

WHEN THE MARKET ISN'T AN OPTION

Vol. III Public Housing Deterioration



KEY TERMS

DETERIORATION:

When something falls from a higher to lower quality. In this context, when public housing maintenance was neglected by the government it led to lowering the quality sewage, electricity, water, gas, and other basic services.

WAR ON DRUGS:

A campaign launched in the 1970s by the U.S. government in an effort to control Black and Brown communities through increased penalties, policing, stigma, and incarceration of drug users.

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM:

A term used to describe environmental injustice within a racialized context both in practice and policy.

NEOLIBERALISM:

Policies that deregulate government and private businesses, and defund social programs in favor of business interests or the “free market”

SECTION 8:

A federally funded rental assistance program that pays private landlords the difference between what a low-income household can contribute and the market rate price.

SCAN TO ACCESS
SOURCES AND
PHOTO CITATIONS



Cabrini-Green buildings president, Henry Lee Johns, showing her great-grandchild new metal banisters and screen she helped get installed (2000)

Broken payphones at Robert-Taylor Homes (2001)

Following the Civil Rights Movement, elected officials politicized low-level drug use and addiction, leading to the indoctrination of drugs being a crime rather than a mental health issue. It is widely interpreted as a way of repressing communities demanding their rights.

There was significant public concern with drug use but activists sought medical, social and economic support.

For example, drug use among white suburban teens increased significantly, many used marijuana to rebel. White suburban parents, wrote to the government to ask for support in addressing, though not punishing, youth in this social crisis.

At the same time, nearly 15-16% of returning Vietnam military service members were addicted to heroin and advocates sought medical and mental health support for them. Instead, the officials tackled the issue by labeling it violent #1 public enemy.

The Nixon administration called the War on Drugs, beginning in 1971. It elevated drug use to a criminal offense but while plenty of white people used and were addicted to drugs, millions of Black and Brown individuals were imprisoned at higher levels than their white counterparts.

Furthermore, proponents pushed stereotypes that drove investment out of Black and Brown communities. The resulted in Black, Brown, low-income, queer, and disabled community members being:¹

- More likely to be homeless/jobless
- Barred from public housing and Section 8 vouchers
- Sentenced harshly for minor infractions
- Profiled and targeted as drug users
- Stigmatized for using drugs

Nixon Calls War On Drugs

"We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks [sic] with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities...Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did"

- NIXON AIDE,
JOHN EHRLICHMAN²
(1994)



Activists protest Nixon's War on Drugs, c. 1970s

Moratorium on Housing Subsidy Spells Hardship for Thousands



Nixon giving a speech to Department of Justice during Watergate scandal in 1973



James and Katie Nicolson standing on their porch looking at destroyed homes, 1973

Nixon passed a moratorium cutting funding from public housing in 1974. Nixon and HUD, stated that the purpose of the moratorium was to delegate responsibility of public housing to local, rather than federal housing authorities.

Guidelines announced that cities had to purchase properties for new subsidized housing units, transfer residents to new homes, while fixing and selling previous homes to developers, all within a year.

Unfortunately, city housing authorities fell behind, leaving some residents uncertain about their housing. The "War on Drugs" housing policies made it difficult for residents with drug citations to even qualify for transfers³.



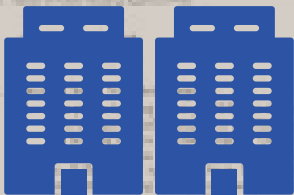
Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority advertisement for affordable housing, 1940

Housing Choice Voucher Program 1974

The Beginning of Section 8

Fair Market Rents represent the cost to rent a moderately-priced dwelling unit in the local housing market. Housing authorities cover a portion of the rent and utilities to ensure that a voucher holder will pay no more than 30% of their income on housing⁴.

Passed by Congress to aid families move out of underfunded urban neighborhoods, especially those in public housing.



"The Housing Choice Voucher program is the nation's largest housing subsidy, serving 2.2 million families, which is still only about 25 percent of eligible households"⁵



Qualifying for the HCV Program

To qualify for the Housing Choice Voucher program an applicant family must be called from the waiting list and then must meet the following eligibility requirements. For further information on these requirements, see [Chapter 3 of CHA's HCV Administrative Plan](#).

Income

A family's total income must not exceed 80% of the Area Median Income.

Citizenship or Eligible Immigration Status

At least one member of the household must be a U.S. citizen or U.S. national or have eligible immigration status.

Social Security Numbers

All members of the household must provide a complete and accurate social security number (SSN). This requirement does not apply to non-citizens who do not have eligible immigration status.

Criminal Activity

If any household member has ever been convicted of arson, of producing or manufacturing methamphetamine, or any other crime that requires them to be registered as a lifetime sex offender under a state sex offender registration program, the individual is not eligible. In addition, if any household member is currently engaged in or has engaged in any of the following criminal activities within the past three years, the family will be denied assistance.

- Drug-related criminal activity, which includes the possession, distribution, sale or use of medical marijuana;
- Violent criminal activity;
- Illegal possession or use of a firearm or aggravated assault weapon;
- Other criminal activity as outlined in CHA's Administrative Plan

Previous Behavior

CHA will also deny a family assistance if:

- The family does not provide complete or accurate information that CHA requires.
- Any family member has been evicted from federally assisted housing in the last three years, or has been evicted in the last three years for drug-related criminal activity. CHA can make limited exceptions to this rule in specific cases as described in the HCV Administrative Plan.
- Any public housing authority (PHA) has previously terminated assistance for any family member under any federal assisted housing program within the last 3 years. This policy excludes voluntary terminations.
- Any family member has committed fraud, bribery or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with any federal housing program.
- The family owes rent or other amounts to any PHA as described in the HCV Administrative Plan, unless the family repays the full amount of the debt prior to being selected from the waiting list.
- The family has breached the terms of a repayment agreement entered into with the CHA, unless the family repays the full amount of the debt covered in the repayment agreement prior to being selected from the waiting list.
- A family member has engaged in or threatened violent or abusive behavior toward CHA personnel (including a CHA employee or a CHA contractor, subcontractor or agent).
- The CHA has reasonable cause to believe that any household member's current use or pattern of use of illegal drugs or alcohol may threaten the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents.

If an applicant family is denied assistance for any of the reasons listed above, they have the right to an informal review to dispute the decision.

ANTI-DRUG ABUSE ACT OF 1988

In this act, the section titled "Preventing Drug Abuse in Public Housing" required public housing authorities to include rules in their leases allowing authorities to terminate the lease immediately if the tenant or tenants engaged in drug related activities on or near the public housing facilities.

These "one strike" policies allowed authorities to evict public housing residents immediately if they or a guest were suspected of drug use or possession

New York's Housing Authority evicted public housing tenants based simply on an arrest for drug use, even if there was no conviction in the end⁶.



First Lady Nancy Reagan speaking at the National Federations of Parents for Drug-Free Youth (NFP) conference, 1982

President Bill Clinton vocally supported the continuity of these "one strike" policies during his presidency.



1989 ANTI-DRUG BULLETIN BOARD AT HARLEM, NEW YORK PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS, THE JOHNSON HOMES



PUBLIC HOUSING⁷

The decline of Public Housing, incline of Section 8

The Federal Government implemented plans and programs to cut funding from public housing to return the "power" to local housing authorities by creating section 8 housing.

Plans such as :
Section 8 Voucher
Demonstration,
Housing Development
Action Grant,
and other rental
rehabilitation programs
in 1983.



Former Stateway Gardens residents standing in front of demolished building, 2001

Plans called for
demolishing or
rehabilitating
25,000 units in
all.

NEO-LIBERAL POLICIES

In simple words
neoliberalism;
profit over
people

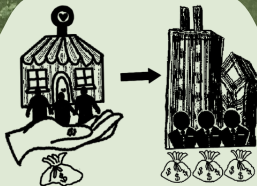


Image shows the majority
of funding allocated to
big business rather than
social services

Comic depicts common
misunderstandings about
affordable housing

Policies such as the Homestead Act and the G.I. Bill reinforced the ideology that property- especially housing- was the best method for building wealth. This ideology was further reinforced with policies created by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Policies such as the Hope VI and the Rental Assistance Demonstration Program contributed to the demise of public housing. While neoliberal or market-based interventions continue to dominate policy, movements advancing non-market approaches to resolving the housing crisis are simultaneously gaining traction.



IMPACT OF THE MEDIA

Despite the 1960s Civil Rights Movements that called for racial equality in the US, media representation led to a widespread association of public housing residents with drug use, gang-involvement, and an over-reliance on public assistance⁹.

Newspapers coined the racist term "welfare queen" in the 1970s to vilify single Black mothers as abusing social support systems¹⁰.

Though that was far from the truth, public housing support declined among U.S. citizens in part due to news media supporting stereotypes as well as government policies creating conditions to fulfill the assumptions. Other forms of mainstream media such as movies and television supported negative perceptions of public housing. Music provided first-hand accounts of public housing from residents themselves and served to counter popular media representations.

Chicago Plans Police Sweep Of Troubled Housing Area

CHICAGO, Oct. 18 — Police will sweep a 7-year-old boy from a public housing development in Chicago this week, Mayor Richard Daley announced a police sweep of public housing projects in Chicago this week.

By DON TERRY
CHICAGO FREE WEEKLY

They Came in Through the Bathroom Mirror

A Murder in the Projects

Ruthie Mae McCoy was the type who talked to herself and cursed strangers on the street. When she called 911 to report that someone was coming through the medicine cabinet of her Abbott Homes apartment, she might have been hallucinating. But she wasn't.



tradition

'Welfare queen' jailed in Tucson

By George Bliss

LINDA TAYLOR, the 47-year-old "welfare queen," was being held in a jail in Tucson, Ariz., Friday at the request of Chicago police in lieu of a \$100,000 bond.

TUCSON POLICE said that when arrested Linda was going under the name of Constance Green. A department spokesman said that there is evidence she had used some 50 other aliases during her stay in Tucson. The name of

she is charged with grand

PUBLIC HOUSING AND COUNTER CULTURE

BROKEN GLASS EVERYWHERE/ PEOPLE PISSIN'
ON THE STAIRS, YOU KNOW THEY JUST DON'T
CARE/ I CAN'T TAKE THE SMELL, CAN'T
TAKE THE NOISE/ GOT NO MONEY TO MOVE
OUT, I GUESS I GOT NO CHOICE/ RATS IN THE
FRONT ROOM, ROACHES IN THE BACK/ JUNKIES
IN THE ALLEY WITH A BASEBALL BAT/ I
TRIED TO GET AWAY BUT I COULDN'T GET
FAR/ CAUSE A MAN WITH A TOW TRUCK
REPOSSESSED MY CAR

—THE MESSAGE¹²

GRANDMASTER FLASH AND THE FURIOUS
FIVE, 1982



SEE AIN'T A DAY OUT HERE, EVER BORING
WHERE GUNSHOTS KEEP YOU UP INSTEAD OF
HEAVY SNORING
PIPES DRIPPING, INSTEAD OF RIVERS POURING
THE ELEVATOR'S BROKEN DOWN (DAAAAAMN!)
AND MAN I'M NEEDIN A LIFT
THANK GOD WE DON'T STAY UP ON THE
TWENTY-FIFTH
F FLOOR, YO WE AIN'T ALWAYS AT WAR
IT'S A LOT ABOUT THE PROJECTS I DO ADORE

—THE PROJECTS (PJAYS)¹³

HANDSOME BOY MODELING SCHOOL, 1999

Media Representation has not only pushed negative stereotypes and assumptions of Public Housing residents to a broader audience, it has also served as a tool by Public Housing Residents to tell their side of the story. Mike Ford "The Hip-Hop Architect" has stated, *"The resulting conditions are what necessitated the birth of hip-hop culture. The lack of private space created a high concentration of people whose cultures cross-pollinated and resulted in the four elements of hip-hop: DJing, MC-ing, B-boying, and graffiti."* In other words, Hip Hop was born as a result of many policies that pushed for high density living arrangements and a desire to speak up about them¹¹.

80's Hip Hop artists varied in style and beat, but most of their messages were similar. The housing projects and boroughs of New York were in dire need of reparations and changes.

Music for many remained a way to talk about the issues regarding public housing even decades later. For example, Open Mike Eagle's *Brick Body Kids Still Daydream*

discusses trauma of living in Robert Taylor and being forced to move out. In his song "Brick Body Complex," he references the address of the Robert Taylor Homes building.

1528 SEDGWICK AVENUE IN NEW YORK, IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE BIRTHPLACE OF HIP-HOP¹⁴



MY OTHER NAME IS 3-9-
2-5/MAKE SURE THAT
MY STORY'S TOLD/16 OR
SO STORIES
HIGH/CONSTRUCTED 55
YEARS AGO

- BRICK BODY COMPLEX¹⁵
OPEN MIKE EAGLE, 2017

PUBLIC HOUSING ON THE BIG SCREEN

Movies have served as a visual representation of public housing.

Unfortunately, many shows and films have provided negative perceptions of public housing that have propagated stereotypes of violence, crime, and drug abuse. For many in the country, especially those who do not live near housing projects, rely on those visuals to create their assumptions. The movie *Candyman* (1992) presents Chicago's Cabrini-Green Homes as the hunting ground for a boogeyman¹⁶.

While TV shows like *The Wire* (2002) demonstrate heavy policing, murders, and drug trafficking written from a Baltimore police department's perspective¹⁷.



Scenes from *Candyman* (1992)



Scenes from *The Wire* (2002)



PUBLIC HOUSING PUBLICITY IN THE 80'S

In 1981, Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne spent, what she described as, a “lovely” and “very quiet” night in the Cabrini-Green public housing complex. The mayor and her husband spent the evening watching the Academy Awards on television. The next day, Byrne spoke with reporters, explaining her stay at Cabrini-Green would end only “when I think people can look out the window and not get shot...we need less fear and more hope.” While some residents and Chicagoans viewed her temporary residency at Cabrini-Green as admirable and tenacious, others saw it as a political stunt; an attempt by Mayor Byrne to gain the Black and Latinx vote in her upcoming re-election. In retrospect, the mayor's presence in Cabrini-Green intended to debunk the stigma around public housing but did not solve the issue regarding the quality of public housing establishments¹⁸.



Jane Byrne and her husband enjoying a lovely dinner!



Jane Byrne reaching out to hi-five Cabrini-Green residents

TITLE I: URBAN-RURAL RECOVERY ACT OF 1983

This act resulted in a great transfer of power from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to local housing authorities in cities across the nation. It directed the HUD secretary to expedite the transfer of HUD-owned multifamily properties to local governments and their housing agencies for the fiscal years of 1984-5. With the department allocating \$3 million for this demonstration, came restrictions. After local governments and housing agencies purchased HUD-owned properties, their primary was only to be for residential purposes and at least 75 percent of the residents had to be earning at or below 80 percent of the area's median household income.¹⁹ A 1988 analysis of the effectiveness of this act proved there was little benefit in granting local governments and housing agencies more authority in providing low-income tenants with housing to propel them toward homeownership.²⁰ The findings in the analysis concluded the ineffectiveness of local governments' and housing agencies' ability to provide housing for low-income individuals the same way HUD did.



Woman looking at poster flying in a building's window that reads "What do we want? Affordable Housing." (c. 2000s)

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Unable to purchase homes, many low-income residents remained in public housing for their whole lives. Discriminatory housing practices that pushed public housing into segregated areas attracted polluting corporations due to the disproportionately low property values. The Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ published a report in 1987 titled "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States". Overall, the report proved that race and socioeconomic status determine how likely someone's home is to be located next to a hazardous waste site.²¹

Communities with 1 commercial hazardous waste facility had

2X

the average minority population than communities without

Smoke stacks emitting pollution into the air

THE MOTHER OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

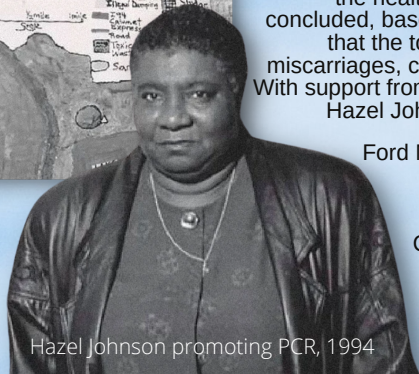
Public housing residents were severely impacted by their toxic surrounding environment. Today, movements advocate against the placement of environmentally hazardous facilities and waste in low-income Black and Brown communities. Hazel Johnson, a resident of the Altgeld Gardens public housing project on Chicago's south side, is known as the mother of the environmental justice movement. After lung cancer took her husband's life and her children experienced respiratory and skin issues while residents at Altgeld Gardens, Johnson took action to find the root cause of the declining health of those living in the homes. Hazel Johnson discovered that Altgeld Gardens was literally built on top of a toxic waste dump and sewage farm created by the Pullman Palace Car Company decades before the Johnsons had moved to the homes in 1962. ²²

50
landfills
surrounded
Altgeld
Gardens

250
chemical
storage tanks
leaked into the
groundwater



Protestors led by Reverend Joseph march against a proposed toxic waste dump, 1982



Hazel Johnson promoting PCR, 1994

This prompted Hazel Johnson to collect data regarding the health of her fellow residents. The activist concluded, based on anecdotes from her neighbors, that the toxic pollution had led to birth defects, miscarriages, cancer, and death for many residents. With support from other residents at Altgeld Gardens, Hazel Johnson confronted Sherwin-Williams Paint Co., Waste Management, Ford Motor Co., and the CHA for allowing such a toxic environment to exist in a residential area.

In 1979, Hazel founded People for Community Recovery (PCR) fighting against the environmental racism imposed upon Altgeld Gardens. This movement eventually spiraled into a nationwide fight for environmental justice. ²³

BUILDING DETERIORATION

When the Chicago Housing Authority began neglecting maintenance high rise buildings, such as “The Hole” located in the Robert Taylor Homes became prime sites of violence and extreme poverty.

Two residents sit on chairs on the top floors of the Henry Horner Homes in the fenced outside hallways 1992



**“ONCE
YOU
FALL IN
YOU
CAN'T
GET OUT”**

--Deborah Mardis²⁴

“As the project filled with impoverished people, rent income fell and maintenance had to be cut. Tenants threw things off exterior gangways that linked apartments,



so they were covered with steel grating, like a prison. Leaks and broken windows went unfixed. Elevators and hallways reeked of urine.”²⁵



Gates of Cabrini-Green, 1981



Protest signs hang on a fence outside Cabrini-Green demolition site, 1995



Bathroom in Cabrini-Green Homes (1984)



Kitchen in Cabrini-Green Homes (1989)



Living Room in
Cabrini- Green
home (1991)



Sleeping area in
Chicago public
housing project
(c. 1990s)

RESIDENT EXPERIENCES IN DETERIORATING BUILDINGS



Scan or call
312-348-7834
to listen to
Daphany's oral
history



"They see public housing and they see it being decrepit like their boilers aren't working right, there are garbage chutes piling up with trash, there are so many things that have happened and somehow society blames it on the people that live there...Public housing hasn't received funding. Year after year it's budget cuts, budget cuts, budget cuts and no one is turning around and saying shame on you at our government, shame on you congress, shame on you senate for cutting operational costs"

- DAPHANY ROSE SANCHEZ²⁶

(Living at Cooper Park Houses in Brooklyn, NYC since 1992)

Henry Horner Homes with massive icicles hanging from the windows, 1995

Q: SO HOW WAS THE UPKEEP AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE BUILDING FROM CHA? WAS THE MAINTENANCE OF THE BUILDING MORE LIKE THE RESIDENTS WERE VANDALIZING THE PLACE SO TO SPEAK OR WAS IT LIKE CHA WASN'T TAKING THE PROPER COURSES TO KEEP UP MAINTENANCE IN THE BUILDING?

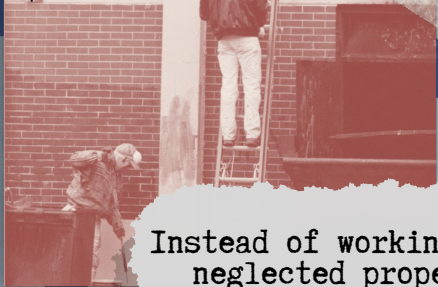
Scan or call
312-348-7834
to listen to Nakia's
oral history



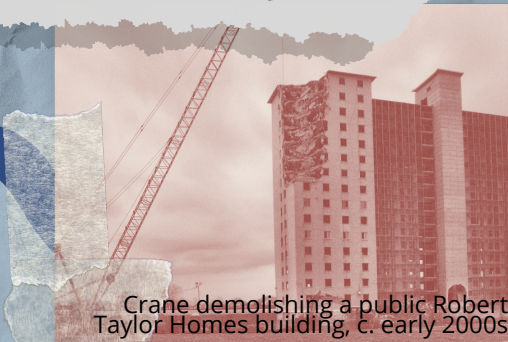
A: "It was a mixture of the two. I think in an environment like that you know you start to feel like it's a cage. To our parents who weren't born in the projects and who grew up in a different environment, they understood what we were going through but to us, we grew up in these places so we thought it was normal. It's like a wild lion that's taken to the zoo yanno? He knows what he's missing, he knows that this environment is abnormal. But that lion has a child in captivity in the zoo, this child only knows the zoo so he thinks it's a normal environment so he adapts to that environment.. So I guess that's what us peeing in the hallways was us rebelling against the system that was structured that put us in this environment"

- NAKIA HERRON²⁷ (Moved into the Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, in 1981)

Residents cleaning up Cabrini-Green apartments, 1992



Instead of working to fix up neglected properties as residents campaigned for, federal and local governments used deterioration as an excuse to begin removing the structures and people that lived in them altogether.



Crane demolishing a public Robert Taylor Homes building, c. early 2000s



After removing residents from the neglected buildings throughout the 1970s-90s with the promise of relocation to decent housing accommodations, demolition of the buildings commenced.



Pruitt-Igoe housing projects of St. Louis fall in large implosion, 1972 (below)



Demolition of the Robert Taylor Homes, c. early 2000s (above)

THIS COLLECTION OF ZINES IS AN ATTEMPT TO INVESTIGATE THE HISTORY OF HOUSING INEQUITY IN CHICAGO, MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE, AND SUGGEST RESTITUTION TO THESE WRONGS BASED ON COMMUNITY COMMENTS. CONTINUE THE SERIES WITH VOLUME IV: PUBLIC HOUSING DISPLACEMENT



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WERNER
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NPHM'S TIFF BEATTY, LIÚ
CHEN, & MARK JAESCHKE
ARTIST TONIKA JOHNSON,
AND LAURA NUSSBAUM-
BARBERENA OF RU'S POLICY
RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE