An increasing proportion of New York Metropolitan Region economic activity has been given over to functions peculiarly associated with its role as the nation's first city.

Raymond Vernon

Redevelopment had a profound impact on the economic life of New York. Despite all the moral anguish about Negro removal from residential districts, the dislocation of blue-collar jobs would prove more consequential to the city's social fabric. Yet the process went along as unacknowledged municipal policy for thirty years. Few politicians debated the subject, and no election turned on voter approval of one version or another of the city's economic future. Planners, who worried about creating community balance with mixed commercial, industrial, and residential uses, never seemed to find room for the industrial leg of the triad. Business lobbyists, who should have been vigilant, proved remarkably complacent when factories were shoved aside for other needs. Most policy makers agreed with economic change that seemed naturally ordained and allowed Robert Moses and his supporters to eliminate blue-collar blight.

Complacency toward the health of New York's manufacturing sector ended during the 1970s. The city had been hemorrhaging factory jobs for years, but the 1975 fiscal crisis, along with postmortems about the War on Poverty, put the loss in alarming perspective. Social theorists noted the drain of blue-collar jobs and the need of the city's black and Hispanic newcomers for unskilled, entry-level opportu-
nity. Using a favorite catchword, they warned about the growing “mismatch” in the labor market between job seekers and available jobs and the explosive pressures felt by minorities who searched for jobs in vain. Analysts explained that manufacturing’s woes were the result of what they called the “structural” shifts that realigned American cities with global economic trends. New York had evolved into a postindustrial metropolis whose blue-collar trades had been replaced by white-collar services. The disappearance of entry-level slots would cause dislocations, but vigorous manpower strategies, such as government-business partnerships to train newcomers, might ease the transition. Theorists alternated between acceptance of the inevitable and responses within established limits.  

Few theorists lingered over the historic dimension of this transformation or the ways in which municipal decisions might have affected what seemed inevitable. Critics pointed to notorious blunders in the early 1960s, when the Port Authority’s World Trade Center trampled over thousands of jobs or when Robert Moses’s final attempt at a cross-Manhattan expressway blighted factories in Chelsea. Few remembered the decisions in the 1940s and early 1950s that cast the fate of New York’s manufacturing, such as when the city chose redevelopment housing and civic centers over manufacturing, and planners and theorists went along with the removal of obnoxious factories as part of the urban revival. After World War II, few disagreed that New York could become a postindustrial metropolis if enough land could be cleared of factories to make it so.  

An Urban Blight

As City College economist John I. Griffin pointed out more than thirty years ago, New York had no policy toward manufacturing except to regard it as an urban blight. Politicians took their cues from theoreticians and planners, who regarded factories as unesthetic. Their disdain drew largely from the City Beautiful’s snobby sense of hierarchy, which gave first priority to monumental public buildings on splendid plazas and virtually none to mundane warehouses and industrial buildings. City planning, moreover, had come of age in the struggles against the tenement and the sweatshop. Beyond their designs for a few company towns, planners rarely met an industry they liked. Their professional responsibility was to distance society’s most vulnerable element from factories and business by insulating women and children, as architect George R. Ford wrote, from the
"continual din and racket of the streets." They naturally turned to zoning as the efficient way to make New York safe from obnoxious uses, starting with "the sordid atmosphere of the ordinary business street." They recognized, of course, that manufacturing was desiring and urged planners to set aside special industrial districts where factories could realize the efficiencies of the electric motor and the assembly line. Machine age metaphors laid over Victorian moralism fashioned the vision of a ranked and segregated metropolis.3

During the 1920s, planners spun variations on the theme of removing manufacturing from the central city. Leaders of the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs (RPNY), which depended on the economic analyses of Columbia University professors Robert M. Haig and Roswell C. McCrea, referred constantly to inevitable transformations, but overlooked few opportunities to advise municipal policy against factories in Manhattan. In that spirit, Lawson Purdy, a director of the RPNY and president of the Charity Organization Society, consigned much of the city south of 14th Street to middle-class housing. The mixed-use neighborhood around Mercer and Greene streets, he told a meeting of social agencies at Greenwich House, "was entirely suitable for residential development." Pointing to other housing opportunities on the Lower West Side, he would keep only Hudson Street, Varick Street, and a few other commercial arteries for business.4

The Great Depression reinforced the determination to clear relics of a decrepit era. With impatient gestures, reformers waved away the commercial prospects of whole districts. Louis Pink wrote off the industrial future of downtown Brooklyn. "The entire waterfront from Greenpoint to South Brooklyn, excepting the Heights, is outworn," he said, calling the area suitable for housing. Social-welfare experts at the Hudson Guild made the same observation about the West Side of Manhattan north of 14th Street, which contained one of the largest concentrations of low-income jobs in the city. "While once it was thought that ultimately industry and commerce would require these entire areas for expansion, now it is conceded that it will not." Arthur C. Holden, activist on Mayor La Guardia's Committee on City Planning, scorned the economic obsolescence that seemed to accompany outmoded property patterns. Holden's crusade for group ownership on the Lower East Side led to contact with small businessmen and manufacturers, whom he viewed as marginal operators who deserved foreclosure. No one on the mayor's committee had any expertise in factory layouts or was associated with small business interests. As alumni of the New York Building Congress,
the RPNY, and its successor, the Regional Plan Association, they accepted the machine age wisdom of regionalized production.5

Influenced by regional visions and late-1930s fears of permanent depression, the master plans proposed by Rexford Tugwell's City Planning Commission attempted to withdraw enormous amounts of inner-city space from the factory zone. "With the exception of land adjacent to the docks, which end at Montgomery Street," the commission declared in 1940, "there would seem to be little need for industry, other than utilities and services, along most of the East River below Triborough Bridge [at 125th Street]. On the West Side, industry can best be served below Seventy-second Street, where rail and shipping facilities already exist and other requirements can be met more readily than elsewhere." The commission further suggested that midtown Manhattan, between 23rd and 59th streets (except on the West Side) be zoned against all but light manufacturing, with residential areas protected from "objectionable uses." It justified these drastic limitations by noting the peculiar structure of local manufacturing. New York had a bewildering array of "light industries," which operated in small plants, had little invested in machinery, and required minimal floor space. The sector was uniquely malleable to policy requirements. Factories could be "more readily distributed, grouped or concentrated, than would be the case if they were larger and represented heavier outlays for land, plants, and machinery." The City Planning Commission looked forward to helping factories find new efficiencies in the outer boroughs.6

These confident pronouncements rested more on technical faith than on statistics. Frederick L. Ackerman, the Housing Authority's chief planner, was convinced that too much manufacturing occurred in outmoded structures. By some vague calculus, he insisted that productivity could be doubled by more efficient operations on half the floor space. Without explaining how those changes could be accomplished or reckoning the social consequences, Ackerman welcomed the shift of manufacturing to Brooklyn and Queens. City planning commissioners applied this economic puritanism to East Harlem. Meeting with local property men, Lawrence M. Orton explained that the commission's zoning policy was premised on the judgment that the district was "predominantly residential." Existing businesses and factories would be "consolidated into fixed centers," with the remaining space allocated to housing. City planners had an offhand way of drawing the boundaries of industrial districts. Robert C. Weinberg, one of the commission's survey leaders on the Lower East Side, remembered that in 1939 the entire area north to
23rd Street "was tentatively designated for clearance and rehousing" with no basis for the decision beyond the commission's weakness for neat boundaries. Soon thereafter, as Weinberg recalled, Consolidated Edison complained about its generating station on East 14th Street, and the commission relented. The facility was once again on acreage pejoratively marked "unnecessary...non-residential."

Policy that depended on aesthetics never would survive Robert Moses's caustic review. In late 1940, Rexford Tugwell's master plans, particularly his proposals to relocate low-rent residential communities in outer-borough greenbelts, were waylaid by Moses's demagogic appeals to business and labor groups. When Tugwell called for rearranging "obnoxious" industry in Brooklyn and Queens, labor unions saw the plans as attacks on jobs. Tugwell's cavalier attitude toward manufacturing invited Moses's sneer that "long-haired planners" forgot that people worked for a living. Tugwell's vaunting attempt to uphold municipal priorities against the profit motive made him city planning's great martyr. But the commission had sided with white-collar careers against blue-collar labor at a time when workers were still reeling from the depression. For all of Tugwell's talk about judicious public authority, he and his colleagues had already picked certain winners in the private sector.

Their policy on industrial placement had begun to unnerve those who otherwise championed master planning. In February of 1940, Manhattan Borough President Stanley M. Isaacs condemned as "quite dangerous" the City Planning Commission's suggestion to relocate the Lower West Side poultry market to Long Island City. Isaacs called his own Borough Advisory Board on Planning, headed by Bowery Savings Bank president Henry Bruère, to ponder the move, and he also alerted Bruère that the commissioner of markets favored shifting the entire Washington Produce Market to the Queens site to save "the consumer substantial sums because of the lowered rent." "Of course the Washington Market needs replanning and rebuilding," Isaacs conceded. But the commissioner, Isaacs charged, ignored "the consequences of vacating large areas in this borough." "The city does not exist except through its ability to give reasonable employment to its inhabitants," Bruère replied. "It cannot consist exclusively of highways, open spaces and subsidized dwellings."

Isaacs broke off the debate by forwarding to Mayor La Guardia one merchant's suggestion of a committee of businessmen to "prevent an exodus of residents and industry." La Guardia responded with a gesture. By executive order, he transformed the Mayor's Re-
cepton Committee, really the official greeter, Grover Whalen, into the Department of Commerce, lodged in the mayor’s office. The New York Chamber of Commerce later found that the agency “never had a clearly defined purpose” or “charter-related responsibilities.” The agency’s lack of purpose was symptomatic of the general failure of the La Guardia administration, where the creativity poured into government make-work had no counterpart in industrial development.10

New York’s manufacturing sector deserved more than fitful improvisation. On the eve of World War II, nearly 40 percent of the work force was still engaged in making things; the city was by far the nation’s largest manufacturing district. But as the City Planning Commission observed, the industrial concentration added up to “little heavy industry.” This peculiar capacity made New York the second largest military contractor (after Los Angeles) even though Washington was hard-pressed to find ordnance for the city to do and minimized its importance as a production center. Carl Norden (bomb sights), Bulova (scientific instruments), and Ford Instruments were located in New York. At the Brooklyn Navy Yard, 30,000 metal workers repaired damaged vessels and built battleships and aircraft carriers. When the federal government bothered to count, it found 170,000 laborers in New York working on war contracts and thousands more working on subcontracts.11

Advocates of urban redevelopment avoided reckoning what impact their projects would have on commerce and industry, but Stuyvesant Town was too large to ignore. During the 1943 debate, Robert C. Weinberg asked the City Planning Commission what it had in mind by extending the project to the East River Drive, which reversed earlier policy that favored access to piers that it called “permanently needed for industry.” Admonishing the commission to provide for waterfront needs between 14th and 23rd streets, Weinberg warned that industrial uses “are being steadily cut down. . . . It is this trend which many city officials and private interests are deploiring.” He wanted the ten blocks kept for industrial use.12

A few days later, Stanley Isaacs’s successor as Manhattan borough president, Edgar J. Nathan, Jr., appealed to Mayor La Guardia to save the commercial frontage. Asserting that “large building investment controls the use of the neighborhood,” Nathan argued that expensive housing had “compelled the discontinuance of commercial property which was deemed a nuisance.” He warned that unless the city acted to preserve the commercial acreage between 18th and 23rd streets, the entire section would become park space. Replying
to La Guardia, Park Commissioner Moses scoffed at Nathan’s fears. He charged that the borough president wanted room for industry, not business, and he agreed with Frederick Eckert, who warned that Nathan’s ideas would “wreck” Stuyvesant Town. “This is the first time I have heard that residence drives out industry,” Moses lectured. “It is a basic principle of all zoning plans and restrictions that it is just the other way around.”

During World War II, plant location began to vex planners pondering the shape of the postwar metropolis. Ordinarily, the American Institute of Architects Committee on Civic Design did not dwell on industrial placement, but in 1944 it pronounced about prevailing economic blight. It branded the vast district of lofts and shops between Chambers and 23rd streets “a vast no-man’s land, which somehow cannot find itself.” The committee spotted other anomalies, such as the Washington Market, which it called a prime example of “economic loss.” The wholesale fruit and produce industry was funneled through what AIA members called “a jumbled mass of antiquated structures and narrow crowded streets, at a considerable loss reflected in high prices.”

For all the professional emphasis on industrial districts in Brooklyn and Queens, the City Planning Commission made policy by zoning variance. On January 23, 1943, it held hearings on whether to apply residential zoning to industrial and commercial developments. Sylvania Electric Products spotted a site for a research and administrative center on 33 acres in Bayside, Queens, and lobbied for a zoning variance, but the commission refused, arguing that Sylvania would intrude on a residential neighborhood. Commissioner Moses prevailed among the desultory planners, as revealed in the minutes of the AIA Committee on Civic Design: “The change in zoning required is being urged by Mr. Moses. The [AIA] Committee seemed to favor the project and the New Sperry Gyroscope plant in Great Neck was mentioned as a plant employing more than 10,000 which should have been kept in the City.” Tugwell’s greenbelts were a sorry memory, but Moses, the czar of greenbelt parkways, became the arbiter of industrial placement near them. Under Moses’s pressure, the City Planning Commission adopted the amendment to allow administrative offices and industrial laboratories “consistent with . . . the value and use of property in residence districts.” With approval by the Board of Estimate, Sylvania built a 28.5-acre center near the Cross Island Parkway. The commission’s difidence toward industry contrasted sharply with Moses’s decisive aid.

The city’s failure to hold Sperry’s jobs, however, was linked to
a set of wartime decisions about a Brooklyn “civic center.” The idea had long been harbored by local boosters, notably Brooklyn Borough President John E. Cashmore, who yearned to replace the lofts and tenements that crowded the approaches of the Brooklyn Bridge with a “dignified” arrangement of public buildings. The plan appealed as well to local reformers, spearheaded by Comptroller Joseph McGoldrick, who saw that Stuyvesant Town–size redevelopment would make him Brooklyn’s successor to La Guardia. The Brooklyn men on the City Planning Commission, chairman Edwin Salmon and Brooklyn Eagle editor Cleveland Rodgers, also regarded the center as overdue civic reform. Moses had the most to say because of his insistence on routing a “Brooklyn-Queens connecting highway” around Brooklyn Heights. Moses would save the district from the choking traffic his arterial poured into it.*

In 1944, Moses, with Cashmore’s staunch support, had the City Planning Commission subcontract the civic center design to his consultants, landscape architects Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano. Completed in November, the Clarke-Rapuano study proposed clearance of obsolete structures in order to open vistas toward the bridge, plazas for a borough hall and municipal courts, and sites for middle-income redevelopment. Adopting the Clarke-Rapuano work, the City Planning Commission report (drafted by Cleveland Rodgers) observed that wholesale clearance would provide “ample” space for business and industry, while leaving large areas for residential redevelopment. In March of 1945, the commission called for removing approximately 160 acres of lofts, businesses, and tenements.†

At the City Planning Commission hearing on April 11, 1945, the civic center was welcomed by the Brooklyn Real Estate Board, the Kings County Grand Jury Association (which wanted additional courtrooms and jails), the Brooklyn Heights Association, and the Citizens Union (whose spokesman applauded the “coordinated planning”). Isolated protests came from representatives of the American Safety Razor Corporation, whose eight-story plant on Jay Street and Myrtle Avenue was within the acreage marked for housing, and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. American Safety Razor reminded the commission, an AIA observer noted, of “the size of the firm, the number of people employed.” The chamber of commerce was torn between the civic center and the company, which it called “a vital factor in the industrial employment of that community.” Businessmen went on to argue that “Brooklyn’s strength depends on the industry concentrated along the waterfront. 30% more people will
be employed in that locality after the war. . . . Ask the Commission to give consideration to the industry in the locality.”

Both sides had a point. Although Sperry had actually taken 12,500 jobs from the vicinity, its 300,000-square-foot loft had been leased by another manufacturer, Howard Clothes. Within the immediate area, nearly 15,000 workers were employed in ordnance plants. Hudson-American, which assembled radar equipment, had purchased a six-story building owned by Long Island University. The district was defined by industry as much as by offices and retail stores. The commission claimed, nevertheless, that “while the area has been largely zoned for industry and business, residential use is still predominant.” It concluded that “nothing less than the transformation of the entire area, creating a wholly new environment, seems likely to achieve the desired results.”

With great enthusiasm, Mayor La Guardia backed Moses’s request for a $4 million down payment on a $50 million civic center. Comptroller Joseph McGoldrick, however, wanted to clear as far as Fort Greene Park. Conceding “considerable displacement” of business, the city’s fiscal officer thought the upheaval could be limited by informing owners of “how long they might stay in their present places, so that they might make plans for new locations.” In November of 1945, during what harried clerks called the largest condemnations in memory, the city took title to twenty-three blocks between Jay, Fulton, Washington, and Sands streets. Bulldozing at the Sands Street approaches of the bridge gave the Brooklyn Park Association the opportunity to “re-unveil” Roebling’s masterpiece and to call on Manhattan improvers to remove similar obstructions. American Safety Razor found the implications unmistakable. Its executives, who were seeking more production space near Jay Street, feared “the entire Brooklyn plant might be taken over by the city for park purposes.” They considered expansion “hazardous” when the city might condemn more property for the civic center at any time.

Observant executives could not ignore the trends in municipal policy. With the end of the war, conventional wisdom favored eliminating industry on both sides of the East River. Before the United Nations headquarters came along, William Zeckendorf’s proposal for “X-City” was applauded for clearing the ramshackle shore at East 42nd Street. Planners talked about ridding industrial blight in Long Island City south of the Queensborough Bridge. During the next five years, stretches of the Manhattan waterfront between 41st and 48th streets were put off-limits to accommodate the world’s medical and political capitals. The process of removing factories to make
## Job clearance along the East River, 1945–1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>No. industrial/commercial structures</th>
<th>No. jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Nations site</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Civic Center</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>8,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYU–Bellevue Center</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Hospital, Peter Cooper, Stuyvesant Town</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Authority Riis, Wald, Baruch, Vladeck, La Guardia, Smith projects</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corlears Hook Title I</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17,900</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Estimated from *Real Property Inventory, City of New York, Non-Residential Report* (1934); Bromley property atlases; Sanborn-Perris fire insurance maps.

The environs safe for housing soon snowballed, despite Moses's decided opinion that industry drove out residence. With housing redevelopments along the East River, economist John Griffin pointed out, "pressure to remove 'objectionable' piers and waterfront installations became very great." Stuyvesant Town soon defined the standards that were compatible with a residential community.22

Redevelopment decisions obliterated the industrial legacy on both sides of the East River. They not only brought the largest elimination of blue-collar jobs in the city's history, they preempted future space for manufacturing and warehousing. Although the acreage can be counted, the job toll remains inexact without employment censuses by block or local district. The 1934 Real Property Inventory enumerated economic use of buildings in selected census tracts, but its boundaries did not coincide with postwar redevelopments. The 1934 figures for "daytime population" (the enumerators' nomenclature for employees, both managerial and line) reflected depression levels, allowing no certain extrapolation to the post-1945 period.

The data had no breakdown of manufacturing versus service or clerical jobs in these buildings, and did not count jobs in residential structures, which included stores that lined the first floors of many tenements. (When the Housing Authority cleared tenements in East
Harlem after the war, it dislodged 1,800 stores.) Still the inventory provides a basis to judge the magnitude of job loss.²²
Transformation alongside the East River between 1945 and 1955 (clearance for the United Nations, the NYU-Bellevue complex, Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, public housing sites down to the Brooklyn Bridge, the first Title I project atCorlears Hook, and the Brooklyn Civic Center) removed nearly 18,000 jobs; including small stores, the toll may have reached 30,000. Although hardly catastrophic in an economy of 3.5 million jobs, this loss of blue-collar work came when factory employment was faltering in Manhattan. Moreover, the toll did not include removals of factories and small businesses for arterial highways along the Brooklyn waterfront and in Greenpoint, nor did it assess the impact of future Title I projects. The first round of postwar reconstruction was a body blow to the factory economy.

**Brooklyn Splendor**

After World War II, Construction Coordinator Moses transformed a large part of Brooklyn's retail and factory zone into the Civic Center. The area contained thousands of manufacturing jobs, but Moses concluded that downtown Brooklyn was destined for government offices, universities, hospitals, and other institutions that uplifted the city. It made little difference that no one had determined what civic functions Brooklyn needed downtown, reckoned how many colleges or hospitals the borough could sustain, or estimated whether upper-middle-class residents would fill the housing redevelopments. Moses saw the Civic Center as a giant jigsaw, and scrounged for pieces from city agencies, Brooklyn Democrats, housing reformers, Fulton Street merchants, pi ilant realtors, and the trustees of colleges and hospitals. He never coordinated on a grander scale.

Moses succeeded because Brooklyn VIPs agreed with the concept of grandeur despite the consequences. Modeled after Washington, D.C., the Civic Center would feature public buildings on wide, tree-lined malls created by the off-ramps of the Brooklyn Bridge. To keep traffic flowing from the bridge to the municipal buildings and Fulton Street stores, Moses arranged with Borough President Cashmore, Robert E. Blum of the Abraham & Straus department store, and the Brooklyn Democratic machine for construction of parking facilities. Cashmore dreamed of vistas around the Brooklyn Bridge and new office towers on Fulton Street. Another downtown
Downtown Brooklyn: from jungle to civic center. Downtown Brooklyn south and west of the Navy Yard was utterly transformed by liberal endeavors. Brooklyn civic leaders demanded clearance of "the Jungle" for the Farragut, Wallabout, and Fort Greene public projects. Boosters, civic reformers, and
booster, Blum had interests as disparate as New York Airways and the Brooklyn Institute of the Arts and Sciences (Brooklyn Museum), and imagined a central business district that pulsed with helicopter commuters and white-collar residents who strolled to nearby shops and entertainment.23

Everyone recognized that the Civic Center required redevelopment housing, partly to remove slum dwellers from the civic attractions and partly to locate white, middle-class residents near Abraham & Straus and the Brooklyn Institute. But few bankers would wager on the logic. Moses spent months cajoling Henry Bruère and other bankers to invest in Concord Village, the center’s residential anchor. In 1948, he almost succeeded in getting the Bowery and East New York Savings to invest several million dollars, but they wanted federal mortgage guarantees and convincing evidence that the city was moving the Civic Center along. In November of 1948, Moses thought he could get Bruère’s commitment on Concord Village with promises of slum clearance around the Navy Yard. “We may add to the public housing to clean up the slum areas,” Moses said, “and thus genuinely rehabilitate the entire neighborhood.” But Bruère wanted the option to build on half the site (and to charge $55 per room) in exchange for the city’s pledge to start improvements near Concord. That was enough for Moses to convene a Civic Center coordinating committee of agency heads, chaired by Gilmore D. Clarke, the City Planning Commission’s consultant. Clarke’s group sent the orders that sped clearance of the bridge approaches, widened Fulton Street, and razed buildings for a park and a courthouse. With those assurances, Bruère’s bank consortium went ahead with the Concord investment.24

The banks, however, poled along, and blamed their reluctant pace on the city’s lack of vision. A year later, when the Committee on Slum Clearance announced the Williamsburg site alongside the Brooklyn-Queens connecting highway as Brooklyn’s Title I project, Borough President Cashmore cried that the city treated his borough

Robert Moses combined to transform 160 acres of lofts and tenements into a Civic Center for borough buildings, open space, and highway ramps. Whereas Concord Village represented the hope for private middle-income housing, the American Safety Razor plant was the kind of obnoxious use civic opinion wanted removed. It was purchased by Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and is today part of the enlarged campus for Polytechnic University.
like a “stepchild.” Fulton Street merchants and politicians expected their fellow Brooklynite, Corporation Counsel John P. McGrath, to restore the balance. Within days, Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri told the Downtown Brooklyn Association that more Title I’s were coming. Moses relied on Brooklyn Eagle publisher Frank Schroth to approach Pratt Institute about a $1 million project for new facilities. Moses had Brooklyn booster Cleveland Rodgers see the leader of the Queensview consortium, Louis Pink, about doing “a coop at around $22 per room.” An informal Brooklyn Civic Center Committee was organized under Robert Blum and Cleveland Rodgers, who was already on the Concord Village payroll. Vowing to end the “exasperatingly slow pace of the public works,” Rodgers became the Civic Center lobbyist and Moses’s mouthpiece; his job was to assure nervous investors on further city improvements. But there remained a major uncertainty about the keystone near Fort Greene Park. Louis Pink in particular worried about “what the Long Island University is going to do. To sell apartments it will be necessary to assure people that the entire area is going to be cleaned up.” Soon Moses dispatched two university trustees, Cleveland Rodgers and John McGrath, to find out William Zeckendorf’s plans for LIU.25

Long Island University was unlikely common ground for McGrath, the Brooklyn Democrats’ legal fixer, and Zeckendorf, the gregarious, ham-fisted realtor. When Zeckendorf joined the LIU board of trustees during World War II, he remembered a “diminutive and uncredited night school” that lived hand to mouth on tuition and died in the wartime shortage of students. In 1943, the Brooklyn bankruptcy judge put Zeckendorf, McGrath, and other local Democrats in charge of its resurrection. The trustees sold off LIU property near Fulton Street, consolidated assets, and fashioned the school into an instrument of Brooklyn’s revival.26

The university worked hand in glove with Civic Center boosters. At McGrath’s encouragement, the academic administrators turned LIU into Fulton Street’s intellectual resource, validating nearly every skill required to run a business with an LIU degree. The university rented space in the Brooklyn Paramount Building that had been vacated by the City Board of Transportation when that agency moved to new quarters in the Civic Center. (Less than two years later, the board’s successor, the New York City Transit Authority, chose McGrath’s law firm as counsel, despite complaints about the conflict of interest with McGrath’s political connections.) The primal force behind LIU ambitions remained Zeckendorf, who was rarely
seen on campus except with conservative businessmen and World War II generals who were receiving honorary degrees. In 1952, his $500,000 gift to the university obtained 7.5 acres of downtown property that completed LIU’s transformation. “It was his idea,” chirped the Brooklyn Eagle, “to get it into the Title I development under which it is to secure a campus.” Zeckendorf candidly recalled: “As soon as the new [Title I] law was passed, I said, ‘Let’s do it.’ I put it to work rehabilitating one of the worst parts of Brooklyn.” It offered improvements of far-reaching scope; “plus,” Zeckendorf added, “great investment leverage.”

In the fall of 1952, the Committee on Slum Clearance made Long Island University and neighboring Brooklyn Hospital anchors for the redevelopment of Fort Greene. Moses pushed the Fort Greene Title I through the Board of Estimate in December, claiming the moment was ripe and citing Zeckendorf’s $500,000 investment in the district’s future. Brooklyn Hospital expansion across Ashland Place, said Moses, would prove “an enormous benefit to the entire neighborhood.” Rounding out the reclamation were two middle-income projects, the Kingsview cooperative to be developed by Louis Pink and his associates, and University Towers, a rental handled by Brooklyn builder Fred C. Trump. The CSC boasted of the broad, responsive planning that would “recapture a region.”

The redevelopment remained a gimmicky contrivance kept together by Moses’s goading. Only three years before, Brooklyn Hospital had no building program beyond a fifty-bed maternity wing. In response to Moses’s grand design, the trustees conjured up a $3 million fund-raising campaign linked to the acquisition of Title I property. But they had no taste for relocations, which hospital trustee Robert Blum tried to unload on LIU. When Moses learned of the hospital’s evasion, he told Blum that the hospital had to carry out relocations or else it would proceed without the hospital or the university. He warned hospital trustee Louis Pink that Fort Greene property owners would challenge the Title I condemnation, and he advised him to hire “experienced, distinguished local counsel” John McGrath. But Pink was more distressed by lagging sales of Kingsview’s cooperative apartments. He hoped to persuade Kingsview board members Nathan Straus and Gerard Swope to use their contacts with local radio stations to broadcast the project’s sales pitch. “In addition,” Pink suggested, “we must immediately work on the industries in the neighborhood, which Mr. Kazan [of the United Housing Foundation] believes is so essential. Local manufacturers and businessmen should be contacted personally.”
As Moses warned, the manufacturers regarded the Fort Greene Title I as their death sentence. They went to the Board of Estimate claiming that LIU expansion would wipe out 20 acres zoned for factories. More serious was the charge, leveled by the Brooklyn Real Estate Board, that the Title I was illegal because the improvements would not be “predominantly residential.” University trustee McGrath countered about the “need for expanded collegiate facilities in a few years” when the baby-boom generation reached maturity. The Board of Estimate approved the Fort Greene Title I during the same session it approved Title I condemnations for Columbus Circle and Morningside Heights.

Fort Greene businessmen took the Committee on Slum Clearance to court in early 1954, but local judges deferred to the wisdom of city officials. The plaintiffs gained unexpected allies, however, when Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives tried to amend the Housing Act of 1949 with the “Phillips Proviso,” which would have limited Title I write-downs to areas that were certifiably residential. Although aimed at Columbus Circle’s brazen commercialism, it also would have blocked Fort Greene and Pratt Institute. Moses trooped to Washington with Brooklyn officials, including the borough’s entire congressional delegation. Frank Schrot (publisher of the Brooklyn Eagle) and Robert Blum (who represented the Downtown Brooklyn Association and Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce) were vehement against the Phillips Proviso. Blum argued that it was mischievous, because no city could “duplicate [in its redevelopment] the original use of every single piece of property.” Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., warned that Phillips endangered $700 million of New York housing projects. Then Moses invoked the ultimate authority for House Republicans. He said that his old friend, the late Senator Robert A. Taft, told him that Title I was meant for residential and nonresidential construction alike.

With the challenges to Fort Greene write-downs swept aside, sale of condemned Title I property went ahead during the summer of 1954. When fully unveiled in August, the 20-acre Fort Greene project encompassed the Brooklyn Hospital expansion, the construction of LIU’s first real campus, the University Towers handled by Fred Trump and financed by the Dime Savings Bank, and the 274-unit Kingsview cooperative. While redevelopers and officials beamed in the background, Mayor Wagner proclaimed “the first time in the city’s history that four private organizations . . . have joined forces to clear a slum area.”

Although not a participant, Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute had
a vital interest in the fate of the Civic Center. When it purchased the
American Safety Razor factory in July 1954, the transaction under-
cut objections to the demise of the industrial zone. For several years,
American Safety Razor had known it would have to move. All along,
the company president added, officials made clear that “a factory is
not the type of occupancy that the City authorities would want in
a redevelopment area.” The acquisition by the engineering school
cased a painful adjustment. It enabled Brooklyn Polytechnic to con-
solidate scattered facilities, plan a one-third increase in enrollment,
and solve an “acute” housing shortage. Claiming that the school
would meet obligations to “the brilliant talent which pours out of the
subways,” President Harry S. Rogers embarked upon a $3.5 million
fund-raising campaign. With the Civic Center, another Brooklyn
college embarked on a new era.84

The redevelopment trade-off, however, uprooted an industrial
company that Brooklyn could ill afford to lose. Almost a borough
institution, American Safety Razor was well managed and technically
advanced, and it coveted nearby space to expand production. Despite
stormy relations with Local 475 of the left-wing United Electrical
Workers, the company boasted that it had a progressive labor policy
and that 20 percent of its 1,200 workers were black. But the city
had decided against the manufacture of razors, film cartridges, and
related items near the Civic Center. “At no time, during this entire
period, when the press was giving considerable publicity to the whole
affair,” complained the company president, “did any official of New
York City or New York State inject himself.” The issue of economic
change soon blured, in any case, when Local 475 struck against
the company’s closure, began a sit-down over severance pay, and
took out newspaper advertisements to emphasize the consequences
“when the factory moves away.” The campaign brought sympathy
from politicians (including those who had attacked the Phillips Pro-
viso) about the “dangerous trend” of companies absconding with
jobs. Flatbush Congressman Emanuel Celler took his own census of
Brooklyn plants that had moved out, and warned against decimating
factory employment.85

Most officials, however, were consoled by the wisdom churned
out by Civic Center publicist Cleveland Rodgers and by Edwin
Salmon, both consultants to Moses and Borough President Cash-
more. The Brooklyn 
Eagle
borrowed their rhetoric to claim that the
Civic Center was more than “the glorified ‘City Beautiful’ type”; it
also was a practical plan to “combat decentralization caused by de-
terioration of out-moded structures, . . . obsolete street systems and
other adverse factors." Still, the *Eagle* was bothered by the company’s removal. Months before its own demise, the newspaper clung to the final judgment of American Safety Razor’s chairman: "We sold to the only type of outfit that was wanted in the Civic Center—Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute." VIP opinion harped on the assumption that social progress allowed no alternative. New York Post labor columnist Victor Reisel commented that the sit-down by Local 475 could not change the fact that the company had to get out of the way of civic progress. The New York Herald Tribune concluded that the company was preventing the renaissance of downtown Brooklyn. Moses, as usual, had the last word. The Civic Center, he said, was Brooklyn’s own Place de la Concorde.35

Moses could philosophize, but Borough President Cashmore struggled for reasons why his borough had eliminated 1,200 jobs. At first he denied that his notion of the Civic Center had meant to exclude industry, although evidence said otherwise. Ever since World War II, Cashmore had urged creation of a government center to galvanize downtown investment. He played an important role in the struggle for Concord Village and he understood how the redevelopment fit other elements in the plan. When investor faith in Concord flagged, he pledged to the consortium of savings banks his determination to stand by $40 million in civic improvements. On the Board of Estimate he boasted his loyalty to Long Island University and Brooklyn Polytechnic. He denied that American Safety Razor had suffered from city policy, which was guided by "good planning procedures." Ultimately, he wrapped himself in the construction boom that would follow.36

But pressure from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce forced Cashmore to save some industry. He took up the issue of factory expansion in his 1955 annual report, intervened on the Board of Estimate to permit Charles Pfizer & Company to expand chemical operations in Bushwick, and took credit for opening plants in Williamsburg. In September of 1955, Cashmore was joined by a fellow Brooklynite, City Council President Abe Stark, who declared that the city "has not done all within its power to attract new industry and to keep those which we already have." Stark wanted Title I funds to reclaim manufacturing areas and submitted a scheme to the Board of Estimate to designate sites for factory renewal.37

Reacting to Abe Stark’s challenge, Moses found four industrial sites and began talking write-downs. No political slouch, Stark announced to an American Federation of Labor dinner that his office, with Moses’s help, was packaging the sites to lure electronics and
plastics companies. Moses offered a 22-acre plot in South Brooklyn
to Stark with a $2.7 million write-down for light industry. Moses
had just finished clearing factories in Fort Greene and had gutted
Greenpoint's factories for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. But 22
acres beckoned, and Stark had to be placated. Although Moses had
no policy to encourage manufacturing, he hastened to assure Stark,
"we would like to see a light industry project go through."

Moses countered Stark's intervention with a plan at Cooper
Square in Manhattan to locate factories as part of a package for
another United Housing Foundation cooperative and faculty hous-
ing for the engineering and art college, Cooper Union. Moses's staff
concluded that a park on East Third Street would shield the coopera-
tive from the manufacturing facility to the south. During 1956, a
consortium of lighting and metal fabricators expressed interest in
the idea. In November, Stark announced the city's first industrial
clearance project: 1 million square feet for electrical manufacturing
to provide 10,000 jobs, faculty apartments for Cooper Union, and
another UHF cooperative. Stark hailed this "first step in a long-
range program to stimulate the city's economy." But union pension
fund trustees had second thoughts about investing in cooperatives
intermixed with blue-collar work. For the time being, worries about
factory jobs in Brooklyn had been dispersed by clever press releases."

Early Warnings

In the mid-1950s, complacency about manufacturing turned to un-
essiness when the Committee on Slum Clearance moved against
industrial districts. Redevelopment stalwarts could rationalize the
transformation of downtown Brooklyn, but a Title 1 project for
Greenwich Village prompted debate, which CSC incursions against
business at Lincoln Square kept simmering. The prospect of lost
factory jobs began to trouble editorial writers, and their worries
reverberated through City Hall and the universities where experts
pondered the urban future. Moses reacted with all his persuasive
authority to stem the anger in Brooklyn, and urban economists and
sociologists articulated the vision of a metropolis that progressed
beyond blue-collar work. Damage control—and damage denial—
would dispel the doubts for another twenty years.

At the beginning of the 1950s, New York's manufacturing sector
was robust. Factory employment in the city actually rose 2 percent
between 1947 and 1954, and the 6 percent decline in factory jobs
in Manhattan was nearly balanced by a surge of jobs in Queens and in the Bronx. Despite this shift, other statistics testified to manufacturing's continued importance to the city and to Manhattan as the central workshop. In September of 1950, the borough contained 61 percent of all the city's factory employment, with over half of these jobs jammed between 14th and 60th streets. In 1953, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counted 30 percent of the city's work force in manufacturing, a figure that overshadowed wholesale and retail trade (21 percent), services (15 percent), government (11 percent), and finance and real estate (10 percent). A year later, the State Department of Commerce counted 948,000 manufacturing jobs in New York, a figure that was larger than in the next two cities combined. The sheer mass and bewildering mix of factory jobs still lent the sector an aura of invulnerability.65

During the winter of 1953, however, the Title I aimed at Greenwich Village touched off debate about the blue-collar future. All the rhetoric of a Moses press release could not disguise the fact that Washington Square Southeast would level a manufacturing district, not a slum. Threatened loft and factory owners told the City Planning Commission that the 1,100 firms they spoke for employed 15,000 people. Their economic livelihood depended on cheap rents and proximity to the garment district. They would never survive relocation, and the city had to realize this when it threw favors at New York University. NYU officials discreetly took their case to the Chamber of Commerce for an endorsement. The chamber never questioned the CSC's argument about the need to clear industrial blight. Although troubled by "the predominance of business" in the area, the chamber endorsed the Title I, but asked the city for "every possible assistance" to firms trying to relocate in New York.66

The New York Commerce and Industry Association provided the same assessment without even that solicitude. Staff investigators conceded that Washington Square Southeast would raze factories, create unemployment, and "move industry out of Manhattan." They counted 173 buildings occupied by commercial or industrial firms, although they found only a fraction in decent condition. Their report also recognized that small businessmen needed the district's cheap rents. But they found these arguments less compelling than the restoration of "a healthier balance between the various family income groups" in Manhattan and the reversal of population decline. Weighing 15,000 low-income jobs against 1,500 middle-income apartments depended less on esoteric calculus than the blunt refusal to accept factories south of Washington Square. The Commerce and
Industry Association found clearance of factories “logical in view of the residential character of adjacent areas and the extensive amount of residential development now in progress or proposed for the near future.”

Manufacturers staged a last-ditch defense by involving the Small Business Administration. In early 1954, the SBA probed Washington Square Southeast as an ill-advised, possibly illegal application of Title I write-downs. The federal men backed off, however, when the city promised relocation aid to affected firms. During the debate on the Phillips Proviso, manufacturers also complained to sympathetic congressmen on the House Select Committee on Small Business. But the committee endorsed the notion that Title I was meant to clear all kinds of blight, not just residential slums. It would not second-guess local Title I administrators. The only consolation lawmakers offered was to urge Congress to revise Title I to repay small firms for the hardships of redevelopment. Eventually, the SBA offered compensation to 1,000 businesses south of Washington Square.

The outcry against the Brooklyn Civic Center and Washington Square Southeast reached the editorial pages, which forced city officials to make gestures toward an industrial policy. In January of 1954, Manhattan Borough President Halan Jack convened a business group to advise on borough projects. In the aftermath of the Electrical Workers’ protests and the recession of 1954, Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., announced that he was exploring ways to “prevail” on companies to stay in the city. He appointed a Business Advisory Council, chaired by David Rockefeller and realtor Robert Dowling, which looked into conditions and found a villain in the gross-receipts tax. The Rockefeller panel also suggested reviving La Guardia’s Department of Commerce, an idea Mayor Wagner promptly accepted. The new commerce commissioner, Richard C. Patterson, Jr., had no office or budget, although he thought one of his first tasks was to find sites for factories displaced by public improvements. The New York Times hoped for something substantial from an agency “regarded as a sort of joke.” In October of 1954, the City Council introduced a change in the city charter to grant Patterson authority to investigate encumbrances on enterprise. The New York Chamber of Commerce was enthusiastic about “promoting . . . locations for new industries, in helping business find suitable locations, and in helping expand present businesses or industries.” Mayor Wagner voiced great expectations, but the department remained as inactive as its predecessor.

The mayor’s associates could read the indicators and knew that
all was not well with the local economy. The City Planning Commission, in particular, was bothered by its November 1954 population report, which showed a dip in blue-collar workers. But commission chairman John J. Bennett claimed that his experts did not “view the findings of this study with alarm.” His staff saw the flutter in demographic terms, as a decline in the supply of production workers as opposed to production jobs, which it rejected as a possibility. Staffers predicted static numbers in the sixteen-to-sixty-four age bracket over the next twenty years and told the newspapers that manufacturing faced a crimp in skilled labor. As Bennett explained, “On the surface, the decrease in the proportion of wage earners to total of population looks discouraging, but we must realize that the very shortage of production workers in the city and nation will bring about increased opportunities for those now in the lowest economic brackets.” 16

Those who surveyed manufacturers came away with far different conclusions. City College economist John I. Griffin ran across a disgusted executive who asked, “Why should we spend more money on developing or rebuilding our oldest building and then have some plan come along to wipe us out overnight.” He had badgered City Hall to find out whether there was “any permanent plan confirming the fact that industrial areas of today would remain.” In the Bronx, Griffin found manufacturers who resented “the encroaching of public housing projects” and believed “that public authorities regard industrial plants as ‘eyesores.’” The need to protect industrial space from housing use was considered by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce in 1955. While Borough President Cashmore boasted about new factories moving in, the Chamber of Commerce asked the city to establish industrial zones to give factories the same “breathing space” as housing. In general, manufacturers were ignored by planners preoccupied with slum clearance. 16

Complaints never reached the highest levels of business opinion because they were dominated by staunch advocates of factory removal. The Rockefeller, of course, had enormous influence over the Commerce and Industry Association. Robert Blum and John McGrath, respected leaders of the Downtown Brooklyn Association and the Chamber of Commerce, were also prominent among the Brooklyn men on the Commerce and Industry Association. Municipal responsibility for the shortage of factory space would never become an issue on the mayor’s Business Advisory Council, whose cochairmen, David Rockefeller and Robert Dowling, were abiding supporters of inner-city clearance. The consensus for redevelopment
was illustrated when the state commerce commissioner addressed the New York Chamber of Commerce. Ignoring the cheerless figures in the manufacturing census, he dwelled on the surge in skyscraper construction and business traffic that clogged midtown. He proclaimed the future of manufacturing to be as bright as the construction volume that was “transforming old and deteriorating sections into new usefulness.” A year later the Chamber of Commerce confronted a 4.8 percent decline in city manufacturing employment since 1947, particularly a drop in employment and output in the vital garment trades. Without further discussion, the chamber tabled the report.37

Aside from gripes by the Electrical Workers, no cries came from organized labor, whose ranks were shifted by the clearance of factories for the garment trades, metal working, and electrical fixtures. Moses had already begun a high-pressure campaign among union leaders to invest pension funds in middle-income cooperatives. As usual, he named specific sites, such as the Washington Market on the West Side and acreage near the Lillian Wald public housing project on the Lower East Side. In late 1955, Moses’s solicitations went to a who’s who of the American Federation of Labor, including Joseph Delaney of the Operating Engineers, Howard McSpedon of the Building and Construction Trades Council, and, of course, AFL president George Meany. Moses enjoyed a close relationship with Harry Van Arsdale, head of the Electrical Workers, who sponsored the Electchester cooperative in eastern Queens. “Joe” Delaney of the Operating Engineers, who said he was “in complete accord” with Moses’s aims, confided that his colleagues wanted good housing at affordable prices, but also 6 percent return on their investment. “It is not our particular field,” Delaney added, “and therefore we would be guided completely by your recommendations.”38

Moses kicked off the campaign at the January 1956 annual dinner of the Building Trades Employers Association, which included trustees of industry pension funds. Moses presented five possible sites, enough for 9,000 apartments with an equity requirement of $400 to $600 per room. He laid out all the financial details and followed with a limousine tour of the sites. It was up to McSpedon and the Building and Construction Trades Council to get quick approval from the pension trustees, along with union pressure on federal officials to release Title I money. One by one, however, the prospects faded. The site on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn was appropriated by Borough President Cashmore for the (ill-fated) Dodger stadium. Union chiefs vacillated about the others, finally admitting to Moses
that they would venture on only one, a $20 million cooperative on Northern Boulevard in Queens, which Moses offered for a $400,000 option. The Building Trades Council soon backed out again. But although the construction unions quibbled about housing sites, they never disputed Moses’s redevelopment priorities.59

The findings of a City College research group set off another outcry against job losses during the summer of 1955. Supported by a Rockefeller Foundation curriculum grant, the professors pursued varied topics in the city’s history and economy, including the study of industrial plant location conducted by John I. Griffin. The results would have remained on campus, except for the break in confidence about the city’s economy. Griffin’s interest in what he called the “employment-creating” character of industrial plants appeared as a small item on the back pages of the New York Times, but it touched a nerve. Reflecting on the story, a Times editorial conceded that 500 manufacturing firms with 50,000 jobs had left the city since World War II. But 47,000 other firms remained, and factory space was reportedly scarce. Although the editors offered reasons for the exodus, such as traffic congestion and rising costs, particularly taxes, they chided city officials for failing to find out “whether we are gaining or losing ground.”60

The Times soon proclaimed its own answer in a ten-part series, “Our Changing City,” that became the most significant appraisal of New York under redevelopment. It began in July of 1955 with Meyer Berger’s affectionate look at Gotham transformed. “In the last quarter-century,” Berger wrote, “municipal surgeons have performed a series of operations to relieve the city’s hardened traffic arteries.” Steel and alabaster had replaced grimy tenement brick, and the new East Side projects were “clean and bright by day, jeweled palaces by night.” The city had wiped out East Harlem’s rookeries, but other “scabby” slums awaited demolition. Berger concluded that New York was too restless and vibrant to “spare her relics,” so the improvements would continue. The segment on Brooklyn, written by correspondent Charles Grutzner, noted the recent business exodus, including Sperry Gyroscope and Mason Mints (to Long Island), American Safety Razor (to Virginia), and E. W. Bliss, a manufacturer of machine tools (to the Midwest). Grutzner added that the Chamber of Commerce “found the main reason that industries leave Brooklyn is that they need room to expand.” But Grutzner ended with an upbeat appraisal: “Brooklyn’s boosters believe that the Civic Center and other public works will open an era of private
development . . . that will make this slice of the Borough an even faster-changing wonderland."

The city had already discounted the damage when, in 1956, the Lincoln Square Title I project threatened 600 stores, 200 additional plants and establishments, and "thousands" of employees. An emergency group, the Lincoln Square Businessmen's Committee, protested the loss, but to no avail. The city would get a culture center, but Manhattan's fledgling electronics sector, its cottage manufacture of tubes, switches, and chassis, suffered a blow from which it never recovered.52

Economist John Griffin, in the meantime, published his research on the removals of large industrial firms. As the New York Times reported on page one, Griffin's Industrial Location found that 100 large manufacturing firms had moved from the city between 1946 and 1954, and 380 of all sizes since 1947. He blamed encroaching housing as the chief cause and urged the city to use Title I to create industrial districts that were off-limits to residential projects. Griffin emphasized that city officials had to recognize that fostering employment was as important as building decent housing. An observer from the Rockefeller Foundation was startled by Griffin's assertion about the lack of data on industrial removals. "Furthermore," the observer added, "there appears to be no institutionalized interest in the area in persuading manufacturing plants to stay." Nevertheless, Griffin's argument was ridiculed by New York State Commerce Department officials, who claimed that a factory "building boom" refuted talk about economic decline.53

Moses responded with his usual quick fix. In 1956, at the height of the Lincoln Square controversy, Commerce and Public Events Commissioner Patterson formed a subcommittee on "business and industrial relocation." According to Patterson, it had looked into the impact of the widening of Manhattan's Water Street on "a great many firms," particularly coffee brokers, the improvements on Lower Fifth Avenue that threatened Booksellers' Row, and "many manufacturers and business firms along Bruckner Boulevard, in the Bronx, where through our good offices a large electronics firm has decided against moving out of the city." Patterson suggested that Lincoln Square business relocations constituted the same challenge, and he offered services to the Committee on Slum Clearance. Moses scrawled to George Sparo: "Good idea. Let's add him." When indifference alternated with contempt toward blue-collar work, cynical maneuvers could pass for city policy.54
Regional Science

Officials who denied that anything was amiss in the destruction of factory zones could summon professors of urban science who said there was more to clear. Their intellectual disdain for inner-city manufacturing was shaped by trends as diverse as sociology's dim view of bourgeois behavior and the New Deal's distrust of business. But nothing equaled the impact of monographs in economic geography, which concluded that costs of location, raw materials, and labor were transforming the nature of metropolitan society. Their analysis rested on notions of national-income accounting and balance of payments applied to regional performance. According to the emerging view, regional productivity and the coordinating functions of central business districts were what mattered, not the functions in between.

As the Regional Plan Association's *The Economic Status of the New York Metropolitan Region in 1944* concluded, the outward migration of factories might undermine city finances, but would benefit "the development of the metropolitan regions in their entirety." Sound public policy had to remove the obstructions to intraregional flows and shape incentives that maximized overall output.

Urban economics generally ignored the subjects of manufacturing and job creation within cities. The most elegant work of the period, *Location of Economic Activity* (1948), by Harvard University economist Edgar M. Hoover, emphasized that mature and standardized production freed manufacturing from dependence on specialized labor pools or particular locations. One of Hoover's ablest students, economist Benjamin Chinitz, argued that cities were constantly engaged in the creative destruction of small business. Firms that failed in market competition were replaced by newcomers stimulated by the entrepreneurial spirit of the central business district. In this rough way, cities "incubated" fresh business ideas.

Few theoreticians pondered redevelopment's likely economic impact on the process. One early anticipation, Henry S. Churchill's *The City Is the People* (1945), spent a few sentences on the failure of planners of mega-projects such as Stuyvesant Town to accommodate nearby industry (what Churchill called the "integration of work and living"). A few years later, Churchill lamented redevelopment's effect on "people who live with their work" at a symposium on pending Title I legislation sponsored by the University of Chicago and the Public Administration Clearing House (PACH). While the assembled planners and housing experts focused on the aesthetic and moral implications of central city renewal, PACH's urban specialist,
Coleman Woodbury, contributed a monograph on economic implications of Title I aid. Forecasting factories dispersed by the search for greenfield plants, the impact of truck and air transport, and cold war fears of atomic attack, Woodbury saw no application of Title I within cities. Instead, he saw Title I’s potential for channeling the growth of economic hinterlands.57

Myopia about central-city jobs was soon institutionalized by Title I operations. The Housing and Home Finance Agency and local Title I administrators never kept track of the program’s impact on commerce and industry and had no idea how projects affected employment. Economist Wilbur R. Thompson could only speculate about the “considerable contract research . . . hidden in confidential reports,” which scholars never pulled together. Sociologist Basil Zimmer noted later that analysts regarded business relocations as a secondary matter. Subsequent HHFA estimates that nonresidential Title I displacements averaged 3,700 per year during the 1950s were based on incomplete reports from local agencies, which only counted businesses that sought relocation aid, not those that self-relocated or closed down. The Committee on Slum Clearance occasionally released statistics on business relocations to rebut critics, but never bothered with a master list. Planning manifestoes that helped discredit Moses-style clearance, such Frieden and Morris’s *Urban Planning and Social Policy* (1968) and Victor Gruen’s *Heart of Our Cities* (1964), contained no discussion of manufacturing or employment. Even that celebrated call for urban diversity, Jane Jacobs’s *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), emphasized economic uses that were compatible with the norms of residential neighborhoods. Thus, key texts on the urban experience overlooked one of its key elements.58

Amid this sophisticated indifference, the New York Metropolitan Region Study provided the most consoling explanation of where the blue-collar-less city was heading. It emerged from the discomfort of the Regional Plan Association, which, in the early 1950s, faced a premature demise because of its success at selling the regional idea to business executives. As corporate donations dwindled, the RPA depended on narrow contract research, such as “RPA Bulletin 80” (August 1952), which surveyed the postwar dispersal, and work on “Project East River,” the melodramatic federal research on the likely industrial survival after an atomic bomb detonated over the river at 42nd Street. RPA executive director C. McKim Norton had reason to worry about the RPA’s survival, when rescue appeared in the form of a request by the Long Island Lighting Company for a market
forecasting committee for public utilities. Although the RPA gained a brief respite, the utility executives came to doubt RPA expertise and to consider pulling the plug on mediocre work.26

The prospect of impending foreclosure lay behind Norton’s 1954 appeal to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to support a major RPA effort in applied social science. Proposing to provide New York businessmen with more than market research, Norton’s staff outlined a “Metropolitan Region Study,” an ambitious look at the future based on “the locational requirements of the various activities that take place in metropolitan areas.” Foundation support would make possible a sophisticated analysis of economic and population movements based on calculations of the region’s share of national growth sectors. Working with what the RPA called “past ratios between the national and local economies,” it hoped to calculate the operational levels of local industries that served national markets and provide “a coordinated picture” for public and corporate decision makers. Rockefeller Brothers staffers acknowledged the argument, but wanted the study carried out by a “competent and impartial body” that would let the RPA stick to planning. Stacy May, Rockefeller Brothers economics consultant, had already conferred with the Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration and found Dean Edward S. Mason interested in a tentative “vestibule study.” Although Norton saw his project slip away, he was reported grateful for the advent of “a new regional plan,” which was “a do-or-die matter” for the RPA.27

Assurances about the RPA’s nominal role clinched support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and, soon afterward, the Ford Foundation. Norton and RPA’s vice-president, New York Life Insurance executive Otto Nelson, recruited an advisory board from the city’s corporate elite, including realtor James Felt, R. H. Macy president Jack I. Straus, New York Times publisher Arthur H. Sulzberger, and NYU chancellor Henry T. Heald, the heir apparent at the Ford Foundation. They were to oversee research that would uncover the economic engine that drove the region. “Harvard is preparing some new techniques for investigating the flow of commodities from, to, and within the metropolitan region,” a Rockefeller Brothers executive explained to David Rockefeller. The academics hoped to fashion “a basic tool” for understanding metropolitan areas that could be applied across the country. “It is this which makes the project of real interest to [Dean] Mason . . . , and he hopes it can give new life to some of the work at the Graduate School of Public Administration.”28

Mason thrust these responsibilities on Raymond Vernon, a New
York-born, Harvard-educated economist who specialized in international finance and had spent World War II as a State Department advisor. Under Vernon's direction, the research staff drew back from tackling "the entire range of economic activity" to concentrate on what the staff considered the "dynamic income generators" that supported the region's balance of payments. Vernon's researchers staked out a deliberate hierarchy of economic activities: export generators (which "paid" for the region's imports), net importers of goods and services, and "residuary" activities which, "...because they produce only for home consumption, bring no new income to the Region."52

The primary agenda shoved aside subsidiary questions, which were then dropped altogether. The researchers doubted their ability to forecast population trends beyond a vague analysis of the region's long-range growth. They would have liked to study socioeconomic variables, such as the ethnic "colonization" of particular communities, but concluded that these were governed by "random elements" that defied prediction. Cautious about political factors, the Harvard group hoped to identify "key variables in the development process which are subject to policy decisions, both public and private." These included local taxes, mass transit facilities, subdivision and other land-use controls, and redevelopment projects. They also expected their investigation of the primary economy to be supplemented by an inquiry into "government and quasi-governmental provision of basic capital and services." Nevertheless, the intention to examine government policy was abandoned for a single case study of mass transit.63

Vernon never expected much from analysis of the political dimension. One of his early staff papers stated that the Metropolitan Region Study was interested in the economic, social, and governmental forces that determined the volume and location of region activities. But, as he explained, this formulation assumed that forces driving the region came from "changes in the structure of the national economy...rather than in autonomous forces within the region." Politics was merely another phenomenon shaped by the economic dynamo. As he later observed, the study would determine how "economic growth has outmoded political arrangements." Having concluded that government had only incidental impact on the region's future, Vernon never tried to document its presence.64

Any look at New York in 1955 would have found government behind every aspect of the region's development, but government rarely entered Vernon's equations. In late 1957, he observed that an
important part of the Metropolitan Region Study recognized New York “as a center for ‘first city’ activities,” including headquarters of national and international financial institutions, the United Nations, foundations, universities, medical centers, and other large-scale administrative services. But he did not acknowledge that economic mechanisms depended on public incentives (and deterrents) that made room for first-city institutions. On occasion, Vernon wavered about the political dimension, as when he allowed that municipal expenditure and “the unique sociological and governmental forces at work could well alter the structure of the region’s demands and the nature of its labor force.” He also conceded that shifts in centrality population and employment might be regarded as “problems” amenable to public policy. If City Hall chose “to arrest the outward job flow,” he pointed out, government might procure factory space for specialized firms. Government might also choose to spend less on mass transit, for instance, and more on job opportunities for blacks and Puerto Ricans. Government, it turned out, did play a role in Vernon’s theoretical framework, but never an important one. In all his comments on where the region was heading, Robert Moses and the Committee on Slum Clearance went unmentioned.

A landmark in applied social science, the New York Metropolitan Region Study pronounced that the metropolis was heading in a sound direction. The published volumes included studies of the Port of New York’s future and the growth of the financial markets and business services industries. Additional volumes in the series included Robert C. Wood’s 1400 Governments (1961) and Oscar Handlin’s The Newcomers (1959), which became instant classics in urban studies. Handlin’s The Newcomers was a masterly account of the mobility of European immigrants, who found a city that was open to their work ethic and entrepreneurial skills. Handlin was confident that the liberal city that did so much for Jews, Italians, and the Irish would assimilate blacks and Puerto Ricans. Robert Wood characterized the region as a kaleidoscope of entrenched suburbs, but expected some supraregional agency to fuse the fragments and make opportunity and residence available to all.

The capstone volumes, Vernon’s Metropolis 1985 (1960) and Anatomy of a Metropolis (1959), which he wrote with economist Edgar M. Hoover, provided a comfortable perspective on New York’s manufacturing crisis. The authors emphasized the long-range trend in factory out-migration. Using the more modest factory employment figures of 1919, rather than those of 1947, as their baseline,
they found that "the number of manufacturing jobs in Manhattan, while fluctuating in response to such national forces as depression and war, never got much beyond" the 1919 benchmark. They insisted on the inevitable nature of the transformation, given the relentless "search for space" among urban businessmen. Modern industrial operations, they explained, needed the horizontal, one-story suburban plant for continuous-flow assembly lines and materials handling. Those remaining behind "have had to take their space where they found it...[moving] either to industrial buildings constructed for multiple tenancy or to obsolete factory buildings abandoned by their original users." Eventually, marginal operators, such as the paper box manufacturers in Washington Square South, could not afford even secondhand space. Whatever factory jobs were lost, Vernon and Hoover assured, would be more than made up for by expansion of white-collar hiring in the central business district.69

The foundations had an immense investment in the predictive value of this social science. By early 1957, the Rockefeller Foundation staff had "serious doubts" about Griffin's Industrial Location and his calls for an aggressive city policy toward manufacturing. They were relieved by the criticism his work received from the New York Chamber of Commerce and economics reviewers. The Ford Foundation made the Metropolitan Region Study central to its urban agenda. With the first results of the research about to appear, Ford executive Paul Ylvisaker wrote that Vernon's economic analysis had "a higher order of precedence than a mere refurbishing of the old landscape-architecture tradition of planning." "God knows," Ylvisaker went on, "as we move into this next age of growing social expenditure and perhaps dwindling resources, we are going to have more rational processes of economic intelligence and decision-making at our sub-national levels." He hoped to apply Vernon's approach to a series of regional analyses that could guide value-added manufacturing and community development.69

Vernon soon had reason to feel that his initial pronouncements about New York's postindustrial future had been too modest. On the eve of a decade that saw minority unemployment reach record levels, Vernon boasted to Ylvisaker about "unexpected" projections: "N=-------Y=-----'s big problem, it seems, may prove to be an acute labor shortage, partly because its mix is so favorable to future growth & partly because its age distribution is so odd that it isn't generating more bodies for the labor force fast enough. Our IBM machines have produced some astonishing results along these lines and we're forced
to assume that there'll be some high in-migration rates in the future & that the Negro & P.R. will get up graded in office work faster than we had assumed."

Vernon had found the driving force behind the vast change in the labor market in the mid-1960s, but the growth would be for white and female workers rather than for blacks and Hispanics. The economists on Vernon's team had overlooked the political and social realities that would keep the newcomers out of the city's mainstream. They gave no attention to the public policies that planted first-city institutions in Manhattan and downtown Brooklyn, but shoved aside the population that Vernon expected to provide their work force. High-powered social science sanctioned the dismantling of the old urban economy for the new one they confidently expected postwar economic forces to bring. They never reckoned that Moses's bulldozers stood in the way.