

“Tarred with the Exceptional Image”: Public Housing and Popular Discourse, 1950-1990

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I

In 1986, readers of a major news magazine learned about Desire, a New Orleans housing project. Presumably open to all of New Orleans’ “poor people,” most of Desire’s residents—as the text and photographs made clear—were African-Americans. Out of the project’s population of 7,800, almost 3,000 were children, some of whom represented a “third generation of poverty” characterized by an “inexorable cycle of crime, welfare dependency and dimmed hopes.” Moreover, Desire was a “world without order, cleanliness, privacy or parental supervision,” where school drop-outs, teenage fathers, and unwed mothers were common. But if Desire conformed to a grim yet all too familiar image of public housing, its residents’ behaviors, which included “violence,” drug use, and random sex, were identified as the chief causes.¹

While Desire typified the image of public housing presented by the periodical press in the 1980s, the issues of race and tenant behavior had not always framed depictions of housing projects. Between 1950 and the early 1960s, a fairly positive conception of low-income subsidized housing dominated popular coverage, a dialogue that stressed slum clearance and the dearth of affordable housing. By the late 1960s, though, a highly problematic image—based largely on race—had come to dominate the popular press, obscuring alternative representations that would have more accurately depicted the range and variety of public housing throughout America. Indeed, national data for 1989 indicated that public housing was neither racially monolithic (one out of every three units was

classified as white), nor occupied primarily by welfare recipients (35 percent reported wages and 45 percent reported social security/pensions as income sources). In addition, 47 percent of all households were comprised of just one person, while only 13 percent had three or more children. Finally, fully 38 percent of all households were classified as “elderly.”² These data described salient aspects of public housing that have been absent from popular coverage for almost three decades.

To understand specifically how the popular press mediated and shaped the image of public housing, this article reviews periodical literature between 1950 and 1990.³ Influenced by recent theoretical formulations in cultural studies, the following analysis argues that mass media are historically significant because of their ability to define parameters of debate and to validate cultural identities and stereotypes.⁴ Indeed, much of the period after 1965 attests to the ability of the periodical press to present its own conception of public housing (and its occupants), while ignoring organizations and scholars who challenged these narrow depictions.

Perhaps equally important, what the periodical press presented was a distorted image of public housing, not an entirely constructed one, nor one completely divorced from reality. This image did accurately characterize some of the nation’s largest urban projects, which were and continue to be segregated, derelict, and troubled by violent crime. But even as it focused almost exclusively on a few inner city projects, popular coverage failed to frame their problems—their atypicality—within the larger social or economic context of ongoing racial tensions, deindustrialization, or the underlying causes of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and violent crime.⁵ Instead, the periodical press served primarily as a forum for presenting a public housing “underclass,” a *Lumpenproletariat* that was neither white nor elderly, but young, African-American, and socially dysfunctional. By doing so, it tended to transform a complex economic issue (providing low cost housing) into a simple moral one (condemning the behaviors of public housing residents). Within this circumscribed framework, the periodical press reinforced rather than debated or contested the long-standing bifurcation in American welfare policy between the deserving and undeserving poor.⁶

II

Spurred by the exigencies of the Great Depression, the federal government’s efforts to provide a significant amount of low cost public housing were nevertheless largely unsuccessful for more than two decades. While the Home Owners Loan Corporation (1933) and the National Housing Act (1934) were aimed at shoring up and promoting single family home ownership, the Public Works Administration’s Housing Division was initially the only New Deal agency devoted to constructing affordable multiple unit dwellings, and even it remained primarily a demonstration program with few tangible results. Reacting to the

lobbying efforts of Senator Robert F. Wagner and others to enact programs that would both clear slums and provide more low cost housing, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1937, the first piece of permanent federal housing legislation, which among other things, established the United States Housing Authority. Even still, opposition from conservative lobbies like the National Association of Real Estate Boards (which feared government competition in housing markets), waning political support for the New Deal, and the priority of defense housing during World War II limited the amount of housing actually constructed under the 1937 legislation. After the war, however, with continuing urban in-migration, and with countless GIs looking for homes, public officials acknowledged that the nation faced an acute housing shortage. Under increasing political pressure, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, which extended and refunded federal housing programs, and in doing so, called for “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family,” an ambitious objective that mandated construction of at least 810,000 units of public housing by 1955. In more concrete terms, the act set up legal mechanisms by which communities could receive aid for establishing public housing and “urban redevelopment” programs.⁷ Most of the discussion of public housing following World War II was a response to the housing built under this legislation.

Despite variation in terminology, the type of housing associated with slums in the 1950s was privately owned “tenements,” not publicly operated “projects.”⁸ In a 1950 issue of *The Nation*, the well known housing advocate, Charles Abrams, described how blocks of decaying Los Angeles “tenements” created vast slums with “rats among the palm trees.”⁹ Three years later, *Time* described a similar situation in Chicago, a city where “as many as 1,000 people” lived in buildings designed for 200, and where reporters met “Pig Face,” a boy whose nose had been bitten off by a rat.¹⁰ For individuals like Abrams, and for a growing number of municipal officials, a potential solution to slums and their “tenements” was public housing. As early as 1952, *Business Week* lauded the urban renewal efforts of St. Louis. Accompanying an article entitled, “St. Louis Attacks Its Slums,” photographs captured both aspects of the St. Louis program: a high-rise “project”—Cochran apartments—stood defiantly in the midst of recently cleared “slum land.” In the background, additional land that had been cleared for the “Pruitt development,” a project for St. Louis’ “Negroes,” was visible.¹¹ That the latter would eventually become a potent symbol for all that was wrong with public housing should not obscure an important point. High-rise, “modern” projects were once presented as an answer to America’s urban woes.

Admittedly, the popular press sometimes presented opinions that criticized the state’s newly enlarged role in housing. In the conservative *American Mercury*, “Creeping Socialism” called public housing a “something for nothing” program that provided occupants a place to live at the expense of families who paid “full realty tax.” A second article, “Bulldozer at Your Door,” condemned the use of eminent domain as a method for acquiring property, and concluded that

“socialistic schemes for redevelopment” were actually “plans to confiscate private property.”¹² In both articles, public housing was anathema because of its supposed antipathy toward private property and limited government; the race or behaviors of tenants were not targets of invective. Even in 1958, when the *Saturday Evening Post* suggested that some changes should be made in New York City’s public housing, it affirmed that “nine-tenths or more of the occupants” were “decent and law-abiding.”¹³ Thus, opponents of public housing in the 1950s usually relied on arguments developed in the 1930s that sought to protect private business interests, especially those in residential construction and real estate, by evoking the spectre of big government and socialized housing, both ominous threats during the early years of the cold war.¹⁴

Balancing these criticisms was the notion that public housing was intended to serve a variety of social groups. Linked by their inability to afford housing in the private sector, these groups included the elderly, blue-collar workers, veterans, and young married couples.¹⁵ Low wages or working-class status, however, did not brand public housing with a racial label. Arguably, reformers like Charles Abrams believed that public housing was the only way for “Negroes” and other “minorities” to obtain affordable housing, given the high rents of urban apartments and the exclusionary policies of suburbs.¹⁶ Nevertheless, whites as well as African-Americans sought occupancy in public housing. In Chicago, white demand for public housing, coupled with racism, resulted in attempts to exclude African-Americans from housing projects during the 1940s and 1950s; other cities, such as St. Louis, minimized racial strife by building separate projects for whites and African-Americans.¹⁷ But while racial strife could and did erupt over attempts to integrate specific projects, the general image of public housing was racially inclusive, though segregated. So strong was the continuing appeal of public housing, *Business Week* lamented in 1957 that a white Pittsburgh family, which earned too much to remain in subsidized housing, had to move from an “up-to-date public housing project” to a dilapidated “two-family house.”¹⁸

When offering more detailed descriptions of public housing occupants, the periodical press almost always identified them as “families.”¹⁹ This description likely reflected the concerns of housing advocates who emphasized the needs of families (and children) in hopes of eliciting sympathy and galvanizing support for public housing. Important, though, was the kind of family for which public housing was intended. “Family” either referred to a married couple without children, like John and Dorris Rudder of Lincoln Heights (Washington, D.C.), or more commonly, a couple with children, such as the Cantrells of Cedartown, Georgia (two children), a St. Louis “shoemaker” and his “family of six,” or Pittsburgh’s Leo Stadelman, his wife, and five children. But “families,” however large, did not include single parents, unwed mothers, or unmarried couples. In the eyes of the popular press, the number of children who lived in public housing would not become a liability until they came from families that included these latter characteristics.

While enthusiasm for public housing projects continued in the popular press throughout the 1950s, their design was increasingly questioned. The individuals who influenced the evolution of public housing were the modernist French architect and city planner Le Corbusier, who argued that skyscrapers were the ideal building type for urban areas; housing advocate James Ford, who believed that large projects were less likely to regress into slums; and Elizabeth Wood, who, as head of Chicago's Housing Authority during the 1940s and early 1950s, subscribed to Ford's views and supported massive "super-blocks" of public housing.²⁰ Initially characterized by the periodical press as bold, modern, and "clean," especially when compared to the slums they replaced or were encircled by, these buildings did indeed dominate their environments—but this seemed only to alienate their occupants and frighten those who had to work or live near them. Commentators soon faulted these "huge projects" for trying to "pack in the most people per foot," and for their "drab uniformity."²¹ By 1958, the public housing authority of Cedartown, Georgia, was already experimenting with small one and two family homes instead of large apartment buildings. In describing this experiment, *Time* confidently stated that large scale housing projects "did nothing to stop decay in good neighborhoods," and that "experts" were recommending smaller units on scattered, not centralized sites.²² Though individual houses remained too expensive to become the dominant mode of public housing, smaller garden apartments did replace massive high-rises as the standard design of public housing by the mid-1960s. Despite these changes, the most frightening and desperate image of public housing—that of decaying, "sterile" high-rises—persisted, even after the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 banned high-rise public housing except for those projects intended "predominantly for the elderly."²³

III

Thus, up until 1965, only two articles (both in *American Mercury*) directly criticized public housing. Though faulted elsewhere for its size and scale, public housing was presented as an antidote for the housing shortage and physical decay that affected both whites and blacks in urban areas. *Time* neatly summed up the prevailing consensus by quoting the assertion of Eisenhower's Public Housing Commissioner that "'public housing creates hope....'"²⁴ The positive record and potential of public housing, however, was forcefully countered by two articles that appeared in 1965. These articles, emphasizing the problems of one particular housing project, foreshadowed an image that would symbolize public housing for the next two decades.

Writing in *The Reporter*, Elizabeth Brenner Drew focused exclusively on Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, a project whose 28,000 residents were predominantly African-American.²⁵ For this reason, Drew argued that public housing in Chicago, and by implication elsewhere, had come to mean "Negro-occupied



**View of Robert Taylor Homes on South State Street in Chicago, 1963.
Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.**

high-rises.” More troubling yet, at least for Drew, was that 20,000 of Taylor Homes’ residents were children. This image—projects overrun by African-American children—became a dominant motif in the public imagination, though overlooked and unremarked was the fact that residential suburbs also teemed with children, except they were neither poor nor African-American. Moreover, according to Drew, public housing was plagued by “problem families.” Drew cited the *Chicago Daily News*’ claim that “‘all’” the residents of Taylor Homes were “‘poor, grappling with violence and vandalism, fear and suspicion, teen-age terror and adult chaos, rage, [and] resentment....’” Drew, consciously or not, was linking the behavior of tenants with the physical condition of public housing, and less explicitly, with the reason its residents ended up there in the first place. What characterized Drew’s article, then, was not overt hostility toward public housing, but its use of Taylor Homes to draw conclusions about public housing generally.

A second article appeared in *Look* a few months later, and while it perpetuated some aspects of an older, more positive image, it also advanced a less flattering, even threatening image of public housing.²⁶ Again focusing on Robert Taylor Homes, “Modern Design for a City Ghetto” asserted that the “31 identical

high-rise slabs,” made of “concrete and steel,” created an atmosphere of “sterile uniformity” and “perpetuated ghetto life.” Agreeing with older criticisms that condemned the size and “uniformity” of public housing, the article refuted the contention that projects were a remedy for inner city blight, but instead equated projects with slums and ghettos themselves. In some respects, though, *Look’s* depiction of Taylor Homes’ residents was somewhat less disparaging than the Drew article, and with an apparent human interest angle in mind, focused on an African-American boy, Lonnie, and his “seamstress” mother. Lonnie, his back to the camera, is initially shown staring at a sea of high-rises through the fence of his balcony. A compelling and prescient image, it foreshadows the use of faceless, usually nameless African-Americans as the human props in photographs of massive, deteriorating housing projects. Moreover, Lonnie’s fingers, intertwined with the webs of fencing, is eerily reminiscent of the way prison inmates grasp the bars of their cells, an image that may or may not have been reassuring to white middle-class readers coming only weeks after the Watts riots.

Though Lonnie and his mother conformed to the image of the conscientious working poor (Lonnie’s mother “works full time to supplement welfare checks”), the continuity with older depictions ended there. The overall image of Taylor Homes was one of an African-American “ghetto” in the form of demeaning, impersonal high-rises that were characterized by “broken homes” and welfare dependency. Like the Drew article, *Look* presented Taylor Homes, one of the country’s most troubled projects, as a synecdoche for public housing. A contemporary housing scholar, Lawrence Friedman, noted this general trend, arguing that “most of the noisy criticism” was “directed at the big urban projects” and that “small-town and suburban projects” did not “deserve to be tarred with the same brush.” The periodical press, however, neither reported nor heeded Friedman’s advice.²⁷

As noted above, the increasingly negative depiction of public housing was constructed both through specific language (e.g., “sterile uniformity,” “ghetto”), and through visual imagery. Photographs selectively emphasized the race and dehumanizing anonymity of the residents of a few large urban projects; other visual images that could have depicted small, predominantly white projects (or even whites in large projects) were absent. Among those scholars who have studied how visual images function, Stuart Hall has concluded that photographs can serve as “connotative codes” that “permit a sign to signify...implied messages.”²⁸ The “implied messages” embedded in public housing photographs were fairly clear by the late 1960s: welfare-dependent African-Americans subverted the objectives as well as the actual structures of public housing. While these images were probably part of a broader trend that witnessed increased depictions of African-Americans in the popular press during the late 1960s, they nevertheless advanced stereotypes that demeaned both public housing and those who lived in it.²⁹

If connotative codes transmitted negative messages about African-Americans, another set of codes conveyed relatively positive messages about whites and

their cultural identities. These positive visual messages combined with alluring descriptions to create a counter-image of apartment life that implicitly identified the problems of public housing by explicitly emphasizing the advantages of similar housing designed for other groups, namely middle-class whites. Briefly exploring this counter-image is therefore necessary for understanding the evolving image of public housing.

Emerging during the 1950s, this counter-image illustrated that assessments of modern architecture were sometimes influenced by factors unrelated to building size or design. As discussed earlier, one of the most consistent criticisms of public housing was its scale and “sterile” design. What these criticisms failed to note, though, was that many urban apartments—both public and private—possessed these same features. Much ballyhooed, huge high-rise apartment buildings were built in several cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York. In the Bronx, Concourse Village encompassed 5,600 apartments located in 22 buildings, each 20 stories tall, while nearby Co-Op City had a staggering 15,400 units.³⁰ What made these and other buildings, so similar in design and appearance to Taylor Homes or Pruitt-Igoe, different from their public housing counterparts? Why did popular coverage refer to them as “sleek” and “modernistic,” instead of “sterile” or “uniform?” The only obvious difference was the people for whom these apartments were built: the middle- and upper-classes. This difference became apparent in descriptions of new apartments; they were “loaded with amenities for a leisure age,” which usually meant swimming pools, covered parking, putting-greens, air-conditioning, and “maid and valet service” for “an extra charge.” These “amenities” translated into high rents, some of which could reach \$700 per month, a princely sum in the late 1950s.³¹ One article suggested that new “tower” apartments were popular because “‘a lot of people like to live up high, to have a view...to go down in the elevator and walk right out to the swimming pool.’” Elsewhere, readers were told that while “everybody would like a penthouse,” one need not worry since “today a penthouse can also mean a top floor or any high apartment with a balcony.” To prove the point, Marina City, a newly constructed apartment building in Chicago, called all forty of its top floors “penthouses”; predictably, no one suggested that the residents of Taylor Homes should refer to their high-rise apartments similarly.³²

That the race and socio-economic status of tenants (as well as whether private or public funding was involved) ultimately determined the media’s evaluation of a building’s design and appropriateness of its amenities was illustrated in *Newsweek’s* reaction to Taino Towers, a HUD financed high-rise in Harlem.³³ Condemning as “posh amenities” Taino’s indoor swimming pool and underground parking, and ridiculing its “plush extras,” *Newsweek* suggested that only bare essentials were justified for “low- and middle-income tenants.” To support this view, an accompanying photograph showed a rather befuddled looking African-American man standing with his back to the camera in one of Taino’s empty apartments. The caption, “Room at the top for the poor—at Federal



The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis. Courtesy of Missouri Historical Society.

expense,” not only hinted at the unjustified largesse of tax supported programs, it also provided a frightening visual subversion of racial and economic arrangements: the African-American “poor” were “at the top” instead of affluent whites. Here, the connotative codes within the photograph conveyed as much if not more meaning than the text itself.

Gender and sexuality also informed the counter-image of apartment life, though again there were racial implications. An article lauding Marina City included a photograph of a young white woman, clad in a skimpy bikini, sunbathing on her balcony.³⁴ Whether the woman actually lived there, or was simply a model posing for the photograph, the reader likely associated a sexy young woman with residency in a luxury high-rise. Furthermore, the sexuality represented by the bikini-clad woman was clearly disassociated from child rearing or state assistance, characteristics increasingly linked to the sexuality of African-American women. The intersection of race, class, and sexuality was even more apparent in the media’s coverage of South Bay Club Apartments in Torrance, California. South Bay rented only to singles, a policy *Time* seemingly approved of and described as “pads for singles.” These “pads” were home to “500 single stewardesses, doctors, teachers, engineers, secretaries and salesmen,”

which made a majority of South Bay's residents white-collar professionals. South Bay's drawing cards included three tennis courts, two swimming pools, a whirlpool bath, two sauna rooms, a billiards room, and a "party room," but its primary appeal was an uninhibited, sexually charged atmosphere. One resident likened it to a "student atmosphere" that was "much sexier than any college's," while another resident stated more directly that South Bay was a "good place to be bad." An accompanying photograph showed three "South Bay swingers"—two white women and one white man—dancing together.³⁵ The message was fairly clear: sex among white professionals in an affluent, discrete environment was apparently a sign of enlightened tolerance that did not merit censure, even from one of the nation's more conservative periodicals.³⁶

In sum, this counter-image was essentially a dialogue concerning middle- and upper-class apartment life that sent subtle visual and textual messages to readers of the periodical press. If public housing was bleak and imposing, the design of private apartments was exciting and daring. Even if the exteriors of such structures often resembled public housing in their starkness and repetitive forms, readers were assured that a wide range of creature comforts and expensive services made them highly desirable and ultimately quite different. Moreover, uninhibited sexuality and unconventional living arrangements, the very attributes that tarnished public housing residents, had the opposite effect on sybaritic whites who lived in stylish apartments. What this counter-image underscored, then, was the increasingly important role of race and socio-economic status in the evolving image of public housing.³⁷

IV

During the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the popular press perpetuated the almost entirely negative image of public housing that had emerged in the mid-1960s. This image was maintained by using stark visual imagery and simplified explanations of complex and often ambiguous policy issues. One of this period's dominant motifs was that public housing re-created rather than eliminated slums. The popular press queried whether or not the government was constructing "instant slums," with answers supplied by *Newsweek's* description of Cabrini-Green as a "vertical ghetto," *Life's* designation of Pruitt-Igoe as a "St. Louis slum," and *U.S. News and World Report's* confident assertion that a "majority of citizens" viewed public housing as a "sort of high-rise slum."³⁸ While both critics and supporters of public housing agreed that the "old style, massively concentrated high-rise" was "largely a thing of the past"—and despite the construction of low-rise, scattered projects throughout the 1970s—popular coverage continued to recycle images of older high-rises.³⁹ Between 1970 and 1973, there were no fewer than eight references to Pruitt-Igoe, a project that appeared in the popular press even after it had been demolished, and despite scholars who warned that Pruitt-Igoe presented a general picture of public housing that was "demonstrably not true."⁴⁰

If the variety of structural forms that projects did or could take received scant acknowledgment, the reverse was true for residents of public housing. Increased attention was given to their socio-economic status and race, factors that were eventually linked to anti-social behaviors, which were in turn linked to the physical deterioration of projects. The first and perhaps most ominous trend that commentators noted was the changing racial demography of public housing. The popular press characterized public housing in a number of cities as almost exclusively “black,” and virtually every photograph of public housing included African-Americans.⁴¹ Conversely, only three articles (two of which were on the same project) after 1965 contained photographs of white residents, though as contemporary and subsequent data suggested, this presented a skewed portrayal of nationwide public housing profiles.⁴² Nevertheless, the link between racial status and public housing made it possible by 1971 for *U.S. News and World Report* to caption a picture of three African-American teenagers with a statement by President Nixon: “Public housing will not be imposed on any community.”⁴³

Relatedly, popular coverage emphasized the high percentage of desperately impoverished individuals who now supposedly typified public housing occupants. Though public housing had always been for those whose incomes did not allow them to secure housing elsewhere, this new generation of poor, according to the periodical press, seemed different. They were not only “very poor” and the “poorest of the poor,” they were welfare recipients, a class of people who represented unconventional family structures (unwed or divorced women and their children) and indefinite economic dependence on the state.⁴⁴

Whether or not public housing was in fact becoming home to a nascent “underclass” is difficult to determine given the dearth of nationwide data for this period. In the nation’s largest urban areas, which the periodical press tended to single out for exclusive coverage, the number of welfare recipients likely increased, both in and out of public housing, during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁵ When these welfare recipients lived in subsidized housing, though, they were often referred to as “problem tenants,” a stock phrase that popular discourse used as an overarching but seldom documented explanation for the condition of public housing. Noting the tenuousness of these assertions, Richard S. Scobie, in his study of four housing projects in Boston during the early 1970s, argued that the focus on “problem” families or “problem tenants” had allowed policymakers to avoid the “harder questions about the inadequacy of our entire system of...subsidized housing.” He concluded that it was time to stop blaming “systemic problems on presumed individual pathology.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the popular press consistently condemned projects as institutions inhabited by “problem families,” by “mothers on relief,” and families who had “no male parent in residence”; projects were not described as sanctuaries for a “stream of refugees,” the sympathetic epithet that popular coverage had used to describe white working-class families who sought public housing in the early 1950s.⁴⁷ On the contrary, popular depictions of public housing subtly reinforced arguments made by some

policymakers and academics in the 1960s that increasingly attributed the plight of the poor to a common set of pathologies, which they often referred to as a “culture of poverty.”⁴⁸

As this rhetoric indicates, criticism did not attack public housing directly. Instead, public housing was one of the most visible targets on which a growing white backlash could project its general concerns over race, sexuality, and state assistance, suggesting in part why a more threatening depiction of housing projects emerged in the mid to late 1960s. Indeed, increased attention to and concern over public housing occurred during a period when some of America’s largest cities gained black majorities, and as the black civil rights movement entered a more militant and confrontational phase.

In addition to issues of race and economic dependency, other factors also supported the apparently widespread consensus that public housing was facing a crisis in the 1970s. These factors bore directly on the supposed behaviors of African-Americans, behaviors that, according to many periodicals, clearly affected the physical condition of projects. Article after article lamented the “broken windows,” “refuse,” “garbage,” and graffiti that had become the visual shorthand for identifying public housing.⁴⁹ Moreover, the smell of urine in many projects—a characteristic frequently noted by the periodical press—signaled an obvious difference between the hygienically concerned mainstream culture and the indigent and seemingly uncivilized residents of public housing.⁵⁰ Perhaps not incidental, the metaphoric use of dirt and filth to symbolize public housing projects also strengthened the notion that its residents represented the undeserving poor.⁵¹

Coupled with the physical deterioration of buildings was an emphasis on the “crime” that plagued them. In many instances, though, this dimension of public housing was presented through colorful prose and metaphors rather than objective data. Cabrini-Green was likened to a “maximum security prison” with “dungeon-dim lighting,” while Pruitt-Igoe was said to resemble “a country under siege,” where “only punks, hoodlums, drug addicts and unfortunates too weak or terrified to move were left.” Though “crime” usually referred to “vandalism,” other more serious activities did occur. “Children” of “deprived families” formed gangs and “terrorized tenants,” sometimes controlling “whole floors.” Nonetheless, gang terrorism sometimes meant nothing more than snatching “quarters from children in the playground,” a repugnant though hardly unique activity among adolescent street toughs.⁵²

Rather than view tenants as directly culpable for their behaviors, popular coverage sometimes publicized an environmental critique that blamed the buildings themselves. In 1969 HUD Secretary George Romney argued that it was “‘certainly true that public housing built on the basis of sheer functionalism’” had the “‘greatest vandalism and least interest among occupants in maintaining the building.’”⁵³ According to this argument, the design of buildings provoked negative behaviors and suppressed positive ones. This view received subsequent support from the noted urban planner, Oscar Newman, whose work was discussed



Children playing in front of Cabrini Homes development, 1959. Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.

in *Time*. Newman asserted that as buildings got “bigger and higher,” they became “more and more anonymous,” and therefore contained little if any “defensible space,” a phrase Newman employed to refer to the area an individual felt responsible for maintaining and “defending.” What Newman and Romney were both arguing was that anyone, irrespective of race or class, would be prone to anti-social behavior if he or she lived in high-rise public housing.⁵⁴

Though infrequently accorded coverage, another explanation for the condition of projects blamed funding cuts. *U.S. News and World Report* concisely described the dilemma that public housing faced in the early 1970s, explaining that “as local officials struggle to make ends meet, putting off repairs and cutting down on services, projects became dilapidated.”⁵⁵ Thus, insufficient maintenance, not tenant behavior, caused physical deterioration. Even this argument, though, had the potential to cast blame on tenants, since diminished funding for public housing resulted from the (theoretically) higher number of occupants who were welfare recipients; these individuals could be charged no more than 25 percent of their monthly income for rent.⁵⁶ Given this set of circumstances, the solution to public housing woes lay either in obtaining more rent money from welfare tenants, or in replacing welfare recipients with occupants whose incomes

were derived from other sources. In either case, welfare, and by extension those who received it, was the problem.

Explanations that placed the blame for deteriorating conditions and anti-social behavior on architectural flaws and funding cuts were unable, however, to redirect the focus of popular coverage or suggest how difficult—and costly—effective housing policies might be. While mitigating circumstances were sometimes acknowledged, the popular press largely supported the notion that it was aberrant “lifestyles” and behaviors of the “very poor” that caused the problems associated with public housing. Perhaps most significant, there was no coverage of the Senate’s 1973 Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee Hearings at which the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) forcefully argued that public housing was not characterized by high-rise developments containing large “multi-problem” families. After debunking a number of other popular “myths,” NAHRO finally concluded that “much of the criticism of the public housing program” resulted from “viewing only a narrow aspect of program experience—the complicated housing experience of certain projects in large urban centers—and viewing even this experience without a true perspective of the issues involved.”⁵⁷ By ignoring these Hearings, the periodical press failed to present assessments of public housing that were significantly different from the ones found in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other mass circulation journals.

V

During the Reagan-Bush era, popular coverage refined but did not transform its depiction of public housing; it continued to present the physical condition of projects and the types of people who lived in them as stark contrasts to what presumably typified (white) middle-class culture. To support its assumptions, the periodical press highlighted views that equated society’s ills with individual failings and public sector programs, not endemic economic problems that defied private sector solutions. As a result, coverage that might have at least acknowledged that political empowerment and fiscal policy were important aspects of the public housing debate, instead presented solutions that stressed only moral uplift, self-help, and personal responsibility. In turn, by emphasizing individualism and simple morality plays, popular coverage suggested that while racial deficiencies played a role in directing African-Americans into public housing, racial discrimination was no real obstacle in one’s attempt to leave it.

As in earlier periods, the popular press continued to use specific projects to represent general trends. While Taylor Homes had symbolized the failure of public housing in the 1960s, and Pruitt-Igoe had functioned similarly in the 1970s, Cabrini-Green played this role in the 1980s. Emphasis on its “rat-infested buildings,” “graffiti-scarred stairwells,” and “broken elevators” suggested the ineluctable fate of public housing, given the behavior of its occupants.⁵⁸ And though Cabrini-Green’s residents were usually identified with names and faces

(unlike the anonymous African-Americans in earlier photographs of public housing), they conformed to the general profile that emerged during the late 1960s and 1970s: they were usually single-parent, African-American families headed by women. Indeed, among the 15,000 residents of Cabrini-Green, *Time* stressed the fact that only "150 husbands [had] their names on leases."⁵⁹ Despite statistical data to the contrary, public housing continued to be depicted as a "permanent home" for "very low-income people," the majority of whom were "black, Hispanic, or elderly," though these last two groups usually went unacknowledged in popular periodicals.⁶⁰

While the popular press maintained its emphasis on the "crime, drugs and vandalism" found in urban projects, the level of violence associated with these activities now attracted the most attention. Specifically, drug use was no longer characterized as an essentially victimless crime, but as a "trade" that turned projects into "battle zones." Whole buildings, where violence was seen as a "part of life," were "virtually held hostage by drug trafficking." The drug trade so dominated the Red Hook project in South Brooklyn that "shoot-outs" occurred "almost daily between rival operations," an event also common in Cabrini-Green, which was labelled "one of the most dangerous places in America." In keeping with simple policy proposals (and downplaying the diversity of opinions), *Time* devoted two articles to the views of Jack Kemp, President Bush's Secretary for Housing and Urban Development. For Kemp, the problems of public housing could be solved simply by evicting drug dealers and their families.⁶¹ What neither Kemp nor the periodical press addressed, though, was why illegal activities were seemingly rational options for unskilled public housing residents. However well suited drug-related violence was as a topic of photo-journalism, popular coverage was concerned only with its consequences, not its causes, as long as it remained within "American versions of Belfast or Beirut."⁶²

Irrespective of how frightening public housing's problems might have been depicted in the popular press, a relatively simple and cheap solution received widespread publicity in the mid to late 1980s. According to this remedy, the "cycle of crime and dependency" could be broken through "self-management and private ownership," a combination that indirectly indicted both tenant behavior and public involvement. The concept of "tenant-management" often translated, therefore, into self-help and self-improvement; once tenants learned "self-reliance," their neighborhoods would become "islands of safety in a sea of urban danger."⁶³ A broader set of tenant-management characteristics stressed "tough standards for residents," fines for "irresponsible behavior," "strong leadership," and, perhaps most significant, the ability to "screen applicants" and "evict undesirables."⁶⁴ Though exactly what made a tenant "undesirable" was never consistently defined by the popular press, the revised guidelines for St. Louis' Cochran project were presented as a model worthy of emulation. Cochran residents had "no criminal record," were "steadily employed," "owned an insured car," and their children could miss no more than ten days of school per year.⁶⁵ The

periodical press failed to note that these and other guidelines might well have disqualified some white suburbanites had they sought shelter in housing projects.

Admittedly, there were occasional hints that tenant-management was not a panacea. In noting the achievements of Kimi Gray, an African-American woman who spearheaded the country's first tenant-managed housing project, *Time* cautioned that Gray's successes depended upon "Great Society programs such as job training to drive home traditional conservative values."⁶⁶ Elsewhere, popular coverage presented the views of critics who argued that tenant-management was neither an answer to the severe shortage of low-income housing, nor an option for the "many public housing projects" that were "too far gone."⁶⁷ The popular press, however, was either ill equipped or unwilling to explore further these more complex explanations for public housing's problems.

As the 1980s came to a close, the periodical press continued to depict public housing as a colossal failure. But by focusing on the types of people who lived in subsidized housing, and by emphasizing their destructive behaviors, popular coverage had created an image greatly at odds with earlier depictions of slums. Instead of inadequate housing debasing decent people, inadequate people now corrupted otherwise decent housing. Ironically, such a vision clearly contradicted an exhaustive study that had been published at the beginning of the decade. Writing for the conservative American Enterprise Institute, John Weicher concluded that neither "project performance" nor "tenant satisfaction" was related to "household size, single-parent-households, teenage school dropouts, adult unemployment, personal problems, health problems, inability to speak English, or education level."⁶⁸ Like earlier studies, the data Weicher presented had little influence on what appeared in the popular press.

VI

This analysis suggests that the periodical press has played a significant role in poverty discourse during the post-World War II period. Indeed, statistical data, academic studies, and government investigations that substantiated a wide variety of experiences associated with public housing had little impact on the popular press. Initially part of broader discussions of the state's role in eliminating slums and providing adequate shelter for both black and white citizens, public housing gradually became, in the words of *Black Enterprise* magazine, "tarred with the exceptional image" of a few, admittedly distressed projects.⁶⁹ The range of metaphors used to symbolize these projects (crime, filth, prisons, drug abuse, unwed mothers) came to represent all forms of publicly subsidized low income housing. The disjuncture between the image and reality of public housing likely resulted from a variety of factors and considerations.

Mass media, both print and visual, have to reduce complex political and economic issues into simple narrative messages. Underlying causes, the interrelated nature of social phenomena, and the multiplicity of factors that affect public

policy are rarely accorded sufficient coverage in the popular press. Consequently, as the United States entered a period of economic decline and persistent urban problems, explanations that blamed “problem tenants” in the early 1970s, or highlighted the politically palatable solution of tenant management in the 1980s, were favored over explanations that suggested a lack of simple solutions or clearly identifiable scapegoats. Part of the historical significance of the popular press, then, was its ability to selectively emphasize certain aspects of housing policy, to proffer some explanations while virtually ignoring others.

Certainly, economic considerations also influenced public housing coverage. Ever mindful of the need to increase or at least maintain circulation levels, popular periodicals rely on provocative headlines, dramatic photographs, and coverage of timely issues to capture the attention of readers.⁷⁰ As periodicals faced unprecedented competition and declining readership during the 1960s, these concerns became critical. With respect to public housing, these considerations may partially account for the emphasis on riveting photographs of abandoned high-rises; sensational details such as urine soaked hallways; and stories framed by dramatic motifs like violent crime, instead of ones that focused on the prosaic but more relevant issues of economic stagnation and cuts in social spending.

Less directly, but no less important to their success, the print media reinforce and validate the cultural and racial identities of readers.⁷¹ In this respect, by associating public housing with poverty, crime, and racial homogeneity, the popular press conveyed unambiguous messages to its readers, most of whom were white, middle-class, and suburban. Even where confusion might have existed over the differences between those who lived in high-rise apartments and those who lived in similarly towering public housing projects, connotative codes established clear racial and class boundaries. The behavior and lifestyle of the average (white) reader of the periodical press were thus validated by indirectly contrasting them to the negative image of public housing and those who lived in it.⁷² In a broader historical context, these validating images likely reflected one aspect of America’s “discovery” of poverty in the 1960s, a phenomenon that included efforts by the professional middle-class to define the poor in both economic and cultural terms—and in contradistinction to their own values and attitudes. While such a process provided middle-class liberalism with an expanded policy agenda (the “war on poverty”), the conceptions and images that these new concerns generated rarely depicted the problems of the poor or public housing accurately.⁷³

Finally, though specific links are difficult to establish, the negative image of public housing doubtless influenced public opinion. As stated earlier, the influence of the periodical press is significant because it often creates the images and defines the terms that inform public debate. While scholars have long argued that the power of mass media lies in their ability to suggest what people should “think about,” more recent scholarship has concluded that the media’s influence

is greatest when information or images outside the audience's everyday experience are presented.⁷⁴ Consequently, just as the periodical press's sympathetic treatment of early public housing residents helped galvanize support behind state programs (not unlike the response generated by Progressive era muckrakers), its more recent coverage likely encouraged opposition to continuing or expanding such programs, especially when little if any accurate information existed about them. As a resident of Forest Hills, New York asserted in the early 1970s, much of what opponents knew about public housing came from what they read in the "news media," and this suggested that projects meant "trouble."⁷⁵ Or, as the *Chicago Tribune* argued in the mid 1980s, "all the stereotypes, all the fears" that had "come to be associated with public housing" were "likely to block significant change."⁷⁶

Thus, as America's economic and racial problems became more complex, the periodical press responded by presenting an increasingly narrow, distorted image of public housing. Moreover, by failing to connect this evolving image with broader changes in urban demography and income distribution, the periodical press advanced a simple, moralistic notion of poverty that focused on race and individual character deficiencies, not structural problems in social and economic arrangements. Such a depiction diminished the spectrum of public policies that seemed appropriate for resolving contemporary urban problems, and perpetuated popular notions of who did or did not deserve society's help.

Notes

1. Vern E. Smith, "Starting Out Poor," *Newsweek* (June 2, 1986), 23-24.
2. C. H. Casey, *Characteristics of HUD-Assisted Renters and Their Units in 1989* (Washington, D.C., 1992), 5, 7, 9, 11, 21. Using data from HUD's *Statistical Yearbooks*, Adam Bickford and Douglas S. Massey determined that by the late 1970s, 82.1 percent of the units in projects designed for the elderly were occupied by whites. See Bickford and Massey, "Segregation in the Second Ghetto: Racial and Ethnic Segregation in American Public Housing, 1977," *Social Forces* 69 (June 1991), 1018.
3. The *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* and NEXIS/LEXIS were used to locate articles on public housing that appeared between 1950 and 1990. Articles published in professional or academic journals (e.g., *The Journal of Housing* or *The American City*) were not included, given their specialized content and audiences. In total, 80 articles specifically addressed the issue of public housing, and they appeared in the following periodicals: *America*, *American Mercury*, *Black Enterprise*, *Business Week*, *Commonweal*, *Ebony*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Life*, *Look*, *The Nation*, *National Review*, *Newsweek*, *New York*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Reporter*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Survey*, *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Washington Monthly*. During the period under examination, four periodicals ceased publication: *Survey* (1952); *The Reporter* (1968); *Look* (1979); and *American Mercury* (1980). Approximately 48 percent of the articles appeared in *Newsweek*, *Time*, or *U.S. News & World Report*. By 1990, these three magazines had a combined circulation of 9,985,018. Circulation figures derived from the *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* (Detroit, 1990). Though newspapers and television have also constructed images of public housing, the regional circulation of the former, and the frequent inaccessibility of the latter make them problematic sources for diachronic analysis.
4. Richard Butsch, *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption* (Philadelphia, 1990); Stanley Cohen and Jack Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance, and the Mass Media* (London, 1973); James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (London, 1977); Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News,*

Newsweek, and *Time* (New York, 1979); Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York, 1992); Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Society, and the Media* (London, 1982); Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972), 176-187; and Robert P. Snow, *Creating Media Culture* (Beverly Hills, 1983), 65-97. This article also draws on methodological insights found in Wendy Kozol, "Madonnas of the Fields: Photographs, Gender and 1930s Farm Relief," *Gender* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1988), 1-23; and Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993), 1455-1482.

5. A recent study of metropolitan newspapers makes a similar point, concluding that "the vast majority of problems and issues relevant to the inner cities have been ignored by the media." See Carolyn Martindale, *The White Press and Black America* (New York, 1986), 178. One of the few attempts to link macro-economic issues—in this case, income inequality—to public housing's problems is Lee Rainwater's study of St. Louis' Pruitt-Igoe project, *Behind Ghetto Walls: Black Family Life in a Federal Slum* (Chicago, 1970). For a general discussion on this point, see Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton, 1988), 426. Explanations of the various transformations that have affected central cities can be found in Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York, 1992); Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York, 1991); and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987).

6. Both Michael B. Katz and Theda Skocpol have examined the bifurcated nature of American welfare policy. For their conclusions, see Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, 1989); Theda Skocpol, "Legacies of New Deal Liberalism," *Dissent* 30 (Winter 1983), 33-44; and Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol, 3-27; 421-445. A general analysis of how a contemporary "underclass" has been constructed can be found in Adolph Reed Jr., "The Underclass as Myth and Symbol: The Poverty of Discourse About Poverty," *Radical America* 24, no. 1 (1990), 21-42.

7. Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (New York, 1976), 206; Richard O. Davies, *Housing Reform During the Truman Administration* (Columbia, MO, 1966), 125-126; Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York, 1975), 59-63; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985), 225, 227; Nathaniel S. Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930* (New York, 1973), 27-28, 38; Martin Mayer, *The Builders: Houses, People, Neighborhoods, Governments, Money* (New York, 1978), 118-119; Gail Radford, *Housing Modern America: Radical Proposals and New Deal Policy* (Chicago, forthcoming), Chapter 4; Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore, 1990), 106-107; Elizabeth Wood, *The Beautiful Beginnings, The Failure to Learn: Fifty Years of Public Housing in America* (Washington, D.C., 1982), Chapter 2; and Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York, 1981), 232.

8. Charles Abrams, "Rats Among the Palm Trees," *The Nation* (February 25, 1950), 177-178; Robert Gruenberg, "Trumbull Park: Act II," *The Nation* (September 18, 1954), 230-232; "Public Housing Gets Drubbing," *Business Week* (May 27, 1950), 26; "St. Louis Attacks Its Slums," *Business Week* (July 19, 1952), 162-165; Charles Abrams, "Slums, Ghettos, and the G.O.P.'s 'Remedy,'" *The Reporter* (May 11, 1954), 27-30; "Home Experiment," *Time* (February 17, 1958), 89-90; "Low-Income Housing," *America* (January 7, 1956), 391; Joseph Arkin, "Creeping Socialism," *American Mercury* (August 1958), 25-29; Jo Hindman, "Bulldozer at Your Door," *American Mercury* (September 1958), 119-127.

9. Abrams, "Rats Among the Palm Trees," 177.

10. "Chicago's Shame," *Time* (June 29, 1953), 75.

11. "St. Louis Attacks Its Slums," 162. A contemporary account of slum clearance can be found in Robert Fisher, *20 Years of Public Housing* (New York, 1959), 62-72.

12. Arkin, 29; Hindman, 119.

13. "Housing Projects Need Not Be Ill Kept Slums," *Saturday Evening Post* (November 22, 1958), 10.

14. Albert Mayer, "Our Side is Well in the Lead," *Survey* (May 1950), 243-244; Lee F. Johnson, "Housing: a 1950 Tragedy," *Survey* (December 1950), 551-555; "A Way to a Permanent Housing Boom," *Time* (February 7, 1955), 74. See also Davies, 17.

15. "St. Louis Attacks Its Slums," 163; "Due Process," *Time* (August 1, 1955), 9.

16. Abrams, "Rats Among the Palm Trees," 177-178; Abrams, "Slums, Ghettos, and the G.O.P.'s 'Remedy,'" 28-30.

17. Gruenberg, 230.

18. "Housing Squeeze on Workers," *Business Week* (February 23, 1957), 75.
19. "St. Louis Attacks Its Slums," 163; Abrams, "Slums, Ghettos, and the G.O.P.'s 'Remedy,'" 27; "Due Process," 9; "Home Experiment," 89; "Low Income Housing," 391; Arkin, "Creeping Socialism," 29.
20. Wright, 234-237. For a review of projects built by the Chicago Housing Authority between the 1930s and 1970s, see Raymond J. Struyk, *A New System for Public Housing: Salvaging a National Resource* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 24-29. See also Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest: The Case of Public Housing in Chicago* (Glencoe, Ill., 1955), especially Chapter 6; and Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York, 1991), 92-93.
21. "Low-Income Housing," 391; "Home Experiment," 89. Less noted was the fact that newly constructed suburbs were also criticized for their scale and tedious similarity, with one contemporary forcefully arguing that "the physically monotonous development of mass houses is a leveling influence in itself, breeding swarms of neuter drones." See John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (Boston, 1956), 193.
22. "Home Experiment," 89-90.
23. 82 Stat. 504, Sec. 207.
24. "The Habit of Suspicion," *Time* (April 5, 1954), 27.
25. Elizabeth Brenner Drew, "The Long Trial of Public Housing," *The Reporter* (June 17, 1965), 15-18.
26. Sam Castan, "Modern Design for a City Ghetto," *Look* (September 21, 1965), M8-M12.
27. Lawrence Friedman, *Government and Slum Housing* (New York, 1968), 144.
28. Stuart Hall, "The Determinations of News Photographs," in Cohen and Young, 176.
29. J. David Colfax and Susan Frankel Sternberg, "The Perpetuation of Racial Stereotypes: Blacks in Mass Circulation Magazine Advertisements," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1972), 17.
30. "Housing Profits v. Shortage," *Time* (July 26, 1954), 68-69; "Landlord's Delight," *Time* (October 25, 1968), 90; "New Day for Mass Housing," *Business Week* (August 27, 1960), 127-130; "Why the New Appeal of Apartment Living," *U.S. News and World Report* (December 10, 1962), 100-101.
31. "Glass Cities," *Time* (April 4, 1955), 90-92.
32. "Penthouses: The Bottom at the Top," *Life* (November 20, 1964), 83.
33. "Ritzy Towers," *Newsweek* (November 10, 1975), 22.
34. "Penthouses: The Bottom at the Top," 84.
35. "Pads for Singles," *Time* (August 26, 1966), 49.
36. *Business Week* also published an article on South Bay, and while it focused primarily on how lucrative singles-only apartment complexes could be for investors, it also noted the generally permissive atmosphere and concluded that "romance...would appear to be king at South Bay." See "Singles Swing for Landlords," *Business Week* (March 5, 1966), 38-40.
37. By 1970, the 1960s' apartment boom was over, and construction of condominiums quickly exceeded that of apartments. Though popular, condominiums never inspired the amount of coverage that apartment life had, perhaps because condominiums, at least initially, housed significant numbers of elderly retirees whose lifestyles were quite different from those of young professionals.
38. "The Vertical Ghetto," *Newsweek* (September 7, 1970), 76; "Instant Demolition of a St. Louis Slum," *Life* (May 5, 1972), 6-7; "Crisis in Public Housing," *U.S. News & World Report* (November 24, 1969), 66-67.
39. Alex Poinsett, "Countdown in Housing," *Ebony* (September 1972), 64. See also "Coming: Federal Aid in Housing for 24 Million," *U.S. News & World Report* (June 15, 1970), 74-76; "Equal Housing: Nixon Defines His Policy," *U.S. News & World Report* (June 21, 1971), 72; "The Vertical Ghetto," 76; "Pruitt-Igoe, RIP," *National Review* (December 15, 1970), 1335-1336; "Where the Tenants Have a Say in the Plans," *Business Week* (September 11, 1971), 132; "Housing Without Fear," *Time* (November 27, 1972), 69-70; Joe Davidson, "Troubled Ground in Philadelphia," *Black Enterprise* (August 1978), 14-15; Ernest Holsendolph, Bob Maynard, and Grayson Mitchell, "Public Housing: Promises, Promises," *Black Enterprise* (September 1978), 22.
40. "Pruitt-Igoe, RIP," 1335-1336; "The Tragedy of Pruitt-Igoe," *Time* (December 27, 1971), 38; "Housing Without Fear," 69-70; "Instant Demolition of a St. Louis Slum," 6-7; Poinsett, 61; "A Threat to Dump Public Housing," *Business Week* (November 18, 1972), 18; "Money Cuts, New Rules—Hard Times for Public Housing," *U.S. News & World Report* (March 26, 1973), 88; Holsendolph, Maynard, and Mitchell, 22; Alvin Rabushka and William G. Weissert, *Caseworkers of Police? How Tenants See Public Housing* (Stanford,

1977), 83. For the vast literature on Pruitt-Igoe, see Roger Montgomery and Kate Bristol, *Pruitt-Igoe: An Annotated Bibliography* (Chicago, 1987).

41. "Crisis in Public Housing," 67; "Equal Housing: Nixon Defines His Policy," 72; "Is the Government Putting Up 'Instant Slums'?", *U.S. News and World Report*, (September 11, 1972), 66-67; "Money Cuts, New Rules—Hard Times for Public Housing," 87-88; "The Vertical Ghetto," 76; "Where the Tenants Have a Say in the Plans," 132; "The Tragedy of Pruitt-Igoe," 38; Poinsett, 62. Thirty-four (43 percent) out of the 80 articles on public housing that appeared between 1950-1990 included photographs of residents. Twenty-four (70 percent) presented African-Americans exclusively; six (18 percent) presented integrated groups (the presence of at least one non-African-American); two (6 percent) pictured Latinos exclusively; and two (6 percent) presented whites exclusively. HUD's *Statistical Yearbooks* indicate that both white and African-American occupancy rates in public housing decreased during the 1970s, largely because of increases in the number of Hispanic residents. Nevertheless, by 1977 (the last year *Yearbooks* published reliable data), 38.8 percent of all public housing households were still classified as white, while 46.8 percent were classified as black. These data confirm that photographs in the periodical press overrepresented the number of African-Americans, and underrepresented the number of whites and Hispanics who lived in public housing. See HUD *Statistical Yearbooks, 1966-1977*.

42. See HUD *Statistical Yearbooks, 1966-1977*; Casey, 5, 21.

43. "Equal Housing: Nixon Defines His Policy," 72.

44. "Crisis in Public Housing," 66-67; "The Tragedy of Pruitt-Igoe," 38; "A New Battle for Breakthrough," *Business Week* (September 9, 1972), 35; Poinsett, 62.

45. The expansion of welfare and attempts to reform social programs in the 1960s and early 1970s are discussed in Winifred Ball and Dennis M. Bushe, *Neglecting the Many, Helping the Few: The Impact of the 1967 AFDC Work Incentives* (New York, 1975), 2-6; Joel F. Handler and Ellen Jane Hollingsworth, *Work and the Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (Madison, 1969), 1-11; James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty* (Cambridge, MA, 2nd ed., 1986), Chapter 11; and Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, 1971), Chapter 6.

46. Richard S. Scobie, *Problem Tenants in Public Housing: Who, Where, and Why Are They?* (New York, 1975), 75.

47. "Crisis in Public Housing," 66-67; "Money Cuts, New Rules—Hard Times for Public Housing," 87; "Public Housing—Same Old Sad Tale," *U.S. News and World Report* (October 27, 1980), 89-90; "The Vertical Ghetto," 76; "St. Louis Attacks Its Slums," 163.

48. For an analysis of how the "culture of poverty" thesis was used by some policymakers and academics, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York, 1989), 48-50.

49. "Crisis in Public Housing," 66-67; "Public Housing—Same Old Sad Tale," 89-90; "Pruitt-Igoe, RIP," 1335-1336; Poinsett, 62.

50. "The Vertical Ghetto," 76; "Pruitt-Igoe, RIP," 1335-1336; "The Tragedy of Pruitt-Igoe," 38. See also Eileen Keerdoja, "Non-Tenant Byrne and Cabrini-Green," *Newsweek* (October 19, 1981), 20; and Martin Wooster and John Fund, "Up From Public Housing," *Reader's Digest* (July 1989), 139-143.

51. The process of grouping and interpreting metaphors is discussed in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," in Mark Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (Minneapolis, 1982), 286-325.

52. "The Vertical Ghetto," 76; "Fixing the Odds in Black Jack," *Time* (April 26, 1971), 19-20; "The Tragedy of Pruitt-Igoe," 38; Poinsett, 62; "Money Cuts, New Rules—Hard Times for Public Housing," 87; "Public Housing—Same Old Sad Tale," 89-90.

53. "The Breakdown in Our Cities," *U.S. News and World Report* (July 28, 1969), 48-51.

54. "Housing Without Fear," 69-70. William Moore Jr., arguing in a similar vein, concluded that the problems that plagued projects resulted from "the whole concept of high-rise public housing." See William Moore Jr., *The Vertical Ghetto: Everyday Life in an Urban Project* (New York, 1969), 220.

55. "Crisis in Public Housing," 66. For an explanation of the fiscal problems that public housing faced in the late 1960s and early 1970s, see R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany, N.Y., 1985), 129-136.

56. Rent ceilings for public housing tenants were established by the so-called Brooke amendments, passed in 1969, 1970, and 1971. While federal funds were supposed to offset the revenue losses caused by these amendments, compensation usually fell short of most authorities' operating budgets. See Rabushka and Weissert, 12, 30.

57. NAHRO's testimony can be found in "Myths/Realities of Public Housing," *The Journal of Housing* 4 (April 1973), 179-191. Rabushka and Weissert's assessment of the

public housing during the same period in Wilmington, Delaware echoed NAHRO's sentiments. They concluded that the "tarnished image of public housing owes much to the glamor and publicity accorded the few horror stories that have emerged from St. Louis, New York, Chicago, and other big cities." Moreover, the authors continued, "these few horror stories misrepresent the general picture of low-rent public housing in the United States in the mid-1970s." See Rabushka and Weissert, 83.

58. "2 Brs, Inexp, W/Vu of Roaches," *Time* (April 6, 1981), 19; "In Chicago: Raising Children in a Battle Zone," *Time* (December 15, 1986), 14; Keerdoja, 20; Melinda Beck, "A Political Slop Bucket," *Newsweek* (April 19, 1982), 34; Smith, "Starting Out Poor," 23-24; George Howe Colt, "Downfall of a Neighborhood: Crack," *Life* (July 1988), 92-100; Wooster and Fund, 139.

59. "In Chicago: Raising Children in a Battle Zone," 14; Casey, 5, 11; Bickford and Massey, 1018.

60. Kitry Krause, "Hammers and Nails in Mt. Winans," *Washington Monthly* (April 1986), 21-26; Mark Starr, "Ranch Houses at Fort Apache," *Time* (February 13, 1984), 30.

61. "Muslims at the Mayfair," *Time* (May 9, 1988), 30; "Evicting the Drug Dealers," *Time* (May 1, 1989), 41.

62. "2 Brs, Inexp, W/Vu of Roaches," 19; "In Chicago: Raising Children in a Battle Zone," 14; "Evicting the Drug Dealers," 41; Smith, 24; Bill Turque, "When Tenants Take Charge," *Newsweek* (November 27, 1989), 44; Colt, 93; "The Muslims to the Rescue," *Ebony* (August 1989), 136-140. Only *Atlantic Monthly* suggested that "cuts in funds for services" might have led to increased violence in public housing projects. See Camilo Jose Vergara, "Hell in a Very Tall Place," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1989), 78.

63. Wooster and Fund, 139-140. See also Ronald Henkoff, "Can Business Save Public Housing?," *Fortune* (November 20, 1989), 121-128; Tom Bethell, "Keeping Them on the Plantation," *National Review* (May 28, 1990), 8s-10s.

64. Art Levine, "When Tenants Take Over," *U.S. News and World Report* (August 4, 1986), 53-54; Wooster and Fund, 141.

65. Wooster and Fund, 141.

66. Jerome Cramer, "Turning Public Housing over to Resident Owners," *Time* (December 12, 1988), 15-16.

67. Turque, 44. Only one article published during the 1980s questioned the ability or appropriateness of selling public housing units to tenants. Though *New Republic* published this op-ed piece by the director of housing for the Boston Redevelopment Authority, it emphasized the editorial nature of the article by stating that the views were the author's. See Peter Dreier, "Public Housing for Sale: Private Project," *New Republic* (August 4, 1986), 15.

68. John C. Weicher, *Housing: Federal Policies and Programs* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 65.

69. Holsendolph, Maynard, and Mitchell, 22.

70. Gans, xii-xiii; Snow, 83-84.

71. Snow, 80, 87, 93.

72. Establishing one's identity through definition of the "other" is discussed in Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (October-December 1989), 9-20.

73. A discussion of America's "discovery" of poverty and the role of the middle-class can be found in Ehrenreich, 42-56.

74. Butsch, 5; William Gamson, "A Constructionist Approach to Mass Media & Public Opinion," *Working Paper #20* (Chestnut Hill, Mass., 1987); William Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *Working Paper #5* (Chestnut Hill, Mass., 1986); Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, "The Mass Media and Voting," in Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz, eds., *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication* (New York, 2nd ed., 1966), 468.

75. Quoted in J. S. Fuerst, "Another Part of the Forest Hills," *Commonweal* (January 1984), 16.

76. Quoted in Teaford, 304.