Before the city could begin to see the truth about Moses’ programs, his legend would have to be exposed for what it was.

Robert A. Caro, The Power Broker

In the spring of 1954, midway through Title I progress, the Moses regime was shaken by scandal at Manhattantown. As Robert Caro recounted, reformers struggled to publicize the facts of Negro removal, while the Committee on Slum Clearance worked feverishly to bury them. Newspaper editors who learned of the facts refused to credit them, and the aversion toward Title I remained confined to liberals, who could not stir the city against redevelopment. The aborted exposé was only the first of numerous investigations of Title I during the next two years, all of which failed to block the Moses machine.

Caro was convinced that liberals had done all they could to warn the public against the bulldozer ruination. Only the full exposure of Moses’s callous policies, only tabloid attacks on his sterling reputation, Caro concluded, would drive the power broker out. 1

During the mid-1950s, knowledgeable critics knew all they needed to know about where Title I was taking the city. From spring 1954 to spring 1956, continued announcements of Title I sites were accompanied by investigations and controversy. Title I projects for Greenwich Village and Lincoln Square provided ample evidence of the cost of creating a city whose core was middle class and postindustrial. City planning commissioners had only to look at their statistics to see renewal’s impact on the working class and people of color.
During those two years, in fact, the largest conclave of city housing experts since the Progressive Era debated the consequences of Title I and public housing. The problem was not a dearth of facts, but what Moses’s critics chose to make of those facts. In nearly every case, they weighed the removal of blacks and Hispanics from redevelopment sites against what they considered the more worrisome exodus of middle-class whites. The soul-searching forced changes in Title I that eased self-relocation and gave continued license to the bulldozing of neighborhoods. Despite the widespread ravaging, liberal New York had too much at stake to call a halt to slum clearance.

Title I was modified, not by heroic liberals, but by a harbinger of the 1960s: a sullen insurgency in public housing. Redevelopment, which depended on projects to serve as catchments for removals, was stalemated when the Housing Authority could no longer absorb refugees from Title I sites. The first signs of this came in East Harlem, where outcasts from slum clearance swamped the hopes of Protestant ministers to evangelize a Hispanic frontier. The hard look that Protestant charity leaders gave Housing Authority projects, particularly the moral questions they raised about relocation efforts, set the stage for placing Title I into receivership. Liberal critics of Housing Authority policy pointed to the “dreaded deadlock” created by the high-rise projects, but they never fathomed the breakdown of the public system. Liberals may have agonized about Moses’s policies, but the collapse of public housing put an end to them.

Greenwich Village

A week after the City Planning Commission’s apology for Title I relocation was made public in August of 1953, the Committee on Slum Clearance divulged plans for Washington Square Southeast. Villagers suspected that Moses’s summer surprise, coupled with hasty City Planning Commission hearings, was designed to catch them off guard, and they reacted with outrage that, as one later remembered, Moses had schemed for the area’s “complete doom.” He had, in fact, finally provided what many Villagers wanted. The CSC called for a Title I project from Washington Square to Houston Street, between West Broadway and Mercer Street, along with a public housing component, named for Mary Simkhovitch, on the old Field Foundation site. The Title I featured nine fourteen-story buildings, containing 2,184 apartments that would rent for an average $48 per room. The plan would also settle the traffic route through Washington Square.
New York University expected 4 acres of subsidized land and NYU trustee Paul Tishman, sponsor of the middle-income housing, had gotten approval from Manhattan’s political leaders.

By and large, Village civic leaders also agreed. The Washington Square Association gingerly approved the plans. Association planning consultant Robert Weinberg called redevelopment overdue for the “narrow truck-clogged streets” to the southeast. He reminded villagers that the Holden, McLaughlin Planning Recommendations recommended replacing “everything south of Houston Street... with modern commercial structures in view of the fact that it would be adjacent to and between proposed express highways.” Weinberg pointed out that high-rise apartments surrounded by parking lots reflected the best of modern planning. “Widely spaced modern apartment towers,” he added, would contain small suites for Village professionals, “who require a fair amount of special comforts including balconies.” The Greenwich Village Association, however, remained uneasy about the public housing, which newspaper stories had linked with the Title I. Weinberg noted that the “adjacent” public housing, about which the Association takes no stand until further details are available... may meet the recognized demand for middle and low rent housing.

The neighborhood leaders gathered at Charles Abrams’s town house on September 28, 1953, were inclined to support a project whose “character [was]... in keeping with Lower Fifth Avenue.” They hoped to avoid “summary abandonment” of a plan which contained “advantages which should not be lost.” Architect Albert Mayer, who favored the Holden, McLaughlin plan, questioned only the Title I’s impact on traffic. But Louis Solomon, a director of the Greenwich Village Association, warned against nit-picking. “The community is given an opportunity to replace a misfit industrial structure with a very delightful residential community...,” he said, “and rather than lose it entirely there is much to be gained.” The directors of the Washington Square Association unanimously approved Moses’s offer.

Several days later, Charles Abrams broke with his neighbors. He charged that Moses’s slum clearance was really demolition of commercial lofts that would wipe out 15,000 jobs. He also warned that the plan would funnel traffic down Fifth Avenue and through Washington Square. Dismissing the redevelopment as “a cluster of tall buildings... rimmed by parking lots,” Abrams urged the Village to demand changes from the City Planning Commission that met real needs. His scathing critique was the rock around which others rallied. The local branch of the Americans for Democratic Action
attacked the plan's inadequate provision of family-sized apartments, the expensive $48 rentals, and, above all, the bisected park.\textsuperscript{3}

The wedge opened by the liberals enabled Italian pinochle clubs in the Lower West Side Civic League to rail against the public housing. Claiming to speak for tenement owners on the Spring Street site (and apparently for Democratic leader Carmine DeSapio), the league charged that Title I advocates were property owners on the north side of the Square. The league urged a gradual renewal and respect for urban diversity that anticipated the views of another Village critic, Jane Jacobs. But lurking behind the appeal for tolerance was a racist populism that sneered at "Simkhovitch City: A Public Dehousing Project." "'Slum clearance' here," warned a flyer, "would mean clearing out of crowded slums in Harlem and elsewhere into these Village projects."\textsuperscript{4}

As chairman of the American Institute of Architects Committee on Civic Design, Robert Weinberg urged his colleagues to stand against Washington Square Southeast at Board of Estimate hearings. Weinberg's request was embarrassing, because the CSC had subcontracted Title I work to members of AIA's New York chapter. "Would it be good policy for the Chapter to publicly protest [those] projects?" asked New York AIA chairman Hugh Ferriss, the patron of Wallace K. Harrison and advocate of downtown clearance. Responding to Weinberg's initiative, Ferriss contacted Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, although he assured Gordon Bunshaft, the firm's design chief, that the AIA "concern was not in any architectural treatment but solely in proposed thoroughfares." Ferriss gave the same assurance to Richard Eggers, the architect working with NYU. Ferriss soon learned from the architects that the Title I would funnel traffic through Washington Square, and concluded that there was no reason to intervene in the Village squabble. But Ferriss wanted a protocol to prevent future embarrassments. "In the case of any so-called 'Moses project,' " he warned, "any Chapter opposition should be based solely on objective study of the project, entirely devoid of any personal animosity or 'feud.'"\textsuperscript{5}

In the spring of 1954, Moses forced the major elements of Washington Square Southeast, three high-rise slabs and the roadway in the park, through the Board of Estimate. He was aided by local realtors and the New York Real Estate Board, which gave endorsements, and the New York Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Commerce and Industry, which sanctioned clearance of outmoded lofts. His local allies included the Washington Square Association, which sought to protect the park, and New York University, which,
as one administrator remarked, pounced on the $10.50-per-foot property as “a non-recurring bargain.” The Greenwich Village Association spoke for neighborhood obligations, but approved clearance that spared the Sullivan-MacDougal Gardens. The sticking point remained the Simkhovitch Houses, but Weinberg heard that it was killed in a backroom deal between Moses and “Italian interests.” If so, Moses gave up a bargaining chip that was never essential.

Greenwich Village, like the New York AIA, reacted against the arterial but not against modern high-rises on the nineteenth-century street grid. Civic-minded liberals, such as Weinberg, emphasized their concerns for community aesthetics, but their neighborhood obligations never extended beyond the environs of the park. As Weinberg confided, the Washington Square Association “went along” with the TIRLE I because of promises that would limit traf-
fic through Washington Square. The arrangement carried out the Village's traditional avoidance of public housing, and Washington Square Southeast remained the only early Title I unaccompanied by a low-rent component.9

Trimming Title I

Despite his Village victory, Moses never quite got redevelopment back on track. The 1953 relocation controversy was soon eclipsed by a series of investigations, beginning with Manhattan town. Moses's critics managed to involve the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, which was probing abuses in the FHA mortgage-insurance program. Senators wanted to know why two years after Jack Ferman Builders acquired the site for Manhattan town, half the condemned tenements were still standing. Moses had given Ferman the usual assurances about relying on the cash flow from the tenements while waiting to rebuild, and the redevelopers, some with Tammany connections, made the most of the opportunity. They claimed that they were dependent on tenement rents because the FHA dawdled about approving mortgage insurance for the Manhattan town construction. But Senate investigators uncovered systematic subcontracts and buy-back deals for such items as maintenance, stoves, and refrigerators in the condemned tenements. Moses tried to delay public hearings, and Ferman's counsel, Samuel Rosen man, did his best to parry senators' questions, but Manhattan town greed became front-page news. Moses avoided the limelight, instead issuing statements that defended what he called the "basic device, to bring private capital into slum clearance." His staff convinced sympathetic senators, such as New York Democrat Herbert H. Lehman, that the "excessively harsh" accusations had to be brought "more in line" with the facts. In the meantime, the Committee on Slum Clearance spread the view that FHA red tape, which prevented sponsors from finding decent mortgages, was behind the problem of Manhattan town.10

Although Manhattan town was a shocking story of tenant neglect, Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., had a different perspective on the project. Elected on promises to streamline government, Wagner named Luther C. Gulick, the dean of American public administration, as city administrator to advise on the reorganization of mayoral commissioners, whom Wagner embraced as his "cabinet." Gulick had reviewed the City Planning Commission's 1953 reports and
The Manhattantown site partly cleared, c. 1955. The half-demolished Title I site on the Upper West Side, which provoked investigations of Robert Moses's tenant-removal policies, sits next to tenements between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue waiting demolition and the New York City Housing Authority's Frederick Douglass Houses, across 106th Street, near completion. After the original sponsor failed to get Manhattantown construction underway, Moses found a replacement, realtor William Zeckendorf, Sr., who completed the Title I as Park West Village in 1959. Courtesy of the Special Archive, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

concluded that Title I relocation was a flagrant case of administrative untidiness. In May of 1954, he urged the mayor to establish a Department of Real Estate Management, headed by a cabinet commissioner, to take responsibility for removing tenants from public improvement sites. Ira Robbins, Councilman Stanley Isaacs, and other Moses critics endorsed the Guilick proposal. Despite all the attempts by the Committee on Slum Clearance to sweep relocation under the rug, doubts about Moses’s “basic device” were on the public record.11

They remained there when Mayor Wagner appointed several committees to advise on reforms of city programs, including one on housing, headed by Charles Abrams. Choosing to tackle “one problem at a time,” Abrams’s committee avoided a direct confrontation with Moses over Title I. Instead it provided a forum for bankers and supporters of cooperative housing, such as Louis Pink, to thrash
out incentives for middle-income construction that eventually led to the (Mitchell-Lama) Limited Profits Housing Companies Law. Greatly valuing the achievement, Wagner followed City Administrator Gulick’s advice to enlarge Abrams’s group into a blue-ribbon mayoral committee to deal with neighborhood conservation. In July of 1954, Abrams’s group agreed to work toward what it called a “program for home ownership rather than tenancy.” The resolve was a watershed for New York liberalism. In the midst of rancorous debate about the destruction of minority districts, housing liberals had turned attention to preserving middle-class neighborhoods.12

In October of 1954, after Abrams left the country to consult for the United Nations, the advisory committee became the Mayor’s Committee for Better Housing. The new committee was chaired by Bowery Savings Bank president Henry Bruère, with New York Life Insurance vice-president Otto Nelson, NYU Chancellor Henry T. Heald, and Bowery executive Earl Schweust as vice-chairmen. The Moses skeptics who dominated Abrams’s group were diluted by 107 mayoral appointees to eight subcommittees, whose interests ran the gamut from neighborhood conservation to shelter for the aged. The setup hardly threatened Title I, but Moses took no chances. He sent an open letter to the mayor warning that if the Committee for Better Housing sought more than “millennial objectives,” it had to realize that private markets needed government subsidy to build housing for under $32 per room. That translated into federal money for Title I and for the public housing needed for relocation. Moses’s assistant William Lebwohl got promises from committee chairman Bruère that he would “keep the report along practical lines.”13

The outcome turned on infighting between Better Housing’s subcommittee on redevelopment, headed by General Otto Nelson, and the subcommittee on relocations, headed by City Councilman Stanley Isaacs. Moses expected straight endorsement of Title I from Nelson’s panel, only to learn that a small cadre of West Side reformers were more concerned with policies, chiefly brownstone rehabilitation, to contain what Lebwohl said was “Puerto Rican expansion.” Their skepticism got out of hand when their tour of Title I sites took them to grim, half-demolished tenements at Godfrey Nurse in Harlem. Stanley Isaacs and the City-Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems were waiting there “to prove,” Lebwohl complained, “callousness on the part of the sponsors.” While Moses raged at the botched tour, his assistant Harry Taylor conceded they would have to do their homework to avoid “a repetition of the hassle we had over the former City Planning Commission report.” Moses worried
that Bruère would fail to resist Isaac's demands for a city relocation bureau.14

During the summer of 1955, Lebwohl coordinated last-minute revisions of the report of the Mayor's Committee on Better Housing. Lebwohl's message was that slum clearance depended on Title I, which in turn depended on accompanying public housing and federal commitments to the low-rent program. But although Lebwohl argued that government had to provide shelter for the displaced, he refused to concede that government had to handle relocation, as was argued by Isaac's subcommittee. Lebwohl claimed that the Committee on Slum Clearance had always anticipated relocation needs with "a certain proportion" of public units, such as the Frederick Douglass Houses at Manhattanville and General Grant Houses at Morningside. Rejecting what he called the "misleading" figures of the 1953 City Planning Commission report and the experience at Manhattanville, Lebwohl argued that with self-relocation and cash bonuses, most tenants "select their own quarters, and don't want to be traced or bothered." He aimed his strongest fire at the figure of 335,000 families that Isaac's panel said faced relocation over the next three years. The "preposterous" number assumed draconian enforcement of the Multiple Dwelling Law. More realistic was the estimate of 75,000 families affected by city improvements, a figure that could be managed by private sponsors supervised by the Bureau of Real Estate. Lebwohl's campaign forced Isaac's subcommittee to slash its estimate down to 127,256 additional people dislodged by 1959, but he could not expunge Isaac's recommendations for a city real estate department to clear Title I sites and relocate tenants before tracts were auctioned to sponsors. Moses warned Bruère of the consequences for Title I, "The City will have to speculate on the possibility of obtaining sponsors if, as and when the land is cleared," said Moses. "No reputable or responsible sponsor will bid on land."15

The controversy was solved when Moses, with Bruère's aid, injected a Title I success story in the report sent to the mayor. The Committee on Better Housing concluded that 24,000 slum units were replaced by 27,000 modern dwellings. Some $130 million in federal write-downs mobilized more than $500 million in private construction. Far more important was the changed attitude toward investing in the inner city, as shown by the areas where "new developments are rapidly taking hold." Reviewing the mixed message, the New York Times conceded that "relocation... has not been satisfactory" and that some city agency, perhaps the Committee on Slum Clearance, should handle sites and relocate tenants before offering
The whitewash of Title I relocations occurred simultaneously with the challenge posed to Moses’s practices by state officials. The Senate hearings on Manhattan town fostered the skepticism of Moses’s policies that enabled Governor Averell Harriman to name SCAD activists Charles Abrams and Hortense Gabel to head New York State’s rent control agency, the Temporary State Housing and Rent Commission. After Manhattan town, Abrams ended commission policy that allowed Title I sponsors to skim on building services while collecting rents. After a tenant died at the half-demolished Godfrey Nurse Title I, a Harlem delegation forced concessions from the Committee on Slum Clearance that assigned an agent to expedite relocation. But Moses could not placate the City-Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems, organized by gadfly attorney Harris Present, Ira Robbins of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, and Episcopal Bishop James Pike. They attacked Title I delays in tenant removals and city tolerance of sponsors who profited from them. State Rent Administrator Abrams sent inspectors to Manhattan town and other sites with orders to slash rents collected by negligent sponsors. Moses protested “blanket rent reductions which . . . only increase resistance to relocation.” He sent a copy of his complaint to Manhattan town counsel Samuel Rosenman, urging a fight against “Abrams’ repeated attacks on all slum clearance. . . . He’s a menace.”

Moses scattered his challengers with a show of Democratic unity. He got the Wagner administration, from the mayor on down, to blame Title I problems on federal red tape. He arranged one complaint against FHA delays from Senator Lehman, who assured Moses that in slum clearance policy “our attitudes are identical.” By late April of 1955, the Board of Estimate rendered the controversy academic with approval of six additional projects. As for the menace, Charles Abrams, a parley between his state agency and Moses’s aides arranged a decorous retreat. Hortense Gabel conceded that “where the sponsors are planning quick demolition we should take all reason-
able steps to cooperate." Although she expected sponsors to speed their acquisition of condemned tenements, she admitted that CSC policy that allowed developers to sit on their sites and collect rents was "none of our business." The state had lined up behind Moses in concluding that the best way to prevent future Manhattantowns was to hasten removals. 18

Moses clinched his victory by driving home the word that Title I's real problem was federal obstructions. In September of 1955, he sent carbons of his go-around with Housing and Home Finance Administrator Albert M. Cole to presidential assistant Nelson A. Rockefeller, asking why the White House "tolerates this kind of thing." He warned Mayor Wagner that although he did not want to "embarrass" him, he would quit the CSC and leave Title I to the Housing Authority if federal bureaucrats continued to delay mortgage approvals. He planned to take Albert Cole to lunch to discuss Title I mortgages with New York bankers and insurance men. But getting Title I approvals from Washington was frustrating, he groused to Nelson Rockefeller. "You can easily check with David to see what happened at Morningside and as to what is planned at the Battery, and with John as to the projected Metropolitan Opera and related Title One program. We simply can't keep up with this gobbledygook with Cole." 19

By late 1955, however, Moses had to face rising insurgency against Title I from groups that harbored moral claims to their neighborhoods. Reports of evictions to make way for East Side speculative high-rises brought protests from a new direction. The Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association, Yorkville Save Our Homes, and Harlem tenant groups denounced the havoc created by Title I, the expansion of Sloan-Kettering Institute, and private apartment construction. In Greenwich Village, Moses faced old opponents and a new cultural force, the Village Voice, a newspaper that approached protest as a form of the avant-garde. Committed to blocking any highway through Washington Square, Villagers resolved to use direct action to stop Moses's plan. That grim determination echoed the civil rights movement and the new level of Protestant militance in New York. 20

East Harlem Witness

For years, the Protestant church had been a bystander to redevelopment. Liberal clergies had joined the agitation that launched the Housing Authority and contributed to the community activism for
specific projects, but planning and redevelopment were instruments of the secular city from which ministers traditionally stood apart. They soon recognized, however, that slum clearance that shifted parochioners into isolated high-rises was putting churches under siege. Gauging the nature of Title I was vital to the Protestant redemption of the city.

The Protestant response began after World War II when the New York City Mission Society cooperated with the Protestant Council and the Federation of Churches to establish a “pathfinding service” to connect churches and congregants scattered by the modern city. Directed by Dr. Meryl Ruoss, an expert on church attendance among Puerto Ricans, the service carried out the Mission Society’s mandate to use the tools of modern sociology to reach “the great numbers now untouched by the Gospel.” Convinced that high-rise housing contributed to Protestantism’s “retreat and retrenchment,” Ruoss’s pathfinders planned to penetrate these projects. Calling for a united effort in East Harlem, which he characterized as a “pagan and even anti-social” environment, Ruoss began to canvas the James Weldon Johnson project.21

With support from the Mission Society and willing hands from the Union Theological Seminary, Ruoss launched the East Harlem Protestant Parish, affiliated churches whose ministers had experienced an urban upheaval beyond anything they had read in the Social Gospel. Don Benedict and George “Bill” Webber rented a storefront on East 100th Street in the summer of 1948 and ventured out among Italian and Puerto Rican anti-clericals and blacks unmoved by the reasoned modernism of the seminary. They held candlelight vigils and passion plays in vacant lots that proclaimed their willingness to share the despair of tenement life. Although they won few converts at first, they were sustained by occasional epiphanies, such as one engendered by the pathetic eviction of a Puerto Rican family on 103rd Street. The ministers plastered the neighborhood with angry handbills, held a service, and marched to the sidewalk of suffering. Even one of Congressman Vito Marcantonio’s calloused regulars was moved by the power of their Christian witness.22

The seminarians could not ignore housing problems that the city shoved on their doorstep. Tenement violations were epidemic in East Harlem, as was the indifference of city bureaucrats. But the ministers were infuriated one weekend before Christmas 1948 when the gas failed in an East 112th Street tenement, where families huddled around stoves for warmth. The parish went on a vigil, then marched on the landlord, who turned out to be the site manager for the
Housing Authority’s Jefferson project. “After some hedging,” Benedict wrote, officials promised “apartments on the site in places where families had already moved out.” A few months later, the parish blared a church service from a sound truck, then sent volunteers through the neighborhood to record building violations. The evidence was used for parish “clinics,” which sent housing complaints to the Buildings Department. Although the seminarians had made progress, they could barely contain their anger. “Every one of these apartment house meetings,” they assured the Mission Society, “has been opened and closed with prayer, the Bible has been read, and some exposition of the Christian faith given.” Nevertheless every cup of shared suffering built a rage against thieving landlords and complacent bureaucrats.39

The East Harlem Protestant Parish soon confronted the ambiguous face of public housing. As missionaries, their first concern was access for their evangelists. Seeking space in one new project, they explained that “the most stable leaders of the Church of the Son of Man [on 104th Street] have been moved from their homes to make way for the Washington Houses.” Deacons from the 114th Street Church made systematic rounds at the Stephen Foster Houses, and similar proselytism was undertaken on the site of the Lexington Houses, which were under construction along Third Avenue between 98th and 99th streets. By early 1953, full-scale evangelism was underway at the Lexington, Washington, and Foster projects. But the turning point for the ministry came in February of 1953, when the Housing Authority announced plans for a middle-income project somewhere between 100th and 105th streets and First and Second avenues, which threatened a whole community. The ministers feared that neighborhoods would be squeezed between “adjoining” projects, leaving churches “more and more on the periphery.”39

By 1955, that reality took the more impatient into the parish’s Christian Action Committee. The ministry had already tussled with Tammany in local elections and made its housing clinics thorns in the side of city agencies. But Christian Action chose a singular evangel with site tenants waiting removal for city projects. Holding vigils amid the rubble of the Washington site, ministers heard these urban nomads describe their special misery. At a parish meeting in July 1955, site tenants protested, Housing Authority officials asked for more time, and the congregation sang “We Will Overcome.”32

The seminarians were nearly at the end of their patience with city policy. They had not given up on large-scale municipal aid, but they found it difficult to deny what “wholesale remodeling” had done to
East Harlem. The parish saw Housing Authority projects as islands of strangers in the midst of a no-man’s-land of crumbling tenements where people awaited the next round of demolitions. Straining to find something positive in the wreckage, seminarians considered public housing “a stark necessity for our community.” East Harlem had been harmed, the Protestant Parish concluded, by the Housing Authority’s “lack of imagination in planning the location and timing of the projects, its tendency to overlook or discount the real human hardships involved in relocation, and its failure to recreate the social institutions which have held the old community together.”

During 1955, disquiet in East Harlem produced a quiet crisis among New York Protestants. The Protestant Council’s Department of Church Planning and Research reported congregations that were desperate “to cope with the activities of city and regional planning bodies.” With twenty-six congregations facing eviction for slum clearance and with serious questions about preserving the “Protestant witness” in New York, Russ and Protestant Council leaders met with Housing Authority chairman Philip Cruise in August of 1955. Cruise said that he would discuss the issue of alternative sites within project areas with top city officials. In the meantime, the Protestants focused on “critical spots” in the Morrisania and Melrose sections of the South Bronx, East Harlem, and the Lower East Side, where churches faced “life or death decisions.”

The churches brought a new dimension to the anti-Moses movement. In January of 1956, Social Gospelers from the Protestant Council joined SCAD, the West Side ADA, and the Council on Housing Relocation Problems to condemn Title I relocations. On the East Side, the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association and Yorkville Save Our Homes goaded the city council to investigate the Franklin Title I project, whose site tenants charged sponsors with feeding on “human misery.” Councilman Earl Brown focused the city hearings on conditions at Godfrey Nurse, North Harlem, and Manhattan Town. Trouble surfaced at the Alexander Hamilton public houses on 140th Street, where Harlem leaders rejected a site that would eliminate several Baptist churches. While hundreds of site residents attacked the project at the Board of Estimate, the Urban League, local tenant councils, and one Democratic district leader urged Mayor Wagner to find another location.

Protestant voices ultimately reached Gracie Mansion, where Mayor Wagner announced a high-level committee to deal with the uprooted congregations. Russ kept up the pressure with a September 21, 1956, conference on the “30 Protestant churches being
East Harlem slum clearance, 1957. Looking southwest at 112th Street. Our Lady Queen of Angels (Roman Catholic) Church and School are the only structures remaining on the huge superblock cleared for the New York City Housing Authority’s addition to the Jefferson Houses. The adjoining James Weldon Johnson Houses can be seen on the upper right. Throughout the postwar era in East Harlem, total removal of Old Law tenements for public housing forced the predominantly Puerto Rican population to seek refuge near the ruins, from which they would often have to move again. Courtesy of the La Guardia and Wagner Archives, La Guardia Community College, The City University of New York.

torn down in the next five years.” Church officials heard City Planning Commission chairman James Felt defend redevelopment and describe tenant relocation as “presently improving,” with better city supervision. Housing Authority planner Samuel Ratensky claimed that his agency had moved away from the bulldozer approach and was working with the Protestant Council to save churches. The head of the Bureau of Real Estate boasted of steady progress on relocation, a problem, he insisted, that had been “overemphasized” because of Manhattantown. Everyone acknowledged that the city had heard the complaints. The Housing Authority would provide space for small businesses in East Harlem’s Taft and Franklin Houses, the Bureau of Real Estate would closely monitor Title I relocations, and the au-
authority, added Ratensky, would listen to local groups when planning future sites.**

The new sensitivity, however, offered no relief to congregations facing imminent removal, particularly for clearance in Brownsville and East Harlem. As part of the huge Brooklyn clearance, the Housing Authority had offered to relocate two Baptist churches within the site, but the congregations refused. In East Harlem, the Disciples of Christ Church was reported “determined to remain in the new project and minister to the whole new community.” Although municipal decisions still threatened the congregations of the poor, Protestant leaders could not bring themselves to condemn policies that proclaimed staunch social goals. Dr. Ruoss, chairman of the City-Wide Committee on Housing Relocation Problems, found the Housing Authority “extremely cooperative in working out the arrangements.” Nurtured on the Social Gospel’s faith in municipal intervention, ministers could not imagine that it had become their enemy.**

**Public Business**

During the mid-1950s, the whole panoply of New York liberalism was joined in the struggle for the Lincoln Square Title I, a sprawl of businesses and cultural and educational institutions layered on redevelopment housing. Sponsors found suitable blight at West 65th Street, where Broadway crossed Columbus Avenue, proclaimed a place for culture, and expected the names Moses and Rockefeller to work their magic. The Title I touched off bitter debate that weighed civic splendor against lesser needs. But one by one, the city’s moral and philanthropic institutions chose Moses’s side or chose not to choose.

Although the idea of a culture center went back to the City Beautiful, the immediate stimulus came from postwar concerns about two venerable institutions, the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera. The search for a symphonic stage to replace Carnegie Hall, which was to be razed for an office tower, had become a grand obsession for John D. Rockefeller III. At the same time, the Metropolitan Opera Association, which had outgrown quarters on 39th Street, had split between partisans for refurbishment, led by Wall Street attorney Joseph M. Hartfield, and advocates for a new facility, led by Charles M. Spofford, another prominent lawyer. Spofford, who also sat on the boards of the New York Philharmonic and Jul-
liard School of Music, was an enthusiast for cultural agglomeration. With fellow Met board member Wallace Harrison, Spofford had access to Rockefeller and, ultimately, Robert Moses.31 Moses saw a culture center in more pragmatic terms as northern anchor for his Coliseum Title I on Columbus Circle. Having decided to stretch Coliseum clearance north to Lincoln Square, Moses scrounged among the cognoscenti to fill it. He sounded out Harry F. Guggenheim about an art museum, and he offered Joseph Hartfield 3 acres for the opera. As always, Moses sketched the comprehensive picture—housing, stores, perhaps a hotel, possibly a new building for the Engineering Societies. In the spring of 1954, he invited Hartfield, Richard E. Dougherty of the American Society of Civil Engineers, NYU Chancellor Henry T. Heald, Harry Van Arsdale of the Electrical Workers, and Howard McSpedon of the Building and Construction Trades Council to Randall's Island to discuss enlarging Columbus Circle. He made another pitch to the Metropolitan Opera in July of 1954, but Hartfield pulled out, leaving Moses enraged at the "weak sisters" who ran the city.32

During the winter, Moses's petulance enabled Spofford and Harrison to ease aside the Met's standpatters. At the same time, the Philharmonic Society found that its lease would run out at Carnegie Hall. Wallace Harrison convinced the Philharmonic to join with the opera to investigate a combined facility at Lincoln Square, and, along with Spofford, prevailed on John D. Rockefeller III to chair an Exploratory Committee for a Performing Arts Center. With these expressions of interest, the Committee on Slum Clearance announced plans to clear eighteen blocks of manufacturing lofts and tenements west of Lincoln Square for the Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera, commercial theaters along Broadway, and middle-income housing between Amsterdam and West End avenues, sponsored by realtor William Zeckendorf. While the newspapers enthused about an urban future built on the performing arts, the Board of Estimate on April 21, 1955, authorized the CSC to apply for federal planning funds.33

In the meantime, John D. Rockefeller's Exploratory Committee wrestled with the public purpose that Title I demanded from the elite arts, a task made harder by the interests that clamored for a piece of Lincoln Square. Some city officials wanted space for a fashion center and for that symbol of 1930s proletarian culture, the City Center, both of which Moses rejected. He favored headquarters for the Engineering Societies, and he got City Administrator Gulick, realtor Zeckendorf, and Ralph Cordiner of General Electric to sup-
port his offer. Moses alerted Dougherty and Rockefeller Institute president Detlev Bronk about “the last call to get into the project.” He was still indulging Chancellor Heath's dream for an NYU art center on West 64th Street. until, in June 1955, he abruptly told the university that he was “overcommitted on space.”

NYU was outbid by Fordham University—and Francis Cardinal Spellman. In the fall of 1955, the Committee on Slum Clearance promised two square blocks to Fordham, enabling the Jesuit institution to consolidate business and social work schools into its first real campus in Manhattan. For a time, Fordham president Father Laurence J. McGinley considered an even larger blueprint, including faculty apartments sponsored by the United Housing Foundation. Cardinal Spellman pressed Moses for a suitable exchange for parish property condemned for Lincoln Square and for other Moses projects downtown. Reaching an accommodation with the Catholic archdiocese meant two more blocks of clearance, along with controversial write-downs to the church. But the arrangement gave Moses leverage among Catholic politicians on the Board of Estimate and helped solve one pesky acquisition problem—purchase, at market rate, of 65th Street property owned by Joseph P. Kennedy.

As outlined by the Committee on Slum Clearance in January of 1956, Lincoln Square Title I would sprawl 50 acres from West 60th to West 70th Street, between Columbus Avenue and the New York Central Railroad Yards, and involve a total investment of $160 million. The marbled jewel, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, would overlook Columbus Avenue, and architect Wallace Harrison was already sketching Le Corbusier forms on an east-west plaza. Running three blocks north on Broadway was the row of private theaters, restaurants, and commercial space sponsored by realtor-imprésario Roger Stevens. South of 62nd Street would stand the Fordham campus. Across Amsterdam Avenue, Zeckendorf’s residential complex would contain 4,120 apartment units renting for $47.50 per room.

The jerry-rigged assemblage left individual sponsors uncertain about their relationship to the overall plan. The Exploratory Committee for a Performing Arts Center had little contact with Fordham, looked askance at Stevens’s theatrical row, and ignored Zeckendorf’s housing component, which was needed for the write-down. The committee talked idly about relating the arts center to district planning, but members could not disguise the haphazard way the project was sited onto the West Side. James Felt, Mayor Wagner’s newly appointed chairman of the City Planning Commission, attended a
conclave hosted by John D. Rockefeller III to shape the Title I appeal for public subsidies. Participants, who knew little about the housing component, heard Felt explain that "a small percentage of the site will be used for housing for low or middle income families and the now unattractive buildings would be removed." Conceding that Zeckendorf's apartments had no physical relationship to the arts center, the City Planning Commission chairman added, "it would complement the area, because it would remove unsightly buildings." On May 28, 1966, the Committee on Slum Clearance recommended to the mayor and Board of Estimate that the city proceed with Lincoln Square. Two months later, the City Planning Commission gave its full endorsement.37

Growing neighborhood pressure and stalling tactics by Councilman Stanley Isaacs blocked the expected approval by the Board of Estimate. Attorney Harris Present, a skilled headline grabber, had mobilized Lincoln Square tenants and small businessmen into large
protest committees. They warned that the project would destroy 600 stores, 200 small manufacturing firms, and thousands of jobs. Present told Mayor Wagner that 7,000 site families would have to be rehoused and that Moses was wildly optimistic in his claim that 40 percent would go into public housing. The noisy contingent left Mayor Wagner agonizing over the displacement, while Planning Commissioner Felt scurried for a solution.\(^9\)

Behind the scenes, Moses mobilized heavyweight support that included Cardinal Spellman, Fordham president McGinley, Samuel Rosenman, who represented realtor Roger Stevens, and businessman and longtime Moses associate Howard Cullman. Cullman was allied with *Herald Tribune* publisher John Hay Whitney and realtor Robert Dowling, who hoped to share Stevens’s venture. At Moses’s suggestion, John D. Rockefeller III conferred with AFL-CIO president George Meany, who pledged labor’s backing. Moses also arranged the practical details on relocation. When the ADA and the Protestant Council demanded plans to rehouse tenants, he drafted city agency heads, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill’s construction manager, and the Exploratory Committee’s public relations consultant for a relocation committee and announced a three-year plan to shift 6,018 families. To the sponsors’ chagrin, he claimed they were prepared to spend $2.5 million, including $400 for each family. James Felt added his pledge that no one would be stampeded.\(^9\)

The centerpiece of the Title I campaign was a collection of fanciful sketches of Philharmonic Hall and the Metropolitan Opera House lit up at night, the plaza thronged with crowds, and the city vibrant with culture. The *New York Times* gave the project rave reviews, highlighted by theater critic Howard Taubman’s April 1956 feature story in the Sunday magazine. A few weeks later Taubman was invited by John D. Rockefeller III to join other culture experts to plan the center’s educational outreach. Delighted by the *Times*’s coverage, Rockefeller reported to the Exploratory Committee that the newspaper planned a series of articles on the center. “Mr. Rockefeller again brought up the question of the preparation of a paper on the significance of the Center to the performing arts and to the public in general, and suggested that Mr. Taubman might head a group to do this. Other members of the [Exploratory] Committee felt that he could not undertake such a task because of his connection with the Times.” Instead they suggested that Rockefeller consult with Taubman “regarding a group to prepare a general concept of the center.” The *Times*’s glowing anticipation of Lincoln Center appeared on the front page on July 23, 1956, along with an unsigned tribute to
“the boldest and most exciting artistic project ever attempted in the United States.” “By bringing the performing arts into proximity,” the commentator added, Lincoln Center would emphasize “that the modern American wants the things of the mind and heart as well as material substances.”

Publisher Arthur H. Sulzberger, however, had the material in mind, particularly the effect that the Title I would have on truck access to the *New York Times*’s West 65th Street print plant. As Moses emphasized to his staff architect, “I told Arthur Sulzberger we would help on access and traffic.” He wanted Sulzberger fully briefed on how the redevelopment would dovetail with 65th Street and ramps to the West Side Highway. After reviewing the plans, Sulzberger wrote that he was particularly pleased with an eastbound 65th Street that would “provide adequately for our purposes.” Two weeks later, John D. Rockefeller III reported to his associates that the *Times* “suggested that another statement about the Center be published and asked for an interview with Mr. Rockefeller to serve as a basis for another Sunday magazine article.”

The sponsors also cultivated West Side liberals, who were more than willing to meet them halfway. One staunch supporter was Leonard X. Farbman, West Side plumbing contractor and political reformer. A member of the Park River Democratic Club and president of the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly, Farbman sat on the executive board of the West Side Chamber of Commerce and chaired what were called “community action” programs. Farbman had no illusions about the impact of bulldozer clearance, and he strongly urged Moses and Borough President Hulan Jack to create a local citizens committee to soothe resentments against clearance. He suggested that Planning Commissioner Felt meet with West Side groups to consider low-cost housing or temporary quarters to “blunt the relocation problem.”

All the preparation could not avert disappointment on July 26, 1956, not one of the Rockefeller’s better days. The Board of Estimate considered the Lincoln Square Title I project surrounded by the din of tenant pickets around City Hall. Lawmakers heard objections from protest leader Harris Present, Councilman Isaacs, property owners, and tenants. The prestigious City Club testified against, as did Ira Robbins of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council. They favored a scaled-down project that would displace fewer tenants. Bowing to the pressure, the board decided to postpone Lincoln Square. Minutes later, the board also deferred the attempt by David and Laurence Rockefeller to condemn the East 67th Street tenement
block to make way for Rockefeller Institute housing, Borough President Hulan Jack was never satisfied with the relocation plans in the face of vigorous Yorkville protests. Sponsors would have to come up with a far better political solution for Lincoln Square.43

During the summer of 1956, Moses elaborated his patented mix of glib promises and veiled threats. To liberals, the Committee on Slum Clearance offered 1,000 units of public housing—but near West 89th Street. William Lebwohl announced that the Teachers Guild had arranged with the United Housing Foundation to sponsor a 500-unit cooperative next to the Zeckendorf apartments. The CSC also extended vague offers to the West Side Chamber of Commerce for a commercial Title I to absorb displaced businesses. Moses warned Lincoln Square sponsors that he would resign from the CSC unless Mayor Wagner quashed an attempt by dissidents to hand control of Title I to City Planning Commissioner Felt. "I told them," Moses added to Fordham president McGinley, "this . . . would drive a wedge between us and our sponsors." Shortly thereafter, in a personal note to Cardinal Spellman, he added Borough President Jack and Comptroller Lawrence Gerosa to the list of Lincoln Square's enemies. When the Housing and Home Finance Agency announced in September that it would stay consideration of Lincoln Square pending action by the Board of Estimate, Moses told sponsors that Mayor Wagner and the board were to blame. He warned Wagner that there had to be "an affirmative" on September 27; otherwise he and his Title I team were "finished."44

The face-saving compromise was concocted by Lincoln Square's West Side supporters. Local activist Leonard Farberman urged Borough President Jack to appoint a citizens committee to offset "Moses' bull in the china shop method" with emphasis on "human values etc. etc. in relocation." Farberman suggested that the borough president name Joseph Montserrat, an "official PR spokesman (as well being a reasonable and knowledgeable chap)," local clergymen, and men from the dissident Lincoln Square Businessmen's Committee. The formulation provided the basis for Moses's September 25, 1956, summit with Borough President Jack. Moses promised relocations from Lincoln Square spread over three years, with the first phase delayed until March 1, 1957. According to the West Side News, Mayor Wagner, Fordham University, and the Metropolitan Opera were signatories to the agreement that promised "proper accommodations . . . for every tenant." Some moderate-rent housing would be provided on-site by the Teachers Guild–United Housing Foundation cooperative, although the public housing on 89th Street

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remained in the "contemplated" stage. A watchdog committee appointed by Borough President Jack would monitor the agreement. With these pledges, Hulan Jack and his colleagues came around. On September 27, as Moses had said, the Board of Estimate approved negotiations with the HHFA on Lincoln Square.

Over the winter, sponsors worked to keep Lincoln Square on track. John D. Rockefeller III visited President Eisenhower's assistant, Sherman Adams, on December 19, 1956, to gain White House support for the more marginal aspects of the project's subsidy. While Adams chatted about organizing intellectuals for Eisenhower, Rockefeller argued for full Title I write-downs for a performing arts library, museum, parking garage, and the Kennedy property. Citing the July 23 New York Times endorsement, Rockefeller claimed that "the Lincoln Center project is in harmony with the President's program to strengthen the cultural position of the United States around the globe." Local HHFA official Walter Fried endorsed write-downs for the library, museum, and even the underground parking garage. HHFA administrator Albert Cole was enthusiastic. Prophesying "an American landmark," Cole pledged his utmost to see Lincoln Center realized. With relocation eliminated as an issue, Moses in January 1957 announced phased removals. City Planning Commissioner Felt offered the facilities of the Tenant Relocation Bureau, without the usual 5 percent fee, "as a public service."

The top-level agreement suddenly collapsed in the spring of 1957 when Lincoln Square's alleged extravagance was caught in the middle of federal budgetary politics. After Treasury Department officials questioned whether taxpayers should subsidize the performing arts with write-downs meant for housing, Albert Cole complained that Moses's estimate of the federal contribution had ballooned from $24 to $42 million. In April, Cole informed local HHFA administrator Fried that he would limit the federal sum to $30 million, enough for the performing arts center, the underground garage, the Fordham tract, and Zeckendorf's housing and the Teachers Guild cooperative, but not Stevens's theaters. Cole objected to writing-down Broadway footage worth $32 to $12.50, "particularly since Commissioner Moses is requesting that Stevens have the right to build thereon office buildings, hotels, theaters and any other facility that the zoning would permit." While Moses leaked Cole's obstruction to the newspapers, federal officials reminded Lincoln Square sponsors who their friends were. "What I believe Mr. Fried wanted to put across," General Otto Nelson informed the Exploratory Committee, "was his belief that the Lincoln Center people should not get worried, that
The transformation of Lincoln Square. The Lincoln Square Title I stretched the Coliseum Title I twelve blocks to 70th Street, creating the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; a campus for Fordham University; middle-income housing, Lincoln Towers; and Lincoln House, a cooperative sponsored by the Teachers Guild and the United Housing Foundation. Although supporters
we should sit tight and that the project would be approved without any reduction in scope." 47

Moses conveyed no such assurance to his friends. Warning that Philharmonic Hall would never survive Cole's attack, Moses had John D. Rockefeller III appeal to President Eisenhower for a compromise. The New York Times on April 9, 1957, editorialized that New York's slum clearance and redevelopment justified "a disproportionately large claim" on federal resources. The pressure forced an agreement worked out by Walter Fried and William Lebwohl that sacrificed the Stevens site and raised the write-down target to $8, including the Fordham tract, which undercut the charge of favoritism to the archdiocese. Within days, Cole announced an "understanding" with Moses that released HHFA funds for Lincoln Square. When Rockefeller argued that government owed the performing arts $61.25, Moses recollected that Zeckendorf's high-rises could absorb $7, allowing the Lincoln Center and Fordham price to drop to $6.86, but that, he swore, "was final." Rockefeller wanted still more write-downs for the Kennedy building. Claiming that he "went to considerable lengths to persuade Joe Kennedy to sell at a very reasonable price," Moses replied that it was pointless to prolong discussion. Delays would run the project into the 1957 elections and "even kill it." 46

That was the fate of the Rockefeller Institute housing. David and Laurence Rockefeller hoped they could placate Borough President Jack with similar arrangements for relocation. Moses asked Carmine DeSapio to intervene against Jack's objections, and David Rockefeller put several calls to the Tammany chief. At the same time, the Rockefellers conveyed their "sense of responsibility" toward relocation. But all the high-powered influence could not bend the borough president's calculation that the clearance of an entire Yorkville block would disrupt too many constituents. The Rockefellers could have Lincoln Square, but they could not have everything. On April 25, 1957, the Board of Estimate rejected the project at Hulan Jack's express wish. (The Rockefeller Institute housing was later developed as a private purchase without city subsidy.) 47

emphasized district planning. Lincoln Center and Fordham faced Broadway and Columbus Avenue and offered a blank wall toward the low-rent units, the Amsterdam Houses. The commercial theater and business block proposed by realtor-impressor Roger Stevens never survived the political controversy surrounding the Title I write-down.
With the Cole contretemps behind them, the Lincoln Square proponents launched the final campaign for city approval during the summer of 1957. They expected the Wagner administration to supply, as one of Rockefeller's assistants put it, "PR . . . to show center is not just for upper crust," along with a steady pace of contract signings. They arranged for HHFA praise of Lincoln Center, and they made sure that Cole remembered his words about an "American landmark." When Mayor Wagner was informed that sponsors accepted the $6.86 figure, he lauded the benefactors, who would make New York the culture "magnet of the modern world." Wagner would do his part, but with deliberate speed. "The Mayor stated," Lebwohl reported to Moses, "that they could not appear to be precommitted or putting on a rush act, that they will do the best they can but would provide full public hearings and time for consideration."

Redevelopers took extraordinary care to prevent Lincoln Square from getting derailed again. Committee on Slum Clearance vice-chairman Thomas Shanahan arranged for a Lincoln Square testimonial dinner with Title I sponsors and the West Side Association of Commerce, because the association held "a similar function for the Coliseum [Title I] project at about the same stage of its development." Charles Spofford's assistants monitored the opposition, including an evening protest rally of 350 people drawn by a tenants council "summons." Warning that the Title I would shift 7,000 families into new slums, Harris Present attacked "dictator" Moses and demanded that the city declare Lincoln Square an urban renewal area to "preserve the 'good' buildings." Although Spofford's men had heard all this before, they were alarmed that protesters promised to attend City Planning Commission proceedings on September 11, 1957, with pickets "for the benefit of TV and newspaper cameras." "While many of the arguments seemed to us to be specious," Spofford's men reported, "we felt that there is enough substance in Mr. Present's program to warrant concern over delay."

Moses prepared carefully scripted blue-ribbon testimony for the September 11 hearing. Besides John D. Rockefeller III, representatives of Fordham University, the Philharmonic Society, the Metropolitan Opera, and the Juilliard School proclaimed the city to be on the brink of a cultural renaissance and promised assiduous attention to the plight of site tenants. Charles Spofford emphasized that the sponsors recognized "the serious human problems involved in a redevelopment." While the Lincoln Square Residents Committee surrounded City Hall with pickets, the City Planning Commission unanimously approved the project, with provision for adequate re-
location. Moses also choreographed the rerun for the October 25 hearings of the Board of Estimate. General Otto Nelson arranged endorsements from the New York Building Congress, the American Institute of Architects, and the Regional Plan Association. Cued by Reginald Allen of the Philharmonic Society, the musicians unions chanted the “key word . . . opportunity.” *West Side News* owner Harry Rogers handled the West Side contingent, including spokesmen for the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly, Community Planning Board No. 7, and the West Side Chamber of Commerce. On November 24, the Board of Estimate approved the condemnation and resale of the 68-acre tract. A few days later, Borough President Jack appointed Leonard Farbman, Rabbi Edward Klein of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, and other West Siders to the Watchdog Committee on Relocation.36

**Reckoning**

The Lincoln Square melodrama, as Robert Caro observed, featured a stunning display of Moses's power. Today when one strolls through the vast marble complex, it is hard to imagine the primal force that drove the former residents out. But the battle was won. The dexterous strokes against critics, who could never disagree with the wisdom that the arts took primacy over ordinary urban needs. Sponsors constantly played on the message that the performing arts were crucial to New York—and to America—during the cold war struggle for people’s minds. Moses was always more practical. When he submitted the Lincoln Square estimates to the HHFA, he reckoned that the federal write-down would leverage nearly $250 million in private construction, the city’s largest commercial project since Rockefeller Center. Moses also squeezed the maximum publicity from the least concession granted his opponents. When SCAD called for an on-site relocation bureau, the Committee on Slum Clearance promptly complied. When Harris Present warned of thousands of homeless, the CSC figured that many would get units in public housing. In a typical gesture, Moses offered low-rent housing on 89th Street (which was never realized because it set off fears of racial imbalance among West Side civic leaders). To the Citizens Housing and Planning Council went another promise that the City Planning Commission would study its suggestions to make the West Side near Lincoln Center the city’s first urban renewal area.38

Under pressure from Moses, the City Planning Commission had
already withdrawn from the relocation debate. It had become a liberal body since Mayor Wagner had replaced two Moses stalwarts with James Felt and Francis J. Bloustein. The commissioners had at their disposal investigations into Manhattan town, tenant relocation surveys at Godfrey Nurse, deliberations of the Mayor's Committee for Better Housing, and its own relocation reports of 1953. Chairman Felt knew the growing unease about the public projects in East Harlem and Brownsville. A City Planning Commission draft report, which Felt had written for Mayor Wagner's use in August of 1956, warned of the crisis that would result from blacks and Puerto Ricans being shoved into the few neighborhoods "open to them," the same neighborhoods targeted for clearance and redevelopment. Because the displaced families had priority for new public units, the concentration of minorities in public housing would markedly increase. The Housing Authority might counter the trend with projects on open land, but this alternative was checkmated by what the staff euphemistically called "neighborhood oppositions." The draft report urged Wagner to use the mayor's office and the Commission on Intergroup Relations to coordinate improvements that would lessen racial segregation.48

Commissioner Felt regarded the draft as confidential, but Moses learned of it and sent a caustic reply. Most New Yorkers opposed housing blacks and Puerto Ricans in the outer boroughs, Moses wrote Felt. "Why don't you say frankly that such opposition has official recognition and tell more about it?" Moses said it was absurd for Mayor Wagner to pretend otherwise. The next day, Felt assured Moses that the draft was not the commission's final view, and the sentiments were never made public. A few months afterward, Felt defended the city's relocation record in a speech to the New York ADA. He went on to argue that slum clearance could not wait for perfect solutions to the problem of displaced residents.49

A year later, the City Planning Commission's Report on Lincoln Center forecast that by the end of the 1950s, another 74,800 families would be relocated by slum clearance and public improvements. It nevertheless concluded that the city would have the housing it needed. Despite vigorous clearance activities, the commission reported a net gain of 144,000 units. Appalled by the commission's overly optimistic figures, many housing reformers begged Chairman Felt to reconsider the facts. Some had the same mixed feelings as State Rent Administrator Hortense Gabel, who tried to document the City Planning Commission's miscalculation while privately ad-
mitting, "I am not necessarily opposed to Lincoln Square, but I am opposed to the irresponsible use of data to support it."

Many liberals who should have objected to the project shared Gabel's ambivalence. Some, like Robert Weinberg, applauded the arts complex, including impresario Steven's row of private theaters. Citizens Housing and Planning Council president Ira Robbins, one of Moses's consistent antagonists, testified in favor of the project at the Board of Estimate. Calling Lincoln Center "a shot in the arm" for the West Side, Robbins said that the Metropolitan Opera Association, Fordham University, and other sponsors were "not the type who would take advantage of tenants." The Teachers Guild, which anticipated cooperative housing at Lincoln Square, refused to "involve itself in these problems, which are not directly the concern of a union for teachers." The Women's City Club, which vigorously attacked Manhattan Town, admired the "imaginative" project that "would stimulate the cultural life of the city as well as help stem the tide of deterioration on the West Side." The club approved Lincoln Square contingent on the start of lower-middle-class housing on the site and a public project nearby to enable an "orderly" relocation with "a minimum of hardship."

Whether or not hardship was minimized, removals for Lincoln Square were carried out with the utmost order, guaranteed by West Side liberals on the Watchdog Committee, who worked with managers of the Lincoln Center and Fordham sites. If their efforts focused on easing panic flight rather than aiding relocation, it was because they had learned the lessons of Manhattan Town. They saw their mandate as "prompt reconstruction," along with quick relocation and adequate site maintenance, to keep "the integrated character of the Lincoln Square area on a social, economic, and cultural basis." How the performing arts center and Zeckendorf's upper-middle-income apartments were to be integrated with the neighborhood was never elaborated. At the final accounting, the Watchdog Committee reported that 3,300 of the 5,572 tenants on the Lincoln Square site had found their own apartments, and only 530 went into public housing. Average relocation expenses cost sponsors $75.

Breakdown

By the late 1950s, redevelopment that withstood Moses's critics was breaking down under the growing backlog of site refugees. The flow
of refugees had overwhelmed the Housing Authority’s traditional dependence on the worthy poor, stringent tenant selection, and power to evict undesirables. Tributaries of the housing system, such as the clearance areas in East Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, were becoming centers of social unrest, and other neighborhoods targeted for low-income projects were beginning to resist that dubious distinction. Site tenants who feared relocation into projects of special notoriety began to reject Housing Authority placement. The historic relationship between redevelopment and public housing, which had sustained inner-city renewal, now threatened the program’s foundation. In 1958 both the Housing Authority and the Committee on Slum Clearance went into receivership by liberals determined to force enough modifications to keep renewal going.

The crisis first appeared in East Harlem, the neighborhood most transformed by Housing Authority operation. Between 1947 and 1956, seven projects opened with a total capacity of 10,244 units, a greater concentration of public housing, city planners later recognized, “than in any other place of comparable size in the country.” Halfway through the slum clearance process, social disorganization had already swamped settlements, churches, and charities, and drew concern from the highest levels of Protestant philanthropy. In late 1955, the Phelps Stokes Fund gave $11,500 to the Citizens Housing and Planning Council to study Housing Authority policies that affected “the social aspects of housing,” particularly what council president J. Clarence Davies, Jr., described as public housing’s changing tenant population. Social work expert Elizabeth Wood of the Chicago Housing Authority was hired to examine the system’s growing concentration of blacks and Puerto Ricans and the ominous increase in what were called “problem families” (those that received welfare and/or were headed by females) that required social work intervention. Wood’s study, published as The Small Hard Core (1957), concluded that Title I “intensifies the trend towards economic, social and racial stratification” in public housing.

During the early winter of 1958, Housing Authority attempts to keep order in the projects touched off tenant rebellion. Authorized by the state legislature to make arrests and carry firearms, housing police confronted youth gangs, who threatened to “take over” community facilities. On the Lower East Side, juvenile delinquency was reported to be rampant in projects that were “collectivities of disorganized and alienated individuals.” Gangs fought over “turf” that included playgrounds, community rooms, and even social settle-
ments. In early 1958, management moves against troublemakers led to rank-and-file complaints about “unjust” evictions and demands for a tenant board of appeals. Struggling against the adverse publicity, the Wagner administration reorganized the Housing Authority in May of 1958. Moses’s longtime ally, chairman Philip Cruise, was replaced by William D. Reid, and Ira Robbins of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council was named vice-chairman.

Robbins promptly toured the worst projects, encouraged liaison with local civic groups, and hired an NAACP expert to advise on race relations. The authority established a Social Consultation Unit to review the admissions of “borderline” tenants, advise on the rehabilitation of problem families, and mediate what it characterized as “potentially explosive situations.” “Although the Housing Authority will not become a case work agency,” Robbins cautioned, “it will try to help needy families who are considered undesirable as tenants because of their social problems, to secure benefit of aid from outside case work agencies.”

Despite Robbins’s cautious words, the small hard core was perceived as a danger to the entire system. In June 1958, Housing Authority managers counted 2,036 problem families, but only 126 cases referred to the Social Consultation Unit. Nevertheless, when the authority applied to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to support special social work at Fort Greene and Queensbridge, it conceded that “behavior of problem families [had] become notorious . . . [and] threatened the reputation of the whole housing movement.” Explaining why the flagships of public housing needed emergency aid, East Side settlement leader Helen Hall reported that “they are among the most difficult and because these difficulties are compounded by the fact that more stable families applying for housing avoid them.”

Officials considered several expedients to quiet the disturbances. Robbins emphasized that the Housing Authority had raised income limits to the highest allowable levels to avoid unnecessary evictions and “reduce the feeling among low-income families that they are only transient residents.” The authority began using nonprofessional caseworkers to reach families that never ventured into community centers. It even sponsored tenant organizations as morale builders, beginning with experimental floor meetings run by the Henry Street Settlement at the La Guardia, Bernard Baruch, and Lillian Wald Houses. But a Women’s City Club survey of project managers found that most regarded family counseling their “number one need,” and many improvised emergency techniques. At the Breukelen Houses, management, working with the Jewish Family Services, “invited”
parents and teenagers to weekly sessions to deal with “family disorganization as expressed through the ‘symptom’ of a poorly kept home.” But the Breukelen manager admitted that counseling could not negate “the concentration of only the lowest income families in one community, with their concomitant problems [that] . . . result in high turnover, unstable communities, and in loss of potential leadership.” The real remedy, she concluded, was mixing income groups by raising income ceilings and devising proportionate rents. Only then would tenants “cease regarding the project as a stop-over place and start taking roots.”

Some housing liberals, however, recognized that fundamental problems stemmed from the nature of large-scale slum clearance. Some experts called for the Housing Authority to adopt a two-year “breathing spell” on new admissions to allow the Social Consultation Unit to create a “favorable reputation of the projects by accepting only stable families.” Social agencies pointed out that problem tenants came from neighborhoods that had been ravaged by authority operations. In East Harlem, Helen Hall wrote, the authority had made slum clearance “an inhuman practice” that devastated thousands of families. Many had taken refuge in “rehab,” makeshift tenements that the authority rented from private landlords. Although the authority supervised, families were put at the mercy of rent collectors before they were unceremoniously told to move again for new clearance. Many families had become so demoralized that social workers despaired of saving them. Helen Hall reported outright “resistance” from casework agencies, which regarded “multi-problem families [as] . . . too difficult,” “too expensive,” and not too hopeful.”

The Housing Authority, she added, was “left with the alternative of letting a family incapable of adjustment to life in a project, stay on, perhaps making life impossible for other tenants, or throwing them back into the slums.”

The 1958 change in leadership reflected the Housing Authority’s decision to persevere with social work. Several projects were assigned to the Social Consultation Unit with orders to do casework without the patronizing that had touched off earlier protests. Swamped by the caseload, the unit virtually gave up family counseling to concentrate on flagrant cases of narcotics use and prostitution. Determined to ride out the crisis, the Housing Authority rejected the idea of a moratorium on new admissions. But the authority board wanted New York to understand that although the authority would try to improve conditions in the projects, it could no longer “house every family now living in slums.”
The force behind Moses's last Title I victory on the Lower East Side, 1957. At City Planning Commission hearing, July 17, 1957, to consider the Seward Park Title I, witnesses wait to testify their support. Front row, from left, Jacob Zukerman, president of the Workmen's Circle; Abraham E. Kazan, executive director of the United Housing Foundation; and United Housing Foundation president Robert Sloid. The audience carries placards that proclaim, "We need decent housing. Approve Seward Cooperative Development." Seward Park won easy approval, but in 1988, further United Housing Foundation-sponsored Title I projects at Seward Park Extension and at Delancey North were blocked by community opponents, ending Moses-style redevelopment in the district. Courtesy of the Special Archive, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

That message filtered back to Title I redevelopers and to site residents whose homes were at risk. Black Harlem opposed further large-scale projects, and neighborhood reaction against the bulldozer touched off a new political insurgency. The movement by Harlem rent-strike leader Jesse Grey made little headway among the tenants of East 117th Street's brownstones. But Grey built a power base in the nearby Stephen Foster Houses, defending families involved in investigations by the Social Consultation Unit. During the quiet years of the civil rights movement, the East Harlem chapter of the
FULL EXPOSURE

Congress on Racial Equality took up tenants' rights at the Robert A. Taft Houses. The limit on public housing's ability to absorb refugees had already put several Title I projects on the shelf. In 1958, Moses's biggest setback occurred when the United Housing Foundation sponsored yet another Lower East Side Title I, the twenty-seven-square-block Delancey North, which threatened 5,722 site families. Wary of the relocation, particularly for the area's shopkeepers, Abraham Kazan met local businessmen, promising commercial space and parking. But the proposal fell through because of the need to shift hundreds of tenants into the nearby Rutgers public houses.66

The breakdown in the housing system finally reached the opinion centers that traditionally backed Moses's slum clearance. Only four years had passed since the New York Times had run the series on "Our Changing City," but the passage of time could have been a generation. Between June 29 and July 2, 1959, the newspaper surveyed the entire scope of public housing and urban renewal and came to somber conclusions. The reporter found that the projects were barren of hope and that the Housing Authority was beleaguered by Title I relocation. The grim data reverberated in lordly circles, including those of the Ford Foundation's urban experts. Staffers became convinced that Title I had aggravated the city's housing shortage, destroyed many Old Law tenements that could have sheltered low-income residents, and created sterile, crime-ridden environments. Searching for alternatives to Moses's bulldozers, policy makers were attracted to City Planning Commissioner James Felt's notion of "spot" renewal, particularly on the Upper West Side. But it was difficult to disengage from old programs that once promised so much. Ford's urban expert, Robert C. Weaver, sounded a familiar refrain. He worried that the "controversy over Title I developments is crystallizing the opposition." "The danger in the present situation," Weaver went on, "is that demagogues and poorly informed persons may articulate the point of view that there should never be any displacement under any circumstances." Weaver favored restoring respectability to Title I by placing restrictions on demolition. For many Moses critics as well as collaborators, the chance to sweep clean and remake the city was a dream they could not abandon.67