We ask for so little, just a placid glimpse of nature, just a chance to live without chasing all over to find a park, a play ground, and a good school, shops and market.
Mary K. Steinbovitch

The New York approach depended on liberal neighborhoods with redevelopment goals as ambitious as any directed by Robert Moses. The earliest Title I projects emerged in Greenwich Village, Morningside Heights, and the Upper West Side, where the postwar vogue in citizens politics (by nonpartisan civic groups) demanded municipal action to revive neighborhoods. The process usually began with an exercise in community self-definition by civic councils and social-welfare leaders, who applied venerable techniques of neighborhood research. After poring over property maps and census data, civic groups defined norms of homogeneous community life, which used class and race to measure what was discordant on the fringes. These steps were carried out by self-proclaimed citizens committees, executives acting in plenary sessions, and planners who stamped their sketches “confidential.” Then they crossed their fingers and presented their plans to the construction coordinator.

If the process overrode the precepts of civic democracy, it was responding to anxieties about the urban condition in the late 1940s. Although the American victory in World War II contributed to a general confidence in what civic life might accomplish, the war also added troubling new elements. Mobilization had fueled the northern flow of blacks and Hispanics, whose numbers reached huge but
uncertain proportions in metropolitan neighborhoods. As a struggle against racism, the war had weakened the Jim Crow habits that had kept minorities in urban ghettos. Civic leaders understood that the postwar metropolis was to be created not only with brick and mortar, but also with a social structure born of a new racial etiquette. Urban liberals were up to the challenge. The generation that had fought the war and then girded to save Europe from communism was ready to apply that sense of mission to reclaiming the cities from social disaster. Preoccupied with crusades abroad and at home, banker David Rockefeller told a redevelopment meeting on Morningside Heights: “The free society which we are willing to defend with our lives from aggression from without is in danger of crumbling from within unless each individual and each community nurtures the will to freedom and accepts the responsibilities which are incumbent on us as citizens.”

Futurama for the Village

Plans to renew Greenwich Village were shaped during World War II by the Postwar Planning Committee of the Greenwich Village Association (GVA), an amalgam of realtors and boosters, and Greenwich House, which expressed the welfare agenda of the Lower West Side Council of Social Agencies. In reality, GVA architect Robert C. Weinberg drew sketches for the approval of GVA leader Mary K. Simkhovitch. Weinberg embodied the conflicting interests of residents in the postwar Village. He belonged to the Washington Square Association, which spoke for Lower Fifth Avenue property and civic interests, and to the Washington Square Neighbors, brownstone owners and preservationists who were vigilant against speculative threats to the Square. Simkhovitch was still the Village proconsul, who shaped the city’s obligations to her neighbors, and who understood that instruments such as the Redevelopment Companies Law meant opportunities for community renewal. “Revised and changed neighborhoods cannot be made to blossom without both public and private aid,” Simkhovitch wrote. “The narrow concept that planning must be the work of private individuals or corporations alone is as unrealistic as it is to assume that government alone can handle the job.”

After a March 1944 meeting of the Postwar Planning Committee with Simkhovitch and planner Arthur Holden, Weinberg drafted a redevelopment proposal. He began with the assumption that some
Village neighborhoods needed rehabilitation through joint efforts by the Housing Authority and private investors. Based on the City Planning Commission's master plan, Weinberg argued that Village areas M-10a and M-10b deserved demolition of substandard dwellings to create “attractive new residential neighborhoods.” Greenwich House had already surveyed area M-10b, which was on the waterfront, and Weinberg agreed that this peripheral section deserved low-rent public units. But his real interest was M-10a, an area bounded by West Broadway, Seventh Avenue, Spring Street, and West 4th Street, that was “close enough to Washington Square and other established residential neighborhoods . . . to justify at least one housing project for tenants of a somewhat higher economic level,” which Weinberg estimated at $9 to $11 per room. The danger was piecemeal rehabilitation of tenements to the south and west. With efforts such as Stuyvesant Town in mind, Weinberg warned that “individual renovations” would block the “orderly redevelopment . . . which we all hope to see undertaken in the not too distant future.”

In 1945, the Fifth Avenue interests in the Washington Square Association hired the Holden, McLaughlin architectural firm to sketch plans for the postwar Village. The consultants proposed to increase what they called the “influence” of Washington Square by extending park space between West Broadway and Thompson Street to Houston Street. On either side, the remaining portions of “Planning Area C” would be cleared of “obsolete” lofts and tenements to make way for medium-rent housing under the Redevelopment Companies Law. These projects, in turn, would connect with a Houston Street expressway (“a shelf highway over stores and intermediate streets”) and apartments to create a “belt at least 200 feet deep on either side of the new widened street.” Spot demolitions in “Planning Area D,” Greenwich Village proper, would eliminate “narrow old law tenements that cause congestion,” and the circumference formed by Hudson Street, Sixth Avenue, and Greenwich Street would be lined by high-rise apartments. Published by the Washington Square Association in 1946, the Holden, McLaughlin Planning Recommendations would ready the Village for the demands of the modern metropolis.

Civic leaders were anxious to move ahead with the plans. Robert Weinberg, fearful that the Washington Square Association would dawdle over the Holden, McLaughlin report, called on the Washington Square Neighbors to take the initiative. Some townhouse owners shared his eagerness. According to one member, the Neighbors felt that the Holden, McLaughlin Planning Recommendations should be the basis for “revamping” of the South Washington Square Neigh-
borhood . . . and holds great possibilities for the city." She favored reconstruction of the South Village with something on the scale of the United Nations headquarters. By then, of course, the city had decided to locate the UN on Rockefeller-purchased land on the East River. Nevertheless, she told Weinberg that she intended to send copies of the Holden, McLaughlin report to "our friend" Wallace K. Harrison.5

Harrison was a curious choice for preservers of Washington Square values, considering the architect's taste for modernism that dated from the 1939 World's Fair, whose symbols of the future, the Trylon and Perisphere, he had designed. The Rockefellers' favorite architect, Harrison was a confidant and an intellectual mentor for John D. Jr.'s sons. He had been a coordinating architect for Rockefeller Center, and contributed Building No. 11, a granite megalith, complete with an 800-car underground garage. After a stint as Nelson A. Rockefeller's cultural advisor in the State Department during the war, Harrison worked on two projects of inestimable importance for redeveloped New York. He designed William Zeckendorf's "X-City" on the East River at 42nd Street, a complex that would have included two curved, fifty-five-story slabs, a heliport, a waterfront restaurant, and, that token of hemispheric solidarity, a nightclub. He also planned the first United Nations headquarters on the old World's Fair site for Robert Moses. When Moses engineered the deal with the Rockefellers that squeezed out "X-City" in favor of the UN on 42nd Street, Harrison set to work on the bold symbol of world government on the East River. Robert Weinberg, nevertheless, hoped to interest Harrison in "the area south of the Square for a large residential project, possibly in connection with the United Nations." Harrison had "extraordinary financial and political connections," Weinberg agreed. "Whether Mr. Harrison, with his 'futurama' tendencies, would have as much concern for the aesthetic values, I do not know, but certainly he has the imagination and initiative which will be needed."6

With Harrison's talents engaged elsewhere, the Holden, McLaughlin proposals became the centerpiece of the Greenwich Village Association's February 1947 conference on housing and planning. GVA activists agreed that the conference was a golden opportunity to showcase the Village to city officials and major investors, such as General Otto L. Nelson, Jr., of New York Life, and James Felt, who represented Metropolitan Life. Arthur Holden described his ideas for long-term redevelopment on a panel that included Manhattan borough president Hugo E. Rogers, Paul O'Keefe of the Savings
Plans for postwar Greenwich Village, 1946. Over the existing street grid, Holden, McLaughlin & Associates proposed sweeping changes for consideration by the Washington Square Association. The planners would have preserved the Square, "stabilized" high-class residential areas to the north, and turned the New York University campus eastward. Everything else would have

Bank Trust Company, and several speculative builders, including Anthony Campagna. "This is the first time," Mary Smkhovitch boasted to Mayor William O'Dwyer, "that a neighborhood has had the gumption to get up a report on its own housing and planning." 7

Soon afterward, Villagers gave the City Planning Commission a direct invitation to redevelop south of the Square. Writing for

the Washington Square Neighbors, Robert Weinberg endorsed the Holden, McLaughlin proposals for what he described as "large-scale clearance and reconstruction... of the blighted area lying between Washington Square and Houston Street." At the same time, he called attention to needed arterial improvements, such as a crosstown expressway along Canal Street and another on Houston Street. Also
on Weinberg's list was a north-south highway parallel with Hud-
son Street to keep trucks out of the West Village. The construction
of highways girding the Village had become central to its civic
demands. By contrast, the Village gave only halfhearted support to public
housing. In January of 1948, Mary Simkhovitch asked the Lower
West Side Council for Social Planning whether it would favor
"unsubsidized" public housing, renting for about $9 per room. When
social-welfare leaders tabled the question, American Labor party
supporters asked for the views of an ad hoc Coordinating Commi-
tee on Housing. The committee, which had sprung up to campaign
for Wagner-Ellender-Taft and OPA rent controls, favored a low-rent
project on the Lower West Side. Denying rumors that it was "a left-
ish pressure group," a spokeswoman wondered why her committee
generated little support in the Village. Social-welfare leaders replied
that the committee's alleged Communist affiliation forced them to
"work for the same thing on parallel lines." As civic leaders distanced themselves from the left wing, they
drew closer to developers of middle-income housing. Robert Wein-
berg favored working with rather than against New York Uni-
versity's expansion and tried to convince the Washington Square
Neighbors to support the university's building program along Fifth
Avenue. Villagers agreed to compromise with Robert Moses's plans
for a traffic route through Washington Square if it meant eradica-
ing blight further south. In April of 1948, the Washington Square
Association endorsed one proposal for vehicular traffic, contingent
on Moses's pledges south of the Square "in connection with the
re-development of private property." The compromise was anathema to the minority of Villagers com-
mitted to public housing. In May of 1948, when the Lower West
Side Council for Social Planning learned of the redevelopment ini-
tiative, a dissenter attacked the proposed rent level as "above the
reach of those people for whom there was the greatest need." Mary
Simkhovitch tried to paper over the differences. She helped con-
vince the Greenwich Village Association to accept redevelopment
south of Washington Square without public housing by conveying
the Housing Authority's judgment that low-rent projects were "dif-
cult of realization" in the district. As a face-saving gesture, the
Lower West Side Council joined the Greenwich Village Association
to resolve for projects on the outskirts of the city. In early 1949, talk about Wagner-Ellender-Taft convinced the
Washington Square Association that redevelopment might realize
the Holden, McLaughlin Planning Recommendations. The association hoped that federal write-downs would subsidize a ten-block clearance for “development by private capital into a planned neighborhood, including two blocks for a park.” A few months later, the Greenwich Village Association was dismayed to learn that Moses’s Committee on Slum Clearance had offered the Field Foundation a site on Washington Street in the West Village. The Washington Street owners bristled at the idea that their neighborhood was a slam. But both the Greenwich Village and Washington Square associations refused to get involved as long as they hoped for Moses’s support for clearance elsewhere. The Washington Square Association offered another Mary Simkhovitch compromise, which called for “diversified and inter-racial” projects to “preserve the present character of the Village,” coupled with a warning against creating “a segregated area of one-income families,” a reference to lower-class public housing. For its part, the Greenwich Village Association invited Moses, the City Planning Commission, the Housing Authority, and the Field Foundation to develop low-income, middle-income, and private projects side by side. The mixed-income formula became the basis for a redevelopment package that civic leaders would soon regret.12

Cold War Acropolis

Redevelopment as a process of community definition occurred with grave urgency on Morningside Heights, where fears about the loosening of racial boundaries were intermingled with hopes for postwar planning. The Heights had the city’s largest concentration of educational institutions, including Barnard College, Teachers College, Union Theological Seminary, and Juilliard School of Music. But the institutions that dominated this American “acropolis,” as the neighborhood sometimes called itself, were Columbia University and such Rockefeller benefactions as the Riverside Church and International House, New York, which pursued scholarship and ecumenical endeavors on a global scale. Those who devoted themselves to postwar Protestant unity, the international monetary system, and Free World responsibilities chafed at the shabby facilities that Morningside Heights provided their efforts.

Before World War II, Riverside Church, Teachers College, and Columbia University kept a nervous watch on the social deterioration in Manhattanville, across 125th Street, and the spread of black
tenants along Claremont Avenue. The war aggravated these fears even as it burdened institutions with homefront responsibilities. In June of 1944, the rising tide of juvenile delinquency prompted welfare experts to assess the black population along St. Nicholas and Convent avenues and to urge support for day-care services at the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center. Contributions, chiefly from John D. Rockefeller III, mobilized youth workers from Columbia University, Riverside Church, and Union Theological Seminary. A Rockefeller advisor predicted tough going against the “roving gangs [that] . . . infest this valley district,” but the Reverend Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick of the Riverside Church sensed that “a movement has gotten underway.”

Collective action depended, of course, on leadership by Columbia University, which emerged from the war pained by the neighborhood insecurity that undermined its world-class status. When Columbia Business School dean R. D. Calkins and economist Raymond Saulnier proposed “to protect the area from progressive decline,” Columbia president Nicholas Murray Butler claimed he was “pressing the matter of control of this [neighborhood] property.” University provost Frank D. Eckenthal had been familiar with Columbia’s protective policies before the war, and when he became acting president on Butler’s retirement in early 1946, he knew the direction Columbia had to take.

Another stimulus came from the University of Chicago, which had considerable success in luring away Columbia professors and handling similar neighborhood problems after the war. In May of 1946, David Rockefeller and other trustees of International House, New York, invited sociologist and planning consultant Wilbur C. Munnecke, a vice-president of the University of Chicago, to examine the “Int-House” community. After surveying Claremont Avenue that summer, Munnecke’s somber conclusions became the confidential wisdom among officials on the Heights. Munnecke saw the Heights as being at a crossroads, but stressed the futility of old methods of urban preservation. “Communities attempt to protect themselves,” said the Chicago expert, “by creating vertical restrictions, that is, by barring commercial properties, apartment buildings, Negroes, Jews, or any other group or class different from the group or class within the community.” Restrictive covenants and zoning devices were “wrong in principle,” he pointed out, and “institutions in this Community should, above all other institutions, be opposed to vertical restrictions.” Such restrictions, Munnecke maintained, were no more than delaying actions, and they also failed to work.
Borrowing from his Chicago experience, Munnecke recommended what he called “horizontal restrictions,” which he explained were “positive actions” designed to keep worthy neighbors and discourage undesirables. With coordinated incentives, including city and state programs, mortgage subsidies, and tax relief, a disciplined effort over the next twenty-five years could create “a self-sustaining Community which is the spiritual, cultural and intellectual center of the world.” Within a planning document that soared with One Worldism, Munnecke urged International House, New York, to plan wholesale redevelopment, starting with a campaign against local rooming houses.26

During the spring of 1946, opinion had become “unanimous and urgent.” Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote, for measures that went beyond the piecemeal. As Dr. Fosdick quoted Frank Fackenthal, “We face such a potentially dangerous problem in our neighboring community of Manhattanville, that all the institutions on The Hill are constrained, both by motives of philanthropic good will and by motives of self protection.” Writing to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Fosdick added his fears for “the community into which Mr. [John D.] Rockefeller Jr., for example, has put so large an investment, and into which some of us have put the best portions of our lives.” A Rockefeller Brothers administrator confirmed the crisis that had been brought by “Negro and Puerto Rican people . . . moving in from Harlem.”27

Impressed by the message from International House, Fackenthal called a meeting on November 8, 1946, of heads of institutions on the Heights to consider the Munnecke report. The occasion was the policy debut of banker David Rockefeller, chairman of the trustees of International House and the Riverside Church, whom Fosdick described as the “prime mover” in the discussions. The meeting decided on a long-range planning committee, chaired by Joseph Campbell, Columbia University vice-president for finance. Serving with Campbell were John L. Mott, a trustee of the Riverside Church, General Otto Nelson of New York Life Insurance, and Lawrence M. Orton of the New York City Planning Commission.28

From the beginning, the Campbell committee saw its goal as not merely to stem blight but also to reclaim the fringes of Morningside Heights from Harlem’s incursions. Riverside Church trustee John Mott prepared a statement about additional institutions that might be brought into the area, including their likely requirements for office space and employee housing. The committee then turned to Columbia University economist Ernest M. Fisher and his newly established
Institute for Urban Land Use to estimate costs for a district study and long-range plan.19

Having devoted his institute to research on urban real estate, particularly redevelopment, Fisher was eager for the contract and organized a committee of Columbia academics, including economist Raymond Saulnier and sociologist Robert K. Merton, to study Morningside Heights from the perspective of the social sciences. Fisher's academics reported a degree of neighborhood "deterioration" that would soon reach the point of no return. The "Hill's" institutions, Merton and his colleagues claimed, faced "the alternatives of taking constructive action to defeat these forces, of abandoning the area, or of attempting what may well be nearly impossible—the maintenance of their usefulness in the midst of a blighted area." But courageous action could make Morningside Heights "the educational and cultural counterpart of the political Capitol of the World." That required reconstructing the entire district west of Morningside Avenue, from 110th to 125th streets. The academics recommended a study of redevelopment costs, but urged data on probable institutional requirements, including which institutions might move in "if suitable headquarters could be made available." At the same time, they proposed social research into "creating a community whose facilities can be available without restrictions as to race, color, or creed." Finally, Fisher's group urged the Campbell committee to create a corporate structure, with technical staff, to give redevelopment forceful direction.20

With Fisher's recommendations in hand, the Campbell committee reconvened on February 13, 1947, and named David Rockefeller, Wallace Harrison, Otto Nelson, and City Planning Commissioner Orton to write a detailed prospectus. Several days later, the trustees of Columbia University and Barnard College approved the goal of re-

Morningside Heights, Inc., 1957 (opposite). After World War II, the assembled institutions on "the Hill" struggled to contain black and Puerto Rican migrants moving west of Morningside Park and south of 125th Street. Informal pressure held the line until 1947, when the institutional consortium, Morningside Heights, Inc., pursued the redevelopment that built the Morningside Gardens Title I, and the concentration of public housing along 125th Street, the General Grant and Manhattanville Houses. Today Morningside Heights, Inc., still provides community leadership as the Morningside Area Alliance.
development of Morningside Heights. In March of 1947, the Campbell committee approved a corporate mechanism, adopted a preliminary budget of $100,000, and, with caution against "widespread discussion of this venture," agreed to call their new consortium by the most innocuous name of Morningside Heights, Inc.21

Some Morningside Heights leaders were uneasy about the costs of holding back neighborhood change. Lincoln Cromwell, president of St. Luke's Hospital, was particularly bothered about the implications of the "horizontal plan." Insisting that the Hill would not countenance exclusion, Frank Fackenthal emphasized that with "a horizontal plan . . . we may be able to set a pattern that will be . . . a big step forward in the handling of mixed populations." Somewhat reassured, Cromwell pledged to bring along the Juilliard trustees, but, as he related to Henry Van Dusen, president of the Union Theological Seminary, he doubted "the advisability of barring admission . . . to any elements which we consider unwelcome." When Cromwell still hesitated about approaching Juilliard, Van Dusen denied that the horizontal plan meant "excluding any social or racial group"; instead, he claimed, it meant attracting with housing and other facilities those that would "augment its [the Heights'] intellectual, cultural and spiritual strengths."22

The doubts momentarily set aside, the consortium, during the spring of 1947, agreed on determined leadership, electing trustees such as Otto Nelson of New York Life and appointing City Planning Commissioner Orton as management consultant. David Rockefeller and Wallace Harrison pushed Orton to accept the full-time executive role that redevelopment needed. By assembling property maps to chart what he called the area's "unlike uses," Orton had already proven his worth. More importantly, he had identified the singular obstacle to redevelopment, the $21-per-square-foot land that was a noose around the Heights' core institutions.23

On July 1, 1947, the consortium was officially chartered as Morningside Heights, Inc. (MHI), with David Rockefeller as president of the board of trustees and Orton as executive secretary and director of planning. Orton had already called on the City Planning Commission for data on fringe areas marked for demolition and had sounded out the fiduciaries for mortgage investment. His schedule for MHI soon conflicted with that of his work on the City Planning Commission, from which he resigned in late 1947. When Mayor O'Dwyer protested his departure, Orton, David Rockefeller, and other MHI trustees went to Gracie Mansion to seek a compromise. Stating that he saw no conflict of interest, Mayor O'Dwyer convinced Orton to
remain on the commission, allowing him to devote substantial time to MHI. How Orton reconciled his role as chief Morningside redeveloper with the City Planning Commission’s need for members to maintain a judicious “autonomy” remained unclear.24

One of Orton’s most difficult tasks was fund-raising among those who were still troubled by the moral questions of redevelopment. Trustees of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, for example, did not see how the cathedral’s interests warranted direct participation. One of them, Clarence C. Michalis, president of the Seamen’s Bank for Savings, was concerned that MHI might be perceived “as an attempt to safeguard the racial character of our neighborhood” and regarded MHI’s $100,000 budget as outrageously high. Henry Van Dusen thought that MHI could dismiss the “bias” charge, he suggested to Frank Fackenthal, by having MHI’s businessmen talk to Michalis and his cathedral colleagues. The resolution involved the Reverend John Howard Johnson, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and rector of St. Martin’s in Harlem, who was elected in 1947 as the only black on the cathedral board. As David Rockefeller related to Fackenthal, “Mr. [Cleveland H.] Dodge and Mr. Orton went to see Mr. Michalis about the Cathedral contribution to Morningside Heights, Inc. . . . Thanks in large part to your happy suggestion that we invite them to nominate Mr. Johnson as one of their representatives on our [MHI] Board, I believe Mr. Michalis is now satisfied on the discrimination issue.” Although Michalis still balked at MHI’s assessment, Rockefeller and Orton personally convinced the cathedral trustees to approve limited participation.25

Orton spent the money to complete a population survey of Morningside Heights, which used data copied from school attendance cards to supplement the 1940 census. The results showed the typical crowding in prewar apartment houses, which raised “substantial problems in finding housing for those likely to be displaced.” Orton’s staff found wide differences in the community’s “national origins” when the school data were analyzed by subareas. In Section I (108th to 110th streets), 14.2 percent of family heads came from the West Indies and Latin America (a figure that included 10.9 percent Puerto Ricans), whereas only 8 percent were American-born blacks. Section II (110th to 116th streets), the heart of the Hill, contained 31 percent from the West Indies and Latin America and only traces of other minorities. The findings for Section III (116th to 122nd streets) revealed 1.2 percent from the West Indies and Latin America, with a scant percentage of American-born blacks. By contrast, Section IV (122nd to 126th streets) had the heaviest concentration of
minorities: 11.9 percent from the West Indies and Latin America (11.6 percent Puerto Rican) and another 19.4 percent black. The MHI survey declared that Puerto Ricans were “heavily concentrated” in the outlying sections, although Puerto Ricans amounted to 7.7 percent in the entire survey area. The direction and pace of population change was ominous.

Nevertheless, Orton considered the demographic survey inadequate as market research for potential redevelopers. He wanted Ernest Fisher’s Institute for Urban Land Use to do a professional job, but Fisher worried about measuring a population whose characteristics would depend on “management and operating policies” that were still to be decided. As he explained to Orton, housing management “in which no segregation is attempted and races, colors and creeds are mixed would obviously create a market situation which is largely unprecedented and would so affect the results as to make them largely invalid.” Fisher’s problem was not made any easier by Orton’s approaches to downtown organizations. From the beginning, Orton had refused to limit his housing calculations to “immediate faculty and student demands,” but instead anticipated the needs of newcomers drawn to the Heights. “At this stage, our inquiries are tentative because of the scarcity of usable space,” Orton told Frank Fackenthal. “Our purpose now is to ascertain whether the organizations are receptive to the idea of a Morningside Heights location.” Fackenthal wondered whether Orton should have first decided how many institutions the Heights could accommodate. Otherwise, he asked, “do we not need to extend the geographical limits of the area chosen for redevelopment?” Fackenthal wondered how MHI would house existing institutional employees, let alone those Orton would gather from downtown.

Although Orton never detailed those figures or the potential displacement, he kept seeking more of the right kind of newcomers. In January of 1948, he outlined MHI’s vision of an enlarged community built around an “interfaith” center, an office complex for more philanthropic organizations, and a commons and campus-life building for student activities. At the same time, he urged MHI members to coordinate real estate purchases through an MHI clearinghouse ultimately known as Remedco. During the summer of 1948, MHI directors approved Orton’s plans and authorized him to proceed through his “confidential contacts” with the nonprofit sector. These activities gained new urgency in late 1948, when what Henry Van Dusen called an “alarming increase in the lawlessness” swept the Heights. At this dire moment, Orton completed the socioeconomic
survey, which underlay his view that "nothing short of large-scale recon-struction of housing, beginning north of 122nd Street and south of 113th Street, would suffice, but . . . high costs and the housing short-age prevented such action." 28

Robert Moses recalled that the redevelopment of Morningside Heights was first recommended by his friend "Larry" Orton. The financial obstacles that vexed Orton came at the moment when Moses was thinking about operations under Wagner-Ellender-Taft. Morn-ingside Heights was a compelling argument for making write-downs of blighted property the central feature of federal policy. MHI's community obligations, in turn, justified the public housing to ease the displacement of low-income families. Nearly three years after his first discussions of neighborhood problems, David Rockefeller talked with Moses about the possibility of public housing, although it remained a supplementary object for the fringes near 125th Street. As Orton remarked, low-rent projects would provide "physical sta-bilization of conditions to the north and to the south." 29

The breakthrough came in March of 1949, when Orton reported that the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance had given consider-ation to two superblocks that would "stabilize conditions in critical areas." Orton added that MHI had lobbied with the Housing Au-thority for a low-rent project in Manhattenville, across 125th Street. On May 19, the Housing Authority added a large public housing project in the clearance area known as Morningside-Manhattenville. A month later, in a departure from the family's reliance on private efforts to preserve the Heights, David Rockefeller went to Capitol Hill to urge passage of Wagner-Ellender-Taft. By late summer of 1949, Orton was busy preparing maps, along with three-dimensional models with "replaceable parts, [showing] individual projects." Liberal planning on Morningside Heights had become a vital part of Moses-style redevelopment. 30

The First West Side Story

The most infamous neighborhood encounter with redevelopment occurred at Manhattantown on the Upper West Side. The shady way in which the Title I was organized and the mean spirit of its clearance made Manhattantown synonymous with political scandal and Negro removal. The community struggle against the project co-incided with the challenge by Democratic reformers to Tammany
clubhouse rule. West Side insurgency against the bulldozer in the mid-1950s broadened into a political crusade for decent housing, "balanced neighborhoods," and community planning. The forces unleashed by partisans of small-scale renewal and Democratic reform would sustain a twenty-year war over the West Side and establish its brand of liberalism as the most creative force in the city. Yet that same insurgency fashioned the initial version of Manhattan-town, and West Side liberals, along with Moses, were present at the creation.31

In the early 1940s, boosters of the West Park district agreed that two blighted areas that contained substantial numbers of blacks threatened the future of the Upper West Side. Black tenants of the first area, San Juan Hill on West 65th Street, were scattered by Housing Authority clearance for the Amsterdam Houses in 1941. Many resettled in a future clearance area near Lincoln Square. Civic improvers also pointed to a second area, West Park, between 90th and 110th streets, and particularly to the 775 nonwhite families clustered between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue, from 98th to 102d streets. Describing West Park as a "prime residential community" menaced by "malignant" forces, the West of Central Park Association in 1944 invited banks and insurance companies to build middle-income housing under the Redevelopment Companies Law. "Once the feasibility of the program is demonstrated," the association's report concluded, "the entire study area will eventually be re-created as a desirable residential community for upper middle income families."32

The city ignored the neighborhood's ambitions, largely because Robert Moses was preoccupied with the other sites across the city. Passed over for more important challenges in downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn, West Park remained near the bottom of the city's priorities. But that indifference ended in the spring of 1949, when community groups joined forces behind a West Side Housing Committee to propose slum clearance for West Park.

The New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee (New York AJC) came to West Park redevelopment by an indirect route. Struggling to secure Jewish neighborhoods in the postwar city, the New York AJC saw the issue of housing as part of its campaign against "gentlemen's agreements" that barred Jewish occupancy. Another concern, less openly expressed, was a possible link between virulent anti-Communism and anti-Semitism because of fears that Communist "fronts" were exploiting Zionist fervor for a Jewish State. On the West Side that worry climaxcd during the 1949 special election in the 20th Congressional District. The underdog,
Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., running as a Fair Deal Democrat, beat the Tammany regular and buried the American Labor party radical. An American Jewish Committee observer exulted that the heavily Jewish district gave only 7 percent to the left wing. The election, he concluded, "should destroy the attempted identification of American Jews with communism."33

Young Roosevelt had little trouble building his own organization among predominantly Jewish veterans clubs and Americans for Democratic Action partisans in the apartment houses along Riverside Drive, West End Avenue, and Central Park West. During the war, Roosevelt headed the Mayor's Committee on Unity, which La Guardia appointed to soothe race relations after the 1943 Harlem Riot. A Navy veteran, Roosevelt also chaired the American Veterans Committee's housing lobby, which demanded homes, not Quonsets, for returning servicemen and backed slum clearance, replanning, and public housing. Close links between the Riverside chapter of the American Veterans Committee and the West Side branch of the ADA made a solid front for postwar redevelopment.34

The diverse strands of Jewish territoriality, political reform, and housing renewal came together in the civic activism of Herbert Sternau of the American Jewish Committee. A Manhattan insurance broker who sold group policies to civil service organizations, Sternau made a second career in civic endeavors on the Upper West Side. He labored time on local groups, including the Park West Neighborhood Association (PWNA), a consortium of Welfare Council organizations, which he chaired, and the 24th Police Precinct Coordinating Council, which advised the police on juvenile delinquency and community relations. When the New York AJC reported "anti-Semitic manifestations" among Puerto Ricans on Columbus Avenue, Sternau pursued another task in intergroup relations. Attempting to fathom Puerto Rican attitudes toward Jews, Sternau called on the resources of the Migration Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Spanish-American Youth Bureau, an organization founded during the war to get city jobs for Puerto Rican high school graduates. Although the Youth Bureau had almost no influence in the East Harlem barrio, Sternau relied on it for data about Hispanics' "growing tendency" toward anti-Semitism. The head of the New York AJC's Intergroup Relations Committee supported his inquiry as a way "to sell the Puerto Rican groups on the idea of a close working relationship with the American Jewish Committee."35

During the April 1949 battle to elect young Roosevelt, the ADA West Side branch claimed it played "a leading role" in a West Side
Housing Committee for a redevelopment project. But the prime mover was Sternau, who chaired the committee and rounded up support from the ADA and American Veterans Committee chapters, the Park West Neighborhood Association, the American Jewish Committee, and the Spanish-American Youth Bureau. As was the case with the citizen reformers, who proclaimed that they and not Tammany clubs were the legitimate voice of the Upper West Side, the West Side Housing Committee showed the degree to which self-appointed civic groups could announce the redevelopment ambitions for an entire community.36

Sternau began the redevelopment campaign with a housing survey of the predominantly black and Hispanic district between 97th and 102nd streets to Amsterdam Avenue. He had full cooperation from the City Planning Commission and Moses’s Committee on Slum Clearance, which shared their data. Having documented tenement blight, the West Side Housing Committee recommended slum clearance between 98th and 102nd streets and the elimination of 1,867 apartments. The committee proposed to replace these with 800 units of low-rent public housing and 400 units of middle-income housing. The committee also called for upgrading adjacent areas through “good neighborhood planning,” which meant selective demolitions and individual rehabilitation. The housing committee acknowledged the dire need for low-rent shelter, but it was more impressed by the shortage of middle-income units for white-collar employees of nearby institutions. Once this priority was met, the committee pledged to “persuade some private group to build low-rental housing on an adjacent tract.” Although it anticipated the net displacement of more than one thousand black and Hispanic families, Sternau’s group called for the kind of social balance where “economic segregation would not be added to the other tensions already present in our area.” Middle-income homes built on the rubble of low-rent tenements became the prototype for twenty years of West Side renewal. From the start, liberals formulated the removal of blacks and Puerto Ricans in the language of community balance.37

In mid-1949, the West Side Housing Committee’s efforts inaugurated another neighborhood tradition—bitter debate about the means and motives of community redevelopment. Balanced housing that tilted toward the white middle class infuriated members of the Precinct Coordinating Council, who wanted the entire clearance area for low-rent public housing. But the West Side Housing Committee remained serenely on course. “Its survey found,” a social worker
reported, "that all of the present residents could be relocated in the
new project at its completion . . . , with the exception of the tran-
sient population." Sternau's committee advocated "a low-rental hotel
to solve this problem without impeding the redevelopment pro-
gram." The social worker commented that the West Side Housing
Committee believed redevelopment could proceed "without creating
more than temporary dislocation. True, this temporary dislocation
assumes fearful proportions . . . but the WSHC feels that it is nec-
essary to the life and welfare of the community to clear slums."
Although radicals attacked redevelopment as "unfair hardship" on
the poor, liberals were never more certain about their rectitude. As
the social worker commented, "The WSHC answers that it is com-
posed of members of these very groups who are in agreement with
the position of the PCC." 38

The West Side Housing Committee's complacency about the
needs of Puerto Ricans was matched by assumptions of the New
York AJC's Intergroup Relations Committee that planned reloca-
tion could shift the newcomers to public housing in the outer bo-
roughs. What the process required, the New York AJC believed, was
intergroup understanding. Working with experts from the Migra-
tion Office and with Clarence Senior of the Columbia University
Bureau of Applied Social Research, who was coauthor of its mono-
graph Puerto Rican Journey (1949), the American Jewish Committee
tried to learn about Puerto Rican social adjustment. It considered
creating a Pan-American federation to support settlement houses
that fostered "closer Jewish-Puerto Rican relations, particularly in
mixed lower middle class neighborhoods." Furthering this objec-
tive, the New York AJC extended community-relations aid to the
Longwood section of the South Bronx, where it subsidized the P.S.
52 Community Council, an experimental project to soothe ethnic
conflict. Arranged by the Spanish-American Youth Bureau and the
Migration Office, the American Jewish Committee's Good Neighbor
Forum flooded Longwood with goodwill pamphlets. The New York
AJC Intergroup Relations Committee also hired a Spanish-speaking
social worker for the settlement near the Melrose Houses, subsidized
the Melrose Community Council, and sponsored a Bronx Com-
mission on Human Relations. Although the funds may have been
scanty, a great deal of decency and good intentions supported these
interracial settlements, roundtable conferences, and Good Neighbor
materials. These efforts had little impact on the South Bronx, but
they spread warm reassurance among their supporters about Puerto
Ricans removed from the Upper West Side. 39
The Search for Balance

Liberals who called for redevelopment were extraordinarily blind to the racial minorities that their plans ignored. Some partisans recognized the insensitivity, weighed the benefits of renewal against the costs of removals, and held steady. Behind them stood the construction coordinator, reminding them of greater duties and ridiculing their doubts. But other liberals, deeply troubled, managed to calculate immediate losses against long-range gains. They nurtured the faith that interracialism would be won by open-housing laws, which, as Robert Moses recognized and never tired of arguing, made Title I projects accessible to all. Even when upper-middle-class rents kept blacks and Hispanics out of Title I’s, planners maintained their illusions of interracialism by defining redevelopment to encompass nearby public housing built as expedients for relocation. At a stroke, the low-rent units for the black and brown poor balanced the apartment houses meant for middle-class whites. With the same wave of the hand, wholesale displacement of blacks and Puerto Ricans from Manhattan became the opportunity to create balanced communities in the outer boroughs.

These dreams were a 1940s fancy, generated by the People’s War against racism. The shameful contrast between the spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the reality of the 1943 Harlem Riot left liberals wringing their hands about Jim Crow and resolving to erase the color line. Contributing to this determination were united-front proliferations, nonpartisan “unity” committees among liberals and the left wing, that campaigned for wartime solidarity. During the war, moreover, nondiscriminatory “open housing” emerged as a feasible goal of American urban life. In their work with wartime housing, social researchers reported the empirical evidence that confirmed this achievement. The research comprised a handful of attitudinal studies taken at emergency housing projects in northern cities, where black tenancy was limited by severe quotas and management stressed group harmony. On these controlled premises, interracial harmony prevailed, or so the sociologists were beginning to claim. Citing wisps of evidence, liberals hailed the new world that was taking shape before their eyes.49

The evidence, although ambiguous, was appreciated by Charles Abrams, the intellectual mentor of the open-housing movement. In November 1943, the attorney who had denounced Stuyvesant Town’s Jim Crow and drafted the legal challenge to Metropolitan Life lectured on “mixed projects” at the New York State Conference
on Social Work. In a year of race riots, Abrams voiced extraordinary confidence that public housing had shown that "with care, good management and patience, the substructure underlying race prejudices can be rebuilt and the prejudices diminished, or even eliminated." The New York City Housing Authority, Abrams pointed out, had three kinds of racial tenancy: single-race projects, such as the all-black Harlem River Houses and the all-white Vladeck Houses; mixed projects with black tenants as a small minority; and mixed projects with blacks and whites in roughly equal numbers, such as Brooklyn's Kingsborough Houses and the South Jamaica Houses in Queens. Abrams did not regard the last category as a breakthrough because the racial makeup confirmed the status quo. The projects were built in areas where the races were already mixed. But the Williamsburg Houses, Abrams insisted, was a project where tenants were "co-mingled for the first time" and demonstrated that "Negro and white families can live in the same areas without friction." He overlooked the fact that Williamsburg, with 21 black families out of 1,629, was for all intents and purposes a single-race project.41

Abrams had few illusions about interracial progress, which would require patient management and plenty of time. Project administrators would need the authority to arrange "the greatest heterogeneity... a mixture of every race, with no particular emphasis on predominance in any one class." They would have to throw away the manuals sent by federal agencies and write their own guidelines for tenant recruitment. A champion of free access to housing rather than fixed quotas, Abrams did not quantify his interracial ideal, although he cracked to the social workers: "It would not have affected the soundness of the investment one iota if the [Stuyvesant Town] project were five or six percent occupied [by blacks]." But even modest numbers of blacks, Abrams conceded, would depend on careful arrangement, chiefly the total isolation of projects from social and market forces. "Where the project is a self-contained unit, creating its own environment," he pointed out, "the existence of any small Negro minority... will not hinder successful operation any more than any other minority." This interracial democracy would need social engineering of the most delicate kind.42

During the next fifteen years, liberals followed Abrams's summons with steadfast campaigns to build an interracial domain. They formed activist committees, pursued pilot projects, and spread the news of the encouraging results. They pestered state legislators and real estate groups, pulled strings at City Hall, and won the opening housing ordinances to ensure persistent change. If liberals sometimes
despaired of major victories, they took comfort in helping to transform the climate of opinion and in erecting signposts of progress. But although their efforts stamped a half-dozen projects as interracial, a tide of segregated redevelopment was dividing the city more than ever.45

Interracial showcases sustained reformers, even where the evidence was dubious or discouraging. Studies of enlightened management were conducted by Robert K. Merton and his associates for the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research. “Hilltown,” outside of Pittsburgh, was a racial checkerboard, where blacks and whites resided in separate buildings and the divisions appeared to strengthen white support for segregation. The New School Research Center for Human Relations, which conducted the market survey for the Field Foundation redevelopment, investigated public housing in the Northeast and reported gains in interracial understanding where the races had to mingle in common facilities, such as basement laundries and meeting rooms. Prejudice, argued Merton’s colleague, sociologist Marie Jahoda, was built on shallow impressions and stereotypes, not experience. The “prevalent attitudes” of whites toward blacks could be overcome by propinquity and positive contact. “The preliminary findings,” Jahoda concluded, “suggest that the less degree of segregation within a biracial housing project, the more the tenants favor the principle of biracial housing.” But Jahoda questioned whether managers who ruled like benevolent despots were reconcilable with public housing’s democratic ideals.46

The more important question was whether the despotism worked. Merton’s housing research generally overlooked the impact on group attitudes of ethnicity and family behavior, except where these social variables appeared under the category of religion. At Columbia University, Merton had advised a social-work thesis on interpersonal relations at the East River Houses. Finding acquaintances that were limited to brief nods and neighbors who were “remote” from community life, the student concluded that “the project does not seem to be any better integrated in itself, than does the surrounding community.” At other Housing Authority projects, racial harmony, or at least its public face, depended on the continuation of wartime unity campaigns. Although Brooklyn’s Kingsborough Houses was regarded as one example of racial harmony, much depended on the old united front and left-wing public relations. The interracial effort at the Brownsville Houses, which was half black in 1947, was sustained by a fervent tenants council, which struggled to keep the project a “progressive” bastion.47
While reformers heralded the interracial prototypes, the Housing Authority, following the construction coordinator’s project list, was busy creating single-race agglomerations. When the authority laid out plans for the Bronx, the New York AJC’s Committee on Discrimination pointed to the East Bronx as the place to “prepare the community to receive equality of housing opportunity as a national principle.” The New York AJC, the State Committee Against Discrimination (SCAD), and the Bronx Urban League organized the Temporary Committee on Equality of Housing to pursue community adjustment in the borough. “The problem in the Bronx,” the New York AJC reported, “has been to build up acceptance for mixed public housing.” The Temporary Committee worked with civic groups, sponsored bilingual forums, and distributed pamphlets that promoted open housing. “Thus far,” the New York AJC reported, “there have been no incidents in connection with the opening of the [authority’s] Bronx Houses.” West Side civic leaders, including those from the West Side Housing Committee, lent their support, attended brotherhood meetings in Bronx schools, and spoke at civic forums. The New York AJC Intergroup Relations Committee helped organize the Morrisania Community Council and subsidized the brotherhood campaign in the Forest Houses.44

In 1949, the New York AJC dispatched Israel Laster, its chief for community conciliation, to the Bronx effort. Laster convinced the Sachs Quality Department Store to host community meetings and establish a “Welcome Neighbor” service in response to what the company called the nearby “construction of huge housing projects.” During 1950, Laster dispensed more goodwill in the Bronx schools, supported settlement work at the Melrose Houses, and arranged with the Pan-American Neighborhood Forum to distribute films and pamphlets. The New York AJC continued to pour staff and money into the Bronx cause. In late 1951, it helped organize the Committee for Balanced Communities, which hoped to use “new public housing to prevent the ghettization of minority groups by creating a balanced integrated tenancy.”45

By the late 1940s, the campaign for interracialism in the outer boroughs had become a full-scale effort, linking activists from the New York AJC, the Ethical Culture Society, SCAD, and such ex parte litigators as Charles Abrams and Shad Polier (husband of Field Foundation trustee Justine Wise Polier). The political lobby was supported by a network of analysts from the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research, the New York University Research Center for Human Relations, and the New York School of Social Work.
who were convinced that prejudice was a social disease prevalent among poorly educated working-class whites. Social psychologists concluded that the success of interracialism depended upon placing college-educated middle-class whites in housing complexes that were controlled for size and racial mix. The academics were eager to get their findings to policy makers. In 1949, SCAD incorporated the Institute for Housing Research, chaired by housing expert Robert C. Weaver, to sponsor studies on neighborhood integration by Robert Merton, Marie Jahoda, and other prominent sociologists. Weaver conceded that there were gaps in the existing knowledge. It was unknown, he said, “how many, and where, pockets of interracial living exist in any particular city.” Nevertheless, he remained confident that his institute could broadcast “the facts of interracial living.”

Many liberals understood the social challenges presented by urban redevelopment, and SCAD took an active role in shaping Title I’s interracial dimension. SCAD planned a broad campaign that included demanding that the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) stand by pledges of nondiscriminatory Title I, writing an antidiscriminatory clause for the state redevelopment law, and, above all, building public awareness for open housing. SCAD stressed the importance of grass-roots education “so that those most intimately concerned with urban redevelopment and discrimination will understand the problem and be able to work effectively towards a democratic solution.” The public, moreover, would be told about the contributions that social research had made toward interracial living. “Within the last five years,” SCAD pointed out, “a great quantity of information on the success of integrated housing projects had been collected by the psychologists.”

The culmination of the SCAD campaign was a conference, “Rebuilding Our Cities for Everybody,” held in New York in December of 1949. Participants included representatives from all parts of the open-housing movement, from SCAD attorneys to academics such as Robert Merton and Marie Jahoda. The keynote speech was delivered by San Francisco planner Catherine Bauer Wurster, who admonished the New Yorkers not to cave in to the “opportunists” who said that nondiscriminatory redevelopment would jeopardize metropolitan progress. Wurster urged her audience to stand firmly against segregation in Title I. She applauded the campaign for antidiscriminatory ordinances and congratulated New Yorkers for their exemplary achievements, particularly such projects as Queensview.

The heart of the SCAD conference, however, was the scholarly roundtable chaired by Robert Merton, which grappled with the
realities of shifting large, diverse populations but came up with few workable ideas. The most vocal participant, former Housing Authority planner William C. Vladeck, rejected delays in slum clearance, but acknowledged the practical difficulties in “lifting and taking segments of the population and putting them where no one was before.” Although no city would tolerate dictated relocation, Vladeck warned against policy that removed “one homogeneous mass from a given area and transplant[ed] it in its entirety to a new and undeveloped section.” Borrowing Merton’s social research, Vladeck argued that integration needed “virgin territory that will be filled with a true cross-section of the populace. Because then you can do it without incident, without friction, and through a stress that is immediately recognized.” But he conceded that not even New York had the moral and fiscal resources to pursue these ideas on more than a piecemeal basis, which he warned was the worst alternative. Professor Merton responded to Vladeck’s pessimism with platitudes about “the practical difficulties involved in utilizing the redevelopment program.”

Those who tried to shape redevelopment recognized that Title I would involve moving thousands from familiar neighborhoods to neighborhoods that did not yet exist. No one had any idea how to accomplish this, least of all the liberals, who saw the necessity but were bewildered about the details. They might have cried disaster and demanded a halt to operations that would inflict more harm than good. But their inherent optimism, their faith in decent people implementing decent plans, would not let them retreat. Despite their misgivings, they gave contingent approval and tried to mudge the possible. In the meantime, they clung to every modest accomplishment. “The Committee’s urban redevelopment conference,” Hortense W. Gabel, executive secretary of SCAD, told a meeting of public housing tenants, was part of “the national campaign to ‘rebuild our cities for everybody.’ “We residents of Amsterdam Houses,” Gabel added, “know that non-segregated housing works. . . . Our living demonstrates that interracial housing is a good thing and that the entire community gains.” For the New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee, along with SCAD, the major triumph came when Acting Mayor Vincent Impellitteri signed the antidiscrimination ordinance that affected all of New York’s publicly assisted housing. Liberals did not sense that Impellitteri had put the city’s imprimatur on vast removals.