into Jewish versus black violence never materialized. Anti-project forces had left by the time Reverend Timothy Mitchell, of the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Flushing, led 500 protestors, mostly children, on a march along the Long Island Expressway that ended near the construction site under a banner reading, “Jamaica NAACP Supports the Forest Hills Project.” “We cannot sit by and let a band of racists block decent housing,” declared the Jamaica NAACP’s Richard Hanson.[106]

The Forest Hills controversy took on national dimensions when President Richard M. Nixon roiled the scatter-site debate. After failing in his attempt to have the Forest Hills project killed, the Republican Senator of New York James Buckley took his case against the project to the Nixon administration. Both Nixon and Buckley, facing re-election, jumped at the chance to attract middle-income Jewish voters away from the Democratic Party. After meeting with Jerry Birbach and other leaders of the FHRA, Buckley proclaimed that the President was “actively” studying the Forest Hills issue.

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[105] Glenn Singer, “Victorious in Housing Fight, Lindenwood Residents Pondering Other Issues,” *NYT*, 5 December 1971; Haskell Lazere, “Pragmatic Assumptions and Plans for 1971-72 New York Chapter,” 24 September 1971, Box 5, Folder Executive Board 1970-71, New York Chapter 1955-1975, American Jewish Committee Archive; Flier, December 1971, folder 1, box 27, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers.
[106] Vito Turso, “Another Rally: Project Foes Plan Protest in Lidsay’s ‘Back Yard,’” *LI Press*, 13 December 1971.

In response to the White House, Mayor Lindsay resolutely proclaimed that there would be "no compromise. No change in plans" to the Forest Hills project. Speaking at the dedication of a 2,300 unit low- and moderate-income project in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, that would house black, Puerto Rican and Jewish families, Lindsay declared that the project would prove that "people of every race" could "live together in peace."[107]

[107] Richard L. Madden, "Buckley Says White Housing is 'Actively' Studying Forest Hills Project," NYT, 8 December 1971; Richard L. Madden, "White House Says it Won't Intervene on Queens Project," *NYT*, 9 December 1971; Richard L. Madden, "Nixon Weighing Fate of Forest Hills Housing, Ziegler Concedes," NYT, 10 December 1971.

CHAPTER SIX
The Forest Hills Compromise: Liberalism in Retreat

Black and Jewish Polarization

A few days after demonstrators had vandalized the construction site at Forest Hills, Simeon Golar, the African American chairman of the Housing Authority and Jerry Birbach, the leader of the Forest Hills Residents Association which had sponsored the protest, appeared together for a televised debate on WNBC-TV. While Birbach repeated the familiar litany of complaints against the project, Golar contended that the underlying issue for opponents of the project was racism. Birbach accused Golar of using the charge of racism against the protestors as a cover for the "conspiracy and fraud" the city employed to construct the project. "We really ought to nail the nature of his anger," Golar responded. "Mr. Birbach is a terribly destructive person. We saw him on the front pages of *The New York Times* throwing torches."[1]

Birbach denied the charge claiming he had never carried a torch, but after he accused Golar of being anti-Jewish the debate devolved into a name-calling melee. A few days earlier, the city had issued Birbach with a restraining order prohibiting him from leading demonstrations that obstructed the construction site. Birbach was served on Friday evening, the Jewish Sabbath, and claimed it was planned purposely by Golar. After the show ended the arguing continued and the staff members of both men had to be separated by security. "I am pained by the shabby, destructive, yes, bigoted leadership that would deny decent housing to the poor people of New York City," Golar shouted

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[1] Michael T. Kaufman, "'Bigot' and 'Liar' Mark TV Clash on Forest Hills Project," *NYT*, 22 November 1971.

above the milling throng. "I am not the bigot," Birbach retorted. "I'm afraid Mr. Golar is the bigot."[2]

The television confrontation framed the debate in the context of racism versus integration and blacks versus Jews. The Lindsay administration was aware that the Forest Hills controversy had the potential of developing into a catastrophe similar the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville school controversy and teachers' strike that polarized the city for over a year. As police in riot gear and on horseback separated demonstrators at the construction site behind barricades, there was a possibility that violent confrontations between blacks and Jews in Forest Hills could ignite riots in other parts of the city. The day before the debate between Golar and Birbach was aired, an early morning fire-bomb exploded in front of a Forest Hills home. The Orthodox Jewish family living in the home was unharmed. Although police theorized the explosion had nothing to do with the housing controversy, the incident frayed nerves in the neighborhood and Birbach demanded police protection.[3]

In November 1971, as the Forest Hills controversy threatened racial violence, the Lindsay administration sought a compromise with opponents of the project. The early compromise plans involved the scaling back of the size of the project in exchange for guarantees that opponents would stop picketing. Lindsay also attempted to organize a meeting between African American and Jewish leaders. New York's crime surge coupled with racial tensions made the city seem more ungovernable and damaged Lindsay's

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.; For police presence see photo in Vito Turso, "Forest Hills Confrontation: Tempers Flare, Fists Fly," *The Long Island Press* (hereafter referred to as the *LIP*), 6 December 1971; Vito Turso and Hal Shapiro, "JVL Huddles with Foes of Forest Hills Project," *LIP*, 17 December 1971; Vito Turso and Michael Dyer, "Forest Hills . . . And Desolate Sounds of Silence," *LIP*, 23 November 1971; Jean Herschaft, "Leadership Cautious as Jews Fight Project," *Jewish Press & Opinion*, 26 November 1971.

standing even among liberal voters. More importantly, Lindsay was preparing to announce his run for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination in December. A peaceful resolution to the Forest Hills controversy and a brokered truce between the city's blacks and Jews would bolster Lindsay's image as racial healer.[4]

At the same time, the American Jewish Congress, claiming that Forest Hills residents raised "many legitimate concerns" regarding the project, urged the Lindsay administration to meet with neighborhood representatives and negotiate a compromise. The American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) supported the scatter-site housing program, but were alarmed by the torch throwing protests that appeared on the front pages of *The New York Times* and the resurgence of black and Jewish tensions.[5]

Days after the protests in Forest Hills, the AJC leadership met privately and offered to broker a compromise. Haskell Lazere, the director of the AJC's New York chapter, believed that the surge of militancy in Jewish neighborhoods in the outer-boroughs was a response to the influx of African Americans. "The Jewish community now looks upon the black community as the principle threat to its security and safety," Lazere wrote in a confidential memo. "As blacks move into neighborhoods or send their children to public schools there is an almost immediate exodus of Jews from both." The AJC's support for integration and the rise of militant groups such as the Jewish Defense League and the Queens Jewish Community Council, Lazere believed, undermined the

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[4]Lindsay changed his political affiliation from Republican to Democrat in August, 1971. See Stephen Isaacs, "Anti-Semitism May Help Lindsay Drive," *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1972; "And Still the Bitter Dispute Goes On," *NYT*, 20 February 1972.

[5] *LIP*, 17 December 1971; "Queens Protest Shows Split with Leadership," *The Jewish Post & Opinion*," 10 December 1971; *Jewish Press & Opinion*, 26 November 1971.

AJC's authority. If it wanted to remain in the forefront as the representatives of Jewish community, the AJC would need to be active in a compromise that pacified scatter-site opponents in Forest Hills.[6]

At the request of the American Jewish Congress and the AJC, the Lindsay administration's first attempt at reconciliation was to host a meeting between Jerry Birbach and other opponents to the project and leaders from the local chapters of the AJC, the NAACP and local Rabbis who supported the project. Lindsay, who had never met with the opponents, seemed to consider the meeting an act of good faith and did not offer any concessions. NYCHA chairman Simeon Golar left the meeting early and afterwards, steadfastly denied a compromise was in the works.[7]

Birbach was angered that the Mayor was not more conciliatory. Planning to announce his candidacy for the local State Senate seat, Birbach had hoped he would return to Forest Hills triumphant with an agreement for a smaller project and concessions for a new neighborhood park or express bus service. In response to Lindsay's snub, Birbach increased the intensity of protests. "If we have to, we'll win it in the streets," he declared at a FHRA rally. "If we have to arm ourselves to get tough, then we'll do it." After his speech, 300 demonstrators marched to the construction site and threw rocks, torches and paint and fought with police. When protestors stormed the Long Island Expressway to stop traffic the police called in reinforcements.[8]

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[6] *Jewish Press & Opinion*, 26 November 1971; American Jewish Committee, "AJC Emergency Meeting on Forest Hills," press release, 24 November 1971, folder Edward Moldover, 68-71, box 9 (347.4.125 AJC, CSD-125); Haskell L. Lazere, "Pragmatic Assumptions and Plans for 1971-1972 New York Chapter," memorandum, 24 September 1971, folder Executive Board 1970-71, box 6 (347.4.125, AJC CSD-125), American Jewish Committee Papers (hereafter AJC Papers), Center for Jewish History, New York; "The Queens Situation," *The Jewish Post & Opinion*, 17 December 1971.
[7] *LIP*, 17 December 1971.
[8] Ibid.; Vito Turso and Hal Shapiro, "Project Foes Try to Block Expressway," *LIP*, 5 January 1972; "Birbach Says, 'We'll Carry Arms Today,'" *New York Post*, 5 January 1972.

In an atmosphere of heightened unrest, a local organization calling itself the Forest Hills Neighbors announced at a press conference its tepid support for the project. Proclaiming the project a "fait accompli," the FHN leaders vowed to work with the city to "calm the passions and fears which have been aroused." Paul Sandman, the leader of the group, believed that the FHN represented the majority of Forest Hills residents, who rejected the message of Jerry Birbach and his "fear mongers" and the Lindsay administration for failing to take into account the community's needs when planning the project.[9]

"I think most people in Forest Hills don't like the project, but most feel it will be built," Sandman explained. "What do we do? Do we pack it in and run or do we try to make it work?" The group hoped to create a network of social organizations that would help absorb and assimilate the new, low-income residents moving into the project and reassure the community to prevent a mass exodus of middle-income whites to the suburbs. "We call for the present residents to stand firm," Sandman proclaimed. "If they panic and flee, all the things feared---increased crime, terror in the streets, declining property values---may very well happen."[10]

"I wouldn't be surprised if they were funded by the Housing Authority," Birbach claimed when asked about the FHN. The Housing Authority chairman Simeon Golar pledged his support for the new group and reiterated his assurances that less than 10% of the families moving into the Forest Hills project would be on welfare that at least 40% of the project's tenants would be elderly families. He also announced that he would be

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[9] Marsha Kranes, "Forest Hills Group Accepts Project as 'Fait Accompli,'" *LIP*, 6 January 1972.
[10] Ibid.; Peter McLaughlin, "New Group Would Pour Oil on the Forest Hills Waters," *The Daily News*, 6 January 1972; "Queens Project Picks Up Support," *NYT*, 6 January 1972.

willing to work with community representatives to establish a set of criteria for selecting tenants. Golar's concessions were quickly dismissed by project opponents. "As for Mr. Golar's promises, for a low percentage of welfare families and his claim regarding screening procedures, we say emphatically: 'Mr. Golar, we don't trust you,'" wrote Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt of the Queens Jewish Center.[11]

As Lindsay kicked off his presidential campaign in Massachusetts, FHRA members followed him with picket signs and heckled him at campaign stops chanting, "Forest Hills, Forest Hills . . ." They hired an airplane to sky-write "Forest Hills Says Dump Lindsay" over Miami while Lindsay campaigned in Florida and planned to rent a series of billboards with anti-Lindsay ads along Florida's highways. As it became clear to Lindsay's campaign staff that the Forest Hills controversy could damage his presidential bid, the Mayor redoubled his efforts for compromise. Publicly, Lindsay maintained his refusal to cut the size of the project. "If the Forest Hills project does not go up as it is currently proposed, it might mean the end of scatter site housing in the country," Lindsay proclaimed.[12]

Behind the scenes, however, the Lindsay administration continued to float trial balloons for an acceptable compromise. It was reported that the Eleanor Holmes Norton, the African American head of the City Human Rights Commission, contacted Alvin Lashinsky, president of the Queens Jewish Community Council, and offered that the Lindsay administration would reduce the size of the scatter-site project in Forest Hills if

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[11] Marsha Kranes, "Golar Gives Residents Voice in Picking New Neighbors," *LIP*, 20 January 1972; Joseph Grunblatt, "Forest Hill Project Opposed," *NYT*, 27 January 1972.
[12] Vito Turso, "Forest Hills Project Fight Follows Lindsay to Boston," *LIP*, 13 January 1972; James A. Wechsler, "Making of an Underdog," *The New York Post*, 14 January 1972; George Douris, "Forest Hills: A Major Issue in JVL Campaign," *LIP*, 4 February 1972; Vito Turso, "Hitting Lindsay Where it Hurts," *LIP*, 7 February 1972; George Douris, "'Lonely Without Pickets,'" *LIP*, 15 January 1972.

the QJCC agreed to support a scatter-site project in another Jewish neighborhood in Queens. The offer was refused.[13]

On February, the Mayor hosted a secret meeting at Gracie Mansion attended by his presidential campaign advisor and former Deputy Mayor Richard Aurelio, Human Rights Commissioner Eleanor Holmes Norton, the leaders of the Queens Jewish Community Council and other Queens Jewish groups opposed to the project and local politicians. The meeting got off to rocky start. Lindsay was angered when it was suggested that he had called the meeting in response to the heckling he had endured from Jewish opponents of the project in Florida. Rabbi Louis Bernstein, of the Orthodox synagogue Young Israel, in Bayside, Queens, who attended the meeting, claimed that the Jewish leaders warned the Mayor that demonstrations in Forest Hills by anti- and pro-project forces could escalate into racial violence and requested a 30 day moratorium on the construction of the project. The moratorium could provide a cooling off period when it would have been possible for the AJC to dispatch Inter-group relations counselors to calm community fears.[14]

Lindsay refused the moratorium request and suggested instead that he arrange a meeting between Jewish and African American leaders to discuss the Forest Hills controversy. Rabbi Bernstien discussed details of the meeting to AJC director Haskell L. Lazere. Both men expressed a deep distrust of Mayor Lindsay and felt that a meeting sponsored by the Mayor would only exacerbate tensions between blacks and Jews. During the 1968 teachers' strikes, Lindsay angered Jewish leaders who accused of him of

[13] Bernard Rabin, "Charge City Asks Forest Deal," *The New York Daily News*, 29 January 1972.
[14] Lazere to Gold and Samet, "Confidential," memorandum, 3 February 1972; Edward D. Moldover, President and Haskell L. Lazere, Director, New York Chapter, AJC, "Text of Telegram Sent to Mayor Lindsay," 11 February 1972, folder Forest Hills 1971-3, box 6 (347.4, 125, AJC CSD-125), AJC Papers.

being insensitive to Jewish concerns for refusing to condemn instances of anti-Semitic behavior by African Americans during and after the strikes. A similar meeting to promote racial understanding was organized by the Lindsay administration after the teachers' strike in 1969. Black and Jewish leaders traded accusations and insults and although they succeeded in discussing some substantive issues, the meetings had no impact on calming the racial tensions and made the Jewish leaders appear intransigent. Lazere and other Jewish leaders also resented being viewed by Lindsay as having influence over Albert Shanker and the predominantly Jewish United Federation of Teachers. [15]

"Bernstein is convinced, as I am," Lazere wrote after their discussion, "that whether consciously or not, the Mayor has been guilty of pitting group against group in our city," Another meeting would frame Forest Hills as a black and Jewish confrontation, Lazere argued, allowing the Mayor to ignore legitimate concerns of the Jewish community about Forest Hills and a host of other issues in which the Mayor sided with African Americans at the expense of Jews. These issues included the distribution of welfare funds and affirmative action quotas for civil service positions and city college admissions.[16]

No compromise deal was offered during the February meeting, but afterwards Lindsay's aides discussed compromise plans with individual black and Jewish leaders and Queens politicians. Eventually, a compromise deal similar to the one fielded earlier by Commissioner Holmes emerged. It called for the project in Forest Hills to be reduced

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[15] Martin Tolchin, "Racial Exchanges Mar Bias Talks of Leaders Here," *NYT*, 22 February 1969; Bill Kovach, "Racist and Anti-Semite Charges Strain Old Negro-Jewish Ties," *NYT*, 23 October 1968; "Negroes and Jews Warned on Power," *NYT*, 10 November 1968; Barbara Chertock to Jay Kriegel, 11 November 1968, in folder 1022, box 56, reel 28, John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
[16] Lazere, "Confidential," memorandum, 3 February 1972.

by least one-third. To make up for the loss of units in Forest Hills, a smaller project, in which half of the units would rented to the elderly, would be constructed in Lindenwood, a Jewish enclave in Howard Beach, Queens where another scatter-site project had been cancelled months earlier. Simeon Golar, who resisted the Lindsay administration's compromise efforts, grudgingly approved of the plan because it would increase the total number of scatter-site units by 100.[17]

In exchange for reducing the size of the Forest Hills project, Lindsay expected Queens Jewish groups to pledge their support to the Forest Hills and Lindenwood projects and possibly other scatter-site projects throughout Queens. The Lindsay administration, however, refused to consider the request of Queens politicians for local control of the design of the Forest Hills project, a set percentage of units set aside for elderly families and a fixed quota that would establish a "working mixture" of blacks and whites. Rabbi Bernstein reported that when he and other Jewish leaders present at the secret meeting were approached by Lindsay administration officials they turned down the compromise proposal outright. [18]

A week after the meeting, the Lindsay administration leaked word to the press that the Mayor was trying to arrange a meeting between black and Jewish leaders to settle the Forest Hills controversy. "Any compromise produced by such a meeting will be supported by the Mayor," an anonymous Lindsay official proclaimed. Lindsay had

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[17] Haskell L. Lazere to Bertram H. Gold and Seymour Samet, "Confidential," memorandum, 3 February 1972, folder Forest Hills 1971-3, box 6 (347.4, 125, AJC CSD-125), AJC Papers; Murray Schumach, "City Aides Seeking Compromise to Ease Dispute in Forest Hills," *NYT*, 2 February 1972; Murray Schumach, "Board Reluctant to Discuss Forest Hills Compromise," *NYT*, 18 February 1972; "No Compromise Now on Forest Hills," *LIP*, 20 February 1972; Murray Schumach, "Aides of Lindsay Evolve a Compromise Proposal Taking in Lindenwood," *NYT*, 17 February 1972; "And Still the Bitter Dispute Goes On," *NYT*, 20 February 1972.

[18] *LIP*, 20 February 1972

pledged to those attending the meeting that neither he nor anyone on his staff would comment on what was discussed. Enraged by Lindsay's attempt to pressure Jewish groups into a meeting with black leaders, Lazere and the AJC chapter president Edward D. Moldover, fired off an angry telegram to the Mayor:

> . . . a meeting is reportedly being arranged under your auspices of Blacks and Jews to discuss the project, as if this issue were one in which those two groups were as such the parties to the dispute. Such a meeting will inevitably result in still more public polarization between Jews and Blacks further heightening emotions and tensions in our city, which are already seriously strained.[19]

Rabbi William Berkowitz, president of the New York Board of Rabbis, castigated Lindsay's handling of the Forest Hills controversy as selling out the Jewish community. "We cannot sit idly by and watch vibrant communities destroyed by bureaucratic double talk," Berkowitz proclaimed.

> We cannot sit idly by and allow politicians in their quest for higher office to walk over the body of any community . . . Intentionally or not, those responsible for the decision to build in Forest Hills made grave errors . . . They have not been able to combine the principle of adequate, integrated housing with that of the preservation of ethnic entities and institutions.[20]

A few days after Berkowitz's remarks, a consortium of Jewish groups opposed to the project, including the militant Queens Jewish Council and the National Jewish Community Rights, announced that they would be willing to meet with black leaders. Still angered by Lindsay's leak to the press, the groups sensed that the America Jewish Committee's opposition to the meeting offered them an opportunity to supplant the AJC as one of the leading voices in the Jewish community. A flat out refusal to meet with

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[19] Edward D. Molover, President and Halkell L. Lazere, Director, AJC, "Text of Telegram Sent to Mayor Lindsay: Confidential," 11 February 1972, folder Forest Hills 1971-3, box 6 (347.4, 125, AJC CSD-125), AJC Papers; Murray Schumach, "City Aides Seeking Compromise to Ease Dispute in Forest Hills," *NYT*, 9 February 1972;

[20] Hal Shapiro, "Rabbi Demands Halt to Forest Hills Job," *LIP*, 10 February 1972; Murray Schumach, "Lindsay Assailed by Rabbi Leader," *NYT*, 10 February 1972; "Jewish Groups Rap Lindsay for Revealing Meeting Plan," *LIP*, 12 February 1972.

African American leaders would have made it appear that their opposition was prompted by racial concerns, especially after Rabbi Berkowitz's remark that the project would overturn the "ethnic entities and institutions" in the neighborhood. Although the Jewish groups wanted to meet with black leaders "without any interference of politicians," a meeting was tentatively scheduled at Gracie Mansion.[21]

Despite his efforts at compromise, the heckling at Lindsay's presidential campaign events grew louder. In Florida, hecklers yelled anti-project slogans along with, "Go back to Harlem!" Hecklers also accused Lindsay of being soft of crime and showing favoritism for blacks in language *The New York Times* claimed "was unprintable." "This is a highly dangerous situation," Lindsay replied when asked if he was acting "against the peoples' interest" in Forest Hills.

> Polarization has set in. We are working to ease the tensions without retreating on principle. We have offered 40% white senior occupancy and pledged to screen the occupants carefully. The people are fearful . . . of muggings, robberies and more serious crimes. We are trying to tell the people of Forest Hills to ease their fears, we will be careful . . . but to no avail, as yet.[22]

Protests continued in Forest Hills as well. Police employed wooden barricades and foot patrols to separate the pro- and anti-project demonstrators that converged on the constructions site nearly every weekend. During one such event, Reverend Timothy Mitchell of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Flushing organized a march of 20 African American school children in frigid weather holding signs reading, "We All Have One Father" and "Bigots Must Not Win in Forest Hills." The children spoke eloquently of the lack heat or hot water in their dilapidated apartments and they would like one day to

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[21] Murray Schumach, "Six Jewish Groups Suggest a Meeting with Black Leaders," *NYT*, 12 February 1972; Roy Wilkins, "Roots of Forest Hills Dispute," *NYT*, 25 February 1972;
[22] *LIP*, 4 February 1972.

move into the Forest Hills project. "I don't think Forest Hills is too overcrowded," Reverend Mitchell commented. "The poor people need housing and there is room in Forest Hills. All people have the right to live in decent housing."[23]

All talk of compromise was silenced on February 15, when State Supreme Court Justice Irving Saypol ruled that the city's construction of the project was illegal and should be halted. Judge Saypol ruled that since the original plan for the project in 1966 had been altered without a public hearing, the city had proceeded with the Forest Hills project illegally. The successful legal action, which had been brought against Simeon Golar and Mayor Lindsay by the Old Forest Hills Association, the oldest neighborhood association in the area, threatened to cancel the project completely. Queens politicians who had opposed the project now smelled victory and scoffed at Lindsay's compromise proposals.[24]

The meeting that had been scheduled between black and Jewish leaders was abruptly cancelled. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP was willing to attend out of loyalty to Mayor Lindsay, but was convinced by the AJC's Haskell L. Lazere to cancel. Lazere claimed Wilkins agreed with him that a "Black-Jewish meeting" would be more likely to heighten racial tensions. Wilkins was the only nationally recognized black leader willing to attend the meeting. Also, Judge Saypol's ruling had undermined the incentive for Jewish leaders opposed to the project to compromise. Faced with the prospect of a black

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[23] Peter McLaughlen, "Pastor's March Backs Housing," *New York Daily News Queens*, 9 February 1972; Michael Dyer, "Black Pupils on visit Plead for New Life at Forest Hills," *LIP*, 9 February 1972.

[24] The original plan for the project in 1966 which called for 828 units spread throughout seven buildings no taller than 22-stories, was altered in 1971to a 840 unit project consisting of three 24-story towers. See Walter Goodman, "The Battle of Forest Hills---Who's Ahead?," *NYT*, February 20, 1972 and "Court Halts Forest Hills Project," *LIP*, 16 February 1972; William Greaves, "Court Orders Halt of Forest Hills Project," *The New York Post*, 16 February 1972.

and Jewish conference that lacked legitimacy, the Lindsay administration cancelled the February 18 meeting.[25]

Forest Hills and Presidential Politics

Both Mayor Lindsay and Chairman Golar promised to appeal Judge Saypol's decision and were confident their appeal would be upheld. Golar announced that the city would continue building the project pending a decision on the appeal. If Judge Saypol's ruling stood, the project would be resubmitted to the Board of Estimate for re-approval, where it was sure to be voted out of existence. The day of Judge Saypol's ruling, Jerry Birbach and other opponents to the project flew to Washington, D.C. to meet with some of President Richard N. Nixon's top aides. They assured Birbach and his entourage that the president viewed scatter-site housing as an issue of "national significance."[26]

To the Nixon administration scatter-site housing was a form of "forced integration" similar to busing. In 1971, President Nixon pledged that his administration would not force communities to accept low-income housing against their wishes. Several suburban municipalities during the late-Sixties had accepted Federal funding to subsidize various middle-income housing developments while refusing to construct any low-income developments that would foster integration. The predominantly white suburbs of Blackjack, Missouri and Warren, Michigan claimed zoning laws prohibited them from constructing low-income housing in middle-income areas. Caught in the vice of Great

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[25] Haskell L. Lazere to Bertram H. Gold and Seymour Samet, "Forest Hills---Progress Report," memorandum, 17 February 1972, folder Forest Hills 1971-3, box 6 (347.4, 125, AJC CSD-125), AJC Papers; *NYT*, 17 February 1972.

[26] *NYT*, 12 February, 1972; Martin Tolchin, "City Seen Locked In on Forest Hills Project," *NYT*, 14 February 1972; Vito Turso and Michael Dyer, "Optimism in Forest Hills But Demonstrations Go On," *LIP*, 17 February 1972; Chris Bonastia, "Why did Affirmative Action in Housing Fail During the Nixon Era? Exploring the 'Institutional Homes' of Social Policies," *Social Problems* 47, (November 1, 2000), in *Academic Search Premier*, <http://web2.epnet.com.citation.asp>, 3.

Society civil rights legislation, Nixon's HUD Secretary George Romney was compelled to take legal action against these cities to force them to comply with Federal anti-discrimination statutes.[27]

Frustrated with enforcing civil rights statutes he opposed, Nixon denounced "forced integration in the suburbs" and tried to distance his administration from integration programs that were extremely unpopular with middle-income whites. "We're going to carry out the law," Nixon proclaimed.

> We are going to open up opportunities for all Americans to move into housing---any housing they are able to afford. On the other hand, for the Federal government to go further than the law to force integration in the suburbs, I think is unrealistic. I think it would be counter productive and not in the interests of better race relations.

The scatter-site controversy came to the attention of the Nixon administration when New York Republican Senator James L. Buckley requested that HUD Secretary Romney review the Forest Hills contract for any construction irregularities. When Romney reported that there was no legal basis for him to halt construction of the project, Buckley appealed directly to the Nixon administration who promised to "actively" study the situation.[28]

Like Buckley, Nixon faced re-election in 1972 and needed a political issue that would attract ethnic white voters who traditionally voted Democratic. Siding with the

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[27] Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (also known as the Fair Housing Act of 1968), mandated that the Federal government enforce the non-discriminatory construction policies of all municipalities receiving funding for subsidized housing. See Bonastia, "Why did Affirmative Action in Housing Fail During the Nixon Era? Exploring the 'Institutional Homes' of Social Policies," 3, 8-9, 13-15; Robert B. Semple, J r., "Nixon to Enforce Rights measures for U.S. Housing," *NYT*, 12 January 1972; John Herbers, "President Orders a Study to Devise Anti-busing Plan," *NYT*, 11 February 1972.

[28] Jack Rosenthal, "President Reaffirms Opposition to Forced Suburban Integration," *NYT*, 18 February 1971; "Transcript of Four Correspondents' Interview with President at the White House," *NYT*, 5 January 1971; Richard L. Madden, "Romney Promises Review of Housing Opposed in Queens," *NYT*, 17 November 1971; Richard L. Madden, "Buckley Says White House is 'Actively' Studying Forest Hills Project," *NYT*, 8 December 1971.

Forest Hills protestors meshed with Nixon's campaign strategy which blamed Democrats and liberals for the interests of African Americans at the expense of blue-collar and middle-income whites. NYCHA chairman Simeon Golar angrily denounced Nixon's interference in the Forest Hills controversy, blaming the White House for "encouraging" the violent torch throwing demonstration. "The real purpose of the Nixon . . . strategy is, of course, to make a white majority see a minority of the black the brown and the poor of American as the cause of all our problems," Golar declared in a speech at a civil rights conference in Atlanta. "Nail them as the nation's enemies, and in the process divert attention from the real problems and issues."[29]

Nixon, by instructing his staff to meet with scatter-site opponents only weeks from Florida's March 14 Democratic Primary, was not only giving opponents of the project moral support, but also delivering a political jab at Mayor Lindsay, a possible presidential rival who was also one the country's most outspoken liberals. As the Florida primary neared, the Forest Hills Residents Association intensified their campaign to defeat Lindsay. As the Lindsay biographer Vincent Cannato reported, many of the former New Yorkers living in Florida, were Jewish, especially those living in the Miami area. Many Jewish Floridians were kept abreast of the controversy through friends and family in New York. "Many of our FHRA members have been writing to friends and relatives in Florida informing them of our plight here in Forest Hills," Jerry Birbach announced. "We're certain they're getting the point and will dump Mayor Lindsay." At one point in

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[29] Richard L. Madden, "Forest Hills Dispute and Politics," *NYT*, 20 November 1971;; Richard L. Madden, "Nixon Weighing Fate of Forest Hills Housing, Ziegler Concedes," *NYT*, 10 December 1971; Simeon Golar, "Address of Simeon Golar, Chairman, NYCHA, First International Civil Rights Conference of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America," 3 December 1971, in author's possession..

the campaign a plane flew over Miami beaches trailing a sign reading "Lindsay Spells *Tsouris* [the Yiddish word for trouble]," and "No Forest Hills---Lindsay Must Go."[30]

Rumors emerged that Lindsay's campaign staff, headed by former Deputy Mayor Richard Aurileo, would exploit the demonstrations against Lindsay by Jewish protestors from New York, to portray Lindsay as a fighter for Anglo Saxon Protestants against Jews who were perceived by many "'white Americans' in Florida" as trying to control the election. On the March 14 Florida primary Lindsay was soundly defeated. He finished in fifth place with only 7% of the vote, well behind the winner of the Florida primary former Alabama Governor George Wallace who received 42% of the vote. Although they expected to finish the race far behind the white backlash candidate, George Wallace, Lindsay's campaign staff had hoped he would finish stronger and admitted that their candidate was "clobbered" in Jewish areas of Florida. "There has to be a rapprochement with the Jews or we've had it," an anonymous campaign advisor conceded.[31]

A few weeks later, after finishing a disappointing sixth place in the Wisconsin primary the Mayor dropped out of the presidential race and headed back to New York where the anti-project movement was gaining momentum. In Albany, the State Legislature was considering two bills that would effectively kill the Forest Hills project. The Knorr-Gallagher bill, sponsored by two Conservative-Republicans from Queens, would require all public housing projects not completed in five years to be returned to the

[30] Vito Turso, "Hitting Lindsay Where it Hurts," *LIP*, 7 February 1972; George Douris, "Compromise Question: Who Will Bell the Cat?," *LIP*, 27 July 1972; *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1972; Vincent Cannato, *Ungovernable City*, 517.

[31] *The Washington Post*, 17 February 1972; Martin Waldron, "Nixon Margin Big," *NYT*, 15 March 1972; Cannato, 517; Frank Lynn, "Lindsay Seeking Funds for Drive," *NYT*, 16 March 1972.

Board of Estimate for re-approval. Another bill sponsored by Democratic Assemblyman Herbert J. Miller, would require a county-wide referendum on scatter-site projects. While Governor Nelson Rockefeller did not endorse the legislation, he announced his opposition to scatter-site housing.[32]

"Belling the Cat:" The Compromise and Local Politics

With the prospects of the Forest Hills project fading Housing Authority Chairman Golar, filed the city's brief appealing Judge Saypol's ruling, claiming that if the decision stood it "would sound the death knell to public housing." The ratification of the Knorr-Gallagher bill by the State Assembly would make the city's appeal moot. At a City Hall press conference, a subdued Lindsay announced that he would ask Governor Rockefeller to veto the bill, but when reporters asked if he was willing to make concessions he added, "A compromise is better than nothing." It was the first time the Mayor had spoken publicly of a compromise, but he steadfastly refused to support any deal that scaled down the project by half and vowed to challenge the unconstitutionality of the law in the courts. "Scatter-site housing is still the policy of the nation," Lindsay proclaimed. "Or it was until the [Nixon] administration deserted it."[33]

Just as quickly as the tide had turned against Lindsay and advocates for scatter-site housing, the winds shifted once again. On May 4, the Appellate Court overturned

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[32] Frank Lynn, "Mayor Runs Sixth," *NYT*, 5 April 1972; Francis X. Clines, "Assemblymen Vote For a Referendum on Queens Project," *NYT*, 14 March 1972; "Wrong Answer for Forest Hills," *NYT*, 15 March 1972; Murray Schumach, "City Files Briefs on Forest Hills," *NYT*, 17 March 1972; Maurice Carroll, "Mayor Finds Pile-p of Problems on His Return," *NYT*, 16 April 1972.

[33] Martin Tolchin, "Mayor Indicates He is Willing to Compromise on Forest Hills," *NYT*, 4 May 1972; *LIP*, May 5 1972; Francis X. Clines, "Albany Votes Acts on Death Penalty," *NYT*, 19 April 1972 Francis X. Clines, "Assemblymen Vote for a Referendum on Queens Project," *NYT,* 14 March 1972; Murray Schumach, "City Files Briefs on Forest Hills," *NYT*, 17 March 1972; Francis X. Clines, "The Magic Words Were 'Home Rule,'" *NYT*, 19 March 1972; Francis X. Clines, "Mayor Runs Sixth," *NYT*, 5 April 1972.

Judge Saypol's decision ruling and nine days later, in a surprise move, Governor Rockefeller vetoed the Knorr-Gallagher bill. It is unclear why the Governor shifted his position so dramatically. Earlier, Rockefeller had announced his opposition to the scatter-site concept. He was pressured relentlessly by the Nixon administration to support Knorr-Gallagher and bills that weakened State supported busing initiatives as well as abortions. Two days later, Lindsay announced that he would appoint Mario Cuomo, a young attorney from Queens to "make an independent exploration of possible revisions" to the Forest Hills project and recommend a compromise plan. "The climate is just too destructive for our city and the future of our housing programs and community stability," Lindsay announced. "We must try yet another way to resolve the matter in fairness to all concerned."[34]

Cuomo's resume made him the ideal candidate for the job. Cuomo had built a reputation serving as a lawyer for neighborhood groups fighting the city's public housing plans. Cuomo was best known for working out the compromise that settled the long dispute between the city and the neighboring Italian-American community of Corona, Queens. The Forest Hills project was originally scheduled to be built in Corona in 1966, but after stiff community opposition and an agreement between Borough President Mario

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[34] Although there is no evidence of a deal between Rockefeller and Lindsay, the timing of the Governor's veto followed by Lindsay's compromise concession raises the point. See George Douris, "JVL Orders 2nd Look at Forest Hills Project," *LIP*, 18 May 1972; The Governor, like the Mayor, probably wanted the Forest Hills controversy to end and could have made a bargain with Lindsay that in exchange for vetoing the legislation the Mayor would compromise with opponents. Murray Schumach, "Mayor in Compromise Move, Names a Lawyer to Study Forest Hills Plans," *NYT*, 18 May 1972; "Rockefeller Vetoes . . . Albany Regresses," *NYT*, 15 May 1972; "Governor Rockefeller Draws the Line," and "On Forest Hills and the Busing Ban," *The New York Post*, 15 My 1971; Alfonso A. Narvaez, "Rockefeller Vetoes a Bill to Kill Forest Hills Plan," *NYT*, 14 May 1972.

Cariello and Mayor Lindsay, the public housing project was moved to Forest Hills and the Corona site was designated for a new high school.[35]

Corona residents were elated with the exchange until it was learned that 69 single family homes would have to be torn down to make room for the school. Cuomo represented the homeowners, who became known as the "fighting 69," in their struggle to have the high school switched to the Forest Hills site and the scatter-site project killed. When that effort failed, Cuomo worked out a compromise whereby only 15 homes would be demolished instead of 69. Some of the homeowners condemned the compromise as a sell out and campaigned for an end to the high school plans. Only a handful of houses were condemned in Corona, and the high school was never constructed. Ironically, in the early 1980s a low lying apartment complex housing senior citizens was built on the site.[36]

Cuomo's success in defending Corona stemmed from the close relationships he developed with homeowners who would be affected by the school. He portrayed Corona as an isolated, low-income ethnic enclave of elderly Italian home-owners, many of whom had built the houses themselves after purchasing vacant plots. His story attracted media stars such as Jimmy Breslin who wrote of Corona neighborhood as defenseless David battling with city an uncaring Goliath. In his campaign to keep a scatter-site project out of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, Cuomo emphasized that instead revitalizing the neighborhood the project would destroy its charm. "On . . . the site of the proposed project and the street which runs along the entire waterfront, old fashioned framed homes and mission styled restaurants add to the New England fishing village atmosphere,"

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[35] Mario Cuomo, *Forest Hills Diary: The Crisis of Low Income Housing*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 6-15.

[36] Ibid.

Cuomo argued in a legal brief. “It is one of the City’s greatest tourist attractions.” Peter Pan Playland, a local amusement park operated by a group of World War II veterans that attracted thousands of low-income children a year, would also be demolished. In Sheepshead Bay, Cuomo succeeded in forcing the city to cancel the project.[37]

To work out a compromise plan for Forest Hills, Cuomo announced that he would interview dozens of area residents and city officials to get the "views of everyone involved" in the struggle. At the end of six weeks, Cuomo promised, he would submit his recommendations in a report to Mayor Lindsay. Cuomo promised to explore every avenue for revising the project including making some of the units available to Vietnam veterans and middle-income tenants.[38]

Almost immediately after Cuomo began conducting his interviews Housing Authority Chairman Golar announced his opposition to any compromise that altered the size of the project. “We are concerned about the character that public housing has in the public’s mind,” Golar announced. “It is time we quit labeling . . . and begin to support public housing that is for both middle and lower-income classes.” Birbach, running for the local State Senate seat, was banking on community opposition to the Forest Hills project to defeat the incumbent Emmanuel Gold. The Queens Jewish Community Council, and other Jewish groups opposed to the project endorsed Birbach’s candidacy. State Senator Gold, however, was relying on a community-wide willingness to support a compromise to end the Forest Hills debacle. Gold had opposed the Knorr-Gallagher bill and openly challenged the contention that a majority of central Queens residents opposed

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[37] Mario Cuomo, *Forest Hills Diary*, 36, 111; Mario Matthew Cuomo, “Memorandum in Opposition on Behalf of the Committee for the Preservation of Sheepshead Bay,” 22 November 1967, box Robert Sweet, Deputy Mayor, D-H, Mayor John V. Lindsay Papers, New York City Municipal Archives, New York, 7-9.
[38] “Forest Hills Report in 6 Weeks,” *NYT*, 18 May 1972.

to the project and refused to ally himself with local opposition to the project. “This does it,” Gold said of Lindsay’s compromise announcement. “[Birbach] is a one issue candidate, and this kills his only issue.” Gold’s campaign distributed press reports of the instrumental role he played in convincing Mayor Lindsay to seek a compromise.[39]

Gold’s sharp political instincts were confirmed when he defeated Birbach by more than 3,000 votes in the Democratic primary election. Gold’s victory demonstrated not only rejection of Birbach’s demagogic anti-project stance, but also reflected community fatigue with the Forest Hills issue. When claiming victory Gold cautiously declared that his reelection was not a “referendum” on the Forest Hills project. Bitter in defeat, Birbach blamed his loss election-day irregularities, claiming that “voting machines were knocked down in areas where I was a favorite.”[40]

During the campaign, Birbach suppressed FHRA demonstrations, but after his defeat the vocal protests returned. Birbach and 100 picketers confronted the Mayor and Mario Cuomo at Jeantets Restaurant, where they were celebrating the success of the compromise reached over the city’s plan to construct a high school in Corona. While some of the protestors were Corona residents opposed to the compromise many more were opponents to the Forest Hills project. As Lindsay left the restaurant protestors broke through police barricades and spit on and kicked the Mayor’s car. Cuomo was slapped in the face by a demonstrator as he exited the restaurant. After the altercation, Birbach denounced Cuomo as a “fraud” and declared the compromise exploration a fraud.[41]

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[39] Robert Hanley, “Forest Hills Project: The Political Side,” *NYT*, 4 June 1972; Francis X. Clines, “Gold Puts Career on Line,” *NYT*, 23 April 1972.
[40] William E. Ferrell, “Challengers Vie for Albany Seats,” *NYT*, 21 June 1972; “Two Women Gain in Albany Drive,” *NYT*, 22 June 1972.
[41] Murray Schumach, “Corona Praises Mayor, Forest Hills Pickets Him,” *NYT*, 7 July 1972; Cuomo, *Forest Hills Diary*, 97-98.

On July 14, Cuomo issued his recommendations in a report to Mayor Lindsay. His compromise plan called for the project to be cut in half; reduced from three towers at 24-story towers to three 12-story towers. “It will look like a compromise,” Cuomo asserted. “Each side will receive half of what it wants.” In announcing his plan, Cuomo had harsh words for the Lindsay Administration: “It is a good opportunity for the Mayor to say, ‘I’ve made some mistakes---I’ve learned something in six and a half years of City Hall.’” Although cutting the size of the project would increase the overall cost of the project, the city should be willing to pay this price in order to stop what Cuomo feared there would be an exodus of middle-income Jewish residents from the neighborhood. “The vacancy rate has gone up,” Cuomo claimed, demonstrating that the Jewish exodus from the neighborhood might have already started. [42]

A closer study of Cuomo’s thirteen page report demonstrated that he was equally critical of the Lindsay administration’s handling of the controversy. “I believe events have now shown that the city tried to do too much too fast in Forest Hills,” Cuomo wrote. “In retrospect it now seems clear that it would have been better to move cautiously and only after the fullest possible discussion with the community. That did not occur.” To justify his recommendation that the project should be halved Cuomo favored the critique that the project’s size was too large and that the number low-income families it would bring to Forest Hills could turn the middle-class housing in the immediate vicinity into low-income housing. Whether or not the attitudes of low-income minorities the project would house would bring crime and decay to the neighborhood was besides the issue, Cuomo argued:

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[42] Owen Moritz, “Mediator Calls for Cut in Forest Hills Project,” *Daily News*, 27 July 1972; Martin Tolchin, “Forest Hills Site May Be Cut 50%,” *NYT*, 15 July 1972.

> After hundreds of hours of discussion, formal and informal with scores of Forest Hills residents, I am persuaded that unless this fear is in some manner mitigated the possibility that the project will be jeopardized by large numbers of people leaving Forest Hills is a real one . . . The city might, before long, be faced with a bizarre irony; it would then have created by the project precisely what it sought to avoid, another racially concentrated low income community.[43]

Simeon Golar immediately rejected Cuomo's compromise as "outrageous" and "manifestly absurd." He decried the proposal of cutting down the project by half as the "direct loss of 408 desperately needed homes for the working poor."[44] Golar and Cuomo had come to different conclusions about the roots of the community protest against the Forest Hills project long before Cuomo issued his report. For Golar, the motivation for the opposition to the project was motivated by racism. Cuomo, however, strongly disagreed with the idea that race was the motivating cause for the protests. "I don't believe it is true that the position of the opponents is motivated by bigotry or dislike . . . of blacks," Cuomo had asserted. "I don't think that's a fair charge."[45] For Cuomo the issue was class, not race. Forest Hills residents believed that the 840 low-income families slated to move into the project would "bring as its inevitable concomitant increasing crime, vandalism, exodus and deterioration," Cuomo stated. "This fear in turn, has created hostility . . . If you built totally luxurious units, totally occupied by middle-income blacks---lawyers, accountants, media people---I don't think they would move."[46]

Cuomo also maintained that white families had already started to move from their homes in anticipation of the project. Despite these assertions, the landlords

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[43] Mario Matthew Cuomo, "Report of Investigation Concerning Forest Hills Low-Income Housing Project," 25 July 1972, in author's possession, 4.
[44] Martin Tolchin, "Forest Hills Compromise Is Assailed by Both Sides," *NYT*, 27 July 1972.
[45] "Troy Vows to Halt Forest Hills," *The New York Daily News*, 22 May 1972.
[46] *NYT*, 27 July 1972.

of apartment buildings directly surrounding the construction site said they noticed no turnover. The project site was bounded by the Long Island Express way to the north, a 14-story apartment building and a two story-garden style apartment complex to the east, a six-story apartment building on the south and a seven story apartment building to the west. "We have not seen an appreciable turnover of apartments since the project was first announced," said Stanley Goldberg, director of renting for Carol Management, the firm that owned some of the buildings. A spokesman for Lenway Management, owner of the 6-story complex, also reported that the project caused no turnover in tenants. [47]

Denouncing the Cuomo compromise as "totally unacceptable" to the community, Jerry Birbach claimed the Forest Hills project was still "merely another project." Birbach demanded that the project be altered to a garden-style apartment for the elderly and that the government subsidize the dispersal of low-income residents in private apartments throughout the neighborhood. The NAACP also denounced the compromise as the abandonment of the scatter-site concept. "It's a little unusual that I should find myself in agreement with Jerry Birbach," stated James E. Robinson spokesman for the Queens chapters of the NAACP. "The NAACP feels there should be no substantial reduction in the size of the project . . . if the mayor is serious about a scatter-site program, he's going to have to stand firm on the Forest Hills site."[48]

After meeting with Lindsay to discuss the report, Cuomo announced that the mayor would not give his endorsement "unless he gets a clear picture of what Queens wanted." Almost every Queens politician who had opposed the project including Queens

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[47] Preson Layton, "Impact of the Forest Hills Project," *LIP*, 3 October 1972.
[48] *NYT*, 27 July 1972; "Liberal Hit JVL OK of Compromise," *LIP*, 28 August 1972; Hal Shapiro, "Birbach, NAACP Oppose Cuomo Compromise," *LIP*, 27 July 1972.

Democratic leader Matthew J. Troy and Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal, supported the compromise. But Donald Manes, the Queens Borough President, was not enthusiastic about the proposal. While Manes claimed it was a step in the right direction, he could not accept the compromise until he received a guarantee that more middle-class tenants would be allowed in the project. Manes' support of the compromise was crucial. As Borough President he had two votes on the Board of Estimate, which was charged with reviewing any changes to the project, and traditionally other Board members voted with a Borough President on any construction project in his home borough.[49]

Politically the Mayor could not afford for the compromise to fall through. If he announced his acceptance of the proposal before Manes gave his blessing, it could go down to defeat at the Board of Estimate. While the Mayor waited for Manes and other Queens politicians to discuss the details of report, Cuomo urged the officials to come to an agreement quickly before the tensions in Forest Hills once again boiled over. A few weeks later, after conferring with Manes, Mayor Lindsay announced that he "reluctantly" accepted Cuomo's compromise plan. For his support of the plan, Manes demanded that the Mayor agree to open hearings where changes to the project could be discussed with direct community input. "The tragedy of Forest Hills is that decisions were made where the community felt it was not consulted," Manes claimed. "This will never happen again during my administration in Queens."[50]

The very act of accepting the compromise plan undercut Lindsay's political principles. By endorsing the compromise Lindsay would be accepting Manes' vision for

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[49] Maurice Carroll, "Forest Hills Mediator Urges A Decision on Compromise," *NYT*, 11 July 1972; "Manes' Kick: Mayor Uses Forest Hills as 'Political Football," *LIP*, 13 August 1972; *LIP*, 27 July 1972.
[50] LIP, 27 July 29 1972; Howard Reiser, "Manes Wants Mid-Income Units in Forest Hills," *LIP*, 21 August 1972.

what the project would look like. The Mayor would also be accepting the blame for the mishandling of the controversy that Cuomo placed directly on his shoulders. Lindsay would also lose the support of NAACP and other African American groups who supported the project. At the time the report was released, Lindsay's political future was flux. After his defeat for the Democratic presidential nomination, there was widespread speculation of whether he would run for a third Mayoral term or make run for Governor.[51]

As Manes skillfully steered the Forest Hills compromise through the various city commissions, he would lobby for the attachment of various provisos to Cuomo's plan insuring that more of the apartments would be set aside for middle-income families and the elderly. The changes to Cuomo's plan would also ensure fewer African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the project. Whites constituted the majority of tenants in the Housing Authority's middle-income projects, while elderly families consisted of one or two members without children, chosen from a one-mile radius of project site. Manes would perform his political maneuvering quietly, behind closed doors, but would announce his alterations to the project publicly to build consensus gradually. By handling the matter in the public view, Manes hoped to convince the community that they had nothing to fear from the project and prevent an exodus of middle-income whites from the area.[52]

As more of the city's politicians lined up to praise Cuomo's compromise plan, a schedule was established for a series of public hearings before the City Planning

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[51] *LIP*, 28 August 1972; Cuomo, "Report of Investigation Concerning Forest Hills Low-Income Housing Project," 4; *NYT*, 15 July 1972; *Daily News*, 27 July 1972.

[52] *LIP*, 21 August 1972.

Commission and the Board of Estimate. Several civil rights groups including the Flushing NAACP, Metropolitan Council on Housing and the Queens County Liberal Party signed a statement castigating Mayor Lindsay. Supporters of the project realized that cutting the project in half and the additional changes by Manes would mean fewer blacks and Puerto Ricans and would undermine the goal of scatter-site housing to promote racial and economic integration. "We shall make our voices heard at these hearings and in the streets," proclaimed the statement. "Just as we will not kneel down and kiss the feet of racists in Alabama, we will not kneel down before a racist in Forest Hills."[53]

On September 5, Manes announced that he would propose to the Board of Estimate a third alteration to Cuomo's compromise proposal. Manes wanted to turn the low-income project into a cooperative owned by low-income families. Claiming that the cooperative would give the new residents a "stake in the [Forest Hills] community," as home owners the cooperative would also have a better chance of winning the acceptance of long time neighborhood residents. Under Manes' proposal the three 12-story buildings would be leased to a non-profit cooperative corporation made up of selected tenants. After a low down payment, cooperators would make up the rest of the cost through "sweat equity," meaning work completed to maintain or operate the cooperative. Federal subsidies could help to hold down the carrying charges to the same level as low-income rents.[54]

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[53] Howard Reiser, "Cuomo Compromise Plan Wins Support," *LIP*, 23 August 1972; "Liberals Hit JVL OK of Compromise," *LIP*, 28 August 1972.

[54] Peter Khiss, "Manes Calls for 'Innovative' Low-Income Coop at Controversial Forest Hills Site," *NYT*, 6 September 1972.

HUD officials responded favorably to the plan and the Housing Authority chairman Golar also seemed to approve of the idea. “The trouble is,” Golar explained, “we don’t have a subsidy source to accomplish carrying charges at the levels low-income families can afford.” The cooperative idea was first broached by the Forest Hills Neighbors, a group formed after violent protests against the project shook the neighborhood. The intention of the FHN was to accept the project as a reality and work to make the integration of low-income tenants into the neighborhood as smooth as possible. “It’s obvious that a housing development will be built,” announced Paul Sandman, the president of the FHN. “Hopefully [the cooperative] would accomplish two things---a pride of ownership and direct participation by the residents in the management of the development.”[55]

The FHN repeated their suggestion of the low-income cooperative to Mario Cuomo during a meeting with him when he was exploring his compromise. The cooperative plan was spelled out by the FHN in a letter to Cuomo he attached to his report to Mayor Lindsay. “Whether true or not, most people believe that people who own their own homes or live in Coops take better care of the property,” Sandman wrote. “By such a move we are off the issue of anti-social behavior of low-income tenants. Second, we have removed the cloud of disbelief over governmental statements of proper maintenance. Third, we instill a sense of pride in the project’s tenants thus helping to develop a greater desire to become a part of the community.”[56]

At the public hearing before the City Planning Commission, over 200 FHRA

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[55] Ibid.; “Make Forest Hills Project a Co-Op, Neighbors Suggest,” *LIP*, 3 June 1972..

[56] “Forest Hills Co-Op Not Certain: Golar,” *LIP*, 24 November 1972; Cuomo, “Report of Investigation Concerning Forest Hills Low-Income Housing Project, 20-22.

opponents chartered buses to City Hall. Several dozen African American pro-project activists led by the Reverend Timothy Mitchell also attended. Rev. Mitchell and his group opposed the compromise and demanded that the project not be reduced. Police had to break up several scuffles between blacks and whites. After the worst of the outbursts, in which Rev. Mitchell claimed a white man had attacked a black women, Birbach and FHRA protestors marched out of the meeting chanting "No project, no way."[57]

The meeting lasted until the early morning hours before it was adjourned. At another meeting two weeks later the Planning Commission ratified the Cuomo compromise plan to reduce the projects by half. In coordination with Manes, the Community Planning Board 6, the local advisory board that included Forest Hills, issued a report to the Board of Estimate, urging the Board to adopt the cooperative concept as part of the compromise deal. Manes, in consultation with Mayor Lindsay, got the Mayor to support the cooperative plan and also asked to Mayor to support his call for 65% of the units to be relegated for the elderly and 35% for Veterans.[58]

While Mayor Lindsay refused to commit to Manes' new quota for the elderly and veterans, the Housing Authority Chairman Golar opposed the new quotas outright. "Those who talk about a higher percentage of elderly simply want to reduce the apartment sizes to zero or one bedrooms, and eliminate families," Golar charged. Golar also maintained that physically the plans could not be altered. The foundation of the project had been constructed to accommodate no more than 40% of the units for the elderly.[59] Jerry Birbach and the various Queens Jewish organizations opposed Manes'

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[57] Irving Long, "Raucous Session Leaves Forest Hills Issue Up in the Air," *LIP*, 21 September 1972; Francis X. Clines, "Forest Hills Project Scored at Meeting," *NYT*, 21 September 1972.
[58] *LIP*, 21 September 1972;
[59] Edith Evans Asbury, "Golar to Oppose Manes on Housing," *NYT*, 26 October 1972.

new quotas also.[60] They insisted that they would only support a compromise plan if the project were altered to house 100% elderly tenants. Alvin Lashinsky of the Queens Jewish Community Council and Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt of the Orthodox Queens Jewish Center, and representatives of other Jewish groups, signed a statement denouncing the compromise and Manes' attempts to alter the quota of elderly. "The Donald Manes-Matthew J. Troy political machine is in the process of betraying the people of Forest Hills," the statement read.

> As a cover for this surrender, they are prepared to accept any easy alternative for the project---which upon examination crumbles apart and adds up to the same disaster. They are seemingly prepared to buy an easy political exit for themselves rather than fight for the kind of program needed for survival of the Forest Hills community.[61]

At the Board of Estimate Meeting on October 26, tempers flared as white opponents and black supporters of the project traded epithets and racial insults. Birbach, realizing this could be his last hurrah as a public figure, was arrested for attempting to lead an impromptu march of FHRA demonstrators down Broadway near City Hall. After he was released, Birbach raced back to the meeting in Borough President Manes' private car. "As he strode into the chambers, with television lights blazing, he received a standing ovation from his more than 100 of his supporters." Eventually the Board of Estimate ratified Cuomo's compromise and Manes' cooperative scheme. The Board also requested that the Housing Authority comply with Manes' quota system that would set aside 65% of the units for the elderly and 35% for veterans. The vote by the Board was

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[60] George Douris and Howard Reiser, "Birbach: Project Okay if Limited to Elderly," *LIP*, 25 October 1972.
[61] Howard Reiser, "Jewish Group Doubts Project Plan," *LIP*, 21 October 1972.

20-2, the two votes coming from Percy Sutton the Manhattan Borough President and the only African American on the Board.[62]

Problems with the final project plan still persisted. The thorniest issue was how to resolve who would get final say selecting tenants for the project, the Housing Authority or the board of directors of the cooperative. Under the agreement passed by the Board of Estimate, Borough President Donald Manes had the right to choose the board members for the cooperative. Simeon Golar, however, maintained that the co-op board's role in the choosing of tenants was advisory and that any selections must be guided by Federal and city admission standards as well as anti-discrimination laws.[63]

Manes wasted no time in appointing members to the cooperative board. His choices included retiring Republican Congressman Seymour Halpern and Joseph DeVoy, the head of Community Planning Board 6 who had both opposed the project. Other members would eventually include Joseph Waldman, one of the leaders of the anti-project FHRA and Kurt Sonnenfeld of the FHN the group who supported the project as well as the Reverend Timothy Mitchell. The subtext of the struggle for the make up of the co-op board was racial. Manes wanted board members that favored his view that the make-up of the project should be heavily tilted toward the elderly and veterans, which would insure that the racial make up of the project was heavily tilted towards whites and not African Americans and Puerto Ricans.[64]

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[62] Howard Reiser and George Douris, "Forest Hills Compromise Adopted," *LIP*, 27 October 1972; Murray Schumach, "City Approves a Low-Income Co-Op for Forest Hills," *NYT*, 27 October 1972.

[63] "Forest Hills Still Beset by Problems," *LIP*, 29 October 1972.

[64] "Halpern Gets Post," *LIP*, 27 November 1972; George Douris, "Birbach Leads New Protest Sit-Down on Forest Hills," *LIP*, 5 December 1972; Peter Kihss, "Forest Hills Co-op Plan Poses Complex Problems," *NYT*, 17 December 1972.

Weeks after their landslide re-election victory in 1972, the Nixon administration announced it was considering a moratorium on all Federal housing funds. In announcing the moratorium in January 1973, HUD Secretary Romney claimed the decision was based on a series of scandals involving the sale of shoddily constructed HUD sponsored homes by dishonest real estate agents. The main goal of the freeze was to pull the plug on the most ambitious of the Johnson administration's Great Society goals: the construction of six-million Federally-subsidized housing units nationally for low-income families as authorized by the Housing Act of 1968. Romney and others in the Nixon administration concurred with the view of most middle-income Americans, that public housing was wasteful and provided shelter for Welfare families, those demonstrating anti-social behavior and had a negative impact in neighborhoods where it was built.[65]

The housing freeze would not affect the Forest Hills project, but would halt or drastically alter the construction of 52 low- and middle-income projects planned throughout the city and force the Housing Authority to raise the rents on thousands of low-income units. In announcing the opening of 28 new projects with 7,379 units for 1973, Chairman Golar noted sadly that the housing freeze would drastically reduce the number of units the Authority could complete in the coming years. "We have been able to marshal the talents and energies of the Authority's housing production staff," Golar noted proudly. "And now the Nixon housing moratorium brings us to a grinding halt." Golar estimated that 12 projects would open in 1974, four in 1975 and none in 1976.[66]

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[65] "White House Said to Plan Freeze on Public Housing," *NYT*, 23 December 1972; Michael C. Jensen, "Romney Discloses Halt in Subsidies for New Housing," *NYT*, 9 January 1972; Michael C. Jensen, "A 'No' on New Starts," *NYT,* 14 January 1973; "Housing Freeze," *NYT*, 16 January 1973.

[66] Robert E. Tomasson, "Freeze on Federal Housing Subsidies Affects 52 Projects in City," *NYT*, 28 January 1973; Ronald Smothers, "City to Open 28 Housing Projects in '73, Golar Says," *NYT*, 10 April 1973.

In a message to Congress in September 1973, Nixon announced that any future Federal housing program would consist of direct subsidies to poor families to purchase privately built existing housing, rather than subsidizing the construction of new public housing units. "Federal programs have produced some good housing," Nixon proclaimed. "But they also produced some of the worst housing in America . . . monstrous, depressing places---rundown, overcrowded, crime-ridden, falling apart." Nixon made no mention of scatter-site housing and other Federal housing laws that required the integration of middle-income neighborhoods through the construction of low-income housing. William S. Green, Nixon's leading housing official in New York, argued that direct Federal allowances to poor families would end battles that pitted the residents of middle-income neighborhoods against low-income projects proposed for their areas. Federally funded allowances, Green believed, would allow low-income minority families to purchase individual homes and integrate white neighborhoods at a more gradual pace than the construction of "provocative" projects in middle-income areas,[67]

Nixon's proposals came too late for Forest Hills residents and protests still dogged the project while it was under construction throughout 1973. Birbach and about 20 FHRA demonstrators staged a four hour sit-down strike in Golar's offices at 250 Broadway. Birbach claimed that protest would continue until he was assured that all the units in the project would be set aside for the elderly, but he could no longer call upon as many demonstrators as he could in the past.[68] In April Birbach announced that he was

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[67] John Herbers, "President Urges U.S. Allowances to Spur Housing," *NYT*, 29 September 1973; "'No' to the Old, 'Maybe' to the New," *NYT*, 23 September 1973; Joseph P. Fried, "Nixon's Housing Policy," *NYT*, 29 September 1973.

[68] George Douris, "Birbach Leads New Protest Sit-Down on Forest Hills," *LIP*, 5 December 1972; Paul Montgomery, "Forest Hills Project Rising, But the Controversy Lingers," *NYT*, 27 March 1973.

moving from Forest Hills to look for a larger home in Jamaica Estates (ironically, where Simeon Golar lived). Many FHRA members claimed that in his drive for political legitimacy, Birbach became less confrontational. “We’re in a different ball park today,” explained Birbach. “Something is going to be built on 108th Street. The foundations are in. Our job is to see that the project is for senior citizens housing.” Diehard FHRA members formed a new anti-project group called the Ad Hoc Committee to Save Forest Hills. Orthodox community leaders like Seymour Samuels, former president of the Queens Jewish Community Council and Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt of the Queens Jewish Center, played leading roles in the organization of the committee.[69]

By 1974, it was still not clear whether the coop board or the Housing Authority would have the final word on the racial make-up of the project. In April, the Ad Hoc Committee to Save Forest Hills demanded that all units in the project be set aside for the elderly, called a demonstration at the construction site. “If we can’t get [a guarantee that the elderly will be housed] we want to make absolutely certain the board of directors selects the tenants,” explained Martin Wunderman, the chief spokesman for the Ad Hoc Committee. The matter was never settled formally. While the Housing Authority could not legally abdicate its control over the tenant selection process, the co-op board formed by Manes made most of the decisions regarding tenant admissions.[70]

The final battles over the project were fought behind the scenes between the leaders of the Ad Hoc Committee, recently elected Mayor Abraham D. Beame, and the Nixon administration. Beame, a colorless Democratic Party insider was elected Mayor in

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[69] Clark Whelton, “‘Something Happened to Jerry Birbach,’” *The Village Voice*, 5 April 1973.
[70] “Manes: Forest Hills Board Can Pick Tenants,” *LIP*, 3 April 1973; *LIP*, 27 November 1972; *LIP*, 5 December 1972; *NYT*, 17 December 1972; *The Village Voice*, 5 April 1974; Ad Hoc Committee to Save Forest Hills, “Save Forest Hills,” flyer, April 1974, folder 27 Housing Controversy Flyers, box 2, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser Papers, JTS.

1973. During the campaign, Beame declared his support for the compromise plan for Forest Hills, but also made it clear that if elected the days of aggressive integration would be over. “In the case of Forest Hills, the community was not consulted about the proposed project until it rose up in protest,” Beame claimed in campaign speech. “I believe the greatest grievance of the people in the community is their feeling that they have some say in their own destiny.”[71]

Sympathetic to Beame’s position, the Nixon administration invited him to the White House to discuss Federal and city relations. The Forest Hills project still needed final approval from the Federal government to be converted into a cooperative and Nixon, after meeting personally with Beame, instructed Leonard Garment, White House civil rights counsel, to work with the Mayor. A month later, a delegation led by Rabbi Grunblatt from the Ad Hoc Committee met with Beame to tell him that they had been informed that HUD did not intend to change the project into a cooperative. Concerned that protests in Forest Hills could plague his mayoralty Beame called Garment who contacted HUD. “Well, in a very short time, it could have been 48 hours, maybe less . . . I got a call that HUD reversed themselves,” Beame recalled years later. [72]

The Nixon administration gave its final approval for turning the project into a cooperative after Beame met with HUD Secretary James T. Lynne in June 1974. Construction on the project was scheduled to be completed a year later. More than 10,000 families applied for the 432 apartments of the country’s first large-scale low-income

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[71] Abraham D. Beame, “City Club Speech,” ca. 1973, in author’s possession.
[72] Martin Tolchin, “Beam and Nixon Meet on City Aid,” *NYT*, 7 February 1974; Glenn Fowler, “U.S. and City Officials Discuss Transit and Job Aid,” *NYT*, 16 February 1974; Joseph P. Fried, “U.S. Approves Co-Ops at Forest Hills Project,” *NYT*, 4 June 1974; Maurice Carroll, “Beame’s 3x5 Cards Tally his Six Months’ Progress,” *NYT*, 30 June 1972; Mayor Abraham D. Beame, interview by Ruth Cowan, transcript (07.001.1.1093), Columbia University Oral History Research Project, 4 April 1978, 135-136.

cooperative. African American and Puerto Rican leaders expressed concern that few minority or poor families would be admitted to the project. Before the project was completed another racial controversy erupted when the city received clearance to implement its "school zoning plan" to desegregate several high schools in Brooklyn. The new plan would increase the number of African American and Puerto Rican students attending Forest Hills High School.[73]

The school desegregation plan touched off several rallies and marches reminiscent of demonstrations against the project. "This is the last stand for Forest Hills," claimed Sheila Potashnick, an opponent of the new zoning plan. "If this school tips, it will mark the end of our community." Demonstrators forced Mayor Beame to cancel the opening ceremonies for the Forest Hills Cooperative in June. Ironically, leaders of the groups protesting the school zoning plan claimed that that their protests were not aimed at the Forest Hills Cooperative and that they wanted to see the project "work."[74]

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee to Save Forest Hills still viewed the project as a threat to the stability of the neighborhood. Leonard Cohen, one of the leaders of the Committee, claimed that many families were already moving. "There are a thousand empty apartments in Forest Hills," he insisted. "People are running like wildfire," claimed a man who worked at a local delicatessen. A mail carrier and doorman both noticed that that families with children were moving and being replaced by families with infants. Board of Education figures showed that the white student population in the neighborhood schools was declining. If families were moving from the neighborhood,

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[73] Art L. Goldman, "Race Plan For School Protested in Queens," *NYT*, 16 March 1975; "Manes Assails School Zoning," *NYT*, 27 April 1975.

[74] *NYT*, 27 April 1975; Joseph Fried, "Forest Hills Housing opens Next Week," *NYT*, 22 June 1975.

there was no evidence showing they moved in anticipation of the project. The moves could have been prompted by the neighborhood's overcrowded conditions or the lure of the suburbs. "A lot of those who had children moved to New Jersey and Long Island," the mailman explained. "Maybe they would have moved anyway."[75]

In June 1975, when tenants finally moved into the 420-unit project, the Housing Authority estimated that white families made up 70% of the tenants, while African American and Puerto Rican families made up only 30%. Those who feared that the project would spur a mass exodus of middle-income whites from the Forest Hills need not have worried. In 1980, the black population of the neighborhood was 1.5% an increase of only 1% for the entire decade of the 1970s. While the increase of the Asian and Latino population was more significant, if added together the entire minority population of Forest Hills was only 9% five years after the project had opened. Cuomo's compromises and Manes' political maneuvering had reduced the number of minority families in the project to the point where its ability to promote integration in Forest Hills was effectively disabled.[76]

The end of the Forest Hills controversy also marked the end of nearly eight years of activist, reform government that to most New Yorkers had become synonymous with liberalism. In March 1973, with his political standing in tatters, Lindsay announced that he would not run for a third term. "We have made the hallmark of this government its openness," he claimed. "We have been willing to meet with any group, walk down any

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[75] Steven Pasternack, "Forest Hills What School for Project," *LIP*, 17 February 1974; "New Forest Hills Co-op for Poor Draws 10,000," *NYT*, 3 July 1974; Murray Schumach, ". . . but in Forest Hills, Some See Co-op as a Stabilizer," *NYT*, 6 June 1974.

[76] 1970 and 1980 census tracts compiled by Susan Weber, Sociology Department, Queens College, CUNY from U.S. Bureau of the Census.

street and face every problem and dilemma with a strong sense of responsibility and accountability." Months later, Lindsay admitted that his concentration on the plight of poor minorities might have alienated middle-class whites. "In scatter-site housing we got burned on Forest Hills," the Mayor admitted. "The tax-supported housing has mainly stopped in the nation due to black-white fears." Lindsay never ran successfully for political office again.[77]

In May, Housing Authority Commissioner Simeon Golar resigned his post. Golar had emerged from the Forest Hills controversy as a heroic figure to the city's African American community and liberals. Under his leadership the Housing Authority started 8,500 new units of public housing in 1971, the most since 1965. He was lionized in the African American newspaper *The Amsterdam News* as a defender of the right of blacks to live in decent housing in any neighborhood. As one of the city's most outspoken advocates for integration, Golar was nominated by the Liberal Party to run for City Council president. Golar lost the race to another eloquent liberal City Councilman Paul O'Dwyer. Days before leaving office, Lindsay appointed Golar judge to the Family Court and serves today as a State Supreme Court Justice.[78]

By 1987, the Forest Hills Cooperative was considered a remarkably successful project. It failed to fulfill the goals scatter-site housing to integrate the neighborhood, but the project was clean, well maintained and safe. When Jerry Birbach was asked how he

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[77] Murray Schumach, "Lindsay Asserts he Will not Run for a 3D Term, but Bars Comment on the Governorship and Senate," *NYT*, 8 March 1973; "Lindsay Recalls the Pressures and Pleasures of 'the Best 8 Years of my Life,'" *NYT*, 23 December 1973;

[78] Joseph P. Fried, "Mayor Elevates Career Housing Aide to Golar Post," *NYT*, 1 June 1973; "1,000 Honor Golar, Including Lindsay," *NYT,* 14 June 1973; "O'Dwyer Favored for Council Post," *NYT*, 4 November 1973; Joseph P. Fried, "Simeon Golar's City-Within-A-City," *NYT*, 30 April 1972; Housing Authority start ups in 1965 consisted of over 9,000 units. See NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1970, All Programs," report, August 1970, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives; Edward Ranzal, "Lindsay Appoints Four of His Aides to Judgeships," *NYT*, 22 December 1973.

accounted for the success of the project he claimed it was to due to community protest. "The integrity of the neighborhood has been preserved pretty well," said Birbach. "But, you know, we really had a lot to do with that." Simeon Golar who drove past the completed project on his way to the Queens State Supreme Court House, still opposed the compromise. "I knew I could have supplied twice as much housing for the same money and still preserved the integrity of Forest Hills," Golar claimed. "I always resented the notion that public housing was by definition a problem."[79]

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[79] Michael T. Kaufman, Forest Hills: From Rage to Tranquility," *NYT*, 15 April 1988.

CONCLUSION
The Lessons Of Forest Hills

"Forest Hills said so much . . . but who will hear it?" Mario Cuomo[1]

Today, driving past the Forest Hills Cooperative on the Long Island Expressway heading east it is difficult to tell the three chevron-shaped buildings apart from the other private developments lining the freeway. Walking around the Cooperative and its tranquil environs it is hard to believe that over thirty years ago it was the center of a series of vocal and sometimes violent demonstration. Forest Hills is a much more racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood than it was in the early 1970s, but it has maintained its middle-class standing. Despite the fears of opponents, the Forest Hills Cooperative had virtually no impact on the racial or economic make-up of the neighborhood.

The same wave of immigration that transformed Queens into one of the most ethnically and racially diverse areas on earth, had a similar effect on Forest Hills. In 1970, Forest Hills was an overwhelmingly white (95.5%) and Jewish neighborhood with a large immigrant population (28.8%) that was mostly Russian. By 2000, there was still a large Jewish presence in the neighborhood, but the white population dropped by 23% while the immigrant population has grown to encompass 49.9% of the neighborhood. The racial diversification of Forest Hills was not fed by a large influx of blacks and Latino families. Their numbers increased slightly, but at least 20% of the Forest Hills population is now Asian. Chinese are probably the largest group of Asian newcomers followed by Indians

[1] Mario Cuomo, *Forest Hills Diary: The Crisis of Low-Income Housing*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 145.

and Pakistanis. The largest immigrant groups in Forest Hills still hail from Russia and the Ukraine.[2]

Forest Hills managed to maintain its large Jewish population due to the increased presence of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet republics. Between 1973 and 1978 at least 1,000 families Soviet Jews settled in Forest Hills. After the loosening of Soviet immigration restrictions in the late 1980s and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the influx of Soviet Jews increased. Many were Bukharan Jews, a sect originating in Persia that was culturally separate from European Jewry, who came from Uzbekistan and other central Asian states. During the 1990s, approximately 30,000 Bukharan Jews settled in Rego Park, Forest Hills and Kew Gardens. Many of the Forest Hills Bukharan Jews attended the Orthodox Israeli Jewish Community Center and owned businesses along 108th Street that included kosher bakeries and restaurants[3]

The newcomers did not did not provoke the same emotional response as did the construction of a scatter-site project only a few years earlier. Project residents would have been both minority and poor, while the "otherness" posed by the Russian Jews was defined solely by class rather than race. Some long-time residents complained that the newcomers' habit of packing several families into a single apartment was at odds with the middle-class standards of Forest Hills. It was also reported that the Forest Hills Jewish

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[2] New York City Department of City Planning, Population Division, "The Newest New Yorkers: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium, Briefing Booklet," October 2004, 17, 21, 25; New York City Department of City Planning, Population Division, "Demographic Profile—New York City Community Districts, 2000 Census SF1, Queens Community District 6" December 2001; *U.S. Bureau of Census, Census Tracts for Queens County, New York, 1920-1970*. Census data compiled by Susan Weber, Sociology Department, Queens College, CUNY.

[3] Ben Abelson, "Russians & Eastern Europeans: In Search of Freedom, A Community Finds a Home in Queens," *Queens Tribune*, in <http//www.queenstribune.com/anniversary2002/russins.html>; Ari L. Goldman, "New Emigres Putting Strain on Services," *NYT*, 16 December 1989; Sandee Brawarsky, "Central Asian Jews Create 'Queensistan,'" *NYT*, 16 November 2001; Perry A. Bialor, "Don't Call Us Russian," *NYT*, 7 August 1994.

population, which in the 1970s was overwhelmingly Conservative with a smattering of Orthodox and Reform synagogues, was becoming more Orthodox. While Conservative Jewish families continued to move out to the suburbs, they were replaced by Orthodox Jews from other parts of the city who required Jewish stores and synagogues within walking distance, an amenity that Forest Hills readily supplied.[4]

Journalists, academics and politicians, who have written about the Forest Hills controversy, usually interpret the hysteria stirred-up by the controversy through the framework of race and class. The most influential interpretation of the Forest Hills controversy was Mario Cuomo's *Forest Hills Diary*. Published only a year after brokering his famous "compromise" between the city and Forest Hills residents, Cuomo's account is written without the foresight of how the neighborhood developed. He focuses instead on searching for the root causes of the neighborhood reaction against the project. While acknowledging the bigotry of some in Forest Hills, Cuomo observed that opposition to the project was grounded more in legitimate class and social concerns than in racial prejudice. It was not only middle-class whites who opposed low-income projects, argued Cuomo, but also middle-class blacks.[5]

When Cuomo discussed the project with a group of black homeowners in Hollis, Queens, they said they believed the whites who opposed the project in Forest Hills were bigots, but admitted they would oppose it in their own neighborhood. Residents of Baisley Park, a black, middle-income neighborhood in South Jamaica Queens, also opposed plans for a low-income project in their neighborhood. "The point I drew from

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[4] *NYT*, 16 November 2001; *NYT*, 7 August 1994; Joseph Berger, "Judaism Takes Different Turns, in Places Blocks of Orthodoxy," *NYT*, 27 September 2002.
[5] Cuomo, 38.

that," Cuomo related years later, "was that there is something beyond color here, it's economic class and distinction."[6]

Cuomo demonstrated the complexity of black and white attitudes towards class and race. Newspaper accounts appearing in the 1980s, however, were less nuanced in their approach. Marveling at the neighborhood's diversity and tranquility, journalists often celebrated the Forest Hills Cooperative as a victory for public housing and integration. The Housing Authority was praised for setting aside many of the apartments for the elderly and employing other methods to "limit the poorest tenants" from the Cooperative, which allowed "public housing to win acceptance in Queens." The average annual income of Cooperative tenants was $14,000, higher than the average income for most NYCHA tenants. To live in the Cooperative required that tenants could afford to purchase shares in the building. A year after the Cooperative opened, the minority population was much lower than in most other of NYCHA's low-income projects. It consisted of 63.9% white and 21.7% African American and Latino families. The 14.4% of the remaining project families listed as "other" probably denoted Asians.[7]

J.S. Fuerst, the sociologist and housing scholar, echoed the triumphal theme. To Fuerst, the Forest Hills Cooperative proved that opponents who claimed, even after the compromise, that the project would spur white flight were wrong. The Cooperative and other NYCHA projects constructed in middle-income areas for those earning more than low-income families, retained integrated populations, while projects constructed in

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[6] Ibid., 75; David M. Herszenhorn, "Cuomo Says Lessons Learned on Housing Have Been Ignored," *NYT*, 22 October 1995.
[7] David M. Herszenhorn, "At the Forest Hills Co-op, A Reminder of Past Fury," *NYT*, 22 October 1995; J.S. Fuerst, "Another Part of Forest Hills," *Commonweal*, 14 January 1984, 15.

poorer areas of the city, remained predominantly black or black and Latino. Projects catering to middle-income populations, Fuerst claimed,

> were all highly integrated developments with black, white and Spanish-American, elderly and young, nuclear and broken families, self-supporting and welfare families. They had low turnover and considerable demand. This . . . was an altogether different picture from public housing . . . placed in unacceptable areas and tenanted by the poorest of the poor.[8]

NYCHA's demographic figures confirmed Fuerst's contention, but with the exception of the Forest Hills Cooperative all the projects Fuerst mentioned were city- and state-sponsored developments built in the 1950s specifically for those whose earnings exceeded the ceilings for low-income projects. The success of these projects actually highlighted the failure of the Forest Hills Cooperative. The project that was originally envisioned to house a much larger number of low-income blacks and Latinos, integrate a predominantly white neighborhood and offer the poor better schools and improved social services failed to achieve its idealistic goals. In this sense, the Forest Hills Cooperative was a set back and not a triumph for integration.[9]

The length to which the Housing Authority was willing to go to insure that the Forest Hills Cooperative remained predominantly white supports a more pessimistic assessment. In 1992, the Federal Courts found that the Authority purposely diverted minority applicants from the Cooperative and a handful of other projects. The Court mandated that the Authority renounce the practice and to fill three of every four vacant apartments with minority families. As a result, more minority families moved into the Cooperative. By 1995, the white population had dropped by nearly 10% while the African American and Latino population of the cooperative grew by nearly 9%. The pace

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[8] Fuerst, "Another Part of Forest Hills," 14.
[9] NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1970, All Programs," August 1970, manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

of opening the Forest Hills Cooperative to more minority tenants was progressing, but even accounting for this shift the project was still over 52% white.[10]

The revelations of NYCHA's racial steering exposed, once again, the deep divisions between black and white attitudes of the Forest Hills controversy. "It was made a cooperative to keep poor blacks and minorities out in the first place," claimed the Reverend Timothy Mitchell, of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Flushing. He had led several protests supporting the project, was an original resident and sat on the co-op board that advised the Housing Authority on tenant selection. "I wanted [the Cooperative] to be 50% black," he added. Blanca Izaguirre an original tenant of the Cooperative observed that the influx of minority families made some white residents nervous. "For about three years now everyone we get is mostly African Americans or Hispanic," she noted. "All they [white tenants] have to do is read in the paper that it is 32% black and people are going to run like wildfire."[11]

While Cuomo, Fuerst and a handful of journalists recognized the significance of the Forest Hills controversy, historians have given it very little attention. When mentioned at all, it is generally grouped with other episodes of racial conflict and used as a marker for the political shift of Jewish voters to the right and thus a major contributor to the decline of liberalism. The historian Jerald E. Podair has observed that like the Ocean-Hill Brownsville teachers' strike, and the 1973 Carnarsie demonstrations opposing the busing of black students to local schools, the Forest Hills controversy represented a turning point in the city's race relations, when Jews joined white Catholics, who they once viewed with suspicion, as allies against policies that they believed favored

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[10] *NYT*, 22 October 1995.
[11] Ibid..

minorities. "Ocean Hill-Brownsville taught Jews and Catholics that the whiteness uniting them was more important than any of the things that had divided them in the past," Podair argued. "In outer-borough neighborhoods like Forest Hills and Canarsie, Jews stood alongside their Catholic neighbors to keep blacks 'out': Out of their homes, in the case of Forest Hills . . . and out of their schools, in the case of Canarsie . . ." [12]

This study maintains that the Forest Hills controversy was an important event in and of itself. It symbolized the city's commitment to integration. The scatter-site housing program was already failing by the time construction was underway in Forest Hills. White opposition to scatter-site housing severely hampered the program. Only a few of the original scatter-site projects had been completed by 1971, providing not nearly enough low-income units to relieve overcrowded conditions in the cities racial ghettos. Lindsay believed that compromising on the Forest Hills project in the face of mounting racial intolerance, middle-class backlash and Jewish militancy would make it appear as though the city had abandoned the goals of civil rights. As the protests threatened violence and jeopardized his presidential ambitions, Lindsay's attempts to negotiate a compromise that would have preserved the original design of the project failed.

The Lindsay administration also deserves some of the blame for the failure of the Forest Hills project. They did a poor job of building on neighborhood support for the project expressed by Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser and the areas other Conservative Rabbis. When the racially charged opposition movement to the project was launched by Jerry Birbach and his supporters in the Forest Hills Residents Association (FHRA), the Lindsay administration remained on the sidelines hoping the vocal protests against the

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[12] Jerald E. Podair, "The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis: New York's *Antigone*," 6 October 2001, presented at the Gotham Conference on New York City History, <www.gothamcenter.org/festival/2001/papers/shtml>.

project would die down. The administration allowed the Housing Authority to launch a cautious and measured public relations campaign to refute charges that project would spur racial turnover and exodus of whites form the neighborhood. This approach only made the city appear hopelessly out of touch in the eyes of Forest Hills residents. Demonstrations led by Birbach and the FHRA continued to fan the flames of racial hysteria in the neighborhood. When Lindsay and Housing Authority chairman Simeon Golar attacked Birbach and his forces for racial intolerance it only increased community solidarity against the project.

The lag time between when the project was proposed and when construction began played a pivotal role in the dynamics of the controversy. Between 1966 and 1971, relations between the city's Jewish community and the Lindsay administration shifted, becoming strained beyond repair. His handling of the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes alienated the city's Jewish community and convinced his allies serving in leadership positions on several Jewish civil rights groups that he was insensitive to Jewish concerns. Friction between African American and Jewish communities was also spurred by the growing influx of black families into largely Jewish neighborhoods. The result was the emergence of Jewish militant groups anointing themselves as the protectors of easily victimized elderly Jewish residents and preservers of the Jewish identity in declining Jewish neighborhoods. During the Forest Hill controversy, when Lindsay tried to reach out to the Jewish community, there was no one for him to negotiate with. The traditional Jewish civil rights groups did not trust him and Jewish militant organizations remained intransigent.

Despite the perception of weakness, the black and Jewish civil rights coalition, that formed the vanguard of the fair housing movement, was surprisingly united. The rise of black militancy, the Ocean Hill-Brown strikes and the looting of Jewish businesses after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr, strained the alliance, but during the Forest Hills controversy the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Anti-Defamation League joined the NAACP and Urban League in supporting the scatter-site housing program and the Forest Hills project. Despite this solidarity, the coalition could do little to calm tensions.[13] The period of increasing tension between blacks and Jews also exposed the divisions in the racial attitudes of middle-class, outer-borough Jews and their wealthier co-religionists who lived in Manhattan or the tonier suburbs.

Many outer-borough Jews had moved to Forest Hills and other middle-income neighborhoods in Queens in response to an influx of poor minorities in their old neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Fearing that the scatter-site project would prompt an exodus of Jews from the neighborhood, they viewed the "liberal Jews" who supported the projects as traitors. For years, outer-borough Jews had chafed at the condescending tone of Jewish liberal admonishments. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. for example, an AJC member testified at a meeting of several Jewish groups that Jews owning businesses in the Bronx and Harlem should sell them to blacks to avoid future looting. Outer-borough Jews viewed liberal Jews as willing to put the interests of blacks ahead of Jews to avoid racial conflict. Members of the AJC,

[13] Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: An Historical Perspective," *Tikkun* 3, July-August 1988, 92-93.

meanwhile, grew increasingly concerned with the growing militancy and racial animosity expressed by outer-borough Jews.[14]

In 1972, groups of demonstrators for and against the project converged at the 108th Street site. The opponents of the project mostly white were separated from supporters of the project mostly African American by police barricades. To calm racial tensions and to negotiate a compromise Mayor Lindsay arranged a meeting between Jewish and black leaders. In the face of possible racial violence, however, the AJC director Haskell L. Lazere and the NAACP's Roy Wilkins agreed to cancel the meeting. Lazere claimed to have convinced Wilkins that such a meeting would promote the image of the Forest Hills controversy as a racial confrontation and could heighten tensions. What hampered Lindsay's attempts to broker a compromise was not the crumbling of the alliance between the black and Jewish civil rights groups, but their mutual distrust of the Mayor who they believed would use a negotiated compromise to bolster his image as a racial healer and his sagging presidential campaign.[15]

Lazere and other Jewish leaders were especially distrustful of the Mayor Lindsay. A similar meeting in 1968 devolved into name calling and Jewish leaders believed the Mayor portrayed them as intransigent in their inability to convince the teachers union to end their strike. Another reason for both black and Jewish civil rights leaders to oppose the meeting was that several of the Queens-based Jewish groups who opposed the project would probably be in attendance. While these groups, such as the Jewish Rights Council,

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[14] Selma Hirsh, "Memo: Jewish Militancy Roundtable," n.d., folder Jewish Defense League 69-70, box 8, New York Chapter 1955-1975, AJC Archive.

[15] Haskell Lazere, "Pragmatic Assumptions and Plans for 1971-72 New York Chapter," 24 September 1971, Box 5, Folder Executive Board 1970-71, New York Chapter 1955-1975; Haskell L. Lazere to Bertram H. Gold and Seymour Samet, "Forest Hills---Progress Report," memorandum, 17 February 1972, folder Forest Hills 1971-3, box 6 (347.4, 125, AJC CSD-125), AJC Papers.

claimed to be dedicated to the cause of preserving Jewish neighborhoods, Wilkins had argued that their opposition to the project was actually based on prejudice and the desire to keep blacks out of Forest Hills. To Lazere, these groups challenged the influence of the AJC and other more traditional Jewish civil rights organizations which supported scatter-site housing and the Forest Hills project.[16]

The divisions caused by the Forest Hills controversy within the Jewish community and between Jews and blacks, weakened liberalism, but to what extent and for how long? After the Forest Hills controversy, liberalism was not completely defeated, but it was on the defensive. In order for liberal politicians to win elections, they would have to prove that they opposed affirmative action and integration policies that middle-income whites viewed as favoring minorities at their expense. "Scatter-site housing was not an important issue" during the 1973 mayoral election, Cuomo observed.

> The popular liberal phrases that had predominated only a few years earlier had been filed away for use at a more propitious time. None of the candidates argued for integration or dispersal of ghetto residents in middle-class areas. The new and safer emphasis was on rehabilitating the ghettos. The clock had been turned back nearly two decades . . . the impetus for this withdrawal had been provided by Forest Hills.[17]

As the political environment after Forest Hills shifted, Mario Cuomo and Edward I. Koch, two major figures in the controversy, emerged as big winners. In 1971, Koch was a Congressman, whose district included Lindsay's old silk-stocking district on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, with a liberal reputation. He opposed the war in Vietnam and was an early advocate of civil rights. In the 1960s, Koch served as a lawyer for civil

[16] "Memo: New York Jewish Community Relations Council Annual Meeting 'Brotherhood in Action,'" 16 June 1969, folder Jewish Community Relations Council of NYC, NY 69-70, box 8 New York Chapter 1955-1975, AJC Archive.

[17] Mario M. Cuomo, *Forest Hill Diary the Crisis of Low-Income Housing*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 149.

rights activists jailed illegally in Mississippi. While most liberal politicians supported the project, Koch marched with demonstrators at construction site at 108th Street and urged them to push for a project with more middle-income tenants. "I don't blame them for protesting," Koch explained. "These people moved out of the slums because of fear and worked all their lives to do it. This project would turn into a slum in no time. They have a rational fear of increased crimes and loss of property values and I resent bitterly anyone who labels them racist."[18]

Koch's position on Forest Hills shocked many of his friends and long time supporters. He was already considering a future run for the mayoralty, however, and needed the support of outer-borough whites to be competitive. Referring to Forest Hills as his "political Rubicon," Koch would become the prototype of Democratic liberal politicians of the 1980s and 1990s, who would oppose liberal policies that appeared excessive to white middle class New Yorkers. Koch articulated the conflict as one of two opposing value systems:

> Two traditions are in conflict. The first is an old very American tradition: You work hard all your life and move to a better neighborhood, give your children better schools, have a better life. You save your money and move to Forest Hills. Work hard, be thrifty and you'll be rewarded. The second tradition is that everyone has a right to the opportunity for a better life and some people, because of historical circumstances beyond their control, can't get that better life unless the government assists them, literally picks them up and moves them there.

While not opposed to integration and the goals of scatter-site, Koch was demonstrating to the voters that in the case of Forest Hills, he favored the values those who worked to maintain their middle-class standing.[19]

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[18] Vito Turso, "Of Picketing and Peace," *LI Press*, 29 November 1971.
[19] Anthony Mancini and Robert Brandes Gratz, "Scattersite Housing---The Battle of Forest Hills, Article I: A Clash of Values," *The New York Post*, 24 April 1972.

In 1977, Cuomo and Koch opposed each other in the run off for the Democratic mayoral nomination. With Koch's stand on Forest Hills and the death penalty and Cuomo's reputation in healing bitter housing disputes in Corona and Forest Hills, both candidates were viewed as centrists who could maintain the liberal base of Jewish and black voters while appealing to more conservative ethnic whites. Years later, both men would relate that their stands on the Forest Hills project brought derision from some liberal Democrats. Koch claimed that liberals denounced his opposition to the project and Cuomo believed he lost his run for lieutenant governor because his compromise angered liberals. "The liberals killed me in 1974," Cuomo claimed. ". . . they called me a 'Queens conservative.'" The stringencies of the fiscal crisis served as a final condemnation on profligacy of the Lindsay administration years and when the 1977 blackout was followed by days of looting crime was once again dominant issue in the campaign.[20]

Koch's support of the death penalty and Cuomo's principled stand against it became the defining issue of the campaign. Cuomo denounced Koch as a "conservative" who was "no longer a traditional Democrat." Koch carried the election by emphasizing he was tougher on crime because he favored the death penalty. While Koch would go on to serve three terms as mayor, Cuomo would win the governorship in 1982 and hold the position for three terms. Both Koch and Cuomo illustrate a governing style that while not as reactionary as conservative Republicans during the Reagan era, was competent, fiscally conservative and not the reform minded liberalism championed by John V. Lindsay. Koch and Cuomo would burn the trail for other formerly reform-minded liberals such as Bill Clinton, who used a similar appeal to serve two presidential terms.[21]

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[20] "Voice of New York," *New York Magazine*, 11 April 1988, 76;
[21] Frank Lynn, "Cuomo Says Koch Isn't 'a Traditional Democrat' Now," *NYT*, 23 September 1977.

The most significant aspect of the Forest Hills controversy, however, was its impact on public housing. Even before the first public housing project was built in the 1930s, housing reformers envisioned slum clearance and new housing as a tool to alleviate crime, disease and other problems associated with the city's sprawling slums. The first twenty years of public housing in New York seemed to justify the housing reformers vision. In order to house African American families, who experienced more extreme overcrowding, higher rents and poor housing conditions than whites, NYCHA adopted a separate but equal policy of building projects for African Americans in Harlem and South Jamaica and allowing only a token amount of African Americans in the majority of projects built in white neighborhoods. Persistant lobbying by the NAACP and Urban League resulted in the Housing Authority slightly loosening its segregation policies and allow more African Americans into projects in white neighborhoods during the 1940s.[22]

Housing reformers imbued with the ideals racial equality during World War II lauded the Housing Authority's "inter-racial" projects that housed significant percentages white and African American families. After the War, housing reformers envisioned an expanded program that promoted integration. During the 1950s, with racial barriers lifted Robert Moses oversaw the construction of low-income public housing units in the city's poorest neighborhoods many of which were experiencing racial transition. As a result, the public housing program emerged from the 1950s as racially segregated. Whites tended to live in a handful of state funded "low-rent" projects and "moderate rent" city funded projects, while the majority of tenants in the city's low-income projects were black and

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[22] NYCHA, "Meeting: South Jamaica Advisory Committee," NYCHA Papers; Robbins with Tyler, *Reminiscences of a Housing Advocate*, 146.

Puerto Rican. The attempts of housing reformers to attract white families to live in predominantly minority low-income projects and the Housing Authority's Phase Program of applying racial quotas for each project failed to integrate public housing. Whites refused to live in projects with more than 30% minority population.[23]

During the 1960s, the rise a more activist civil rights movement championed a more aggressive integration effort for public housing. Instead of attracting white families to projects, the housing reformers conceded the racial imbalance of low-income projects and demanded that to promote integration projects be constructed in middle-income areas that were predominantly white. The emergence scatter-site housing, as it became known, would be the culmination of the housing reformers idealistic vision for public housing.

Campaigning for the presidency, Richard M. Nixon viewed the Forest Hills controversy as an example of forced integration. While he could not stop the Forest Hills project or alter the laws requiring housing integration, he could publicize his opposition to the program and attempt to cleave white ethnic voters from the Democratic Party. Nixon's posturing struck a chord with many whites in the 1970s opposed to integration. Nixon won the 1972 election by a landslide.[24]

In the years immediately following the Forest Hills controversy public housing was never to regain its prestige in the city's social welfare agenda. Many projects the Lindsay administration had proposed were finally constructed during the Beame years after the Nixon administration lifted its freeze on public housing funds. But in the midst

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[23] City-Wide Citizen's Committee of Harlem (hereafter CWCCH), "The Story of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," folder CWCCH City Wide Harlem Week 1943, box 8, Algernon Black Papers (hereafter Black Papers), Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 4.
[24] Chris Bonastia, "Why did Affirmative Action in Housing Fail During the Nixon Era? Exploring the 'Institutional Homes' of Social Policies," *Social Problems* 47, (November 1, 2000), in *Academic Search Premier*, <http://web2.epnet.com.citation.asp>, 3.

of the city's fiscal crisis, the federal government saw the city's public housing program as a symbol of wasteful spending. Between 1976 and 1980, only 3,233 units of public housing were constructed. In the thirty years after Forest Hills, only 31,000 units of public housing were built. The majority of being renovated apartments or apartments for the elderly. In the thirty years before Forest Hills 150,000 new units were constructed. The nation's most comprehensive and experimental public housing system was relegated to managing its existing stock of public housing units. Scatter-site housing, the program that was designed to promote integration effectively hastened the demise of public housing in the city and the country.[25]

[25] Bonastia, 19; NYCHA, *Development Data Book 2004*, (New York: Department of Research and Policy Developmentof Research and Policy Development, 2004), on line at www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/deve_data_book.pdf, 1-49; NYCHA, "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30k 1970, All Programs," 1970 August, Manuscript box IVB, NYCHA Papers.

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