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U.S. Public-Housing Transformations and the Housing Publics Lost in Transition

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For several decades now an era of dismantling traditional, place-based public housing developments has emerged. Our essay draws upon sociological and geographical thought to argue for a more critical understanding of this process which welcomed in the expansion of government policies to build public–private mixed-income housing developments as a way to improve the lives of impoverished public housing households. Yet, only a modest portion of the original residents forced to relocate have actually benefited from these redevelopments. We document how public housing in the United States has always been approached by the State and private market interests with apprehension. The primary purpose is to provide a diagnostic perspective focusing on the promise of mixed-income policies to provide its stated opportunities and what got lost in transition. Urban scholars have critiqued the transformation of public housing developments as being constitutive of neoliberal urbanism and the privatization of the commons. However, equally important is a broader understanding of how the neoliberal project has been underwritten by mainstream social norms and assumptions about poverty and income mix, as well as the edict that the private market could adequately "fix" the social problems associated with traditional public housing.

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Legislated by the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 (Pub L. 89–117, 79 451), HUD oversees federal funding for housing programs such as public housing. Its current mission statement echoes the 1949 Act:[1] "to create strong and sustainable, inclusive communities, and quality affordable housing for all" (HUD, 2015: 1). Yet actual access to affordable housing paints a much more doubtful picture.

Capps (2015) reported findings from an Urban Institute study about the growing housing affordability gap for extremely low-income renters in the private, unsubsidized[2] rental market (Leopold et al. 2015). Since 2000, the number of households with incomes at 30 percent or less of an area's median income has increased, whereas the number of

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housing units affordable at these income levels has decreased by 25 percent. One in four low-income renter households pay 70 percent or more of their monthly income toward rent, leaving little disposable income (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University 2016). This deficit often forces such households into deplorable private-market housing where landlords eke every cent of profit by overcharging while undermaintaining their buildings (Desmond 2016). Desmond's new book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* evokes Riis's (1890) work about the abysmal tenement conditions on New York City's Lower East Side.

The most iconic program HUD oversees originated when Congress passed the Housing Act of 1937 establishing a national public housing program governed at federal, state, and local levels. The origins, history, and current state of the program has a broad literature, reporting factors that affected its rise and fall, as well as empirical studies which drew on variants of social ecological theories to suggest that public-housing environments link to resident outcomes. For example, Progressives in the 1930s argued that replacing "slums"[3] with government-sponsored public-housing developments would guide people to become good citizens, and during the 1980s, the environmental determinism of "neighborhood effects" studies in sociology supported HUD initiatives to demolish traditional public housing and rebuild mixed-income developments in its place.

This relationship between the state and the academy has been truncated as alternative perspectives offered by urban scholars critical of such initiatives have been largely dismissed or marginalized in policy circles. This paper provides an analysis of the emergence and current trajectory of the U.S. public-housing program, empirically and theoretically, to elucidate factors lost in transition through policy enactments, as well as highlighting underlying conceptualizations that push such programs forward.

The fractured nexus between the state and the academy has yielded a pervasive neoliberal discourse that assumes, polemically, that the only way to address concentrated poverty in traditional public housing is to destroy it and reinvent it as new mixed-income redevelopments. However, not all public-housing residents forced to relocate have benefited. Common thinking about remedies focused on public–private interventions is deeply embedded in assumptions about the private housing market. In other words, the only way to fix traditional public housing's perceived failures has been to "re"-partner with private interests.

PUBLIC HOUSING'S EMERGENCE, DESERTION, AND TRANSFORMATION

Proposals to provide government-sponsored housing affordable for low-income households—particularly in cities—date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Fraser et al. 2012). The Great Depression hastened the creation of traditional public housing. New Deal Legislation created the Public Works Administration (WPA) in 1933, which subsequently constructed 21,000 public-housing units in 21 cities (Aiken and Alford 1970). The Housing Act of 1937 established local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) to construct, manage, and operate public housing for low- and moderate-income households with limited housing options. The Act officially established public housing that targeted inner-city slum dwellers (von Hoffman 2000). One criterion was that for every public-housing unit built, one slum unit would be demolished.

The Act emerged from the Great Depression as a compromise between the real estate industry and Progressives who advocated for better housing conditions for the inner-city poor. Prior to the 1937 Act, a coalition of reformers made the case that the private-housing market was incapable of supplying housing for those in poverty, and that life in the slums had ruinous effects on families (McDonald 2011). The WPA developed a campaign to highlight deplorable social conditions in the slums, grounded in environmental determinism. The campaign pointed to the dire conditions of the slum as creating a morally bankrupt citizenry (Hutchison and Haynes 2012; Katz 1993).

Many scholars have argued that the 1937 Housing Act was as much about job creation and bolstering the real estate industry as providing affordable and quality housing for slum dwellers (Gotham 2002). The National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) actively campaigned against public housing, favoring a market-based solution. NAREB garnered the necessary financial and political tools to forward slum clearance, largely through "eminent domain."[4] While slums continued to be cleared, construction of public housing stalled, with much of the building beginning after World War II (Argersinger 2010). By 1948 a modest 168,000 public housing had been built (Shill 1990).

The Housing Act of 1949 authorized building more public housing to revive the stalled program (Goetz 2003), but implementing the three Titles of the Act in tandem had contradictory effects (Oakley and Burchfield 2009). While the Federal Housing Administration's expanded mortgage-insurance program under Title I fueled flight to the suburbs, yielding rapid suburbanization and further divestment in the urban core (Fraser et al. 2012), discriminatory lending practices meant Black and other minority inner-city households could not purchase a suburban home (Massey and Denton 1993). Urban renewal efforts led to razing entire neighborhoods, displacing minority families and shrinking the supply of affordable housing (Teaford 2000). Government expenditures to tear down slums, replacing them with parking lots and commercial developments, far exceeded those allocated to build new public housing.

Interestingly, by the 1930s and 1940s the term "ghetto" had entered the American lexicon in describing such neighborhoods in a more nuanced way than the term "slum." Drake and Cayton codified the American version of the term in their 1945 book. As Duneier (2016) states: "Drake and Cayton used the ghetto idea to (1) highlight the difference between black neighborhoods and other neighborhoods; (2) ascribe ghetto conditions to a vicious cycle of outside repression and inside decay; and (3) argue that the separate institutions brought about by the ghetto were inherently inferior to the those outside while still serving as a source of pride and a rounded life" (p. 66). Yet, this more refined conceptualization with its emphasis on both outside forces and inside agency did little to change the mainstream public discourse on "slum" clearance.

To make matters worse, discriminatory siting practices led to concentrated development of public housing on land cleared through urban-renewal efforts, often just a few blocks from where displaced families originally lived (Bickford and Massey 1991). This led to the hyper-segregation of inner-city poor Black households (Massey and Denton 1993). In the 1960s, these "public housing" neighborhoods became "federal slums" (Rainwater 1970). Hirsch called this process in Chicago the emergence of the "second ghetto," where eight Blacks resided in the same area for every ***one*** who lived in the vicinity during the 1920s (Hirsch 1983: 253). The concentration of urban poverty and the placement of public housing were considered interdependent (Massey and Kanaiaupuni 1993). Siting was implicitly discriminatory and a form of spatial containment of

poor Black households. The political decisions that created hyper-segregation back then continue to haunt the racial equity spatial context today (Sharkey 2013). By 1972, when the number of public housing units was nearing the numbers promised under the 1949 Housing Act, it was already well documented that most were concentrated in very poor Black neighborhoods (Oakley et al. 2013).

Government divestment continued, accompanied by the outmigration of manufacturing industries, yielding high unemployment in and around public housing. Despite ongoing debates, high levels of neighborhood poverty aligned with lower educational attainment, increased crime, a disproportionately high share of single female-headed households, and social isolation (Jargowsky 1997; Strait 2006; Wilson 1987). Public housing was dealt a major blow by the Housing Acts of the 1950s and early 1960s, with several rounds of federal funding cuts to PHAs (Parson 2005). Hunt (2009) argues that by the mid-1960s public housing had "spiraled downward into insufferable warehouses for the poor" (p. 212). During this period, the forcible removal of more moderate-income families from public-housing developments through the implementation of required "rent caps" created a budget shortfall whereby rents collected by housing agencies fell well below the amounts needed for capital improvements. Although the Housing Act of 1968 reaffirmed the goals of the 1949 Act and provided additional funding, it was short lived and did little to remedy the increasingly unmaintained existing public-housing stock (Orlebeke 2000).

Likewise, as early as the mid-20th century, even initial proponents of public housing questioned the program. Bauer (1957) stated, "Even among public housing's most tireless defenders, many would welcome a fresh start if they did not fear that in the process any program at all might get lost" (p. 140). Had public housing gained the support of the general public and public leaders, private sector opposition would not have taken a stronghold and affected the program in such deleterious ways (Bauer 1957).

To complicate the situation, in many cities, slum clearance meant that public housing was one of the only housing options for the urban poor (Freeman 2004). This was happening at the same time the physical infrastructure of public housing in major cities was deteriorating. Media racialized depictions of their appearance and condition emerged (Henderson 1995). This trend demonstrated what urban geographers refer to as raced space (Neely and Samura 2011).

In fact the racialization of public housing occurred during an era when the "culture of poverty" thesis, developed by Lewis (1966), with a Marxist bent, was taken to mean something entirely different in part because of the infamous Moynihan Report, published the year before, representing the pathological Black family. Moynihan's (1965) depiction evoked an image of Black public-housing residents popularized in the academia, public imagination, and policy discourse. As Henderson states:

> The periodical press … [presented] a public housing "underclass," a Lumpenproletariat that was neither white nor elderly, but young, African-American, and socially dysfunctional. By doing so, it tended to transform a complex economic issue (providing low cost housing) into a simple moral one (condemning the behaviors of public housing residents). … The periodical press reinforced … the long-standing bifurcation in American welfare policy between the deserving and undeserving poor. (Henderson 1995: 32)

This emerging discourse demonstrates how public-housing residents were increasingly fused into a dominant imaginary of transgressing the bounds of "proper" society, and if environmental determinism guided earlier government efforts of housing the submerged middle class and working poor, the shifting representations of public housing and its tenants suggested it was the people themselves who created bad environments.

Subsequent housing policies such as the 1969 Brook Amendments tied rent to income, effectively pushing out the remaining moderate-income working families from public housing and exacerbating concentrated poverty, which became the impetus (or legitimation) for dismantling the public-housing program several decades later. Meanwhile, the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 provided funding for a new housing program called Section 8 (Hartman 1975), subsidizing private-market initiatives to rehabilitate housing, and limiting funding for new construction. Federal funding to PHAs for maintenance again decreased, leaving an increasingly dilapidated stock (Hunt 2009).

Then, in 1980, President Reagan placed a moratorium on all new public-housing construction and the existing public-housing stock languished with more rounds of federal funding cuts. Entire areas of cities were defined as no-go zones, ghettos, hoods, projects, and home to what policymakers and academics eventually referenced as vilified spaces of concentrated poverty, without acknowledging the genealogy of public policies that created this purported reality (see Wilson 1987).

BLAMING CONCENTRATED POVERTY AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGIES

The Reagan administration drastically cut funding for HUD. This would later be theorized as the nascent implementation of neoliberal policies, moving away from the earlier Keynesian welfare state (Fraser et al. 2012). This proved fatal for many urban public-housing developments as conditions worsened, and federal policymakers did not address structural factors in any meaningful way. Instead, sociological theorizing on the effects of living in concentrated poverty gained recognition (Wilson 1987). Key here was William Julius Wilson's seminal work *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). However, much of Wilson's theorizing, such as the impact of deindustrialization and suburbanization, was taken out of context in policy circles that embraced "deconcentrating" the poverty associated with traditional public housing as the only way to fix it. In many ways, the "stripped down" version of the concentrated poverty thesis dovetailed effectively with the goals of political leaders to dismantle the program. Drawing on the growing corpus of "neighborhood effects" studies (see, for example, Sampson 2012) that supported the claim that neighborhood-level conditions exacerbated individual-level poverty, policymakers legislated the razing of traditional public-housing developments through the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program in 1993, an initiative favoring a public–private mixed-income approach to the provision of government-sponsored low-income housing (Chaskin and Joseph 2015).

The specific context from which HOPE VI emerged was that traditional public housing and its residents had taken the brunt of the concentrated poverty thesis in sensational and stigmatized ways. Chicago's Cabrini Green public-housing development became the fictional setting for the horror film *Candyman*. Ironically, this box-office blockbuster was released around the same time the federal government initiated HOPE

VI. But mixed-income programs like HOPE VI did not necessarily lead to better economic conditions for very low-income families: Only a small percentage of former public-housing residents can move back to the redevelopments; and to work, most public-housing residents must be forced into private-market housing with Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs); they *do not* necessarily end up in mixed-income neighborhoods but in those with somewhat less poverty; depending on the geography with improved housing quality; perceived in some cases as being safer, but in many cases just as racially segregated (see, for example, Chaskin et al. 2012; Clampet-Lundquist 2004, 2010; Crump 2002; Fischer 2001, 2002; Fraser 2004; Goetz 2003, 2010, 2013; Greenbaum 2002, 2008; Johnson-Hart, 2007; Keller 2011; Kingsley et al. 2003; Kleit and Manzo 2006; Oakley and Burchfield 2009; Oakley et al. 2013; Popkin 2010; Shamsuddin and Vale 2016; Vale 2013; Varady and Walker 2000; Venkatesh 2000, 2002; Wang et al. 2008, among others.). It is important to qualify here that findings about HCV destination individual and neighborhood-level outcomes of former public-housing residents vary by the specific geographic context in terms of how tight rental housing is in the private market. Also important to note is that not all public-housing residents qualified for a voucher subsidy, which meant they moved without any government support.

Although by-and-large HCV-destination neighborhoods may not have the "concentrated" poverty thresholds (typically 40 percent or more); thresholds are more than modest at between 25 and 30 percent (Oakley et al. 2013), exhibiting many of the same challenges as those with so-called concentrated poverty (Galster 2005).[5] This begs the question of how "income mix" is defined for the HCV holders versus those former public-housing residents who get into the new mixed-income developments. Moving with an HCV from public housing has been an essential aspect of the HOPE VI program.

The chasm continues to grow between the need for affordable housing and the number of public-housing and other subsidized units to serve populations that the private real estate industry is unable or unwilling to assist. Despite the increasing number of think tanks, housing advocates, and policymakers who recognize the current housing affordability crisis, political leaders continue to embrace the neoliberal commitment to the mostly private market logic of mixed income, thereby maintaining the framework that underlies the problem.

The ascendance of mixed-income housing policies resulted from shifting relations between the state and market whereby providing affordable housing rests on facilitating privatization of public housing by cross-subsidizing affordable housing with market-rate units. HUD's recent Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program transfers ownership of public-housing development land from the federal government to local housing agencies. This neoliberalist roll-out facilitates privatization, allowing public-housing agencies to literally mortgage their properties to raise private dollars for needed capital improvements. It is unclear at this point what the impact of RAD will be on the provision of public housing.

The HOPE VI program was part of a larger urban imaginary that focused on bringing more affluent populations to the city, leading some urban scholars to dub the strategy gentrification by stealth (Fraser et al. 2011). This is because such efforts typically involve a class remake of neighborhoods. Not simply providing better environments for low-income populations, these initiatives may also be part of state-led gentrification efforts to absorb the initial risks of investing in urban areas, drawing in speculative capital.[6]

WHAT ARE THE FUTURES OF PUBLIC HOUSING AND HOUSING PUBLICS?

Public-housing transformation efforts like HOPE VI and RAD constitute the neoliberalization of space whereby public policies privatize the commons, increasingly allowing private real estate industry interests to access the land on which subsidized housing exists, averring that a mixed-income framework is the only elixir. In June 2016, Obama's administration proposed changes to the HCV subsidy program, providing incentives for low-income renters to move to wealthier neighborhoods while decreasing subsidies for moves to poorer neighborhoods (Kusisto 2016). The goal is to give these households opportunities for better schools and other needed amenities. Implicit here is change to encourage better income mixing and further deconcentrating poverty. This announcement was met with praise for continuing the mixed-income dictum and outrage because it fails to address the broader issues of housing affordability and could even result in fewer vouchers allocations.

Despite efforts to deconcentrate poverty and the social ills of traditional public housing through mixed-income redevelopment, cities retain persistently high-poverty urban neighborhoods with low-quality housing (Kneebone and Holmes 2016). Thus, problems in traditional public housing cannot be explained by a single causal factor such as the concentration of poverty, as such conditions have persisted post-HOPE VI (Dagen-Bloom et al. 2015). Proposed voucher-subsidy changes, based on neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics, might help provide a remedy, but without a significant increase in the number of vouchers allocated, it cannot effect meaningful change. Despite a deficit of 7 million affordable housing units, only 2 million households currently receive a voucher.

Public officials and the real estate industry actively promote urban development as the next frontier to be revitalized (i.e., to bring economic new life). The state, at all levels, participates in promoting this form of redevelopment and gentrification through a range of development policies that assume the initial risk of redevelopment and provide generous incentives for the real estate industry. It is difficult to overlook the class remake that state and market actors have actively pursued through land-use planning and access to political power to craft economic and governing policies that privatize public space such as public-housing developments (Logan and Molotch 1987). Together, these have radically transformed many public-housing developments across the country into desirable locations for speculative investment.

In this sense, public housing transformation can be viewed as a form of city-building, seeking to increase the exchange value of property by removing populations that hinder this objective. Focusing only on the economic aspects such as concentrated poverty and mixed income to dismantle public housing conceals the complex ways culture underwrites neoliberalism. Gregory (2004) notes, "Culture involves the production, circulation and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world" (p. 8). Drawing on Said's discussion in *Orientalism*, Gregory evokes the term *imagined geographies* to indicate a process of transforming distance to difference through spatializations that render "our" space as familiar, with positive tonalities, compared to other spaces which are understood in "their" unfamiliar/unsettling features and constituted by lack (Gregory 2004).[7]

This selective "othering" was central to urban renewal and public housing transformation policies that entailed the reterritorialization of space.[8] The federal government's answer to the public-housing dilemma was HOPE VI: relocate, demolish, and redevelop, creating mixed-income communities, assuming that a more balanced income mix would translate into improved economic opportunities and quality of life for *all* poor residents (Brenner and Elden 2009). In Soja's (2000) concept of spatiality, this assumption of mixed-income communities yields a positive reproduction of social space. This assumption has not been universally accepted despite the literature on the social problems associated with concentrated poverty. For example, Schwartz and Tajbakhsh (1997) argue that this hypothesis is, at best, loosely supported through correlation, not causality, and at worst, supports an ecological fallacy that neighborhood characteristics predict individual outcomes (Robinson 1950). Remarkably, the lineage of "concentrated poverty" has only begun to be interrogated (Ansfield, 2015).

Even if one accepts the concentrated-poverty thesis, rather than focusing on how racism and capitalism operate to produce inequality, evidence should move researchers to become more critical of proposed spatial solutions to social problems. In other words, did HOPE VI successfully create mixed-income communities? In answering this question researchers and policy makers need to more directly include the neighborhood characteristics not only of the HOPE VI redevelopments but those of the HCV holders as well. While we critique the efficacy of this program, this question is still open to debate, particularly in terms of how mixed-income neighborhoods and affordable housing are defined and by whom.

Many social scientists seem to seek a causal relationship between a range of outcomes and urban areas inhabited by people in socioeconomic stress or poverty. However, they fail to fully examine the validity of the concept of concentrated poverty, or, at the very least neglect to critically examine the spatial politics involved in vilifying a geography such as public housing—one that is somehow cut off by Euclidean boundaries from other neighborhoods. The spatial partitioning of public-housing developments and their surrounding neighborhoods as places of territorial stigma has a symbiotic relationship with the unscheduled social composition of the larger city in producing such spaces and representing them as such. Wacquant (2008) argues that this territorial stigma has denigrated poor, inner-city, and predominantly Black neighborhoods as spaces of social pathology; particularly those with high concentrations of traditional public housing (also see Keene and Padilla 2010). This could not have happened without spatial othering, containment, and subsequent government and infrastructure divestment. In fact, an essential aspect of traditional U.S. public housing is that the spatial stigma attached to residents does not go away with relocation, demolition, and redevelopment.[9]

Scrubbing away the taint of place does not operate in a vacuum. In public-housing transformation, it became an embedded aspect of policy for residents who relocated with HCVs and for those who returned to HOPE VI redevelopments. In Atlanta, which by 2011 had virtually destroyed all traditional public housing, residents had to participate in the "Good Neighbor Program" to obtain a voucher. The Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) describes this program as "a training series that prepares AHA-assisted families to transition successfully from environments of concentrated poverty into healthy mixed-income communities" (AHA 2008: 7; Hankins et al. 2015). The program provides information to voucher-qualified residents about compliance with private-rental landlord and neighborhood expectations, including caring for a unit and premises, respecting the rights of

others to the peaceful enjoyment of their housing, and compliance with other essential conditions of tenancy. In addition, residents are assigned relocation counselors to assist them in finding a new place (AHA 2008). The Good Neighbor Program, modeled after HUD's "Good Neighbor Next Door" program for low-income homeowners, assumes that former public-housing residents cannot be "good neighbors" without mandatory counseling. For HOPE VI, this plays out in who, among low-income residents, gain entry into redevelopments, often involving complex screening and approval processes that can include current home inspections, criminal background and credit checks, and other preapproval procedures (Fraser et al. 2011).

Even public-housing residents who qualify to live in mixed-income redevelopments receive a range of empirical treatments that call into question the benefits of social mix for these populations. This is remarkable because mixed-income-housing policy rests on the assumption that deconcentrating poverty will alleviate the supposed ills of life in traditional public housing. Virtually all studies on cross-race and class social ties in mixed-income developments find a lack of connectivity (see, for example, Chaskin and Joseph 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015; Chaskin et al. 2013; Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph 2012; DeFilippis and Fraser 2010; Fraser and Kick 2007; Joseph 2006, 2008, 2010; Joseph and Chaskin 2012; Joseph et al. 2007; Khare et al. 2014; Kleit 2004; Kleit and Carnegie 2011; Kleit and Manzo 2006; Owens 2012; Popkin et al. 2012; Tach 2009, among others). In other words, a spatial solution to the social problem of poverty is untenable, failing to advance the interests of low-income families. The purported benefits of social mix for low-income residents have been elusive. In fact, being in close proximity need not engender interaction; when it does, that interaction may mean conflict. Power dynamics often lead to low-income residents being subjected to social judgment, increased surveillance, and more property rules than market-rate residents (Chaskin and Joseph 2015; Owens 2012; Tach 2009). Similar dynamics have been documented in gentrifying neighborhoods whereby original lower income residents who remain experience social, cultural, and political displacement (Freeman, 2006; Hyra forthcoming; Pattillo 2007).

U.S. urban public policies have produced these dynamics. Since its inception, traditional public-housing environments (and the people residing in them) have been considered socially suspect, either through NAREB's claims that the program was a dangerous socialist experiment, or the objects of social scientific and policy research based on theories that focus on individual attributes, behaviors, or traits, often leading to damage-centered accounts of living in public housing (Thurber and Fraser 2015). The production of truths about public housing repeatedly reify the proposition that public-housing residents, because of people- and place-based attributes, lack the capacity to effect change to their own welfare or the production of a well-operating neighborhood environment where people may flourish. Alternatively, more affluent households, courted to live in redeveloped mixed-income environments, are constructed as the norm toward which public-housing residents should aspire. Mixed-income policies operate through the production of difference, defining certain geographies as distinct from others: Public-housing developments are often treated as the "other" of normal neighborhoods with well-functioning civil society.

Thus, the colonization of former public-housing residents (or households at similar very low-income levels) by more affluent populations is a legible path to pursue through public–private ventures, assumed to create "better citizens" out of poor residents.

> Production of a neighborhood is inherently colonizing, in the sense that it involves the assertion of socially (often ritually) organized power over places and setting that are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious. … [The] anxiety that attends many rituals of habitation, occupation, or settlement is a recognition of the implicit violence of all such acts of colonization. Some of that anxiety remains … long after the foundational event of colonization. (Appadurai 1996: 183–184)

Mixed-income redevelopment initiatives hold the promise of social mixing to produce an environment that regulates low-income and public-housing residents, hailing them to enter a new moral community (Fraser et al. 2013; Kipfer and Petrunia 2009).

Despite various supports while former public-housing residents navigate their new terrain, the original geographic imaginary that made the demolition and redevelopment of public-housing sites possible remains operative, in particular for those raced as non-White. Fraser et al. (2013) suggest:

> This *other* place—inhabited by those who "have either refused the bonds of civility and self-responsibility or aspire to them but have not been given the skills, capacities, and means" (Rose 1996, p. 347)—draws on the persistent purchase of classed and raced cultural signifiers evoking images of the slum, hood, ghetto, or project. (p. 532)

The power dynamics in mixed-income redevelopments/neighborhoods reproduce social abjection.

To ask what the future of public housing can be is to not only provide immediate policy suggestions that attenuate the realities of current mixed-income housing interventions, but also to engage in conceptualizing different geographical imaginaries that seek to create cities for people over profit. Urban scholars are astute at identifying and describing social problems that beset cities because of political-economic and cultural structures and practices, but less often put forth a way out of this place.

Pinder (2015) notes, "Struggle and contestation need to embrace [the real, possible, and impossible], extending the possible by proclaiming and desiring what is currently defined as impossible" (p. 34). This change requires uncovering the utopia(s) submerged in an intervention, the potentialities for a better future, and the incitement of alternative possibilities (Pinder 2015). This process begins by interrogating the premises on which the state's actions to divest from providing affordable housing unfold. Clearly, the production of certain spaces as inhospitable plays a central role.

> Deconcentration of poverty is not only the preferred treatment for what is often naturalized as a disease afflicting the "inner city," it is posited as the only imaginable treatment. Scholarly and political consensus around this avowedly deracialized initiative borders on absolute; the debate occurs not over this particular modus but rather over its methodology and ramifications. (Ansfield 2015: 127)

This spatiality of public housing relies on a deficit model toward understanding life in these developments, not only animating interventions including demolition and redevelopment, but claiming that people who reside in such spaces are trespassing the norms of civil society. It is a discursive move, foreclosing the possibility that community development and investment in the same people will accomplish anything more than "gilding the ghetto" (Shaw 2003). Redevelopment does not erase this sociospatial subjectivity because

urban policy has already constructed public-housing residents as potentially threatening, unless they willingly accept the bonds of society through their own initiative to secure the economic resources to transform themselves into normal citizens by entering the private-housing market (Fraser et al. 2013). Public-housing residents often endure the suspicion of their more affluent neighbors, as they have already been constructed as victims or perpetrators of the conditions in which they previously lived (Chaskin and Joseph 2010, 2011; Chaskin et al. 2012; Fraser et al. 2013).

The import of developing this political-economic and cultural theorization about the state of public housing is to understand the tools and efforts necessary to imagine *a present that could be otherwise*. Lefebvre (1974) is useful here. If the abstractions of the state (i.e., planners, policymakers) constitute the spatial ordering of people and places, then a corrective politic involves *disrupting the order of things* (Thurber and Fraser 2015). This necessarily entails different forms of resistance that foreground the voices of those whose everyday lives are being represented. Dikec (2007), referring to Rancière's earlier work (2003), contends that the political context surrounding processes in need of disruption revolve almost entirely around the forced distribution of spaces and who qualifies for which space—spaces that are inherently unequal.

It is insufficient to make material and political demands of the state, but rather to resist the techniques the state deploys. To create a better future for housing the public who experience poverty requires epistemological resistance involving "the struggle of the uncounted/exploited against their classification and against the social destinies defined by 'class names'" (Tyler 2013: 155). In the U.S. context, achieving this end may mean finding ways to change the very structure of the private-housing market and how government subsidizes it (Immergluck 2015; Shlay 2014).

As space is constituted by social relations that extend beyond a particular place, it not only entails the reconfiguration of relationships in mixed-income developments but also the larger project of enrolling public officials to alter their understanding of the relationships between housing and citizenship rights, requiring commitment and motivation. Efforts to work toward these ends are already underway: The Right to the City Alliance's "Homes for All" campaign not only makes demands of the state to provide truly affordable and dignified housing, but does so with the understanding that structural barriers to housing are real, changeable, and based on the social inequality of neoliberal policies that uncritically turn toward private sector solutions—which, by definition in a capitalist society, produce the very problem they are being asked to resolve. It is also a campaign, led by those whose housing and economic conditions are precarious, to shift the discourse, for example, to public-housing residents and their value.

Although efforts may be ongoing and forming potential long-term movements, other strategies can be put into practice to at least shift the dynamics of securing public/subsidized housing and living in mixed-income developments/neighborhoods. Fraser et al. (2013) conceptualized effective interventions in four realms: (1) housing, (2) social services and supports, (3) employment, and (4) neighborhood life. Some recommendations require major policy interventions by the state and significant economic resources. For housing, a well-funded community land trust that manages developments and scattered-site affordable units could achieve permanently subsidized homeownership and rental opportunities. Community land trusts provide a range of effective social services and supports and could also be funded to develop transportation, healthcare, and childcare cooperatives. For employment, a range of options might include government

support to subsidize household earnings to simulate a living wage, and the development of worker cooperatives that provide democratic opportunities for job training and advancement. For neighborhood enhancement, life in mixed-income developments carries a range of community building opportunities that would foster a greater sense of shared fate. Although not comprehensive, these strategies gesture toward a right to the city in which all residents have the opportunity to produce the spaces in which they live so as to undo some of the pernicious effects of unbridled capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1970s advent of Section 8—recruiting private landlords to partner with HUD to receive compensation for housing lower income households—market logic increasingly emerged in congressional legislation. Citizenship rights to access affordable housing rest on individuals' ability and willingness to accept the bonds of capitalism, even when it does not work for them.[10] Public policy research consistently seeks to determine factors aligned with lower income populations accessing jobs, no matter how precarious their employment conditions in wages or tenure. People in poverty experience significant barriers to meaningful work opportunities including lacking access to meaningful educational programs, transportation, healthcare, and childcare, to name a few.

Yet, housing policy in the United States increasingly relies on employment and wages as a criterion for social inclusion, reverting to the origins of public housing whereby families could only gain entrée into newly built units if they had a member who was employed; thus, some scholars reference the program's beginning as serving the needs of the "submerged" middle class. Although 20th century legislation mandated these developments would serve those who were truly impoverished, statutes now return to the previous era when the lowest income populations were unserved by the state. Notwithstanding the long history of tenant activism to improve conditions in public housing, and later to prevent its demolition, currently, public housing and housing publics can procure more social justice only when we, as a society, maintain the essential framework of decoupling housing as a right from one's position in a capitalist society instead of losing this decoupling in transition.

Notes

[1]The 1949 Housing Act declared, "every American had the right to 'a decent home and a suitable living environment'" (Lang and Sohmer 2000: 291).

[2]Unsubsidized refers to any very low-income household renting in the private rental market without federal-issued subsidies. Such subsidies typically cap resident rental costs at 30 percent of their monthly income (Oakley and Burchfield 2009).

[3]The word slum originated in the early 19th century European city context as a geographic designation where poor or "low" people resided and translated to inner-city American neighborhoods as places of blight, crime, and social disorganization among other problems (Vale 2007).

[4]Eminent domain refers to the legal ability of government entities—and sometimes private ones—to take over private property for public use. Eminent domain takeovers are conducted through a legal process whereby the property owners must be paid at the market rate (see Pritchett 2003).

[5]Housing quality for former public-housing residents relocated with a voucher varies by city. In cities with relatively soft rental markets like Atlanta, former public-housing residents ended up in better quality housing

and perceived their neighborhoods to be safer (Ruel et al. 2013). In contrast, in cities with very tight rental markets such as New York, the quality of voucher housing was compromised (Wyly and DeFilippis 2010). Even in this best scenario, such neighborhoods are still poor, lacking a balanced income mix that generates needed amenities for upward social mobility, such as good public schools.

[6]The provision for the needs of low- to moderate-income families does not only include current public-housing residents. Thousands of people sit on waiting lists for public housing units or HCVs (Section 8) while no plans exist to expand the public-housing program. Many HUD contracts with HCV landlords end soon, unless they apply for another period of time. Cities experiencing inner-city gentrification face a dilemma. As the federal government and local public housing authorities actively reduce and privatize public housing, the number of HCVs, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and Project-based Section 8 properties are diminishing (Oakley 2008; Oakley et al. 2013).

[7]Not everybody has the power to create such abstractions. Foucault (1980) notes, "truth isn't outside of power, or lacking in power. … Truth is a thing of the world. … Each society has its régime of truth … the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (p. 131).

[8]Urban policy "consolidates a certain spatial order through such practices of articulation—spatially designating areas to be treated, associating problems with them, and generating a certain discourse (though not the only one) about them" (Dikeç 2007: 21). The political effects of this consolidation of spatial order render certain populations as problematic and in need of interventions.

[9]Keene and Padilla (2010) examine the consequences of stigma for Black traditional public-housing residents relocated from Chicago to Eastern Iowa, evoking Goffman's work (1963). Residents reported they were already "labeled" with negative stereotypes because they were poor, Black, and came from inner-city Chicago, specifically pointing to the racialization of urban poverty. The added label of former public-housing residents further undermined residents' ability to seek opportunities for improved socioeconomic status. But even more telling is a process of "defensive othering," in that some former public-housing residents sought to distance themselves through "selective association" with other former public-housing residents (p. 11). Also see DeLuca et al. (2016) concerning their concept of positive "identity project" that some youth moved with voucher develop to successfully complete their schooling while others do not.

[10]HOPE VI, Choice Neighborhoods, and RAD pivot on the cross-subsidization of public housing units with market-rate units. Likewise, the HCV program depends on willing landlords to accept vouchers that, in many cases, are worth less than these owners might receive by not participating in the program.

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