Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath

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Abstract

The federal urban renewal program created by Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 fell short of expectations and spawned an army of critics. Originally the program had promised a great deal to a variety of interests, but it could not accommodate all of its early supporters. Social reformers and low-rent housing advocates were among the first backers who found it wanting. By the early 1960s, the foes of big government and critics of prevailing planning orthodoxies were exploiting the program's shortcomings to further their own agendas.

The impact of urban renewal, however, was never as great as some observers assumed, and its physical legacy was limited. Yet its record did influence later federal revitalization programs that granted local authorities greater flexibility and emphasized rehabilitation and the urban context. Moreover, it called into question the efficacy of planning panaceas and federal dollars in solving urban problems.

Keywords: Federal; Policy; Urban planning

Introduction

Congress launched the federal urban redevelopment program in Title I of the Housing Act of 1949, and during the next two decades, planners, mayors, journalists, and the public dreamed of grand schemes to revitalize the nation's cities. Artists' renderings of slick glass and steel skyscrapers set in sunny plazas appeared in metropolitan newspapers and city planning reports, and nurtured hopes of a golden future. With the aid of Uncle Sam, cities were supposedly to be cleansed of their ugly past and reclothed in the latest modern attire. By the early 1960s, however, skeptics were questioning the merits of federally subsidized urban renewal, and 10 years later the program generally evoked images of destruction and delay rather than renaissance and reconstruction. By the time it died in 1974, the federal urban renewal program was much maligned and could claim at best mixed results.

While Title I and succeeding amendments to the program fell short of expectations, it was a valuable experiment that taught certain lessons necessary to later urban revitalization initiatives. It exposed the social and political costs of big bulldozer schemes and revealed the limitations inherent in federal policy. Ultimately, however, its lessons might well have been more negative than positive. It taught what not to do as much as what to do. Though the physical monuments to federal urban renewal during the 1950s and 1960s might be relatively uninspiring, the program itself, through trial and error, informed later efforts to revitalize older central cities.

Title I and its initial supporters

From the beginning, federal urban redevelopment was a program better suited to stir hopes than produce concrete projects. A multitude of interests rallied behind the passage of Title I, each investing it with a different purpose. Central-city business interests viewed it as a means of boosting sagging property values; mayors and city councils perceived it as a tool to increase tax revenues; social welfare leaders hoped it would clear the slums and better the living conditions of the poor; and, more specifically, advocates of low- and moderate-income housing thought it would increase the stock of decent, affordable dwellings in the central cities. According to planner Catherine Bauer, urban redevelopment won congressional approval "because different groups of people, like the blind men feeling the elephant, made entirely different assumptions as to the essential nature and purpose of this legislation" (Gelfand 1975, 153).

The provisions of Title I were ambiguous enough to accommodate the dreams of its varied supporters. It specifically provided federal funding for "slum clearance and urban redevelopment," but the federal government would subsidize only the redevelopment of areas that were primarily residential before clearance or would become primarily residential when reconstructed. This requirement, together with the fact that Title I was part of a housing act, seemed to indicate that housing would be the chief focus of the program. The wording, however, permitted federal subsidies for projects that destroyed residential slums and replaced them with commercial development or leveled commercial slums and erected residences. Thus there was a loophole that developers of nonresidential properties could exploit.

Moreover, nothing in Title I mandated the construction of low- or moderate-income housing. The federal government was to pay two-thirds of the net cost of clearing slum tracts, with local authorities shouldering the rest. But private developers were responsible for constructing new buildings on the cleared land, and the law permitted them to build high-rent structures.

In other words, improved housing seemed to be the principal goal of Title I, but Congress had not specified what kind of housing and had left an opening for nonresidential projects. Title I could then serve various purposes, depending on who sought to exploit its provisions, and as such it won the support of diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. "Seldom has such a variegated crew of would-be angels," Bauer commented, "tried to sit on the same pin at the same time" (Gelfand 1975, 153).

Amendments to the law would increase that army of angels on the pin. In the Housing Act of 1954, Congress required communities receiving urban renewal funds to prepare a comprehensive community development plan, a provision that served the interests of professional planners who had long been attempting to foist their expertise on sometimes reluctant city governments. Moreover, the 1954, 1959, and 1961 housing acts permitted an ever-increasing amount of urban renewal money to be spent for commercial projects and facilitated the use of the urban renewal mechanism to expand colleges, universities, and hospitals in the central city. Meanwhile, devotees of the International style of architecture embraced the program as a way to realize French architect Le Corbusier's plan for a city of superhighways and skyscrapers in parks. Ugly Victorian relics and pompous Beaux Arts edifices would give way to a city that conformed to the sleek functionalism favored by the greats of modern architecture. By the early 1960s, such architectural firms as I. M. Pei and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, as well as downtown associations, chambers of commerce, boards of trustees, and university and hospital administrators, had all joined the corps of interests envisioning great benefits from urban renewal.

Results versus expectations

Yet the inclusiveness of urban renewal proved a weakness. Because the exact goals of the program were ambiguous and ill-defined, there was constant controversy over its application. Housers claimed that urban renewal funds were misused for the benefit of commercial developers, while business leaders balked at subsidizing moderate-income housing that would not bring lucrative upper-middle-class shoppers back to downtown stores. Meanwhile, planners deplored schemes driven by business realities and oblivious to the dogmas of the planning profession. And universities and hospitals regarded urban renewal money as vital to realizing their noble purposes. Urban renewal was clearly intended to renew the city, but what exactly this meant was a matter of debate.

Given these varied and often clashing expectations, Title I was destined to fall short in many minds. Its achievements simply could not match the expectations of all of its original supporters. Most notably, by the 1960s, social welfare reformers and public housers had turned against it, claiming that it burdened the poor rather than helped them. In their opinion, Title I had become a welfare program for the wealthy, a means of enriching private developers and downtown property owners. Too often the victims of redevelopment were the poor, because slum clearance meant removing them for the benefit of the rich and powerful.

Many of the earliest Title I projects had focused on moderate-income housing. New York City's first four Title I projects, approved in 1950, were apartment complexes, one of which was sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union. One-third of the apartments in this project were intended for union members, and the *New York Times* reported that those units quickly attracted "families who had given up hope of finding a good apartment renting under $100" (Teaford 1990, 112). Two of the other projects were for middle-income African Americans, and the fourth was designed to house employees of Columbia University. None were for the wealthy; all sought to house tenants who would otherwise have a hard time finding decent apartments in high-rent Manhattan.

Philadelphia's first Title I project, the East Poplar scheme, provided racially integrated housing for low- and middle-income residents. In this project, the city used Title I funds to clear land for public housing as well as private rental units. Cleveland's initial Title I money financed the Longwood and Garden Valley projects, which consisted of moderate-income apartments for African Americans together with low-rent public housing.

By the late 1950s, however, such projects had lost favor because the federal government permitted more money to be spent on commercial redevelopment and because local boosters sought more dramatic results. A lackluster expanse of moderate- and low-income housing would not win a city a reputation for renewed vitality. Such projects did not stir the souls of chamber of commerce presidents or enhance the revenues of downtown department stores. Decent, affordable housing simply did not seem the essential stimulus for an urban renaissance.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the shift away from affordable housing projects was evident in a number of cities and was stirring an outcry from displaced residents and their allies in academia. One of the most publicized examples of callous disregard for the poor was the West End project in Boston. A congested collection of aged tenements, the West End housed a close-knit Italian community. Unfortunately, it also bordered on Boston's central business district, and in the minds of some planners and politicians, it was a blot on the reputation of the city center. Thus it was slated for leveling; in its place were to rise 2,400 swank, high-rent apartments in soaring towers. In 1959, the *Boston Globe* expressed the optimism of backers of the scheme when it observed, "If the West End can be switched from dilapidation to delight as was New York's East Side, it may be the trailblazing spark which could revitalize Boston" (Teaford 1990, 148). Yet

West Enders did not yield their turf to the wealthy without protest, and their bitter attacks on the urban renewal project attracted the attention of academics. Sociologist Herbert Gans chronicled the West Enders' attachment to their "urban village," psychologist Marc Fried reported on the psychological damage inflicted on the displaced residents, and housing expert Chester Hartman computed the financial burden that relocation placed on West Enders as they paid an average of 73 percent more for rent in their new homes (Fried 1966; Gans 1962; Hartman 1966).

Moreover, the West End was not an isolated example of the injustice visited on displaced residents, and many of those affected responded angrily to proposals for renewal. As early as 1953, the Croatian-American residents of the Vaughan Street area in Portland, OR, mobilized to block the destruction of their ethnic neighborhood (Abbott 1981). In the late 1950s, the residents of Philadelphia's expansive Eastwick project and the city's Society Hill area protested the burden imposed on them. Criticizing the absence of moderate-rent housing in the Society Hill proposal, one resident complained, "What we have here is a plan for an area of wealthy poodled people," and a local shopkeeper argued, "All we'd have here are bluebloods and executives" (Teaford 1990, 154).

During the early 1960s, residents of Chicago's Near West Side similarly attacked urban renewal plans that would destroy their neighborhood and create in its stead a new campus of the University of Illinois. In 1961, the inhabitants of New York City's West Village fought a renewal plan, and the *Village Voice* noted that at one neighborhood meeting called to promote the scheme, "the audience response in the form of catcalls, boos, and indignant speeches proved the attempt to be conspicuously unsuccessful" (Teaford 1990, 155). Later in the 1960s, residents of San Francisco's Western Addition likewise mounted a campaign to save their neighborhood from the onslaught of bulldozers. Opponents of this California project characterized renewal as "not a *war on poverty* but rather a *war on the poor*" (Mollenkopf 1983, 179).

Many African Americans were especially bitter over programs that reduced the already limited housing stock available to them. Although many of the renewal projects actually leveled white ethnic neighborhoods such as Boston's West End and Chicago's Near West Side, some African Americans regarded urban renewal as "Negro removal." For example, as early as 1949, a black Washington newspaper criticized white redevelopment advocates who had "decided that the pauperized underdogs of color are too close to the nation's seat of government" and needed to be relocated (Gillette 1995, 163). In addition, by the early 1960s, the creation of all-black Title I housing such as Longwood, Garden Valley, and the Harlem apartment towers did not sit well with a number of angry African Americans. Such projects perpetuated racial segregation by attempting to ensure that middle- or moderate-income blacks remained in black neighborhoods. These projects might have provided decent, affordable dwellings, but they also preserved a pattern of residential apartheid.

Within a decade after its passage, Title I had become a pariah to some of those who had originally supported it. It displaced poor residents, did not adequately provide for their relocation, and seemed dedicated to enhancing the wealth of the central cities by getting rid of the less affluent. By the early 1960s, urban renewal was widely regarded as a program for tax-hungry city officials, downtown business interests and their hirelings in big planning and architectural firms, and institutional imperialists seeking to expand their campuses or hospital complexes.

Yet even among these proponents of urban renewal, the federal program was proving a disappointment. Again, the program's image suffered because of a widening chasm between expectations and realities. At the beginning of each project, planners presented drawings of a jet-age rebuilt city, with glistening high-rise towers in fountain-adorned plazas. Metropolitan newspapers faithfully reprinted these images, rallying support for proposals that seemed to promise a transformation from grit to glitter. Cleveland appeared destined to become Manhattan, Philadelphia would no longer be a joke, and Los Angeles would acquire a business core appropriate to a city of its size. But the initial hype proved a liability as frustrated boosters gradually realized that federal urban renewal was not a quick and easy fix for the ills of the central city.

Especially discouraging was the time lag in project completion. In 1964, the House Banking and Currency Committee noted "the poor public image created by too many incomplete projects, particularly those which seem to have come to a halt at the demolition stage" (Weicher 1972, 7). Two years later, the National Commission on Urban Problems reported that the typical urban renewal project required more than four years to plan and six to nine additional years to execute. Thus, from proposal to completion, an average urban renewal project consumed between 10 and 13 years (Weicher 1972). The renewal process was cumbersome and seemingly designed to produce more delays than buildings. Plans required both local and federal approval, and a speedy turnaround of project plans never seemed a high priority among Washington bureaucrats. Each project generated mountains of paperwork, and the prospect of being strangled by government red tape discouraged some private developers from signing on.

All across America, long-vacant tracts testified to the delays that plagued urban renewal. Buffalo's Ellicott project won city council endorsement as early as 1954, resulting in the displacement of 2,200 African-American families. Yet 10 years later, only six new single-family houses stood forlornly on the 161-acre tract, and the middle-income African Americans who were the intended residents proved reluctant to purchase property adjoining a "near slum." According to one member of the chamber of commerce staff, the Ellicott clearance "left a 29-block scar on the face of the city that could lead naive light plane pilots to assume the city was constructing a landing strip for them next to its busiest retail area" (Teaford 1990, 156).

Similarly, cynical St. Louis residents nicknamed the stalled Mill Creek Valley project with its acres of desolation "Hiroshima Flats" (Montgomery 1966, 459), and a Detroit site won the disparaging label of "ragweed acres" (Friedman 1968, 157). In Pittsburgh, 8,000 residents, most of them African Americans, lost their homes because of the Lower Hill project, which produced a civic arena in 1961. But 25 years later, a 9.2-acre tract in the project area remained vacant. According to a local newspaper, the boosters of the city's renaissance had "been unable to produce anything but a crop of weeds" on this land (Teaford 1990, 158). Meanwhile, Minneapolis's premier urban renewal scheme, Gateway Center, proceeded at a slower place than expected. Although the project was originally scheduled for completion in 1971, by that date only 60 percent of the land was redeveloped, with the remaining 40 percent still awaiting private investors (Schwartz 1995; Teaford 1990). "Not many years ago, the Minneapolis Gateway redevelopment project was being hailed nationally as an example of how a city could rebuild its blighted lower downtown business district," the *Minneapolis Tribune* observed. Yet the newspaper added sadly, "Today, the project is nearly at a standstill" (Teaford 1990, 214).

Los Angeles's Bunker Hill project leveled the remnants of a Victorian residential area, but for years much of the cleared land was used for parking lots, with new structures only gradually arising amid the sea of parked cars (Garvin 1996; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Loukaitou-Sideris and Sansbury 1995/96). In the smaller city of Madison, WI, the 52.5-acre Triangle project suffered through 20 years of protests, procrastination, and shelved plans before it was completed: The result was a group of undistinguished and unprofitable buildings (Teaford 1993). The sweat and stress of two decades had yielded relatively little.

Madison was not the only city with a renewal project that hardly seemed worth the effort. In one city after another, completed renewal schemes earned at least as much criticism as applause. Again, realities fell short of expectations, and the product of years of planning and construction proved disappointing.

Some of the projects were economic failures. Tenants did not flock to the new structures, and renewal schemes often failed to generate much private development on adjoining tracts. Too many projects were not seeds of a burgeoning renaissance. For example, in a number of cities, high-rise middle- and upper-income apartment projects did not launch a new wave of downtown living to counter the outward flow of population to the suburbs. In St. Louis, the middle-class Plaza Square apartment complex failed to spark a mass return to the city and instead proved a poor investment. The Southwest Washington Redevelopment project's first apartment complex also attracted tenants at a slow pace, earning its private developer no profit. One commentator referred to it as "a lonesome rose blooming in the slum desert" (Lowe 1967, 187), and the project's developer lamented: "I never dreamed how long it would take with government red tape, and how much time it would require to get acceptance of a new community in a former slum area" (Lowe 1967, 193).

Soon after the opening of a 990-unit luxury apartment complex in Cleveland's Erieview project, its developers defaulted on mortgage payments (Teaford 1990). This was hardly an incentive for similar projects in downtown Cleveland. In one city after another, middle- and upper-income Americans shunned areas whose reputations had been so odious that they required renewal. With millions of new homes on the market during the 1950s and 1960s, there was no compelling reason to opt for life amid the bulldozed wastelands of once-blighted areas.

Not only did some projects fail to pay off financially, but they also fell short aesthetically. Somehow they lost their allure when translated from the architect's drawing board to actual concrete, steel, and glass. Too often the architect's chic high-rises ended up as regimented rows of dull boxes with empty windswept open spaces that proved unappealing to the many office workers who were expected to frequent them during their lunch hour. One member of Cleveland's Fine Arts Advisory Committee described the Erieview project's first building, a 40-story office tower, as a "piece of tin," and a second committee member tagged it a "block of nothing" (Teaford 1993, 219). The modernist aesthetic dictated that "less is more," but too often in urban renewal projects, the stripped-down architecture belied this precept. In Cleveland, at least, less was less.

Many new buildings are derided and evoke critics' catcalls. Moreover, not all structures prove profitable; any real estate developer inevitably risks failure. But given the initial upbeat publicity lavished on urban renewal schemes and their intended purpose of reviving the city, the financial and aesthetic failure of many projects was a serious blow to the forces of urban renaissance. The whole city, and not simply an individual developer, had invested its hopes in these projects. If a renewal scheme failed, it was not just one more example of entrepreneurial error; it was a black mark on the reputation of the city and a blot on its image as a dynamic economic center. Rather than revive the city, it tarnished the image further.

Some successes

Despite the bad publicity, the urban renewal record was not totally bleak: There were some success stories. For example, Baltimore's Charles Center was a much admired complex of offices, shops, restaurants, apartments, and a legitimate theater. Instead of bulldozing the entire tract, Baltimore planners retained five existing buildings and incorporated them into the new center. Thus, Charles Center was not a modern monument at odds with the existing city; it was made to fit into the urban context. Famed modern architect Mies van der Rohe designed the project's first new structure, winning the scheme some initial distinction. This building rented quickly, as did the other Charles Center office towers. Before renewal, the area had provided work for 12,000 Baltimoreans; the completed Charles Center employed 17,000, and real estate tax receipts quadrupled (Garvin 1996). Having boosted the image of gritty Baltimore and buoyed the fortunes of downtown, Charles Center was everything its promoters hoped for.

Detroit could take pride in its Lafayette Park renewal project. Intended to attract middle- and upper-income residents who might otherwise opt for the suburbs, Lafayette Park also benefited from the work of Mies van der Rohe, whose 20-story Pavilion Apartments on the clearance site avoided the minimalist banality of less capable modernists. Handsomely landscaped and intelligently planned, the Detroit project represented the best of central-city apartment development.

Meanwhile, some cities garnered a disproportionate share of federal urban renewal funds and earned national recognition for their revitalization efforts. Most notably, New Haven, CT, under Mayor Richard Lee, became an urban renewal showcase. As of 1966, it led the nation in per capita federal urban renewal funding, with $745 per person (Garvin 1996). This was almost three times as much as any other city in the nation received. During the 1950s and 1960s, the New Haven redevelopment authority was responsible for a series of apartment complexes, as well as the Church Street Redevelopment Project, which sought to maintain downtown New Haven as a retail center through the construction of a shopping mall. No one, however, surpassed New York City's renewal chief Robert Moses in capturing federal funds and creating large-scale projects. By the end of 1959, Moses had completed 7,800 Title I dwelling units, and 7,400 more were under construction (Teaford 1990). Moses's Lincoln Center project in the 1960s included a complex of concert halls and theaters, as well as high-rent apartments. Not only would Lincoln Center become a hub for the performing arts in New York City, but it would also spur private investment in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, gradually transforming a blighted district into a fashionable neighborhood. Throughout the nation, urban renewal authorities hoped for such a ripple effect, and Moses achieved it with Lincoln Center.

During the 1960s, Boston won favorable attention for its renewal program, especially the 61-acre Government Center that cleared the disreputable Scollay Square area, notorious for cheap bars, burlesque theaters, and prostitutes. In place of this moral cesspool, redevelopment authorities created a complex of state, federal, and local government buildings, including a new city hall that garnered the praise of architecture critics when it opened. The once shabby hub of New England fashioned a new public face and, in the process, shed its reputation as an aged metropolis in a state of decay.

Philadelphia's most acclaimed urban renewal project, however, emphasized the age of the city and did not seek to obliterate the past. The Housing Act of 1954 authorized the use of federal funds for rehabilitating existing structures as well as clearing slums. Combining rehabilitation with selective clearance, Philadelphia's redevelopment authority renewed the 18th-century Society Hill neighborhood on the southeastern fringe of downtown. On the cleared site of the malodorous, rodent-infested Dock Street Market, developers built three glass and concrete apartment towers with 720 luxury apartments overlooking the Delaware River. But most of the renewal project focused on rehabilitating brick town houses from the 18th and early 19th centuries. Soon the comfortable and well-to-do were supplanting the neighborhood's less affluent residents, and once shabby structures were donning colonial-style shutters and commanding increased rents. Unlike most central-city neighborhoods of the 1960s, Society Hill attracted middle- and upper-income whites and their capital. During the first 10 years of renewal, private investment in Society Hill totaled $180 million and tax receipts soared. Before renewal, the neighborhood produced $454,000 annually in property taxes; by 1974 it was generating $2.47 million (Garvin 1996). If urban renewal was intended to prove the desirability of central-city living, Society Hill was certainly a success. In an age of rapid suburbanization, Philadelphia's renewal authorities offered well-heeled whites an attractive inner-city alternative.

By the 1960s, Chicago's Hyde Park–Kenwood renewal project was also winning national recognition for its success in preserving a middle-class neighborhood around the University of Chicago. During the early 1950s, many poor African Americans moved into the university area and crime rates rose. The university faced increasing difficulty in attracting first-rate faculty and students. To help the university and its neighborhood, the city of Chicago embarked on a renewal scheme that involved combining rehabilitation with selective clearance (Rossi and

Dentler 1961). As in Society Hill, buildings deemed unsalvageable were bulldozed, but others were repaired, and 80 percent of the area's buildings survived renewal (Weicher 1972). Through strict code enforcement, the city blocked the conversion of single-family dwellings into low-rent apartments and eliminated overcrowding by the poor in existing buildings. A combination of code enforcement, rehabilitation, and clearance thus preserved the university area and served as a model to other cities that did not want to rely solely on wholesale leveling of neighborhoods.

Some notable successes countered the negative perceptions of the federal urban renewal program, but even these positive examples often had a downside. Lafayette Park failed to stem the tide of decay in inner-city Detroit and did not reverse the flow of middle-class Michiganders to the suburbs. This model urban renewal project did not typify the Detroit of the future, however. Instead, it was an anomaly. Moreover, to create this attractive oasis in the increasingly grim heart of Detroit, the redevelopment authorities displaced almost 2,000 poor African-American families.

Also, New Haven may have garnered a rich bounty of federal funds, but its renewal projects were not unqualified triumphs. The city's own mayor regarded the Oak Street project's high-rise apartments as "the most God-awful-looking things I ever laid eyes on" (Garvin 1996, 212). The Church Street redevelopment scheme did not ensure that downtown New Haven remained the metropolitan area's dominant retailing hub. It proved no more able to withstand the competition of suburban shopping malls than central business district retailers in other cities.

Further, Robert Moses was a prolific builder but not a man of great taste. The ugliness of New Haven's apartments paled next to the endless rows of banal apartment towers that Moses inflicted on New York City. With an egalitarian disregard for aesthetics, a pallid modernity characterized low-income as well as luxury apartments in Moses's federally financed projects. Boston's Government Center was no eyesore, although critical opinion of the new city hall soured somewhat as the years passed and the giant brick-paved plaza facing the municipal building endowed the project with a surreal bleakness. It evoked emptiness rather than vitality. Even Society Hill suffered some criticism. It may have brought wealth to the inner city, but as in later gentrified neighborhoods, the poor were displaced here as well.

Chicago's Hyde Park–Kenwood project also had its dark side. It won applause for its sensitivity to existing buildings, but it proved less considerate of disadvantaged human beings. Poor structures were to be rehabilitated, but poor persons were to be removed. To preserve the middle-class neighborhood, the poor were evicted, and there was a conscious policy to ensure that they did not again encroach on the university's sphere of influence (Hirsch 1983). African Americans were welcome as long as they were middle class, but low-income newcomers from Mississippi and Alabama were not permitted to move too close to the faculty or students. As one comedian observed: “This is Hyde Park, whites and blacks shoulder to shoulder against the lower classes” (Beadle 1964, 18).

Critics of urban renewal

Thus, even successful projects were open to criticism, and during the 1960s and early 1970s, negative opinions prevailed over positive ones. A growing army of commentators attacked the federal program, exploiting its every shortcoming. In fact, urban renewal became a good “bad example” that observers with a variety of gripes could cite to support their arguments. Perhaps its most lasting significance was as a whipping boy for a number of causes. Its supposed failure served the interests of a number of malcontents dissatisfied with the status quo.

For example, the purported failure of urban renewal fit into the laissez-faire agenda of conservatives who sought to turn back the tide of an expansive federal government. Since the 1930s, federal aid had seemed the answer to a multitude of problems. Apparent flaws in federal urban renewal challenged this assumption. In 1964, Martin Anderson, a future domestic policy adviser in the Reagan administration, launched the conservative critique of urban renewal in *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949–1962*. “In my opinion,” Anderson wrote, “the federal urban renewal program is very costly, destructive of personal liberty, and is not capable of achieving the goals put forth by Congress” (1964, x). Expressing his faith in private enterprise, Anderson concluded that “the federal urban renewal program will not achieve these goals as rapidly and effectively as the means employed by free enterprise—if at all” (1964, x). With its bureaucratic delays, its large-scale projects of regimented, look-alike apartment towers, and its mixed record of dividends, urban renewal seemed an ideal target for those fed up with big government, social engineering, and wasted tax dollars. As public opinion turned against the program, Anderson and like-minded conservatives could cite it as a prime example of why Uncle Sam should not be trusted with so much power.

While Martin Anderson used urban renewal to challenge liberal orthodoxy, Jane Jacobs viewed it as a prime example of the evils resulting from planning orthodoxy. In her 1961 landmark book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs launched “an attack on current city planning and rebuilding” (3). Targeting the assumptions underlying federal urban renewal, she observed, “There is a wistful myth that if only we had enough money to spend—the figure is usually put at a hundred billion dollars—we could wipe out all our slums in ten years, reverse decay in the great dull, gray belts that were yesterday's and day-before-yesterday's suburbs, anchor the wandering middle class and its wandering tax money, and perhaps even solve the traffic problem" (Jacobs 1961, 4). But so far the several billions had bought "middle-income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life [, and] luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with a vapid vulgarity" (Jacobs 1961, 4). Moreover, she contended that "the means to planned city rebuilding are as deplorable as the ends," for "the economics of city rebuilding do not rest soundly on reasoned investment of public tax subsidies, as urban renewal theory prclaims, but also on vast, involuntary subsidies wrung out of helpless site victims" (Jacobs 1961, 5). In other words, urban renewal had used cruel means to achieve abhorrent ends. Jacobs believed that it destroyed rather than stimulated urban vitality. In her opinion, urban renewal was not just ineffective: It was downright dangerous.

According to Jacobs, large-scale schemes and the sudden infusion of massive federal funding could not create vitality in the city. Only gradual, small-scale investment could nurture the rich diversity essential to a lively urban hub. She argued, "The forms in which money is used must be converted to instruments of regeneration—from instruments buying violent cataclysms to instruments buying continual, gradual, complex and gentler change" (Jacobs 1961, 317). To Jacobs, cities were organic, living entities that needed to be observed, and planners had to act on the basis of these observations and not simply impose the unfounded theories of "city beautiful" advocate Daniel Burnham, modernist Le Corbusier, or garden city proponent Ebenezer Howard. Rebuilding the city according to some preconceived formula was nonsense. Big schemes for clearance and renewal could never work. Cities had to be respected, not bulldozed. Jacobs wrote:

> From the beginning to end, from Howard and Burnham to the latest amendment on urban-renewal law, the entire concoction is irrelevant to the workings of cities....Unstudied, unrespected, cities have served as sacrificial victims. (1961, 25)

Urban renewal was then wrong, and, more important, it was proof of the error of prevailing planning orthodoxies. Just as the federal program supposedly disproved the assumptions of midcentury liberalism, it could also be used as a weapon in the war on modern city planning dogmas. Its failures were the failures of the planning profession.

Those ready to attack modern architecture regarded urban renewal projects as valuable ammunition for their assault as well. During the 1970s, a postmodern school of architecture challenged the modernist precepts so evident in renewal schemes. According to the postmodernists, architects should take into account the urban context; buildings should fit into the existing environment, not clash with it. Moreover, postmodernists rejected the modernist taboo on ornamentation and the devotion of such architects as Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe to unadorned functionalism. Given its bulldozer approach to urban redevelopment and its adherence to the modernist aesthetic, federal urban renewal was a prime example of the evil influence of modern architecture. Robert Moses's projects were islands of modern high-rises set on superblocks, oblivious to the surrounding buildings and neighborhoods and destructive of the existing street pattern. They were designed to be different and not to relate to the urban context. Detroit's Lafayette Park, likewise, was an oasis in the inner city. It was intended to obliterate the urban past and replace it with something better. For most urban renewal planners, there was no reason to conform to the urban context: That context was the very thing they were trying to destroy.

Urban renewal was therefore a welcome target for advocates of a number of causes. Unable to meet unrealistic expectations, federal renewal was earning a reputation for failure, and political conservatives and foes of modern planning and architecture exploited that failure. Urban renewal became a whipping boy, and that was perhaps its greatest legacy. Moreover, the critics of renewal were to gain the upper hand. In the 1970s and 1980s, the New Deal–Great Society political paradigm lost its luster, and in 1980, Martin Anderson and his allies won control of both the White House and the Senate. Jacobs's razor-sharp rhetoric effectively pierced the pretensions of orthodox planning, and during the late 1960s and 1970s, the planning profession was under siege from irate neighborhood groups that were no longer willing to be pushed around by supposed experts with planing degrees. Participatory planning was the new battle cry, as community activists sought to replace the top-down tradition of planning professionals with a bottom-up procedure in which neighborhood residents were supposed to play a major role. By the 1980s, the spare International style appeared old-fashioned. In the eyes of late-20th-century observers, many of the renewal projects were as ugly and out-of-date as the relics of the Victorian age had been to their counterparts 50 years earlier. Federal urban renewal was a combination of political liberalism, mid-20th-century planning orthodoxy, and International-style architecture, but by the last two decades of the 20th century, all of those seemed passé.

The limited impact of the federal renewal program on the city

In retrospect, however, federal urban renewal appears less of a despoiler or a benefactor of the city. Rather, given the controversy surrounding it, what is most remarkable is its relative insignificance. Neither Martin Anderson nor Jane Jacobs needed to worry, since all the discussion about renewal and all the redevelopment plans did not actually change America's cities radically. Title I and its amendments generated more paperwork than buildings; they promised much more than they produced.

Much of the so-called renewal of the central cities in the 30 years after World War II was not, in fact, due to Title I. The most highly touted revitalization effort of the early postwar era was the renaissance of Pittsburgh. Dingy warehouses and unsightly railroad yards at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers yielded to gleaming high-rises in a park-like setting. Within a decade, downtown Pittsburgh had a new face, earning the city an enviable reputation for revival. Once dismissed as representing the worst in American urban life, Pittsburgh became the comeback city of the 1950s and a model for other metropolises seeking a makeover. However, this renewal of the Point district of downtown Pittsburgh was a product of state, local, and private effort. Begun before the passage of Title I, it did not rely on federal urban renewal funding. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania developed a state park on 36 of the 59 acres in the redevelopment tract, and the city's redevelopment authority assembled the remaining 23 acres, on which the Equitable Life Assurance Society constructed a complex of office towers known as Gateway Center. This effort triggered further private office construction in the adjacent downtown area, so that by the mid-1960s, developers had rebuilt one-quarter of Pittsburgh's central business district (Garvin 1996).

Elsewhere, many of the most noteworthy renewal projects were not Title I programs either. During the 1950s, a cluster of high-rise office buildings known as Penn Center transformed Philadelphia's West Market Street from an eyesore to a model of urban redevelopment. This project did not receive Title I funds, but rather was the product of cooperation between city government and private enterprise. The decaying center of Newark, NJ, benefited from the private redevelopment schemes of two locally based insurance companies, Prudential and Mutual Benefit. The latter acquired and cleared 35 acres of slums, erecting in their stead a 20-story headquarters as well as a surrounding corps of office buildings. All of this was achieved without any public land-cost writedown (Adde 1969).

In Denver, developer William Zeckendorf embarked during the mid-1950s on the development of the Mile High Center office building, followed by the Courthouse Square project, comprising a department store, hotel, and office annex. Local observers hailed this private renewal effort as the spark that reignited Denver's core (Abbott 1981; Adde 1969). St. Louis pinned much of its hope for a comeback on the 630-foot Gateway Arch along the city's waterfront. This extraordinary monument was the product of federal money, but not Title I funding. The arch received special appropriations from Congress, and the landmark was to be administered by the National Park Service.

By the 1960s, belying the prophets of downtown demise, new office towers were rising in cities throughout the nation. The central business district was again attracting millions of dollars in private investment, although only a fraction of the new structures were in federal urban renewal projects. Instead, most of the office buildings were private projects on land assembled by private investors rather than public redevelopment authorities. Referring to the large-scale construction of office buildings and luxury apartments on Manhattan's East Side during the two decades after World War II, Morton Schussheim observed, "The most impressive renewal program of all has occurred in [this] district without writedown of land costs, without use of eminent domain, without any other important public bounties" (Greer 1965, 174). Title I was not responsible for the scores of new structures in Midtown and Lower Manhattan, the Chicago Loop, and in downtowns across America. There is no evidence that the resurgence of central business district construction in the 1960s resulted from federal urban renewal. Instead, private demand and available financing seem to have spurred this reconstruction.

In fact, a number of cities refused to participate in the Title I program, preferring private renewal of their central business districts instead. Unwilling to succumb to the paternalism of Uncle Sam, conservative residents of Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston rejected the blandishments of Title I money. In 1966, Fort Worth's electorate followed the lead of the Citizens Committee for the Protection of Private Property and defeated an urban renewal proposal by a 4-to-1 margin. Nearby Dallas likewise deemed the federal program too socialistic for its taste but benefited instead from a boom in privately financed downtown development, including the multipurpose Main Place project (Adde 1969). Having refused to adopt zoning, Houston was unable to qualify for Title I redevelopment, and most residents did not seem to mind. One Houston official noted that "urban renewal was not even in our lexicon" (Thomas and Murray 1991, 286). The city sponsored an impressive Civic Center redevelopment project west of the city's office core, but this was achieved without Title I funding.

Similarly, Omaha, NE, never signed on to the federal urban renewal program. The city received some federal funds for code enforcement but eschewed Title I renewal projects (Daly-Bednarek 1992). New structures rose in Omaha's core, however, and Creighton University expanded its downtown campus just as inner-city institutions in communities that exploited Title I did.

By the early 1970s, those cities that had refused federal renewal funds were not markedly different in appearance from those that had enjoyed a federally funded facelift. A visitor to Omaha in the 1970s would be hard-pressed to distinguish the Nebraska metropolis from comparable cities that did draw on Title I funds. Moreover, the centers of Dallas and Houston were no shabbier or more down-at-the-heels than the core areas of Atlanta and Los Angeles—cities that had accepted federal renewal money. In most cities, Title I was simply not that significant, so the difference between participants and nonparticipants was imperceptible to the average observer.

Federal urban renewal by itself did not dramatically transform America's cities. It generated a good many proposals, plans, protests, and ideological clashes, but in most cities its mark on the physical environment was relatively minor. It was an experiment with ambiguous goals and questionable consequences. Some believed that the program benefited the city, while others loudly berated it. The latter gained the upper hand. By the early 1970s, urban renewal had become synonymous in the popular mind with bulldozers and heartless displacement of the poor and powerless. Consequently, its enduring lessons were primarily negative. It taught America what *not* to do in the future.

The aftermath of urban renewal

In 1974, Congress, faced with growing popular discontent, combined urban renewal with the Great Society's Model Cities scheme and produced a new Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The CDBG scheme sought to give localities greater flexibility in using federal funds. Recipient cities had broad discretion in how they used federal grants, but the chief beneficiaries were supposed to be low- and moderate-income residents. As was the case under the previous urban renewal program, cities could allocate the money for clearance or rehabilitation of slum buildings, but the grants could also fund a range of programs and facilities including neighborhood centers, nonprofit economic development schemes, building code enforcement, energy conservation, and varied public works projects and public services. Complementing the CDBG was the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program authorized by Congress in 1977. It too emphasized flexibility and sought to avoid the red tape and delays endemic to Title I urban renewal. UDAG funds could be used for virtually any private development that produced new jobs and increased local tax revenues. Thus, it could be applied to sewers, streets, parking garages, and other infrastructure improvements necessary to lure tax-rich businesses and jobs (Black et al. 1980).

Critics questioned whether either of these programs served primarily the poor. Eager for economic growth, city development agencies allocated federal funds for glitzy downtown projects, claiming that low-income residents could secure jobs in the new enterprises and thereby benefit. For example, Boston used UDAG funds to help finance the Copley Place hotel, retail, and office complex. Its two luxury hotels and Neiman-Marcus department store catered to the affluent, but lowand moderate-income Bostonians did find employment there. Other cities also exploited the UDAG program for projects that only indirectly aided the poor. For example, half of all downtown malls constructed between 1978 and 1985 received UDAG financing (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989).

Neither of these programs constituted a major portion of the federal budget. The negative image of urban renewal, together with growing budget deficits, dampened any enthusiasm for marked increases in federal funding to the central cities. Beginning in the late 1970s, the portion of city revenues derived from the federal government declined, especially during the Reagan administration. Whereas in fiscal year 1977–78, 27 percent of Chicago's general revenue came from Washington, by 1984–85 the figure was down to 15 percent. The federal government accounted for 20 percent of Philadelphia's general revenue in 1977–78, yet seven years later it contributed only 8 percent. And during this same period the federal share of Detroit's general receipts plummeted from 23 percent to 12 percent (Teaford 1990).

States and localities increasingly had to rely on their own ingenuity and resources to finance revitalization. One of the most widespread, significant approaches was tax increment financing (TIF). Basically, under TIF, a portion of the additional property tax revenue generated by development in a renewal area was used to pay off the bonds issued to finance such project costs as site and infrastructure improvements. In other words, a city borrowed against its expected increase in income and used the enhanced tax revenues in a designated TIF district to reimburse the cost of the public investment in the renewal project. By the late 1990s, 44 states had authorized municipalities to establish TIF districts, with 780 such project areas in California alone (Andrews 1999).

States and localities also turned to tax abatements and incentive zoning to lure businesses, and in one city after another, redevelopment authorities and private developers negotiated complex deals that included promises of tax breaks, zoning waivers, and improvements in public infrastructure. States also proved increasingly willing to make direct grants to help finance sports stadiums, convention centers, and other amenities that would supposedly boost central-city fortunes.

The bottom line, however, is that the federal government was less significant in redevelopment and renewal in the last quarter of the 20th century than during the 25 years of federal urban renewal. The hated bulldozer projects tarnished Uncle Sam's image as a benevolent big brother and discouraged officials in the executive and legislative branches from fashioning another program promising a wholesale makeover of urban America. During the 1980s and 1990s, cities still received federal aid, but no one was seriously proposing a return to

Title I. The age of large-scale, federally funded clearance projects was over.

Changing ideas about urban planning and architecture further doomed any revival of Title I. Jane Jacobs's ideas were to become the new orthodoxy of the late 20th century, as planners, developers, and architects spoke increasingly of the need to respect the urban context and the merits of preserving older structures and the existing street pattern. During the last years of the federal urban renewal program, the funds allocated for rehabilitation projects increased, and after 1974, the new emphasis on preservation and repair was even more evident. In the 1970s and 1980s, the historic preservation movement attracted a growing army of supporters, and federal tax laws were especially favorable to the rehabilitation of aged structures. Recycling existing buildings became the prevailing fashion. Old warehouses deemed eyesores in the 1950s were transformed into shops and restaurants, gritty factories became apartment lofts commanding exorbitant rents, and developers showed considerable imagination in finding new uses for empty post offices, railroad stations, and city halls. Robert Moses was an archvillain in the urban literature of the late 20th century, and weighty tomes portrayed him as the debaucher of cities. From the vantage point of the 1980s and 1990s, Society Hill was the finest product of the earlier federal renewal effort, for it preserved the existing environment rather than obliterating it.

The negative image of the federal bulldozer had caused a marked shift in urban revitalization efforts. Existing buildings might still need to be destroyed for the construction of the giant convention hall or major-league stadium that every chamber of commerce president and mayor craved, and some large-scale projects were planned for former railroad yards or sites that did not warrant preservation. But late-20th-century urban revival schemes were more often small-scale and selective. One building would fall to the wrecking ball whereas its neighbor would survive and be rehabilitated. Planners spoke of the need for "urban infill." In other words, cities needed to mend the rents in the urban fabric, but they did not need a whole new cloth. Respecting the past, planners and developers no longer sought to create a new city and discard the old one. Instead, they sought to bring out the best in the existing urban environment.

Given the pall that continues to hang over Title I renewal, the trends of the late 20th century will probably persist. There is little prospect for a handsomely funded federal program for the large-scale rebuilding of the central cities. Title I was a product of a convergence of factors unlikely to recur in the near future. In the wake of the New Deal, lawmakers and voters had great faith in the federal government's capacity to work wonders. The professional hubris of planners was likewise at a high point, as was the power of czars such as Robert

Moses. They all felt that they had the answers to urban problems and that they should impose them on America's city dwellers. Moreover, central cities still accounted for the largest proportion of the American electorate, and their support was vital to the success of Democrats in controlling both the White House and Congress. Toward the close of the 20th century, however, fewer voters and lawmakers believed in the invincibility of the federal government. The urban renewal experience of the 1950s and 1960s had undermined the confidence and authority of planners and redevelopment officials, as was evident in increased demands for resident participation in neighborhood planning. The older central cities, which held a declining proportion of the American population, wielded less political clout than they did in the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s, and they were less likely to garner a larger share of the federal budget. The center of American life had moved to the suburbs, and both major political parties seemed dedicated to wooing the middle class, meaning those who lived, shopped, and worked in the outer rings of America's metropolises. These citizens knew little of the central city and probably cared even less.

The most highly publicized planning movement of recent years, the New Urbanism, focuses primarily on the need to redesign the suburbs. More accurately labeled the "New Suburbanism," it seeks to right the wrongs of the centerless, sprawling fringe just as Le Corbusier and his urban renewal disciples sought to re-create the central city. Though the new urbanists advocate urban infill, their principal projects and plans are for spanking-new, compact communities of businesses and residences along the metropolitan periphery (Katz 1994). With planning rhetoric increasingly aimed at the problem of suburban sprawl and the need for smart land-use planning in fringe areas, the prospect is better for suburban redevelopment than for urban renewal. At the beginning of the 21st century, there is increasing interest in creating a better suburban environment, and local, state, and federal officials appear to be turning their attention to that endeavor.

Conclusion

No matter whether the focus is urban or suburban, policy makers might well heed a number of lessons taught by the quarter-century history of Title I. First, federal intervention generates delays as well as development, and unfettered state and local action might prove more expeditious as well as more creative than projects straitjacketed by federal guidelines. Second, the nation's democratic tradition and devotion to individual rights clashes with efforts by big government or big developers to displace or burden the little people. Planners and politicians who persist in ignoring the will of the locality and its people will likely face retribution in the press and the polling booth. Third, policy makers should beware of planning panaceas that promise a fix for the multitudinous problems of the city. Neither Le Corbusier nor the new urbanists have the answer, because urban areas and problems vary greatly and no single manifesto can offer a solution satisfactory for Phoenix as well as Philadelphia. Fourth, planning fashions and architectural styles change. This year's model is next year's monstrosity, and from the standpoint of posterity, it might prove best that many public plans for a refashioned metropolis never progressed beyond the drawing board. Fifth, a healthy skepticism and an appreciation of the complexity of urban life should underlie renewal initiatives. A sensitivity to the city and its citizens is far more desirable than devotion to a currently fashionable aesthetic, planning, or political dogma.

Because the planners and policy makers of the 1950s and early 1960s lacked this healthy skepticism, the chief product of Title I was a widely held commitment never to have another Title I. Federal urban renewal taught the possibilities of rehabilitation in such projects as Society Hill and produced some worthy monuments such as Charles Center in Baltimore. It also spawned a chorus of critics who rejected the program as well as the political and planning assumptions underlying it. Title I tested the public's faith in Uncle Sam and planners' faith in Le Corbusier. Both were found wanting, and the result was urban revitalization efforts that relied more heavily on state and local ingenuity and preferred rehabilitation over clearance and preservation over destruction.

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