

# ROBERT MOSES AND URBAN RENEWAL

## THE TITLE I PROGRAM

HILARY BALLON

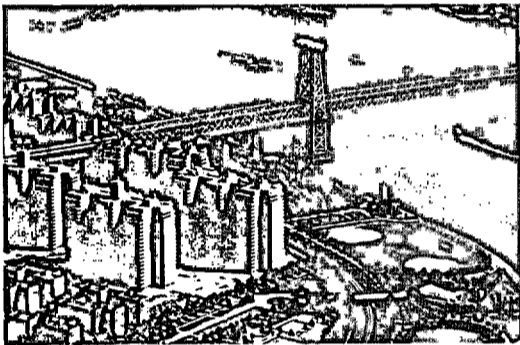
**R**obert Moses led the nation's largest slum clearance program in the 1950s. As in the 1930s, when he built a dazzling web of recreational facilities with New Deal dollars, so too his work in urban renewal was made possible by a federal program, Title I of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949. Title I provided deep federal subsidies for clearance of slum areas in order to stimulate their reconstruction by private developers.<sup>1</sup> Scores of cities, even in Alaska and Hawaii, joined the program. Although slow to take off, by 1960 Title I funding had set 838 projects in motion. Moses was the pacesetter and experimenter-in-chief.

As chairman of the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance, the entity through which he ran Title I from 1949 to 1960, Moses demonstrated his characteristic skill at capturing federal funds and expediting public works. He began planning early, in December 1948, and put in place enabling legislation so that when Title I became law, in July 1949, New York alone was primed for action. In January 1951, while other cities were still dumbstruck by the innovative legislation, Moses announced seven slum clearance projects, and he maintained that hectic pace to the end, as a tally of his work confirms. Moses obtained planning grants for thirty-two urban renewal projects, moved seventeen redevelopments into execution (another four were carried out by his successors) (fig. E-24). Due to his efforts, New York won more Title I aid than any other city. During his twelve-year reign over Title I, the city received \$65.8 million; Chicago, the second biggest spender, received less than half that amount, \$30.8 million.<sup>2</sup>

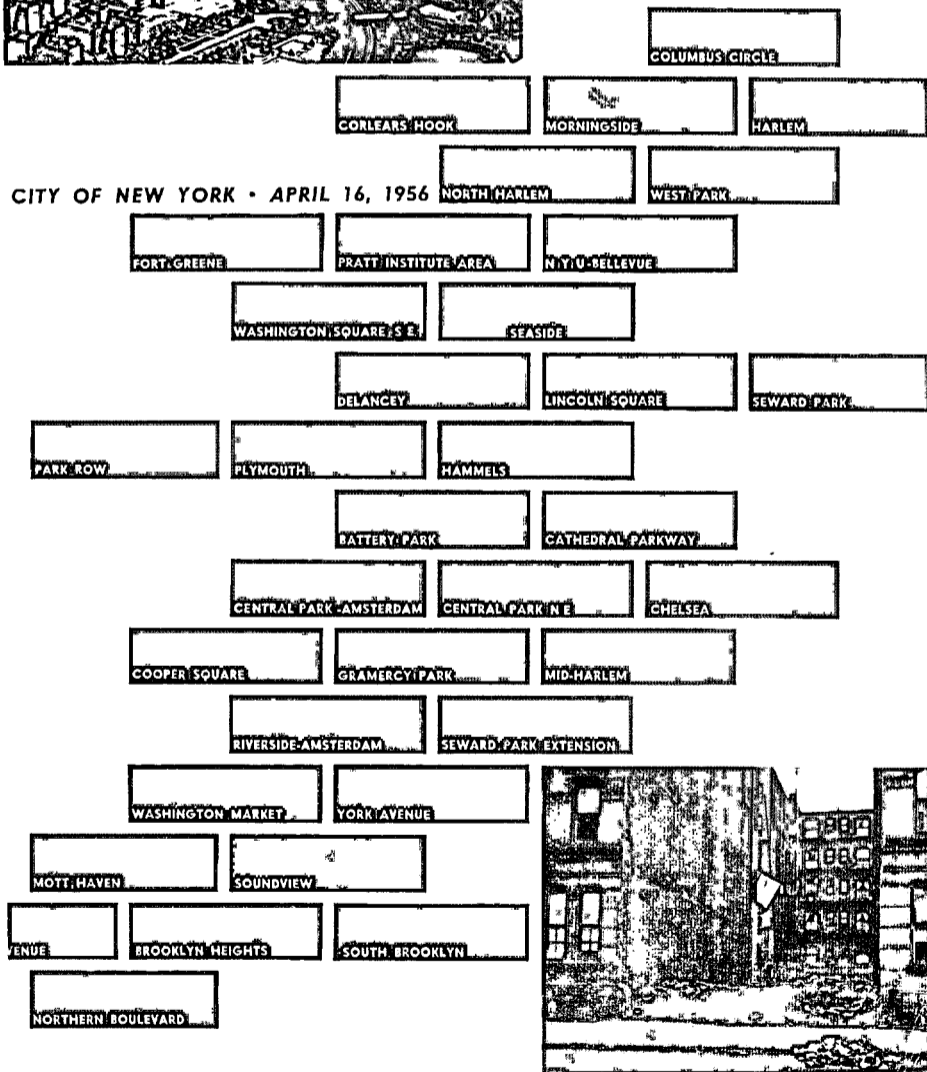
A productive record, yet it has long been considered a disaster, both for the city and for Moses, since Title I brought him down. In March 1960, when Moses was forced to resign as chairman of the Committee on Slum

Clearance, his approach to urban renewal was publicly rejected and his reputation was in tatters. Mayor Robert Wagner disbanded the committee and installed a new system designed to correct Moses's errant ways: his secretive selection of sites and sponsors, privatization of relocation, and opposition to preservation. His antidemocratic methods and indifference to community values had incited a citizen planning movement that he did not comprehend and could not accommodate. "The democratic way is to allow the people of the community to have a voice in its projected use," a citizen wrote the general. "We urge you to schedule public hearings in which we may participate before you proceed. We cherish the right to participate in the planning of our community." To which the uncomprehending general replied, "It must be obvious that this [planning issue] cannot be settled by a mass meeting."<sup>3</sup> Moses trusted the wisdom of professional expertise over the local concerns of residents, and he put the interests of the city over those of a neighborhood.

Our historical distance and experience of a thriving, resurgent city inevitably cast the Title I work in a new light. When Robert Caro published *The Power Broker* in 1974, the city was failing, the wounds of large-scale clearance were fresh, and urban renewal was still under way. Caro highlighted the sponsor scandals and Moses's Olympian blindness to the misery he caused. What we see fifty years later is rather different: the Moses projects have been absorbed into the fabric of the city; problems that he identified, such as the vulnerable stake of the middle class in the city, remain a challenge; and solutions that he devised remain valid, in particular, the potential of art centers and universities to serve as engines of redevelopment. It is time to reassess Moses's urban renewal program and its impact on the growth of New York City.



# TITLE I SLUM CLEARANCE PROGRESS



E-24. Brochure cover showing 35 slum clearance projects, some under way and others in planning but never built, 1956

This reappraisal is built on two main points. First, the New York Title I work should be understood in relation to Moses's attempt to negotiate between public and private claims on land use. The dominant Moses narrative plays up the myth of his unbounded power; in this story line, the Title I work demonstrates his gross abuse of power. Of course, Moses fostered the idea of his omnipotence to intimidate rivals, even as he battled the myriad

forces—political, bureaucratic, financial, democratic, journalistic—that hedged his power. This essay makes a point of reinserting his Title I work into the context of a national program in order to underscore the constraints Moses faced as well as his aggressive responses, particularly to federal rules that failed, in his view, to acknowledge the unique demands of building in New York City. Moreover, the national policy framework more sharply

defines the basic job Moses faced: managing the difficult and ill-defined partnership between the federal government, the city, and private developers in urban renewal.

"The federal bulldozer" was Martin Anderson's moniker for Title I in his 1964 critique of the program. True, the funding was mostly federal, but in other respects urban renewal was a local program.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Housing Act of 1949 gave responsibility for planning to local authorities, who structured their own urban renewal programs and determined the sites, plans, mixture of uses, developers, and methods of execution and relocation—albeit subject to federal approval. The local authority was also reliant on private investors to buy the land and redevelop it. The blinding effect of Moses—his larger-than-life persona, autocratic methods, astounding productivity, and publicity machine—obscures all but his role as decision maker, yet in truth he functioned as an intermediary between the government and private investors. He had to induce reluctant developers to enter the risky business of urban renewal while restraining counterproductive federal actions that undermined Title I. Moses may have had the personality of a commanding general, but in reality he was a middleman, negotiating between public and private interests in land use.

Throughout his life, Moses was devoted to both the public realm and the private market, two values that were at times in conflict. Indeed, the arc of his career and his evolving approach to public works take on greater meaning when seen in light of this historical American dilemma: how to balance private property rights and the public good. The intractable problem of the slums—a city killer—posed the conflict between public and private control of land in an acute form. Slums were the dark side of the private property regime: the cost of city services exceeded tax revenues, yet slumlords extracted profits from impoverished residents. As Moses saw it, he was on "a middle course between the leftwingers who want government to do everything . . . and the old-fashioned tycoons who still demand that the State give away its basic, legally inalienable, national resources."<sup>5</sup> His work on Title I can be seen as a culminating chapter of a career-long attempt to shape the processes of the market through planning.

The second major claim of this essay can be put simply: Moses had a coherent and intelligent plan. Whereas the standard view holds that he was subservient to real estate interests and proceeded opportunistically without a larger purpose, I argue that Moses had a strategic vision. His aim was to strengthen the center city in an age of decentralization, suburban drift, and urban decay. Toward this end, he pursued a three-part strategy: build housing for the middle class, expand higher education, and promote the city's cultural preeminence. Admittedly, this redevelopment agenda did not benefit all alike. The losers were those displaced from tenement districts: the poor, Puerto Ricans and blacks, and small-business owners, often banished to other slums. The beneficiaries were middle- and upper-class residents; universities, college students, and an economy propelled by brainpower; and cultural institutions, suburbanites, and tourists who saw New York as a cultural magnet.

What stands behind the Title I work is an idea of New York as an irresistible center of gravity. "I am not much of an evangelist," Moses allowed,

"but I share the latent American idealism which lurks under the hairiest chest and the hardest crust."<sup>6</sup> The lurking idealism in that most pragmatic of men stemmed from a driving faith in the city. He said:

For youth of any age, aware, observant, impressionable, the city is endlessly fascinating, and that is why so many families gravitate to population centers, why suburbs continue to be suburbs and satellites, why the vast hinterland may talk against the big town, deprecate and deplore it, minimize its attractions, but somehow can't keep away from it, why our domestic critics carp, groan, crouch, vent their spleen but are unable to tear themselves away . . . why, in spite of analogies with Babylon and Babel, traffic and other congestion, it will never be dispersed, decentralized and abandoned.<sup>7</sup>

It is unfamiliar to hear Moses speak in this lyrical mode, but his remarks convey something that was part and parcel of the expediter, master builder, and power broker: a commitment to the survival of New York City, which motivated his urban renewal work.

### THE FRAMEWORK OF TITLE I

In retrospect, Title I seems a reckless assault on the urban fabric, both its physical and social order, but the willingness to shred and reshape the city at midcentury grew out of a broad consensus on the slum problem. It had been forged during the previous thirty to forty years and had become as widely accepted as our regnant street-centered model is today. Precisely because a countertheory of urbanism is now supreme and it is difficult to fathom how what we see as misguided was once idealized, we should begin by recouping the convictions that shaped national policy and Moses's actions.

The three elements of Title I—large-scale clearance, replanning, and private redevelopment—emerged from a long-established view of the slum problem. According to that view, improvement of slum conditions required large-scale operations. The slums were a "cancer" endangering the future of the city, which if not excised would spread and destroy it. Rehabilitation of individual buildings or clearance of a single block was not enough to change the character of a neighborhood. Indeed, as a Title I manual explained, "Patching up hopelessly worn-out buildings on a temporary or minimum basis presents the possible result of slum preservation rather than slum clearance."<sup>8</sup> To achieve areawide change, the solution was to aggregate large properties, clear them, and rebuild on a large scale.

A second, related conviction concerned the configuration of the built environment. Urbanists and housing reformers as varied as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jacob Riis, Lewis Mumford, and Le Corbusier agreed on one thing: the traditional pattern of street-oriented, gridiron urbanism created unhealthy living conditions. It produced damaging population density and high land coverage that deprived people of basic human needs: open space, light, and air. Disinclined to attribute these problems to property relations and economic forces, American urbanists put their faith in changing the physical order of the city. Create a tabula rasa, enlarge the dimension of the grid by merging several blocks into one, and replace street walls with free-

standing towers on superblocks. This reform recipe had been promoted by modern architects since the 1920s and ultimately was rendered official doctrine by Title I. A Title I manual summed it up: "Bad housing is only one manifestation of slum conditions and fixing up substandard houses will neither cure nor even seriously alter the factors that make slums—unwise mixture of residential and commercial uses of land, overcrowding and bad planning of the land, lack of recreational facilities, frozen patterns of street layouts and traffic congestion."<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive replanning was needed.

The third premise of Title I was that housing construction and redevelopment were private-market activities. An exception was made in the circumscribed field of low-income housing, which did not interest the private sector, but even in that area there was considerable resistance to government intervention. In order to appease the home-building industry and allies opposed to public housing, the sponsors of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949 choked funding for low-income housing while more generously subsidizing private redevelopment of slums. Acknowledging the anxiety about government intervention in the field of housing, Moses positioned Title I work as a middle path between the free hand of the market, which on its own would not cure the slums (slumlords made money), and a federal takeover of housing. "The size of New York's problem can be measured by the 9,000 acres of recognized slums which cannot be eradicated by ordinary private, speculative building. . . . [But] obviously, private capital must be brought into the picture on a large scale if we hope to escape a tremendously enlarged public housing program with all the implications which go with it."<sup>10</sup> As in other areas of federal policy, the idea of public subsidy was more readily accepted when the beneficiaries were not only the poor.

Although reflecting a consensus view of the slum problem, Title I came without a road map. Moses truthfully stated at the beginning of each slum clearance plan that the field of urban renewal was "new, untried and experimental" and that progress was therefore likely to be "slow and cumbersome." Title I proposed an unfamiliar model of public-private partnership. Such partnerships, now the norm in urban redevelopment, have become sophisticated instruments for shifting public responsibilities to private management, but Title I launched the first wide-scale use of this model of development. At that time, there was virtually no empirical experience to call upon in defining public and private roles, only the knowledge that previous efforts to interest private capital in the slum problem had largely failed.

Moses's approach to Title I was informed by his efforts in the 1940s to involve private capital in slum clearance. In 1942, New York State passed the Redevelopment Companies Law, an important step in expanding the powers of eminent domain and the definition of a public purpose to facilitate slum clearance. Taking advantage of the powers granted by this law, Moses assisted the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in assembling the sites for three slum clearance-redevelopment projects in Manhattan: Stuyvesant Town, Riverton Houses, and Peter Cooper Village. The Redevelopment Companies Law solved the problem of site assemblage but did not provide sufficient incentives to motivate private investors; Met Life stood alone. In an effort to appease Met Life and to attract other private investment, Moses sweetened the terms of the deal. The state law as amended in 1943 retained

rent controls but relieved private sponsors of rehousing obligations and extended tax exemptions. Moreover, Moses acquiesced to housing segregation in order to accommodate prevailing market conditions. The development of Stuyvesant Town embroiled Met Life in damaging controversies over tenant relocation, racial segregation, and rent controls—more reasons for private investors to avoid the messy business of slum clearance.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the Met Life experience, Moses remained committed to private slum clearance, and this bias shaped his attitude to the postwar program of the New York City Housing Authority. In 1946, it advanced a plan to build moderate-income units on undeveloped sites, where land costs were lower than those on developed sites. Although Moses was seen to dictate NYCHA policy and site selection, he initially opposed what was called the "no-cash subsidy program" for two reasons: he regarded the construction of middle-class housing as a private-sector activity, and he favored redevelopment in inner-city slums over construction on undeveloped land.<sup>12</sup> Moses ultimately backed the program, which had Mayor William O'Dwyer's support, but he disapproved of the approach. In drawing the line between public and private action, Moses firmly believed that the private sector could adequately meet the housing needs of the middle class. Put in the context of housing programs in the 1940s, in particular the failure of state laws to induce private investment and the expansion of NYCHA into middle-class housing, Moses's Title I work can be seen as a more aggressive effort to enlist private capital in urban redevelopment.

The essence of Title I was a land subsidy known as the write-down. The cost to the city of assembling and clearing a redevelopment site was greater than the market value of the cleared land. The federal government covered two-thirds of the loss or write-down, with the city absorbing the other third. It was expected that the city would recoup this loss through higher tax revenues as the value of the redeveloped property rose over time. The explicit purpose of the program was to stimulate private investors to build market-rate housing in slum areas. But while the Title I write-down discounted the cost of land, it did not diminish other expenses—construction, debt service, and taxes—that raised housing costs beyond the reach of the middle class. Congress had assumed that lowering the cost of land would be sufficient to decrease the cost of housing, but as Jeanne Lowe put it in her groundbreaking early study of Title I, "Congress was unsophisticated in its housing economics."<sup>13</sup> In an expensive city like New York, the framework of Title I yielded luxury housing. To obtain moderate-priced housing, government would need to provide other subsidies.

#### THE MOSES RULES

As king of Title I, Moses had more concentrated power over the physical development of New York than any man had ever had or is ever likely to have again. Slum clearance involved all aspects of urbanism—not just roads and recreation, the domain Moses had commanded in the 1930s; not just housing, which was added to his portfolio in the 1940s; but every aspect of city growth—site selection, streets, circulation, sanitation, community facilities, social use, and design. Renewal projects were crafted by the Mayor's

**SLUM CLEARANCE PLAN  
UNDER TITLE I OF THE  
HOUSING ACT OF 1949**

*washington square  
southeast*

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AUGUST 1953



SLUM CLEARANCE PLAN



E-25. Pages from *Washington Square Southeast: Slum Clearance Plan under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949*, August 1953

Committee on Slum Clearance, which included leaders of relevant municipal departments: the New York City Housing Authority, City Planning Commission, Board of Estimate, Department of Buildings, Comptroller, and Corporation Counsel. But it was a committee in name only.<sup>11</sup>

Concentrating power in a redevelopment czar was not unusual. Most cities with robust Title I programs had powerful leaders: Louis Danzig in Newark, Edward Logue in New Haven and then Boston, Edmund Bacon in Philadelphia. Conversely, where power was dispersed, redevelopment often lagged, as in Boston until Logue arrived. Redevelopment intersected most parts of city government; to cut through the thicket of bureaucratic obstacles and compel coordinated action required concentrated power and fierce leaders like Moses and Logue.

But while wielding giant power at home, the redevelopment czars had relatively little power with the federal government. In a local context, Moses looked like Goliath; in dealings with the federal government, he sometimes came closer to David. Moses challenged federal rules that he thought obstructed the Title I program in three particular areas: sponsor selection, appraisal standards, and clearance procedures. The nitty-gritty information about operational intricacies presented here explains how Moses made a rough-hewn federal program work in a real estate market as expensive as Manhattan's.

**RULE 1: Prenegotiated Sales.** The federal guidelines neatly divided the public and private parts of the redevelopment process in prescribing the fol-

lowing sequence of events. The city selects a renewal site, buys it, relocates tenants, and demolishes the buildings; then and only then does the city sell the vacant land to a redeveloper who subsequently takes over. Moses upended the sequence so that city and sponsor interacted before the sale; selection of sponsor and site coincided at the outset of the process and preceded the city's acquisition of the site. In the federal model, competitive land auctions established fair market values on which the write-down was based; the higher the sale price, the smaller the write-down. In New York, the land auction was a ceremonial occasion with one party bidding on a prenegotiated sale. In theory, the auctions were open to other bidders, as Moses would inform prospective sponsors, but in practice, the advanced state of planning and customized terms at auction precluded other parties—only one groom comes to the altar.

Moses argued that cities could not afford to purchase and clear a multi-acre site only to discover afterward that no one would buy it. "If you are looking for private capital, you can't in a City like this persuade elected officers, the press and public to condemn and clear slums first and then look around for sponsors. You must snare them first," Moses explained to the Urban Renewal Agency. "Is there anyone dumb enough to think any Committee on Slum Clearance could persuade the governing body of New York (the Board of Estimate), with its shortage of capital funds, to condemn 50 odd acres of congested land in the center of Manhattan, like the Lincoln Square area, put out the tenants and raze the buildings, in the hope that in a year or so spon-

## DEMONSTRATION OF BLIGHT

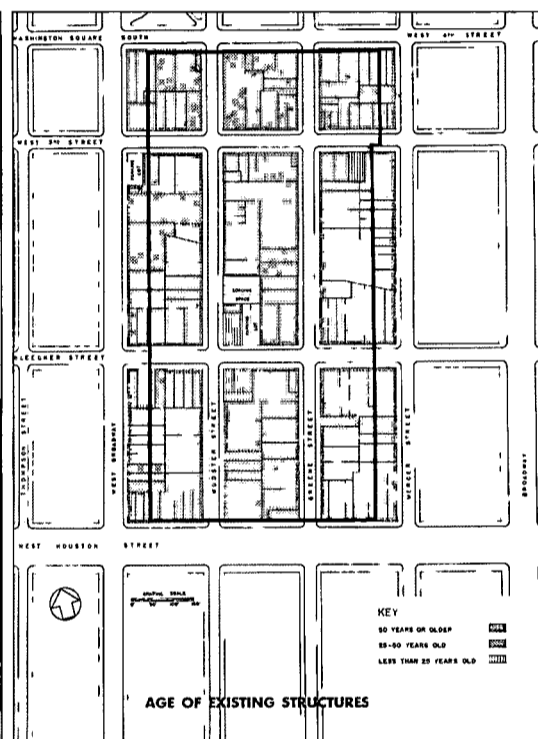
- I land use
- II condition of existing structures
- III age of existing structures
- IV land coverage
- V existing zoning
- VI commercial obsolescence
- VII residential obsolescence & tenant data

### III AGE OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

The existing buildings are old and 80% have been in use at least 50 years. Many are considerably older; some commercial structures date from the 1870's and 1880's and several residential structures evince the early development of this section of the city.

The balance of the buildings, or the relatively recent construction, consists of the New York University School of Commerce, 3 apartment buildings and the garages and other automotive buildings, but these were all in existence by the late 1920's.

Age contributes to obsolescence in these commercial structures because it prevents their adaptability to the requirements of present-day business.



sors of music, education, housing and what not would turn up eager to pay any old price to bail the City out?"<sup>15</sup>

Detroit and Newark learned this lesson the hard way. In Detroit, officials spent several years planning the redevelopment of the Gratiot area before testing the interest of the private sector. There were no bidders at the first auction, in 1952, and only two bidders at a second auction, in 1953. The land was sold and cleared, but when the buyer's renewal scheme proved unacceptable, the city canceled the sale and was stuck for a time with a desolate site.<sup>16</sup> After a similar experience, the Newark Housing Authority, the local redevelopment agency, changed procedures and gave precedence to developers. "We took an awful chance in the North Ward . . . by guessing at what redevelopers wanted," an official reflected. "Then we had to go around peddling vacant land. Now we let redevelopers tell us where they want to build." The new rule: "find a redeveloper first, and then see what interests him."<sup>17</sup> As Harold Kaplan explains in his study of the Newark Title I program, site feasibility forced the city to bypass the hard-core slums. The Title I requirement to attract private capital dictated a quest for the "right blight" with investment potential. In due course, the federal government accepted the procedure of prenegotiated sale, which became standard operating practice.

Site feasibility involved more than site selection; it included the development of a business plan to make the deal economically feasible for the investor. The Slum Clearance Committee was conceived as "a negotiating group of city officials," the corporation counsel explained, with Moses as the

negotiator.<sup>18</sup> Upon matching a sponsor with a site, he shaped a viable deal, determining the land resale price, the number of dwelling units in residential projects, and tax abatements, if any. Thus, by the time a project was introduced to the public, it was a fully packaged deal.

Moses presented the redevelopment projects to the public in stunning brochures designed by Richard C. Guthridge. Their bold graphics, potent images, detailed plans, construction schedules, and financial calculations made untested experiments in urbanism look like irrefutable, routine projects (fig. E-25). The brochures constructed a powerful visual argument and demonstrated Moses's sophisticated use of images, charts, and other visual material to shape perceptions. "I don't want the texts to be long," Moses instructed his staffer. "It's the schedules themselves, the plans and pictures that count with the statement that we mean business, that the procedure will be entirely fair and orderly and that hardships will be, so far as humanly possible, avoided."<sup>19</sup> The brochures also demonstrated Moses's commitment to professional expertise. The materials were prepared by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), whom Moses appointed as coordinating architects for the Title I program, and by two reputable real estate firms, Charles F. Noyes Company and Wood, Dolson Company. Deaf to the citizen's voice, Moses relied on experts in real estate and finance, architecture and engineering to translate the public good into specific renewal plans.

The brochures were organized in three parts: the redevelopment plan, demonstration of slum conditions, and appendices. The redevelopment plan

was cast in terms of square-foot and dollar calculations rather than social vision. It included a site plan, aerial rendering of the redevelopment, apartment layouts, business plan, and relocation schedule. The demonstration of slum conditions made the case that the area in question was, indeed, a slum. Title I did not define a slum or blighted area; it left the determination to the federal administrator.<sup>20</sup> For a definition of slum, one had to refer to the U.S. Housing Act of 1937: "The term 'slum' means any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health or morals."<sup>21</sup> Following these indicators, Moses presented data on the existing structures: their age, condition, heating and sanitary facilities; land coverage; population density; and tenant data, including family size and income.<sup>22</sup> The appendices preemptively addressed controversial matters with supporting evidence: acquisition and resale appraisals to rebut federal questions about the write-down, and letters from city officials about tenant relocation.

The brochures were submitted to the Board of Estimate and City Planning Commission for public hearings and approvals, then to the federal administrator, the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, a division of the Urban Renewal Administration, for federal review and approval. "Be sure to mention the fact that the City Planning Commission will ultimately have an opportunity to report on the Title I project," Moses instructed a staffer editing a brochure. "I want this in the booklet so no one will be able to say that they will not, in the end, be consulted before final action is taken."<sup>23</sup> To Moses, public input was accomplished through such gestures. The degree to which he controlled the hearings has been overstated, however. Of the first set of seven plans, all published in January 1951, Moses dropped or revised four, as he learned how to tailor more successful projects.<sup>24</sup> During the public review process, projects were often delayed and modified to accommodate critics; for example, the City Planning Commission rejected the enlargement of West Broadway when it approved the Washington Square Southeast Title I. Still, Moses had an overwhelming rate of success, which was primarily due to the buy-in of the city's political and business leadership in the renewal program rather than to his puppetlike control of the Board of Estimate and City Planning Commission.

**RULE 2: Appraisals Based on Future Use, Not Market Value.** The write-down, the key to Title I, was a soft number. It was the difference between the acquisition price, which could be firmly established, and the resale price, which was based on guesswork. The write-down raised many questions. How, for example, would the city fund its one-third share of the write-down? "Can this be done by some special type of City-wide assessment based upon the theory that the amortization and interest will be met as the new buildings go up and become taxable?" Moses queried Spargo, his numbers man. "We certainly have to have some theory in mind to guide us in determining how far down we can write these values. . . . I know how difficult it is to spell things out of the Federal rules, but it is time we got down to essentials."<sup>25</sup>

Moses developed an unarticulated theory of the write-down: quasi-public institutions serving the common good should not pay market value for land.

Values should be based on the prospective use of the land. The concept of use value, now accepted, was a contentious part of Moses's Title I plans and sparked skirmishes with the federal government.

New York University (NYU) agreed to pay \$5 per square foot for the property on Washington Square South where the university library now stands. The city approved the deal, which covered the three-block area extending to Mercer Street, about a third of the Washington Square Southeast renewal area, but federal officials challenged the price. A private developer had entered a bid of \$10.50 per square foot for the land directly to the south (where Washington Square Village was later built). Land valuations should be the same on adjoining land: this was the position of the federal administrator James Follin, regional director of the Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment of the Housing and Home Finance Agency. Moses and NYU countered that the lower bid properly reflected the public purpose of the university.

The chancellor of NYU, Henry Heald, was well versed in the civic arguments for slum clearance. As president of the Illinois Institute of Technology in the 1940s, he had pioneered in this domain, taking advantage of state laws to acquire and clear a slum area where he launched the construction of IIT's iconic campus, designed by Mies van der Rohe. Upon arriving at NYU in 1952, Heald responded enthusiastically to an overture from Moses. When Moses conveyed his dismay with NYU's previous leader, because of his silent response to vocal critics, Heald offered reassurance: "You need have no fear about my backing out of the program because there is some opposition to it. I learned long ago that no slum clearance project could ever be 100% popular."<sup>26</sup> When the federal government rejected the low NYU appraisal, Heald mounted a vigorous case for use value. He argued that, first, the university should not "be penalized because the area in which it is located is ideal for redevelopment"; second, New York City had a stake in the quality and scope of the service provided by NYU; and third, NYU would raise surrounding property values. "In many projects it is in the best interests of the public to include areas for institutional or public use which by their very nature will produce no direct dollar income. Such inclusion is justified where the institutional or public use serves a broad public purpose and where such a use, by adding an increment of value to the adjacent area, provides greater security for the private investment." Ultimately, Heald acknowledged, "there is no formula by which a fair value price can be arrived at for land for education use." Lacking an exact formula, Moses and NYU agreed on a 50 percent discount.<sup>27</sup>

Eventually, Moses and NYU prevailed, but the federal government mounted a similar challenge to the appraisal of the Lincoln Center site, which was lower than that of the adjacent housing site. Differentiated valuations benefited about a dozen quasi-public institutions, which paid land prices well below market value because they served a public purpose. Although the framework of Title I dictated a real estate orientation, Moses did not narrowly pursue the bottom line. His position was consistent with his career-long view of public works as an engine of economic development: a civic investment in public infrastructure will drive up property values and ultimately make economic sense.

**RULE 3: Sponsor Relocation and Clearance.** Federal guidelines defined tenant relocation and clearance as municipal responsibilities; this phase of work was supposed to precede the land sale. Moses rewrote these rules: he sold redevelopment sites before relocation and clearance and required the sponsor to handle these operations. The federal model assumed that the city would better manage the challenge. Moses believed that if the city ran relocation, political pressures would produce interminable delays. He was correct: after the city took control of relocation in 1960, it slowed to a snail's pace. Efficiency was Moses's critical concern. Conceiving of relocation as a practical and technical challenge, not a social problem, he envisioned relocation and clearance as an incremental process to be flexibly coordinated with the phasing of construction rather than as a stage precedent to construction.<sup>28</sup> Phasing allowed for the gradual displacement of site residents, but it also subjected them to abuses, and Moses's system afforded no protection to tenants awaiting eviction.

As a result of Moses's hand's-off approach, relocation procedures varied from project to project, depending upon the sponsor's standards. There were bad sponsors, the most notorious being the team at Manhattantown. In 1954, a Senate investigation threw a national spotlight on this Upper West Side project, located between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue from 97th to 100th Street. The sponsors had acquired the renewal site in 1951; three years later, there was no new construction, and only a fraction of the site had been cleared. Meanwhile, the sponsors were making money as old-fashioned slumlords and collecting rent on condemned tenements while letting them rot. Moses subsequently imposed a municipal monitor, but he fiercely defended both private relocation and the right of Title I sponsors to collect rents before demolition.

There were also conscientious sponsors, like Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Fordham University. They hired a reputable relocation firm, Braislin, Porter & Wheelock, which staffed an on-site relocation office and maintenance department. Communicating with owners and tenants in Spanish as well as English, the firm brought buildings into code compliance, maintained apartments during the waiting period, and actively assisted in the search for new housing. They paid brokers for listings and landlords for painting replacement apartments. The on-site office housed representatives of the New York City Housing Authority, who assisted in the search for public housing, and the New York City Bureau of Real Estate, the municipal body that monitored relocation.

Herbert Greenwald, a national Title I developer, also tried to handle relocation in a responsible manner (fig. E-26). He had come to the rescue in Detroit, where he bought the Gratiot area, and rescued the Pratt Institute project from a defaulting sponsor. Greenwald updated Moses on his progress in 1957:

Our relocation experience leads us to believe that the method of the Slum Clearance Commission, which has come in for so much criticism of late is overly much maligned. A sponsor willing and able to carry out his contract can do a good relocation job and possibly even a better job than City authorities. If the atmosphere of suspicion and bickering were not in the background, we might have proceeded more slowly in our relocation program. Despite our speed, no one suffered grievous injury. In the end,



E-26. Herbert Greenwald, May 27, 1957. Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing. Courtesy Chicago History Museum, neg. HB20465

bidders might be more eager for a project if an atmosphere of confidence were restored and a sponsor allowed to work in a more orderly fashion.<sup>29</sup>

Greenwald indicated another factor complicating relocation. After Title I's slow start in the early 1950s, all parties—the federal government, Moses, the press, and the public—demanded results. The pressure was to clear and build quickly, but responsible relocation attempting to address individual needs moved at a slower pace.

Even at its best, relocation was hobbled by structural forces with brutal consequences: underfunding of relocation and a severe shortage of affordable housing. Title I provided meager support for relocation expenses. Commercial property owners and tenants received no compensation under the 1949 legislation. (The Housing Act of 1956 permitted relocation payments up to \$2,000 to businesses.) Residential property owners received \$500; Lincoln Center and Fordham added bonuses for self-relocators (\$275 to \$500, depending on the apartment size); by comparison, NYCHA grants were \$100. Most important, there was inadequate replacement housing: a 1960 study put the shortage at 430,000 units.<sup>30</sup> The demand for low-income units was aggravated by the postwar influx of Puerto Ricans and southern blacks, by the cumulative effects of clearance necessitated by public housing and arterial highways as well as Title I, and by the incommensurate growth of the public housing program.<sup>31</sup> Tenants displaced by Title I clear-



ance could not afford the on-site replacement housing, which was intended for higher income residents. Nor could they typically afford to remain in the gentrified neighborhood. In theory, the best option was public housing, but it was in short supply, with waiting lists in the tens of thousands. In a relocation analysis of the first five hundred evicted families, Lincoln Center documented trends that generally characterized the Title I diaspora in New York City: 70 percent moved outside the neighborhood (broadly defined in this case as the Upper West Side); the average rent of the displaced rose from \$51.82 to \$65.26; and only 11.4 percent moved into public housing.<sup>32</sup>

### PAIRING UP WITH PUBLIC HOUSING

One response to the demand for low-income housing was to use a Title I site for that purpose. Moses pursued this strategy in the Washington Square South plan, which dedicated seven of forty acres to a New York City Housing Authority project, named Houston Houses on the plan (fig. E-27). As Joel Schwartz established, the lending community opposed this integrated approach.<sup>33</sup> So did the federal administrator who reminded Moses that Title I was intended for redevelopment by private enterprise: "It would not appear that the use of sites cleared under the Title I program exclusively or to a predominant degree for redevelopment in public housing would be consistent with this general policy."<sup>34</sup> Moses never again included public housing in a Title I project. He did not, however, abandon the idea of mixing incomes.

Morningside Gardens (the Morningside-Manhattanville Title I) introduced a new approach, which coordinated the Title I project with a neighboring public housing project. The expectation was that tenants displaced from the Title I site could be locally rehoused in the NYCHA project. In his report "Essential Postwar Improvements" of April 1946, Moses called for the coordinated construction of public and moderate-income housing:

There is, beyond question by the toughest individualist, a large part of our population which will have no decent lodgings, much less homes, unless government provides them on a frankly uneconomical basis, if dollars are the only measurement. . . . Those helped by the government should not be segregated, nor should they monopolize whole neighborhoods. This is why redevelopment, limited dividend and speculative building, with all the services that go with them, should go on step by step and block by block with public housing for the lowest income groups. Postponing one or another is a dangerous business. They must be timed to go together.<sup>35</sup>

It would seem that Moses had contradicted this position in the 1940s when, as the city construction coordinator, he was associated with a housing program that rebuilt much of the Lower East Side as public housing. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, when he controlled site selection for Title I, he located twelve of his seventeen executed projects beside public housing. Only in two cases, Morningside and Manhattantown, were the Title I apartments built in tandem with new NYCHA projects, the General Grant Houses and Frederick Douglass Houses respectively (fig. E-28). In the other instances, Moses chose Title I sites adjacent to preexisting NYCHA projects (fig. E-29).<sup>36</sup>

Coordination proved difficult: NYCHA and Title I were pulled in different directions by divergent constituencies, locational strategies, and funding

constraints. Moses was obliged to target more expensive, developed land for clearance, whereas the federal public housing program (Title III of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949) put limits on land costs that obstructed this approach.<sup>37</sup> The pairing of Title I and NYCHA projects offered various benefits, including the formation of mixed-income neighborhoods, but the coordinated projects did not come close to solving the relocation problem, as the numbers revealed: only 18 percent of the tenants displaced by the two Morningside slum clearance projects (the Title I cooperative, Morningside Gardens, and the NYCHA project, General Grant Houses) moved into public housing elsewhere in the city.<sup>38</sup> Moses did not reckon with the hard truth: public housing was no haven for Title I evictees.

Moses blamed NYCHA's tough eligibility standards, which ruled out single-parent families, noncitizens, and the unemployed. In 1959, he again suggested a coordinated Title I-public housing program with phased construction to deal with relocation. NYCHA would first build a low-income project on the site of the Polo Grounds (involving no evictions) to provide housing for those displaced from two proposed clearance sites in Harlem. William Reid, the chairman of the NYCHA, would not prioritize Title I evictees and reminded Moses that only 12 percent of tenants of Title I sites were relocated to NYCHA projects, attributing the low figure to the bonuses and finder's fees offered by Title I sponsors, which ostensibly made alternative housing more attractive. Moses's reply to Reid gives some sense of the intragovernment battles he fought and, as in this case, lost: "We had hoped for a better position and assurance which would make most of the tenants eligible. . . . It would be helpful if your staff, in reviewing applications for relocation to public housing projects, would be more liberal and flexible in qualifying our site occupants."<sup>39</sup>

Slum clearance affected black New Yorkers more profoundly than others. Some Title I projects were located in integrated neighborhoods, such as Manhattantown, and the result of redevelopment was to resegment those areas, with the expensive new housing generally pricing out minority residents. The discrimination in the housing market and the limited options available to blacks landed them in other slums, but Moses did not recognize this problem. "What type of housing is referred to by the term new slum?" Moses was asked in a questionnaire sent to him in 1957 by Whitney North Seymour, the president of the Municipal Art Society. Your letter "makes no sense to me," Moses answered. "I don't know who invented the term 'new slums' or what it means, and don't propose to be hornsogged into any such silly controversy. When by the way, did the members of your Society stop beating their wives?"<sup>40</sup> The problem of the new slums and the racialized impact of clearance did not deter Moses. On the contrary, New York's thousands of slum acres reinforced his conviction of the need to bulldoze and build.

Moses compartmentalized the problems that he attacked and accepted what Scott Greer felicitously called the "cage of constraints" surrounding Title I policy.<sup>41</sup> That cage allowed Moses to ignore the secondary effects of Title I clearance: a housing crisis, resegregation and discrimination, and shrinking central-city housing options. He failed to acknowledge that slum clearance begat slums. His ability to see the city as an organic unity and the wide scope of his operations put Moses in the unique position to advance

integrated solutions. The tragedy is that instead he declared limited objectives to rationalize the social damage he caused.

### THE TITLE I DEVELOPERS AND FEDERAL ROADBLOCKS

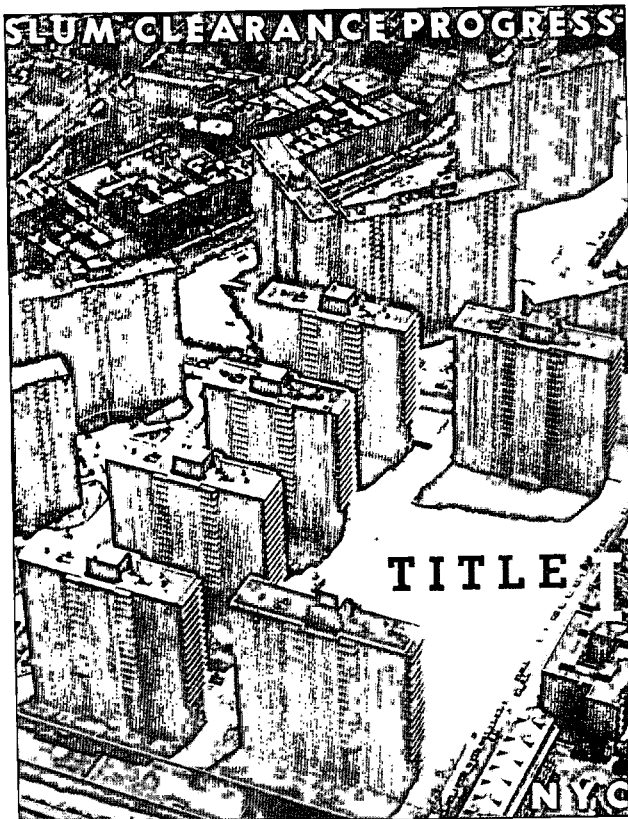
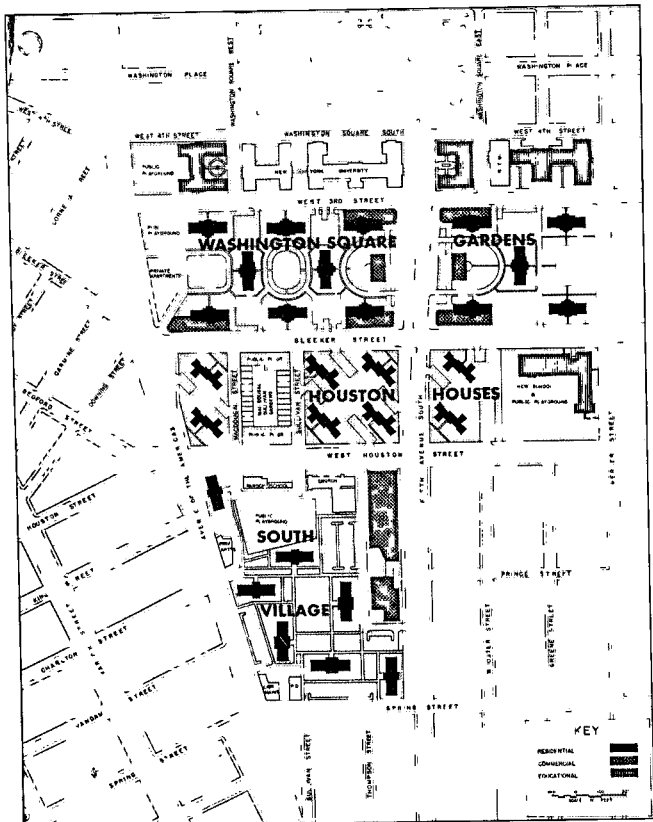
As a group, the New York Title I developers were suspect, tainted by their secretive selection. There was no transparent bidding process or established procedure to submit redevelopment proposals. Moses not only decided what the city needed and where; he also anointed the Title I sponsors with limited vetting. Construction delays and cases of malfeasance compounded the problem. Manhattantown became emblematic, shaping the view of sponsors as slumlords, political cronies, and cheats who profited from a state-sponsored land rush. Putting the program in historical perspective, William Zeckendorf described the write-down as "a variant of the land subsidies through which our early railroads were built."<sup>42</sup> But in the early years of Title I, before regulations were loosened, there was no land rush. Absorbed by colorful sponsor scandals, the press missed an important and unexpected story: at the outset, Title I failed to attract private capital.<sup>43</sup> Moses certainly chose some bad sponsors, but the main problem was the risky business of slum clearance, not the sponsor selection process.

Moses was disheartened to find that relatively few developers were interested in slum real estate. In January 1950, he acknowledged that "for vari-

ous reasons those representing large reservoirs of private capital in banks, insurance companies, real estate and building enterprises have been hesitant to take a lively interest in slum clearance." His report ends with an entreaty to investors: the "Committee recommends at this time that further steps be taken to invite a larger interest in this slum clearance and redevelopment program. We hope that additional private investment groups will come forward."<sup>44</sup> Moses had encountered such resistance in the 1940s, and now discovered that the write-down did not sufficiently change the financial equation for investors.

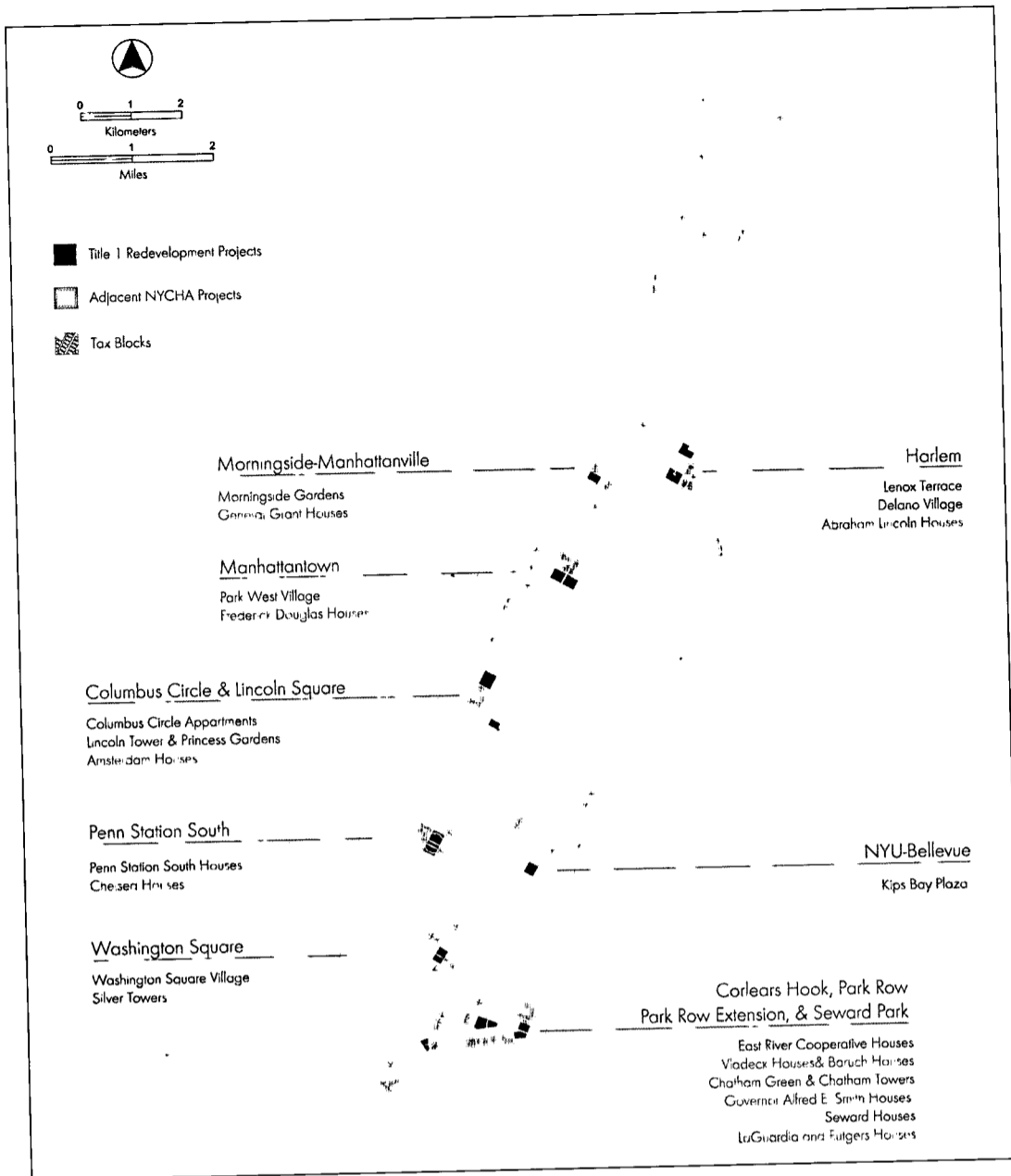
Several discouraging factors were at work. First, slums were a real estate profit center. A 1957 study by the Council for Better Housing acknowledged that "favorable yields on the existing properties provide little incentive for redevelopment. It is more profitable to keep structures in their present conditions at a 67 percent return than to demolish them to erect new structures earning a smaller return."<sup>45</sup>

Second, the pioneer redevelopers could not obtain financing. Banks would not fund the risky business of urban renewal without federal mortgage insurance, and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) adopted the same risk-averse attitude as banks. As the administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency explained, the FHA was not "permitted to insure houses in slum areas because a slum was regarded as beyond redemption."<sup>46</sup> Thirty lending institutions reportedly refused to finance the NYU-Bellevue project.



E-27. Composite site plan of Washington Square South and South Village Title I redevelopments, January 1951. Houston Houses was planned as a public housing project.

E-28. Brochure cover showing aerial view of Morningside Gardens (bottom) and General Grant Houses, public housing project (top), 1957. Courtesy MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive



E-29. Map of Manhattan, showing Title I projects executed by Robert Moses, with adjacent low-income housing of the New York City Housing Authority. Map by James Conlon

The FHA had been established to support housing construction but, following banker's logic, undermined the goals of urban renewal. Federal policy was at odds with itself. As Zeckendorf noted, "The FHA, while freely funneling funds to the suburbs, treated proposals to build in slum areas with about as much enthusiasm as your maiden aunt getting an invitation to a strip tease show."<sup>47</sup>

Moses complained incessantly to his federal contacts and lobbied Senator Robert A. Taft to amend the 1949 law, recommending mortgages of up to 90 percent of construction costs, without limitation on the basis

of room or apartment count.<sup>48</sup> Moses got the first part of the request, the 90 percent mortgage, when Congress amended the housing law in 1954 and authorized the FHA to insure urban renewal projects, based on the value of the completed redevelopment. The first government-insured mortgage for a Title I project anywhere in the nation was issued to Delano Village (the North Harlem Title I) in 1955.<sup>49</sup> The primary reason for the Title I standstill during its first five years was the policy of the FHA, not wayward sponsors. Once mortgage insurance was available, projects came to life.

But FHA insurance came with restrictions disadvantageous to city builders. The FHA set a maximum base cost of \$8,400 per room; an additional \$1,000 per room was allowed in areas of high construction costs, such as New York City, but only in apartments of four or more rooms. In order for city developers to qualify for FHA mortgages, they were compelled to reduce costs and build cut-rate housing. Moreover, a room had to meet an idiosyncratic FHA definition—balconies but not bathrooms were defined as rooms—that created an incentive to build balconies and penalized bathrooms. I. M. Pei, who was involved in several Title I projects, predicted that as a result apartments in Alaska would begin sprouting balconies; certainly they sprouted all over New York. At Kips Bay Plaza, Pei persuaded the FHA to count the alcovelike projection of the structural wall as balcony space, although it was inaccessible, and in this way his design complied with FHA price ceilings.<sup>50</sup>

The FHA was only one part of the problem. Title I entangled developers in a web of bureaucratic rules, red tape, and government oversight that caused expensive delays and timing problems. Standard developments did not impose these restrictions. And in New York, sponsors faced the additional burden of managing relocation. Given the financial risks, public scrutiny, and unproven market appeal of redeveloped slums, the early sponsors were often less motivated by business sense—there were safer investments elsewhere—than by commitment to an urban future. The pioneering sponsors included Herbert Greenwald, who worked with Mies van der Rohe; Abraham Kazan and Shirley Boden, leaders of the union-sponsored cooperative housing movement; Robert S. Olnick, who at the start of his career sponsored the Harlem Title I and provided Harlem with its first apartment buildings with doormen, at Lenox Terrace (fig. E-30); and, most important, William Zeckendorf, whose large-scale imagination and dazzling ambition made him a fine match for Moses (fig. E-31).

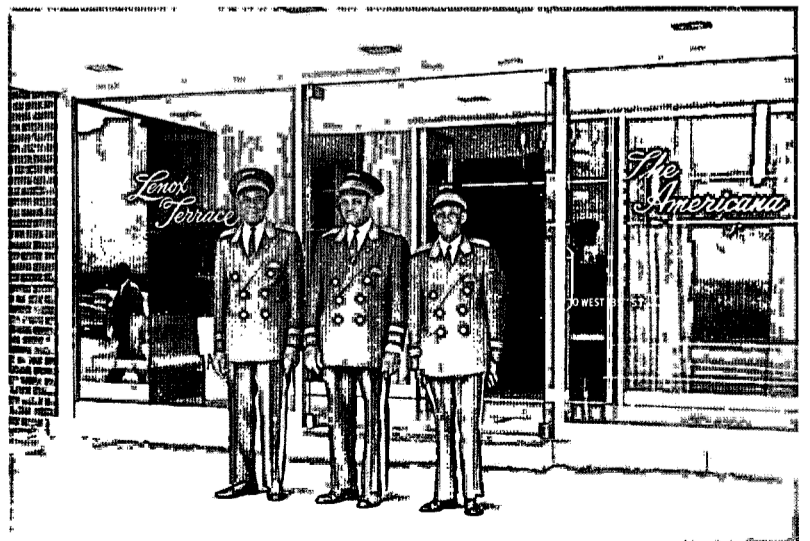
Having previously collaborated on the United Nations, Zeckendorf and Moses partnered again in connection with the Fort Greene Title I, announced in December 1952. This project provided Long Island University (LIU) with seven and a half acres to build a proper campus surrounding its outpost in a converted theater on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, where it served ex-G.I.s and a local student population.<sup>51</sup> Zeckendorf was president of the university's board of trustees and donated the funds (\$500,000) for the land purchase. The site met several of Moses's criteria: it was beside a public housing project (Fort Greene Houses), a park (Fort Greene Park), and Brooklyn Hospital, and could buttress an already significant investment in public resources. Still, Zeckendorf's association with LIU, a fledgling university founded in 1926, had to have been a major consideration in the selection of this site for Title I funding.

Zeckendorf's role in this early project was limited to financial support; his first venture as a Title I developer came a year later, in 1953, in the Southwest Washington project, which was followed by intensive Title I work between 1956 and 1958. As Zeckendorf explained in his spellbinding autobiography, his firm Webb & Knapp studied possibilities in about thirty cities and submitted proposals in half that number to reap a harvest of eight projects nationwide.<sup>52</sup> He entered New York in a big way in 1957, as sponsor of

three projects. By this time, Moses had given up on small-time, inexperienced developers and favored veterans on whom he could rely to get the job done. Zeckendorf rescued the notorious Manhattantown and the NYU-Bellevue projects, paying the back taxes; he was rewarded with the sponsorship of the Lincoln Square housing, which required Moses to break a contract with the novice developer whom he had originally designated. In addition to deep experience with Title I, Zeckendorf brought his brilliant architect, I. M. Pei, who set a high design standard at Kips Bay Plaza, as the NYU-Bellevue venture was renamed. Alas, Zeckendorf overreached. To avoid bankruptcy, he sold his three New York City Title I housing projects to Alcoa in 1962 (bankruptcy happened anyway in 1965), which became an important institutional participant in urban renewal. With significant projects in Hyde Park, Chicago; Society Hill, Philadelphia; Southwest Washington; and New York City, among other places, Zeckendorf's Title I work was unparalleled and remains an untold chapter in the history of post-war American urbanism.

#### THE STRATEGY: HOW TO SAVE THE CITY

Moses proudly assumed an antivisionary stance: "I recommend you file the 'Master Plan of Land Use' and forget it." Contemptuous of "long-haired planners" who promoted wholesale change yet had no idea how to get things done, he saw himself as an administrator "driving persistently at limited objectives and reaching them. . . . There it is," Moses proclaimed in mocking self-debasement, "you can't expect anything better from moles who are blind, crawl short distances under the earth, and have only the most limited objectives."<sup>53</sup> In principle, he opposed master planning, but in practice he made and executed plans. The question is, what if any idea of the city informed those plans?



E-30. Doormen at the Americana, Lenox Terrace, 10 West 135th Street, ca. 1958. Photograph by Cecil Layne



E-31. Caricature of William Zeckendorf, by Paul Davis, 1961. The original caption reads: "The Sand Hog, or Badger (Zeckendorfus barbarus): A burrowing animal, fully webbed and napped except for the sharp claws used in operating its famous game called 'urban renewal.' In this process the resourceful little creature, equipped with such clever devices as ground leases, accelerated depreciation allowances, mortgage pyramids, and mergers—yet rarely a penny of its own money—can level a city faster than you can say 'Robert Moses.' Reproduces by subdividing. Approach of its bulldozing claws into hitherto unharmed areas marked by sudden appearance of white X's on windows and shutting off of heat unless taken to court, where it knows everyone anyway. Makes grunting noise that sounds like 'Title One! Title One!' abhors high ceilings, thick walls, and decorative architecture. Naturalists believe it instinctively builds drab buildings the way the beaver builds leaky dams."

The prevailing view of Moses is that he had no overarching urban public purpose. Caro portrays an empty soul crazed by power who, by the 1950s, had lost the public mission of his early years. Stressing Moses's "real estate project approach to community building," Jeanne Lowe sees Moses as servile to the market imperatives of Title I, a point echoed by Joel Schwartz. "Moses actually had in mind purposeful reclamations for mixed-uses, but under the studied indifference of investors adopted the opportunist approach. The resulting Title I's," Schwartz concluded, "had no central purpose other than to improve isolated areas, fill the city's write-down quotas, and preserve the prerogatives of the construction coordinator."<sup>34</sup> Granted, Moses was opportunistic; it does not follow that he lacked a guiding vision.

Indeed, a survey of his urban renewal projects indicates that his opportunism served well-defined goals.

Moses shaped Title I to reinforce the role of the central city and to keep New York the thriving center of a spreading metropolitan region and a magnet for suburbanites, the U.S., and the world. He pursued three objectives. Objective one was to recapture the middle class, which had chosen the suburb over the city, by building modern, affordable housing. Objective two was to establish New York as a center of higher education by making land available for university expansion. Objective three was to elevate the national and international stature of New York with magnetic world-class institutions: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Coliseum, and the United Nations. (The United Nations did not involve Title I clearance and thus is not discussed here, but it was part of this strategic vision.) Moses concentrated the Title I program in Manhattan: of the seventeen executed projects, thirteen were in Manhattan, two in Brooklyn, two in Queens. Manhattan represented the ideal ground for Title I: slums were extensive, land values inflated, and real estate interest high. But unlike other cities, which used Title I to lure banks and department stores and office buildings back into ailing downtowns, New York under Moses avoided commercial land uses. The only exception was the Coliseum, New York's first purpose-built convention center, which had a showcase role and fit with Moses's desire to put New York on display.

Economic critiques of urban renewal serve to highlight the opposing values that motivated Moses. In his penetrating study of 1965, Scott Greer concluded that the total costs of renewal were not reflected in the increased advantages of enterprises' returning to the central business district.<sup>35</sup> According to his economic reasoning, he saw no inherent benefit in a strong center city, whereas Moses had an a priori commitment to the city. Nationwide, Greer noted, few careful demand studies were made before urban renewal project sites were cleared. By the 1960s, Chester Rapkin and other urban sociologists were studying the economic opportunities in the region and the demand for inner-city, middle-income housing, but Moses did not collect such data. He molded renewal projects more on faith in the city than on empirical proof that middle-class families would come back from the suburbs and that universities and the arts were key to an urban future.

Moses warned that New York would become a polarized city of rich and poor unless it took aggressive steps to provide for the middle class. His first objective was to build affordable housing for teachers, nurses, garment workers, municipal employees—the broad middle class. New York City had a strong tradition of union-sponsored cooperative housing going back to 1926. Although Moses had no sympathy for the movement's ideology, his pragmatism led him into a productive alliance with the cooperators; through Title I, he launched the biggest expansion of union-backed cooperatives in the city's history: eight Title I housing cooperatives in all.

Moses found a partner in Abraham Kazan, a union leader focused on housing issues. In 1951, Kazan established the United Housing Foundation (UHF) to capitalize on Title I, and under his leadership the UHF sponsored three Title I cooperative projects: the East River Houses at Corlears Hook; Seward Park Houses, also on the Lower East Side; and Penn Station South.

The UHF was also slated to sponsor the Cooper Square Title I, which was canceled after Moses's reign ended. (It went on to sponsor the Jamaica Race Track development and Co-op City.) In each case, the UHF worked with a sponsoring labor union. Louis Pink, another UHF leader, sponsored Kingsview in Brooklyn, part of the Fort Greene Title I; and Shirley F. Boden, who got his start with Kazan, was involved with three Title I cooperatives. Boden structured the housing cooperative at Morningside Gardens, which was sponsored by a consortium of Morningside academic and religious institutions. He then established the Middle Income Housing Corporation, which sponsored Chatham Green and Chatham Towers (Park Row and Park Row Extension Title I) with the backing of city and state credit unions. Located near the heart of city government, these apartment buildings were intended to provide municipal workers with apartments they could afford to own. The last of the Title I cooperatives, Princess Gardens, a single building in the Lincoln Square development, rejected the ideology of cooperativism but retained the financial structure as a way of reducing housing costs.

The disappointing truth about Title I was that it naturally resulted in luxury housing unless market forces were restrained, or other subsidies provided, or both, as with the cooperatives. The cooperatives contained costs by three means: equity down payments at the start of the project allowed advantageous long-term mortgages and reduced financing costs; speculative profits were eliminated; and, thanks to Moses's advocacy, tax abatements were provided. After an initial down payment of roughly \$700 per room, owners paid modest monthly charges of about \$20 per room.<sup>56</sup> The tax abatements alone saved purchasers a meaningful amount: \$3 to \$4 per room per month, or \$149 to \$192 a year on a four-room apartment.<sup>57</sup> The city comptroller Lawrence Gerosa opposed the tax abatements, arguing that they undercut the Title I goal of growing the city's tax revenues. The comptroller's recommendations, Moses responded, "would ultimately make not only Manhattan but all of New York City a home for the very rich and the very poor, with no place for the real 'forgotten man' with middle income who can support himself if rents are reasonable."<sup>58</sup>

The cooperatives gave Moses a mechanism to control real estate market forces while populating the city with middle-class home owners. At the opening of the Seward Park Houses in October 1958, he paid tribute to the cooperators, "substantial and reliable people who have a real stake in the City . . . and ask only that City and Federal agencies help them get started. They don't want the City to be their landlord; they want to pay their way." With cooperatives, we shall "rebuild the City for those who want to stay and for those who, in increasing numbers, want to come back to town from the suburbs."<sup>59</sup>

The second objective of Moses's Title I program was to support higher education. He directed projects to benefit private universities—New York University and NYU Medical Center, Long Island University, Pratt Institute, Fordham University, and the Juilliard School—as well as the academic institutions on Morningside Heights. Yeshiva University and the Cooper Union were slated to participate in two canceled projects, Riverside-Amsterdam and Copper Square respectively. The transfer of land to universities was a response to the postwar explosion of college enrollments. With the public

sector funding the expansion of the city colleges and the establishment of the state university system in 1948, Moses used Title I to support private universities, or what he preferred to call quasi-public institutions because they served the public interest.

Title I provided private universities with tools that they otherwise would not possess: eminent domain, land assemblage, and discounted land. Through Title I, NYU was able to shift its center of operations from the Bronx to Washington Square and complete its takeover of the south side of the square. As the development evolved and the sponsor of the private housing opted out, NYU acquired the entire renewal site, stretching from Washington Square to Houston Street. Fordham University was an invisible presence in Manhattan, with dispersed classrooms complementing the main Bronx campus. Moses provided a two-block site at Lincoln Square for a full-fledged campus. The Lincoln Square Title I also accommodated a new building for the Juilliard School, which expanded its curriculum and profile in a monumental new structure. (A high school of performing arts was added to the project after Moses's retirement.) Moses did not originate the idea of using slum clearance on behalf of universities; Henry Heald had previously done this in Chicago. But recognizing a good idea, Moses translated it into a large-scale building program and urban mission.

The third objective was to enhance the stature of the city with new institutions that would draw national and international attention. Both the Coliseum and Lincoln Center were publicized as proof of American urban progress; the former was a magnet for trade, the latter a beacon of cultural achievement. Lincoln Center, probably the most influential Title I project in the nation, demonstrates Moses's originality in execution, not in conception. When Fiorello La Guardia first conceived of a performing arts center, in 1938, he asked Moses to study the idea. Moses dismissed it, unable to imagine a project involving "so much expense, so much cooperation among quasi public and private interests and such complexities in the establishment of the operating corporation." He correctly gauged the future challenges that Lincoln Center would face, but he would reverse the position that he staked out in 1938.<sup>60</sup> Moses came to embrace La Guardia's vision as he witnessed the inability of the Metropolitan Opera and the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra to cope with the real estate challenges of New York City and recognized cultural institutions as a source of urban prestige and international renown.

Determined to assist the Metropolitan Opera in its thirty-year quest for a new home, Moses offered the organization two Title I sites, Columbus Circle and Washington Square, before the parties agreed on Lincoln Square. The forty-five-acre project, the city's largest Title I project, included land for Fordham, housing, and a commercial theater complex to be developed by Roger Stevens. When the federal government balked at the large write-down, Moses dropped the commercial complex, the part with the highest tax rates. John D. Rockefeller III and the exploratory committee that he chaired were ultimately responsible for the high quality of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, which expanded from the opera and symphony to embrace five additional cultural entities plus a park with band shell, but Moses played an essential role in its realization.

Moses grasped the appetite for culture in the postwar period, a trend diagnosed by Alvin Toffler in his book *The Culture Consumers*, which appeared in 1964. The public marketing of Lincoln Center was part of its mission, with outreach to suburban audiences and school programs built in from the start. Historically, the opera and symphony were hermetic, and their elite donor circles provided limited financial support; by contrast, Lincoln Center launched a broad-based capital campaign, appealing to a wide public. Lincoln Center illustrated what Toffler described as an organizational revolution in the culture industry, a revolution fundamentally connected to the urban strategy that Moses devised, based on centralization, monumental architecture, and urban prominence.

### SUPERBLOCK SOLUTIONS

"I am inclined to think of it in terms of people rather than buildings," the *New York Times* editor Lester Markel wrote in explaining why he objected to Moses's approach to slum clearance. For Moses, the slums were like war-torn Dresden—dead structures to be demolished before new life could flourish. They were a physical, not a social, problem, to be cured by replanning and new building. "The big unresolved question seems to me to be this," Markel continued. "What do you do with the inhabitants of a slum area when you clear up that area for purposes other than low-income housing?"<sup>61</sup> These social matters fell outside Moses's shuttered view of the slum problem, but planning did not; planning was at the heart of the problem as he understood it. Replot the streets, replace the site plan, build anew, and the reformatted, upgraded city would generate a better life.

Yet, despite this environmental premise, Moses did not attach importance to urban and architectural design in his planning process. He determined land use and produced preliminary site plans, then turned the project over to the sponsor without imposing design standards. Moses conceived of design decisions as a matter of private choice, outside the sphere of government control.

The categorization of design as a private preference is unsurprising. Although buildings and site plans establish the physical framework of urban life and have long-lasting effects, design was, and still is, rarely considered a domain of public policy. Even so, given Moses's conception of urban renewal as a building program, his lack of interest in design was a serious blind spot. For all his overreaching power, when it came to physical form and urban design, Moses did not go far enough. He relinquished control of these fundamental aspects of renewal to the sponsor.

The planning process began with the land-use plan, which fixed the allocation and distribution of uses on a renewal site and wholly reflected Moses's decision making. Mixing tax-exempt and full tax-paying uses, he aimed for a net tax gain without adhering to a formula in balancing these uses. Although nonresidential uses came under attack on the grounds that slum clearance money should be used only for housing, the Housing Act of 1949 imposed no land-use restrictions if the site had been a residential slum.<sup>62</sup>

Next came the site plan, which involved a collaboration between the sponsor's architect and SOM, representing Moses. Although various

architects were involved in this work, site plans followed the same pattern. High-rise apartment buildings floated on a superblock, the towers set back from the street but usually aligned with the city grid. To bring apartment living into the automotive age, sites contained several surface parking lots and sometimes an underground garage.<sup>63</sup> To compensate for the closure of streets within the superblock, the bounding cross streets were enlarged to accommodate the displaced traffic. These extra-wide streets are, indeed, good for cars but further separate the projects from the surrounding fabric. Moses and his planners placed a premium on open space and reduced land coverage: renewal dramatically decreased land coverage from 80 to 90 percent in the slums to 30 percent in the redevelopments (fig. E-32). But despite its amplitude, the open space was fragmented by scattered buildings and parking lots, and landscaping was an afterthought. The promise of reduced land coverage all too often resulted in surface parking.

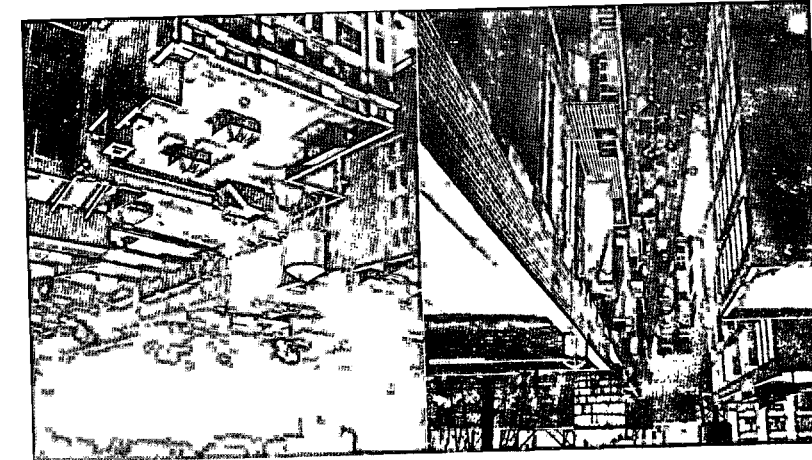
A banal but significant feature of the housing projects was the one-story commercial strip fronting on the avenue. The strips maintained the traditional building line and the commercial vernacular of the street while providing modern commercial space. Gone were the mom-and-pop shops of tenement buildings; the new commercial space could be flexibly sized to accommodate the larger retail operations demanded by national chains and postwar consumer trends. One of Harlem's first large supermarkets, if not the first, opened in the retail space at Lenox Terrace. Unlike the NYCHA projects, which excluded shops, the commercial-residential mix in Title I projects was an asset.<sup>64</sup>

The site plans often included new public facilities—a playground or school—or incorporated existing community facilities. Lenox Terrace is the best example of a flexible site plan; it wrapped the new structures around a preexisting play center (the Children's Aid Society and its playground), and integrated a church (formerly a theater), public bath, and power substation in the superblock (fig. E-33). The success of this approach reinforced Moses's effort to site Title I projects near existing community structures in order to shore up the public infrastructure.

Site planning was managed by SOM, a firm Moses had first hired in 1939, when it was newly formed, to work on the World's Fair and had used ever since. As Nathaniel Owings explained, the Moses connection helped the firm grow and "gave SOM a niche in the tight hierarchy which controlled architectural, planning, engineering and construction jobs in New York City."<sup>65</sup> By 1949, when Moses hired SOM to coordinate planning for the Slum Clearance Committee, there was no more distinguished corporate firm in the city. The urban renewal point men at SOM were Robert Cutler, one of the founding partners in the New York office; Kenneth Young; and Major General George J. Nold, an engineer with exceptional experience in managing large-scale projects. As director of the Joint Construction Agency, European Command, Nold headed the building program for all American fighting forces in Europe from 1953 to 1955, whereupon he joined SOM.<sup>66</sup> That Moses enlisted the military's top engineer to oversee the reconstruction of New York indicates his approach to renewal as a technical, engineering, and management problem.

SOM did more than act as project manager; the firm worked with the sponsor's architects, approved all designs, and at times submitted its own plans (their site plans in the Harlem and North Harlem Title I brochures are notably uninspired). It is clear that Moses expected SOM to guide planning from an early stage, as when he instructed Cutler to "see what sort of attractive plan of the Riverside-Amsterdam area can be figured out with the City Planning Commission and Yeshiva University."<sup>67</sup> SOM, however, did not respond creatively to the urban design opportunity that Moses offered. Ultimately, Moses is accountable for the mediocre site plans that his committee issued, which he might have more fully controlled. Nevertheless, he was not schooled in urban design nor were most redevelopment czars. (The exception was in Philadelphia, where the urban designer Edmund Bacon shaped urban renewal and achieved significant refinement in design.) Moses hired distinguished professionals from whom he expected excellence

E-32. Existing buildings and proposed new buildings showing reduction in land coverage, 1953



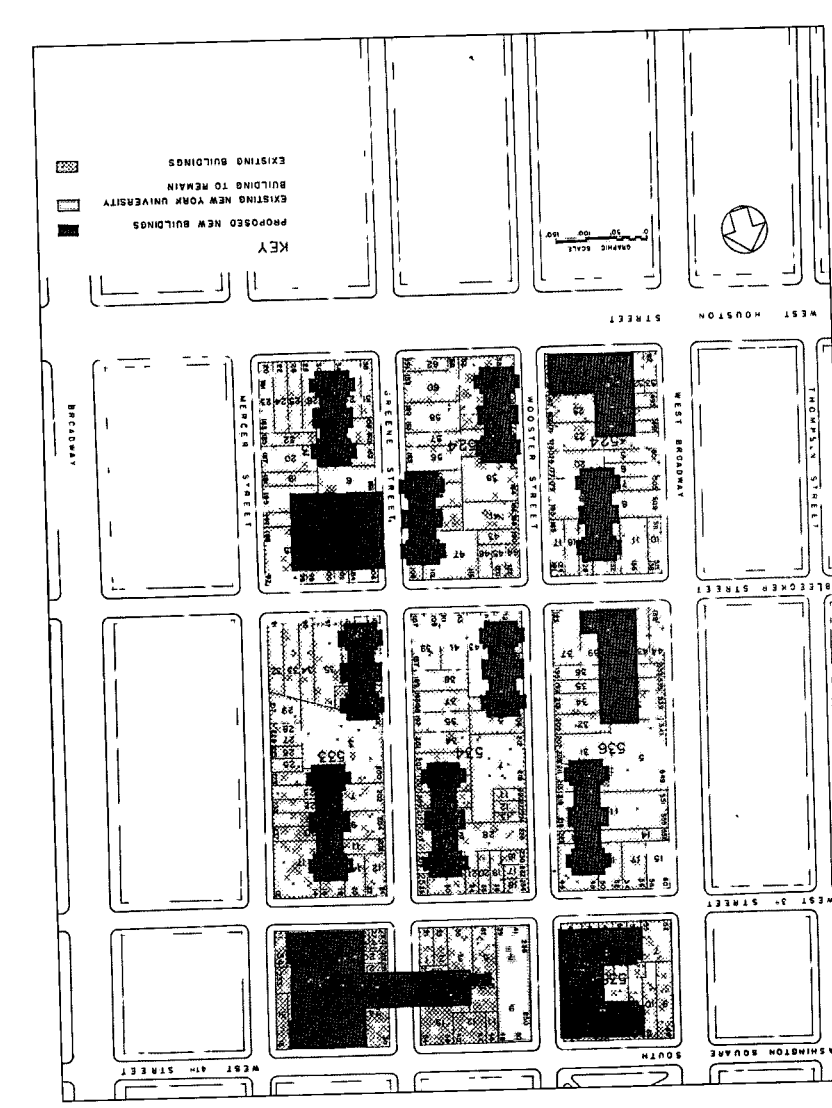
The only land in the redevelopment site which is not solidly built up is in streets, sidewalks, two small parking lots and one off-street truck-loading space. The adjacent map indicates that the coverage within lot lines is virtually 100%. So little ground area is devoted to small, inadequate and isolated piazzas and light courts as to be negligible. In this respect no distinction can be made between commercial or residential properties.

**IV LAND COVERAGE**

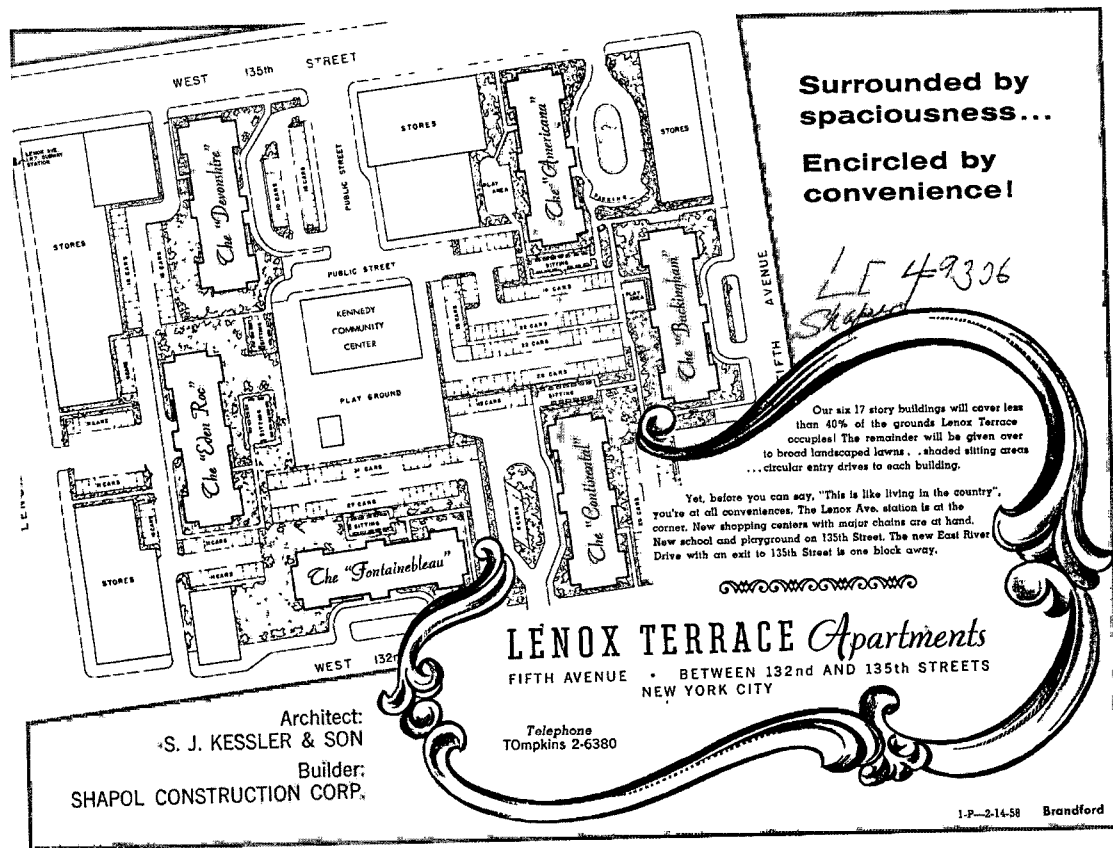
The failure of the Title I work to meet the same high standards has severed bridges from that period. seen in the high-quality designs of pools, recreational landscapes, and architectural Gilmore D. Clarke, and the engineer Ohmar Ammann—can be and outstanding performance. He had done as much in the 1930s: the talents of his top designers—the architect Aymar Embury II, the landscape architect Gilmore D. Clarke, and the engineer Ohmar Ammann—can be seen in the high-quality designs of pools, recreational landscapes, and bridges from that period.

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E-32. Existing buildings and proposed new buildings showing reduction in land coverage, 1953







E-33. Site plan of Lenox Terrace Apartments (Harlem Title I), from rental brochure, 1958

posture.<sup>69</sup> The inflexibility of the federal approval process blocked design improvements. The site plans and corresponding aerial views published in the slum clearance brochures were schematic and recorded an early stage of planning, but under certain circumstances those plans were binding. After approval by the Urban Renewal Administration and a grant of FHA mortgage insurance, any subsequent change in the site plan required new approvals. The case of Herbert Greenwald and the Pratt Institute Title I illustrates how the FHA obstructed design improvements.

Greenwald inherited a mediocre plan when he took over the housing portion of the Pratt Institute Title I project. For the Brooklyn block bounded by Myrtle and Willoughby avenues (Area B), S. J. Kessler and Sons made a typical site plan of parking lots and apartment slabs (fig. E-34). But, as Greenwald explained to Moses, "We felt that it was an anachronism to place automobiles between buildings . . . [and] much preferred the complete segregation of automobiles from people and green areas." Greenwald pursued an alternate plan for the project called Willoughby Walk with the consulting architects, SOM, and arrived at an agreement on what he regarded as a superior scheme. Greenwald provided Moses with an account of his failed effort to improve the design:

We then approached the FHA and were flatly rejected. Several alternate plans were devised for the benefit of the FHA Land Planner, and in April 1958, a compromise

plan was submitted to SOM which received their approval. At this juncture we went to see Mr. Leibold [the director of the Committee on Slum Clearance] and apprise him of our desire to execute the plans . . . and to enlist his support. To his credit . . . he went to the FHA with our people; that he made several telephone calls apprising the Land Planner and the Director at FHA that the SCC, SOM and the sponsor were in unanimous accord that the new site plan should be used. All this was to no avail.

As a final step, I discussed with the Director of FHA the possibility that I might appeal his decision to Washington. I was then told that if I insisted upon my plan, which would mean a reprocessing of the commitments (I was willing to pay for this), the jobs would be stopped and that no commitment would be available to me for Building # 3. With this immovable force, there could be no further argument. In order not to postpone the occupancy of the buildings, we reluctantly retreated to the original site plan.

We are disheartened that we were compelled to produce an inferior situation when an excellent alternative was available. We fought long and hard. SOM fought for us, Mr. Leibold was on our side, but the FHA controls the purse strings and I reluctantly yielded. . . . I can only promise you, in the Quadrangles we will have *ab initio* a site plan we believe in before we go to FHA for any commitments.<sup>70</sup>

Greenwald was forced to build Willoughby Walk as Kessler had planned it. He set Mies van der Rohe to work on the Quadrangles, his other part of the Pratt Institute renewal project, but Greenwald died in 1959—en route to New York to discuss Title I business, his plane crashed in the East River—which ended Mies's involvement and changed the course of this project as well as the Battery Park Title I, for which he was also the sponsor.

Design was also defeated by other government rules. "Don't touch it," Gordon Bunshaft of SOM warned Pei about Title I. "That's not for architects. That's for lawyers."<sup>71</sup> The busiest Title I architect in New York was S. J. Kessler and Sons, a firm headed by Melvin E. Kessler, an entrepreneurial figure who specialized in apartment buildings but whose real talent was mastery of the regulatory apparatus. He began his career at the New York State Housing Division; in private practice, he worked for the NYCHA, in 1946 built the first FHA-insured apartments in Scarsdale, and was quick to see Title I as a business opportunity. The Kessler firm was the housing planner on six Moses projects and, presumably on Moses's recommendation, was hired as the housing architect by sponsors of seven Title I projects.<sup>72</sup> Even Zeckendorf retained Kessler as a consultant to advise Pei on compliance with Title I/FHA rules.

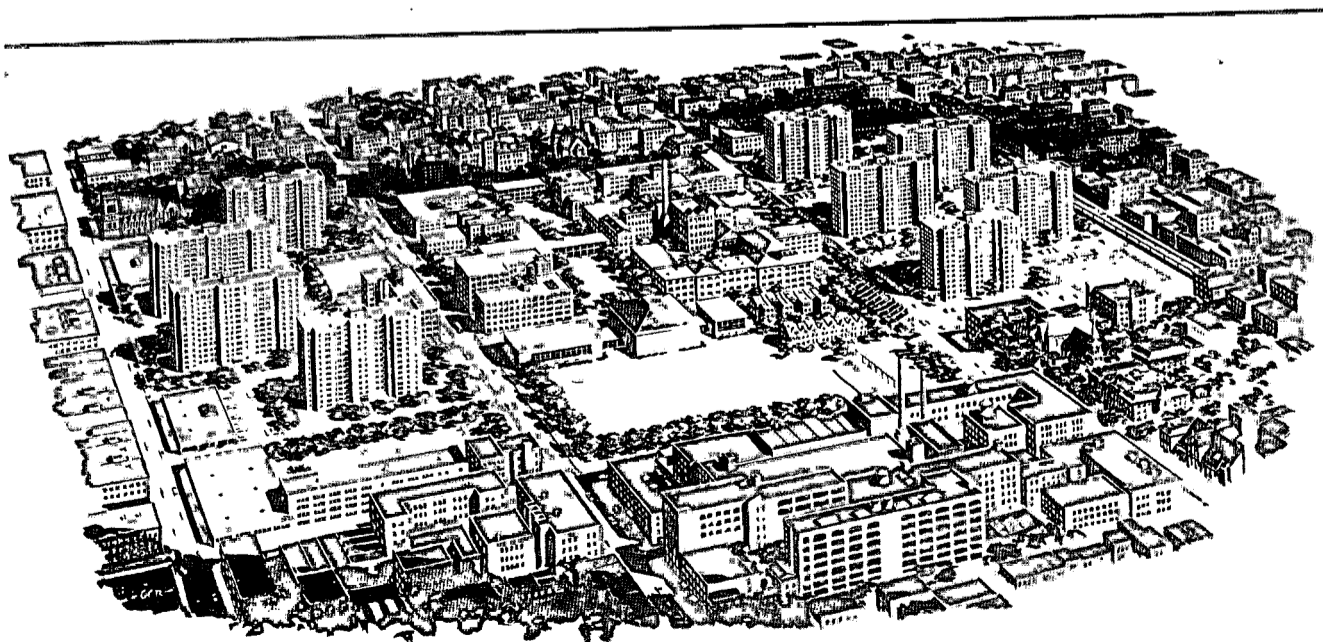
Moses broke down the wall dividing public and private phases of redevelopment in order to negotiate financial plans, but he did not insert design into this conversation. Nothing was written into the ground rules to advance architecture. The rare cases of good design that survived both this process and the stringent economics of slum redevelopment represented an exceptional commitment on the sponsor's part and his patronage of a talented architect. There were five quality designs: Zeckendorf's Kips Bay Plaza, designed by Pei; the three towers for NYU (originally University Village, now called Silver Towers, and 110 Bleecker Street), also designed by Pei; Shirley Boden's neighboring cooperative projects, Chatham Green and Chatham Towers, both by Kelly and Gruzen; and Lincoln Center.

Nevertheless, there were limits to individual efforts. Absent public control, there was no mechanism to regulate how the parts of a renewal project related to one another or how a project related to the bounding streets. Each

sponsor was left to operate as if on a self-contained island. Lincoln Center demonstrates the best and worst of this system. Under the enlightened leadership of John D. Rockefeller III, Lincoln Center set high design standards and worked with internationally acclaimed architects. The plan created a cross axis to link up with Fordham, but Fordham turned inward, declining the invitation to extend the axis into its campus. More troubling, the Slum Clearance Committee did not consider how the superblock related to the environs. Lincoln Center is built on a platform that closes off Damrosch Park to the potential community of users residing across the street in the Amsterdam Houses, and ignores Amsterdam Avenue and the side streets. (At present, Lincoln Center is attempting to address some of the problems of the original urban design and animate 65th Street with a design by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.)

Once title was transferred to the sponsor, Moses drew a sharp line and claimed no right to intervene. "We have no control over [the selection of architects] and want none" was his policy position.<sup>73</sup> It was not that he was undiscerning or indifferent. Moses personally had conservative taste and held that the design of public works should meet conventional standards of beauty. For the preliminary designs of the project at Washington Square, he chose Eggers and Higgins, the successor firm of John Russell Pope known for its mastery of historical styles, as the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., and NYU's Georgian-style law school exemplify. When NYU unveiled Max Abramovitz's modern design for a student center, Moses complained to the university's chancellor:

You will remember that all the brochures and other publications and sketches published and circulated with respect to the Title I project promised Georgian architecture. There is genuine, not merely woolly sentiment on this subject, not only in the



E-34. Perspective of Pratt Institute Title I, with the Quadrangles (left), Pratt Institute (center), and Willoughby Walk (right), July 1953. Collection MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive

neighborhood but throughout the City. . . . We develop enough support . . . only if we meet reasonable demands and expectations for the maintenance of the traditional Colonial or Georgian architecture which we have promised. While we cannot control what you do on the plot west of the area you acquired in connection with the Title I redevelopment [where Abramovitz's student center was located], I must make it clear to you that we shall have to use our full power in connection with the land incorporated in the Title I redevelopment to compel adherence to the Colonial or Georgian plan. [In public works,] I have to be something of a traditionalist.<sup>71</sup>

Moses's concern about community standards was legitimate; NYU eventually built misguided modern buildings on Washington Square.

It should be noted, however, that Eggers and Higgins did not offer a Georgian or Colonial design, but an overscaled superblock scheme. Their site plan demonstrates the extent to which the modernist agenda of superblock urbanism had been absorbed by the profession, including its most conservative wing. Despite his being a self-proclaimed traditionalist, Moses's urban renewal projects were a fulfillment of the modernist urban paradigm, not as interpreted by creative designers but in the vernacular of the professional mainstream. They delivered light and air and open space in a dense, high-rise setting. It was a model that privileged the experience of the apartment dweller rather than the experience of the pedestrian in the street. Perhaps that is why, according to my thoroughly unscientific, anecdotal evidence, these projects seem well appreciated by their residents.<sup>75</sup>

Notwithstanding the design failures of Title I, most of these projects are flourishing. This is a tribute in part to the gentrifying effects of the renewal projects on their environs and to the strength of New York City today. But the Moses-Title I template also had certain regenerative features that have fostered the reintegration of these superblocks in the urban fabric. The commercial strips on the streets have maintained street life, in contrast to the scenario at the housing enclaves built by the NYCHA. A size comparison of Title I projects across the country remains to be done, but my working hypothesis is that those in New York were relatively small: the Southwest Washington Title I encompassed 427 acres; New York's biggest slum clearance project, Lincoln Square, covered 45 acres; the average size of the Title I projects in Manhattan was 16 acres; Corlears Hook and Washington Square South were each 14.5 acres. The modest size of Moses's projects combined with the commanding authority of the city's great grid limited the deadening effects of superblock urbanism. Moreover, Moses embraced density, which is now recognized as a precondition of the city's diversity, vitality, and mass-transit system. Yet his Title I program notably failed to integrate buildings at varied scales and to combine rehabilitation with selective clearance, as in I. M. Pei's work at Society Hill, Philadelphia. Indeed, the rehabilitation issue brings us to the end of this story and exposes the outdated conceptual framework in which Moses was stuck.

### THE END OF BULLDOZER CLEARANCE

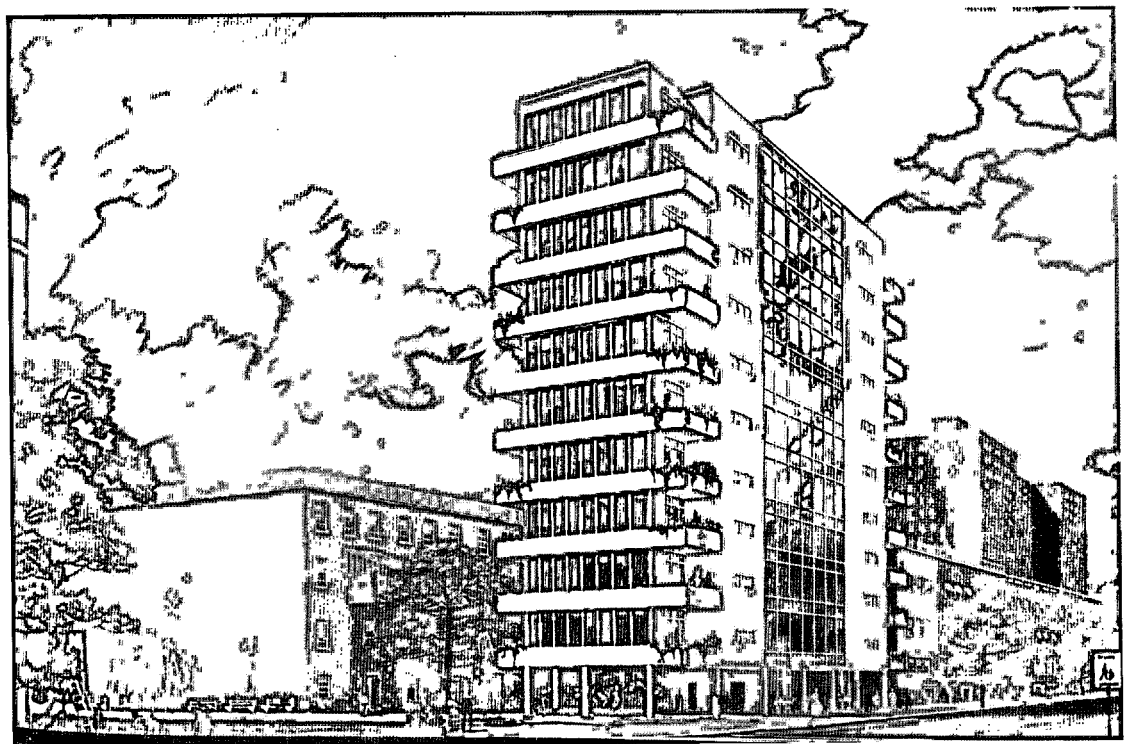
As criticism of Title I mounted across the nation, Moses took heart from his star lineup of New York City sponsors. He welcomed the prospect of congressional hearings in the city in 1959. "The more I think of it, the more the pic-

ture of a parade of witnesses including [those from] the top universit[ies], labor cooperative[s, and] all other reputable sponsors appeals to me—the sponsors of Lincoln Square for instance including the Performing Arts, Fordham, Red Cross, etc., Long Island University, New York University, Pratt Institute, the needle and building trades cooperatives, Morningside Gardens headed by David Rockefeller and including [President] Dwight D. Eisenhower as Honorary Chairman."<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, city leaders were moving urban renewal in a different direction. Moses was forced to resign in March 1960, and Mayor Wagner overhauled the urban renewal apparatus, establishing a central relocation bureau and the Housing and Redevelopment Board to manage Title I work under new procedures. According to Moses's tally, during his reign over Title I, 314 acres were cleared and 28,400 apartments were built. This compares to 30,680 public housing dwelling units built in Manhattan alone during the period from 1947 to 1959.<sup>77</sup> Moses's effort was prodigious, but in the face of the great structural forces reorganizing the metropolitan region and in a city as large as New York, the overall impact of Title I was small.

In 1956, the City Planning Commission hatched an alternative renewal program based on spot clearance and rehabilitation. James Felt, its chairman, obtained federal funding for a study of the Upper West Side based on the premise that conservation could rescue a declining neighborhood to avoid demolition. The 1949 housing law had funded only advanced planning and clearance; an amendment in 1954 authorized funding for rehabilitation and conservation to broaden the range of renewal strategies. (The 1954 amendment replaced the term *urban redevelopment* with *urban renewal* to signal the new approach.) Moses adamantly opposed rehabilitation. Trapped in a mind-set formed in the 1930s, he saw slums as a spreading cancer, and clearance and superblock urbanism as the only effective cure. His imaginative capacity failed him when a more modest approach to renewal took hold; he did not fathom how small-scale measures could transform a neighborhood and have large-scale effects.

Felt is an interesting counterpoint to Moses. His business was real estate; he had been involved in early clearance projects—his real estate company had assembled the land for Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town—and had run relocation programs. But Felt had a more nuanced view of the slums than Moses had. In 1939, he distinguished three stages of decay: areas in need of clearance, areas where complete rehabilitation was appropriate, and "twilight zones" requiring strict code enforcement. But this dissenting view went underground in the 1940s, as demands for bold action swayed public policy.<sup>78</sup>

The West Side Urban Renewal Study was published in 1958.<sup>79</sup> The plan covered a larger territory than typical of Moses's renewal plans: a seventy-four-acre, twenty-block area from 87th to 97th Street and from Central Park West to Amsterdam Avenue. While worried about "creeping blight," Felt's study looked at the city through a new lens that revealed the social fabric of the Upper West Side. It praised the positive role of block-improvement associations and community groups, and endorsed racial integration as a goal. Under the banner of "self-preservation" and incremental change, the West Side Renewal Plan overthrew the superblock model and pursued selective inter-



E-35. West Side Renewal Plan, new and rehabilitated buildings with public walk through block, 1958

vention with the existing gridiron street pattern left intact (fig. E-35). A fine-grained analysis sorted out high-rent elevator buildings in good shape, structurally sound old-law tenements and run-down brownstones in need of remodeling, and structures to be demolished. Instead of the speedy, military-style implementation that Moses favored, Felt called for slow, "judicious phasing." The West Side Plan signaled a complete paradigm change from clearing to pruning: "Renewal can be more like pruning a tree," Felt explained, "resulting in a healthier and more fruitful organism."<sup>80</sup> Pictures of street tree plantings, community fix-ups, and streetscapes with buildings at different scales indicated the new, small-bore approach to the city.<sup>81</sup>

Wielding the watchword of reformers, the West Side Plan called for a "comprehensive" approach to renewal, including more open space, school improvements, and expanded community services. In practice, Moses integrated these elements in his Title I projects, but he rhetorically denounced the idea of comprehensive planning and its collaborative, all-inclusive approach; his pragmatism led him to segment issues into containable, circumscribed tasks. Moses's strength and weakness were one and the same: the pursuit of limited objectives. Moreover, in looking at tenement blocks, Moses did not see the self-healing powers that Jane Jacobs extolled in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961 in response to urban renewal. He saw the destructive forces of real estate speculation that profited from slums and a need for sweeping government action.

Some of the problems with Title I, which recurred across the country, flowed from the law, its real estate orientation, and built-in assumptions about

clearance. Other problems flowed from Moses's management of the program and his abstracted, bird's-eye-view of the city. Yet, to a surprising degree, he managed to stretch the framework of Title I in order to provide middle-class housing, expand higher education, and create a world-class performing arts center. He developed innovative strategies of urban renewal that remain effective engines of economic redevelopment, and he tackled serious problems, in particular the lack of affordable housing, which persists in Manhattan where the high cost of housing is squeezing out the middle class.

In response to constraints on his maneuverability and scope of action, Moses tactically pursued limited objectives. This approach was the precondition of his prolific record of public works, but it also rationalized his willful disregard of collateral effects and refusal to pursue comprehensive solutions. Moses failed to go far enough in asserting public control over relocation and over the planning and design process; these two major shortcomings of New York's Title I program were not due to his overreaching but to his reticence to assert public control over the private sector.

To a generation of post-Moses urbanists, his concentrated power made him a public danger. Yet, exaggerating his power and disregarding the constraints that he faced—from federal policy and local politics, lending institutions, and citizen groups—reinforces the myth of omnipotence that Moses shaped and distracts from the clash of public and private interests in urban space and land markets that he embodied. His Title I work crystallizes the persistent challenge of directing market forces to serve public goals and of promoting a public good that transcends local interests.

## NOTES

1. While my view of Moses was primarily formed through archival work, I drew on the rich literature from the 1960s on the national Title I program. Three outstanding books in particular deserve to be better known: Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time: Progress and Poverty in America's Renewing Cities* (1967), the sole book to address design issues; Charles Abrams, *The City Is the Frontier* (1965); and Scott A. Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention* (1965). The Title I program is spottily discussed in Robert Caro's *Power Broker* (1974), which highlights Manhattantown and Lincoln Center, sponsor scandals, and relocation problems. The most important book on Title I is Joel Schwartz's *New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (1993), which established the deep bed of support for Moses's renewal agenda. I am in awe of the book's archival depth, which allowed Schwartz to track decision making with astounding texture. In contrast to his close-up view of political dynamics, my essay considers renewal as urbanism, by which I mean urban design and physical and social planning.
 

Throughout this essay I refer to *urban renewal* because it has passed into common usage, but technically the correct term to describe Moses's work is *redevelopment*. The 1949 law referred to urban redevelopment; as amended in 1954, the law adopted the term urban renewal to indicate a broader range of planning options, including rehabilitation as well as clearance.
2. The key source on the legislation is Mark I. Gelfand's *Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (1975). Moses followed the congressional debate over federal housing policy and advised the senators who took the lead on the issue: New York's Robert Wagner; Mr. Republican, the Ohio senator Robert A. Taft; and the Louisiana senator Allen Ellender. Hearings in 1943 opened a legislative battle that divided on the scope of federal intervention, more specifically the degree to which the government should be involved in housing construction. In 1945, the senators introduced a housing bill; it failed to pass in 1946 and again in 1948, but Moses discerned the shape of compromise legislation and began to plan in anticipation of its passage.
 

Moses described the preparatory measures in the two reports of the Committee on Slum Clearance: *Preliminary Report on Initial New York City Projects under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949*, July 14, 1949; and *Second Report to Mayor William O'Dwyer from the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance by Private Capital*, January 23, 1950.

Of the 32 projects for which Moses obtained planning grants, 26 resulted in published plans; and at the time of Moses's resignation, in 1960, the following 6 projects were in the stage of advanced planning: Cooper Square, Seward Park Extension, Delancey Street, Mid-Harlem, Division Street, and Bellevue South.

For national data, see U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency, Urban Renewal Administration, *Urban Renewal Project Directory* (Washington, D.C.: 1960), cited in Kaplan, *Urban Renewal Politics*, 3. Also see the compilation of national data on urban renewal in Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*, appendix A.
3. Dunbar McLaurin, letter to Moses on the development of the Polo Grounds, August 26, 1957, and Moses's reply, August 29, 1957, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Robert Moses Papers, Box 116, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1957. This archive is hereafter abbreviated as Moses Papers. The archive is uncataloged and only roughly organized by the positions that Moses held, for example, Slum Clearance Committee, Construction Coordinator, Parks Department. Each box contains numerous unnumbered files; I have provided the name exactly as it appears on each file.
4. Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*.
5. "The Critics Build Nothing," an address by Robert Moses at a luncheon meeting of the New York Building Congress, November 10, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59, Library Corr. Folder 4 of 6.
6. Moses, "Practical vs. Theoretical Planning," *Public Works*, 477.
7. Remarks of Robert Moses at the Annual Teachers' Institute of the Archdiocese of New York, March 5, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59, Library corr. Folder 4 of 6.
8. Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment, Housing and Home Finance Agency, *The Relationship between Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment and Low-Rent Housing* (Washington, D.C.: 1950), 13.
9. *Ibid.*
10. This statement appeared at the beginning of every plan published by the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance.
11. On the Redevelopment Companies Law of 1942, the 1943 amendment that liberalized the private sector obligations, and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's developments, see Schwartz, *New York Approach*, 82-83, and chap. 4.
12. In NYCHA's no-cash subsidy program, rents averaged \$74 to 75, the level required to cover operating expenses; in subsidized low-income projects, rents averaged \$37 to \$38.
13. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time*, 184.
14. Moses made decisions, assisted by indispensable and long-time deputies: George Spargo, an engineer turned financial analyst; Harry Taylor, and later William Leibold, both lawyers who served as staff director. George Spargo was assistant to the director, who began working for Moses in the 1930s after serving in the Queens borough president's office. Like his boss, Spargo wore multiple hats: in the parks department, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, Office of the City Construction Coordinator, and on the Slum Clearance Committee. Moses lent him to Mayor O'Dwyer, whom Spargo served as deputy mayor. In 1938, when Spargo was an executive officer at the parks department, he was known the Accelerator. Moses commended his ability in financing Triborough bonds. In 1959, Spargo became embroiled in a controversy over a conflict of interest when it was revealed that he was the director of a bank making mortgage loans to slum clearance sponsors; see Wayne Phillips, "Spargo Is Dropped from Slum Agency," *New York Times*, January 29, 1960. Leibold, the director of the Slum Clearance Committee, was a lawyer at the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.
15. Remarks of Robert Moses at the conference of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, Region I, April 17, 1958, Moses Papers, Box 117, File 1: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
16. On the Gratiot area urban renewal, see Roger Montgomery, "Improving the Design Process in Urban Renewal," in Wilson, *Urban Renewal*, 459-66; and Waldheim, *CASE: Hilberseimer/Mies van der Rohe*.
17. Kaplan, *Urban Renewal in Politics*, 24.
18. John P. McGrath [Corporation Counsel, 1947-51], letter to the editor, *New York Times*, July 27, 1959.
19. Robert Moses, memorandum to William S. Leibold, December 3, 1956, Moses Papers, Box 116, File: Robert Moses's Library Corr. From Housing File Folder 1 of 3.
20. The law offered the following definition: "Urban renewal area" means a slum area or a blighted, deteriorated, or deteriorating area in the locality involved which the Administrator approves as appropriate for an urban renewal project." U.S. Housing Act of 1949 as amended through August 1955, Title I, Section 110. The original language was even broader; it defined a redevelopment area as "an area which is appropriate for development or redevelopment and within which a project area is located."
21. U.S. Housing Act of 1937, Section 2.3.
22. The relocation surveys were completed by Frederick E. Marx, associated with Wood, Dolson, then later as vice president of Helmsley-Spear. On Marx's work for the Slum Clearance Committee, see Peter Kihss, "Slum Aide Hints Job Favoritism," *New York Times*, July 18, 1959.
23. Robert Moses, memorandum to Harry Taylor, December 11, 1950, Moses Papers, Box 90.
24. The next 13 plans, published between September 1951 and August 1957, were all executed. But the last 6 plans, published between November 1958 and June 1959, ran into trouble. Moses quickly withdrew one plan (Gramercy), and two were executed (Park Row Extension and Soundview, a Mitchell-Lama project), and the fate of 3 projects (Riverside-Amsterdam, Battery Park, and Cadman Plaza) was determined by Moses's successors.
25. Robert Moses, memorandum to George Spargo, September 5, 1950, Moses Papers, Box 90.
26. Henry Heald, letter to Moses, December 6, 1952, NYU Archives, Box 12, Folder 5. This folder contains other relevant correspondence between Heald and the Slum Clearance Committee.
27. Henry Heald, memorandum to James Follin, April 3, 1954, NYU Archives, Box 12, Folder 7.
28. See Moses's letter to J. Anthony Panuch, the special adviser to Mayor Wagner on housing and urban renewal, commenting on the desirability of a central city agency for tenant relocation, October 16, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59.
29. Herbert Greenwald, letter to Moses, December 26, 1957, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
30. Panuch, *Building a Better New York*, 35.
31. The Committee on Slum Clearance quantified "concurrent government displacement activities" estimated as of April 30, 1956: New York City Housing Authority (public housing), 20,853; Committee on Slum Clearance (Title I), 15,385; Bureau of Real Estate (schools, parks, playgrounds, hospitals, traffic arteries), 14,897; State-Federal Arterial Road Program, 10,320. Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance, *Comprehensive Relocation Plan. Park Row NYR3. Title I Urban Renewal Project* (New York: [1956]), 7.
32. Braislin, Porter & Wheelock, Inc., *The First 500 Families: A Relocation Analysis*, mimeographed report, [1960]. I consulted a copy in the Fordham University Archives, Box P-M-15, Folder LCPA, Subcommittee 1958; another copy can be found in the Lincoln Center Corporate Archives. On studies of relocation in other cities, see Wilson, *Urban Renewal*, part 4. "Relocation and Community Life," 291-404.
33. Schwartz, *New York Approach*, 143.
34. N. S. Keith [Director, Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment], letter to Moses, February 27, 1950, Moses Papers, Box 90.
35. Moses Papers, Box 90. For another endorsement of this policy, see Robert Moses, letter to Helen Harris [Executive Director], October 21, 1958, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
36. This strategy, which is at odds with the prevailing view of Moses, has rarely been noticed; an exception is Joshua Benjamin Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), 114. The twelve Title I projects with the neighboring NYCHA project are as follows.

Title I	Housing	Adjacent Public Housing
Corlears Hook	East River Coop. Houses	Vladeck & Baruch Houses
Columbus Circle	Columbus Circle Apts.	Amsterlam Houses
Harlem	Lenox Terrace	Abraham Lincoln Houses
Lincoln Square	Lincoln Towers and Princess Gardens	Amsterdam Houses
Manhattantown	Park West Village	Frederick Douglass Houses
Morningside	Morningside Gardens	General Grant Houses
Park Row	Catham Green	Governor Alfred E. Smith Houses
Park Row Ext.	Chatham Towers	Governor Alfred E. Smith Houses
Penn Station South	Penn Station South	Chelsea Houses
Seward Park	Seward Houses	La Guardia and Rutgers Houses
Fort Greene	University Towers and Kingsview	Walt Whitman & Ingersoll Houses
Hammel	Dayton Towers	Hammel Houses

37. Schwartz, *New York Approach*, 172. Title III limited property acquisition to 25 percent of total project costs.
38. John T. Metzger, "Rebuilding Harlem: Public Housing and Urban Renewal, 1920-1960," *Planning Perspectives* 9 (1994), 276. Abraham Kazan described the resistance of the NYCHA to rehouse tenants dislocated from the United Housing Foundation sites; see "The Reminiscences of Abraham Kazan," 1968, 425, in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University.
39. Robert Moses, letter to William Reid, September 2, 1959; Reid, letter to Moses, December 4, 1959; Moses, letter to Reid, December 9, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 118, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59, Robert Moses—Library corres. Folder 6 of 6. There was generally a sizable gap between the preclearance estimate of tenants eligible for public housing and the actual number that relocated to public housing. Moses attributed the gap to two factors: an estimated 20 percent of eligible families either rejected units offered or did not apply for public housing, and 4 percent proved to be ineligible at the time of processing their applications. Moses also argued that Title I relocation was comparable to that of the NYCHA. See Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance, *Comprehensive Relocation Plan. Park Row*, 13-14, 28-31.
40. Whitney North Seymour, letter to Moses, January 3, 1957, and Moses's reply, January 7, 1957. Moses Papers, Box 116, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1957.
41. Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities*, 125.
42. Zeckendorf, *Autobiography*, 202.
43. Several writers on urban renewal have called attention to the low investor interest in Title I; see Anderson, *Federal Bulldozer*, chap. 7; and Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time*, chap. 4.
44. *Second Report to Mayor William O'Dwyer from the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance by Private Capital* (January 23, 1950), n.p.
45. City-Wide Council for Better Housing, *New York City's Slum Clearance Committee: A Critical Study* (New York: 1957), 24.
46. "Big Slum Project Insured by F.H.A.," *New York Times*, September 30, 1955.
47. Zeckendorf, *Autobiography*, 203.
48. Robert Moses, letter to Robert A. Taft, November 28, 1952, Moses Papers, Box 90.
49. "Big Slum Project Insured by F.H.A."
50. "Pei's Apartments Round the Corner," *Architectural Forum* 11, no. 5 (August 1961), 106-14.
51. Zeckendorf, *Autobiography*, 227.
52. *Ibid.*, esp. chap. 16 and 17.
53. Robert Moses, "Commissioner Moses Dissects the 'Long-Haired Planners,'" *New York Times Magazine* (June 25, 1944), 38.
54. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time*, 48; and Schwartz, *New York Approach*, 301.
55. Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities*, 157-59.
56. At Corlears Hook, the down payment was \$625 per room and monthly maintenance was \$17 a room. At Morningside Gardens, the down payment was \$750 per room, monthly maintenance, \$21.
57. Stephen G. Thompson, "Co-op Housing: N.Y.C. vs. U.S.A.," *Architectural Forum* 111, no. 1 (July 1959), 133.
58. Robert Moses, letter to Mayor Robert Wagner, May 24, 1956, in response to the *Report to the Board of Estimate on Title I Slum Clearance Projects and Tax Exempt Housing*, Lawrence Gerosa, Comptroller (May 9, 1956), Moses Papers, Box 116, File: 1956 Robert Moses' Library Correspondence from Housing File Folder 3 of 3.
59. Remarks by Moses at Seward Park, October 11, 1958, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
60. *Report to the Mayor from the Park Commissioner on the Proposed Municipal Music Art Center* (September 20, 1938), brochure. A manuscript copy of the letter from Moses to Mayor La Guardia of the same date is in the Moses Papers, Box 97.
61. Lester Markel, letter to Moses, March 4, 1958, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
62. Amendments in 1954 and 1959 increasingly liberalized the restrictions on nonresidential uses.
63. An amendment to the zoning law adopted on June 21, 1950, required new dwellings to provide garage or parking space for cars of occupants. In A and B districts (most of the Title I sites), parking spaces had to be provided for 20 percent of the dwelling units. See New York City Planning Commission, *Planning Progress 1940-50* (New York: 1951), 24.
64. On the absence of stores in public housing and the resultant problems, see Charles Grutzner, "Shopping Scarce in City Projects," *New York Times*, June 16, 1957.
65. Nathaniel Alexander Owings, *The Spaces In Between: An Architect's Journey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 77.
66. Nold was consulting engineer to SOM from 1955 to 1962, when he died.
67. Robert Moses, letter to Robert Cutler, June 5, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 118, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1959.
68. On the demise of CIAM and the related establishment of an urban design program at Harvard, see Eric Mumford, "The Emergence of Urban Design in the Breakup of CIAM," *Harvard Design Magazine* 24 (spring-summer 2006), 10-20. This special issue, on the origins and evolutions of "urban design" 1956-2006, contains other relevant articles on the state of urban design in the 1950s. Also see idem, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1958-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).
69. Robert Cutler, letter to Moses, September 17, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 118, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1959. I should like to acknowledge a potential bias in my sources. It may be that the SOM archives would afford a different perspective on their role as consultants. My initial queries did not turn up relevant material but continued research is needed.
70. Herbert Greenwald, letter to Moses, October 2, 1958, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Committee on Slum Clearance 1958.
71. Cited by Cannell, *I. M. Pei*, 143.
72. The Kessler firm was the housing planner on the following projects: Manhattantown, NYU-Bellevue, Lincoln Square, Battery Park, Gramercy Park, and Riverside-Amsterdam. Kessler designed the following buildings: Lenox Terrace (Harlem Title I); Park West (Manhattantown Title I); Willoughby Walk (Pratt Title I); the two projects in Rockaway, Seaside and Hammels; Kips Bay, with I.M. Pei (NYU-Bellevue); and Washington Square Village, with Paul Lester Wiener (Washington Square Southeast). Kessler, together with his father and brother, had a 5-percent ownership interest in the corrupt Manhattanville project. This combined with his dominant role in Title I cast suspicion on the firm, and in July 1959 Mayor Wagner barred him from obtaining additional Title I work. "New York's Title I Controversy Spotlights Architect Kessler—A Combination of Know-How and Know-Who," *Architectural Forum* 3, no. 2 (August 1959), 13-15; and Wayne Phillips, "Barred Designer Has 2 Slum Jobs," *New York Times*, November 2 1959.
73. "Statement by Robert Moses, Chairman as to Architectural Services of the Kessler Firm," July 2, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 118.
74. Robert Moses, letter to Henry Heald, September 2, 1955, Moses Papers, Box 116, File: Housing Correspondence for Mr. Moses's Library Project Jan. 1, 1955 to Dec. 31, 1955.
75. When asked to recommend an architect, Moses offered these respectable suggestions: SOM; Eggers and Higgins; McKim, Mead & White; Harrison & Abramovitz; Voorhees, Walker; Kelly and Gruzen; Chapman, Evans & Delehanty; and Brown, Guenther and Booss. Memo, November 30, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 117, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59.
76. Robert Moses, letter to Congressman Charles Buckley, July 27, 1959, Moses Papers, Box 118, File: Housing File 1/1/59-12/31/59; Robert Moses—Library corres. Folder 6 of 6.
77. Metzger, "Rebuilding Harlem," 283, note 3.
78. James Felt, "The Problem of the Old Law Tenement: An Address before the New York Metropolitan Association of Real Estate Boards at the Hotel Commodore, N.Y.," brochure, January 11, 1939, 7.
79. James Felt, New York City Department of City Planning, *A Report on the West Side Urban Renewal Study to Mayor Robert F. Wagner and the Board of Estimate of the City of New York, and to the Urban Renewal Administration* (New York: [1958]), 8. The study was prepared by the following team of consultants: Donald Monson, general consultant; Elizabeth Kempton, community organization consultant; Brown & Guenther, architectural consultant (Moses also used this firm); Chester Rapkin, economic consultant.
80. *Ibid.*, 85.
81. In some respects, the West Side plan vindicated Moses's point of view. In a supporting study of the real estate market in the renewal area, Chester Rapkin, a planner at the University of Pennsylvania, confirmed Moses's view that rehabilitation was not financially sound for tenement owners: rehabilitation costs ran high and resulted in less rental income if rehabilitated properties met higher occupancy standards. Sustained government intervention and subsidy were needed for the middle class, while the demand for luxury and moderate-income apartment houses would grow. Rapkin, *Real Estate Market*.