THE REDEVELOPMENT MACHINE

If we can be scientific about planning our highways, we can certainly be scientific about making certain that democracy is equally accessible to all.

New York Americans for Democratic Action

When World War II ended, Robert Moses was ready to move ahead on redevelopment. As the housing man on the City Planning Commission and as chairman of the mayor's Postwar Works Program, he had written the Housing Authority's agenda and La Guardia's list of postwar projects. By the time William O'Dwyer had succeeded to Gracie Mansion, the conventional wisdom agreed that the city needed a construction czar. In January 1946, Mayor O'Dwyer named Moses New York City Construction Coordinator, charged with expediting the vast agenda of postwar plans. Some civic leaders worried about the Park Commissioner's awesome reach and the demands made in his name by obscure assistants. But they never questioned the decisive expertise that Moses seemed to embody.

Although depression and total war gave Moses the opportunity, politics remained crucial to his success. During the war, Democrats and the left wing had agreed that the city needed vast reconstruction, even when they debated the details. For several years, Moses rode that solidarity and public anticipation of bold plans. Even after liberals grew fearful of his expanding power, they were still drawn to his schemes. With the onset of the cold war, they came to distrust complaints about redevelopment from former allies on the left wing. While Moses tightened his administrative grasp, naysayers splintered

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into quarreling camps that could never unite against him. During the war, redevelopment became a test of the city's will to start over. Afterward it became a litmus test for a new urban orthodoxy.

For all the force behind Moses's initiatives, few institutions shared his confidence in redevelopment's prospects. Despite widespread conviction about Washington's responsibilities for the cities, the federal government remained on the sidelines while congressional barons wrangled over money. Norwithstanding the bluff talk that Stuyvesant Town would unlock millions in private capital, fiduciaries hesitated to have their investments subjected to public scrutiny and to postwar racial standards. Moses had to look elsewhere for partners. He found them among universities and hospitals that craved expanded roles in the postwar metropolis and enjoyed an unassailable public purpose. He also found them among the unions, whose leaders looked to housing benefits as the means to strengthen their hold on the rank and file during the cold war. These pillars of liberalism helped Moses rebuild New York.

Parting Company

Moses consolidated his authority amid the political vacuum created by the deaths of La Guardia and the united front. The entente between liberal Democrats and the left wing was crucial for Stuyvesant Town. But it withered after V-J Day, leaving a bitter estrangement that made liberals more determined to pursue bulldozer redevelopment and radicals less able to thwart it. Liberals' distaste for their old left-wing allies soon hardened into a refusal to recognize their contributions to housing policy or their championship of the dispossessed. The left wing, which ignored the implications of Stuyvesant Town, would also fail to recognize how much it would need liberals in struggles to save neighborhoods. Moses strode over this fundamental breach during the cold war.

In the embattled center was the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which had been founded before Pearl Harbor by anti-Communist liberals as the Union for Democratic Action. Its committee on housing was a who's who from the Citizens Housing Council, the United Neighborhood Houses, the Ethical Culture Society, the American Jewish Committee, and the City-Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem, all of whom were convinced that government responsibility for decent housing included the moral duty to foster "open," interracial neighborhoods. After the war, when
the ADA became the liberal wing of the Democratic party, members hammered together the housing planks that were the heart of postwar liberalism. Their agenda included: massive federal subsidies for public housing, the Wagner-Ellender-Taft Bill for federal aid for slum clearance and urban redevelopment, state bond issues for low-rent public projects, and a City Planning Commission master plan for slum clearance and rehousing. ADAers envisioned well-designed neighborhoods near greenbelts and highways.1

The ADA advocated much of what Moses promised, and they resented his high-handed dismissal of their agenda. Although they conceded the need for centralized, coordinated decisions on land use, they wanted them vested in the City Planning Commission, not Moses’s network of shadowy subordinates. Their uneasiness grew when Moses scoffed at ending the immorality of Jim Crow. Redevelopment and racial integration went hand in hand, proclaimed the ADA “Anti-Discrimination Program”: “Only through the creation of a true ‘Master Plan’ for New York City; only through systematic re-development of the City can present patterns of segregation be terminated.” Social engineering by the City Planning Commission would meet the moral challenge.2

During the spring of 1946, liberals mobilized against Moses’s threats to these ideals. They called together a convention of civic leaders to consider ways to clip Moses’s powers, which “were not being used to build the kind of city we would like to see.” They said Moses had lobbied against an antidiscrimination clause in state housing legislation, rejected construction of a midtown bus terminal to relieve traffic, and pulled strings for an expensive municipal airport. Worst of all, he had ordered immediate eviction of 750 families from the westernmost segment of the Cross-Bronx Expressway. Although the convention fizzled when Moses intimidated participation by city officials, its real shortcoming was an unwillingness to disagree with Moses on basics. The ADA objected to hasty evictions from the Cross-Bronx, not the concept of an arterial through the borough. They could not condemn the powers granted Moses because they still hoped, as Rexford Tugwell did years before, to harness them for the public good.3

The stop-Moses movement had little chance when liberals lost contact with grass-roots organizations that mustered left-wing votes. During 1947, the struggle to extend Office of Price Administration (OPA) rent controls pitted American Labor party and Communist party activists, who favored attacking landlords, against liberals, who wanted incentives for private investment. When radicals agitated for
tough OPA ceilings, liberals hung back to avoid embarrassing the Harry S Truman administration in Washington. They became convinced that Communists were exploiting the housing emergency to benefit Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign. Ready to tangle with the Wallace crowd, ADA leader Charles Abrams offered, "I'll carefully plan a [housing] program that may have a strategically political implication." But well-crafted planks could not balance the loss of local clubhouses.

Conceived by liberals as a stop-Moses affair, the April 1948 Citizens Conference on City Planning heard fervent pleas for beleaguered neighborhoods. City Councilman Stanley M. Isaacs attacked the "so-called coordinator," whose powers had become "an octopus . . . sprawling all over the City." Most speakers favored invigorating the City Planning Commission, and many seconded the call by the Citizens Union for independent planning districts that served neighborhood needs. But other participants from the financial community had already committed to Moses's redevelopment schemes. And ALP clubhouses and tenant and consumers groups boycotted the conference. Preoccupied with "Wallace for President," they sneered at the liberals' agenda.

The fight against the color line in housing became another arena for political recrimination. In 1944, after failing to defeat the Stuyvesant Town redevelopment contract in the courts, liberals forced municipal enactment of an ordinance that ended city tax exemption on future projects that discriminated by race. But coverage was not blanket, and the issue continued to stir local politics. When radicals (belatedly, Charles Abrams claimed) raised the Jim Crow issue with a Tenants Committee Against Discrimination in Stuyvesant Town, the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, the American Jewish Committee, and the Ethical Culture Society responded with an implicitly anti-Communist open-housing lobby, the New York State Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (SCAD). SCAD lobbied for passage of the Wicks-Austin Law of 1950, which prohibited discrimination in projects built under the Redevelopment Companies Law; and the Brown-Isaacs ordinance of 1951, which extended the ban to all city-aided projects. Throughout the postwar campaign, however, SCAD and its parent groups remained vigilant against Communist organizing tactics. The New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee debated the Stuyvesant Town controversy, but resolved to remain aloof from "Communist-inspired" groups. When the Jewish Labor Committee, with ties to the needletrades unions and the AFL, labeled a Bronx Committee for Inte-
grated Housing the “newest excursion by Cominform apologists,” liberal groups, including SCAD and the Bronx Urban League, backed away."

Pervasive suspicion undermined campaigns against Moses and the mayors who gave him power. With La Guardia’s passing, deep fissures opened between insurgent Republicans, reform Democrats, Liberals, and ALPers. In the 1949 election, divisions helped reelect Mayor O’Dwyer and weaken the political review of Moses’s policies. But the fact remained that liberal platforms closely resembled those of the construction coordinator. Republican Grover Whalen pummeled O’Dwyer for letting slums fester and delaying work on “revitalized business centers” and “neighborhood units.” In the next breath, however, Whalen’s campaign could also call for “elevated arcades for pedestrians, moving sidewalks, helicopter landings on buildings in the heart of the city and greenbelt parkways.”

The Liberal party, which attracted the ADA, needle-trades unions, and Democrats estranged from Mayor O’Dwyer, offered an omnibus program that called for federal and state funds for slum clearance and low-income housing. The party recognized the need for middle-income redevelopment projects built on vacant land with phased tenant relocation. Above all, the Liberal party wanted a City Planning Commission to create a master plan that preserved neighborhoods. But the ADA housing platform also congratulated Moses for “the excellent achievements of private builders and public housing agencies.” Requesting more for “the middle group,” who could not afford private rents, it called for subsidies to create nonprofit housing corporations and cooperatives and to get insurance companies and banks involved in redevelopment. Moses was already on the job.

In the 1950 special election (after O’Dwyer quit in scandal), Acting Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri was challenged by scattered claimants to La Guardia’s legacy. The ALP candidate, a Stuyvesant Town tenant leader, snubbed queries about city planning from liberal civic groups. Two Republican candidates, both La Guardia protégés, pledged to preserve communities, protect small property owners, and balance the city budget. They favored giving the City Planning Commission a stronger say in redevelopment, subject to vetoes of neighborhood planning boards. Moses’s man, Impellitteri, remained cautious. Before giving more power to the commission, he wanted to see whether it used the power it had, and he expressed satisfaction with the existing redevelopment machinery run by Moses. By 1950, the La Guardia coalition had dispersed, and with it the votes that might have curtailed Moses’s authority.
Belts of Public Housing

After World War II, federal subsidies were locked in congressional committees and banks and insurance companies doubted the wisdom of Stuyvesant Town. Thus Moses's housing work came to center on the state-funded public program. Postwar liberalism put the unfinished task of slum clearance high on its agenda, and the prestige of public housing as stable projects inhabited by working-class whites was never greater. Although many of Moses's housing ambitions remained out of reach, the millions of dollars that he could tap from state bond issues could clear miles of slums. The major decisions were laid down during Mayor La Guardia's last year in office.

In January of 1945, Moses drew up an expansion of state-funded housing that dwarfed the prewar backlog: the Lillian D. Wald and Governor Alfred E. Smith projects on the Lower East Side, Abraham Lincoln and James Weldon Johnson Houses in East Harlem, the Brownsville, Marcy, and Gowanus Houses in Brooklyn, the Morrisania and Melrose Houses in the Bronx, and the Astoria Houses in Queens. His plans rested on several basic assumptions, starting with the determination to clear the most slums for the dollar. Except for limited opportunities along the Queens waterfront, Moses refused to build public housing on vacant land. He preferred to extend massive phalanxes on the Lower East Side, in East Harlem, and in Brooklyn near the Navy Yard and in Brownsville. As a matter of course, these
Redevelopment of the Lower East Side, 1934–1958. The New Deal–financed Knickerbocker Village and New York City Housing Authority's projects, First Houses and Vladeck, hardly made an impact on the Lower East Side's great concentration of Old Law tenements. Robert Moses considered the acreage too valuable for low-rent public housing and expected insurance companies to
agglomerations were defined by race. Asked about his priorities for funds, Moses would casually remark about “the Rockaway [Queens] colored project” or “the Bronx colored project.” In Moses’s mind, the need to clear “colored” slums was distinct from but no less urgent than the need to clear tenements occupied by whites.10

Although many Old Law districts were natural targets, Moses’s political sense removed some as priorities. He specifically vetoed operations in Bushwick and Greenpoint in Brooklyn because of hostility in these predominantly Italian communities. His assistant, George Spargo, cautioned against redevelopment in Greenpoint, where the houses were old, but looked “as though the people living there are rather proud of their community.” Spargo was impressed by homeowners’ spirit in nearby Greenwood, and he found Bushwick “not slum-ridden enough.” Shortly after, Moses removed Yorkville and Greenwich Village from his active list in Manhattan. Despite strong pressure for a low-rent project in Yorkville, Moses concluded that private capital would handle the rehabilitation. Moses reached the same conclusion about the Village, which he deemed an area for redevelopments and private construction. He frowned on going further into the West Village or Chelsea, where the mix of structures would allow only “compromise, gerrymandered” projects.11

East Harlem was different. Up until the end of the war, the district contained only one low-rent project, the East River Houses. This project was the pride of Fiorello La Guardia, his old law partner, Vito Marcantonio, and Benjamin Franklin High School principal Leonard Covello, the proconsuls who oversaw city policy toward their neighbors. But ethnic mobility and political turmoil had loosened their grip on redevelopment. Before the war, reformers had written off blocks west of Third Avenue as being overrun with Puerto Ricans. Responding to one philanthropist’s diatribe against “confirmed outlaws,” Moses remarked that there was no choice for East Harlem except broad clearance. Downtown charity leaders who raised funds for East Harlem benevolence feared that the needs of displaced blacks and Hispanics would overwhelm existing social services. By the end of the war, they declared the district bankrupt.

finance middle-income housing under the redevelopment laws. His hopes were dashed for the site that became the Governor Smith Houses, but the Amalgamated projects that constituted Cooperative Village and the giant middle-income complexes at Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town realized the original intent to reclaim the tenement district.
Redevelopment of upper Manhattan, 1937–1958. The New York City Housing Authority, with New Deal funds, completed only two low-rent projects on the periphery of Harlem’s slums: all-black Harlem River Houses and all-white East River Houses. Under Robert Moses’s coordination, the Housing Authority built projects financed by the New York State postwar program.
When Dr. LeRoy Bowman of the Federation Settlement attempted a last-ditch interdenominational rescue, philanthropic administrators pulled back from an area that, Bowman said, they called “a dead zone.”

Sensing the urgency, East Harlem leaders tried to direct the city’s slum clearance program, but their arguments only bolstered Moses’s determination to sweep clean. From his school office, Dr. Covello choreographed the campaign to control renewal of the Italian community, which the city, in the words of one newspaper, had branded a “verminous crime ridden slum.” Covello’s last hurrah was a community conference that blamed delinquency on the “lack of recreational facilities and bad housing.” But the appeal for public services only invited Moses-style intervention: health stations, playgrounds, and housing projects. Covello’s group hoped to develop projects for mixed incomes, along with mortgage funds to remodel tenements that it deemed worth saving. It targeted one site near Third Avenue and 100th Street for occupancy by East Harlem residents who earned more than the Housing Authority’s $3,000 ceiling, but Moses held the ground for low-income blacks and Hispanics. By early 1948, bulldozing was under way to such an extent that a philanthropic expert marveled at the “commendable progress in construction.”

Brownsville, Brooklyn, was another major area of Housing Authority operations that was expected to shape the tide of municipal improvement. The district’s campaign for public housing dated from late 1930s, when Jewish leaders on the Brownsville Neighborhood Council tried to get the city’s attention with pamphlets and radio broadcasts. They boasted that the city—and Robert Moses—had heard the message. The Housing Authority announced plans for Brownsville, but shelved them during the war. Before V-E Day, boosters who feared the district would be overlooked again demanded public housing as part of their “Post-War Plan for Brownsville.”

Moses’s staff had already chosen Brownsville as a prime location for public housing. In a memo for the boss, Moses assistant Arthur Hodgkiss made this judgment about Brownsville and nearby East New York: “This is a bad section. The population is mixed colored and white. The property is very small and will not lend itself to satis-

that cleared large areas of central Harlem and one-third of East Harlem. When project construction ended in the mid-1960s, East Harlem had the largest concentration of public housing in the country.
Redevelopment of northern Brooklyn, 1937–1958. Brooklyn political interests and the federal government's investment in war housing around the Navy Yard gave the borough considerable progress in slum clearance at Williamsburg, Red Hook, Kingsborough, Wallabout, and Fort Greene (later renamed
factory development." Moses agreed to expand the Brownsville complex, although in a lengthy response to Hodgkiss's choices George Spargo preferred to balance Brownsville against opportunities elsewhere. The Vladeck Houses in Manhattan should be expanded, Spargo was certain, although he questioned further concentrations nearby. "I think that we have enough on the Lower East Side in the present program," he argued. "If we adopt Hodgkiss' [view], we will have a complete belt of public housing along the East River from Brooklyn Bridge to 14th Street." Spargo favored more work in East Harlem. "Is there anything to be said for consolidating the Thomas Jefferson, the St. Nicholas and the Frawley Circle projects and doing a rather complete job of expanding the lower Harlem project, that is the one from 112th Street to 115th Street."

By late spring 1945, Moses's staff had hammered out the final plans for the city's public housing. An additional $14.8 million state project on the Lower East Side, along with the Governor Smith and Vladeck enlargements, would make a solid wall of public housing from the Brooklyn Bridge to Grand Street. The $9.6 million state project in East Harlem would extend the James Weldon Johnson Houses west to Fifth Avenue. The staff decided to make Brownsville-East New York the third concentration of public housing, with an expected $18.5 million, federally subsidized addition to the Browns-

ville Houses and another $10.5 million state project west of the Navy Yard. These decisions touched off "strenuous objection" about the size of the sites, particularly Brownsville. Some officials questioned whether Moses had exhausted all possibilities for bank-financed, middle-income projects. "The project west of the Navy Yard is of the greatest importance," Moses told the Housing Authority, adding that it had "the united support of all the Brooklyn people." "The fact that this project is near Fort Greene [public project] seems to me to be in no way objectionable... We have projects close together in lower Manhattan and in Harlem." He conceded that the East New York site placed too many units near Brownsville, "but here again we have a neighborhood which needs to be cleared and apparently can be rehabilitated in no other way." 16

Infighting was quelled in time for Mayor La Guardia to announce the gigantic system on his May 27, 1945, address over WNYC. The

Whitman-Ingersoll). After World War II, the combined pressure of the Brooklyn Democratic organization and local reformers completed clearance of "the jungle" around the Navy Yard and the Brooklyn Civic Center. 
Housing Authority's fourteen completed projects sheltering 58,100 would be supplemented by thirteen more, which would house an added 69,573 people. A state bond issue would fund three projects, including those in East Harlem and on the Lower East Side. Another $60 million expected from Washington would make possible another East Harlem project at Jefferson Park and the enormous addition to Brownsville. "Great care has been taken in the selection of the sites," the mayor assured. "All are in undesirable areas where there is not the slightest possibility of rehabilitation through private enter-
prise." Although the mayor's language came from Moses' office, La Guardia agreed with wholesale slum clearance.17

In early 1946, decisions to concentrate projects still rankled, as indicated by State Housing Commissioner Herman T. Stichman's complaint to a civic gathering. Housing Authority chairman Edmond Borgia Butler alerted Moses that the state official voiced "more of his nonsense about the poor planning of the lower Eastside." Moses conceded that Stichman had a valid point, but he denied that it applied to the Lower East Side, Harlem, or other "very substandard areas."18

Moses was sensitive to the charge, however, and responded with talk about "mixed neighborhoods," where private, middle-income redevelopments would be interspersed with low-rent projects. When State Commissioner Stichman held out against the Madison site on the Lower East Side, Moses offered an alternative south of Tompkins Square—"close," he claimed, to "people of somewhat higher in-
come." Moses believed that Stichman would have to approve another state project in the Bronx near an expected middle-income investment by Mutual of New York Life Insurance. Moses worked for another mixed development at Lindsay Park, Brooklyn, for sponsorship by a group of banks. He figured that the City Planning Com-
mission could recommend a state low-rent project on remaining ground near the park. As Moses summarized, "wise city planning requires that a savings bank project should be placed in the neighborhood of every public housing project."19

Bank executives needed constant reminders of their civic obli-
gation. Soon after the war ended, Moses had tried to convince the Savings Bank Trust Company, a credit pool organized by the Bowery and other banks, to finance the Amalgamated Housing Corporation's East Side cooperative and a middle-income project at Bowery Park, Brooklyn. But even Moses could not budge Mutual of New York Life Insurance, whose president, Lewis W. Douglas, worried about the company's high risk in the city. Douglas's assistants never forgot how Metropolitan Life "became entangled" at Stuyvesant Town. They
stroningly doubted whether any government policies, such as tax relief and write-downs, could counter "the forces of decentralization" that would draw tenants to the suburbs.30

Understanding the resistance Douglas faced, Moses presented modest alternatives. These included a "colored" project near St. Mary's Park in the South Bronx for $10.50 per room; acreage west of Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, where higher land costs could be handled by city condemnation; and a Lower East Side project near the Williamsburg Bridge, with tax breaks to keep rents at $14 per room. When Mutual executives preferred the Bellevue site, Moses decided it failed to meet his housing priorities and kept up pressure for the Bronx. Douglas turned it down, writing Moses that his mortgage men told him "the project cannot stand on its feet." Although flustered, Moses persevered for the Bronx, offering rents as high as $12.50 per room. But privately he doubted that Mutual would construct "any project which directly involves the so-called discrimination issue."31

Eventually, Moses's talk of mixed housing wore down Commissioner Stichman's objections to building public housing in mass concentrations. The breakthrough came at a showdown conference between Mayor La Guardia and officials of Governor Dewey's administration. Moses advised the mayor that if he stood firm, the state would have to approve the Navy Yard project, the Madison project north of the Manhattan Bridge, and the Frawley Circle project in the "Puerto Rican section of Harlem." Moses also wanted final agreement on tenant removals for the Governor Smith, Astoria, and Metrose sites. Shrewdly appraising Governor Dewey's concern for the private sector, Moses emphasized his efforts to bring the banks into mixed neighborhoods. In early 1946, Commissioner Stichman grudgingly approved the Brooklyn Navy Yard site under the fiction that it was near the middle-income Concord Houses. When Stichman remained hostile to the Madison Houses, Moses suggested moving it south of Tompkins Square. "While this is fairly close to the belt of public housing on the East River," he explained, "[i]t is in a different neighborhood where people of higher income live, especially those around Tompkins Square." He already had Stichman's agreement to Lindsay Park, Brooklyn, where a savings bank redevelopment and a low-rent project would stand on opposite sides of the park. The arrangement, Moses added, would combine "various income groups, all using the same school, recreation and other facilities."32

In early 1946, thirteen months after Moses began work on a housing program, he presented the new mayor, William O'Dwyer,
with an immense system that reflected his own values and what he confidently believed the city wanted. New York demanded wholesale slum clearance, and he would cover the ground with a low-rent system all his own. He would also entertain the notion of "mixed projects," which mimicked the all-inclusive communities favored by liberals. Throughout the process, neither Moses nor Housing Authority chairman Butler bothered to consult with residents in the affected areas. The authority ended the pretense of local advisory committees, which had little to do because the authority had systematized tenant selection and planned the projects to spartan standards that ruled out community facilities. Moses regarded talk of dispersing black ghettoes as quixotic blather. Nothing persuaded him that housing placement could dilute racial concentrations, especially when bankers and realtors were convinced that the public would never buy this social goal. Charles Abrams could arouse the Ethical Culture Society and the ADA toward the ideal of planned integration, but Moses asked where were the mechanisms for creating these projects, and concluded that none existed beyond isolated, dubious experiments. In the meantime, he had to get on with the business of clearing the most slums for the money.

The Relocation Crunch

The scale of Housing Authority construction depended on passage of the state housing bond issue in the November 1946 elections. But the referendum hinged on voters' perceptions of relocation progress, which reached a crisis because the O'Dwyer administration, goaded by Moses, agreed on slum clearance at all cost. One of Moses's first messages as construction coordinator denounced a bill in the state legislature that would have required the Housing Authority to file relocation plans before site clearance could start. He argued that the concern for evicted tenants was needless, because the Tenant Relocation Bureau, which had succeeded at Stuyvesant Town, was handling the job for the authority in East Harlem. The authority, in fact, had adopted James Fel's proven methods, including an on-site office, canvasses of nearby tenements for vacancies, and revisits of site residents. But even these measures had their limits. Park Department relocation expert Harold Klorfain, whom Moses called upon to examine the relocation bureau's East Harlem operation, concluded that it was confronting people with strong "racial and community
affiliations.” Klorfén recommended that the authority evict “one or two unreasonable tenants as an example to the rest.”

In June of 1946, Moses claimed that the Housing Authority’s refusal to move tenants from clearance sites had jeopardized New York’s housing program. Authority counsel Maxwell H. Tretter pointed out that over 90 percent of the families on seven sites had been relocated, most within the past year. “There is no doubt that we are now reaching the bitter enders,” Tretter conceded, which necessitated “an entirely new approach.” Moses retorted that the way to handle the crisis was “to speed up certain projects and to fill them up with tenants from other projects.” He rejected the alternative suggested by many liberals, that of building on vacant land, because he claimed it would mean wasteful duplication of city construction. The solution for 2,500 families on the Stephen Foster and South Harlem sites, Moses concluded, was to complete James Weldon Johnson, and refugees from the St. Nicholas area would be absorbed in the Abraham Lincoln Houses. Authority chairman Butler agreed that reconstructing Harlem came down to “paying for quick work.”

Nevertheless, Butler warned Mayor O’Dwyer that the authority’s policy of building in “centrally located slum areas” was hindered by “the great scarcity of housing and the tremendous difficulty in relocating families.” The authority, Butler advised, had to consider some sites on the city’s outskirts. Maxwell Tretter added that the crisis required “extraordinary measures and . . . exceptions to principles which in normal times we ourselves espouse”; this was, in effect, a modification of the authority’s historic goal of slum clearance. Tretter estimated that the relocation backlog would swell to 18,000 families when the authority took over more sites in June of 1946. A few vacant areas would ease the jam.

Moses’s reply went straight to Gracie Mansion. He impressed on Mayor O’Dwyer that the vacant-lot idea would “abandon” the policy of slum clearance and betray what New York stood for when liberals had to close ranks behind the state bond issue. The mayor, he stressed, had to seize control of an “unstable” authority board. O’Dwyer did so: he forced chairman Butler to resign and replaced him with a former state highway engineer, General Thomas F. Farrell. Finally, Moses got O’Dwyer’s direct order naming him czar of all public and redevelopment housing. These monumental tasks were added to his duties as city construction coordinator.

With the consolidated position, Moses completed the city’s project list under the state’s loan program. Citing unfinished work in
Brooklyn and East Harlem, Moses mused about an additional project in downtown Brooklyn, although he suspected that State Housing Commissioner Stichman would frown on yet another project close to Fort Greene. East Harlem had a site north of Thomas Jefferson Park where, Moses assistant Arthur Hodgkiss wrote, the right-sized project could “make a real impression on the neighborhood.” Concluding that East Harlem would not attract private capital, Moses decided on more public housing north of Thomas Jefferson Park and on projects to “round out” the reclamation east of Mount Sinai Hospital. On the Lower East Side, the Madison low-rent project and another east of Hamilton Fish Park “would clean up” areas that would otherwise remain untouched by private investment. Moses also slated a public project for “the central negro district” of the Bronx and three in Queens, including “the rundown negro residential area” in Flushing. His rule of thumb was the unlikelihood that private redevelopers would do the job.\(^\text{27}\)

Passage of the state bond issue in November 1946 left relocation a formidable prospect as long as Moses refused to build on vacant land. The quarrel between Moses and Maxwell Trettter reached loggerheads when Housing Authority board member John S. Parke, president of the Presbyterian Hospital, voted with board members Mary Simkhovitch and Frank Crosswhite of the Negro Labor Committee against Moses’s list of projects. At Moses’s behest, Mayor O’Dwyer asked the legislature to replace the authority board with a paid administrator and unpaid members serving at the pleasure of the mayor. In the meantime, Moses urged O’Dwyer to call Parke on the carpet, while Crosswhite got the attention of authority board chairman Thomas Farrell. “I told Tom,” Moses said, “we were working on the [relocation] schedules and also on the matter of additional city-financed public housing on vacant land, what the obstacles are.” Mayor O’Dwyer applied pressure, but Crosswhite refused to bend, leaving Moses’s men without their majority.\(^\text{28}\)

Blocked at the authority, Moses made clear that as construction coordinator he had relocation under control. His office drew elaborate charts showing the flow of site refugees from the Farragut site near the Navy Yard into Brownsville, from Stephen Foster in Harlem into Amsterdam and James Weldon Johnson, and from Melrose in the Bronx (along with Farragut refugees) into the Marcy Houses in Brooklyn. Moses promised plenty of housing for relocation without resorting to vacant land. But he was canny enough to proclaim opponents’ solutions as his own. He agreed to five medium-rent, “city-aided” projects: in Eastchester in the Bronx, Sheephead Bay
in Brooklyn, a site on Staten Island, another in Astoria, Queens, and the fifth in Harlem. Located east of Colonial Park at 155th Street, the Harlem project was hardly an outer-borough site, but Moses expected it to absorb refugees from clearance near St. Nicholas Park. Nevertheless, Farrell could not obtain Frank Crosswaith’s vote. “Mr. Crosswaith apparently favors a vacant land project outside of Harlem,” Moses explained to Mayor O’Dwyer. “He says that the Colonial project is too close to the Harlem Houses. Bearing in mind the differences in rent this is, of course, sheer nonsense, because they are not close together and because projects with different rentals are often placed side by side.” Concluding that “Crosswaith has in the back of his mind siphoning people out of Harlem,” he warned the mayor that the authority faced paralysis with Crosswaith, Parke, and Simkhovich ranged against the Colonial site. O’Dwyer dangled patronage at Crosswaith, who refused to budge. But Moses influenced Parke by threatening to block construction of city facilities at Presbyterian Hospital, and the Colonial project went through.29

Relocation remained a Gordian knot despite the Housing Authority’s faith in Stuyvesant Town techniques. When a city official proposed direct payment to families for self-relocation, Moses jumped at the expedient to hasten their departure. Moving people from clearance projects required “every kind of ingenuity,” he said, “moving houses, and even apartment houses, paying tenants to move, rehabilitating boarded-up structures, building half or one-third of a project at a time, using vacant land housing to assist slum clearance, setting aside apartments for temporary occupancy by people who want to move back to the old neighborhood.” Moses and his staff refused to admit failure. They ridiculed proposed legislation that would halt the evictions from public housing sites until the authority could secure substitute units. Chairman Farrell claimed the bill would “incite” families to raise “petty objections.” Moses aide Harry Taylor put it succinctly: “None of them would help themselves if this were law.” George Spargo agreed. Moses and his staff would not see how their relentless schedules turned the city upside down.30

Friends in Need

Moses was too busy with decisions in the city to give much attention to the Wagner-Ellender-Taft Bill for federal aid to public housing and urban redevelopment. Congressional stragists combined drafts for low-rent projects and for private renewal, but Moses
looked dimly on the omnibus approach. In March of 1947, he urged Mayor O'Dwyer to have city lobbyists ready to detach and save the public housing portion. "There is no reason," he advised, "for sacrificing the loan and grant provisions for federally assisted public housing to the other and more controversial parts of the bill." Moses expected federal grants to finance $236 million for low-rent units over the next four years. The redevelopment provisions would strengthen his campaign to involve the fiduciaries and banks, but this was secondary. He confided to a Republican congressman that as long as redevelopment depended on relocation in public housing, he deemed Wagner-Elledge-Taft "an emergency measure for the next five years," not permanent policy.\footnote{\textsuperscript{31}}

The private sector hesitated about investing in the inner city, whatever the talk of subsidies. Banks had proved a "washout," Moses complained to Henry Bruere of Bowery Savings. They had gotten cold feet about the Concord Village project in downtown Brooklyn. "Won't you, and perhaps two or three forward-looking institutions," he pleaded, "pick up the Concord land from the recalcitrants at a fair price? This is the finest multiple apartment site in New York and with all the Civic Centre improvements around it, it can't help but establish an entirely new kind of neighborhood." The Savings Bank Trust Company, representing the resources of the Bowery and other banks, considered a mortgage for an Amalgamated Housing cooperative project on the Lower East Side. But Savings Bank Trust wanted 4 percent interest, forcing Amalgamated to withdraw from the deal. The Amalgamated's Abraham E. Kazan recalled that Lewis Douglas of Mutual of New York Insurance came to the rescue with a $5.6 million mortgage at 3.5 percent.\footnote{\textsuperscript{32}}

Douglas's intervention nevertheless underscored Moses's headaches with nervous capitalists. Mutual of New York director Louis Pink pleaded with Douglas to consider building Ravenswood, a 1,200-unit apartment complex in Astoria, Queens. To do so, Douglas had to overrule his executives, who were against building on the "wilting and withering locale" on the Queens waterfront. Moses tempted Mutual with streets, parkland, a twenty-five-year tax exemption, and land condemnation under the Redevelopment Companies Law, and he pledged Mayor O'Dwyer's staunch support. But he had to remind Douglas of the Stonybrook Town lesson—"the quid pro quo for municipal condemnation was a nondiscriminatory clause in the contract with the city. "I continue to believe that this will not handicap you in the slightest degree," Moses quickly added. "Certainly some respectable colored families won't hurt the project."\footnote{\textsuperscript{33}}
Convinced that Mutual needed special care, Moses had his Stuyvesant Town team draft a memorandum of agreement that would "bind the officials who finally have to vote." But Mutual wanted strong assurances of city aid. "Mr. Moses is rather indifferent to the risks the company takes," Douglas complained to his staff. "His reply is that we can increase the rents. But one of the difficulties is there is a ceiling in that particular [Queens] area beyond which rents cannot go." Moses and Douglas toured the site in October of 1946 and reached terms over lunch. If the company broke ground within two years, Moses would contribute streets and other city-owned property to get the land down to eighty cents per foot, and he promised maximum tax exemption for twenty-five years. Keeping the details quiet, Moses went to Mayor O'Dwyer and the Board of Estimate to arrange support for $16 rents. He told Douglas the politicians would frown on anything higher for a middle-class project. Although the company was disappointed, Douglas agreed that major obstacles had been removed.34

As inflation raged beyond Office of Price Administration controls during the winter of 1947, Mutual executives saw the $16 limit as an ominous threat. One proposed confronting Moses with the offer to build for $20.75, figuring that the city would have to provide condemnation as a matter of public interest. Douglas needed another summit, which took place in the construction coordinator's limousine on January 11, 1947. According to Douglas's notes, he assured Moses that Mutual favored the project, but was hesitant about cost. Douglas proposed that if the city condemned the land, Mutual would agree to build, with or without tax exemption, within three years, provided that construction costs fell and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) approved mortgage insurance. But Moses could not accept the delay without a stronger commitment, particularly before the 1949 mayoral election. "Beyond that time," Douglas's notes quoted Moses, "we would have trouble and he explained the reasons why (municipal political conditions)." Moses was also bothered by the $20.75 rent, which he considered too high for city condemnation.35

Douglas then brought up another point raised by Mutual's midwestern directors, who were unfamiliar with the city's political climate. "I said to him, in the greatest of confidence, we have run into more trouble with this project as it is the first to be built under the non-discriminatory provisions of the New York City code. I surmise that you will understand immediately why we may want to build under an FHA guarantee. He [Moses] said I see your point perfectly."36
But Moses doubted Mutual would have trouble. "He said he didn't think we would have over twenty negro families." If the project were not tax-exempt, Douglas persisted, "would the city ask us to take any negroes?" Moses replied that the city would not, although the state legislature might require fair occupancy in redevelopment projects. Douglas still faced stiff company opposition to the rent level, even with city tax exemption.

Despite Moses's blandishments, pressure mounted at Mutual to seek a delay and to build Ravenswood gradually, if at all. The company had taken soundings of the construction trade that warned of an inflationary storm. By February of 1947, cost estimates looked so unfavorable that Mutual's executives forced Lewis Douglas to back out. All the powers at Moses's command could not bring the company around. The experience left Moses with a confirmed distaste for antidiscrimination laws. He insisted that "the right of selection of tenants by private investors in new redevelopment housing is one of the basic elements upon which the fiduciaries and other large private investors depend."

The private sector's reluctance cast a pall over the city's anticipation of the Wagner-Ellender-Taft Bill in 1948. Housing Authority chairman Thomas Farrell had already proposed that the authority choose redevelopment sites in conjunction with the City Planning Commission and the construction coordinator. Moses offhandedly replied that he was eyeing for housing investment by commercial banks and other private sponsors 40 acres in Williamsburg, 20 acres in central Harlem, an area north of the Williamsburg Bridge, and a strip near the proposed state project south of Tompkins Square. Another stretch of land, Moses figured, "might bring the Gowanus housing developments up to the business and commercial center of Brooklyn." But imponderables remained, particularly how to remove site tenants, which would require phased clearance and public housing. Moses was also uncertain about the kind of neighborhoods redevelopment should create in addition to the housing. "I am not clear in my own mind," he added to Farrell, "as to whether it would be practical to permit some light manufacturing, garages, and businesses." 18

The hazziness ended in December of 1948, when Mayor O'Dwyer appointed Moses to chair the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance. Moses was ready with what he called his "realist program" for a conference with banks and insurance companies. He proposed clearance areas of at least twenty acres "to make a real impression on the entire neighborhood." They would not impinge on sites
for low-rent public housing. Moses assured, although they would
"logically adjoin" them. He would allow an array of quasi-public,
limited-dividend, and commercial facilities, and, where practical,
some manufacturing. Moses expected to sell sites in advance on an
"agreed basis or at auction under conditions that the plans be carried
out, to responsible financial groups." He anticipated "orderly re-
moval of all tenants over a reasonable period of time," by which he
meant construction phased over a period of five years.\footnote{64}

He had already suggested sites to likely prospects. The first in
Manhattan was south of Washington Square, a rectangle stretching
to Wooster Street, East Houston Street, and Macdougal Street, part
of which New York University wanted for expansion. He knew that
the Metropolitan Opera Association had inquired about West 3rd
Street for an opera house, but the site might also accommodate "a
new Whitney Museum, housing of various kinds, stores and some
play space including a public plaza or place in front of the Opera
House." He favored a second site, north of the Williamsburg Bridge,
for an Amalgamated Housing cooperative, stores, and light manu-
facturing. A third site was 20 acres located north of 125th Street in
Harlem. The fourth site was 20 acres located north of Sara Delano
Roosevelt Park that Moses hoped to devote to business, manufac-
turing, and mixed housing. He also sketched three Brooklyn sites:
between the Gowanus Houses and the Fulton Street business dis-
trict, alongside the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway in Williamsburg,
and in the remaining slums between the Farragut Houses and the
Brooklyn Civic Center.\footnote{65}

Private investors were not excited by Moses's targets. Aside from
Washington Square and Sara Delano Roosevelt Park, where inner-
city renewal fit the Regional Plan Association's old priorities, the
Manhattan sites were grimy slums that resisted glamorous revival.
Investors might have found the location north of the Williamsburg
Bridge suitable if it were not "contaminated" by light manufacturing.
(It eventually was claimed by the Housing Authority for the Bernard
Baruch project.) The three Brooklyn sites would have allowed busi-
ness and factories, and the fourth planned no housing whatever.
Moses had in mind mixed-use areas and had a far more traditional
concept of redevelopment-as-swill-clearance than did the bankers he
hoped to lure into the business.

Moses's outline certainly troubled Housing Authority chairman
Thomas Farrell. Although he did not object to the sites, he warned
against the exclusion of public housing, when relocation, particularly
in Harlem, would require some public units. But Farrell was both-
ered most by turning over large tracts to private redevelopers. Site clearance and relocation, he felt, required "continuous scrutiny and control" by a city agency. Public auctions, he added, were absolutely necessary to safeguard the public interest. Replying that he expected little public housing on most sites, Moses politely told Farrell to stay away from redevelopment. Any administrative costs, Moses added, would be borne by redevelopers who agreed to buy sites "at a fixed figure" and who would relocate tenants with business efficiency. The program had to avoid the bureaucratic red tape "so distasteful to the private capital we must enlist." Public auctions were out of the question, for instance, when the city had to arrange sales carefully in advance for the development "of a university or a cultural center, especially if it is in an area in which the university already owns part of the land." Given redevelopment's sophisticated goals, the city had to tailor the process to sponsors' needs.1

Moses welcomed fiduciaries and bankers to a January 24, 1949, meeting at Randall's Island "to smoke out," he told Mayor O'Dwyer, "their willingness to assume responsibility for building up slum areas." A substantial group attended, including George V. McLaughlin of the Brooklyn Trust Company, James L. Madden of Metropolitan Life, Earl Schwust of the Bowery Savings Bank, Robert W. Dowling of the City Investing Company, Thomas J. Shanahan of the Federation Bank & Trust Co., and plenipotentiaries from the Chase National Bank, National City Bank, and J. P. Morgan & Co. Although Moses drafted them as an advisory committee, redevelopment was clouded by fiscal storms in an election year. Moses warned Mayor O'Dwyer that the city's share of write-downs made an advance agreement with "responsible, private interests" imperative, and he suggested that O'Dwyer authorize him to pursue four sites of particular promise.2

Despite defections by Chase, National City, and J. P. Morgan, Moses offered the finance men the Washington Square and Williamsburg Bridge sites, 30 acres in Harlem south of 135th Street, the ground alongside the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and a small location on the Brooklyn side of the Williamsburg Bridge. But negotiations remained at a standstill. The project north of the Williamsburg Bridge "collapsed," Moses explained, because the Amalgamated Housing Corporation wanted acreage further south, and Moses had reserved that to expand the low-rent Vladeck Houses. Moses put Washington Square in the hands of Robert Dowling and Metropolitan Life vice-president James Madden, a New York University administrator. They were to work closely with the architectural firm
of Eggers & Higgins, which was advising NYU's expansion. But Madden admitted that the university "had already assumed all of the obligations it could carry." In the meantime, eyes had turned to Washington for passage of Wagner-Ellender-Taft.\textsuperscript{43}

**Washington Proposes**

How much federal money to offer the private sector—with how many stipulations—prolonged debate on Wagner-Ellender-Taft that was finally resolved with the Housing Act of 1949. Since the war, New Deal liberals had tangled with Dixiecrats and conservative Republicans over the scope of federal commitment to metropolitan well-being, and particularly to inner-city housing. Few quarreled with the necessity of federal participation to stimulate municipal economies. Most accepted the argument by Truman Democrats that federal dollars were needed to ward off a return of the depression. Most also accepted what economists Alvin Hansen and Guy Greer had said about the write-down. The peculiar nature of urban blight, the dismal slums on expensive land, required public aid to liquidate the cost of assembling and recycling parcels for better use. The write-down was based upon (a) the monetary difference between the fair market value in condemnation and the more dubious appraisal of the potential redeveloper; (b) the cost of clearance, including demolition and tenant relocation; and (c) the cost of site preparation, including installation of water mains, streets, parks, and other amenities for residential communities. The total was daunting for cities whose tax collections had withered in the 1930s and whose postwar fortunes remained uncertain. Only the federal government could shoulder the urban burden in the national interest.\textsuperscript{44}

Debate focused on the magnitude of the federal write-down and the stipulations Washington could ask for its investment; in effect, the degree to which the government could intrude on local real estate markets. New Deal Democrats favored long-term low-interest loans for redevelopment to facilitate continued federal oversight of projects, rent limits on new housing, and redevelopments that dovetailed with master plans. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, the titular leader of Senate Republicans, championed the views of real estate conservatives, who favored federal capital grants instead of loans for the write-downs, rapid disposal of condemned property to private redevelopers, no rent limits, and little or no public housing.

After years of wrangling, Congress enacted the Housing Act of
1949, the omnibus law that gathered together scattered housing programs, including FHA mortgage insurance and rural home finance, into the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA). But the Housing Act was best known for its major features: Title I, which featured the write-down program for residential redevelopment; and Title III, which authorized $10,000 units (over six years) of federally financed public housing. Both sides found satisfaction in the package. The Taft forces had succeeded in making the Title I write-down a one-time capital grant to which the federal government would contribute two-thirds, and in requiring prompt disposal of redevelopment tracts to private sponsors. Taft could furthermore claim that Title I was written to subsidize private, middle-rent housing, as distinguished from Title III public housing. The local redevelopment authority might choose to blend the two programs, particularly as part of a relocation strategy for Title I clearance, but this was left to local discretion. New Deal Democrats could point to Title I's requirement that some local public authority, a city redevelopment agency or housing authority, choose sites that conformed with a master plan and that met the approval of a local planning body. During the start-up stage, the local redevelopment authority was expected to confer on sites with the Urban Redevelopment Administration of the HHFA and could apply for HHFA advanced planning funds. As plans matured, the local government would vote to approve the site plan and the relocation and other features of site preparation, and to condemn the property and approve the one-third local contribution to the write-down. The local redevelopment authority would then proceed to clear the site and relocate tenants. Only then could the local redevelopment authority offer cleared sites at public auction to private sponsors.

Well before the Washington debate was over, New Yorkers had mooted all but the fine points. In December of 1948, William O'Dwyer appointed the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance, headed by Construction Coordinator Moses and composed of the city comptroller, the corporation counsel, the chief engineer of the Board of Estimate, and the chairman of the Housing Authority. But Moses's long experience with redevelopment at Stuyvesant Town, his discussions with the bankers about the Lower East Side, and his work on the Brooklyn Civic Center established precedent for the CSC becoming another one-man "subcommittee." Moses muscled aside Housing Authority chairman Farrell, and CSC operations were run by Moses, his Triborough Bridge deputy, George Spargo, William Lebwohl, Harry Taylor, and other trusted emissaries. A de-
cade of private negotiations and understandings between mayoral advisory committees and private realtors guaranteed that no matter what Congress intended, New York Title I would proceed on handshakes between men who knew the city's special needs.

Promised Land

Urban redevelopment was predicated on private investors, guided and subsidized by city agencies. The policy, however, meant asking venture capitalists to risk millions during the most uncertain moment in the city's history. At the end of World War II, the metropolis stood poised between inflationary boom and postwar collapse, inner-city revitalization and renewal of the suburban trend. The war had ushered in OPA rent controls, which left-wing agitation soon grafted onto local law. The city not only zoned and laid out planning districts, but also designated large swaths for clearance and replanning. The politicization of the housing emergency meant an agenda that included huge bond issues for public projects and even confiscation of idle property. Not since 1937, or perhaps 1919, had realtors faced so many nightmares.35

All this paled in comparison with the race issue, which was a peculiar torment for La Guardia's New York, the cosmopolitan, progressive city, the headquarters of world liberalism, the home of the United Nations. Finding a site for the UN and its personnel of many creeds and colors vexed leaders on hospitality committees in diverse neighborhoods, from Morningside Heights in Manhattan to Sunny-side, Queens. The site selection taxed the legal ingenuity of the men around Mayor William O'Dwyer, who wanted to fashion a welcome that was not so open as to release the forces of racial harmony on real estate developers with no experience in this area. What Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal called America's dilemma was acutely New York's, generated by the city's aspirations for the interracial ideal that it had neither the will nor the means to achieve.46

New York's dilemma became Robert Moses's creative opportunity. Splintered postwar politics handed Moses an array of allies just when the city's redevelopment program needed them most. The Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance established ties with organized labor that bound the blue-collar trades not only as contractors for new housing construction, but also as potential occupants. Major customers for redevelopment housing included members of the liberal, predominantly Jewish needle trades, who were caught in the
cold war struggle with Stalinists in their midst. They came to Moses to help create the cooperative domain that eased the domestication of the left wing after World War II. They rallied around the liberal objective of community revitalization and gave institutional support to the reclamation of the inner city when capitalists hesitated. There was no ideological basis for Moses’s outreach, beyond the fact that Jewish labor leaders were deeply involved in the city’s neighborhoods and liberal Democratic politics.

The relationship that Moses struck with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers depended on the goodwill of its president, Jacob S. Potofsky, and of Abraham E. Kazan, veteran chief of the Amalgamated Housing Corporation. Part businessman, part prophet, Kazan drew such men as attorney Robert Stold and architect Herman Jesser from lucrative practices to join him to build workers’ housing: the Bronx cooperatives and the Amalgamated Dwellings on Grand Street. Kazan’s willpower and tightfisted management kept the Bronx co-ops afloat through the depression. “They were impossible to deal with,” residents said of Kazan and his colleagues. “They used to sit and count pennies in order to make ends meet.” Certainly they kept track of the dollars. Kazan convinced shareholders to accept extra assessments and forego dividend payments to build the reserve fund during hard times. The cooperative movement survived the 1930s as a tiny (980-unit) outpost of idealism in the north Bronx.47

Kazan had few illusions about how these communities got built. He could expound on the educational benefits of cooperative life, but he admitted that his customers “were not cooperators ideologically—they were looking for better housing.” They liked the spaciousness, prices, and limited turn (headaches) offered by managers who took charge of all responsibilities. The Amalgamated’s “pilot projects,” moreover, had proven themselves to hardheaded bankers. “Large financial institutions no longer hesitate to lend substantial sums to soundly organized cooperatives,” Kazan emphasized. “Public confidence in cooperative housing, badly shattered by the several failures in the past—the result of poor financing, poor management and too much politics [i.e., co-ops founded by Communists and anarchists]—is now restored, and tenants-to-be flocked by the thousands.”48

Moses’s relationship with Kazan came to fruition as the war ended, when the Amalgamated Housing Corporation wanted to expand middle-income projects on the Lower East Side. In July of 1946, Moses arranged a straight loan from Mutual of New York Insurance (which probably enabled Lewis Douglas to avoid handling
the Bronx "colored" project). With the mortgage in place, Moses and the Amalgamated, in December of 1946, reached an agreement to build the East River Houses (soon renamed for Sidney Hillman), three twelve-story residential buildings along Grand Street. The city would convey land through eminent domain under the Redevelopment Companies Law for the project to include a garage and a community center, along with a city-built park.30

Moses was soon pressing Kazan to do more. Anxious to expedite a $16 million expansion of the Hillman Houses, Moses offered Kazan an extraordinary municipal package: a thirty-year tax exemption, a break on the city sales tax on construction material, and a pledge to amend the state housing law so that the city could finance a forty-year first mortgage on the project. "Whether or not the City wishes to go into this type of housing" was a decision Moses said he reserved for Mayor O'Dwyer, although he tried to bind the city to those terms. The arrangement fell through after City Comptroller Lazarus Joseph refused to concur. The Amalgamated proceeded on the Hillman extension without the subsidy, although Moses did what he could. When eminent domain payments came to $300,000 more than expected, Moses stepped in to ease the burden, despite Comptroller Joseph's further complaints. He intervened again when construction stalled over relocation of 218 families. Moses had the Housing Authority waive income limits and accept forty families as a gesture, he said, of "our cooperation in the slum clearance work which the Amalgamated is undertaking."30

The Amalgamated Housing Corporation was already Moses's favorite redeveloper when discussions occurred about Title I sites in late 1949. For some time, as Moses claimed, he had hoped to expand the Amalgamated domain in "one guise or another," and in December he called Jacob Potofsky's attention to Title I. Moses's inquiry prompted more than he bargained for: the establishment of the Council for Cooperative Development by Kazan, attorney Robert Szold, former Housing Authority counsel Maxwell Tretter, cooperative enthusiast Shirley F. Boden, and eminent housing re-former Clarence Stein. Moses's aggressive patronage convinced them to think about urban cooperatives on a mass scale. But when he saw their enthusiastic solicitation, he responded, "Who in hell are these lads?" His staff agreed that they might hatch "very unstable projects." Moses worked with Kazan and Tretter, who were known quantities and who talked dollars and cents about specific deals.31

The city's relationship with the unions was consummated at the Board of Estimate on May 18, 1950. Behind closed doors and despite
the uneasiness of board members who looked at the city’s balance sheets, Moses arranged tax exemption for the International Union of Electrical Workers’ 2,226-unit cooperative at “Elecchester” in Queens, another grant for a Brooklyn project sponsored by the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, and the “necessary arrangements” for the Amalgamated Housing Corporation’s Title I cooperative at Corleas Hook. At a stroke, the city had subsidized construction of 5,000 middle-income units, and in the middle of the 1950 mayoral race, Moses had done more for labor’s cooperative commonwealth than the candidates who claimed to run as labor men. Within days, the Council for Cooperative Development incorporated as the United Housing Foundation (UHF). Headed by Amalgamated veterans
Kazan and Szold, it would harness union pension funds to build cooperatives in systematic fashion.\textsuperscript{32}One cooperative outside the UHF's realm, Queensview, was erected by reformers on the aborted Ravenswood site in Long Island City. After Mutual of New York Life Insurance backed out, company director Louis Pink corralled other housing reformers to organize a nonprofit cooperative. Pink arranged from Mutual an 80 percent mortgage for a 620-unit cooperative. Owner-shareholders were expected to put up the 20 percent equity, which ranged from $2,100 to $2,900 per apartment, and to pay maintenance of $17 per room. Abraham Kazan advised how to make Queensview a genuine cooperative, and settlement leaders helped with community facilities. But success hinged on Board of Estimate approval, which the incorporators hoped would come with some fanfare. "Our public relations people," a Queensview officer explained, "believe that a statement from the Mayor [O'Dwyer] shortly after approval of the project would be of tremendous value to our sales program."\textsuperscript{33}

Queensview's most celebrated feature was a pioneering interracialism. City Planning Commissioner Cleveland Rodgers, Moses's loyal publicist as well as his staunch ally on the commission, observed that many liberals considered Queensview the first large redevelopment designed to comply with the antidiscrimination laws. Pink and his colleagues insisted on barring discrimination. They worked hard to recruit black shareholders and hired James Felt & Company to seek applicants. Charles Abrams's exposé of residential bigotry, Forbidden Neighbors (1955), lavished praise on Queensview as the housing venture that leveled racial barriers.\textsuperscript{34}

Queensview proved to be another battleground in the cold war at home. Despite recruiting efforts among blacks, most shareholders were middle-class Jews who streamed in from Greenwich Village, the West Bronx, and the Upper West Side. They brought along a predilection for factional politics, including vehemenence about the Communist-dominated American Labor party. Some ALPers competed in the election of Queensview's first board of directors, which included such outsiders as Charles Abrams, housing reformer Ira S. Robbins, and Ethical Culture Society leader Algernon D. Black. During the previous months, one resident explained, "a well organized and active left-wing minority" seemed determined "to capture control of the board." Some residents worried that "a left-wing label" would scare away the waiting list and ruin shareholders' equity. But after an "arduous campaign," liberals managed to swamp the radicals.
Queensview confirmed Kazan's belief that postwar co-ops needed carefully chosen boards of directors to promote sedate cooperation rather than sectarian squabbling. Otherwise they would be shunned by lending institutions and city officials. Supporters of the UHF, along with national spearheads of the movement, such as the Cooperative League and the Washington-based Cooperative Society of the U.S.A., recognized what rested on the campaign in New York. They may have differed on points with Moses or found him irascible to deal with, but they trusted him to deliver sites and write-downs when it counted.\footnote{56}

Moses's other allies included institutional builders at New York University, who dreamed of extending the campus across Greenwich Village. The spearhead was James L. Madden, the Metropolitan Life vice-president who joined the NYU Council (board of trustees) in late 1946, headed the council's special committee on development, and became university treasurer. As chairman of the council's reconstituted planning committee and as an advocate of preemptive land acquisition on Washington Square, Madden kept liaison with the architectural firm Eggers & Higgins, employed in late 1946 to plan the university's future. Administrators agreed that expanded facilities, particularly dormitory space, were crucial to maintain the university's enrollment—and tuition revenues. "The money of the Square," the provost quipped, "keeps the University mare in feed."\footnote{56}

Eggers & Higgins's blueprints, which showed "how much territory might be adapted with Georgian style structures to university purposes," were welcomed by Robert Moses, who intervened with timely aid. Moses arranged at the City Planning Commission for a denial of the zoning variance on Washington Square South that builder Anthony Campagna needed for an apartment tower on land that the university coveted for its own uses. (Moses also encouraged NYU's partnership in the Bellevue Hospital medical complex, a coup of immense importance to the university.) NYU owed Moses an obligation, but the university could only go so far as a redevelopment partner. In late 1947, Madden promised the university council that his planning committee would not venture into "visionary undertakings."\footnote{57}

The university could prepare itself, however, if opportunity knocked. Madden had proposed organizing a "foundation" that would buy and control properties around Washington Square, but that would be kept independent of the university for fiscal and public-relations reasons. The chance came in the summer of 1948, when Moses pressed Campagna to sell his idle property at fair market
value. “All at once,” remarked NYU chancellor Harry W. Chase, “the housing project south of Washington Square has come back to life.” Campagna pledged to build the first unit of the project for the university at cost plus 5 percent with a mortgage from Metropolitan Life. Chancellor Chase relied on James Madden to distance NYU’s involvement: “He will set up a board of trustees and the University will be kept away from the housing project.” The opportunity, Chase believed, revived “the whole question of a housing corporation for the redevelopment of properties south of Washington Square. . . . This will in no way come back on the University, but after it is free from debt the corporation will, I take it, pay over its profits to the University.” Chancellor Chase had no doubt that the achievement would leave the university “sitting pretty.” After Moses warned NYU to act fast or the Metropolitan Opera would get the nod from the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance, Madden and Campagna rounded up “prominent citizens” to sponsor a redevelopment corporation for the area between West 3rd Street and Houston Street. The citizens committee soon gave way to favored realtors, who sponsored the controversial Title I project called “Washington Square South.”

At the other end of Greenwich Village, liberals thrust on Moses another venture to redeem the city. The New York–based Marshall Field Foundation, organized by the Chicago department store heir to pursue social betterment, had agonized over urban race relations and the possibility of developing prototypes for interracial housing. In the summer of 1948, a committee comprising Marshall Field III and his wife (Ruth), Judge Justine Wise Polier (daughter of Rabbi Stephen J. Wise and a founder of the State Committee Against Discrimination), Channing H. Tobias (head of the Phelps Stokes Fund), and Lloyd K. Garrison (Field Foundation legal counsel and National Urban League president) embarked on a pilot project. They hired former Housing Authority counsel Maxwell Trettter to explore the practical steps for creating an interracial community. Trettter relied on Garrison’s soundings of bankers, who advised that to build decent housing for rents under $19 required city tax exemption, which meant facing local antidiscrimination laws. Garrison found institutions “hesitant to invest even first mortgage money” under those conditions. Mortgage lenders regarded the few examples of mixed tenancy as wartime arrangements sustained by the scarcity of shelter. It was widely expected, Garrison added, that “admission of Negroes to projects would, when the housing shortage is over, drive out white tenants.” This was all the more reason why Trettter concluded that the
Attempts to modernize Greenwich Village, 1949—1953. Old civic ambitions to redevelop the area south of Washington Square, coupled with the Holden, McLaughlin & Associates Planning Recommendations (1946), justified a series of attempts by New York University, the Washington Square Association, the
Field Foundation could “demonstrate the commercial practicability of non-discriminatory housing” without subsidies.¹⁹

Having agreed on the basics, Ruth Field and her associates turned to practical issues. They decided that only a project of substantial size, at least 500 units, could have the right impact. It would have to be located in a blighted area to take advantage of the condemnation and tax-exemption privileges of the redevelopment law. At the same time, they insisted on a white neighborhood to prove that interracialism did not endanger property values, and they wanted Manhattan’s cosmopolitanism and media impact. They also rejected a cooperative in favor of a rental project, which more blacks could afford and which would provide a greater lesson for mortgage lenders. All along, they operated under a principle of controlled interracialism. The Field trustees agreed to keep black tenancy below 20 percent, while rejecting what they called the “discrimination” of quotas, thus settling on the concept of a “preponderance of whites.” They understood that to mean that “the proportion of Negro tenants to white, according to the laws of probability, would be not far from that of the general proportion . . . in the population at large—roughly ten per cent.” “Only in this way,” observed Mrs. Field, Judge Polier, and Channing Tobias, “could the project achieve the significance which ought to attach to it.”²⁰

Pledging $250,000 toward the $1 million equity (with the remainder to come from other philanthropic donations), the Field Foundation incorporated an operational arm, the Foundation for the Improvement of Urban Living (FIUL), and hired Trettter as executive director. Although Trettter recognized that a white Manhattan neighborhood spelled high land costs and what Trettter called “severe” tenant relocation, FIUL leaders hoped he could find $8-per-square-foot land that, with an FHA-insured mortgage, would bring rents to $20 per room. In the meantime, FIUL commissioned a sociologist from the New School for Social Research to survey attitudes

Field Foundation, and the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance to modernize large portions of the Village after World War II. The Field Foundation and Washington Square South Title I projects, along with the Simkhovitch Houses, were defeated by community opposition. New York University and local property interests finally succeeded in superblock clearance at the Washington Square Southeast Title I, which provided room for NYU’s Bobst Library, Washington Square Village, and the University Plaza Apartments.
of white, middle-class New Yorkers toward living with blacks. After studying a sample top-heavy with members of the ADA and the American Veterans Committee, the sociologist reported that strong demand for apartments in the $17-to-$25 range was unaffected by the project's interracial character.*

Tretter managed to find a site on Washington Street in the West Village that offered nearly 4 acres at $9.03 per square foot. The property was expensive and contained little blight, but Tretter concluded that the time had come to consult with Robert Moses, "who is in a key position in relation to slum clearance." Moses's involvement was all the more imperative as the FIUL campaign to attract private investors for the $1 million equity hit unforeseen snags. Moses promised complete cooperation, Tretter reported, "and said that the Mayor [O'Dwyer] wants to announce four or five projects as soon as the President has signed the housing bill."**

A few days after President Truman signed the Housing Act of 1949, Tretter, Mrs. Field, and Channing Tobias met with Moses to fix the FIUL project on the mayor's Title I list. Moses was anxious to proclaim the deal, and, to Tretter's embarrassment (since FIUL had yet to clinch philanthropic investment), told the newspapers that the Field Foundation would clear slums on Washington Street. In late July, FIUL advisor Lloyd Garrison walked the site and found it "awfully good," particularly because Tretter said that Title I could get square-foot land costs down "to a workable figure of around $3." Confirming Moses's enthusiasm for the location, Garrison hoped Tretter would move quickly on the details. Certainly Moses expected the Field trustees to get cracking. As Tretter observed, "now that we have started with Commissioner Moses, we will be under pressure from him for continued activity and progress."***

That was a wry understatement, given the site's costs and lack of blight. The 4 acres, bounded by West 11th Street, Washington Street, West 12th Street, and Greenwich Street, were actually assessed at $10.50 per foot. But when Tobias, Garrison, and Tretter met Moses on September 19, 1949, they offered $2 per foot and expected the city to condemn the site and relocate the families. Be-moaning the fiscal loss, Moses countered with $3 and loaded the cost of demolition and relocation back on the FIUL. Despite the hard bargaining, Tretter recognized the terrific price, which made the venture feasible. It was never pleasant to exchange views with the construction coordinator. With the media at his disposal, Moses could give an embarrassing twist to the work of the most public-spirited groups. But Tretter knew that once Moses was convinced
on specific plans, a decent cause could have no more enthusiastic or
effective public servant.44
Robert Moses and his associates did not set out to use Title I for
commercial purposes, to swamp the city with hapless relocates, and
to shove around people of color. They put their stake in pilot projects
of limited scope. They had a fairly balanced conception of the pur-
pposes of Title I and saw a city of middle-class housing and mixed-use
neighborhoods rising where slums had stood. It was the lending
community that wanted restricted upper-middle-income projects
and boycotted redevelopments "contaminated" by public housing
and factory sites. In the face of these private pressures, Moses's mo-
mentary championship of "mixed" neighborhoods seemed almost
naive. The private sector forced Title I beyond many of the politi-
cal and social constraints that Moses accepted for operating in the
liberal city.

As Title I got off the drawing boards, critics were scandalized
by what they claimed was Moses's reckless abandonment of public
oversight of private redevelopment. The public-private distinction
had no relevance in New York, where liberals as well as conservatives
vied for public subsidies for private ventures, and where a host of
reformers, nonprofit redevelopers, and trade unions elaborated stan-
dards of public use as they went along. A particular sore point was
the charge that the Committee on Slum Clearance abdicated munici-
pal responsibility for handling tenant relocation as Title I stipulated.
Liberals claimed that handling relocation was the least the city owed
unfortunate refugees. At the time, however, the chief importance of
city-handled relocation to redevelopers was lowered project costs, as
moving tenants seemed to them a prohibitive expense. Relocation
by municipal agency was not the recognition of public well, but
merely the way to slough off a burdensome expense. In the city that
pioneered constraints on the profit sector in the 1930s, quasi-private
redevelopers emerged with no guidelines whatever, except for the
limits that people of goodwill agreed upon with the construction
coordinator. Whatever Congress might propose in 1949, the New
York approach had already moved in its own direction.