

THE PRUITT-IGOE PROJECTS: MODERNISM,
SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE FAILURE
OF PUBLIC HOUSING, 1954-1976

BY
BENJAMIN ALEXANDER LAWSON

Bachelor of Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
2003

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
2004

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 2007

THE PRUITT-IGOE PROJECTS: MODERNISM,
SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE FAILURE
OF PUBLIC HOUSING, 1954-1976

Thesis Approved:

Michael F. Logan
Thesis Advisor

James L. Huston

Joseph F. Byrnes

A. Gordon Emslie
Dean of the Graduate College

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction and Historiography.....	1
2. The "Failure" of Pruitt-Igoe and the "Death" of Modernism.....	19
3. National and Local Policy Changes toward the Central City.....	34
4. Civil Disorder and the Isolation of the Inner City.....	49
5. Culture, Social Control, and the Legacy of Pruitt-Igoe.....	72
6. Bibliography.....	86

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. The Pruitt-Igoe Projects.....	3
2. Map of Pruitt-Igoe and Surrounding Area.....	8
3. Idealized plan of the Pruitt-Igoe Complex before it was Built.....	11
4. The Pruitt-Igoe Complex in 1955 Seen from the Air.....	15
5. The Destruction of Pruitt Igoe.....	20
6. Artist's Conception of an Interior Hallway in Pruitt-Igoe.....	21
7. Interior Corridor of Pruitt-Igoe just before Demolition.	23
8. Quality of Life in St. Louis.....	25
9. Percent of Households below the Poverty Line.....	26
10. People per Square Mile, in Thousands.....	27
11. Vandalized Windows at Pruitt-Igoe.	29
12. Percent of Housing Occupied by African-Americans.....	36
13. Demographic Change in the City of St. Louis, 1940-1975.....	38
14. Demographic Change in St. Louis County, 1940-1970.....	39
15. Percent African American, Labor Force and Neighborhoods.....	41
16. Percent of Housing Built in the Old City Center, 1940-1976.	43
17. Percent Housing Built before 1940.....	44
18. Percent of Housing Built after 1960.....	46
19. A Model of Traditional Urban Form.....	51

20. A Model of Postmodern Urban Form.....	53
21. An Abandoned Warehouse by the Waterfront.....	55
22. Midtown Warehouse District.....	55
23. Median Home Value, in Thousands.	57
24. Mean Personal Income, in Hundreds of Dollars.....	58
25. Percent Crowded Housing in St. Louis SMSA.....	60
26. Residence Quality and Personal Income.	61
27. Old Houses in St. Louis.....	62
28. Evidence of St. Louis's Decay.....	63
29. Tiny Housing Units in St. Louis.....	65
30. Boarded-up and Burned-out Housing in St. Louis.....	68
31. The Interior of a Building during the Destruction of Pruitt-Igoe.....	73
32. The Evacuated Pruitt-Igoe Complex from the Air prior to its Destruction.....	75
33. Pruitt-Igoe prior to Destruction.....	76
34. Dynamite Explodes a Building in Pruitt-Igoe.....	80
35. The Dramatic Destruction of a Building in Pruitt-Igoe.....	81
36. The Former Site of the Pruitt-Igoe Complex.....	83

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the 1960s liberals declared “war” on poverty, but by the early 1970s it appeared that poverty had won, as--among other things-- America, the world’s wealthiest nation, could not house many of its citizens in habitable conditions. The Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, Missouri is one of the best examples of this trend, as despite an obvious shortage of adequate housing, city officials decided to tear down the complex after visible signs of disorder demonstrated that they had lost control. An old industrial city, St. Louis faced problems of decaying infrastructure and racial division, and lacked the necessary resources to address these problems. Consequently, city officials and elite citizens anxious to secure their position of authority focused on damage-control policies--such as dynamiting Pruitt-Igoe when it became a problem--rather than utilizing the resources necessary to fix the problem at its source: the geographic concentration of race and poverty in the decaying urban core.¹

¹ As in most American cities at the time, the elites tended to be wealthy whites, who usually lived in exclusive areas of the city or in the suburbs. In addition, city officials tended to side with elite interests, and the official policy often reflected elite interest. By poverty I primarily mean inadequate finances, or economic poverty—not cultural “deficiencies.” Data from the 1960 Census illustrated the poor state of housing for African Americans in St. Louis: the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) labeled 40.3% of all “nonwhite” occupied housing

The situation in St. Louis was not unusual, as similar conditions existed in urban areas nationwide. Thus, despite the lack of a contemporary large-scale race riot in St. Louis, events such as the highly publicized "ghetto" uprisings in Watts (1965), Newark (1967), and Detroit (1967) convinced policymakers in St. Louis (and in cities nation-wide) to switch their focus to the suburbs, cease to implement large-scale housing projects in the city center, and destroy existing complexes like Pruitt-Igoe that were not functioning as planned.²

The Pruitt-Igoe complex, which attained social, cultural, economic, and political significance when city officials began dynamiting it in 1972, was one of the most visible--and misunderstood--symbols of the late Vietnam-era urban malaise. Contrary to the views of contemporary critics like Oscar Newman and theorists like Charles Jencks, Pruitt-Igoe was not primarily a failure of design, but a component of the larger social, political, and cultural crisis of the 1960s-1970s. In the following pages I will argue that--in addition to problems with the complex's design--the destruction of

units in the city to be "deteriorating or dilapidated"; Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, (Government Printing Office, Washington DC 1968), 467-469.

² The Kerner Commission's 1968 Report is the best official contemporary account of this unrest, and demonstrates the nation-wide fear it caused. The Report also listed disturbances in cities across the nation, including: Chicago, IL; Birmingham, AL; Philadelphia, MS; Savanna, GA; Tampa, FL; Cincinnati, OH; Atlanta, GA; Plainfield, NJ; and New Brunswick, NJ; Kerner Commission, Report, pg. 35-108. For a more recent account of the causes and significance of ghetto riots see Gerald Horne's analysis of the Watts riot in Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s, (Da Capo Press, 1995).

Pruitt-Igoe symbolized the outdated and ineffective nature of modernist social-control methods and demonstrated that the problem of poverty was too complex for policymakers to fix through official means.³



Fig. 1: The Pruitt-Igoe Projects. Source: Public Domain; Oscar Newman, Creating Defensible Space, (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996).

³ The last sentence of this paragraph is my thesis—that Pruitt-Igoe was not just an architectural failure but it also symbolized the breakdown on the modernist conception of social hierarchy, which I term “modernist social control.” See also Oscar Newman, Defensible Space, (MacMillan, 1972); Christopher Falzon, Foucault and Social Dialogue, (Routledge, 1998). Charles Jencks outlined his theory in The Language of Post-Modern Architecture (London: Academy Editions, 1978). For a concise account of Jencks’s theoretical impact see Glenn Ward, Postmodernism (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2003) pgs. 17-26, and Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, (Thriplow, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2005), 114-118.

Modernism and postmodernism are two concepts useful in assessing Pruitt-Igoe's larger significance; however, their meanings often depend on context. To cite the definition given by Jean-Francois Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition, modernism refers to any discipline “that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse...making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative.” In contrast, Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives,” or, more specifically, a rejection of the modernist tendency to distinguish between “high” and “low” in favor of an all-inclusive approach.⁴

In the context of Pruitt-Igoe, these concepts may be understood in relation to social control: the means by which the elites (those in power) keep order and solidify their position of authority. Thus, modernist social control—embodied in the Pruitt-Igoe complex-- emphasized the divisions of class and race, with a clear “underclass”—the impoverished African-American residents—and a clear elite class—the white policymakers and wealthy city residents. In contrast, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe (arguably) signified the failure of modernism, and thus the beginning of

⁴ Modernist Architecture, as defined in this thesis and by Charles Jencks, refers primarily to the “International Style” championed by Le Corbusier, which was noted for its stark functional appearance. The quoted passages above are from Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, (University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xxiii-xxiv. Alex Callinicos provides a useful critique of Lyotard’s definitions in Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique, (St. Martin’s Press, 1989) 3-4. For a more general description of the relation between postmodernism and modernism see Glenn Ward, Postmodernism, 4-15; and Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, 3-20.

postmodernism, represented by the collapse of the modernist conception of social control through the blurring of the distinctions between class and race in recent America. This is not to suggest that all racial and class divisions have vanished, but merely that awareness of the injustice of such divisions has increased in the “postmodern” era after the collapse of Pruitt-Igoe.⁵

As modernist social control—the justification and defense of social hierarchy—depends on clear distinctions between class and racial groups, several definitions of key terms are necessary: the “elites” and the “underclass.” As defined by Liam Kennedy in Race and Urban Space, the underclass refers both to the “intense concentration of poverty in increasingly isolated inner-city areas” and the “powerful myth of behavioral deficiencies which combines common assumptions about poverty and race.” Thus, the concept of the underclass in America’s urban areas often

⁵ It is often unclear what the difference is between a “symbol” and a “sign.” By “symbol” I mean something that represents or embodies the essential aspect(s) of a particular event or concept. In contrast, a “sign” is something that illustrates that an event or concept has, or will soon occur. For example, Pruitt-Igoe symbolized the end of modernist social control as the complex’s layout embodied that concept (the division of “high and “low” social groups), but Pruitt-Igoe’s destruction also signified the death of modernism as its failure represented the need for a new conception of society; see Alex Callinicos, Against Postmodernism; Glenn Ward, Postmodernism; Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism. One of the earliest examples of the new awareness that the (modernist) racial and class-basis for the ordering of society was harmful was the Kerner Commission, established by President Johnson in 1967 after the wave of ghetto violence in the summer of that year. The Commission, led by Otto Kerner—the governor of Ohio, released its report in 1968, but Johnson rejected its suggestions.

assumes racial significance, as the inner-city poor are predominately African American: in St. Louis, African Americans comprised 28.8 percent of the city's population in 1960, 40.9 percent in 1970, and 45.6 percent in 1980. In contrast, the elites are the wealthy citizens (often—but not limited to—white men) who have the power to sway or make the majority of policy decisions. For the purposes of this study, the “elites” refers to those people with the power to influence policy decisions in order to benefit themselves or their class; consequently, I will use the terms “elites” and “policymakers” (city officials) interchangeably.⁶

Though the law is the official form of social control, it is not the only manifestation; cultural assumptions—such as modernist grand narratives--also have substantial influence. However, a basic understanding of the legal basis of social control is still necessary. There are several levels of lawmaking, most notably the creation of new, and interpretation of existing policies, which can occur on the federal, state, or local level. These are not always in agreement, as specific laws and/or policies are often unclear until the judiciary has decided on a particular interpretation on which to

⁶ Liam Kennedy, Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture, (Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 3, 4-5. The population data listed may be found in Gibson, Campbell and Kay Jung. “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1790 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States.” (U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005). Other definitions of the elite are possible, but this inclusive description serves my purposes well—for a more specific description of the negative influence of the elites in America's cities see Mike Davis's account of Los Angeles in City of Quartz (Vintage, 1992).

hold parties accountable. The law determines the minimum standards individuals and organizations must follow, regardless of ideology or background. The law has both a material and theoretical function: the form of a society reflects the laws both in terms of physical development (material) and in policies of accepted social behavior (theoretical).⁷

What this means for urban America is that local elites make the majority of decisions for (re)development and minorities often have little direct influence on policies unless the law specifically guarantees that right. Consequently, laws and official policies tend to support the status quo, unless specific circumstances justify an exception---usually to uphold social order, or address changing ethical standards. The elites (policymakers and wealthy whites) enjoy a substantial amount of influence in the ordering of society, both in material developments and in policymaking.⁸

⁷For an account of the legal basis of social control, see John D. Hodson's The Ethics of Legal Coercion, (D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983); Charles G. Howard's Law its Nature, Functions, and Limits, (Prentice-Hall, 1965); Austin Sarat, ed., The Blackwell Companion to Law and Society, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004); and Ronald L. Akers and Richard Hawkins, Law and Control in Society, (Prentice-Hall, 1975). Michel Foucault is one of the most important recent theorists about cultural social control; Christopher Falzon provides a clear analysis of Foucault's work in Foucault and Social Dialogue, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁸ A notable exception to the elite dominance of policymaking was the idea of "maximum feasible participation" championed by Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" in programs like the Community Action Project (CAP). These programs failed, however, as they tended to undercut elites' (policymakers') authority so they opposed it. For a detailed account of this see Robert H. Bremner, Gary W. Reichard, and Richard Hopkins's American Choices: Social Dilemma and Public Policy

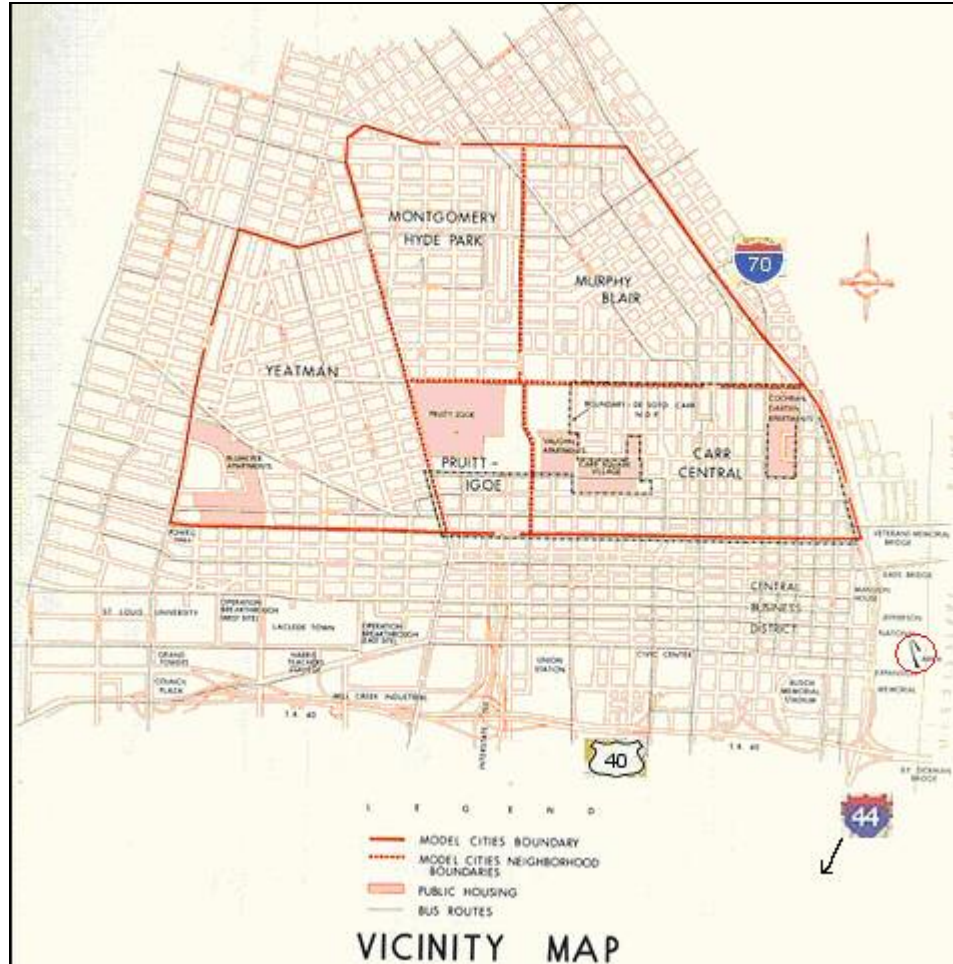


Fig. 2: Map of Pruitt-Igoe and Surrounding Area. Note the surrounding public housing complexes—Pruitt-Igoe, though the most famous, was not the only complex in St. Louis. The red circle in the bottom marks the site of the Arch, which is adjacent to the central business district (CBD). Source: <http://library.wustl.edu>.

Because the residents of the "ghetto" have few cultural similarities with the elites and policymakers, the inner city is an extreme example of

since 1960, (Ohio State University Press, 1986). For accounts of the inner city see Liam Kennedy, *Race and Urban Space*, (Edinburgh, 2000), and Jose Camillo Vergara's *The New American Ghetto*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1995) Also see Missy L. Allen, "Maximum Feasible Participation: the War on Poverty in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1965-1970," MA Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2004.

top-down social control in recent America. Until the 1960s--and occasionally after that as well--policymakers assumed that ghetto residents--usually low-income minorities--were incapable of ordering their own society, and required stringent regulations to keep them in line. In some extreme cases--as happened in the later stages of Pruitt-Igoe--the elites adopted a policy of total isolation and completely ignored the needs or existence of the ghetto.⁹

In either scenario, the policymakers made the decisions from "above" without directly consulting the residents in question. Pruitt-Igoe is an extreme example of modernist social control, as it combined the problems of the isolation and racial segregation of the inner-city with unpleasant living conditions and modernist design. Therefore, the Pruitt-Igoe complex provides an exceptionally clear view of the negative impact of elitist policymaking and the modernist ideals of social control.¹⁰

⁹ Alexander Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe", in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America edited by John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) 180-205; Lee Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company 1970); Oscar Newman, Defensible Space, (MacMillan, 1972); Mary C. Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," Journal of Architectural Education, 34 (Summer 1981): 26-31.

¹⁰Alexander Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe", in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 180-183; Oscar Newman, Defensible Space; Mary C. Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," Journal of Architectural Education, 34 (Summer 1981): 26-31.

In order to understand the significance of Pruitt-Igoe, a basic understanding of the history of public housing in urban America is necessary; Pruitt-Igoe was not the first example of failed public housing. Public housing is an offshoot of industrial society: the concept of low-cost housing communes began soon after the rise of industrialization, in response to the problem of providing shelter for the impoverished urban working class. Early examples--that indirectly influenced complexes like Pruitt-Igoe--include the utopian ideals of social reformers in mid-nineteenth century Europe, like Henri Saint-Simon—who advocated communes--and wealthy industrialists like Robert Owen who pioneered the concept of company towns.¹¹

The American equivalent of Owen's plan was the development of mill towns--like Slatersville, RI, set up by Samuel Slater--to house workers. Though these communities differed from modernist public housing because they were privately financed and the buildings were small, they were precursors to twentieth-century public housing in that they were self-supporting communities that provided basic shelter. These early communes differed significantly from later complexes like Pruitt-Igoe, however, in that they relocated poor workers away from urban centers,

¹¹For a general overview late-nineteenth and twentieth-century public housing see John F. Bauman "Introduction: The Eternal war of the Slums" in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 1-17. For accounts of European utopianism see G. D. H. Cole, Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1955) and Barbara Goodwin, Social Science and Utopia : Nineteenth-Century Models of Social Harmony, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978).

whereas twentieth-century public housing primarily housed impoverished minority groups in the inner city.¹²

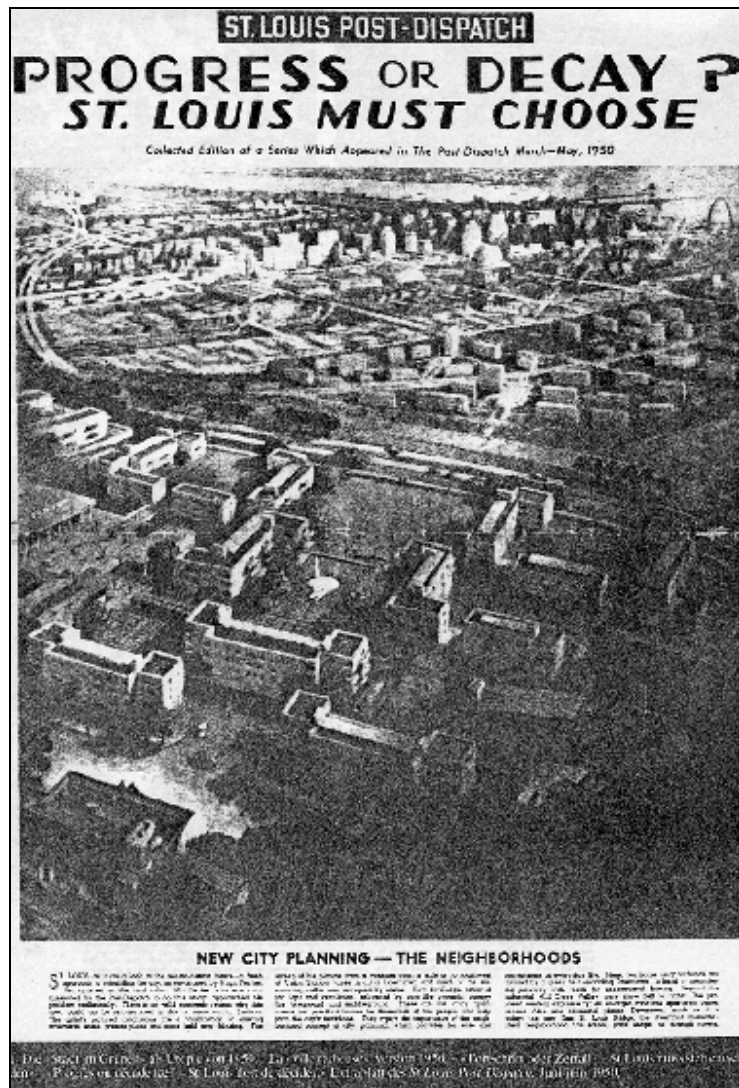


Fig. 3: Idealized plan of the Pruitt-Igoe complex before it was built. This drawing illustrates the early optimism about Pruitt-Igoe as a quasi-utopian solution to St. Louis’s post-World War Two housing problems. Source: <http://www-1.tu-cottbus.de>.

¹² John F. Bauman “Introduction: The Eternal war of the Slums” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes 1—17. For additional accounts of Samuel Slater and early American mill towns see Benjamin Lawson, “Samuel Slater” and “Textile Mills” in the Encyclopedia of American Science, (MESharpe, slated for 2007 publication).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the terrible living conditions of the urban poor—especially the despicable conditions in tenements in large cities like New York—came to the forefront. Exposés like Jacob Riis’s How the Other Half Lives led to moral reform movements in cities across the nation, and contributed to government involvement in housing reform. Unlike later public housing, late-nineteenth-century tenements were privately owned, and in terms of design, the tenements bore little resemblance to modernist public housing; the tenements lacked the logical format of the Pruitt-Igoe complex. More importantly, tenement dwellers experienced *de facto* segregation from “mainstream” middle-class society; as in modernist public housing, the underclass residents were not accepted in middle-class white society. Many tenement dwellers were from immigrant families—and like the African-American residents of Pruitt-Igoe—bore obvious visual markings of difference, whether skin color, native language, or religious belief.¹³

During the “progressive” era the modern conception of public housing began to take shape. In 1911 the National Housing Association (NHA), led by Lawrence Veiller, held its first meeting, and clarified its “scientific” approach to housing reform. The NHA had five major goals: to

¹³ For a recent account see Robert B. Fairbanks, “From Better Dwellings to Better Neighborhoods,” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 23-39. For a contemporary account of New York’s tenements see Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), available online at: <http://www.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/about.html>.

prevent the erection of “unfit” housing, to encourage the building of “proper” housing, to ensure proper management and maintenance of existing housing, to attempt to renovate existing structures, and to bring about “scientific,” economic, and “reasonable” housing laws.¹⁴

At the same time that the NHA was clarifying its strategy, the “garden city” movement was vogue—aided by Herbert Hoover’s housing policy that favored the movement to the suburbs. A revamped plan to develop company towns, the garden city movement attempted to develop working-class suburbs with limited population to ensure good living conditions. Popular prior to World War Two, garden city communities had the undesirable effect of encouraging the growth of suburbs, which hurt the inner city, and increased the need for public housing in the city center.¹⁵

The conception of public housing as a high-rise slum (like Pruitt-Igoe) supported by the federal government began during the New Deal. Whereas previous housing programs had attempted to improve the plight of the poor through renovating overcrowded tenements and jumpstarting community, the modernist public housing complexes of the New Deal represented the beginning of an explicit top-down housing policy. During the Great Depression, the problem of the urban underclass became so

¹⁴ Robert B. Fairbanks, “From Better Dwellings to Better Neighborhoods,” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 23-39, quotes from 32-33.

¹⁵ John S. Gardner, “The Garden City and Planned Industrial Suburbs” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 43-59.

large that policymakers were forced to implement a program of large-scale public housing. These programs never received sufficient financial support, as the elites and middle classes were not interested in programs that “benefited” only the very poor. This same problem hindered Pruitt-Igoe, as cost-cutting influenced the starkness of the design and increased resident dissatisfaction.¹⁶

The 1937 United States Housing Act (USHA) led to the popularity of modernist housing, as it encouraged cost-cutting measures in any way necessary to keep expenses down. Early examples of modernist housing complexes built under the USHA were Brooklyn’s Red Hook and Queensbrough housing developments. As in Pruitt-Igoe, these complexes were designed on a strict geometrical layout, did not have any design frills, and were generally dirty, unpleasant places to live. Also like Pruitt-Igoe, the enclosed design and large scale of these early modernist complexes led to a feeling of isolation from the rest of the city.¹⁷

¹⁶ In “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” (From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, pgs. 102-108) Gail Radford describes the middle-class unwillingness to support programs that primarily aided the underclass. Radford quotes writer/activist Catherine Bauer, a proponent of what she termed “modern” housing in her 1934 book Modern Housing. Bauer argued that a top-down approach to public housing (one that focused only on the very poor and did not include mixed-income support) would lead to the failure of public housing complexes, as she believed that a complex could not function if the residents relied on welfare “hand-outs” to provide for themselves and their family. Bauer’s “modern” label is not to be confused with “modernist” housing, which refers the complexes that were in fact built, whereas Bauer’s “modern housing” remained a dream.



Fig. 4: The Pruitt-Igoe complex in 1955 seen from the air. Note the geometric form of both the buildings and landscaping—the austerity is symptomatic of modernist design. Source: <http://www.jahsonic.com/ModernistArchitecture.html>.

There were several main features of the modernist approach to public housing, evident in Pruitt-Igoe. The first aspect was the belief that the underclass could not provide for themselves and were dependent on welfare handouts. The second idea was that the elites should make the

¹⁷ For information about the USHA and the Red Hook and Queensbrough developments see Gail Radford, “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 112-116.

policy decisions from ‘above’ as the underclass was not capable of providing for themselves (the ability to provide for oneself was assumed to be a necessary condition of managing one’s affairs). The final aspect was the perception that once the very poor were separated into modernist public housing complexes the elites and middle class could go about their business unencumbered by daily reminders of the plight of the underclass.¹⁸

Despite the obvious problems of modernist public housing evident by the 1950s, policymakers retained an idealistic attitude toward modernist complexes like Pruitt-Igoe. In fact, as illustrated in Fig. 3, urban planners and policymakers often had a utopian vision of what public housing would accomplish for their city. This unwarranted utopianism—not unlike the visions of nineteenth-century social reformers—set up projects like Pruitt-Igoe to fail, as they could not live up to the naïve ideals of the men who supported and designed them.¹⁹

¹⁸ Early twentieth-century complexes like the Red Hook and Queensbrough developments in Brooklyn had the same problems that occurred in Pruitt-Igoe, such as cost-cutting, strict geometrical design, and the dead-end situation of the underclass residents. Gail Radford, “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 112-116.

¹⁹ For an account of the conditions that contributed to St. Louis official’s decision to build Pruitt-Igoe see Alexander Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 180-205. Gail Radford discusses the Red Hook and Queensborough developments in “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 112-116.

Many critics and scholars have discussed Pruitt-Igoe, and most agree that it has some significance in the larger structure of urban America: it occurred at an important time, in a central location, and affected minority groups. In addition, Pruitt-Igoe has significance for architects and urban planners, as its end symbolized the failure of modernist housing and social control, and—theoretically--prepared the way for new solutions. Most commonly, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe has been hailed as the end of modernism, and a transition point toward postmodernism.²⁰

This is a debatable division, however, as distinctions between the modern and postmodern are often vague. Within architecture, the difference is that postmodernism tends to emphasize surface decoration and allusion to past styles, which is a direct contrast to the sturdy, functional appearance of the “International Style,” which was (according to Le Corbusier) the high-point of modernist architecture. Most importantly,

²⁰ Charles Jencks’s The Language of Post-Modern Architecture (London: Academy Editions, 1978) connected Pruitt-Igoe with the “death of modernism.” A plethora of urban planning literature exists on the subject of Pruitt-Igoe, the most important of which include: James Bailey, “History of a Failure” Architectural Forum, (December 1965): 22-25; Mary C. Comerio, “Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories,” Journal of Architectural Education, 34 (Summer 1981): 26-31; and Kate Bristol, “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” Journal of Architectural Education, 44 (May 1991): 163-171. A complete bibliography (up to 1987) is available in Roger Montgomery and Kate Bristol, Pruitt-Igoe: An Annotated Bibliography. (Chicago: Council of Planning Librarians, 1987).

however, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe marked more than the end of a stylistic trend, as the complex's failure embodied the predicament facing urban areas nationwide.²¹

²¹ Charles Jencks was the first to refer to the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe as the end of modernism, and the beginning of post-modernism. For definitions of the postmodern city and the differences between postmodern and modernist architecture see Glenn Ward, Postmodernism, 17-27; Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, 26-27. John Hannigan also discusses the impact of commercialization in the postmodern city in Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis, (Routledge, 1998).

CHAPTER TWO

THE "FAILURE" OF PRUITT-IGOE AND THE "DEATH" OF MODERNISM

Completed in 1955 in St. Louis, Missouri amid international fanfare, the massive Pruitt-Igoe complex included thirty-three buildings of eleven stories each. However, the complex quickly devolved to the point that city officials chose to dynamite it from 1972 to 1976 because they deemed the complex to be uninhabitable. Why were these buildings regarded so highly, and then less than twenty years later so hated that they were ignominiously torn down? There are many factors, not limited to: architectural style; city, state, and federal policy; demographics; racial division; and economics. Regardless of the specific factors, however, the fate of the Pruitt-Igoe is not just the story of failed architecture or the failure of urban renewal in one city, but is part of the larger context of urban America and the crisis situation of the late Vietnam-War era (Fig. 2).²²

²² The first residents moved into Pruitt-Igoe in 1954, before the entire complex was completed. Lee Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), 8. Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe," From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes; Newman, Defensible Space; Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories"; Vergara, The New American Ghetto.



Fig. 5: The Destruction of Pruitt-Igoe. Source: Oscar Newman, Creating Defensible Space.

The architect responsible for designing Pruitt-Igoe was Minoru Yamasaki, the same man who designed the World Trade Centers in New York City. Working with the St. Louis Housing Authority, Yamasaki designed the cheapest possible plan; cost saving measures, not just aesthetics, influenced the design of Pruitt-Igoe. For example, Yamasaki designed skip-stop elevators (which only stopped at every third floor) to reduce the cost of installing an elevator stop on every floor. The stark, functional interiors—characterized by flimsy, cheap, built-in accessories,

like cabinets and doors with latches or knobs that broke off very easily—were also due to cost-cutting, not design.²³



Fig. 6: Artist's Conception of an Interior Hallway in Pruitt-Igoe. Source: Oscar Newman, Creating Defensible Space.

Many of the “innovations” that excited architects in the mid-1950s—such as the skip-stop elevators—were the root of the dissatisfaction of the late 1960s. Yamasaki’s original plan was to include long communal hallways that served the residents of several floors; as seen in Fig. 6, Yamasaki intended these corridors to serve as community gathering places, where families could relax in a manner similar to how they would on a front porch in a street-level neighborhood. However, these hallways

²³ For a discussion of Yamasaki’s design for Pruitt-Igoe, see Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes and Newman, Defensible Space.

quickly became unsafe, defaced, and isolated; one of their primary uses was to serve as havens for drug-dealers, and most residents stayed locked-up in their rooms and only ventured into the corridor when necessary. Eerily symbolic of the entire complex, (as seen in Fig. 7) the corridors quickly devolved from the idealized communal space Yamasaki envisioned to dangerous and isolated areas.²⁴

A primary function of public housing is to provide a safe shelter—cheap and not luxurious but secure; therefore, the Pruitt-Igoe projects failed, due both to bad design and the destructive behavior of the tenants themselves. At the beginning, Pruitt-Igoe was supposed to provide a better environment than the “slums”—though the elites who thought this may have been incorrect—and also to keep the underclass in line by isolating them and meeting their basic needs. According to Oscar Newman in his 1972 book, Defensible Space, where people live affects their behavior. In the case of Pruitt-Igoe, he argued, the residents felt ignored so they vented their frustration on the environment where they

²⁴ Interestingly, Yamasaki was not the first to incorporate skip-stop elevators, as many scholars have argued in order to emphasize Pruitt-Igoe’s innovativeness as a paragon of modernist architecture design. As noted by Gail Radford in “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression” From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 113, the Red Hook and the Queensbrough developments also had this feature. This is an example of the “mythology” surrounding Pruitt-Igoe, and suggests that Pruitt-Igoe was not as innovative as some theorists suggested. Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” 2000; Newman, Defensible Space, 1972; Comerio, “Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories”; Vergara, The New American Ghetto.

lived. While this concept is debatable, it does help explain the failure of Pruitt-Igoe.²⁵



Fig. 7: View of an Interior Corridor of Pruitt-Igoe just before Demolition. Source: Public Domain; Oscar Newman, Creating Defensible Space.

Rather than improve the conditions of the poor, the projects made the plight of the underclass more visible. While daily life in the projects was not worse than homelessness, or life in tenements, or boarded up and burned out neighborhoods, the problems within Pruitt-Igoe were more

²⁵ In his 1972 book, Defensible Space Oscar Newman analyzed the connection between living environment and behavior; he argued that the design of Pruitt-Igoe precipitated civil disorder due to its claustrophobic feel. For an additional account of how enclosed spaces lead to crime see the excerpt on Bryant Park in New York City in Michael Leccese and Kathleen McCormick, Charter of the New Urbanism (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000) and Jose Camillo Vergara's account of the high-rise projects in Chicago and New York in The New American Ghetto where the secluded public areas became violent and unusable for the purposes the designers intended.

conspicuous due to the complex's large size and architectural distinction--architects nationwide had praised Yamasaki's innovations in the mid-1950s, which were supposed to quell social ills and build community within the complex. As Fig. 8 shows, there is evidence to suggest that life in Pruitt-Igoe was not worse than in other poor areas of the city: the decline of Pruitt-Igoe mirrored the status of the surrounding areas.²⁶

Pruitt-Igoe was a symptom of racial and class division in St. Louis; however, the poor living conditions in the complex were more visible due to Pruitt-Igoe's image as an innovative architectural achievement. As Lee Rainwater demonstrated in Behind Ghetto Walls, life in the project was often harsh, but, in many ways, conditions there were not worse than in typical "ghetto" neighborhoods. The key difference was not the types of problems—graffiti, drugs, female-headed households, poverty, racial segregation—but the cramped quarters of the high-rise design, which increased friction between residents and exacerbated the aggravation common among the very poor. As Fig. 9 shows, poverty levels in Pruitt-Igoe were not lower than in the surrounding areas, including East St. Louis; thus, poverty was a location-specific trend in the older urbanized areas, and not limited to Pruitt-Igoe.²⁷

²⁶ Ronald Abler and John S. Adams, A Comparative Atlas of America's Great Cities: Twenty Metropolitan Regions, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 125; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, vii.

²⁷ Ronald Abler and John S. Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 416; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-9.

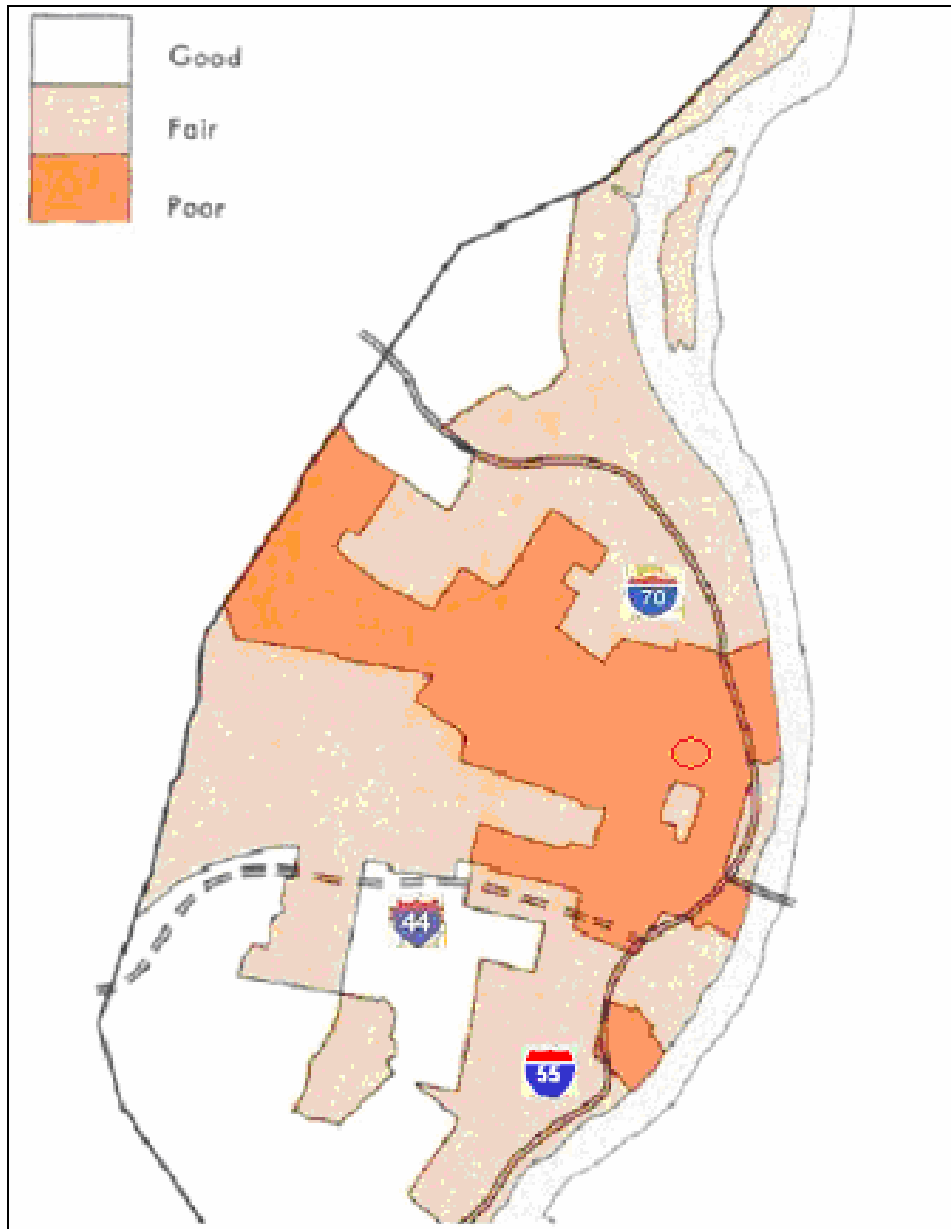


Fig. 8: Quality of Life in St. Louis. Note that Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the red oval) is not distinguished as any worse than the surrounding area; according to this map, the entire African-American section of the central city was “Poor.” To avoid confusion, the “Fair” section beneath Pruitt-Igoe is not a residential area, but the World War Memorial Park, and the light section next to the Mississippi River is the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, where the Arch is. Source: Abler and. Adams, *A Comparative Atlas of America’s Great Cities*, 125.

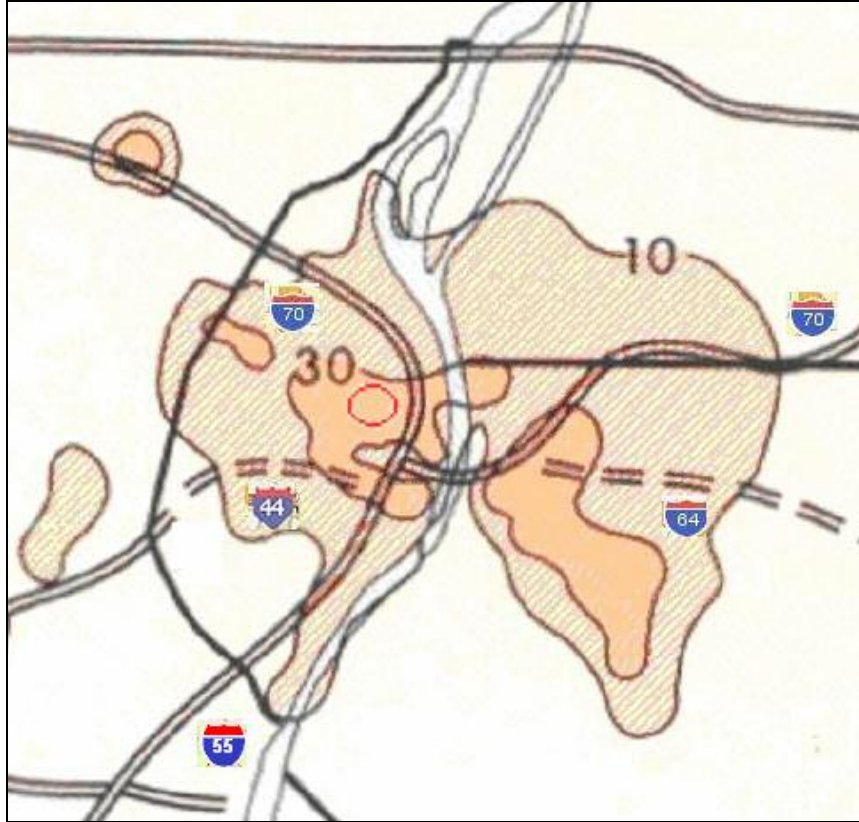


Fig. 9: Percent of Households below the Poverty Line. Poverty levels in Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the red oval) are not lower than the surrounding areas and East St. Louis. Thus, poverty is not a function of the projects, but a location-specific trend in the older urbanized areas. In 1976, St. Louis had the fourth-largest proportion of residents below the poverty line. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 416.

Population density—not quality of life--was the starkest difference between Pruitt-Igoe and the surrounding area. As illustrated in Fig 10, the Pruitt-Igoe complex presented a startling change from the comparatively sparsely populated surrounding neighborhoods; a difference which may have accounted for the project’s unpopularity. Coupled with poverty and racial prejudice, the close proximity of thousands of frustrated residents within Pruitt-Igoe led to heightened tensions, expressed through vandalism, resentment of authority (welfare workers and the police), and

destructive acts (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 11), which signified that city officials had lost control of the complex.²⁸

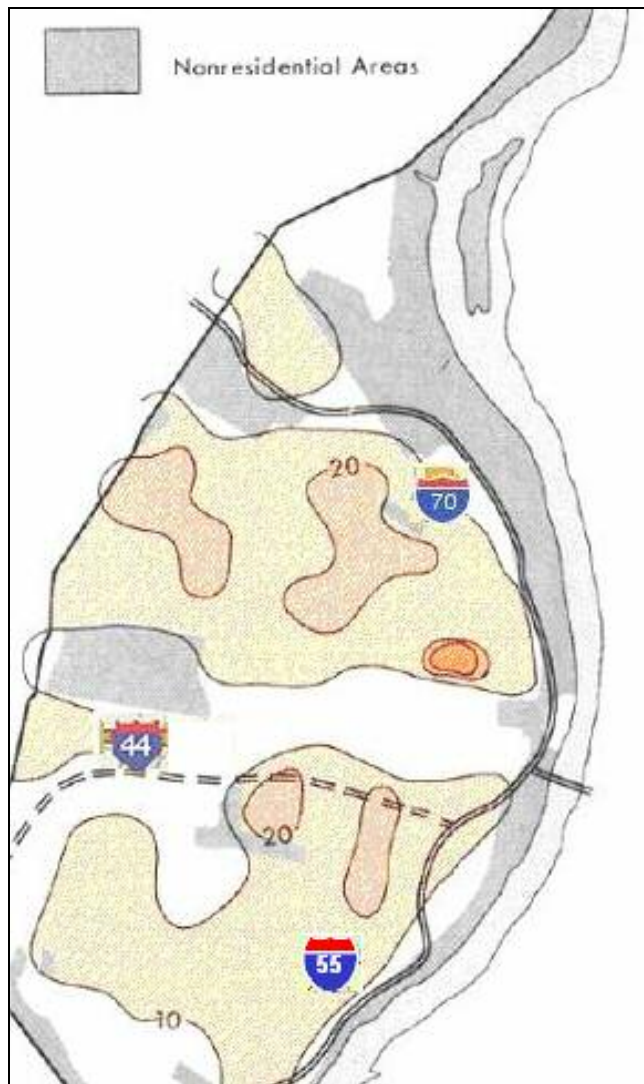


Fig. 10: People per Square Mile, in Thousands. Note the gray “nonresidential areas” along the river, where the city’s oldest neighborhoods and former commercial center had been prior to urban renewal. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 120.

²⁸ Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 120; Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*, 1970, 8-12; Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” in *From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes*; Newman, *Defensible Space*, 1972; Comerio, “Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories,” 1981.

This illustrates both the specific fallacy of modernist design, and the general problems of demographics and racism: the uncompromising modernist layout of public housing served as a way to maintain the existing social hierarchy, as the inhabitants could not move “up” in such dehumanizing conditions. The high density was a consequence of urban renewal projects that had destroyed ghetto neighborhoods in the old urban core. As Fig. 10 shows, many of St. Louis’s oldest neighborhoods were transformed into “nonresidential areas” (marked by the gray) along the river, as urban renewal projects had recently obliterated the city’s former waterfront for use as parkland and the site of the famous arch.²⁹

The prevalence of vandalism in Pruitt-Igoe was one of the most visible symbols of the failure of modernist ideals of social control. An effective means of protest, vandalism directly influenced city officials’ decision to demolish Pruitt-Igoe, as it illustrated that they had lost control over the complex. Due to the destructive and rebellious acts of the residents’ (illustrated in Fig. 7 and Fig. 11), the logically designed buildings of Pruitt-Igoe became a symbol of disorder in the inner city. The subversion of the rational design of Pruitt-Igoe mirrored the collapse of the

²⁹ Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 120; Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes; Newman, Defensible Space; Comerio, “Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories”; Vergara, The New American Ghetto; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-12.

modernist philosophy of social order and control reflected in the project's layout.³⁰



Fig. 11: Vandalized Windows at Pruitt-Igoe. Source: Oscar Newman, Creating Defensible Space.

Besides the modernist layout of Pruitt-Igoe, the presence of welfare workers and the police were the most visible symbols of policymakers' authority in the complex. Thus, Pruitt-Igoe's residents often expressed dissatisfaction with these groups, and in return the police (both the

³⁰ For an account of the relation between vandalism and protest see Newman, Defensible Space. For accounts of the relation between activism and rioting, see Ernesto Chávez, "¡Mi Raza Primero!": Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), and Gerald Horne, Fire this Time, (Da Capo Press, 1995).

project's special force and the St. Louis police) made few allowances for the residents' wants. A series of surveys conducted of the complex's residents in the 1960s clearly illustrated their distrust of authority and recognition that the elites were not concerned with their needs. This attitude (the underclass's frustration due to the elites neglect), parallels the findings of the Kerner Commission, which argued that such frustration was the primary cause of the ghetto unrest of the 1960s.³¹

In general, the residents tolerated welfare workers (who were often of African-American descent) more than police. These surveys demonstrate that men (66 percent dissatisfaction) serving as "Head of Household" were more critical of welfare workers than women (17 percent dissatisfaction) serving in the same capacity. Common complaints about the welfare system (represented by residents' experience with individual welfare workers) were that the system was too inflexible (not willing to make exceptions for specific cases) and unjust (as many residents thought the system promoted inequality). Some of these impressions were shaped by personal experiences; for example, one respondent complained: "many of them (welfare workers) do not know to talk to people" because "her last workers" fit that description. Another common complaint—strikingly similar to the view of many white elites--was that

³¹Lee Rainwater based his observations on these surveys, but the actual responses are available in Jerome S. Stromberg, "Private Problems in Public Housing: A Further Report on the Pruitt-Igoe Project." Occasional Paper #39, February 1968.

welfare promoted indolence because “other sources of income. . . make them ineligible” for continuing governmental support—a source of income that many residents were unwilling to forego, due to the lack of worthwhile job prospects.³²

The police, however, tended to elicit more poignant responses—though many residents welcomed police presence as a counter for youth violence and the drug trade within the complex. In fact, 91 percent of the respondents (88 percent of the men and 92 percent of the women) agreed that Pruitt-Igoe needed more policemen, while only 3 percent thought the complex needed fewer policemen. A common complaint of those residents dissatisfied with the police was that the police (both the St. Louis police and the project police) took too long to respond and seemed disrespectful of the complex’s residents.³³

Some respondents made distinctions between the St. Louis police and the project police, but while the project police received slightly better marks, there does not seem to have been much difference. For example, 31 percent of the respondents agreed that the St. Louis police did a “good job of providing protection” for the residents of Pruitt-Igoe, while 78 percent complained that the St. Louis police were “never around and take too long to come when you call them.” Likewise, only 40 percent agreed

³² Stromberg, Jerome, “Private Problems in Public Housing,” 1968, 5-11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11-18.

that the project police did a good job providing protection, and 65 percent complained that the project police were never around and did not come when called. Two typical quotes are: “the (city police) threw me behind bars and took all my money and the ring off my hand...they talk to you like a dog” “three-fourths of the time they (project police) don’t come.”³⁴

As the survey responses show, Pruitt-Igoe was not merely an architectural disaster. Rather, it represented a larger social and cultural breakdown and a shift in the prevailing social order. Modernist high rise housing complexes—drab, mechanical, functional buildings—failed, as cost cutting, racism, politics, and urban decline all directly led to the project’s failure. While Charles Jencks argued that Pruitt-Igoe provided a concrete event to mark the supposed “end” of modernism, the distinction is neither as clear nor obvious as he thought, as critics do not agree on a universal definition of postmodernism. For example, some theorists--such as Jean-Francois Lyotard--describe postmodernism as an extension of modernism, and not an absolute break. Therefore, it is an oversimplification to state (as Jencks did) that the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe can represent such a transition.³⁵

³⁴Ibid., 11-18.

³⁵ In The Postmodern Condition Lyotard defined postmodernism as “not modernism at its end but in the nascent state,” noting that postmodernism was merely a renewal of modernism, and not an absolute break; Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition; Ward, Postmodernism; Bill Readings, Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics, (Routledge, 1991); Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism;

While the complex isolated the residents from “mainstream” city streets—separating the impoverished African-American residents from white elites--the design of Pruitt-Igoe, though elitist, was not sinister. The problems that followed may have had something to do with poor design, but the argument that the design was the most significant reason for the project's demise is an oversimplification. In addition to architectural style, factors such as the changing political outlook toward the inner city and the suburban boom of the 1960s-1970s were also very important.³⁶

Newman, Defensible Space; Comerio, “Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories,” 1981.

³⁶Newman, Defensible Space; Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices.

CHAPTER THREE

NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY CHANGES TOWARD THE INNER CITY

Charles Jencks's view that the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe signified the end of modernism--and thus the beginning of postmodernism--is one of the most misleading interpretations of the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe, as it ignores the political and economic changes that led to the complex's demolition. The modernist design of Pruitt-Igoe was a factor, but not the only reason for its destruction; likewise, the city officials' decision to dynamite the complex in the early 1970s was a reaction to many considerations unconnected with dissatisfaction with modernist design. In fact, the general urban malaise of the late-1960s and early 1970s directly affected both the national and local policy decisions that led to the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe.³⁷

On the local level, the decline of St. Louis hastened Pruitt-Igoe's demise. City officials' decisions led to the project's negative image, and they chose to isolate and not renovate it; they saw Pruitt-Igoe as part of

³⁷ The idea of racial inequality expressed spatially in the division of the city is central to the Kerner Commission's Report. For more on Pruitt-Igoe's connection with the failure of Modernism see Ward, Postmodernism; Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism.

the problem, and therefore expendable. The failure of Pruitt-Igoe is inseparable from the plight of St. Louis, as the city faced a severe budget crisis and dwindling population and resources. From its inception, Pruitt-Igoe was a compromise, intended to house the city's poorest residents and keep them off the city streets, which would allow St. Louis to present a cleaner and more aesthetic image to outsiders. Once Pruitt-Igoe devolved, city officials did not hesitate to destroy it.³⁸

St. Louis officials planned at first to make Pruitt-Igoe a racially segregated complex: one part for whites and the other for blacks. This plan did not last, as the majority of the residents (most of who had to be relocated due to urban renewal projects that had razed their former neighborhoods) were black. Not surprisingly, few whites moved into the complex, and the overwhelming majority of the tenants were of African-American descent. This illustrates a significant aspect of both urban renewal and public housing projects: as seen in Fig. 12, minority groups, especially African-Americans, were a disproportionate percent of the people affected by these programs.³⁹

³⁸ The maps in Abler and Adams, [A Comparative Atlas of America's Great Cities](#) show the sharp decline of St. Louis; the section from pages 116-126 is especially informative; Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe"; Rainwater, in [Behind Ghetto Walls](#), calls Pruitt-Igoe a "dumping ground" for the underclass, pgs. 8-10. These arguments mirror the findings of the Kerner Commission.

³⁹ Abler and Adams, [A Comparative Atlas](#), 384; Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe"; Rainwater, [Behind Ghetto Walls](#), 8; Kerner Commission, [Report](#).

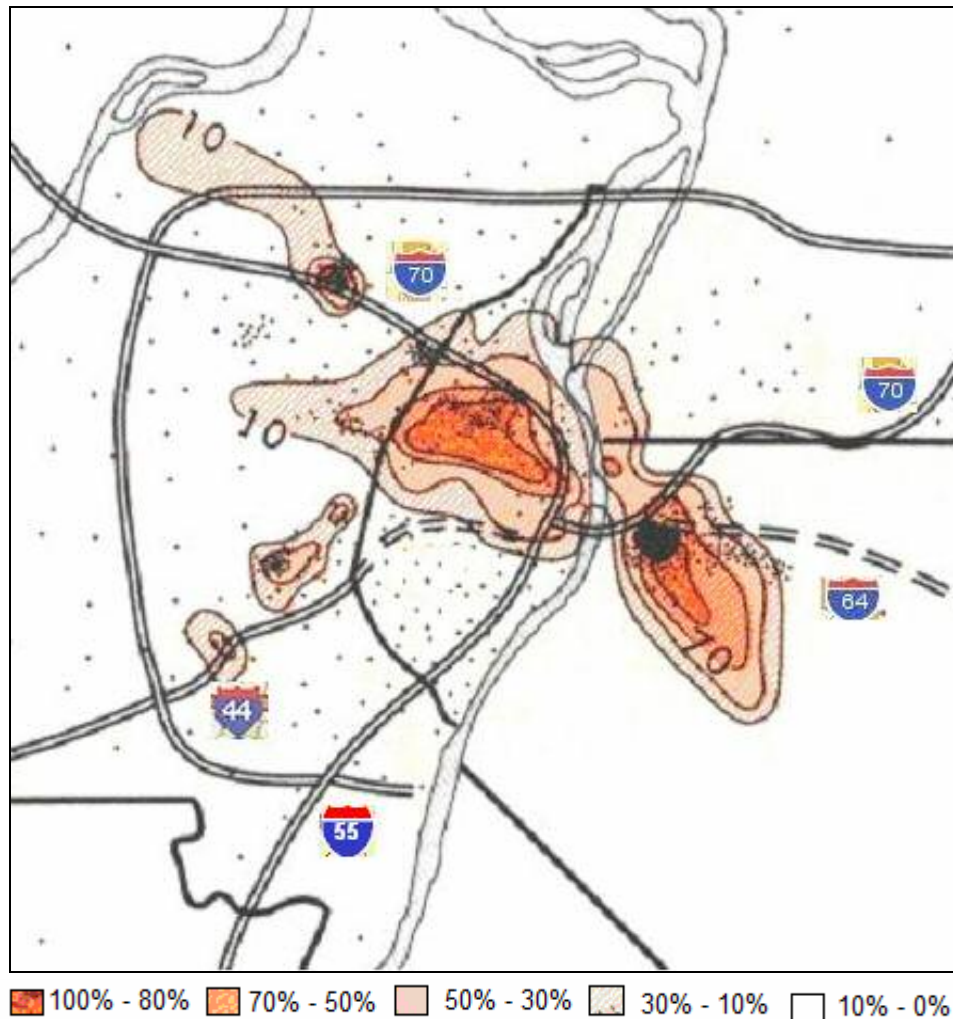


Fig. 12: Percent of Housing Occupied by African-Americans. Pruitt-Igoe is in the darkest area left of the Mississippi River. Note that the area surrounding the project was inhabited by a 90% African-American majority, similar to that of central East St. Louis. This map suggests that the projects were a visible symbol of racial segregation, but not unusual within the St. Louis Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 384.

Arguably, white city officials targeted the inner-city minority neighborhoods for “renewal” due to their prime location near the central business district (CBD) and their potential for economic development: both as a corridor for interstate highways to serve suburban commuters and as potential sites for upscale housing or business offices. In St.

Louis, the busy waterfront area—the city’s commercial heart during the height of its heyday as a western inland port—was also home to much of the city’s minority population (see Fig. 12). In an effort to clean up its image, St. Louis—which by the mid-1950s was steadily declining—cleared the waterfront and erected the arch to symbolize St. Louis’s status as the gateway to the west. Ironically, the arch called attention to the city’s past, yet the process of constructing the arch destroyed the very section of the city the arch commemorated.⁴⁰

Pruitt-Igoe provided housing for the displaced residents of the razed neighborhoods. Under the circumstances, Pruitt-Igoe was necessary, and city officials were optimistic about it, as they envisioned the complex as a symbol of St. Louis’s regeneration; the irony of their position was that Pruitt-Igoe—and modernist public housing in general—represented the existence of social inequality. Pruitt-Igoe freed prime land for redevelopment in the city center, and also ensured that wealthy elites would not often interact with the city’s poorest residents, who were safely relocated away from the central business district. This separation increased as the complex aged and the surrounding neighborhoods

⁴⁰ In Dead Cities (New York: The New Press, 2002) and City of Quartz (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) Mike Davis argues that policymakers in Los Angeles carried out renewal projects in order to obtain prime land near the central business district (CBD), to sell to developers and reclaim the area for WASP use; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 384; Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe.” For a pictorial representation of the changes in St. Louis see Elizabeth McNulty, St. Louis: Then and Now, (Thunder Bay Press, 2000).

declined. As very few commercial establishments survived in the vicinity, the residents of Pruitt-Igoe—according to some critics--became “as isolated as if they occupied an offshore island.”⁴¹

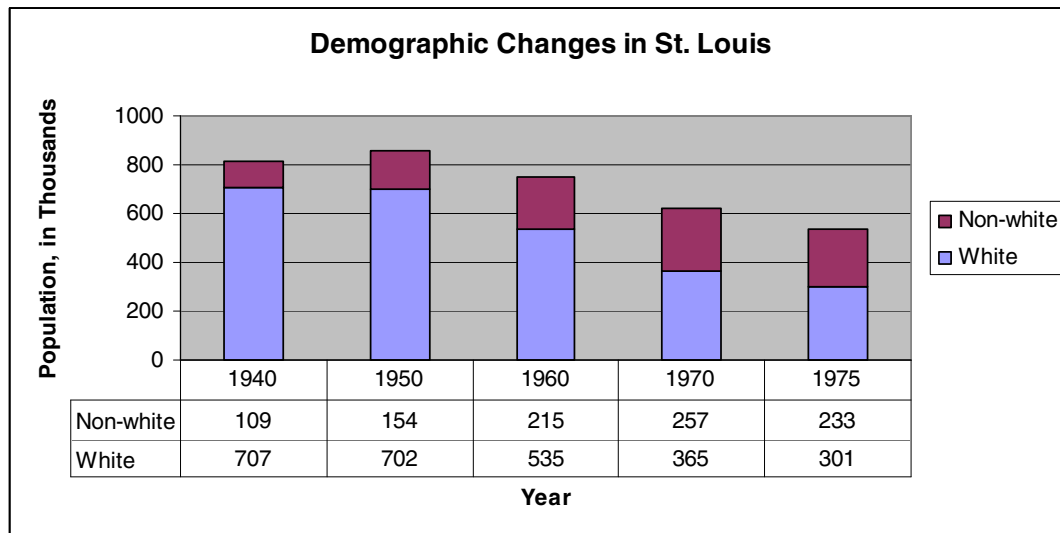


Fig. 13: Demographic Change in the City of St. Louis, 1940-1975. Though the overall percentage of non-whites rose dramatically, the significant change was the sharp decline in the white population, a result of “white flight” to the suburbs. Source: US Census Data as recorded in Chris Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited.” (University of Sheffield, 1985).

⁴¹ As previously noted, the division between the elites and the underclass was also a racial distinction, as “whites” tended to have more money, live in better neighborhoods, and have more political influence, while “blacks” tended to have less money, live in ghettos or public housing, and did not have much political influence. The quoted section is from Chris Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited.” (Unpublished Manuscript, University of Sheffield, 1985) 27; Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 116-126. The division between whites and blacks is a primary theme of Rainwater’s *Behind Ghetto Walls*; likewise, the Kerner Commission’s *Report* emphasized that theme. Von Hoffman argues in “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” that city officials commissioned Pruitt-Igoe as part of the overall beautification plan for St. Louis.

Pruitt-Igoe is not an isolated or extreme example, compared to the situations of other cities. In addition to the common factors of elitism, racism, and poor design, federal policy toward American cities affected local policies. National politics and federal policies toward the city had a direct effect on Pruitt-Igoe and similar housing projects like Chicago’s Robert Taylor Homes, as the availability (or conditions required to receive) federal funds influenced local public-housing policy.⁴²

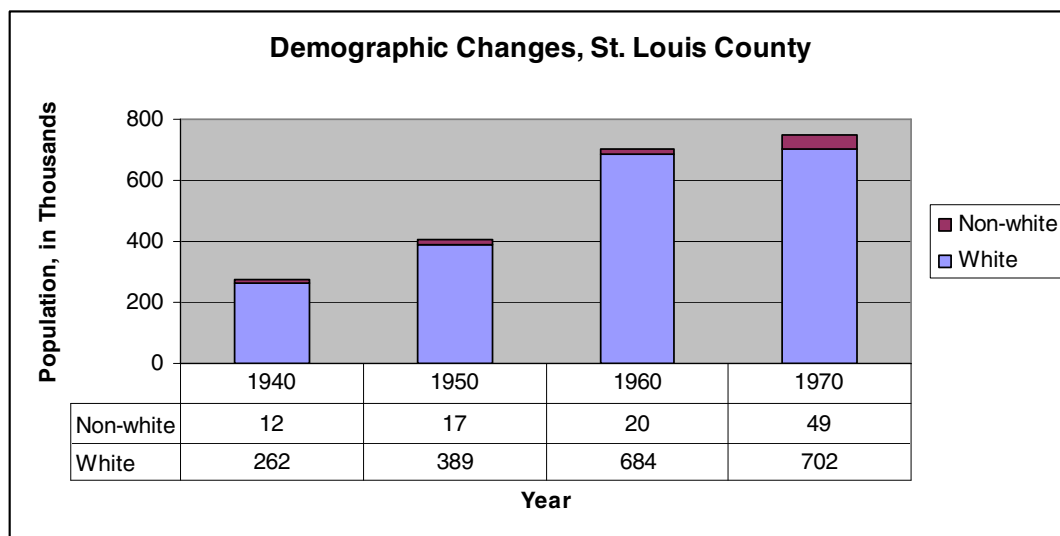


Fig. 14: Demographic Change in the Remainder of St. Louis County, 1940-1970. As shown here, the overall demographic make-up of the St. Louis SMSA remained predominately white, and despite a reduction of the city’s population (shown in Fig. 13), the metropolitan area grew in size from 1940 to 1970. Source: US Census Data as recorded in Chris Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited.”

On the national level, policy toward the city became increasingly negative during the final years of the Vietnam War era, and was often

⁴² Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe”; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 406-410.

divided by political party. Early in the 1960s when the Democrats were in power, the liberal view dominated. Under the leadership of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Democrats stressed government involvement to allow the underclass—primarily impoverished African Americans--to catch up. Johnson’s “Great Society” and “War on Poverty” are the most extreme examples, and their inability to provide immediate results, coupled with the fiasco of the Vietnam War, legitimized the Republicans’ rise to power on a conservative platform.⁴³

When Kennedy took office in 1960, he brought an image of vigor and youth and promoted optimistic plans for federal-sponsored urban renewal. His “Second National Urban Policy” was an attempt to address the problems of crime and the underclass. This policy was based on the “structural” view of poverty, which argued that instilling values of self confidence and independence in the poor was the best way to address social ills. The intention of Democratic federal government policy was to help the poor take care of themselves rather than to implement a welfare program.⁴⁴

However, this policy of encouraging “maximum feasible participation” of the aid recipients was unsuccessful, as the elites had

⁴³ Several theories of poverty also affected these policies--the “structural” and the “functional”-- I will discuss these in detail in the following pages. A useful account of the rise of the Republican Party is Michael Schaller and George Rising, The Republican Ascendancy American Politics, 1968-2001, (Harlan Davidson, 2002).

⁴⁴ Mark Gelfand’s essay is in Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices, 3-33.

difficulty relinquishing power to the underclass. According to Mark Gelfand in his essay “Elevating or Ignoring the Underclass,” maximum feasible participation—as used in the Community Action Program (CAP)—functioned as a federally sponsored means of subverting governmental authority, as the CAP’s policy of allowing the poor to enact policy on their own behalf negated the power of elected policymakers and angered elites.⁴⁵

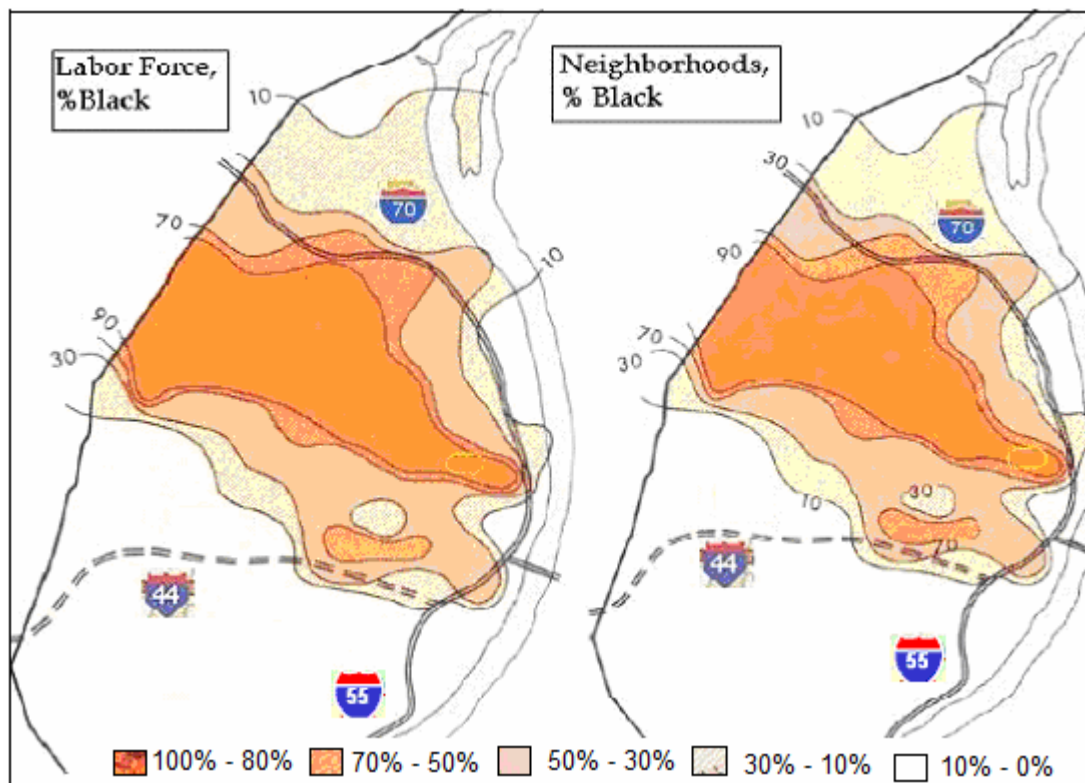


Fig. 15: Percent African American, Labor Force and Neighborhoods. Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the yellow oval) was not unusual for its part of the city. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas 121, 125.

⁴⁵ Mark Gelfand, “Elevating or Ignoring the Underclass,” in American Choices, 3-33. Also see Missy Allen, “Maximum Feasible Participation: the War on Poverty in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1965-1970,” MA Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2004.

Johnson's "Great Society" and "War on Poverty" programs, from 1964 to 1968, were among the most ambitious social plans since the New Deal. Many of these programs addressed the material needs of the urban poor. The Job Corps, Community Action, Public Housing projects, social work programs, the restructuring of the education system, Head Start, civil rights, and affirmative action all grew (in part) out of the desire to quell future uprisings and social problems such as the riots in Watts (1965), Detroit (1967) and Newark (1967). The problems of poverty were larger than Johnson thought, however, and as emphasized in the 1968 report of the Kerner Commission, and illustrated in Fig. 15, racial prejudice—not just the lack of money--was at the root of the plight of the inner city, as racism confined African-Americans to the impoverished city center.⁴⁶

In contrast to the liberal emphasis on state-controlled social reform, conservatives—often Republicans--emphasized individualism and less government control, a policy designed to help the elites, as it allowed them more leeway to support policies favorable to their interest. Not surprisingly, the Republican voting base was in the WASP-dominated suburbs, which did not place as much emphasis on the inner

⁴⁶ Note that the confinement of African-Americans in the decaying city center is the basis of Liam Kennedy's definition of the underclass, given on page 6; Kennedy, Race and Urban Space. Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 121, 125; Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices; Kerner Commission, Report; Schaller and Rising, The Republican Ascendancy.

city. Nevertheless, Nixon's election had a direct effect on the inner city and federally sponsored social programs. Nixon's tenure in office from 1969 to 1974 was the critical time when St. Louis officials gave up on Pruitt-Igoe and determined to dynamite it.⁴⁷

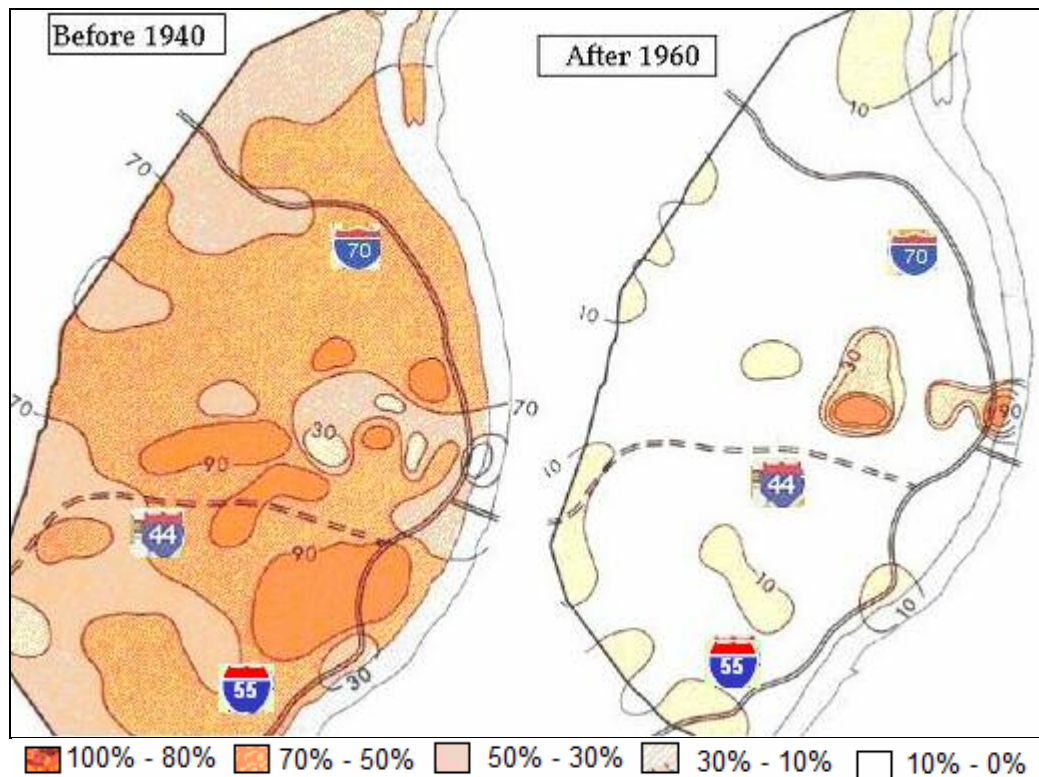


Fig. 16: Percent of Housing Built in the Old City Center, 1940-1976. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 125.

The political switch from liberal to conservative also paralleled attitudes toward the city. The Kennedy and Johnson presidencies of the 1960s were a time of programs to rejuvenate the city center, and make the urban poor functioning “mainstream” citizens, but ghetto violence and

⁴⁷ Schaller and Rising, The Republican Ascendancy; Kerner Commission, Report,

unpopular urban renewal programs negated the success of the liberal movement. During the Nixon administration many cities phased out their social-welfare programs and (as seen in Fig. 14, Fig. 15, and Fig. 16) focused on development projects near the periphery--not the center--of the city.⁴⁸

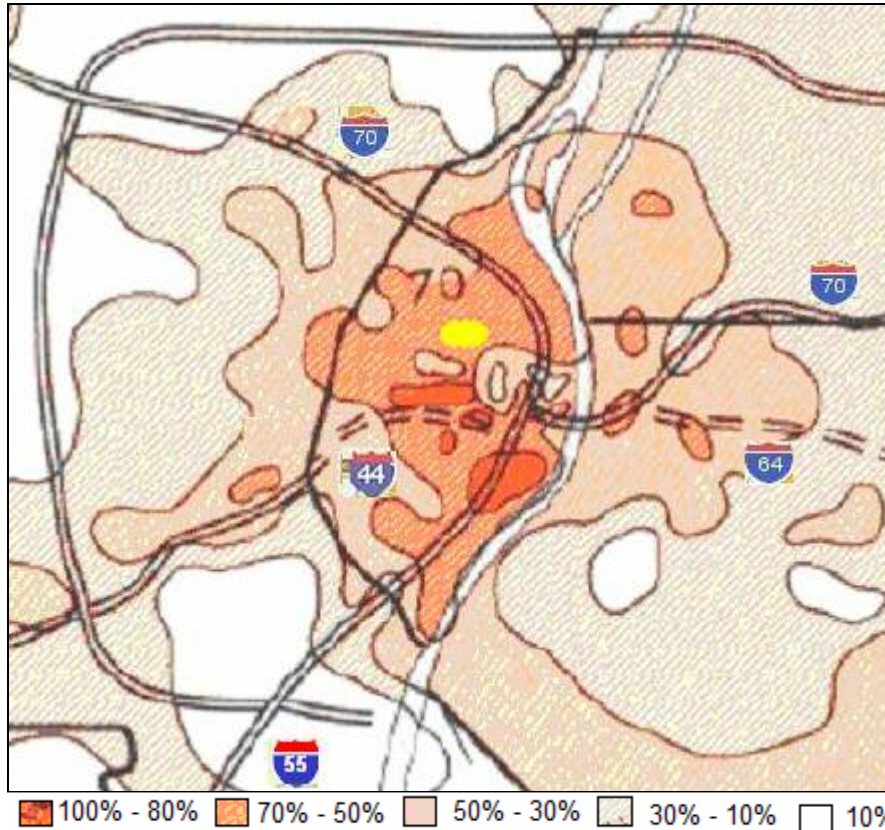


Fig. 17: Percent Housing Built before 1940. Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the yellow oval) was built in the 1950s, but most neighborhoods around it were older, often of nineteenth-century origins. As this map shows, most development in the old city center predated 1940. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 118.

⁴⁸ The Kerner Commission's Report was released in direct response to ghetto unrest, and the resulting fear of the elites. See also Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices; the maps in Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 118, 121, 125, show how the general isolation of the inner city occurred in St. Louis.

Upon his election in 1968, Nixon took a different approach to urban renewal than his predecessors, and phased out many of Johnson's programs, as the Republicans also regained control of Congress. Instead of direct government involvement, the Republicans favored the policy of revenue sharing (giving money without strings attached) giving the individual city and the local elites greater control. The Nixon Administration's policy of "new federalism"—the systematic use of revenue sharing on a large scale--gave power to local areas, and reinforced WASP movement to the suburbs, as the federal government gave funding to the metropolitan region—not just the city—and allowed local officials to determine how to divide the money.⁴⁹

Nixon's revenue sharing plan empowered local administrations, but Nixon still sought to influence and promote urban development. For this policy, Nixon relied on the advice of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, head of the Urban Affairs Council (UAC). Moynihan was a well-known scholar, and intellect, and was the author of "The Negro Family," an analysis that followed the structuralist ideology that had motivated Kennedy's and Johnson's policies. For example, Nixon proposed to reform the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program by establishing a new welfare program called the Family Assistance Plan (FAP). FAP generated criticism from the same conservative analysis that had criticized Johnson's

⁴⁹ For additional information on the changing urban policy of the early 1970s, see George C.S. Benson, The Politics of Urbanism: The New Federalism, (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1972); Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices.

Great Society. Liberals also criticized FAP as too limited or wrongly motivated.⁵⁰

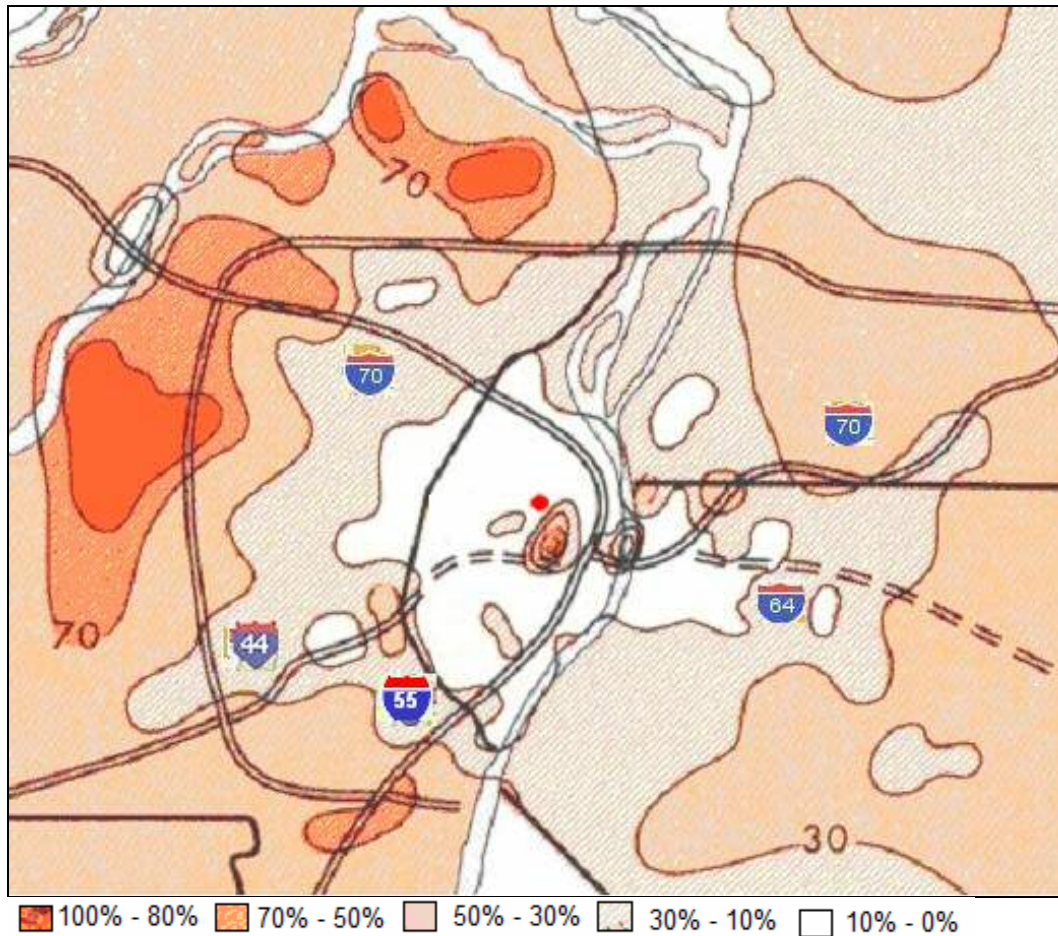


Fig. 18: Percent of Housing Built after 1960. The former site of Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the red circle) is now an open field—still undeveloped after thirty years. Also, note the scarcity of new housing built in the old city center and East St. Louis, and the influx of new development near the outskirts. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 118.

⁵⁰ Moynihan outlined his ideology in the introduction of Toward a National Urban Policy (New York: Basic Books, 1970) 3-25. Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices; Kerner Commission, Report.

Differing views about the nature of poverty were the cause of the split between the conservatives and liberals. In general, conservatives viewed poverty as a result of “cultural deprivation,” not “permanent physical misfortune,” so they discontinued many of Johnson’s welfare programs. Not surprisingly, many liberals criticized Nixon and the conservatives’ rejection of these welfare policies, and decried the Republican emphasis on the suburbs and corporate interest over the minorities in the inner city who (they thought) needed aid the most. Thus, liberals argued in favor of revitalizing existing urbanized areas instead of the sprawling development favored by Nixon’s policy of “new federalism.”⁵¹

The overall decline of interest in the problems of the inner city exacerbated the dismal situation of Pruitt-Igoe (and similar complexes in other cities) and hastened its demise; likewise, the switch from liberal to conservative (and, to an extent, Democrat to Republican) altered ideology toward the city. The shift in policy toward the old city center was only one of the many causes of the failure of Pruitt-Igoe and other modernist housing complexes, however, and to state that the Republicans and Richard Nixon were primarily to blame is an overstatement. In fact, the political shift away from the inner city was only one part of a larger

⁵¹ See Figs. 16, 17, and 18; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 118, 121, 125. For a definition of “new federalism” see page 31, in George Benson, The Politics of Urbanism; Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices; Kerner Commission, Report, 1968.

demographic trend. Though Nixon and the federal government did not make the decision to dynamite Pruitt-Igoe, their negative outlook toward the inner city, and their focus on the suburbs, affected the decision of St. Louis officials. Therefore, the increasingly conservative outlook of the federal government in the late 1960s and the early 1970s contributed to the loss of faith in, and destruction of, existing complexes like Pruitt-Igoe.⁵²

⁵² Kerner Commission, Report, 1968; Bauman, Biles, and Szylvian, From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes; Benson, The Politics of Urbanism; Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices.

CHAPTER FOUR
CIVIL DISORDER AND THE ISOLATION OF THE INNER CITY.

The isolation of the African-American underclass in the inner-city ghetto directly led to the outbreak of civil disorders, both in Pruitt-Igoe and in riots nationwide. Harsh living conditions and the residents' lack of hope for advancement combined to create a social situation conducive to civil unrest. As noted by the Kerner Commission in 1968, the obvious inequality--expressed in geographical and economic terms-- between the elites and the underclass (and white and black) was a primary cause of the urban unrest of the mid 1960s and early 1970s.⁵³

The geographical, cultural/racial, and economic isolation of the inner city intensified the already harsh living conditions of Pruitt-Igoe and the surrounding ghetto areas. In addition, St. Louis's industrial past exacerbated the division between rich and poor within the metropolitan area, as the wealthy tended to congregate in the outer, non-industrialized areas, while the poor—especially African-Americans—remained near the old industrial core. As illustrated in Fig. 17 and Fig. 18, St. Louis—like cities across the nation—was changing from a “traditional” centralized

⁵³ Kerner Commission, Report.

form (Fig. 19) to a more “postmodern” pattern of sprawl that intensified the geographic split between race and class (Fig. 20).⁵⁴

The division of America’s urban areas was not a new development after World War Two, as American cities have been divided since the rise of industry in the nineteenth century. Racial and financial divisions are common and have always existed to some extent; however, the isolation of social/cultural groups is a major feature of twentieth-century urban development. Technological developments such as the trolley in the nineteenth century and the automobile in the twentieth century made commuting from the suburbs feasible, and allowed the white middle class to move away from the old city center. This general trend also fits into postmodernism, as the splintering of community into many small, self-serving, decentralized parts is different than the traditional centralized urban form common before the development of the automobile (see Fig. 19 and Fig. 20).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The text in Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas discusses these general trends from pages 1-15, and relevant maps of St. Louis are on pages 118, 121, 125. For a good description of these general changes in urban America see David R. Goldfield and Blaine A. Brownell, Urban America: From Downtown to No Town (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979).

⁵⁵ Sam Warner, Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson, Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities, (Washington: Island Press, 2004). David R. Goldfield and Blaine A. Brownell, Urban America.

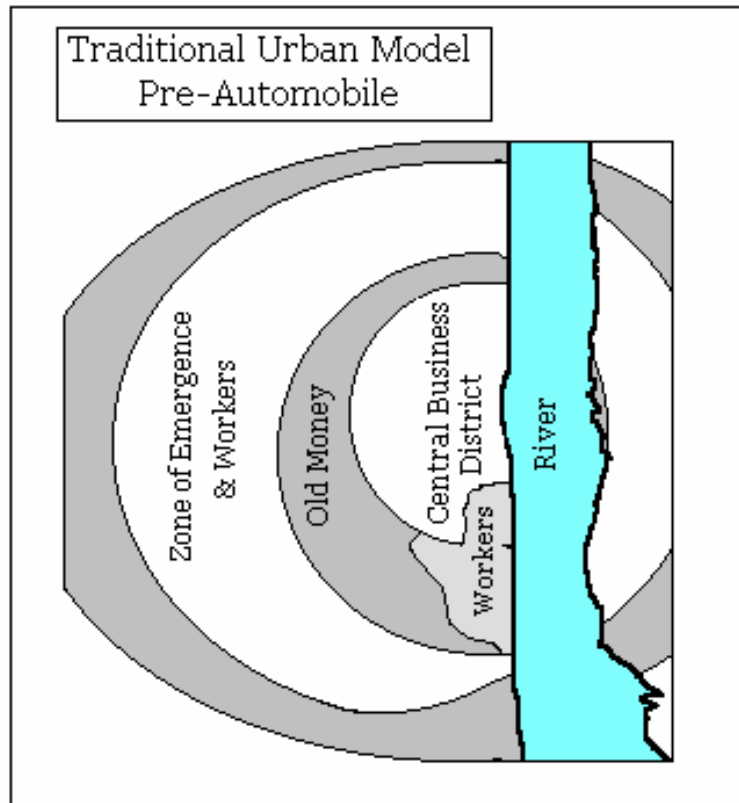


Fig. 19: A Model of Traditional Urban Form. The central business district and industry tended to cluster around the waterfront, and persons of all class backgrounds lived in relatively close proximity to each other. Note the similarities to the left side of Fig. 16 and Fig. 17, which illustrate pre-1940s development in St. Louis—both maps show the same centralized form depicted above.

The problems associated with the decline of the twentieth-century inner city were most evident in old industrial cities like St. Louis, Detroit, Camden, and Newark, though these trends were common to all cities to a certain extent. The switch from heavy industry to service industry in post-industrial urban America significantly influenced urban geography and culture. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the Rustbelt—the old industrial

cities of the Northeast and Midwest, including St. Louis--suffered the most, while the Sunbelt—the warmer, less industrialized cities of the South and West--prospered.⁵⁶

The rise of the automobile and the interstate highway system contributed to increased suburbanization after World War Two. At the same time, the decline of heavy wartime industry led to the closing of many large corporations in old northern urban industrial centers and an influx of migration toward the warmer, less industrial, cities in the Sunbelt. This migration is significant, as the decline of population and industry left the Rustbelt urban poor with fewer employment opportunities; and, as only the most destitute stayed, Rustbelt cities suffered significant financial losses as well. Thus, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, St. Louis—like other Rustbelt cities--faced the problems of declining population and resources, and the increasing poverty of the residents that stayed behind (see Fig.23 and Fig. 24).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Abbott, Carl, The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Kerner Commission, Report; Janet Rothenberg Pack, Sunbelt/Frostbelt: Public Policies and Market Forces in Metropolitan Development, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005). The general decline of St. Louis is evident in Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 116-126.

⁵⁷ Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15, 116-126; Abbott, Carl, The New Urban America; Goldfield and Brownell, Urban America.

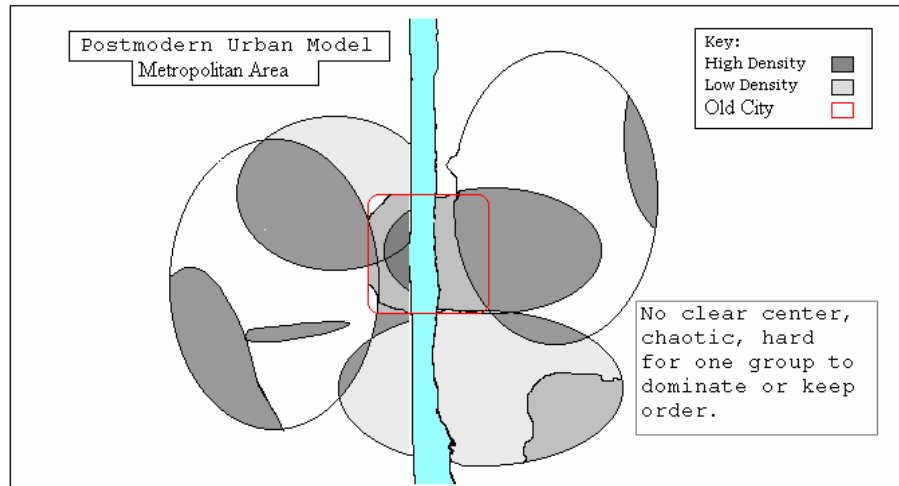


Fig. 20: A Model of Postmodern Urban Form. Due to increased use of automobiles and the decline of heavy industry that required a nearby water source, the postmodern city no longer follows a centralized pattern, but sprawls outward (unplanned) where land is cheapest; it is also more of a metropolitan area than a city. As seen in post-1960 St. Louis in Fig. 13, Fig. 19 and Fig. 22, development tends to congregate toward the outskirts--and suburbs—and there is an obvious geographic division of ethnicity and economic status.

Examination of a city's physical development gives insight into its policies and lifestyle, as residents shape communities based on their priorities. This is often a problem, both for cities like St. Louis that lose resources, and cities like Los Angeles that grow so fast that they have trouble sustaining themselves. In this scenario it is often the impoverished minorities who lose out. The affluent relocate to the suburbs, leaving city officials with fewer resources to support the inner-city poor, and thus precipitating the failure of public projects like the Pruitt-Igoe complex. This underscores the human causes of decay and urban stratification: neglect, lack of funding, and prejudice. Those groups able to flee the inner city and relocate to new jobs do, leaving behind all those who lack sufficient

means; the inner city fails to rejuvenate because the money is concentrated elsewhere.⁵⁸

Regardless of exact location—whether in the projects or in impoverished neighborhoods--poverty equals less freedom of choice, as individual autonomy is related to affluence: automobiles require an initial investment and constant maintenance; advancing job opportunities require education and skill enhancement. In declining cities like St. Louis the accoutrements of hope were not available for all citizens. For example, the residents of Pruitt-Igoe lacked the basic comforts of life that the middle class and elites take for granted, such as generally clean and safe housing. The poor often try to overcome these limitations by any means necessary; consequently, crime, and the drug trade, may be traced to their desire for money at any cost. The defacement of the interior walls and windows of Pruitt-Igoe (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 8) can also be traced to this, as vandalism and drug-trafficking were ways that frustrated youth rebelled against the conditions and their limited prospects.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Though the Kerner Commission condemned this separation as a cause of the ghetto riots, it nevertheless confirmed that the African-American ghetto was a terrible place, and thus reinforced WASP fear of the inner city; Kerner Commission, Report. Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15, 119, 123.

⁵⁹ Newman, Defensible Space; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15; Jerome Stromberg, "Private Problems in Public Housing" 1-18; Liam Kennedy, Race and Urban Space; Vergara The New American Ghetto; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-7.



Fig. 21: An abandoned warehouse by the waterfront; a remnant, not yet demolished (as of 2005), of St. Louis's industrial past. Buildings such as this demonstrate why the elites moved far away from the industrial core.



Fig. 22: Midtown Warehouse District. Even away from the waterfront, St. Louis's gritty appearance illustrates why many elites relocated to the suburbs and the outskirts of the city.

Lee Rainwater's sociological study Behind Ghetto Walls (1970) provides a useful contemporary account of the day-to-day struggles of the residents of Pruitt-Igoe. Though Rainwater focused his study on Pruitt-Igoe, he quickly discovered that the problems common there were representative of the larger problem of ghetto poverty and racial segregation, and not limited to public housing. Some of these problems were: the prevalence of divorced or single mothers; unruly youth, often involved with gangs or drugs; the lack of a stable adult male presence; and hazardous materials like broken glass that rendered gathering areas unusable, as no one would clean up the complex. Some of these problems were directly connected to Pruitt-Igoe, as the high population density exacerbated social friction there.⁶⁰

As part of his research in Pruitt-Igoe, Rainwater (and his team) conducted many surveys of the residents of the complex. Some of the responses provide insight into the particular lifestyle endured by the project's residents. When asked about the problems of the project itself, common responses were divided into two general foci: poor maintenance and social problems. In addition to the problems with the police mentioned in chapter two, residents often noted that the skip-stop elevators were confined, dangerous, and inconvenient, as they did not stop at every floor. The prevalence of broken glass and trash within the

⁶⁰ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-7; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15; Kennedy, Race and Urban Space.

complex, and the large numbers of cockroaches and mice also annoyed many residents.⁶¹

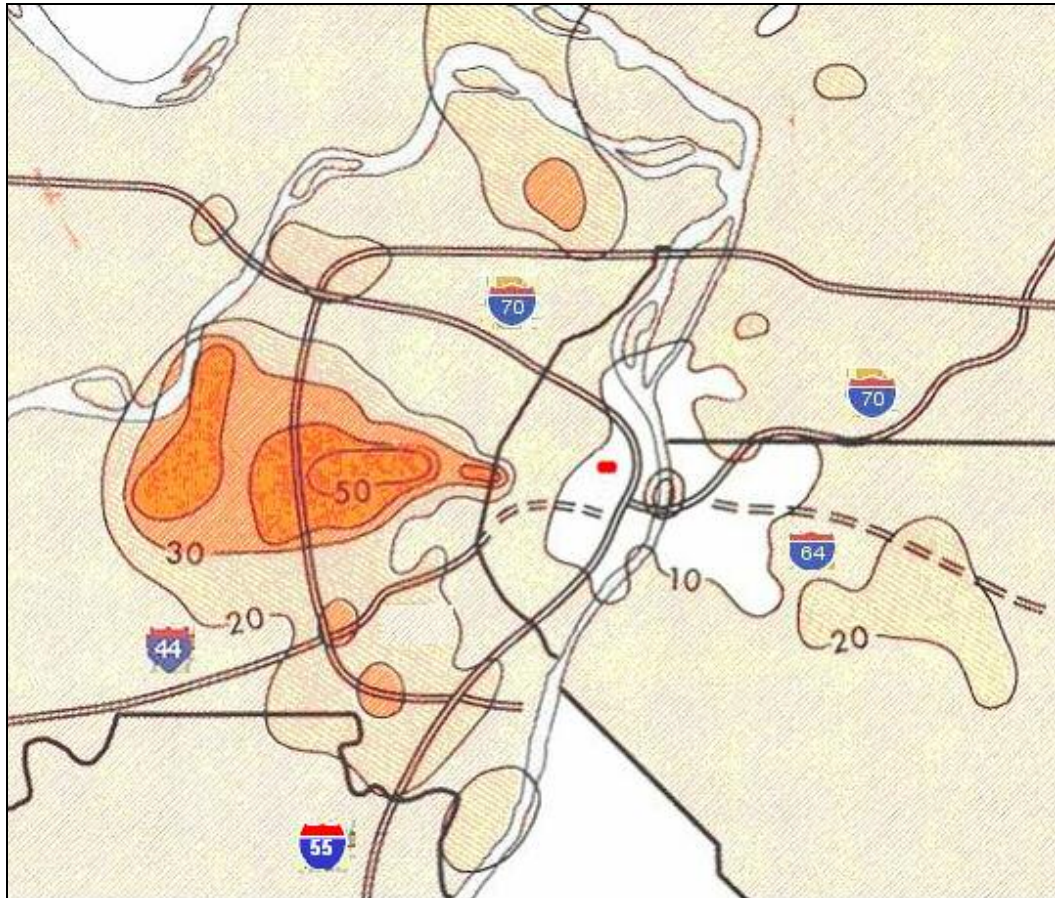


Fig. 23: Median Home Value, in Thousands. This map, from the mid-1970s, exhibits the “postmodern” format illustrated in Fig. 18. Pruitt-Igoe (marked by the red oval) is in the impoverished core, and the most expensive areas are on the periphery. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 119.

⁶¹ Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*, 8-16; As described in the survey responses reproduced in Stromberg, “Private problems in Public Housing” 1-18, the lack of an efficient police force contributed to increased unrest within Pruitt-Igoe.

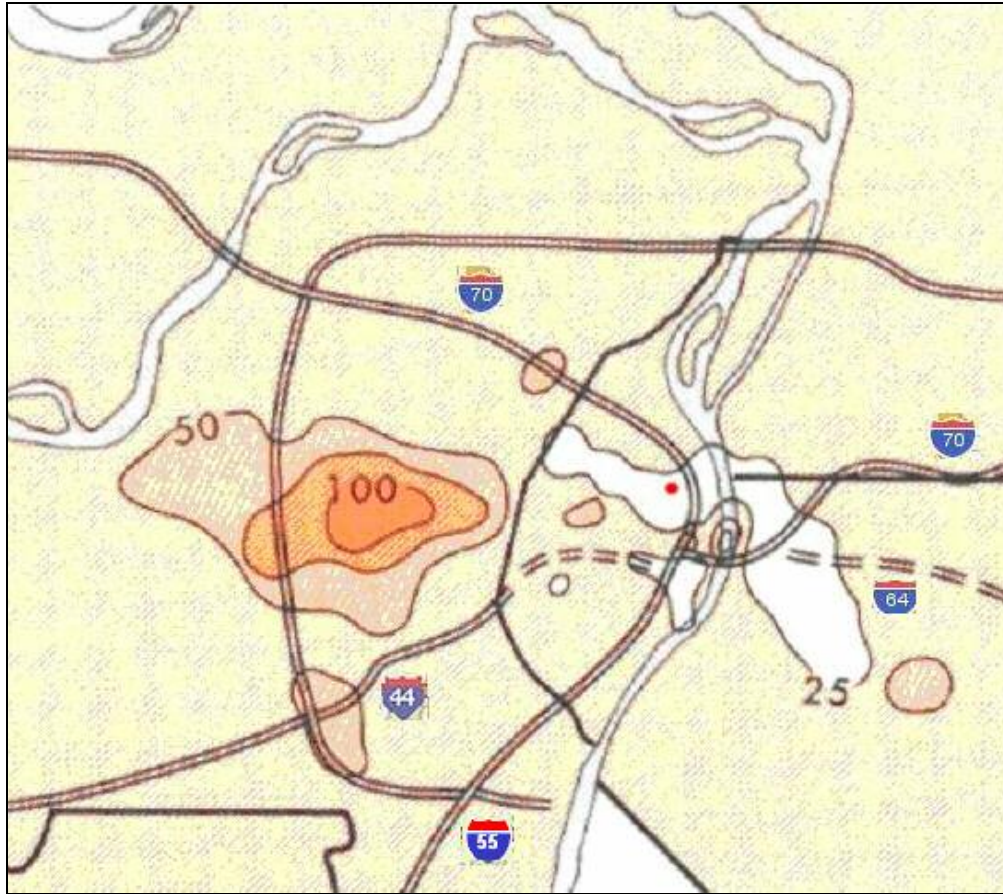


Fig. 24: Mean Personal Income, in Hundreds of Dollars. The red circle marks the location of Pruitt-Igoe. As expected, income levels are lowest in the old city center, and highest in the exclusive outlying areas. This mirrors the Housing Value map, Fig. 23. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 123.

The destructive behavior-- both criminal and negligent--of other residents was another common cause of dissatisfaction within Pruitt-Igoe. Criminal acts included: mugging and armed robbery, stealing, molesting women in elevators and hallways, breaking windows, and throwing glass bottles out of the high-rise windows. Negligent (or non-criminal) acts included: the common use of "bad language" near children, urinating in the halls and elevators, alcoholism, not cleaning up after oneself, fighting, and

“boys and girls having sexual relations with a lot of different boys and girls.” Residents also complained of nonresidents coming to the complex and starting fights and causing trouble there, a fact that underscores that Pruitt-Igoe was not separated from the ghetto, but was a highly visible aspect of St. Louis’s poverty-ridden inner city (see Fig. 26). The problems listed above were not limited to Pruitt-Igoe, but were more noticeable there due to the high population density and the complex’s tendency to attract aimless nearby ghetto residents as a place to hang out and cause trouble.⁶²

The prevalence of vacant apartments within Pruitt-Igoe also contributed to the complex’s failure. Of the 2,762 available apartments, nearly 27% were vacant in the mid 1960s; according to Rainwater, though 86 percent of the complex’s residents indicated that they would prefer to live elsewhere, 69 percent (of the total residents) had no plans to move out. Pruitt-Igoe had two types of apartments: one-bedroom and two-bedroom. In general, the smaller one-bedroom apartments were more popular, as the average vacancy rate in them ranged from 20 to 25 percent (from early 1966 to 1968), while the two-bedroom apartments had a vacancy rate of about 35 to 40 percent.⁶³

⁶² Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 8-16.; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 126

⁶³ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 8-16.

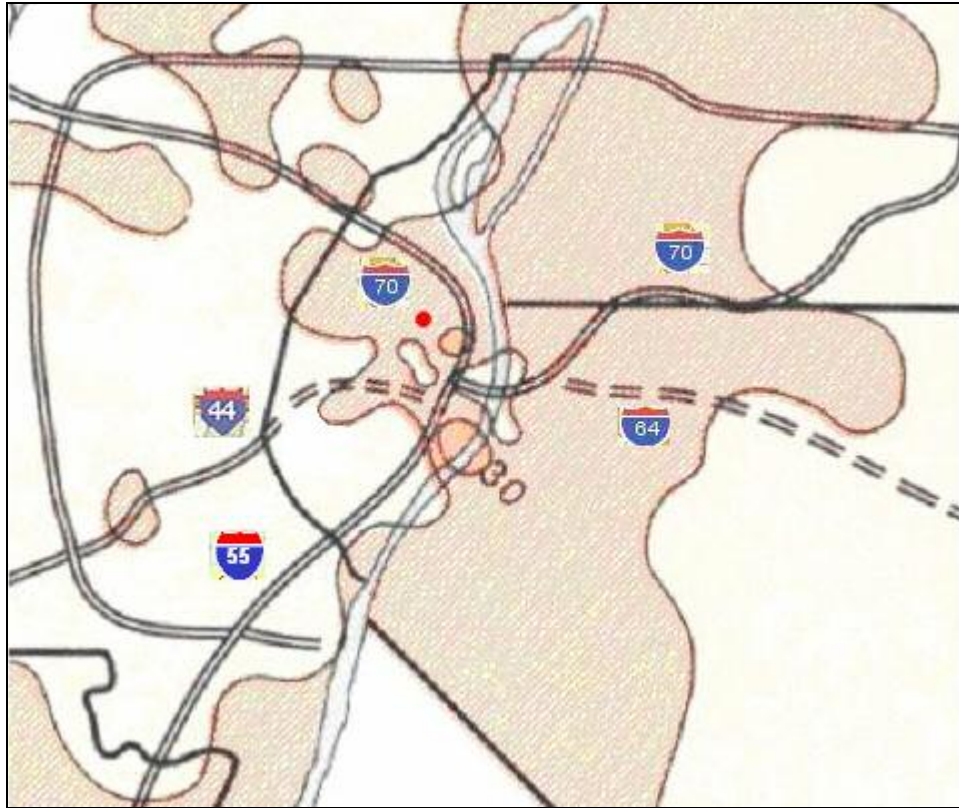


Fig. 25: Percent crowded housing in St. Louis SMSA. The red dot marks the location of the Pruitt-Igoe complex. Note that the most crowded areas are the old urban centers of St. Louis and East St. Louis, on both sides of the Mississippi River, where poverty levels were highest (about thirty percent). Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 288.

In the Pruitt-Igoe complex (and in the ghetto) the “underclass” residents no longer had much hope for advancement, materially or socially, so they expressed their discontent through destruction and civil disorder. As implied in Rainwater’s Behind Ghetto Walls and explicitly argued by Oscar Newman in Defensible Space, the overwhelming discontent of the residents, combined with the feelings of profound hopelessness about the future eventually led to the spontaneous civil

disorder of the late 1960s. This disorder directly led to the St. Louis city officials' decision to dynamite Pruitt-Igoe, as the prevalence of such disorder demonstrated that the city had lost control of the complex, and forced white elites to reassess their position.⁶⁴

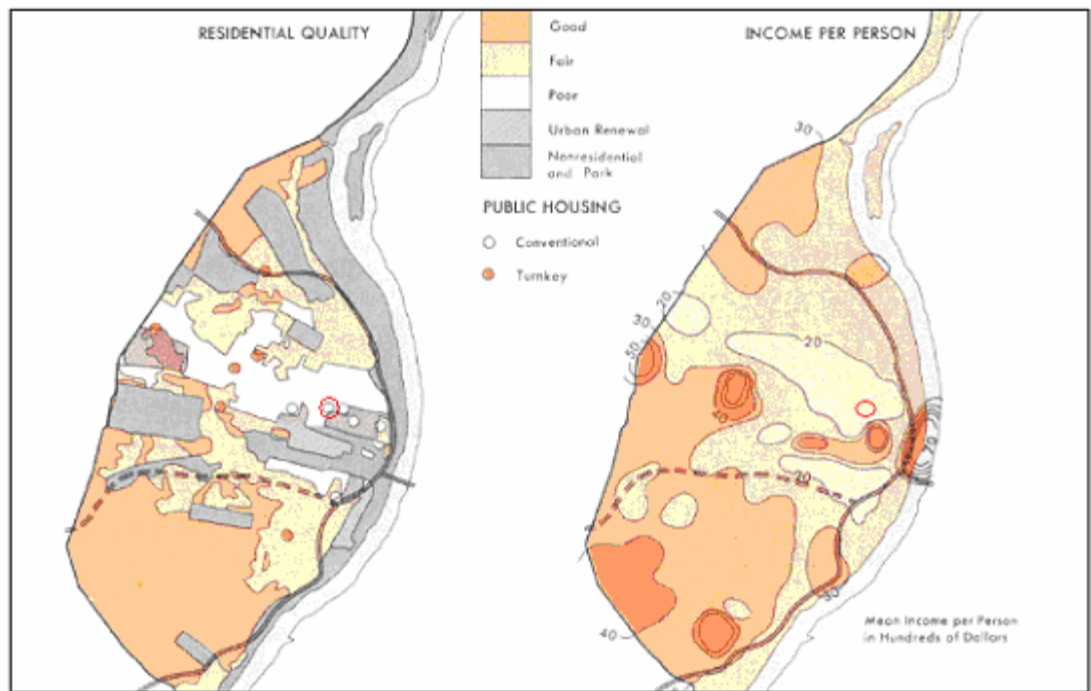


Fig. 26: Residence Quality and Personal Income. The old urban core (including Pruitt-Igoe, which is marked by the red circle) had both lower average personal income rates and a lower quality of residence—which, combined with considerations of race, emphasizes the direct relation between the inner city and a low standard of living. Source: Adapted from Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 126.

The outbreak of ghetto riots in 1965, 1966, and 1967 in cities nationwide (but not in St. Louis) forced the federal government—led by Lyndon B. Johnson—to recognize that the problems of the inner city were not local, but required a national plan of action. The federal government's

⁶⁴ Newman, *Defensible Space*; Rainwater *Behind Ghetto Walls*, 1-16, 406-409.

first official response to the race riots that racked American ghettos in the mid-1960s was the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—also known as the Kerner Commission, as Ohio governor Otto Kerner served as chair. As the Kerner Commission analyzed the ghetto unrest on the national level, many of its findings apply to Pruitt-Igoe.⁶⁵



Fig. 27: Old houses in St. Louis. These are the “alternative” to large complexes like Pruitt-Igoe. Such ghetto neighborhoods are common in St. Louis and other cities across the nation, which raises the question whether the conditions of Pruitt-Igoe were any worse.

Though the members of the Kerner Commission were white policymakers, they realized that substantial alterations to the existing structure of racial inequality and spatial division in America’s cities were necessary to quell future ghetto uprisings. The Kerner Commission

⁶⁵ The concepts I am discussing here and on the next several pages are general themes in the Kerner Commission’s Report. In general, the Report begins with an overview of the riots, next it presents data collected from surveys and the Census, and ends with an outline for improving the situation of America’s cities.

placed blame on the white-dominated social hierarchy, as well as the inner city minorities, for the ghetto riots; however, the Commission did little to dispel common perceptions that the inner city was a disorderly, dangerous place for whites (whether elite or middle class) to live.⁶⁶



Fig. 28: Evidence of St. Louis's Decay. Though these buildings may have been serviceable when built in the nineteenth century, they now serve as a symbol of St. Louis's decline, especially as many buildings similar to those illustrated above are boarded up and are fire hazards.

The Kerner Commission accepted that white-dominated society and the isolation of the minority underclass in the decaying city center was the cause of the ghetto unrest, but the Commission focused on the appalling conditions of minority life in the inner city. Therefore, it reinforced existing myths of racial inequality, and implied that the ghetto residents were incapable of helping themselves, and only the beneficence of white policymakers and taxpayers could remedy the situation. As an official federal undertaking, however, the Kerner Commission attempted to

⁶⁶ Kerner Commission, Report.

objectively analyze urban ills—and, more importantly, was willing to place blame on accepted social institutions and practices--and in that sense it was non-partisan.⁶⁷

Economic inequality, the Commission argued, was the cause of the ghetto unrest—reducing the unrest to this single, fixable cause allowed the Commission to propose a plan of action to curb future unrest. Citing high rental rates, low-paying jobs, unemployment, and racial inequality, the Commission—as a politically minded group-- emphasized the causes that policymakers could fix. Geographical division, economic inequality, and racial bias were all factors of the urban unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but the Kerner Commission's Report did not tell the whole story. The Pruitt-Igoe complex provides insight into the deeper-seated social and cultural implications that the Kerner Commission downplayed.⁶⁸

The Kerner Commission's Report was significant, however, because it marked a shift away from the pathological explanation for poverty to a functional definition: poverty is society's fault, not the fault of individual ghetto residents. Thus, society has an obligation to fix the problem of poverty, and—the Commission argued—the government has the power to do this, if it has the will. President Johnson—despite his liberal Great Society program-- refused to accept the Commission's report, however, which underscores most policymakers' reluctance to accept

⁶⁷ Kerner Commission, Report.

⁶⁸ Kerner Commission, Report; Rainwater discusses these cultural factors in Behind Ghetto Walls, 398-404.

responsibility for unpopular schemes. It was easier to ignore the unpleasant social causes and focus on quick-fix schemes like destroying “failed” complexes like Pruitt-Igoe that dramatically demonstrated that policymakers were taking action, however ineffective it proved to be.⁶⁹



Fig. 29: Tiny housing units in St. Louis, another alternative to Pruitt-Igoe. Compared to housing such as this, complexes like Pruitt-Igoe do not seem as bad.

One way to assess Pruitt-Igoe’s significance is to compare the situation there with alternative scenarios: the housing it replaced and the housing that followed. Pruitt-Igoe was never the only housing for the St. Louis underclass. Even before city officials dynamited the complex, St.

⁶⁹ Kerner Commission, Report; Lee Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16, 406-409.

Louis's poorest residents did not enjoy adequate housing. Therefore, neither the construction nor destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe complex had great impact on the overall housing trends of the St. Louis underclass. Pruitt-Igoe's significance is in what it implies about social and cultural trends--such as changing views of social control and the race-based ordering of society—of which housing policy is only one factor.⁷⁰

Despite the efforts of both the St. Louis Housing Authority (the office responsible for Pruitt-Igoe) and the federal government, inner-city housing remained a serious problem in St. Louis. As seen in Figs. 27-30, present-day St. Louis still retains many of the ghetto residences that public housing such as Pruitt-Igoe was supposed to replace. Several features are common among such housing: broken or boarded-up windows; minor fire damage, as in burnt spots on the roof or on a small area of the building; major fire damage, in which the building is nothing more than an empty shell; and small size, though more than one family may live there. An additional feature is the closeness of such residences, as there is rarely more than a few feet separating each house, and it is not uncommon for an entire row of houses to demonstrate signs of a fire that spread from one building to the next.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Kerner Commission, Report; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16, 406-409.

⁷¹ These observations are based on my own experiences visiting St. Louis; however, Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas discusses

In light of these “alternatives”—the only residences besides public housing available to the very poor—the situation in Pruitt-Igoe does not seem so bad; in fact, Pruitt-Igoe provided greater living space than did the alternative housing available in ghetto neighborhoods. Despite the many inconveniences—the most serious of which was the high incidence of crime--of life in Pruitt-Igoe, the situation there does not seem to have been much worse than anywhere else St. Louis’s underclass could have afforded. If this is the case, however, why were so many apartments within the Pruitt-Igoe complex vacant: what induced St. Louis’s underclass to reject public housing, and consequently demonstrate to city officials that the complex had failed? ⁷²

As noted in chapter one, the layout of the Pruitt-Igoe complex embodied the modernist conception of social control--which was concerned primarily with maintaining hierarchy of class and race—and that the project’s destruction symbolized the failure of that concept. The high population density, and Pruitt-Igoe’s notoriety--both its acclaim as an architectural innovation and its attraction for St. Louis’s street hoodlums—combined to give the complex a negative image, which embarrassed St. Louis city officials. More importantly, Pruitt-Igoe tended to isolate its residents within the complex, and thus reinforced the hopelessness of

these general trends. For example, in the decaying city center housing vacancy rates increase, as does overall income.

⁷² Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 8-16; Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited.”

their situation: life in the projects plainly demonstrated to the residents that they were unwanted, unneeded, and confined to the fringe of society.⁷³



Fig. 30: Boarded-up and burned-out housing in St. Louis, the problem Pruitt-Igoe was supposed to fix.

The interviews conducted by Lee Rainwater (and his team) clearly illustrated this feeling of hopelessness. Common laments included: lack of prospects for economic advancement, as most residents could not obtain jobs high-paying enough to move out of the project; lack of marital fidelity, which was often directly tied to economic hardship; and the wild lifestyle of adolescent residents, who were responsible for much of the destruction in

⁷³ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16; Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited.”

and around the complex. Many of these complaints were related to poverty, and not unique to Pruitt-Igoe.⁷⁴

One of the most revealing anecdotes Rainwater relates—culled from extensive interviews of Pruitt-Igoe residents—is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Coolidge, which demonstrates how economic deprivation led to many other problems. In brief, Mr. Coolidge had lost his job, forcing his wife to obtain employment to provide for the family. Interestingly, Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge reversed roles as a result. Mrs. Coolidge began telling her husband what to do, and flaunted her newfound power and independence, so Mr. Coolidge became desperate. Mr. Coolidge appeared to have been cynical prior to this role reversal, like many of the residents surveyed he expressed deep pessimism about both the federal government and the American way of life. He panicked afterward, as his wife now represented not only romantic or familial attachment, but had become the means of his sustenance. Mrs. Coolidge, in contrast, emphasized that she had no real commitment to her husband, and as working-class men have often done in taverns, she spent a large portion of her earnings on personal diversions.⁷⁵

Mr. Coolidge's situation provides significant insight into the way poverty negated traditional social roles in Pruitt-Igoe. Faced with the dire

⁷⁴ These interviews comprise the majority of Rainwater's Behind Ghetto Walls.

⁷⁵ For the complete story, and for many similar ones, see Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 24-28.

circumstances of the project, many residents rejected the norms of mainstream white society, and adapted as best they could. In such conditions it is not surprising that the residents of Pruitt-Igoe felt little nostalgia for their residences—and dreamed of moving out of the complex—but the real problem was the racially based concentration of poverty in the inner-city core, not the design of the complex.⁷⁶

City officials—and researchers like Lee Rainwater—viewed Pruitt-Igoe as a dead-end complex; consequently, they did little to dispel the residents' feelings of hopelessness, and thus did not solve the problem. With the underclass confined to Pruitt-Igoe, policymakers reasoned, tourists and the elites could feel safe conducting their daily business in the nicer parts of the city, unobstructed by constant reminders of society's underbelly: the African-American underclass. Most city officials saw Pruitt-Igoe as a compromise that would enable the city to present a cleaner public image, and they had little interest in maintaining the complex after conditions there devolved. This general attitude ties into the ineffective police presence within the complex: according to the survey responses of Pruitt-Igoe, the residents felt that the St. Louis police often

⁷⁶ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 24-28, 43-46; The survey responses are reproduced in Stromberg, "Private Problems in Public Housing," 11-18.

“distrusted” or “ignored” residents’ calls for help, while the project police were likewise inept and/or disrespectful.⁷⁷

With the onslaught of civil disorder and vandalism (nationwide and at Pruitt-Igoe), St. Louis city officials could no longer ignore the threat the complex posed—both as a potential site of serious rioting as in Watts, Detroit, and Newark, and as a serious impediment to the city’s public image. As mentioned previously, Rustbelt cities like St. Louis already faced serious problems competing with less-industrial Sunbelt cities, and city officials were obsessed with improving St. Louis’s image to attract conferences, corporations, and tourism. Because the policymakers’ real concern was St. Louis’s image, not the betterment of the underclass’s living conditions, they did not hesitate to destroy Pruitt-Igoe once it became a liability.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, vi-x; Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited”; Stromberg, “Private Problems in Public Housing.”

⁷⁸ Kerner Commission, Report; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 116-126.

CHAPTER FIVE
CULTURE, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE LEGACY
OF PRUITT-IGOE

The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe symbolized the breakdown of modernist social control and, in some respects, the beginning of a new era for urban America. As the problems that led to the failure of Pruitt-Igoe were widespread, and not limited to St. Louis, the destruction of the complex symbolized what was wrong with America's cities nationwide: racial division, crime, and economic inequality. After dynamiting the project, however, city officials did not have a viable alternative plan. Therefore, while the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe signified the failure of modernist public housing, it did not necessarily represent the end of urban inequality, as many of the same problems remained as before.⁷⁹

As illustrated in the geographic isolation of the African-American underclass in the urban core, the form of a city can function as a means of social control. In St. Louis, the division between the wealthy and the impoverished was so significant—the elites congregated near the outskirts and the inner-city housed the underclass--that the classes (cultures) rarely

⁷⁹ Kerner Commission, Report; Kate Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth." 163-171; Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," 26-31.

mixed. Moreover, the run-down inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, and especially modernist public housing projects like Pruitt-Igoe, served as physical barriers to ensure that diverse social and cultural groups did not intermix.⁸⁰



Fig. 31. The Interior of a Building during the Destruction of Pruitt-Igoe. Source: <http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>.

The stark geometric layout of Pruitt-Igoe emphasized the underclass residents' isolation from the rest of the city, as the complex functioned as a city-within-a-city for the very poor—those who had nowhere else to go. Pruitt-Igoe had its own infrastructure to increase its separateness from the rest of St. Louis; for example, the complex had its own police force. This illustrates Pruitt-Igoe's quasi-utopian beginnings: like the utopian communes championed by nineteenth-century social reformers, Pruitt-Igoe was a self-supporting complex separated (in theory)

⁸⁰ Abler and Adams, *A Comparative Atlas*, 116-126; Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe," *From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes*.

from the surrounding city. Nevertheless, Pruitt-Igoe remained closely connected to the surrounding ghetto areas of St. Louis, and the isolated set-up only served to increase the residents' frustration, as they had twice the police (the St. Louis police also patrolled the complex) but few of the benefits that the city's wealthier residents enjoyed. Consequently, the design of Pruitt-Igoe was similar to utopian ideals, but the reality was nearly the opposite.⁸¹

Part of the problem with Pruitt-Igoe was the project's dehumanizing layout: the complex's stark geometry contributed to a machine-like atmosphere (similar to Le Corbusier's ideal) that allowed the project to house many residents in a small surface area, but did not take into account the comfort of the residents. This design feature paralleled city officials' plan for Pruitt-Igoe as a functional complex necessary to house St. Louis's underclass: the cost of building, not the comfort of the residents, was the top priority. Therefore, as noted in chapter two, Minoru Yamasaki made many concessions to cut cost, such as installing skip-stop elevators, but made few concessions to increase the livability of the project.⁸²

⁸¹ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16; Newman, Defensible Space; Bacon, "Pruitt-Igoe Revisited."; Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" 163-171; Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," Journal of Architectural Education, 26-31.

⁸² Newman, Defensible Space; Von Hoffman "Why they Built Pruitt-Igoe" From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes.



Fig. 32. The Evacuated Pruitt-Igoe Complex from the Air prior to Destruction. This photograph captures the city-within-a-city character of the complex, which due to its large size and maze-like form served to isolate the residents from the rest of St. Louis. Source: <http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>.

Due to policymakers' emphasis on cost-cutting and not quality of life, the residents of Pruitt-Igoe felt little attachment to the complex—it felt more like a prison than a home. If the residents had felt more comfortable in Pruitt-Igoe, perhaps they would have taken better care of the complex, and not allowed it to fall into such a state of disrepair and disorder. Similarly, the police (both the project police and the St. Louis police) would probably have acted with more respect toward the project and the people that lived there if the residents of Pruitt-Igoe had felt more comfortable there, and had not trashed the complex through vandalism and general dirtiness. Many of the project's shortcomings, such as broken glass and

vandalism, were due to the residents' discontent, and not the complex's geometric design.⁸³



Fig. 33. Pruitt-Igoe prior to Destruction. The vandalism is very noticeable in this empty building, slated for destruction. Source: <http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>.

However, it is an oversimplification to state that additional comforts of life would have saved Pruitt-Igoe from destruction. While the no-frills design increased residents' dissatisfaction, it was not the only source. As noted in chapter four, the general isolation of the underclass in the old urban core led to the overall impoverishment of the inner city. Regardless of the project's design, the decline of the surrounding areas, and the growing racial frustration expressed in the ghetto riots of the mid 1960s, would probably have been enough to force Pruitt-Igoe's destruction. The

⁸³ Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16, 414-415; Newman, Defensible Space.

failure of Pruitt-Igoe had many causes, each of which contributed in some way, but most—like the example of Pruitt-Igoe’s no-frills design—were not significant enough to precipitate the destruction of the complex alone.⁸⁴

The only cause that was absolutely essential—without which Pruitt-Igoe would have lasted much longer—was the racial division of America’s cities, with the predominately African-American underclass isolated in the decaying inner city areas. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Pruitt-Igoe was a compromise intended to house society’s most destitute residents (the underclass) in the manner most beneficial to the elites. City officials commissioned Pruitt-Igoe to ensure that impoverished African Americans would not impose upon the public space of the central business district, so St. Louis could present a better public image. The project was built to serve the needs of the elites, not the residents. Therefore, Pruitt-Igoe embodied the explicit top-down policy of modernist social control: the complex ensured there was a clear division between “high” (policymakers) and “low” (the residents).⁸⁵

In this sense, Jencks was correct in his assessment that Pruitt-Igoe signified the end of modernism: the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe symbolized the failure of the top-down conception of social control. The problem with

⁸⁴ Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 116-126; Kerner Commission, Report.

⁸⁵ Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 116-126; Newman, Defensible Space; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 362-373; Bacon, “Pruitt-Igoe Revisited”; Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe,” From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes.

Jencks's assessment was that he presented the social failure of Pruitt-Igoe as a failure of design. While the design of Pruitt-Igoe did not foster a sense of belonging of community in the residents, the design was not the most significant reason for the project's demise.⁸⁶

The destruction of Pruitt-Igoe marked the end of modernist public housing as a viable solution to urban ills. The destruction of Pruitt-Igoe did not mean that policymakers had given up their policy of aloofness, as similar social divisions still remained. From the officials' viewpoint, the problem was how to preserve St. Louis's existing economic base after the failure of Pruitt-Igoe, as St. Louis, like other Rustbelt cities, continued to dwindle in size and resources. Thus, policymakers lost interest in large-scale public projects like Pruitt-Igoe and turned to "mixed income" developments and townhouses, which served residents with more money than the former residents of Pruitt-Igoe.⁸⁷

Dynamiting Pruitt-Igoe allowed city officials to reestablish their position of control. Destroying the symbol of their failed policies—Pruitt-Igoe—policymakers took action to ensure that the chaos symbolized by the unruliness of the underclass did not expand. Pruitt-Igoe was not the real problem, but from the officials' viewpoint, it was easier to target the

⁸⁶ Charles Jencks, The Language of Post-Modern Architecture.

⁸⁷ This is the general theme of the essays in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes. For additional information on recent urban planning trends see The Charter of the New Urbanism edited by Michael Leccese and Kathleen McCormick.

symptom (modernist public housing) than challenge ingrained social inequality and reevaluate government policy and society from the bottom-up, as the Kerner Commission suggested. Destroying Pruitt-Igoe did not solve St. Louis's problems, but it helped to disguise them.⁸⁸

This raises the question whether Pruitt-Igoe was as bad as policymakers thought: was life in the complex as bad as the images just prior to its destruction suggest? The images of Pruitt-Igoe after it was evacuated present the complex in an overly negative fashion. Granted, Lee Rainwater presented a negative view of life in the complex, but many of the complaints were surface-oriented, and not indicative of serious structural problems. Crime, broken glass, police intolerance, and young residents' moral laxity were not unique to public housing. Rather, these problems were effects of underclass isolation and lack of hope for advancement, and not the fault of the Pruitt-Igoe but poverty in general. Pruitt-Igoe was not luxurious, but the images of it just prior to destruction are too stark.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Kerner Commission, Report; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls; Von Hoffman, "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe," From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes.

⁸⁹ Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 116-126; Kerner Commission, Report; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16.



Fig. 34. Dynamite Explodes a Building in Pruitt-Igoe. Source: <http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>

In contrast, the images of Pruitt-Igoe's destruction give it an air of dignity—as it dramatically pummeled toward the earth the project regained an ironic sense of splendor. As the dynamite exploded—captured in these photographs—nostalgia for what might have been took precedence over the bad memories of crime and vandalism. Though it is common to see references to Pruitt-Igoe as the best example of the horrors of high modernist architecture, and its inhuman—almost machine-like—character, the images of its destruction carry a sense of loss.⁹⁰

Perhaps this is why websites—which reflect the popular myths about the complex—compare it within the context of both disasters like

⁹⁰ Charles Jencks, The Language of Post-Modern Architecture; Ward, Postmodernism, 17-26; Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, 114-118.

Chernobyl and modernist utopian dreams. This is the Pruitt-Igoe myth, but the reality is no less fascinating, if more complex. As noted in the earlier chapters, many aspects—social, cultural, political, architectural--combined to doom the Pruitt-Igoe complex; however, no one was dominant to the extent that it alone can explain why the complex failed. At least the myths present the fiasco in an accessible, if misleading, format.⁹¹



Fig. 35. The Dramatic Destruction of a Building in Pruitt-Igoe. Source: <http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>

⁹¹There is a large assortment online material about Pruitt-Igoe. Though the presentation is often simplistic and repetitive, online sources illustrate the quasi-mythic significance of Pruitt-Igoe. Pruitt-Igoe draws worldwide interest—which is not surprising, as modernism was an international movement, and the “International Style” consciously sought to erase nationalist stylistic character. For example, there are web sites discussing Pruitt-Igoe in Spanish, Russian, German, Japanese, and English—the story of Pruitt-Igoe has eclipsed St. Louis and even America in its interest. See the bibliography for a listing of some of these web sites.

More than thirty years later, the former site of the Pruitt-Igoe complex remains vacant, of no use to anyone (Fig. 36). Did the complex's destruction help or hurt the city? A rhetorical question, this does provide some insight into the complex's destruction, as it underscores St. Louis city officials' haste to tear down the project despite St. Louis's housing shortage (due largely to urban renewal) and without an alternative plan. Focused on their own concerns, and not the housing needs of the underclass, St. Louis elites determined to dynamite Pruitt-Igoe: not because they had a better plan, but due to anxiety after the rise of civil disorder—both within the complex and in ghetto riots nationwide--that signified the breakdown of modernist social control, and thus the failure of modernist public housing.⁹²

In conclusion, the failure of Pruitt-Igoe—and modernist public housing in general— illustrated the complexity of poverty, especially in older urbanized areas. In the 1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson optimistically declared that America—the wealthiest nation in the world--could defeat poverty; thus he laid out plans for a “Great Society,” in which all Americans would enjoy the lifestyle of the middle class. As the racial, economic, and geographic division of America's urban areas shows, the causes of poverty were too complex for government policies like Johnson's Great Society to rectify. The failure of Pruitt-Igoe, together with

⁹² Kerner Commission, Report; Rainwater, Behind Ghetto Walls, 1-16; Alexander Von Hoffman, “Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe”, in From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes, 180-205.

the ghetto riots of the mid-1960s demonstrated that in order to eradicate the problems of poverty, a complete overhaul of cultural assumptions-- such as class and racial divisions—would be necessary in addition to changes in official policy.⁹³



Fig. 36. The Former Site of the Pruitt-Igoe Complex. Still unused after thirty years, St. Louis officials have considered additional plans for the site but to date nothing has occurred. This illustrates city officials' haste to destroy the complex despite the lack of an alternative housing plan. Source: <http://ocw.mit.edu/>.

⁹³ Kerner Commission, Report; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15, 116-126; Newman, Defensible Space; Bremner, Reichard, and Hopkins, American Choices.

The best interpretation of the failure of Pruitt-Igoe is that the complex's destruction symbolized the failure of the modernist conception of social control due to the increased discontent of the African-American underclass in urban areas nationwide. In the wake of the ghetto riots of the mid 1960s, elites reevaluated their policies and focused on quick-fix solutions like destroying the symptoms of unrest—dynamiting modernist public housing and slating ghetto neighborhoods for “urban renewal”—but did little to address the real problem: the geographic, economic, and racial isolation of the underclass in the decaying urban core. As a result, in “postmodern” urban America the elites congregate toward the outskirts (the suburbs), while the situation in the inner city continues to worsen.⁹⁴

Pruitt-Igoe's real significance was its relation to the Vietnam-era urban malaise and the failure of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. The destruction of Pruitt-Igoe conclusively demonstrated that the problem of the urban poor was too large for policymakers to address through official means. The circumstances of Pruitt-Igoe's failure demonstrated that a real “war” on poverty would require a much more significant overhaul of existing social and cultural norms than policymakers were willing to consider. Interpreted thus, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe was St.

⁹⁴ Kerner Commission, Report; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15, 116-126; Newman, Defensible Space; Abbott, The New Urban America; Goldfield and Brownell, Urban America.

Louis elites' last-ditch effort to preserve what status they had left, before the situation in the inner city spiraled out of their control for good.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Kerner Commission, Report; Abler and Adams, A Comparative Atlas, 1-15, 116-126; Newman, Defensible Space.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Government Documents

Farmer, David J. Civil Disorder Control. Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1968.

Forstall, Richard L. "Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790– 1990." U.S. Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996. Available on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

Gibson, Campbell. "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990." U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Working Paper No. 27, 1998. Available on the Census Bureau's Internet site at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html>

Gibson, Campbell and Kay Jung. Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Working Paper No. 76, February 2005.

Gibson, Campbell and Emily Lennon "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990." U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Working Paper No. 29, 1999. Available on the Census Bureau's Internet site at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html>

Gibson, Campbell and Kay Jung. "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1790 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States." U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Working Paper

No. 56, 2002. Available on the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html.

Hobbs, Frank and Nicole Stoops. "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century." U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, CENSR-4, 2002. Available on the Census Bureau's Internet site at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html>

Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968.

Newman, Oscar. "Creating Defensible Space." Institute for Community Design Analysis, Rutgers University, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996.

Other Published Materials

Abler, Ronald and John S. Adams. A Comparative Atlas of America's Great Cities: Twenty Metropolitan Regions. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Riis, Jacob. How the Other Half Lives, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), available online at <http://www.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/about.html>.

Secondary Sources:

Books

Abbott, Carl. The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981.

Akers, Ronald L. and Richard Hawkins. Law and Control in Society. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Appignanesi, Richard and Chris Garratt. Introducing Postmodernism.

- Thriplow, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2005.
- Arac, Jonathan, editor. After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Atkins, Jacqueline M., Executive Editor. Encyclopedia of Social Work. Eighteenth Edition, 2 vols. Silver Spring, MD: The National Association of Social Workers, 1987.
- Barnett, Jonathan. The Fractured Metropolis, New York: HarpersCollins Books, 1995.
- Bauman, John F., Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian, editors. From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Benson, George C.S. The Politics of Urbanism: The New Federalism. Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1972.
- Bremner, Robert H., Gary W. Reichard, and Richard Hopkins, ed. American Choices: Social Dilemma and Public Policy since 1960. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986.
- Callinicos, Alex. Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Callow, Alexander B. Jr., editor, American Urban History: An Interpretive Reader with Commentaries (3rd ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Chávez, Ernesto. "¡Mi Raza Primero!": Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.
- Checkoway, Barry and Carl V. Patton. The Metropolitan Midwest, Policy Problems and Prospects for Change. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Cole, G. D. H. Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850. London: MacMillan & Co., 1955.
- Davis, Mike. Dead Cities. New York: The New Press, 2002.
- _____. City of Quartz. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

- Docherty, Thomas, editor. Postmodernism: A Reader. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Falzon, Christopher. Foucault and Social Dialogue, New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Fleming, John, Hugh Honour, and Nikolaus Pevsner. The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, fourth edition. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Fornas, Johan. Cultural Theory & Late Modernity. London: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Frumkin, Howard, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson. Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities. Washington: Island Press, 2004.
- Gablik, Suzi. Has Modernism Failed? Revised Edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Goldfield, David R. and Blaine A. Brownell. Urban America: From Downtown to No Town. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979.
- Barbara Goodwin. Social Science and Utopia : Nineteenth-Century Models of Social Harmony. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978).
- Hannigan, John. Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis, New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Hays, R. Allen. The Federal Government and Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.
- Hodson, John D. The Ethics of Legal Coercion. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983.
- Horne, Gerald. Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995.
- Howard, Charles G. Law its Nature, Functions, and Limits. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. Harlem Renaissance. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

- Jencks, Charles The Language of Post-Modern Architecture. London: Academy Editions, 1978.
- Kennedy, Liam. Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2000.
- King, James E. The Impact of Federal Housing Policy on Urban African-American Families. San Fransisco: Austin & Winfield, 1996.
- Leccese, Michael and Kathleen McCormick, editors. Charter of the New Urbanism. New York: McGraw Hill, 2000.
- Mason, Joseph B. History of Housing in the U.S., 1930-1980. Houston: Gulf Coast Publishing Co., 1982.
- Meehan, Eugene J. Public Housing Policy—Convention Versus Reality. New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1975.
- McNulty, Elizabeth, St. Louis: Then and Now. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2000.
- Miles, Malcolm and Tim Hall, editors. Urban Futures: Critical Commentaries on Shaping the City. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Montgomery, Roger and Kate Bristol, Pruitt-Igoe: An Annotated Bibliography. Chicago: Council of Planning Librarians, 1987.
- Moynihan, Daniel P., editor. Toward a National Urban Policy. New York: Basic Books, 1970.
- Newman, Oscar. Defensible Space, MacMillan, 1972.
- Pack, Janet Rothenberg, editor. Sunbelt/Frostbelt: Public Policies and Market Forces in Metropolitan Development. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.
- Rainwater, Lee. Behind Ghetto Walls: Black Families in a Federal Slum. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970.
- Readings, Bill. Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Sarat, Austin, editor. The Blackwell Companion to Law and Society. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

- Schaller, Michael and George Rising. The Republican Ascendancy American Politics, 1968-2001, The American History Series. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2002.
- Soja, Edward W. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.
- Stephens, Chris and Katherine Stout, editors. Art & the 1960s: This was Tomorrow. London: Tate, 2004.
- Vergara, Camillo. The New American Ghetto. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- Ward, Glenn. Postmodernism. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2003.
- Warner (Jr.), Sam Bass. Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Yochelson, Bonnie. Bernice Abbot's Changing New York. New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1997.

Articles

- Bailey, James. "History of a Failure" Architectural Forum, (December 1965); 22-25.
- Brinkley, Alan. "The Problem of American Conservatism." The American Historical Review. 99 (April 1994), 409-429.
- Bristol, Kate. "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth." Journal of Architectural Education, 44 (May 1991); 163-171.
- Comerio, Mary C. "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories." Journal of Architectural Education, 34 (Summer 1981); 26-31.
- Crouch, Dora P., Charles Jencks, Michael McMordie, William H. Jordy. "Letters," The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 39 (October 1980); 255-256.
- Gleye, Paul. "Letters," Journal of Architectural Education, 45 (July 1992); 251-252.
- Harvey, David. "Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization Reflections on "Post-Modernism" in the American City." Perspecta, 26 (1990);251-272.

Mayo, James M. "Political Avoidance in Architecture," Journal of Architectural Education, 38 (Winter 1985); 18-25.

McCue, George. "\$57,000,000 Later." Architectural Forum, (May 1973); 42-45.

Schumacher, Thomas L. "Letters," Journal of Architectural Education, 45 (July 1992); 191-192.

Wilson, Colin St. John Wilson. "Two Letters on the State of Architecture: 1964 and 1981." Journal of Architectural Education, 35 (Autumn 1981); 9-12.

Unpublished Materials

Allen, Missy L. "Maximum Feasible Participation: the War on Poverty in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1965-1970," MA Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2004.

Chris Bacon, "Pruitt-Igoe Revisited." (Unpublished Manuscript, University of Sheffield, 1985)

Stromberg, Jerome S. "Private Problems in Public Housing: A Further Report on the Pruitt-Igoe Project." Occasional Paper #39, February 1968.

Web sites

<http://www.jahsonic.com/ModernistArchitecture.html>

<http://www.laputan.org/>

<http://library.wustl.edu/units/westcampus/govdocs/onlinedisplay/>

<http://ocw.mit.edu/>

<http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/>

http://www-1.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/wolke/deu/Themen/971/Schlueter/schlueter_t.html

www.architecture.ca/planningarchitecture/document/document_images/PruittIgoe.JPG.

VITA

Benjamin Alexander Lawson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: THE PRUITT-IGOE PROJECTS: MODERNISM,
SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE FAILURE OF
PUBLIC HOUSING, 1954-1976.

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Stillwater, Oklahoma on April 21, 1981, the son of Russell and Linda Lawson.

Education: Graduated from Stillwater High School in Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 1999; received a Bachelor of Arts in Art History (Honors College Degree) in May 2003 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art in 2004 from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree with a major in History in May 2007.

Honors: Member of Phi Alpha Theta (History Honor Society) and Phi Kappa Phi. Recipient of a Wentz Project (2002-2003), Honors College/Departmental Award (2003), General Honors Award (2002), and a 4-year Wentz Humanities Scholarship (1999-2003).

Name: Benjamin Alexander Lawson

Date of Degree: May, 2007

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: THE PRUITT-IGOE PROJECTS: MODERNISM,
SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE FAILURE OF
PUBLIC HOUSING, 1954-1976.

Pages in Study: 92

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: History

Completed in 1955 in St. Louis, Missouri, the massive Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex included thirty-three buildings of eleven stories each. However, the complex quickly devolved to the point that city officials chose to dynamite it from 1972 to 1976 because they deemed the complex to be uninhabitable. Primary causes of Pruitt-Igoe's destruction were the ghetto unrest of the mid 1960s and the geographical, racial, and economic division of St. Louis.

The destruction of Pruitt-Igoe symbolized the failure of the modernist conception of social control and clearly demonstrated that poverty was too complex for policymakers to address through official means. Regardless of the specific factors of the complex's demise, the fate of the Pruitt-Igoe is not just the story of failed architecture or the failure of urban renewal in one city, but provides insight into the larger context of urban America and the crisis situation of the late Vietnam-War era.

Advisor's Approval: Michael F. Logan