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Adam Goldstein April 10, 2016

A Purposely Built Community: Public Housing Redevelopment and Resident Replacement at East Lake Meadows

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Abstract

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The story of East Lake's redevelopment is well known throughout the city of Atlanta and the United States for being a gold standard for public housing and community redevelopment. This thesis will examine the history of the East Lake Meadows public housing project and its redevelopment and, while couching that story alongside the history of public and assisted housing in the United States, seeks to show how the story of East Lake is not particularly unique. Furthermore, this thesis hopes to display that East Lake's story should not be looked to as a model for community development, but instead as a case study in community replacement. While this project does not intend to dismiss the successes of the East Lake redevelopment, it hopes to highlight how the redevelopment did not invest in the residents of the East Lake Meadows public housing project. Instead, the history shows that the business and political elite of Atlanta involved in the redevelopment process opted to invest in a section of America's poor they deemed more worthy of their help.

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Table of Contents

On a sunny day in late October 1998, Tiger Woods, the young golfing phenom of mixed race ancestry and a working class background, hit the inaugural tee shot at Charlie Yates Golf Course, a public 18-hole course that had recently opened alongside the redeveloped East Lake Golf Club. East Lake, the historic course where the young Bobby Jones learned the game, would be hosting its first ever season ending PGA Tour tournament. Woods, who would be competing that weekend, made history the year before when at the age of 21 he became the youngest and first non-white player to win the Masters, one of golf's most prestigious tournaments. In hitting the first tee shot at Charlie Yates, Woods was showing his support for the redevelopment occurring in the community surrounding the East Lake Golf Club. "'I think what they've done is absolutely phenomenal," Woods said. The bold revitalization taking place around the golf course had not only captured the attention of those who visited East Lake, but was being touted by major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as a model for neighborhood rejuvenation around the country.[1]

In the East Lake community, however, all was not as auspicious as it seemed. While Woods struggled through his first tournament at East Lake the leaders of the community being redeveloped were preparing for their day in court, demanding a halt to the redevelopment. The tenants association of the neighborhood's soon to be demolished public housing project believed that their voices were not only being silenced as part of the redevelopment process, but that the legal contract they had entered into with the Atlanta Housing Authority was being broken. In response, the tenants association filed litigation against the Atlanta Housing Authority demanding an injunction to stop the demolition of their homes. The tenants lost the litigation, their homes were demolished, and a majority of them never returned to the newly constructed

[1] Clifton Brown, "Golf Course at the Center of a Community; Developer's Dual Initiative Revives Atlanta Neighborhood." *New York Times*, Oct 29, 1998.

mixed-income community. Moreover, their critical voices, which had reverberated around the halls of East Lake Meadows and throughout the city, have been largely forgotten in East Lake's history.

In many ways, the redevelopment of the East Lake neighborhood is a remarkable success story. In the early 1990s East Lake, which is located five miles east of downtown Atlanta, was one of the poorest and most violent communities in the city, the anchor of which was the East Lake Meadows public housing project. Bobby Jones's home course had fallen into disrepair alongside the community. Beginning in 1993, however, Tom Cousins, a wealthy real estate developer with a passion for golf, realized that he could bring the golf course back to championship grade, and in the process use the course's revitalization as a catalyst to lift the whole community out of poverty. Thus began a redevelopment process that has made the East Lake community today the home of the state's highest ranked charter school, a 50/50 market-rate and publicly assisted housing community, a YMCA, an early learning center, a grocery store, and a well-endowed foundation that ensures that the community's needs are met.

Yet for all its success, East Lake's story serves more as a model of community *replacement* than community *development*, a narrative which seems less remarkable when placed in the broader history of national public housing policy in the United States. From its construction in the early 1970s, through its decline in the 1980s, and through the process of its redevelopment in the 1990s, the story of East Lake Meadows mirrored national trends in public housing policy. In turn, these trends shed light on the changing beliefs as to how to best serve the nation's poor. The construction of the Meadows took place during the final years of the Great Society, when large government programs and interventions were seen as solutions to structural poverty. The decline of the Meadows occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, when all subsidized

housing came under fire as a new, more conservative political ideology gained traction in the nation's consciousness. The further decline of public housing communities in the late 1980s and early 1990s drove the belief that the needs of the residents of public housing should be at the top of the national agenda. Legislation that came out of this contention, however, evolved as Republicans took control of both houses of Congress in 1994 and encouraged a devolution of power over public housing to the private sector.

Of course, the East Lake community today is much more effective at supporting the poor than the community that preceded it, and all of the actors in the East Lake's story worked with the best interest of the poor in mind. Yet it is important to remember that the poor being served at East Lake today are not the same kind of poor who were forced to live in an underfunded and underpoliced East Lake for the vast majority of the existence of the Meadows. Those poor, like many of the thousands that inhabited severely distressed public housing units in the 1990s, either happily left their hellish conditions in search of a safer community, or watched from afar as their public housing developments were demolished and the redeveloped mixed-income community welcomed a more "deserving" poor.

East Lake's Beginnings

In the late 19th century, interest in golf began to spread from the coast of Scotland to the American high society. Charles Blair MacDonald, a successful Chicago stockbroker who fell in love with the game during his time studying at the University of St Andrews, founded the first eighteen hole golf course in the United States in Chicago in 1892 and devoted the rest of his career to promoting the game in the United States.[2] MacDonald passed along his passion for the game to his business acquaintance Henry Atkinson, an Atlanta banker and member of one of

[2] Mark Frost, *The Grand Slam: Bobby Jones, America, and the Story of Golf* (New York: Hyperion, 2004), 45.

Atlanta's elite private clubs, the Atlanta Athletic Club. Atkinson owned a portion of land just outside the city limits, and when the Athletic Club approached him about buying the land with the hopes of building the city's first golf course, Atkinson was happy to oblige.

The club's board of directors used their influence to encourage the Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority to extend the city's streetcar to the future site of the course. The Club hired well-known architect Donald Ross to design what would become the East Lake Golf Club, attracting golf's best from around the world to venture for the first time to the Southern United States. George Adair, Asa Candler, and other patriarchs of contemporary Atlanta built their summer homes around the course.[3] East Lake became a center for the city's golfing elite and became a breeding ground for some of the top golfers in the world. Most notably East Lake was Bobby Jones' home course and the two became inextricably linked throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930, Bobby Jones made history when he, as an amateur, won all four majors in a single year, elevating both him and his home course to national and international prominence. The golf course and neighborhood maintained its prestige throughout the next three decades, consistently hosting amateur and professional golf tournaments including the South's first United States Golf Association national event, and the 1963 Ryder Cup, the biennial team match between the best American and British golfers.[4]

Yet, as Arnold Palmer and the Americans were solidifying a resounding win over the British in the fall of 1963, change was brewing in the Atlanta Athletic Club's board room and Atlanta as a whole. After the Ryder Cup finished, news broke that the Athletic Club had purchased a 600-acre parcel of land twenty-five miles north of the city. While the club president

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[3] Ibid at 50.

[4] "History of East Lake Golf Club," East Lake Country Club, accessed January 12, 2016, http://www.eastlakegolfclub.com/about-us/history/.

H.C. Allen Jr. denied the rumors that the Club was considering moving, the migration of the Club's membership told a different story.[5] In the 1950s and 1960s Atlanta was going through an unprecedented transformation in its neighborhood's demographics. Kirkwood, a neighborhood adjacent to East Lake, went through a well-documented struggle with white flight during this time period. In the late 1950s Kirkwood was a community for the white-working class, many of whom had lived in the community for decades. In the mid-1950s blacks began to slowly move into Kirkwood, alarming residents. The local civic club warned that "attempting to sell to Negroes," would indicate a failure in the community's "responsibility as home owners and neighbors."[6] The most important community institutions were the churches, and they rallied together with the hope of maintaining the white presence in the neighborhood. In 1961, the six main Kirkwood churches formed the Kirkwood Churches Committee with the goal of guarding against "undesirable neighbors." However, the influx of blacks into the neighborhood persisted, and by 1964 observers described it as "all-negro." The active work of the community institutions failed to halt white flight.[7] Atlanta lost 60,000 whites, one-fifth of the total white population to the suburbs in the 1960s.[8] East Lake's story parallels that of Kirkwood and the rest of Atlanta. In 1960, East Lake was home to just over thirteen thousand Atlantans, 99.8 percent of whom were white. In 1970, almost seventeen thousand people lived in East Lake, and 57 percent of them

[5] Sidney Matthew and Janice McDonald, *East Lake Golf Club* (Atlanta: Arcadia, 2015), 67 and Ted Simmons, "Athletic Club to Consider Selling East Lake's no. 2 Course to Builder," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 5, 1963.

[6] Quoted in Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 92.

[7] Kruse, *White Flight*, 93.

[8] Ibid at 234.

were white. The other 43 percent were black. By 1980, 95 percent of the almost twenty-thousand Atlantans who lived in East Lake were black.[9]

The 1960s proved transformative for the Atlanta Athletic Club as well. In 1965, they announced the sale of East Lake's No. 2 course, a nine-hole course adjacent to the original eighteen-hole course, to developers interested in zoning the land for apartments.[10] While simultaneously assuring its members that they would stand committed to Bobby Jones' home course, the Athletic Club broke ground on a golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones on their newly acquired land north of the city. The commitment to East Lake would prove short lived. Late in the day on April 2nd 1968, the club's directors informed their membership that they were selling all of their East Lake property. Many responded with outrage at the club's abandonment of one of the South's most famous and historic golf courses.[11] One group filed litigation calling the sale unlawful, while another, including some members of the Athletic Club, decided to put a bid in to buy the East Lake property from the Athletic Club. The litigation proved unsuccessful, and by the end of April 1968, the Club had joined much of its membership in their flight from the city, and left the course to twenty-five men dedicated to preserving it.[12] These men established the East Lake Country Club, and for the next twenty years they did what they could to keep the course relevant while the neighborhood transformed around them.

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[9] United States Census Bureau, *1960 Atlanta Census Tracts*: 150-155 and United States Census Bureau, *1970 Atlanta Census Tracts*: 215-230 and United States Census Bureau, *1980 Atlanta Census Tracts*: 117-127.

[10] Ted Simmons, "Athletic club votes to sell golf course," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1965.

[11] C. Roberts, "Big battle is underway to 'save' old east lake big battle is underway to 'save' old east lake," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 28, 1968.

[12] A.Nesmith, "East lake sale valid, court says," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1969.

Building East Lake Meadows

Atlanta's demographic changes put stress on the Atlanta Housing Authority to build affordable housing to meet the growing demand. The housing authority and the city's mayor Ivan Allen prioritized increasing the stock of affordable housing at low cost.[13] In 1965, Allen committed his administration to the development of 16,800 units of affordable housing.[14] How the city and Allen's administration would approach this goal was informed by the history of public housing as well as the federal changes in public housing policy taking place in the mid-1960s.

The federal government's role in providing shelter for the poor came out of the Great Depression and New Deal era. Within the first three months of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidency his administration passed legislation that created a federal housing division charged with building and operating subsidized housing for America's poor. This was the first time that the federal government involved itself in housing the poor, and it sparked a national conversation that pitched economic concerns regarding public housing's effect on the private market against efforts to provide decent housing to thousands living in poverty and squalor. There were hopes among more liberal progressives that this federal housing program would resemble some of the contemporary European housing strategies that focused less on targeting the neediest, and more on creating well-designed housing communities that attracted a broad range of incomes. However, federal officials saw this federal housing program as a way to combat the "cancer" of inner-city slums.[15]

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[13] Alex Coffin, "Bankhead Site Okayed For Low-Cost Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 6, 1967.

[14] Alex Coffin, "East Lake No. 2 Zoned for Housing Coffin," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1968.

[15] Lawrence Vale, *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8.

The debate culminated in the Housing Act of 1937, the details of which supported the contention of federal officials and private developers. The legislation had two main functions. The first was to raze city slums. Not only was this in and of itself a politically attractive goal, but as developers found no value in developing slum areas, it ensured that public housing did not interfere with the private housing market. The effect of public housing on the private market was of the utmost concern to members of Congress, and the legislation's sponsor, the democratic Senator from New York Robert Wagner, said in regards to the bill "the most important consideration is, that public housing should not be brought into competition with private industry."[16]

The act's secondary function was to stimulate the economy by bolstering the construction industry. The construction industry employed a third of the wage earners on relief in 1934 yet it was a tenth the size of what it had been before the Depression. The construction industry directly affected American manufacturing, trucking, lumber, and steel, and the downturn in investment in all of these industries had a significant overall impact on the availability of employment for skilled and unskilled laborers.[17] Stimulating the construction industry through the federal construction of public housing worked towards the goal of bringing the nation out of economic depression.

The execution of the 1937 Housing Act severely limited who benefited from federally assisted housing. The specifics of the legislation empowered local housing authorities chartered by states to construct and manage public housing that was paid for in part by the federal

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[16] Edward Goetz, *New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice & Public Housing Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 26.

[17] Louis Hyman, *Debtor Nation: The History of America in Red Ink* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 48.

government. Local administration of public housing restricted access to only those deemed worthy of assistance, who, as historian Lawrence Friedman described it, were the "submerged and potential middle class which was lower class in income but middle class in values or aspirations."[18] Due to high demand for housing assistance the public housing authorities were able to be highly selective. The Chicago Housing Authority put applicants through an extensive process that included an in-office and at-home interview with a qualified social worker and an investigation into employment and criminal history.[19] This often ensured that those living in the slums that were razed for public housing were not allowed to return to their communities. In the four housing projects built in Boston before the beginning of World War II, an estimated 80 percent of those whose homes were demolished to make way for the housing project applied to return, but only 2 percent were allowed back.[20]

Race played a major role in the decision as to who was allowed to move into public housing. Almost all of the initial public housing developments were segregated, and the decision as to which race a project was to be built for was one made by local housing authorities. The first public housing project in the country was built in downtown Atlanta and replaced an all-black slum located in the shadow of the city's business district. As the project was seen as a way to increase the vitality of downtown Atlanta, it was naturally deemed a development for whites upon its completion.[21]

Another area of housing born out of the New Deal that actively excluded blacks was the newly developed Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Before the Great Depression,

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[18] Lawrence Friedman, *Government and Slum Housing* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 131.

[19] Vale, *Purging the Poorest,* 12.

[20] Lawrence Vale, *From Puritans to the Projects* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 119.

[21]Paul Mitchell, *Federal Housing Policy & Programs: Past and present* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1985), 27 and Lawrence Vale, *Purging the Poorest,* 9.

Americans interested in buying homes were able to get short-term mortgages of three to five years from financing companies. All mortgages were non-amortized; debtors paid only the interest on their loan every year, and then paid the full principle at the end of the term. Throughout the 1920s, it was common practice for homeowners to refinance whenever their mortgages came due to avoid paying the whole principle. When the stock market crashed in November of 1929, institutions that provided these mortgages started to turn down homeowners' requests for another mortgage, leaving homeowners with the option of paying the principle or foreclosing. By 1933 one thousand homeowners were being foreclosed on every day.[22]

In order to guard against bouts of widespread foreclosure, the New Deal government passed the National Housing Act of 1934, which created the FHA. The FHA provided insurance on small consumer loans for housing improvement, on large fifteen to twenty-five year amortized mortgages with interest rates capped at five percent, and created a marketplace for banks and other financing corporations to sell their mortgages. The FHA also created and published guidelines for "good" and "bad" mortgages. Good mortgages were federally insured while bad mortgages were not. These guidelines were fraught with racist provisions that ensured that no mortgages in majority ethnic or black areas would be "good" and no people of color from these areas would be able to get mortgages to move to "better" neighborhoods; a practice that came to be known as redlining.[23] By the end of the 1930s, even as President Roosevelt noted in his second inaugural address the need to house the "one third of the nation ill-housed,"

[22] Hyman, *Debtor Nation*, 57.

[23] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014.

government policies ensured that only the most well off of that one-third, mostly the temporary white working poor, received housing assistance.[24]

The United States' entry into World War II put a hiatus on political action for the poor. Little housing was built in the 1940s as construction materials and labor were allocated to the war effort. As the war wound down in 1945 it became clear that veterans' interests would dominate post-war politics.[25] In regards to housing, the Servicemen's Readjustment Acts of 1944 and 1945 allowed veterans to receive federally subsidized and backed mortgages with long-terms, requiring small down payments and charging little interest. This opened up housing opportunities for thousands of returning veterans and their families who began the migration from the city to the budding suburbs. Mirroring the FHA, however, almost none of the mortgages went to the numerous black veterans. A study done in 1947 found that "banks and mortgage agencies refuse loans to Negroes, thus making the GI Bill ineffective. Restrictive covenants confine Negroes to the worst slum areas in the nation."[26]

In the aftermath of the War, President Harry Truman brought housing for the poor back to the top of the political agenda. In Truman's 1949 State of the Union address he urged Congress to "enact the provisions for low-rent public housing, slum clearance…and housing research," which he "repeatedly recommended." Specifically he demanded that the "number of low rent public housing units provided for in the legislation should be increased to 1 million units in the next 7 years," a number which he believed would not "begin to meet our need for

[24] Mitchell, *Federal Housing Policy & Programs*, 27 and Vale, *Purging the Poorest*, 9 and Hyman, *Debtor Nation*, 57.

[25] Mitchell, *Federal Housing Policy & Programs*, 8.

[26] Quoted in Hilary Herbold, "Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 6 (Winter 1995): 106.

new housing."[27] As part of his Fair Deal platform, Truman fought for the passing of the Housing Act of 1949, whose goal was to provide "a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family." Among other provisions, the act authorized the building of 810,000 units of public housing over the next six years. While it was passed in 1949, a powerful real estate lobby coupled with America's entrance into the Korean War restricted funding allocated by Congress for public housing construction during Truman's administration.[28]

The Republican presidency and Congress that took power in Washington in 1953 took public housing off of the political agenda. Not only was President Dwight D. Eisenhower unenthused about public housing, but the Second Red Scare began to grip the nation and draw negative attention to federally assisted housing.[29] In 1952 a Congressman from Michigan described public housing as "the first fatal step toward national socialism." In the same year a Senator from Virginia "complained of the 'stench of gross inefficiency and Russian communism' which hovered in the projects."[30] As a result less than a quarter of the 810,000 authorized units to be built over the decade had received funding and been completed by the end of Eisenhower's presidency.[31]

By 1960 the whites that public housing had been built for migrated out of the city with the help of the FHA and the VA, while the blacks suffered from an affordable housing shortage in the inner city. This led to a distinct shift in the tenant population of public housing, especially

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[27] Harry S. Truman: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 5, 1949. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

[28]Alexander von Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949," *Housing Policy Debate* 11 (2000): 311.

[29] Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions," 312-313.

[30] Quoted in Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 28.

[31]R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 97.

in large cities. Public housing authorities no longer had the ability to choose the most "worthy" poor to fill their housing, and slowly over the 1950s and at a faster rate in the 1960s the public housing that had been intended to be temporary shelter for the white working poor became permanent housing for poor blacks.[32]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the nascent Civil Rights Movement and the works of academics such as Michael Harrington shifted national attention back towards America's poor and underprivileged. The inevitability of the nation's confrontation with racial injustice was identified by the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal in the mid-1940s. His study of American race relations brought him to the conclusion that there was a contradiction between the "American creed" of equality and the reality of segregation, and believed that if whites in the United States understood the plight of blacks, they would act on behalf of blacks to breakdown racism in America. The Civil Rights Movement began in earnest in the 1950s and its proponents relied on Myrdal's strategy of bringing the nation's attention to the realities of the black experience.[33] From bus stops in Birmingham, Alabama to public school steps in Little Rock, Arkansas, to lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina the Civil Rights Movement began to turn the nation's attention towards the underprivileged. Concurrently, Michael Harrington, a sociologist and democratic socialist was working on a study of American poverty. Published in the early 1960s, his book *The Other America*, in concert with its widely read review in the *New Yorker*, contended that despite the post-war boom mass poverty still persisted and it was disappearing at a much slower rate than the nation believed.[34]

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[32] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins,* 57.

[33] Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

[34] Jill Lepeore, "How a New Yorker Article Launched the First Shot in the War Against Poverty," *The Smithsonian Magazine,* September 2012.

Harrington's work and the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement played a significant role in shaping the policies of John F. Kennedy's administration. Kennedy, elected to the presidency in 1960, called for the nation to begin the "struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."[35] Kennedy viewed affordable housing as a key component in the struggle against poverty, and sent an ambitious housing bill to Congress within the first hundred days of his presidency. The bill displayed "major shifts from the policy of the Eisenhower Administration," and was described as an "ambitious and complex housing program to spur the economy, revitalize cities and provide more residences for middle-income and low-income families."[36] The bill was passed and signed on July 1st, and it authorized the spending of almost $5 billion which went to a myriad of programs including the building of 100,000 units of public housing by 1964.[37] At the signing ceremony Kennedy promised that the bill would "offer our communities…the opportunity and the challenge to build the cities of tomorrow where families can live in dignity, free from both the squalor of the slums and the unbroken monotony of suburban sprawl."[38]

In addition to increasing funding for public housing, Kennedy began to act with the tide of the Civil Rights Movement and combat racism in federal policies. In November 1962, Kennedy signed Executive Order 1106 which banned discriminatory practices based on race,

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[35] "Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Quotations/Inaugural-Address.aspx.

[36] "New York Times Chronology: Housing," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 10, 2016, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/New-York-Times-Chronology/Housing-in-progress.aspx.

[37]"Legislative Summary: Housing," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/Legislative-Summary-Main-Page/Housing.aspx.

[38] John F. Kennedy: "Remarks Upon Signing the Housing Act," June 30, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

color, creed, or national origin in all forms of federally assisted housing. The order described the government's past practices such as redlining as "discriminatory," and acknowledged that they worked to "deny many Americans the benefits of housing financed through Federal assistance and as a consequence prevent such assistance from providing them with an alternative to substandard, unsafe, unsanitary, and overcrowded housing."[39] Kennedy's executive order opened up housing opportunities to blacks through FHA financing and the desegregation of public housing projects which accelerated the flight of whites from the cities to suburbs.

Kennedy was assassinated a year after he signed Executive Order 1106, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed office. He continued Kennedy's work on behalf of the poor and ran for reelection shortly thereafter. The platform of Johnson and other Democrats during the 1964 elections underscored the belief within the Democratic Party that urban blacks were an essential piece of their party's coalition.[40] Johnson won election to office in 1964 and, aided by an overwhelming liberal majority in Congress, furthered Kennedy's commitment to the urban poor. In 1965, Congress passed the Housing and Urban Development Act, which Johnson deemed the "single most important breakthrough in housing policy" in over 30 years.[41] The program authorized funding for 60,000 new units of public housing each year for the next three years, developed a cabinet-level position for overseeing the federal housing and urban development programs, and introduced alternate forms of housing assistance such as rental assistance. Johnson appointed Robert Weaver, longtime politician and academic who had

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[39] "Executive Order 11063," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed February 10, 2016, http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/FHLaws/EXO11063.

[40] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

[41] Robert Semple, "$7.5 Billion Bill, With a Rent Subsidy Proviso, Signed by Johnson," *New York Times,* August 11, 1965.

advised Roosevelt and served in urban development roles for the state of New York, to be the first secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Weaver was the first African-American to be appointed to the President's cabinet.[42]

In order to ensure that the government would be able to fulfill the promises of housing, Johnson and Weaver turned to the private sector. In 1966 Johnson and Weaver invited one-hundred business leaders to the "Business-Government Conference on Urban Problems," where Weaver announced HUD's Turnkey Program, which allowed private developers to build public housing projects for local public housing authorities. In Johnson's State of the Union in January 1967, he clarified his belief in the promise of public private partnerships: "We should call upon the genius of private industry," Johnson said, "to help rebuild our great cities."[43]

The urban riots of 1967 and 1968 encouraged Johnson and his administration to think more deeply about the role of government in housing in the inner city. Johnson directed a committee, run by successful businessmen and directed by industrialist Edgar Keiser, to "rebuild America's slums." Concurrently, he charged Weaver with developing a "ten-year housing program that would eliminate all the substandard housing in this country."[44] The work of Keiser's team, Weaver, and Johnson culminated in the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act. The legislation authorized 300,000 units of public housing to be built in the year and also bolstered programs that subsidized homeownership and rental payments for low-income Americans.[45]

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[42] James Barron, "Robert C. Weaver, 89, First Black Cabinet Member, Dies," *New York Times,* July 19, 1997.

[43] Lyndon B. Johnson: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," January 8, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

[44] Alexander Von Hoffman, "Calling Upon the Genius: Housing Policy in the Great Society, Part Three," *Joint Center for Housing Studies Harvard University*, March 2010.

[45] Alexander Von Hoffman, "History Lessons for Today's Housing Policy: The Political Processes of Making Low-Income Housing Policy," *Housing Policy Debate,* 22 (August).

In many ways, Johnson's 1968 housing act was the ultimate legislation in Johnson's War on Poverty. The Act stated that the goal to "provide a decent home and living environment for every American family" could be "substantially achieved within the next decade by the construction or rehabilitation of 26 million housing units, six million of these for low- and moderate-income families."[46] It was in this political environment that the city of Atlanta almost doubled its public housing stock between 1965 and 1970. However the city still had trouble meeting the rising demand. Over two-thousand families were on the waiting list for public housing at the beginning of 1970, and even though Atlanta's housing authority opened over a thousand new units throughout the year, there were over four-thousand families on the waiting list at the start of 1971.

Under these pressures the city decided to develop the land on which sat nine holes of the original twenty seven that comprised the original Atlanta Athletic Club. Since it was sold in 1965, developers were unsuccessful in rezoning the land for apartments. Mayor Allen leveraged HUD's Turnkey program and made a deal with developers assuring them that he would push through the rezoning proposal if the developers built public housing.[47] After a long battle with the zoning committee where Allen reportedly used "all his political power and prestige" East Lake was rezoned in May 1968, successfully overriding the protests of the committee chair who believed the apartments would "turn East Atlanta all-Negro."[48]

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[46] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Housing in the Seventies: A Report on the National Policy Review*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1974), 143.

[47] Maggie McCarty, "Introduction to Public Housing," *Congressional Research Service*, January 3, 2016.

[48] Alex Coffin. "East Lake No. 2 Zoned for Housing," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1968 and Alex Coffin, "East Lake Course Zoned For 800 Housing Units," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1968.

In August of 1968 the Atlanta Golf Association paid homage to East Lake's No. 2 course by making it the host site for the Atlanta City Amateur Championship.[49] It was the last tournament played on the course before developers broke ground on an eighty-four building, $15 million public housing project called East Lake Meadows.[50]

The four years it took for the developers to finish the East Lake project were, at a national level, peak years for public housing in terms of political support. When Richard Nixon took office in the winter of 1969 his administration fully supported the work of his predecessor on housing despite their different political affiliations. Nixon appointed George Romney, the former head of American Motors who had served as Governor of Michigan during the 1967 Detroit riot, to run HUD in its newfound role in mass housing production. In 1969 Romney stated in response to the task of before him, "I accept these goals, not as an engineer's measure, but as a reasonable expression of our national need by a knowledgeable and humane Congress which sought to give some definite expression to the ends we seek in housing."[51] He managed the production of over 600,000 units of housing in his first two years as HUD secretary. A senior HUD economist noted in early 1971 that the efficiency of the federal government's housing production in the preceding two years raised "serious doubts about the validity of oft-repeated claims that the complexities and red-tape involved in the present subsidized housing programs are serious impediments to volume production."[52]

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[49] Allen Hauck, "East Lake No. 2 Gets Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1968.

[50] Nat Sheppard, "Area Poor Get Homes," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1971.

[51]U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Statement by George Romney before the Subcommittee on Housing of the U.S. House Committee on Banking and Currency on Housing Goals*. (Washington, D.C.: Unpublished HUD Document, 1969).

[52] Quoted in Charles Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy, 1949 to 1999," *Housing Policy Debate*, 11:2 (2000): 496.

During its construction East Lake Meadows was lauded for being at the forefront of frenzied national public housing development. Les Persells, the executive director of the Atlanta Housing Authority noted in 1970 that housing officials from the federal government, as well as other large public housing authorities looked to East Lake as a model for the coordination between schools, services, and housing.[53] He was referring partly to the building of a thousand student elementary school across the street from the Meadows to accommodate the two-thousand school age children expected to move into the development. In the same year the *Atlanta Constitution* described East Lake Meadows as a "remarkable low-cost…housing development," and noted that it would likely "serve as a model of what low-cost housing could be like," around the country.[54]

In 1971 East Lake opened its 800 units which housed all low-income, mostly black, and largely single parent households.[55]

"Little Vietnam"

Fissures began to develop in Johnson's dream of housing in the late 60s and the cracks widened throughout the early 1970s. The rapid increase in the housing stock that public housing authorities around the country had to manage, coupled with rising maintenance costs from aging housing projects put significant financial pressure on local housing authorities. As per the Housing Act of 1937, federal subsidies covered the capital costs of public housing while tenant rents were to be used to cover operating and maintenance costs. In the late 1960s public housing authorities began increasing the rents to cover burgeoning maintenance and management costs,

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[53] Alex Coffin, "Public Housing Here Tops U.S. Picture Coffin," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 5, 1970.

[54] Sheppard, "Area Poor Get Homes."

[55] Bill Seddon, "Poor Services Plague Area." *Atlanta Constitution*. January 18, 1972.

which led to multiple rent strikes in public housing around the country.[56] Senator Edward Brooke, a moderate Republican from Massachusetts and the first African-American to be elected to the United States Senate since reconstruction, worried that the rent in public housing would continue to rise as more housing units came on line. To combat the problem, Brooke added an amendment to legislation in 1969 that capped rents in public housing to no more than twenty percent of the household income.[57] While this successfully limited the rent burden on public housing tenants, it limited the ability of public housing authorities to invest in their public housing communities.

While the Brooke amendment began to put fiscal pressures on local housing authorities, federal officials began to question Johnson's housing strategy as the nation began to wrestle with the first economic downturn since the Great Depression. In 1971, Nixon's administration published the *President's Third Annual Report on National Housing Goals* that outlined some of the government's initial worries regarding the future of public housing. First, the report identified the rising costs of construction and noted that to meet the 10-year goal outlined in the 1968 legislation it would cost "the staggering total of more than $200 billion." In response to this estimation, the report declared "the Federal Government could not stand impassively at the cash register and continue to pay out whatever is necessary to feed runaway inflation of housing costs."[58]

In addition to increased costs, the report also identified issues with the environment in large housing projects. They described some of the large developments as "drab, monolithic

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[56] Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing,* 130.

[57] Howard Husock, "How Brooke Helped Destroy Public Housing," *Forbes,* January 8, 2015.

[58] *President's Third Annual Report on National Housing Goals* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1971): 21.

housing projects, largely segregated, which still stand in our major cities as prisons of the poor—enduring symbols of good intentions run aground on poorly conceived policy, or sometimes simply a lack of policy." In response to these identified problems, the report put the impetus on local governments to create programs that connect to "community growth, development, and services," in order to meet the "housing needs of citizens of all income levels."

An article in the *National Journal* following the report quoted Congressmen, HUD employees, and local elected officials who saw problems with the contemporary housing policy. They highlighted increased costs, poor quality of construction, inefficient local administration, and a lack of overall urban planning. A report from HUD in the fall of 1971 noted that while the production of housing since 1968 was "unquestionably one of the Administration's great success stories," it cautioned the government that the housing strategy carried "the seeds of vulnerability…instances of negligent administration, inferior projects, excessive profits, and overbuilding a particular market can be expected to crop up in spite of our best efforts to prevent them, particularly since our manpower is dangerously thin in such key functions as inspections and appraising."[59]

Some of the problems prophesized by HUD began to plague East Lake Meadows shortly after the development opened. Many of the services more common to inner-city projects were lacking at the Meadows, which stood on the outskirts of the city. The Atlanta Housing Authority promised to open a park, day care center, and health clinic in the neighborhood, but by the time East Lake opened, none of the promised facilities were built. These projects along with expected government services such as policing and trash collecting were made more complex by East

[59] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Housing in the Seventies: A Report on the National Policy Review*.

Lake's location: it was in one of the few areas of the city that stood outside of Fulton County, yet was still considered a part of the city of Atlanta. Complaints arose about the lack of policing at East Lake; in the first few years residents shared experiences where police that they had called refused to respond because they were unsure if it fell within their jurisdiction.[60]

In addition, the physical infrastructure of East Lake was poorly built. The sewer system was awful. In 1974, just three years after East Lake opened, residents complained to maintenance for two days as raw sewage flowed from a manhole cover in the middle of the street into the development.[61] Furthermore, the maintenance system in place at East Lake was wholly incapable of dealing with the problems that affected the four-thousand residents. The maintenance crew consisted of only fifteen full time staff.

Mayor Maynard Jackson toured East Lake in 1974 as part of his administration's strategy to revitalize the city's public housing developments. Tenants complained about high levels of crime, inadequate police protection, and a growing level of open air drug sales. The project manager for the Meadows cited the need for tenant involvement to ameliorate many issues within the project, and Jackson encouraged residents to develop a tenants association to streamline complaints to the AHA.[62]

East Lake residents did create a formal tenants association, the purpose of which was internal and external. Internally, the tenants association intended to "promote harmony and understanding among the Tenants…provide a democratic forum for the communication of concerns and the redress of grievances," and to empower residents to "act in [their] enlightened

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[60] Seddon, "Poor Services Plague Area."

[61] Chet Fuller and John Head, "Public Housing: It Will Take Much, Much More Than Money, Bricks or mortar to solve the ugly dilemma of the people who must live here," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1974.

[62] Jim Stewart, "Mayor Hears Same Housing Story," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1974.

self-interest." Externally, the association hoped to connect the tenants to the housing authority and to local elected officials to ensure issues were being addressed by those with the power to ameliorate them.[63] The tenants elected Eva Belle Davis, an active community member who had lived at the Meadows since they opened. Davis moved to East Lake from South Atlanta where she was actively involved in the emerging local chapter of the Welfare Rights Organization. In the mid-1960s the welfare rights movement worked to organize poor black women to reform the welfare system, particularly Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which failed to provide adequate compensation to support women on welfare.[64] At the time of her elections as president of the tenants association, Davis was serving as president of the DeKalb chapter of the Welfare Rights Organization, and was well known in the community as a grassroots leader. Davis worked under the belief that the government would not solve the problems of the poor, and that the community had to organize to support itself. In the early 1970s she worked to develop a community space at the Meadows, and continuously brought issues of crime and unemployment to the attention of city officials.[65] However, the federal government had, during this time period, turned its back on "hard units" of public housing. Despite the clear need for investment in Davis's work and the work of others at East Lake, the Southeastern regional director of HUD sadly noted in 1974 that there was nothing his office could do to help. "All we can do," he said, "is dispense money as required by government regulations. We don't have any provisions for social programs for the people."[66] Due to this shift in federal policy and despite

[63] Villages at East Lake Records Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority Archives Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority, December 8, 2015.

[64] Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

[65] Chuck Bell, "East Meadows Center Is 'Almost' a Reality," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1972.

[66] Chet Fuller and John Head. "Public Housing."

the efforts of Davis and others, East Lake Meadows spiraled further into a state of violence, drug sale and use, and hellish living conditions for its residents throughout the late 1970s and 1980s.

The era of East Lake's decline was one in which the government decided that the strategy of housing production that the nation had just undertaken had been a mistake. During the 1972 election cycle public housing continued to receive bad press. Congress's Joint Economic Committee released the findings of two studies regarding the nation's housing policy that, according to the chair of the committee, formed a "damning indictment of [the] present housing programs and their administration." The committee's condemnation of public housing coincided with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis. The Pruitt-Igoe project, as historian James Patterson noted, "received more devastating publicity" than any other public housing project at the time. The project was opened in 1954, cost $33 million, and consisted of over thirty eleven story buildings with 2,800 units of public housing.[67] At its peak it was estimated that 12,000 people lived at Pruitt-Igoe.[68] However, the project quickly fell into disrepair and disarray. The elevators were constantly broken, attracting crime in the hallways and stairwells. The apartments were too small and lacked functionality and the local, state, and federal government could not keep up with the costs of repairing the project. By 1971 only 600 people called Pruitt-Igoe home, and the rest of the project was boarded up. [69] In May, 1972 *Life Magazine* photographers and CBS News cameramen documented its demolition which provided the American public "a lasting image of catastrophic failure," of public housing.[70]

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[67] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 336.

[68] John Herbers, "St. Louis Housing Project a Disaster," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1970.

[69] Lawrence Harold Lawsen and Richard Stewart Kirkendall, *A History of Missouri, 1953-2003,* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 67-69.

[70] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins,* 40 and Mariana Mogilevich, Ben Campkin, and Rebecca Ross, "Pruitt Igoe: Blowing up this St Louis housing project was easier than demolishing the myth it created," *The Guardian*, December 10, 2014

Nixon won reelection in 1972 with overwhelming support, and in response to the rising attacks on public housing, he made the controversial decision to put a moratorium on all assisted housing. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) warned Romney and Nixon after the reelection that they could not maintain the status quo of housing subsidy programs. Romney, who had informed Nixon that he would not serve as HUD director for Nixon's second term, advised against a complete moratorium.[71] He believed it would not only "raise havoc with many existing commitments for subsidized housing," but would also "invite a wave of protest and justified cynicism on the part" of local governments, developers, and residents.[72] While the official position declared by Nixon was a complete halt to all of the affordable housing programs, Romney was able to convince Nixon and the OMB to continue funding portions of the program, including modest public housing development and government backed mortgages for home purchasers and apartment developers. Even though public housing development continued, the moratorium symbolized the end of broad support for Johnson's optimistic view of government assisted housing outlined in his 1968 bill, and began a conversation about alternative strategies for housing the poor.[73]

These strategies revolved around one of the policies highlighted by well-regarded economist Henry Aaron, who wrote one of the papers commissioned by the Joint Economic Committee in 1972. Aaron proposed the expansion of the Section 23 Leased Housing Program. This was a small program born out of the 1965 Housing and Urban Development Act that

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and Nora Wendl, "An Ecology from Absence: In Place of Pruitt-Igoe." *New Ecologies, New Constellations, Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture's 101st National Annual Conference in San Francisco*, April 2013.

[71]Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy," 501.

[72]Quoted in Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy," 500-501.

[73] Mitchell, *Federal Housing Policy & Programs*, 13.

allowed for public housing authorities to subsidize the rents of citizens living in private housing.[74] The Joint Economic Committee favored this suggestion, believing that it was more economical and favored by "both tenants and the community."[75] President Nixon concurred with Aaron and the Joint Economic Committee, and in a speech to Congress in September of 1973 he challenged the "underlying assumption that the basic problem of the poor is a lack of housing rather than a lack of income." He cited Pruitt-Igoe as a "particularly dramatic example of the failure of Federal housing policy," that was "only one example of an all too common problem." He declared that "the Federal Government has become the biggest slumlord in history." He contended that the "most promising way to achieve decent housing for all of our families at an acceptable cost appears to be direct cash assistance."[76] Many members of Congress agreed with Nixon's position, and in 1974 Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act. The legislation established the Section 8 program which emphasized the use of cash subsidies in addition to unit production as part of its housing strategy.[77]

Political movement around housing quelled in the wake of Nixon's resignation, however, President Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 brought assisted housing back to the political agenda. Carter was the only President to have ever lived in public housing. Carter and his family lived in a public housing project rural Georgia in the early 1950s after Carter left the Navy and took over his family's faltering peanut farm.[78] Carter was passionate about assisted housing and worked

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[74] Henry J. Aaron, *Shelter and Subsidies: Who Benefits from Federal Housing Policies?* (Brookings Institution, 1972), 133.

[75] Quoted in Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy," 500.

[76] Richard Nixon: "Special Message to the Congress Proposing Legislation and Outlining Administration Actions To Deal With Federal Housing Policy," September 19, 1973. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

[77] Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy," 505.

[78] David Goldberg, "Jimmy Carter`s Town Becomes A Southern Charmer," *Chicago Tribune*, September 4, 1989.

with Congress to push litigation that authorized funding for assisted housing, including the construction of public housing developments.[79] Despite Carter's efforts, however, the election and administration of Ronald Reagan's presidency left an indelible impact on public housing history.[80] Reagan was elected in the fall of 1980 and was the first President in over forty years not to mention housing or poverty in his inaugural address. Reagan did note his goal to "curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment" declared that his top priorities were to "reawaken [America's] industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden."[81]

In regard to housing, Reagan passed an executive order in the summer of 1981 that established the President's Commission on Housing which reported its findings in April 1982. The report mirrored Reagan's position on little federal government involvement. The commission believed that in order to ensure the "American economy will provide housing that is adequate to the needs of the people, available to those who seek it, and affordable," national policy should, "encourage free and deregulated housing markets; rely on the private sector; promote…minimal government intervention; recognize a continuing role of government to address the housing needs of the poor; direct programs toward people than toward structures; and assure maximum freedom of housing choice."[82] With the support of the commission's report, Reagan successfully lobbied Congress to halt the production side of the Section 8 Program and left the vouchers as the dominant method by which the government provided housing for the

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[79] Jimmy Carter: "Housing and Community Development Act of 1980 Remarks on Signing S. 2719 Into Law," October 8, 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.
[80] Hoffman, "History Lessons for Today's Housing Policy," 364.

[81] Ronald Reagan: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

[82] President's Commission on Housing, *The report of the President's commission on housing.* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1982), xv-xvii.

poor.[83] Overall, housing subsidies for housing the low-and-moderate income, along with community development programs, were defunded more than any other domestic program during Reagan's administration.[84]

These cuts were coupled with policies that further targeted the most underprivileged as the main tenant base for public housing. In 1984, HUD instituted a policy that restricted the wealthier poor—those making between 50 percent and 80 percent of area's median income—from access to public housing units built after 1981. In 1987, Congress expanded those who received priority for public housing to include the homeless, the disabled, the mentally ill, and those whose rents amounted to over 50 percent of their household income. These policies worked to significantly increase the concentration of poverty in public housing. In 1981, less than 3 percent of public housing residents were making less than 10 percent of the area median income. By 1990, more than 20 percent of public housing residents were suffering from this level of extreme poverty. [85] The lack of financial investment, coupled with increase in the extent of poverty, left the "drab, monolithic housing projects" identified as a point of worry a decade earlier to decay and continue on a path to destruction.

A shift in the discussion of the roots of poverty also took place in the Reagan administration, led by Charles Murray's *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*. Murray's book, published as Reagan won his second term in a landslide, argued against the beliefs of Michael Harrington and the architects of the Great Society programs that structure, not individual faults, created poverty. Instead, Murray introduced the idea that the Great Society

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[83] Orlebeke, "The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy," 505.

[84] Charles H. Moore, and Patricia A. Hoban-Moore, "Some Lessons from Reagan's HUD: Housing Policy and Public Service," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 23 (1990): 13-18.

[85] Vale, *Purging the Poorest,* 19-20.

programs themselves encouraged poverty by disincentivizing the poor from climbing out of poverty. Murray used fictional characters Phyllis and Harold to show that changes in welfare policies between 1960 and 1970 encouraged single-parent households. In 1960, if Phyllis and Harold had a child, the welfare structure would incentivize the two to marry. However, by 1970 the more economical decision would be for Phyllis and Harold to remain unmarried, as the welfare check that Phyllis would receive as a single mother would be larger than what Harold could make working minimum wage.[86] While Murray was a self-proclaimed libertarian, his view on poverty would serve as one of the main foundations for neoconservative poverty ideology that gained traction throughout the 1980s and was solidified in legislation in the mid-1990s.[87]

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the *Atlanta Constitution* began to report regularly on the terrible living conditions at the Meadows. Reporters highlighted one woman's housing unit, reporting that, "her toilets leak, flooding her apartment with sewage and shorting out her lights. Electrical fixtures and sockets stand open to prying young fingers, but few of the lights work." The plumbing issues persisted: "a one and one-half-square-foot chunk of her ceiling collapsed from above the stairwell one year ago; thanks to the leaky plumbing. Metal and plaster hit two of the nine children living in the four-bedroom apartment."[88] In addition to abominable living conditions residents were exposed to persistent violence, only a fraction of which was covered in the press. The director of DeKalb's Community Relation coalition described the violence at the Meadows as "another problem in ELM that no one seems able to solve," and cited one weekend

[86] Charles Murray, *Losing ground: American social policy, 1950-1980*. (New York: Basic books, 1984).

[87] Irwin Seltzer, *The Neocon Reader*, (Great Britain: Atlantic Books, 2004), 19.

[88] Barry King and George Rodrigue, "Jail would be nicer than some AHA apartments," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1981.

alone in 1980 in which there were seven shootings reported in the project.[89] In the late 1980s, an arson in East Lake Meadows burned down several apartments and left over fifty residents homeless.[90] By the 1980s the pervasiveness of the violence at East Lake led residents and Atlantans throughout the city to refer to the project as "Little Vietnam."

The Atlanta Housing Authority did little to stop the disintegration of East Lake. The housing authority's board was in constant turnover throughout the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s and was marred by scandal. Between the inception of the Housing Authority in 1936 and 1975, only eight members resigned from the board. In 1980 alone, three members resigned from the board.[91] In 1981 news broke that low-level employees were stealing thousands in home supplies from the Housing Authority warehouse.[92] In the late 1980s, a member of the AHA board plead guilty to extorting side payments from public housing tenants, and was sentenced to five years in prison.[93] A survey completed in 1981 found that around half the residents in public housing described the Housing Authority as doing a bad job.[94] Many of the other large scale projects the Housing Authority built in the late 1960s faced similar issues in physical structure and upkeep. In 1981, the Housing Authority declared that they needed over $83 million on top of their operating budget to bring their housing stock to "an acceptable living condition."[95] Continuing budget cuts from the Reagan administration throughout the 1980s left the Housing

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[89] Barry King, "Violence In 'Little Vietnam'," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 2, 1979.

[90] "Woman Held for Arson; 14 Families Homeless," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 14, 1988.

[91] "City housing authority loses third board member in a year," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1980.

[92] Barry King and George Rodrigue, "Report says employees may be robbing housing authority blind," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1981.

[93] "City housing authority loses third board member in a year."

[94] Brenda Mooney, "Constituents say AHA adequate," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 21, 1981.

[95] Barry King and George Rodrigue, "A model in public housing debased," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 15, 1981.

Authority strapped for money, unable to construct new housing for the thousands that remained on their waiting list every year, and incapable of bringing the already existing housing up to a minimum level of acceptability.[96]

In 1987, the horrors of public housing, like those at the Meadows, began to attract national attention. In October of that year William Julius Wilson, a sociologist from the University of Chicago, published *The Truly Disadvantaged*: *The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, which highlighted the deteriorating conditions in America's inner cities. He, as opposed to Murray, emphasized structural issues such as poor transportation in black neighborhoods and the lack of employment for black men as reasons for what he viewed as the cultural breakdown of black families and black neighborhoods in the inner city. He used the public housing projects in Chicago as places of observation, and his work brought national attention to problems of concentrated poverty.[97]

Shortly after Wilson's book was published, *The Wall Street Journal* published a series of above the fold stories that followed the life of a 12-year old boy over one summer in Chicago's Henry Horner Homes public housing project. The story of violence, death, gangs, and detestable living conditions sparked shock and outrage among readers.[98] Following the story, the *New York Times* ran an editorial titled "What It's Like to Be in Hell," that covered life in the same project. The editorial commended the "endurance" of the residents who "in the midst of suffering" were fully determined "to continue on," and "give their children all the love and protection of which

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[96] Pamela Fine, "Housing authority to lose $5 million in federal funds," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 23, 1982.

[97]William Julius Wilson, *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy.* (University of Chicago Press, 2012) and Robert Greenstein, "Prisoners of the Economy," *New York Times*, October 25, 1987.

[98]Alex Kotlowitz, *There are no children here: The story of two boys growing up in the other America.* (New York: Anchor, 1991).

they are capable." It further scolded the American people and government for being incapable of imposing "some minimal discipline within which a reconstruction of decent life can begin," and for being uninterested in giving "a token of our commitment to our fellow citizens, that their American children may live."[99]

The broad coverage of public housing's failures encouraged Congress in 1989 to establish a Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing. The commission was given 18 months and $3 million to fulfill three goals. The first was to "identify those public housing projects…in severe distress;" the second was "to assess the most promising strategies to improve the condition," of those projects; and the third was to "develop a national action plan to eliminate" all public housing with unfit living conditions "by the year 2000."[100] The committee of 18, which included private developers, public housing officials, the leaders of non-profits, community development corporations, and foundations, spent the following three years travelling to public housing projects around the country, gathering data, and commissioning reports to fully understand the problem of severely distressed public housing problem and to develop concrete solutions to once-and-for-all solve the problem of public housing in the United States.

East Lake Comes to the Forefront

On the morning of September 5, 1989, seven thousand Atlantans donned matching shirts with the year 1996 on the front and, in front of twenty-four members of the International

[99] Adam Walinsky, "What It's Like To Be In Hell," *New York Times*, December 4, 1987.

[100] National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (US). *The final report of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing: a report to the Congress and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development*. Commission, 1992.

Olympic Committee, ran a ten kilometer race through downtown Atlanta.[101] The week before, a delegation of Atlantans traveled down to Puerto Rico to make a formal presentation to the Olympic Committee, encouraging them to choose Atlanta as the site for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. While many believed Atlanta was a longshot for the Centennial Olympics, lobbying over the next year made Atlanta one of, if not the favorite, to win the bid. Vying against Athens, Greece among other cities, Atlanta emphasized to the Olympic Committee that the Games in Atlanta would be privately funded, and underscored the distinctness of Atlanta and the Southeast from the rest of the United States.[102]

Three-thousand people gathered outside the Underground Atlanta Shopping Center and rejoiced when the news broke over television that Atlanta had, against all odds, been chosen as the third city in the United States to host the Summer Games.[103]Almost immediately following the announcement, many began to wonder how Atlanta was going to pull off all that they had presented to the Olympic committee in the six short years before the torch would make its way down Peachtree Street. Over a billion dollars of construction was planned, including two sports stadiums. There were worries that the estimated cost was far below what actual costs would look like, and that the image of racial harmony and economic vibrancy was more façade than fact.[104]

One of the first areas that the city looked to for redevelopment was the Techwood and Clark Howell public housing projects. These projects were located in downtown Atlanta, across the street from Georgia Tech and under the shadow of Coca-Cola headquarters. Techwood,

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[101] Peter Applebome, “Atlanta Journal; Atlanta Has a Dream: It's the 1996 Olympics.” *New York Times,* September 5, 1989.

[102] Christine Brennan, “It's the Real Thing: Atlanta Has a Leg Up on Olympics.” *Washington Post,* September 13, 1990.

[103] "Fireworks greet Atlanta's winning bid," *Toronto Star*, September 18, 1990.

[104] Peter Applebome, “Atlanta Seeks to Deliver City It Sold to Olympics,” *New York Times,* September 23, 1990.

opened in 1935, was the first public housing project in the United States. President Roosevelt spoke to a crowd of 50,000 people at Georgia Tech's stadium in commemoration of its opening declaring that Techwood stood "tribute to useful work under government supervision." Clark Howell was opened in the 1940s, and both projects had razed black slums and replaced them with white-only housing for the white working poor. However, Techwood and Clark Howell suffered the same fate as East Lake Meadows and many of Atlanta's major public housing projects. They became housing for Atlanta's poorest residents, were almost exclusively black, and fell into disrepair throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[105]

Shortly following the announcement of the Games, the Atlanta Olympic Planning Committee submitted a plan to redevelop Techwood and Clark Howell. They intended renovate the projects so they would serve as the Olympic Village—housing for athletes—during the Games. Growing interest in Techwood and Clark Howell's real estate, however, encouraged numerous developers to submit their plans to the city to demolish the public housing projects and replace them with more attractive developments. In early 1991, Marvin Arrington, the influential president of the Atlanta City Council, submitted a letter to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that recommended that Techwood and Clark Howell be demolished and replaced with newly developed housing for the Olympic Village. However, he urged the city to do nothing without the "clear and expressed concurrence of the tenants that would be affected." In response Arrington's proposal, the Housing Authority began negotiations with residents, a process that would serve as a blueprint for East Lake over the coming years.[106]

[105] Vale, *Purging the Poorest*, 66-113.

[106] Ibid at 100-113.

Many believed that more had to be done around the city than just the redevelopment of Techwood and Clark Howell before the Games came to Atlanta. Just a month after the Olympics announcement, Former President Jimmy Carter announced an ambitious effort to alleviate the ills of poverty that extended beyond the city's downtown. Carter noted some of the issues that faced the city ahead of the Games, stating that Atlanta had a "major affliction of self-delusion," and that while Atlanta was "proud of getting the Olympics…underneath, Atlanta [was] rotten in many ways, and this needs to be addressed frankly."[107] He called his effort the Atlanta Project.

After losing his bid for presidential reelection in 1981, Carter remained a powerful force in the international sphere. In 1982, the Carter Center, in conjunction with Emory University, opened with the intent of "advancing human rights and alleviating unnecessary human suffering." Throughout the 1980s, the Center focused its efforts on attacking diseases in Africa and Latin America, encouraging a peace process in the Middle East, and promoting democracy throughout the world. The Atlanta Project was the Carter Center's first foray into work of a local scope.[108] Some questioned Carter's ability to bring the success that he found in developing countries to Atlanta, and many were worried about the expansive and undefined nature of the project.[109] Atlanta's business and political elite were galvanized by Carter's focus on the city, and his local and national connections cut through some of the red tape that would have otherwise hampered such an ambitious and cross-sector initiative.[110]

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[107] Elizabeth Kurylo, "Carter plans project to aid city's needy; All-out effort' to use volunteers in tackling various social issues," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* October 25, 1991.

[108] "Timeline of the Carter Center," The Carter Center, http://www.cartercenter.org/about/history.

[109] Elizabeth Kurylo, "Analysis; Can Carter's Third World successes work at home?; Timing is right for local experiment," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* October 26, 1991.

[110] Rebecca Perl, "Bush helps cut red tape for Atlanta Project Carter hails 'leeway to try new ideas'," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* July 9, 1992 and Chet Fuller, "Carter speech fires up Atlanta business leaders," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* March 26, 1992.

A month after announcing the project, Carter named Daniel Sweat as the coordinator for the Atlanta Project. Sweat was a long-time civic leader in Atlanta. He became well-known in 1969 when Mayor Ivan Allen named him chief administrative officer of Allen's second term administration. He then moved on to become the first executive director of the Atlanta Regional Commission, before becoming president in 1988 of a local philanthropic foundation, the Cousins Family Foundation, a position he would continue to serve in while working on the Atlanta Project.[111]

Sweat and Carter chose over twenty projects for the Atlanta Project to initially focus on one of which was East Lake Meadows. In late November 1991 Carter traveled to East Lake to get a sense of the problems that the project intended to ameliorate. He met for an hour with residents of East Lake who shared many of the same issues that they described to Mayor Jackson almost two decades earlier: squalid living conditions, high amounts of drug use, open air drug markets, and severe levels of violence. After walking around the Meadows and talking to its residents, Carter announced that he would make it his personal mission to improve the housing and the schools in East Lake. He intended to focus more on volunteerism than donations to help East Lake, calling for "several thousand volunteers to come in and adopt families and be grannies to help with the children" of East Lake. [112] Furthermore, he hoped to encourage improved law enforcement and to urge the Housing Authority to better carry out their responsibilities in the East Lake neighborhood. He noted that given the "breadth of the problems," at East Lake, there should not be "any time limit" attached to solving them.[113]

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[111] Maria Saporta and Maria Fuller, "Carter picks a chief for city project; Noted civic leader to tackle social ills," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 12, 1991.

[112]Kurylo, "Analysis; Can Carter's Third World successes work at home?"

[113]Douglas Blackmon, "Carter Visits East Lake ;Former presidents says curing ills may take years," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 27, 1991.

The attention brought by Carter had an evanescent effect. Early in November an 11-year old boy was shot and killed when a group of teenagers shot into a crowd of people playing dice on the sidewalk. Less than a week later, an eight-year boy was accidentally shot and killed in his bed by police during an early morning drug raid.[114] In response the city implemented a curfew for children sixteen and younger, and the police began operating a mobile command post as well as around the clock patrols. While this instigated a cease fire between drug dealers and sent them "behind closed doors," the semblance of peace would not last. Eva Davis, still serving as president of the tenants association, noted that while "it's been a great difference since [the police and Carter] have been here…the week they leave here, every drug dealer and pusher will know it." [115]

Five days later, in one of the units at East Lake, a fight between two men over a woman unraveled when one of them "pulled out a handgun and chased the second man into a nearby parking lot, where he shot and then stabbed him." For Sweat the violence only reaffirmed Carter's decision to develop the Atlanta Project. He warned that the incident should not cause activists to "panic," adding that "anytime anything happens to anyone in East Lake Meadows we should take it serious and work harder. But the program isn't going to swoop in overnight and have the streets of East Lake Meadows paved with gold." For Davis however, it was yet "another strike" against East Lake. In the aftermath of the event she summarized the whole of East Lake

[114] Susan Laccetti, "Children and violence: an Atlanta tragedy; our romance with guns has to end,' upset lowery says; leaders urge stricter curfew as violence claims third Atlanta youth this; week," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* November 13, 1991.

[115] Kathy Scruggs, "Life in Little Vietnam; Teenagers, Guns and Drugs: Despite a Cease-Fire,; Residents Say East Lake Project Still a War Zone," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 23, 1991.

Meadows as "nothing but a bunch of vacant buildings….a bunch of people thrown up there together, sleeping on top of each other like rats and roaches."[116]

The Atlanta Project put a newfound spotlight on East Lake Meadows, and the extent of its issues shocked and worried Carter and the political and business elite involved in his project. The average yearly income hovered around five-thousand dollars and over eighty-percent of the adults were unemployed. Ninety-five percent of the almost three-thousand households were headed by women, and over sixty percent of the population were under the age of twenty. The annual drug trade was valued to be thirty-eight million dollars, and over twenty percent of the apartments were vacant. The city faced a daunting challenge.[117]

In August 1992, the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing published its report that provided some insight into how the city of Atlanta and cities across the United States could combat their public housing difficulties. The commission, which was chaired by Bill Green, Manhattan's congressional representative, and Vincent Lane, head of the Chicago Housing Authority, travelled to over 25 cities, visited hundreds of public housing units and spoke to thousands of public housing residents.

The report defined severely distressed public housing as housing that "falls short of being able to provide a safe, secure, and decent environment and a supportive community for its residents."[118] The commission found that 86,000 units, or 6 percent of America's total public housing met their definition of severely distressed. Given the extent of the di

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[116] John Blake, and John Laccitti, "East Lake scene of another killing; Incident reaffirms Carter's project," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* December 2, 1991.

[117]Douglas Blackmon, "East Lake; Can gulf between two worlds be bridged?" *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* December 22, 1991 and Renee Glover, "The Toxic Impact of Concentrated Poverty." http://ahalessonslearned.blogspot.com/2009/08/toxic-impact-of-concentrated-poverty_17.html.

[118] National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (US), B-2.

scourse of disaster surrounding public housing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this seemed like a relatively low number. However, the 86,000 units in severe distress housed families who lived in "extreme poverty in almost unimaginable and certainly intolerable conditions." The Commission viewed the living conditions in these units as "a national disgrace." Even so, the Commission understood that this meant that the other 94 percent of the units represented "an important rental housing resource for many low-income families," and required that the Commission work to maintain this resource.[119]

The Commission's strategies for revitalizing severely distressed housing focused heavily on the condition of the residents of public housing. The Commission believed that "the absence of economic resources…and assistance to public housing residents is a consistent, pervasive, and inexorably destructive contributor to distress." They contended that if the purpose of public housing was to "provide homes and a safe living environment to those people most in need," then there should be a distinct focus on "the *residents* living in severe distress as well as the physical condition," of their homes. Working under this belief, the Commission's recommendations were all "framed within the context of providing for the social and support service needs of the resident population."[120]

The recommendations for improving the plight of the residents of public housing focused on improving economic condition of residents by supporting their businesses and providing them job opportunities, and also stressed the importance of resident involvement in their housing. During the Commission's site visits and conversations with residents, they found that the residents of severely distressed public housing suffered from a "lack of involvement and active

[119] Ibid at 3.

[120] Ibid at 4 and 36.

participation in decision making concerning their communities." They spoke to the president of a tenants association in a public housing project in Washington, D.C. who described her frustration about how "people don't even listen to people in public housing when they cry out." The "service providers," she explained, "give us our needs according to the way they have been trained, not the way we ask or we present ourselves." Conversations like this and other observations during their research led the Commission to believe that involving residents "at every level" of the management of their housing would address the "institutional abandonment and isolation of severely distressed public housing," and allow local housing authorities to better provide for the needs of their tenants. Their specific recommendations included increased "funding for resident support services," the development of a system that required local housing authorities to "solicit resident input prior to eliminating" programs, and the appointment by the President of "White House staff to coordinate social and support services to be delivered to severely distressed public housing."[121]

In terms of the physical housing developments, the commission recommended establishing a program within HUD that focused specifically on severely distressed housing units. They recommended the program authorize funds for rehabilitation or destruction of housing units, and the report recommended that the decision for rehabilitation or destruction be left to local housing authorities and public housing residents. The report noted that the one-for-one replacement rule, which mandated that each "hard" unit of public housing that was torn down had to be replaced, disincentivized local housing authorities from tearing down units due to the significant cost of building new units. The commission therefore urged HUD to fund local housing authorities to ensure they could rebuild any housing units that were torn down. The

[121] Ibid at 45-57.

commission also recommended that replacement units be built in the same neighborhood as the original public housing in order to ensure it was constructed "in a timely manner," and encouraged that any new developments work to mix the incomes in the neighborhood. The commission encouraged that this new program only apply to the 86,000 units of housing they found severely distressed and stressed that there be "no diminution in the total number of units" available to low-income families.

Overall, the report encouraged members of government at all levels involved in public housing to invest in the improvement of the physical condition of housing developments and the neighborhoods that housed them, while stressing investment in the human element of public housing. The commission acknowledged the work that public housing residents were already doing to improve their neighborhoods, and the report demanded that these residents be taken into consideration when major decisions were being made that impacted the places they called home.

"A Hidden Light at East Lake"

While the Olympics brought the city's attention to the areas of violence and poverty in the city, residents and community groups continued to work within East Lake Meadows to improve the quality of life. The tenants association met regularly, led by Eva Davis, to discuss the neighborhood issues and bring them to the attention of the appropriate authorities. The tenants association maintained a relationship with their representative on the Atlanta City Council, Davetta C. Johnson. Johnson, first elected in 1991, lived a mile from the Meadows and worked to bring the complaints of the tenants association to the AHA directly.[122] In 1991, Councilwoman Johnson and the tenants association fostered a relationship with Home Depot, the home improvement store chain based in Atlanta to "improve the landscape and appearance of the

[122] "Atlanta Elections '93 citylife voters guide city council," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* October 28, 1993.

project." The program developed a lawn care tool bank in the Meadows and was encouraged to not only beautify the project but also to increase tenant participation and ownership of their home.[123]

Davis also set up open meetings with Atlanta's public transit authority, MARTA, to voice the concerns of the community in regards to transportation. The meetings highlighted issues pertaining to the accessibility of the bus stops and the busses themselves for handicapped residents, the creation of lighted shelter covers at the bus stops, and the rebuilding of bus stop signs that had been damaged and were causing the busses to skip stops. All notes on these meetings and all meetings that identified issues with the Meadows were sent directly to the executive director of the Housing Authority.[124]

In addition to the activity of the tenants association, non-profits, community groups, and churches worked within the East Lake community with the hopes of providing some relief, the most notable of which was the Urban Training Organization of Atlanta. It was founded in 1968 as an interfaith response to racial tension and economic crises facing Atlanta. The organization was an amalgam of seven denominations, three theological seminaries, the Jewish community, and representatives from Atlanta business and community organizations.[125] The Urban Training Organization came to East Lake Meadows in the late 1980s and focused its efforts on residents of the Meadows between the ages of six and eighteen. They employed a full-time staffer, Dewy Merritt, to work in the Meadows with these groups. At the request of residents, Merritt created

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[123] Villages at East Lake Records Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority Archives Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority, Dec 8, 2015.

[124] Ibid.

[125] "Rev. Calvin Houston named executive head of UTOA," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 16, 1984. One of the three theological seminaries included Emory's Candler School of Theology.

social clubs to rival the Meadows' drug gangs. The residents called these alternative groups "Cool Gents" and "Cool Girls."[126]

In 1993, the director of the Urban Training Organization, Clay Moore, wrote an editorial in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that described the work that they had done in "Little 'Nam." He highlighted the work of Merritt to help the residents "analyze what was happening and to organize against violence," but noted that "the actual work was done by the residents who had the courage and fortitude to undertake the mission…to save their community." The focus of the Urban Training Organization was to complete the "painstakingly slow" work of gaining the trust and respect of the youth in the Meadows and teaching non-violence. The program that the Urban Training Organization developed, however, proved effective. Moore claimed that in the six short years of their involvement, the Meadows was in "much better shape." According to Moore, "You won't see drug buys being made openly, and the community is directly involved in several programs that engender a positive attitude.[127]

Eva Davis described the work of Merritt and the Urban Training Organization as doing "…what Carter [had not] done," with the Atlanta Project. Many viewed Merritt as a father figure who performed a myriad of activities, from posting bail for youth who found themselves in jail to finding children's birth certificates when needed. His focus and that of the organization as a whole, however, was for the residents to "take credit for everything" in order to develop a sense of empowerment in the community. The work of the Urban Training Organization, while intentionally kept under the radar, was noticed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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[126] "A hidden light at East Lake Low-profile group's work predates Atlanta Project," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* June 10, 1993.

[127] Clay Moore, "Lessons from 'Little 'Nam'," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 18, 1993.

in the early 1990s as an effective method of reducing violence in communities by focusing on strategies that were "impact oriented," and were part of a "long-term commitment."[128]

The publicity of the Atlanta Project, however, cut into the support for the Urban Training Organization. Like many other small organizations that depended on donations, the Atlanta Project acted as a "big dry sponge landing in a small puddle." The Urban Training Organization saw its annual budget decrease by thirty percent in 1992. The future of the organization in East Lake was in question. "If someone else can do it better, it would be ok, but nobody's doing exactly what we're doing," Merritt explained. We're helping them form an organization that can support them like a family."[129]

Others shared similar critical perspectives of the Atlanta Project. While Carter's work intended to highlight and funnel funding to entrenched and successful community organizations, leaders of some of the city's most established non-profits observed a different reality in the first two years of The Atlanta Project. Anita Beaty, the executive director of the Atlanta Task Force on the Homeless, described the work of the Project as "appalling." She believed that the bulk of the "umbrella planning was done without involvement of the people in the trenches."[130] Bill Bolling, the executive director of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, worried that along with the lack of proper direction, The Atlanta Project was acting in direct competition with many of the community's non-profits. Philanthropic organizations in the city encouraged community organizations and non-profits to refrain from announcing major fundraising campaigns until

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[128] "A hidden light at East Lake Low-profile group's work predates Atlanta Project." and John Blake, "Relationships, not rhetoric; One Atlanta group works to prevent violence by investing the time to earn kids' trust and being there when conflict occurs," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* September 22, 1995.

[129] "A hidden light at East Lake Low-profile group's work predates Atlanta Project."

[130] Douglas Blackmon, "Rebuilding: tackling urban blight in Atlanta, Los Angeles Atlanta: A year of organizing - along with fence-mending," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* November 22, 1992.

Carter finished raising the last $6 million of the estimated $26 million five-year budget for the Atlanta Project. Sweat assured non-profits in the fall of 1992 that "as soon as [The Atlanta Project is] fully funded, and we hope [that will be] soon, then a lot of our efforts will be directed toward channeling resources to other organizations that are serving a legitimate community need."[131]

In late October 1992 The Atlanta Project announced its first notable success at East Lake. In a reported "direct, behind the scenes appeal," Carter successfully lobbied Secretary of HUD Jack Kemp to award a $33.5 million dollar grant to the Atlanta Housing Authority to be used to renovate East Lake Meadows "from the ground up."[132] The grant was the largest of its type ever awarded to a public housing development in the Southeast, and housing officials and residents were both excited at the prospect of improvement at East Lake. The regional director of HUD, Ray Harris, saw the funds as an opportunity to "increase security and keep the troublemakers out." Harris hoped that the funds would turn the Meadows into "a community [his] mother would live in." Eva Davis viewed the grant as a "miracle," and an answer to everything that the residents had been asking for.[133] They looked forward to the funds being used for everything from replacing the electrical system to installing new furnaces in every unit. However, the terms of the grant required that the residents wait over a year and a half for the two-year revitalization process to begin. The Atlanta Project planned to take the interim time to develop a committee of residents to identify priorities and find qualified architects for the job, a process that followed

[131] Peter Scott, "Service groups feel threatened by Atlanta Project Carter clout cited as donations fall," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 17, 1992.

[132] Lyle Harris, "$ 33.5 million for East Lake Meadows Project to get major overhaul Tenant leader hails funding as 'a miracle'," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 29, 1992.

[133] Ibid.

many of the recommendations made in the national commission's report on severely distressed housing.

Shortly after the Atlanta Project announced receipt of the grant a debate broke out over the logic of spending such a significant amount of money on the Meadows. Landlords of low-income apartment units and non-profit developers contended that they could house just as many people for far cheaper. One landlord expressed his frustration, saying "to spend that much money to house people in the ghetto and keep them there while private apartments are available for them is an outrage." The executive director of Habitat for Humanity Atlanta noted that his organization could build a single family home for $16,000 less than the per unit revitalization cost at East Lake.[134] Others saw the revitalization of East Lake as a long-term investment in supporting the city's poor. The editorial board of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* highlighted the importance of the grant for not only the amelioration of the housing stock, but also for the enhancement of the community's job training programs, the improvement of the neighborhood schools, and the development of local medical facilities.[135]

"Bringing Golf to Public Housing"

Before The Atlanta Project and the residents of East Lake Meadows could begin to fully conceptualize how the $33 million could be spent to improve East Lake, an unexpected Atlantan who made his fortune constructing much of the city's skyline entered the fray and altered the city's visions of the redevelopment possibilities at East Lake.

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[134] Lyle Harris, "Some question if it's smart to spend $ 51,000 a unit to rebuild East Lake," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* November 5, 1992.

[135] "The public housing agenda," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* November 7, 1992.

In mid-November 1993, the development firm Cousins Properties purchased the East Lake Golf Club for $4.5 million.[136] Cousins Properties was one of the most successful and oldest publicly traded real-estate companies in the country. The company was founded in 1958 when Tom Cousins, an ambitious twenty-six year old, decided to start his own real estate company and make a mark on the city he called home. He took the company public in 1962 and by 1964 was the largest home builder in the state of Georgia. In the proceeding two decades, Cousins Properties developed much of the contemporary Atlanta skyline, including the Omni Hotel and the Bank of America building.[137] Cousins had a longtime passion for golf and interest in the East Lake Country Club. He remembered hopping over the fence at East Lake as a young boy and watching Bobby Jones hit "the greatest golf shot" he had ever seen.[138] In purchasing the East Lake Country Club, Cousins was determined to bring the course back to its former glory.

In the twenty years of East Lake's decline, the golf course struggled to maintain its membership and had fallen into disrepair. In 1971, Bobby Jones donated his memorabilia to the new Atlanta Athletic Club facility north of Atlanta, fearing that East Lake Country Club would soon succumb to its debts. By 1983, the membership proved Jones wrong and successfully paid off its mortgage; however, as one of the course's owners noted "we haven't kept up the place as well as we might have." While he viewed it as remarkable that the course stayed open at all,

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[136]Mary Louise Kelly, "Reviving a legendary country club An Atlanta developer wants to return East Lake to its former splendor, when the legendary Bobby Jones played golf there," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 23, 1993.

[137] "Reaching New Heights," Cousins Properties, accessed February 23, 2016, http://cousinsproperties.com/about-us/history/.

[138] Patricia Sellers, "More Than a Game Tom Cousins chose an unlikely centerpiece--a golf course--to revive an Atlanta neighborhood. Is his project a model for other cities?" *Forbes*, September 3, 2001.

"wild onions [had] invaded the fairways" and the "roof of the massive Tudor clubhouse" was falling apart.[139] Instead of Ryder Cups, East Lake was hosting local college tournaments.[140]

Cousins planned to bring the top professional and amateur tournaments back to East Lake, and closed the course for 18 months immediately following its purchase for renovations. Cousins hired Rees Jones to revitalize the course.[141] Jones was one of the most accomplished golf course architects in the country and had recently finished restoring The Country Club, a Donald Ross original, to championship form. Cousins hoped he would do the same with the remains of East Lake's Donald Ross design. Moreover, the course held sentimental value for Jones. Jones' father, also an accomplished golf course architect who had designed the Atlanta Athletic Club's new course north of the city, was a friend of Bobby Jones and the two had played together at East Lake in the 1930s and 1940s.[142] Cousins Properties invested $25 million into the golf course and the clubhouse before it re-opened in July of 1995. A month before it opened, the Professional Golf Association had agreed to host the final tournament of its 1998 season at East Lake, and the United States Golf Association had announced East Lake as the host of the 2001 United States Amateur Championship.[143]

Before East Lake would be ready to host the world's top golfers, Cousins felt the need to address the problems of poverty and violence in the broader neighborhood and in the Meadows. Throughout his career Cousins had been an active philanthropist, driven largely by his faith. Cousins and his wife Ann were devout Christians and throughout their careers tithed their

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[139] Jim Auchmutey, "East Lake Winning Battle for Survival as Hallowed Links," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 24, 1983.

[140] "Track, tennis, golf schedules," *Atlanta Constitution,* February 17, 1974.

[141] No relation to Bobby Jones.

[142]M. James Ward, "Q & A with East Lake Golf Club Designer Rees Jones," *Epoch Times,* September 14, 2014.

[143] Glenn Sheeley, "East Lake G.C. expects to host '98 Tour finale." *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* November 29, 1995.

income. Cousins established his first charitable foundation, the Cousins Foundation, in 1963 and funded it primarily through stock in Cousins Properties, which grew so fast that they had "trouble giving it all away." In 1987, he established a second charitable foundation, the CF Foundation, Inc. which was managed by Dan Sweat who would begin serving concurrently as the leader of the Atlanta Project in 1991. Both foundations funded a broad array of local education, arts, and faith-based non-profits. After purchasing the golf course at East Lake in 1993 Cousins was struck by the extent of poverty surrounding the golf course, and he focused his philanthropic efforts to coincide with his business venture at East Lake.[144]

Cousins worked actively to buy up property in the neighborhood to accelerate its revitalization. Beginning shortly after the purchase of the golf course, Cousins worked through intermediaries to purchase land in and around the golf course. Cousins Properties had a longtime relationship with King & Spalding, one of Atlanta's oldest and most powerful law firms, which in turn maintained a close relationship with the small local law firm McLarty, Robinson & Van Voorhies. In early 1994, under the direction of Cousins, King & Spalding asked Paul McLarty, one of the founding partners at McLarty, Robinson & Van Voorhies, to set up a shell corporation and purchase land "contiguous to the golf course and in the [East Lake] neighborhood" on behalf of Cousins but without connection to Cousins' firm. The veil of secrecy was to ensure that sellers did not hike up the price of their property. McLarty worked with an African-American real estate broker who knocked on doors in East Lake and made many of the sales on "some of the worst properties" in the neighborhood. This helped to clear the way for development that not only

[144] SECF Channel, "Tom Cousins Purpose Built Communities," Filmed [June 2013]. Youtube video, 30:39. Posted [June 2013]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cat5LfGPkNE.

added to the profits of Cousins Properties but also made the neighborhood "look better" to the world's top golfers and the upper echelon of business and politics in Atlanta.[145]

Cousins went beyond buying up property in the East Lake neighborhood, and began in 1994 to strategize the revitalization of what he believed to be at the center of the neighborhood's problems—the East Lake Meadows public housing project. Throughout the year Cousins worked with his colleagues at the East Lake Golf Club and the CF Foundation, as well as with city officials to devise the plan for "The New Community at East Lake." In June, 1994 Walter Ashmore, the project manager for the redevelopment of East Lake Country Club, hinted to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that a portion of the new membership fees would be invested in the East Lake community.[146] Cousins also began speaking with the Atlanta Housing Authority about a redevelopment plan at the Meadows. His ideas proved attractive to Renee Glover, a former Wall Street corporate lawyer who had recently joined the board of the AHA, and was swiftly climbing the ranks amid the organization's tumult.

Glover joined the board of the Housing Authority during a time of persistent turnover and rampant mismanagement. In 1992, HUD published rankings of the 815 housing authorities in the southeast, and the Atlanta Housing Authority ranked second-worst in the region.[147] When Maynard Jackson, who was finishing his third term as the city's mayor, approached Glover about joining the AHA's board, she initially wondered what she could had done to deserve such a punishment. As a relatively new Atlantan, her experience with the AHA was what she read in the papers, "corruption scandals, bad situations, shootings, [and] drug trades." What drew her to the

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[145] McLarty, Paul. Interview by Adam Goldstein. Phone. Atlanta, GA, February 9, 2016.

[146] Joe Strauss, "Restoring East Lake's splendor Cousins wants to turn Bobby Jones' old course into a living memorial," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 11, 1994.

[147] Vale, *Purging the Poorest*, 96.

position, however, was the prospect of improving the plight of her "folks—African Americans" in the city.[148] Under the direction of the new mayor, Bill Campbell, Glover became the chair of the AHA's board in 1993, served as acting director of the Authority when the executive director abruptly quit in March of 1994, and finally was appointed CEO of the Housing Authority in September 1994. She acted quickly and with the experience of a Wall Street veteran to craft the Housing Authority she believed would succeed. In her first eight months as CEO, she fired or received the resignations of fourteen senior Housing Authority officials.[149]

Glover was a firm believer that the large public housing projects of the 1970s and 1980s were an utter failure, and that the living conditions in Atlanta's public housing were intolerable. These contentions led Glover to prioritize getting "people out of these horrible conditions," while vowing not to "rebuild a newer version of something that has failed." She also believed that "the private sector had to be very much a part of the solution" to the housing problem.[150] This made Cousins' interest in revitalizing the Meadows through the golf course's revitalization particularly attractive to Glover and her Housing Authority.

Cousins assigned the work on the Meadows redevelopment to the CF Foundation. Dan Sweat, who had been leading the Atlanta Project and the CF Foundation since 1991, matriculated to the foundation's board, and Greg Giornelli took over as executive director in 1994. Giornelli was working in the DeKalb County district attorney's office after graduating from the University of Georgia School of Law School where he had met his wife, Tom Cousins' daughter Lillian Cousins. The two were married in the early 1990s and Cousins asked his son-in-law to run the

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[148] Ibid at 107-108.

[149] Ibid at 108.

[150] Ibid at 108-114.

CF Foundation as it took on the East Lake project.[151] In 1994, Giornelli and Glover approached the East Lake Meadows tenants association, still run by Eva Davis, to begin discussing plans to redevelop the Meadows that went beyond the rehabilitation that Carter and the Atlanta Project had planned.[152]

Davis and others were immediately skeptical of Glover and Cousins' intentions and requested the counsel of longtime public housing advocate Dennis Goldstein. Goldstein, a self-described "conscientious objector and community organizer," dropped out of the University of California at Berkley in 1968 itching for direction and clarity in his life. Following a friend and his interest in the Civil Rights movement, Goldstein moved to Atlanta and began working at a community center in Peoplestown. At the community center he met the leader of Atlanta's budding Welfare Rights Movement, Ethel May Matthews, and her next door neighbor, Eva Davis. He found that he was passionate about working with Matthews and Davis, who he described as "indigenous black leaders," and decided to attend law school in the early 1970s.[153]

After completing his undergraduate degree and finishing law school, Goldstein began his career with the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Atlanta Legal Aid was dedicated to working on behalf of low-income people at no cost, and Goldstein began to specialize in the representation of community groups.[154] He communicated regularly with the presidents of Atlanta's largest public

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[151] Glenn Sheeley and S.A. Reid, "Bringing golf to public housing; Foundation hopes Eat Lake rehabilitation project will turn area around," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 18, 1995 and "Lillian Cousins Giornelli," Atlanta Rotary Club, accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.atlantarotary.org/lillian-cousins-giornelli.

[152]Darryl Fears and Charmagne Helton, "East Lake Redevelpoment; 'Where are we going?'; Tenant opposition: Public housing residents are concerned the mixed-income proposal will force them to relocate," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 2, 1995.

[153]Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein. Phone. February 7, 2016 and Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by LeAnn Lands. Skype. July 31, 2009.

[154] "About Us | Atlanta Legal Aid Society," Atlanta Legal Aid, accessed on March 1, 2016, http://www.atlantalegalaid.org/about-us/.

housing projects, including Davis after her move to East Lake in 1971. Throughout the 1980s he advised the Citywide Tenants, a formal association of the tenant association presidents of Atlanta Housing Authority public housing developments. He filed a number of class action lawsuits on behalf of the organization and for individual tenant associations focused on violations of public housing leases and federal public housing regulations.[155]

When Davis contacted Goldstein he was representing the residents of Techwood Homes and Clark Howell in their negotiations with the city. Goldstein worked on behalf of the residents, who felt they had little say in the future of their housing or where they would go after it was demolished. With Goldstein's aid, the residents and the city agreed on a development plan in 1994. By that time the process had spanned three directors of the Atlanta Housing Authority and two mayors. The Housing Authority and the residents agreed to demolish the public housing and, through a public-private partnership, rebuild a mixed-income community.[156]

Davis and Goldstein were in contact throughout Goldstein's work at Techwood and Clark Howell, and sought his help given their long relationship and his expertise in working for public housing residents in the redevelopment process.[157] As he was still tied up with work at Techwood and Clark Howell the tenants association asked the Atlanta Project for full-time legal support. In response, President Carter asked Frank Alexander to work on behalf of the tenants association. Alexander was on leave from Emory University's School of Law, serving as a fellow of the Carter Center assisting with the Atlanta Project. Alexander had attended the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill before receiving degrees in law and divinity from Harvard in 1978. He started as a professor at Emory in the early 1980s, teaching property and

[155] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[156] Ibid at 112-114.

[157] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

real estate law, and became an expert on federal housing policies and community development. Alexander began working on behalf of the tenants association in 1994, and attended the initial bimonthly meetings between the Housing Authority, the tenants association, and the CF Foundation.[158]

In the fall of 1994, President Carter met with Glover and Alexander and received an update on the work at East Lake. In response to their discussion, Carter encouraged Glover to "salvage as much as possible from existing facilities," believing that "renovation costs are almost always less than destruction and replacement." He also noted that if any funds were to come from the Atlanta Project, Glover and Alexander would have to be in "full coordination with" Cousins and the residents of the Meadows.[159] Glover, Alexander, the residents, and Giornelli continued to meet regularly throughout the winter and spring of 1995 as the Housing Authority and the CF Foundation worked to fully flesh out a redevelopment plan for the Meadows.

On a warm summer evening at the end of May, 1995, the Housing Authority and the CF Foundation unveiled their plan for redeveloping the Meadows publicly to the East Lake Meadows tenants association. They proposed demolishing the 650 units of housing at the Meadows and replacing it with a mixed-income development of 406 single family homes, duplexes, and apartments, 150-acres of recreation space, and a public golf course. They projected the redevelopment would cost $52 million; $32 million would be covered by the HUD grant awarded for East Lake's rehabilitation, and the rest would be raised by Cousins. Cousins planned to raise the $20 million using membership fees from the East Lake Golf Club. He gave the club to the CF Foundation and planned to invest the majority of the $250,000 membership fee for

[158] Alexander, Frank. Interview by Adam Goldstein. Emory University School of Law. January 15, 2016.

[159] Villages at East Lake Records Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority Archives Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority, Dec. 8, 2015.

businesses in the Meadows' redevelopment. This allowed the future corporate members to gain a $200,000 tax write-off from joining East Lake Golf Course, and enabled Cousins to write off a portion of the almost $30 million that Cousins Properties had invested in the golf course's revitalization.[160]

The plan drew immediate praise from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, which published an editorial two days after the plan was announced praising the "ambitious proposal" to "transform the East Lake neighborhood into a symbol of hope." They praised Renee Glover for taking an active role in "changing the way that public housing" worked, and lauded Cousins for "reaching out to make the neighborhood better," instead of "walling [the East Lake Golf Club] off from the rest of the East Lake area."[161]

Just as immediate, however, was the public critique and skepticism on the part of the residents and the tenants association at the Meadows. "Where are we going?" and "how will we survive?" were two questions that immediately came to mind for Vivian Louise Featherstone, a 67 year old Meadows resident. Now on top of the bullets, she felt she had to fear Cousins' and Glover's bulldozers as well. Eva Davis vowed to reject the plan. "A lot of residents feel like this is a sneaky way to get rid of us," Davis said. She believed that Cousins and Glover were "just pushing [the residents] away from the golf course."[162] Many of the residents were worried about the stark reduction in the amount of public housing units—from 650 to 206—and the lack of planning for replacement housing. DeKalb County's commissioner had similar concerns, saying

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[160] Macon Morehouse, "New lease on life for East Lake?; Rebirth: New neighborhood would boast mixed-income housing, recreation area and a public golf course," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 1, 1995 and Glenn Sheeley and S.A. Reid, "Bringing golf to public housing."

[161] "Transforming East Lake into an urban showplace," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 2, 1995

[162] Morehouse, "New lease on life for East Lake?"

that while he wasn't "anti-golf course," he wanted to ensure that Cousins and the Housing Authority did "a real good job of placement."[163]

Glover understood the concern and stressed that this was "just a proposal," and that "nothing [would] happen without resident consent."[164] Giornelli also noted that "the next challenge will be to find good, decent, safe housing off the East Lake Meadows site."[165] Giornelli understood that he and his colleagues at the CF Foundation were not "revitalization experts," but instead described them as "reasonably intelligent folks with common sense" who saw the problem of cyclical poverty in public housing and wanted to "solve that problem in a specific neighborhood." Giornelli remained confident that the CF Foundation, the Housing Authority, and the tenants would "be able to work through this together."[166]

The editorial board of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, however, had no patience for the residents' complaints and worries. While members of the board thought that residents "ought to be heard," they contended that the residents at the Meadows "live, temporarily we trust, off the beneficence of the tax-paying public." Given this, the editorial board believed that the residents therefore "ought not be able to dictate the nature of that beneficence."[167] This sentiment represented how the paper would cover the East Lake story as it continued to develop throughout the 1990s.

Over the next six months, the Housing Authority and the tenants association, with the guidance of Goldstein and Alexander, met weekly with the hopes of working towards a

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Fears and Helton, "East Lake Redevelopment."

[165] Ibid.

[166] Macon Morehouse, "Revised plan pushed for East Lake; Residents contend more homes needed," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 14, 1995.

[167] "Transforming East Lake into an urban showplace."

redevelopment agreement. The residents' main goal in the negotiations was to ensure that the residents could live in the newly built facilities.[168] This desire mirrors the recommendation for resident-focused redevelopment made by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Housing in its 1992 report. While it seemed that immediately following the report federal policies would support resident-focused revitalization, political shifts instigated a policy move away from investing in residents and toward investing in broad neighborhood revitalization driven by the construction of mixed-income housing developments. The effects of these policy changes trickled down to the tenants association meeting room in East Lake Meadows, and weakened the position and bargaining leverage that the residents had during negotiations with the Housing Authority.

In October 1992, two months after the report on severely distressed public housing was published, Congress passed legislation that enacted the Urban Revitalization Demonstration program, also known as HOPE VI. The goal of the program was twofold: first, to "transform public housing communities from islands of despair and poverty into a vital and integral part of the larger neighborhoods," and second, to "create an environment that encourages and supports individual and family movement toward self-sufficiency." Only the largest forty housing authorities were eligible for HOPE VI funding, and in its first two years, the program allocated over a billion dollars to 80 percent of the eligible housing authorities. HOPE VI stipulated that 80 percent of the funding be invested in capital costs, replacement housing, and management costs, and the remaining 20 percent be invested in community development. Community development covered a wide range of programs, from job training programs to resident

[168] Alexander, Frank. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

relocation support services.[169] In 1993, a housing policy expert for The Urban Institute described some of the early HOPE VI programs as distinct from past efforts to revitalize housing due to the strong emphasis on "community participation in policy formulation and program implementation."[170]

Beginning in 1993, however, the HOPE VI Program began to evolve from an "embellished modernization" and community development program to one that encouraged full scale demolition and community replacement.[171] This was largely due to a massive political shift in the 1994 midterm elections. Bill Clinton's 1992 election brought the Democratic Party back to the White House for the first time in 16 years. Clinton had run on a moderate platform, siding himself with the centrist ideology of New Democrats. In his first two years in office, however, a Republican led attack painted Clinton as a classic "tax and spend" leftist Democrat. The attack was led by Newt Gingrich, a Republican Congressman representing the white flight northern suburbs of Atlanta. The attack took written form in the ten-point "Contract with America," co-authored by Gingrich and published by the Republic National Committee in 1994. The contract vowed to balance the budget, reduce crime by "building more prisons and making sentences longer," reform welfare by encouraging "people to work, not to have children out of wedlock," and "roll back government regulations."[172] Unsurprisingly, Republicans viewed HUD as one of the big government programs that needed to be reined in, if not cut entirely.

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[169] Gayle Epp, "Emerging Strategies for Revitalizing Public Housing Communities," *Housing Policy Debate* 7:3 (1996): 569-572.

[170] Christopher Walker, "Nonprofit housing development: Status, trends, and prospects." *Housing Policy Debate* 4:3 (1993): 369-414.

[171] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 64-65.

[172] Congressional Record Volume 140, Number 134 (Thursday, September 22, 1994).

It was under this scrutiny that Henry Cisneros took over as the Secretary of HUD. Cisneros had served as the first Hispanic mayor of a major city, San Antonio, and after completing four terms as mayor he moved to the private sector to chair an asset management firm. Cisneros was confirmed as Secretary of HUD in January 1993, and almost immediately began attending congressional hearings in which he had to lobby for HUD's survival. In front of Congress in 1993, Cisneros declared that he would drive the "most far-reaching reform of federal housing…in 60 years."[173] Cisneros was in favor of deregulating HOPE VI to allow it to serve Americans with a higher income, but was still actively concerned with the plight of the extremely poor concentrated in public housing at the time. When asked in Congress whether "an approach that…focused less on" residents who were suffering the most in public housing "might be a better approach," Cisneros clarified that it was important to "solve the problems of the people who are poor who are [in public housing] now," and believed he could do so by changing "the dynamic incentive structure for work" in order to raise incomes.[174]

When the Republicans routed the Democrats in the 1994 midterm elections and took control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1952, it became clear that Cisneros' "reform of federal housing," would be one that focused less on solving the "problems of the people who are poor who are [in public housing]" and more on reducing the federal government's role in housing, and encouraging private sector involvement. This took the form of two major shifts in HUD policy; the allowance of private developers to own and manage publicly funded public housing, and the suspension of the one-for-one replacement rule. In 1994, a major St. Louis developer asked HUD's general counsel Nelson Diaz whether or not HOPE VI

[173] Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright, *Where are poor people to live?: Transforming public housing communities*. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 53.

[174] Ibid at 53.

regulations allowed public housing to be owned and operated by a private developer. Up until then, public housing could only be owned and managed by public housing authorities, which restricted the extent of private capital that could be invested in public housing developments. Diaz ruled in favor of developers, which for the first time made the mixing of public and private capital to fund public housing redevelopments a possibility. This also devolved the power of tenant selection to private developers.[175] The one-for-one replacement rule, which had been a staple of public housing since the 1937 Housing Act, was the only major impediment standing in the way of large-scale demolition. One-for-one mandated that for each "hard" unit of public housing torn down, one "hard unit" of public housing had to be built as replacement; a rule that made demolition particularly cost-prohibitive to local housing authorities. The suspension of this rule, as well as the Diaz opinion, sparked the evolution of HOPE VI from a rehabilitation program to a demolition program.[176]

These shifts in policy took place as the East Lake Meadows tenants association was in negotiations with the Atlanta Housing Authority over the Meadows' redevelopment, and not only weakened their bargaining power with the Authority but added to the residents' worries that they would not receive adequate replacement and off-site housing during and after the redevelopment.[177] The policy changes also strengthened the power of Cousins' capital, making a redevelopment deal with the CF Foundation that much more attractive to the Housing Authority and the city as a whole.

Despite these changes the Atlanta Housing Authority worked with residents throughout the summer of 1995 to assuage their worries about adequate replacement housing. That August

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[175] Ibid at 53.

[176] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 66-67.

[177] Alexander, Frank. Interview with Adam Goldstein.

the Housing Authority instituted a policy that expanded the options for temporary relocation for public housing residents. Up until then the policy restricted temporary relocation—relocation of residents during the redevelopment of their housing project—to transfers between public housing projects. The new policy allowed residents to take a Section 8 voucher or move into other subsidized housing, with family and friends or to other apartments within their development. Only residents being relocated or permanently displaced due to federally funded demolition of their projects were covered under the new policy, which was announced a day before Meadows residents were scheduled to meet with Housing Authority officials about relocation housing. The policy also mandated that the Housing Authority work with residents to develop plans regarding relocation at each housing development.[178] At the Meadows, Doug Faust would lead the process of planning resident relocation. Faust had recently joined the Atlanta Housing Authority and served as resident consultant and relocation planner throughout the Meadows' redevelopment.[179]

"Great Step Forward"

Less than six months after Glover and Giornelli publicly revealed their contentious plan for redevelopment at East Lake Meadows, the tenants association and the Housing Authority signed a redevelopment cooperative agreement, outlining the timeline and details of East Lake's demolition and redevelopment. Davis, Glover, and Giornelli were excited about the future redevelopment, and praised the effort and compromise that went into reaching an agreement. Davis noted that she "felt like we're going somewhere," and despite the "long, drawn-out process" thanked "God we made it." Glover declared that the redeveloped Meadows was destined to be "the best community in the country and the world," and Giornelli was happy to be

[178] S.A. Reid, "Options expanded for AHA tenants forced to relocate," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 24, 1995.

[179] Faust, Doug. Interview by Adam Goldstein. Phone. February 26, 2016.

celebrating “a project that’s redefining public housing in America.” Carter added to the praise, saying that the agreement was an important step forward in the process, but noted that much hard work to be done before the redevelopment was complete.[180]

The agreement was legally binding between the Housing Authority and the tenants association, and outlined how the Meadows could be transformed “into a development…with the highest probability of long term success."[181] The Housing Authority agreed to replace all of the units at the Meadows. Almost forty percent of those 650 units would be part of the new development at the Meadows, which constituted half of the total new housing planned for the Meadows. The other 60 percent would be a mixture of Section 8 vouchers and newly built off-site housing. The Housing Authority promised that all of the off-site replacement housing would be “of a quality comparable to the housing in the redeveloped East Lake Meadows property.” They also promised that to the “extent feasible using all reasonable efforts,” that the housing would be in neighborhoods “as attractive” in terms of job accessibility, “schools, health facilities and social, recreational and commercial services,” and as “appropriate for the various needs” of the residents.[182]

The agreement also outlined the timeline of demolition and redevelopment. Phase I of the development included the demolition of completely vacant buildings, the construction of housing units on vacant land on the East Lake Meadows property, and the construction or acquisition of 100 off-site replacement housing units. Phase II and Phase III would include the demolition of the remaining units at the Meadows, the provision of 327 more replacement housing units, and

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[180] S.A. Reid, “East Lake pact: ‘Great step forward’,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 26, 1996.

[181]Atlanta Housing Authority, Redevelopment Cooperative Agreement By and Between The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, Georgia and East Lake Meadows Residents Association (Atlanta, GA: AHA, 1996), 1-4.

[182] Ibid at 5-6.

the construction of the remaining on-site units. Furthermore, the Housing Authority also agreed that any resident of the Meadows as of July 1, 1995 still in compliance with their lease would have a right to on-site or off-site replacement housing at the end of the development.[183]

The Housing Authority also agreed to provide temporary relocation housing, under the new policy, to all residents through Section 8 vouchers, or other off-site or on-site housing. They acknowledged their desire to "maximize on-site relocation of residents," especially for members of the residents planning committee, a group established by the residents association to work directly with the Housing Authority throughout the redevelopment. The Housing Authority also went as far as agreeing to "provide relocation benefits," and "comprehensive social service programs," to displaced residents.[184]

The agreement also discussed a forthcoming agreement between the East Lake Foundation and the Housing Authority that would outline the development of recreational and multipurpose facilities including an 18-hole public golf course, a golf and tennis academy, and a "'YMCA quality' family recreation center."[185] Finally, the agreement promised that the residents would have "significant involvement…in the planning and implementation phases" of the development.[186]

In return, the tenants association promised to work with the Housing Authority, to "treat the redeveloped East Lake Meadows property with respect" and "work for the success…of the

[183] Ibid at 3, 7-9.

[184] Ibid at 10-12.

[185] Ibid at 13-14, the CF Foundation was renamed to the East Lake Foundation in the months leading up to the agreement.

[186] Ibid at 1.

community as a whole," in order to encourage "the long term independence and self-sufficiency of all residents."[187]

The redevelopment agreement between the Housing Authority and the tenants association was, as Carter said, "a great step forward," and seemed to show that the Atlanta Housing Authority was intent on resident-drive revitalization at the Meadows. The involvement of residents at every step of the process, and the focus on temporary and permanent relocation that met the resident's needs seemed, despite federal politics, to be in line with the recommendations laid out in the report on severely distressed housing. However, the Housing Authority and East Lake Foundation found it hard to remain resident-focused and impervious to federal policy changes. In the following year residents grew to believe that the promises laid out in the agreement were not being met, leaving them angry, disappointed, and unsure whether Glover and Cousins had ever had their best interest in mind.

"The Loud Voices of Incivility Now Reign"

Beginning shortly after the agreement was signed, the residents planning committee along with Alexander and Goldstein, began meeting weekly with Faust, Glover, and Giornelli. The most important aspect of the meetings for the residents, according to Goldstein, was that they felt like an "equal bargaining partner," as opposed to being treated "paternalistically…and forced to leave," which had been more indicative of the residents' experiences in Atlanta. Goldstein recalled that in these initial meetings, the Housing Authority and the residents planning committee worked "in good faith" on the main issues of resident relocation and the specifics of redevelopment. Faust and the Housing Authority completed a preliminary survey on resident's relocation preferences, and found that many were interested in taking Section 8

[187] Ibid at 16-17.

vouchers and did not plan to use their right of return to move into the Meadows once it was redeveloped. Faust recalled that for many of these residents, the experience at the Meadows was so traumatic, and Section 8 vouchers provided such flexibility, that many residents were excited at the opportunity to get out of East Lake. With a voucher residents had the freedom to move around the city of Atlanta or anywhere in the country that met the federal requirements.[188]

Goldstein remembered that he and Alexander were worried that the Meadows residents did not fully understand how successful the redeveloped Meadows could be, and were not "fully educated" about the details of Section 8 before they made their replacement housing choice. Goldstein recalls calling two or three meetings with residents interested in Section 8, where he made sure that the residents understood that "unlike public housing where you could stay long term as long as you complied with your lease, in Section 8 they were signing one-year leases and were subject to the whims of the Section 8 owner." While this changed some of the minds of the residents, many of them, especially younger residents, maintained their preference for Section 8 as their replacement housing option.[189]

Most of the members of the resident planning committee, who continued to live on-site as demolition and development began, expected to use their right to return. They were adamant about living on-site for as long as possible, and then being relocated immediately to their newly developed on-site units. They believed it was important to stay together and live on-site in order to oversee and provide input during the redevelopment process.

Tensions began to rise, however, as redevelopment began at the Meadows. Demolition continued on schedule, but the acquisition or construction of 100 units of off-site replacement

[188] Faust, Doug. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[189] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

housing outlined in Phase I did not appear to be on schedule. The relationship between the residents and the Housing Authority, and the residents and Giornelli and the East Lake Foundation started to fray as the residents planning committee, and Davis in particular, more sharply expressed their frustration. While Faust recalled acknowledging that the long history of broken promises the residents had experienced informed their fear and frustration, he also recalled that "there was a fair amount of lack of respect between the residents and the Authority."[190] Goldstein recalled that Faust and the AHA dealt well with this perceived "lack of respect," but that Giornelli "did not have the cultural sensitivity that was needed." This, Goldstein recalled, created "a lot of friction between Giornelli and Davis" that, in his opinion, "Giornelli did not handle so well."[191] Furthermore, Goldstein recalled that he, Alexander, and the tenants association only spoke face-to-face with Cousins once. All issues relating to the East Lake Foundation and Cousins Properties' role in the redevelopment were managed by Giornelli.[192]

Despite the rising tensions between the residents and the Housing Authority and the residents and the East Lake Foundation, and before any of the new units of housing were finished at East Lake, the work at the Meadows was receiving national attention and praise was being given to Cousins. In October 1997, Cousins was awarded Developer of the Year by the National Association for Industrial and Office Parks, the most prestigious commercial real estate organization in the nation. Cousins devoted his acceptance speech to discussing the success of his "East Lake project," and encouraging his colleagues to take on similar challenges. He told the

[190] Faust, Doug. Interview by Adam Goldstein. Giornelli was reached out to for comment but noted that he was often out of town and unavailable to comment on the project. He recommended Evan Smith, who was interviewed for this project, to fill in.

[191] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[192] Ibid.

gathered group of real estate developers that "property values [were] rising dramatically," and that "drug dealers no longer treat the community as an open-air market." He implored that the developers in the room "look for opportunity in your own inner city. And then do what you do so well. Develop it."[193]

Yet all was not well at East Lake. The negotiations and relationships started to unravel. New residents began moving into the redeveloped Techwood and Clark Howell community and found that the Housing Authority was using "stringent readmission standards to exclude the neediest public housing residents." The residents at East Lake wanted a say in screening the new residents, but the Housing Authority retained the right, granted by Nelson Diaz's 1994 ruling, allowing the East Lake Foundation to have the final say as to who was allowed to move back into the development. Davis denounced this as a "takeover," claiming that it was "not about helping public housing residents" but about "running us out." In one of their weekly meetings in February 1998, Davis proclaimed to Faust that she hoped Phase I failed because Faust, the Housing Authority, and Giornelli were "not doing it right." She promised to "make it so ugly [at the Meadows] that no one will move into new units."[194] If that failed, she pledged to "go to Washington and get it all straight." Indicative of Davis's strong opinions, the residents voted in late February 1998 to expel the East Lake Foundation from "further participation in reconstruction."[195] The vote was symbolic and had no effect on the development schedule. Despite the sentiment of the residents, Glover remained stayed confident that the redevelopment process would continue on successfully.

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[193] "Cousins asks developers to duplicate East Lake," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, December 8, 1997.

[194] Villages at East Lake Records Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority Archives Collection, Atlanta Housing Authority, Dec. 8, 2015.

[195] Hollis Towns, "Rebuilding dispute; East Lake residents seek to oust developers," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 5, 1998.

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* editorial board once again scorned the "angry voices in the East Lake Meadows tenants association." They lauded Cousins for his "huge investment" and appreciated that his foundation was "committed to shoring up the community," even if some of the residents lacked the "courtesy to appreciate it." They restated their contention that "tax-payer supported housing" was not a "God-given right," and believed that public housing residents had "no more right to tax-supported housing than Atlantans who pay for their own." They proclaimed that the fact that subsidized housing existed was "by the grace and generosity of taxpayers." Tenants, they believed, "shouldn't be able to dictate the terms under which they receive that largess."[196]

The weekly meetings continued, but by September 1998 it was becoming clear to the residents planning committee that the off-site construction that was supposed to take place in Phase I of the redevelopment would not be completed before Phase II of the redevelopment began. This meant that the demolition of the remaining Meadows units would begin before residents could be temporarily relocated to local off-site housing units. The residents planning committee asked that the 28 families left at the Meadows be moved to the newly finished on-site units, but Cousins wanted to restrict the number of families who could move temporarily into the newly developed section to 15. Glover explained that the restriction was necessary to ensure that the community was "stabilized," and the Housing Authority voted to support the restriction. The other thirteen families would be given a temporary Section 8 voucher, while maintaining the right to return to East Lake once the development was finished. The residents planning

[196] "East Lake residents aren't calling shots," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 6, 1998.

committee viewed this as nothing short of eviction, and demanded that at worst they be relocated to a nearby housing development. They threatened to sue if their demand was not met.[197]

Goldstein argued that Cousins' hard line on the fifteen units was "sending the wrong message" to the residents at the Meadows. Giornelli believed that the Foundation "never had an obligation to offer temporary replacement housing" and saw the fifteen units as a "compromise." The residents and the Foundation, Giornelli believed, were miles apart on this issue. Goldstein recalled that the Housing Authority and the residents wanted to avoid a lawsuit, but it was Giornelli and the Foundation that refused to compromise. The residents filed an injunction to halt the development, citing a breach of the redevelopment cooperative agreement, in the last week of September 1998.[198]

While the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* published editorials that disparaged the residents for filing a lawsuit, the PGA Tour held their first tournament at the newly developed East Lake Golf Club in late September, which brought East Lake's story to a national audience. In early November 1998, the *Washington Post* published a story titled "East Lake Changes Course of Its Neighborhood." The *Washington Post* was amazed by the redevelopment of the East Lake golf course into "the St Andrews of America," but called the golf course's revitalization "not even half the story." The best part, according to the article, was the revitalization of the neighborhood that placed "welfare recipients" next to "residents who pay market-value for modern, brick townhouses and apartments." While the article noted that there was some controversy about replacement housing, Giornelli assured *Washington Post* that this was a "tiny minority" of

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[197] Hollis R. Towns, "East Lake residents might sue; Housing woes: Residents of the housing project are upset they can't temporarily move into newly built townhouses meant to replace old apartments," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 24, 1998 and Alexander, Frank. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[198] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

residents, and concluded the story quoting Cousins: "People rolled their eyes at first. But it's working."[199]

"It's Divide and Conquer"

Goldstein and Alexander worked throughout October and November to develop their arguments in support of the resident injunction. The main issue was the failure by the Housing Authority to develop the off-site replacement housing on the schedule outlined in the redevelopment cooperative agreement. Goldstein and Alexander both intended to fight for the residents' rights and believed that the injunction should be granted.

Alexander believed that more was at stake than ensuring that the replacement housing was constructed as promised. In his view, the loss of the injunction would severely restrict the ability of the residents of East Lake Meadows to hold the Housing Authority accountable for the promises made in the redevelopment cooperative agreement. The agreement was legally binding between the Housing Authority and the tenants association. Alexander believed that if the development continued into Phase II, which included the demolition of the remaining units at East Lake Meadows, the tenants association at the Meadows would cease to legally exist, making any future litigation brought against the Housing Authority on behalf of the tenants association a legal impossibility. Alexander recalled believing that he would "lose his client," if the injunction failed.[200]

In December 1998, Goldstein and Alexander made their case to Judge Kevin Westmoreland in DeKalb County Equity Court against the Atlanta Housing Authority. Westmoreland heard the case for one day, and released his decision on Tuesday, December 15,

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[199] Ray Glier, "East Lake Changes Course of Its Neighborhood," *Washington Post*. November 1, 1998.

[200] Alexander, Frank. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

finding that, even though the AHA deviated from the "strict terms" of the agreement, this "shortfall" was not "significant or material as to prevent [the Housing Authority] from proceeding with further redevelopment activities on-site at East Lake." He denied the motion for an injunction.[201]

"I Have to Move On"

The loss of the injunction was a devastating blow to Davis and the tenants association. They were forced to vacate their housing units at the Meadows by the end of the month, and as Alexander prophesized, it constituted the end of the battle between the tenants association and the Housing Authority and East Lake Foundation. Demolition began as soon as the resident planning committee left what was East Lake Meadows for the last time. A defeated Davis told the Housing Authority board that "what y'all are doing to us is not right." Davis believed that she had "made a mistake" working with Glover, but accepted that "I can't take it back. I have to move on."[202]

Glover noted that the Housing Authority was "very pleased" with Westmoreland's decision and was excited that they could "press ahead with the second phase of the East Lake redevelopment."[203] Soon thereafter, units at the new Villages of East Lake began to open and the East Lake Foundation began screening the new market-rate and publicly assisted residents. Cousins was careful to ensure that the market-rate families would be good neighbors and role models to the families on public assistance. For that reason, Cousins and Giornelli actively

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[201] East Lake Meadows Residents Association v. The Housing Authority of the city of Atlanta, Georgia (1998), Civil Action - Order - Superior Court (Superior Court of Fulton County 1998).

[202] Hollis R. Town, "East Lake residents dealt legal setback; Tenant leader, others are ordered to move after judge vetoes their suit to slow redevelopment of public housing complex," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, December 17, 1998.

[203] Ibid.

recruited families from churches and seminaries around the country.[204] When it came to publicly assisted units, Cousins was bound by federal and city policies when determining who would move into the public housing units. While Faust recalled that any family who wished to return to the Villages could do so, Goldstein remembered a different story. Goldstein recalled that in the first couple of years Cousins was "too careful," meaning too stringent, while "screening out people who were potential problems." Goldstein filed litigation when Cousins' screening illegally barred residents who used to live at the Meadows from returning to the Villages. For Goldstein, it was "irritating when they found that people who were on the list to come back had to go through litigation to get them back in the development."[205] Of the 423 families who lived at the Meadows before the redevelopment, 69 families eventually returned to the Villages.[206]

"A Lot of Flexibility and Ingenuity"

The Atlanta Housing Authority viewed the redevelopment of East Lake and Techwood Clark Howell as a success, and branded these programs as part of the city's "Olympic Legacy Program." Following demolition and redevelopment, East Lake's crime rate declined and real estate values increased significantly, both of which spurred investment in the community.[207] This encouraged the Housing Authority to replicate the "Olympic Legacy Program" in the decade following the Games. By 2007, the Housing Authority had demolished and redeveloped over a quarter of their public housing properties into mixed-income developments.[208] By 2010, the city

[204] Cynthia Tucker, "The Villages of East Lake: Hope from the ground up; Urban model: Mixed-income community that replaced beleaguered housing project focuses on spiritual and economic growth," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 17, 1999.

[205] Goldstein, Dennis. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[206] Faust, Doug. Interview by Adam Goldstein.

[207] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 105.

[208] S.A. Reid, "Atlanta to raze most of its public housing," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 15, 2007.

had demolished almost three-quarters of their public housing projects, affecting over 15,000 units of public housing.[209] The public housing demolitions and redevelopments were part of a broader rebirth of Atlanta's inner city. Rents in the city rose by 13 percent between 2000 and 2010, and in 2010, it was estimated that the public housing redevelopments alone had increased the city's tax base by over $2 billion.[210] Many of the tens of thousands of residents affected by the public housing redevelopment met the same fate as the residents of the Meadows. A small portion of them moved into their redeveloped community, and a majority took a Section 8 voucher and dispersed throughout Fulton and other adjacent counties.[211]

Public housing around the country looked remarkably similar to Atlanta's over the same time period. HUD and the federal government fully embraced the belief that the private market, driven by incentives from the federal government, should house the poor. In 1998, Congress passed the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act. The act's stated purposes included deregulating and decontrolling public housing authorities, demolishing severely distressed public housing developments, and deconcentrating poverty by encouraging mixed-income communities.[212] To this end, the act allowed public housing authorities to demolish or sell their public housing stock and officially eliminated the one-for-one replacement rule that had been suspended in 1995. The act also restricted public housing authorities from increasing their inventory of public housing. These stipulations further encouraged local housing authorities to reduce their public housing stock either through demolition or sale. Between 1994 and 2007

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[209] Robbie Brown, "Atlanta is making way for new public housing," *New York Times*, June 21, 2009.

[210] Goetz, *New Deal Ruins*, 105.

[211] Gwynedd Stuart, "Life after the projects: GSU study suggests Atlanta Housing Authority demolition only shifted pockets of poverty," *Creative Loafing*, August 25, 2011.

[212] Rod Solomon. *Public housing reform and voucher success: Progress and challenges*. Brookings Institution, 2005, 66-69.

almost 100,000 units of public housing were demolished across the United States. Similar to East Lake, slightly more than half of these units were replaced by "hard" units of public housing, yet only a small percentage of displaced residents returned to their newly developed community.[213]

Furthermore, the legislation tried to build the "self-sufficiency" of public housing residents by mandating that those in public housing be employed. The act also tried to disincentivize criminal behavior among public housing tenants by allowing local housing authorities to evict tenants with a criminal record.[214] Thus, similar to East Lake, the demographics of the tenant population of public housing, especially in mixed-income developments, shifted towards a more "deserving poor" by privileging those on their way to the working or middle class, and restricting access to public housing to the nation's poorest citizens.

As part of the 50th anniversary of HUD, current Secretary Julian Castro travelled to Atlanta and spoke on a panel with Glover and other former city officials about Atlanta's public housing strategy. Castro praised the work that the city had done throughout the 1990s and 2000s to alter the city's public housing, and noted that Glover's vision "really set the stage" for federal public housing policy.[215] Castro was highlighting that the success of East Lake and other Atlanta redevelopments not only encouraged Atlanta to continue along the demolish and redevelop strategy, but also served as a model for local housing authorities around the country to do the same.

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[213] Margery Austin Turner and G. Thomas Kingsley, "Federal Programs for Addressing Low-Income Housing Needs." *The Urban Institute* (2008): 11-12.
[214] Maggie McCarty, Libby Perl, and Katie Jones, "Overview of Federal Housing Assistance Programs and Policy." *Congressional Research Service*. April 15, 2014.
[215] Katie Leslie, "HUD Sec. Castro hails Atlanta housing development as national model," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 4, 2015.

The East Lake Way

The story of East Lake's redevelopment is used today as a model for public housing transformation, yet the full history of East Lake, from its construction through its decline and redevelopment, highlight broader changes in public housing and poverty policy in the latter half of the 20th century—changes that call into question the value of looking to East Lake as a model. A close look at East Lake's history sheds light on the merit of devolving power to the private sector to revitalize communities and the discrepancies between perceived and actual changes in these communities.

The relationship between private enterprise and public housing has been contentious since public housing was first codified into law in the 1937 Housing Act. In an attempt to garner broad support for the bill, legislators went to great lengths to ensure that public housing would not interfere with the private housing market. Through the evolution of public housing, however, the government began to look to the private sector for support in public housing development.

During the large scale public housing construction that took place in the late 1960s, President Johnson began conversations with business leaders as to how business and the private sector could support Johnson's public housing policy. One of the government programs that came from these discussions was the Turnkey Program, which allowed private developers to build public housing on their land and then sell it to local housing authorities. Before the Turnkey Program, local authorities had to own the land they wanted housing to go on, put out a bid for development, and oversee the construction process. The Turnkey Program cut through the bureaucratic controls and made public housing construction a more viable investment for private enterprise. East Lake Meadows was a Turnkey project, and the program made constructing the Meadows a win-win opportunity for the developer and the city of Atlanta. The city ensured that

the land was zoned for apartments, and the developer provided expedited construction and low costs. However, the low cost of construction and dearth of oversight were part of what led to the Meadows' woefully inadequate infrastructure. Within three years of opening, a broken sewer system caused raw sewage to flow through the middle of the Meadows. Poor construction continued to wreak havoc for the residents, and was a significant reason why the $15 million development needed to be demolished only 25 years after opening its doors.

Turning to the private sector for the Meadows' low-cost construction proved to be a failure, yet government policies continued to look to the private sector for aid in poverty alleviation throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Charles Murray and other conservative critics of federal welfare policy encouraged the nation to think of poverty alleviation as an economics game: one in which the government should use free market principles to encourage a citizen's rise out of poverty. While Murray's ideas seemed promising on paper, the story of East Lake's redevelopment helps to show how socio-economic hierarchy can alter a free market environment in the case of neighborhood revitalization.

It is interesting to consider the ways that the free market did and did not operate in the redevelopment of East Lake. Tom Cousins actually ensured that a free market did not exist at East Lake by working through intermediaries to hide his interest in East Lake's real estate. He used his political and economic capital to manipulate the East Lake real estate market to keep prices of surrounding properties artificially low. While this approach seems deceptive, there was nothing illegal or particularly novel about Cousins' business practices. On the contrary, Cousins was making a sound business decision that not only allowed him to invest more money into the neighborhood's redevelopment, but fulfilled his fiduciary duty to his shareholders. However, Cousins' practices ensured that small business owners and property owners at East Lake, who

were subjected to working and living in an area of violence and concentrated poverty with little to no social services, would be deemed unworthy to share in the windfall of their neighborhood's redevelopment. Furthermore, the identification and selection of the worthy was left to a private business that was legally bound to work in the interest of its shareholders, and not to the government, which was legally bound to work for the benefit of all of its citizens.

The trend in public housing and poverty policy over the past twenty years has been to use the private sector to the benefit of the poor. However, as illustrated by the history of East Lake Meadows' construction and redevelopment, cost saving principles and responsibilities to third parties affects the private sector's ability to work effectively on behalf of the poor and underprivileged section of the nation's citizens. A true model to the nation for public housing and community development would be more comprehensive and earnest in its work on behalf of that community's poor than was the case in the private sector driven redevelopment of the Meadows.

Public housing has served varying segments of the nation's poor since it began in the 1930s. The New Deal Era saw the beginning of large government programs aimed at helping nation's poor. In 1936, President Roosevelt assured the country that the government was supporting the bottom third of the nation "ill fed and ill housed," yet in reality those who received the most support during the New Deal were in the middle class or soon-to-be middle class. The majority of public housing in the 1930s was built over inner city slums, displacing the nation's poorest and replacing them with the white working poor temporarily affected by the Great Depression. The largest investment in housing during the 1930s, however, was through the FHA. Federally financed mortgages made homeownership and the wealth accumulation that accompanied it a possibility for millions of Americans. This benefit, however, was almost

exclusively restricted to the nation's white population. Minorities and the communities they lived in were barred from these New Deal benefits. The perception in the 1930s was that the nation's poorest were being served by government housing programs, yet the reality was that they were largely left behind from the programs that supported the poor through housing.

A distinct shift—partly intentional and partly unintentional—occurred in the population served by public housing in the 1950s and 1960s. A combination of civil rights legislation, the rise of the suburbs, and white flight led the public housing population to evolve from the temporary white poor to the permanent black poor. To accommodate this population, the government encouraged the construction of massive monolithic public housing developments that led even Soviet urban developers to question America's lack of investment in subsidized housing.[216] The stock of public housing around the country increased significantly through the late 1960s, and legislation was passed that ensured that only the nation's poorest inhabited public housing. The revenue structure of public housing, which had not been significantly altered since 1937, made the maintenance of public housing impossible without significant government funding. This funding was reduced under Nixon and halted entirely under Reagan, leaving many large public housing developments to decay into shockingly abominable communities of violence and crime. In this era of public housing, the nation's poorest were being served, yet little investment in their housing and well-being left them in dangerous and disgraceful environments from which few escaped.

Increased negative publicity about the condition of public housing encouraged Congress to strategize how to improve public housing in the United States. In 1989, Congress commissioned a report on severely distressed public housing. Published in 1992, it represented a

[216] Kotlowitz, *There are no children here*, 24.

well-researched, non-partisan document that concluded that to improve the worst public housing investment needed to be made in its residents. While the report inspired legislation that initially supported the rehabilitation of public housing communities, the changed direction of national politics led to a shift in housing policy away from resident investment and towards demolition, displacement, redevelopment, and replacement. This once again shifted the tenant population of public housing communities. The nation's poorest were replaced by a more "deserving" segment of the poor, a shift that some historians have compared to public housing's slum-clearance origins in the 1930s.[217]

East Lake's history reflects the national public housing story from the 1960s forward. The Meadows was a large, monolithic public housing project built in the 1960s that, due to little investment, became one of the most violent communities in the country throughout the 1970s and 1980s. When government officials and civic leaders turned their attention to the city's worst neighborhoods in the early 1990s, many were struck by the extent of the violence and poverty at the Meadows. In response, East Lake Meadows received significant funding for rehabilitation and revitalization. There was a period of time in which it was plausible that the Meadows and its residents would benefit from increased funding for not only capital improvements, but for investment in the community's leaders and grassroots non-profits that were already engaged in the long-term work of community development. However, just as the recommendations for resident investment in the 1992 report on severely distressed public housing were forgotten, so too were the ideas of rehabilitation and community investment as the redevelopment process, led by the Housing Authority and Cousins, began at the Meadows. The redevelopment took place

[217] Vale, *Purging the Poorest*.

largely on their terms, and as a result very few of the members of the East Lake Meadows community returned to their redeveloped homes.

It would be unfair, however, to view the displacement of East Lake Meadows residents as exactly comparable to the displacement of those who lived in slums razed for public housing in the 1930s. All of the Meadows residents were offered housing through a voucher, and many were happy to take the voucher and move away from the East Lake environment. While no study has been done on the outcomes of resident relocation at the Meadows specifically, studies of resident relocation for other demolished public housing projects in Atlanta have provided insight into what likely happened at East Lake. A study of the residents of the McDaniel-Glenn public housing project, for example, found that most moved to areas of lower-crime within the city limits, and were generally satisfied with their new homes.[218] Even without a formal study, it is clear that the East Lake community today better supports almost 200 publicly assisted households than the East Lake community of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s supported the thousands who called the Meadows home. It is also clear that while some residents of the Meadows were overwhelmingly displeased with the redevelopment process and their subsequent displacement, many were happy to be given the option to leave the Meadows for a different community.

What *is* problematic is when the story of East Lake is seen as a model for community development around the country. This view is pushed by the PGA Tour when they descend upon East Lake every fall, supported by Cousins and other members of Atlanta's political and business elite through widely read editorials in national newspapers, and encouraged by Purpose Built Communities, a non-profit supported by Cousins and other major philanthropists dedicated to

[218] Michael Rich et al. "Evaluation of the McDaniel Glenn HOPE VI Revitalization." *Emory University Center for Community Partnerships,* July 2010.

replicating East Lake around the country. These individuals and institutions frame the story in before-and-after snapshots that highlight statistics such as educational achievement, employment rates, and crime rates that have improved remarkably since the redevelopment. This is a powerful and compelling story, one that fuels the narrative of East Lake as a model that could be applied to other poor neighborhoods in cities across the country.

The power of this narrative is best indicated by the curious case of Eva Davis, the former resident of East Lake Meadows and the staunchest and most vocal critic of the East Lake's redevelopment. Remarkably, through a process that is not fully explained or understood, by the early 2000s when she moved into the Villages of East Lake, Davis became one of the Villages biggest cheerleaders. In 2003, she told the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that at East Lake "we tore down hell and built heaven."[219] Until she passed away in 2012, Davis served as an advocate for the East Lake model and supported Glover's demolition-based public housing strategy. It is hard to know all that went in to Davis's change of heart, but it would seem that part of the explanation is simply be the power of the East Lake story in providing a home for the homeless, the story of a community redeemed.

The real history of East Lake, however, is more complicated. It shows that these statistics and stories are illustrative of the outcomes when an extremely impoverished community is replaced with a less impoverished one. As inspiring as it is, East Lake's story is not a case study in community development. East Lake's redevelopers did not invest in those who called the Meadows home. Instead, they opted to replace them with a community they found more worthy of their investment.

[219] David Pendered, "The new East Lake; Another Life: Once a violent pocket of poverty, area stands as a national model for a turnaround*," Atlanta Journal Constitution*, April 7, 2003.

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