MANEUVER AND COLLABORATION

The story of the West Side Housing project is typically American. It is top-notch material for the Voice of America.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.

Robert Moses gave New York a head start on Title I. Well before President Truman signed the Housing Act in July of 1949, Moses was offering sites, tax breaks, and credit lines, scouting relocation, and arranging consents from city officials. Critics said that he sprang projects on unsuspecting neighborhoods that lacked the resources to defend against the charge of blight. But redevelopers who relied on Moses's maneuvers rarely questioned the way he operated. Invariably they applauded, as did the projectors of the South Village Title I, who praised the construction coordinator for his "foresight and advanced planning."

Moses's directives alone could not make Title I projects a reality or prevent a remarkable number from being rejected by unwilling neighborhoods. Redevelopment Moses-style involved a practical division of labor between the Committee on Slum Clearance and neighborhood collaborators. Moses brought city officials, sponsors, and mortgage bankers together, and he usually clinched Title I deals with last-minute tugs on the Housing Authority for relocation units. But he could not hammer the Title I's and low-rent housing into the balanced communities that local opinion required or supply community advisors who would give their benediction to bulldozer clearance. For this Moses needed liberal activists, who withstood the
long, thankless struggles for renewal. They were driven by a sense of urgency to save their neighborhoods and by the politics of the cold war, which made it all the easier to label the enemies of renewal as the enemies of the city. They were also sustained by the lofty goal of creating racially balanced communities. Although his neighborhood allies could never ignore the way Moses drove tenants off redevelopment sites, they closed ranks around what they believed were the decent projects that would reclaim neighborhoods.

Advanced Planning

With President Truman's signature on the Housing Act of 1949, Moses's staff rushed to announce Title I pilot projects: New York University's housing and educational complex south of Washington Square, the Field Foundation's "social venture" in the West Village, and the Amalgamated cooperative south of the Williamsburg Bridge. "These three projects," Moses told Mayor O'Dwyer, "all have excellent prospects of being shaped into firm proposals." Twenty acres in Harlem were under study for clearance and redevelopment by an investment group headed by realtor Robert Dowling, past president of the New York Urban League. In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, thirty acres along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway had been selected for similar redevelopment by a consortium led by banker George V. McLaughlin. Moses overstated his progress, probably to polish O'Dwyer's image for the 1949 mayoral race. The Amalgamated Housing Corporation had not committed to further enterprise along Grand Street. The Field Foundation was already running into stiff neighborhood opposition. More serious were the clearance demands of James Madden and his NYU colleagues, which Moses saw would require substantial relocations—and public housing—near Houston Street.

The vague boundaries of the pilot projects also required approval for enlarged mixed-use areas by city government. In October of 1949, the CSC had the City Planning Commission revise the clearance boundaries that dated from 1940. "The new redevelopment sections," the commission explained, "have generally been extended to include business frontages and other areas not presently in residence use because the new federal Housing Act permits redevelopment of substandard residential areas." Moses's assistant, Harry Taylor, after conferring with the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), reported that the changes would pass muster with
Washington. “The master plan, zoning and maps of areas declared eligible for slum clearance,” he alerted Moses, “should contribute all that will be necessary.” Taylor had met HHFA slum clearance chief Nathaniel S. Keith, who was anxious to streamline Title I applications. Taylor heard that the HHFA forms would be only a few pages long, with “nothing . . . that would bother us.” In early 1950, the CSC sought advanced census data for the Harlem site, the Amalgamated project at Corlars Hook, Delancey Street, the Field Foundation plot, Washington Square South, Williamsburg, and a late addition, Morningside-Manhattanville.3

Some housing officials recognized that the list would impinge on existing slum clearance. State Housing Commissioner Herman Strichman warned that refugees from the Williamsburg and Harlem sites would swamp the state’s low-rent projects. Denying that he was out to commandeer the state program, Moses proposed “[s]tate aid in establishing small, nearby projects to take care of some of the tenants we have to get rid of.” Strichman’s refusal was a minor problem compared to the challenge from federal administrators of Title III, the public housing portion of the Housing Act. In February of 1950, John A. Kerckv, the HHFA regional official, rejected the New York City Housing Authority’s application for federal grants to acquire the sites for the Baruch Houses on the Lower East Side, the Brownsville addition, and the George Washington and Jefferson Park Houses in East Harlem as part of the 12,000 Title III units earmarked for the city. Kerckv pointed out that Title III limited property acquisition to 25 percent of total project costs. Expensive land, he lectured, was meant for Title I write-downs, and he suggested that the Housing Authority resort to Title I for site costs that exceeded the 25 percent limit. Somewhat disingenuously, he also urged the authority to present a number of sites on cheaper vacant land.4

Annoyed by the rebuff, Moses found more amenable officials. He had HHFA slum clearance chief Nathaniel Keith chauffeured around Title I sites while Harry Taylor described New York’s unique problems and Title I’s role in their solution. Keith seemed amenable toward the projects, Taylor reported, including Williamsburg, which was a commercial quarter, not the “predominantly residential” acreage that Title I required. In fact, Taylor related, the federal administrator saw broad rationalizations for slum clearance, “such as arrested development, blight and continuous deterioration.” After delivering his spiel, Taylor came away convinced that Keith agreed that Title I “should not become primarily an adjunct to reduce the cost of public housing on slum clearance sites.” Keith kept his views confidential,
but Taylor thought that he would consider public housing sites in Title I areas as long as they were “incidental to the project.” Ten days later, Keith telegrammed approval of $16 million in Housing Authority grants.  

Moses used the victory to impale his critics. Obstructionism by local HHFA officials, he complained to Nathaniel Keith, had frozen negotiations with those who controlled the “reservoirs of private capital.” He alerted David Rockefeller that his family’s hopes to renew Morningside Heights, which depended on a large low-rent project, were imperiled by “radical planners” in Washington. A similar message went to New York Times publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who replied that he would immediately confer with Rockefeller to “straighten out what certainly seems to be a ridiculous situation.” Moses wanted Mayor O’Dwyer to press the White House, and he wrote O’Dwyer’s eloquent appeal to President Truman not to retreat from the goal of ridding the city of slums. A few days later, the federal housing commissioner, citing “very special conditions in New York,” announced that the 25 percent limit would be averaged among the site costs for all of the 12,000 federal units.  

As the crisis abated, Moses forwarded for approval of the mayor and the Board of Estimate arrangements for eight Title I projects that specified the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill as general management of planning; Harrison & Abramovitz and Eggers & Higgins as architects of Morningside-Manhattanville and Washington Square South, respectively; and James Felt’s Tenant Relocation Bureau to plan site removals. The Board of Estimate vote, which approved the preliminary steps for Title I, turned redevelopment over to private hands.  

Moses’s sidestepping of public responsibility was too much for Jerry Finkelstein, the new chairman of the City Planning Commission. In May of 1950 he challenged Mayor O’Dwyer to decide whether the City Planning Commission or the Committee on Slum Clearance had primary charge for devising the redevelopment program. Predictably, Moses demanded that O’Dwyer choose between him and Finkelstein. The controversy touched off another version of the 1948 Citizens Conference rhetoric. The Citizens Housing and Planning Council called upon Mayor O’Dwyer to give to the City Planning Commission initial responsibility for redevelopment sites. Council president Ira S. Robbins demanded an end to the “illogical arrangement” by abolishing the CSC.  

Moses’s reply directly at O’Dwyer. “I have been for some years a subcommittee to report upon and expedite arterial improve-
ments, grade crossing eliminations, housing, parks, recreation, and related subjects," he reminded the mayor. "When you asked me to act as Co-Ordinator it was with the understanding that such an arrangement would be continued, since it was the only possible way of insuring progress on the projects approved by the Mayor for action and accomplishment as distinguished from gestures and debate." Moses dismissed the challenge by having O'Dwyer send a letter to the HHFA that dispelled any "misunderstanding" about who was in charge. The Committee on Slum Clearance, chaired by Moses, would continue to represent the city in all Title I matters with the federal government. O'Dwyer waved away the subject of the City Planning Commission with assurances that it would be "dually and properly consulted." And he concluded with the accolade Moses wanted, acknowledgment that his committee had slashed the "technicalities and delays" that kept private capital from redevelopment.

The ultimate clarification was supplied by Corporation Counsel John P. McGrath, the staunch Brooklyn Democrat who managed Mayor O'Dwyer's 1949 reelection campaign. McGrath explained that although the City Planning Commission had the opportunity to keep current on CSC negotiations, municipal law required the commissioners to preserve a "quasi-judicial" posture. McGrath doubted "whether the Commission would apply to each proposed project the critical judgment required under the law when such project is brought formally before it, if the employees had developed the project in the first instance." It was all well and good to plan projects that the city hoped private sponsors would acquire, McGrath conceded, but that was an indulgence the city could not afford. "A realistic approach would seem to require that the necessary sponsorship should come first and then a project should be worked up, within the limits of proper planning."

Despite the challenges raised by Kerwick, Finkelstein, and Robbins, Title I went forward. Sponsors never questioned the morality of their projects or paused to consider how their relocations would add to the growing load on public housing. By the fall of 1950, Moses had planned projects to place middle-class anchorages in Harlem and on the Upper West Side and to begin the process of gentrification north of City Hall. None of this could have been done without the cooperation, or at least tacit approval, of officials at NYU and Columbia University, several city planning commissioners, several members of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council and the Urban League, realty men at Metropolitan Life and a half-dozen
### Maneuver and Collaboration

#### The Title I Program, 1949–1957

Projects proposed, realized, and rejected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Cost (millions)</th>
<th>Size families</th>
<th>Percent nonwhite</th>
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<td>Corlears Hook (1/51)</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>1,668</td>
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*Source: Wool, Dobson & Company, relocation data, Box 16, Moses Papers; Committee on Slum Clearance, Title I Slum Clearance Program (September 30, 1958); Title I Progress (January 29, 1960); Caro, Power Broker, p. 1014; project folders, Citizens Housing and Planning Council; Abraham E. Kazan, reminiscences, Fainstein and Fainstein, "The Politics of Urban Redevelopment."*
other investment houses, and the liberal trade unions. Many may have wilted under Moses's ridicule, but none objected to the New York approach.

Cooperative Village

There was no Title I steamroller in the early 1950s. Moses rarely foisted projects on startled neighborhoods and gained no easy victories, except when his emissaries carefully prearranged with local enthusiasts. That was how trade-union liberals used Title I to clear Old Law slums and to create what today they call Cooperative Village on the Lower East Side.

The Amalgamated Title I at Corlears Hook had few opponents and wide support on Grand Street. The Amalgamated Dwellings and Hillman Houses were already thriving middle-class islands when Moses importuned Jacob Potofsky and his right-hand man, Abraham Kazan, to redevelop 12 additional acres. During the spring of 1950, Kazan and his colleagues organized their housing agency and offered to take on the Grand Street Extension. Moses replied with the arrangements at the Board of Estimate for the Amalgamated's "entire expansion project downtown." They included enough write-downs and tax breaks for a parking garage and an auditorium for the shareholders' meetings Kazan considered vital for the cooperative spirit. Moses made clear to Potofsky that he overrode the Board of Estimate's doubts about granting tax exemption "as a general rule." He had done the persuading that made the Corlears Hook Title I possible.¹¹

With that firm endorsement, Kazan, Shirley Boden, and the others incorporated the United Housing Foundation to mass-produce the cooperative ideal. Although the UHF board of directors included such venerable reformers as Louis Pink, architect Clarence Stein, Jewish charities’ leader Dr. LeRoy Bowman, and New School president Bryn Hovde, the real assets were the Amalgamated’s veterans, Kazan and his staff. They dreamed of a new generation of workers’ cooperatives, leagued with the Amalgamated and utilizing its management services, that would become a formidable presence in the larger city. The UHF expected to work with Moses on future projects, but the construction coordinator replied that they could not count on an automatic stream of subsidies. With New York "near, if not at, the limit of its [fiscal] capacity," he lectured, O'Dwyer administration policy was that "each new project involving tax exemption
will have to stand strictly on its own feet." Kazan and the others may have envisioned an irresistible force, but Moses made clear that he would take the substance of each project to the Board of Estimate. 12

Title I progress at Corlear's Hook depended on the liberalism of members of the needle trades. The UHF lined up equity investors, including the Elene Good Will Fund, the Lavanburg Foundation, the Workmen's Circle, and the Jewish Daily Forward. But what clinched the deal was David Dubinsky's decision to allow the International Ladies Garment Workers Union to split the mortgage (with the Bowery Savings Bank) in exchange for half the apartments being reserved for I.G.WU members. The UHF boasted that hundreds of rank-and-file unionists were waiting for apartments, and that the neighborhood was unanimous that the Title I "would remove a bad slum section." The achievement, moreover, had national implications for renewing cities. Supporters of the New York effort included Edward A. Norman, president of the American Jewish Committee and the New York State Credit Union League, and former congressman Jerry Voorhis, who headed the Cooperative League of the U.S.A. They proclaimed that the cooperative movement was alive and well on the Lower East Side. 13

The liberal euphoria smothered the naysayers. A few dissidents questioned the removal of 878 families, most of them Puerto Rican, from the Grand Street site, but they could not obstruct clearance that carried so many endorsements. The UHF also subsidized the rehabilitation of boarded-up tenements, which was a temporary boon for local realtors. The American Labor party and its Manhattan Tenants Council tried to stir up site protests, and community relations experts on the American Jewish Committee considered dispatching conciliators. But, except for complaints from a few Puerto Ricans and small businessmen, the project suffered no major delays. Efficient management of the condemned tenements actually produced a tidy surplus until the buildings were cleared. 14

The Delancey Street project also was spearheaded by local enthusiasts who had long been attached to reform. For some time after World War II, a housing committee of the University Settlement had investigated creating a "neighborhood unit" on the Lower East Side. With support from the East Side Chamber of Commerce and the Bowery Savings Bank, the settlement in 1949 hired Massachusetts Institute of Technology planner Kevin Lynch to supervise the start-up research. The MIT "redevelopment study," which was circulated among community leaders, contained ingredients that local reformers and Robert Moses could accept. Envisioning a residential
Corlears Hook redeveloped, c. 1954. The Committee on Slum Clearance's illustration of the Corlears Hook Title I showed the spread of publicly aided housing south of the Williamsburg Bridge that cleared the Old Law district.

The United Housing Foundation's Corlears Hook project (renamed the East River Housing Cooperatives) stood east of Amalgamated Dwellings and Hillman Houses on Grand Street. Nearby are the New York City Housing Authority's Vladeck Federal Houses (Z-shaped) and Vladeck City. Corlears Hook Park, with Moses-style flag pavilion and amphitheater, lies astride the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive. Courtesy of the Special Archive, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

district cleared for superblocks of high-rise apartments, the plan also endorsed a cross-Manhattan expressway along Delancey Street. The MTA planners had handed the University Settlement a neighborhood unit with a vengeance.\(^{15}\)

The Committee on Slum Clearance took over from there, tapping former Housing Authority member William Wilson to work with the UHF as sponsor of Title I cooperative housing. Wary of local businesses, Moses cautioned Wilson to fashion modern store space on Allen and Delancey streets, and to check all plans with the East Side Chamber of Commerce. But neither Wilson nor Kazan reckoned on the merchants' rage when they learned that most would never be relocated into the shopping mall. They summoned Kazan to a stormy meeting at Ratner's Delicatessen, where they told him
to change the UHF plan. They wanted their businesses relocated on-site, with room for a parking garage. The UHF's business lobbyist had always been careful to arrange their cooperatives to meet the needs of local businessmen. Kazan was not prepared for the bitter reaction or the scale of enterprise required to soothe ruffled feelings, and so Moses was forced to withdraw. It was the first of several Title I defeats. 16

South Village

Greenwich Village also was put at Moses's disposal by reformers who argued that its brownstones, tenements, and lofts deserved a higher purpose. Some were outsiders, such as the Field Foundation, which followed metropolitan agendas, but others were local boosters who never forgot the Holden, McLaughlin Planning Recommendations (1946) and its call for green space and a Houston Street expressway. At the time, no social critic, such as Jane Jacobs, came forward to urge preservation of the fragile urban fabric or the brownstone scale. The best Village opinion believed that superblocks, high-rises, and shopping malls would bring the Village into the mid-twentieth century.

The Field Foundation still wanted a Village site for an interracial pilot project even after Washington Street rebelled against the idea in late 1949. When Field Foundation housing advisor Maxwell Tetter suggested an alternative south of Washington Square, Committee on Slum Clearance staff member Harry Taylor conferred with Moses. Tetter heard, however, that the CSC was negotiating with banks for the Washington Square South Title I, "and he [Moses] thought that these banks ... would want to control the entire area." Although those conversations cast doubt on an interracial investment, Taylor said the CSC might still "carve out a site." Ever resourceful, he found 7 acres of tenements and lofts east of Sixth Avenue between Spring and Prince streets. Tetter pointed out to the Field trustees that the $11-per-foot land was expensive and that tenant relocation would raise "political and public relations problems." Although they were not enthusiastic, the trustees agreed that the site was the best available and that the city might soften the terms. "Commissioner Moses is now much more eager to include the Field Foundation in his plans," Tetter advised, adding that they might persuade Moses to absorb the cost of relocation along with site clearance. 17

At a "sumptuous" CSC luncheon at Randall's Island on March 14,
1950, Tretter discovered otherwise. Moses played the congenial host for his Greenwich Village allies, Tretter and New York University treasurer James Maddox, and he praised what they promised south of Washington Square. But when Tretter claimed that Spring Street re-development hinged on obtaining $3-per-foot land, Moses chortled and Mayor O'Dwyer mentioned the cost of relocation. Tretter persisted that it was the city's job, and Moses conceded that the Housing Authority would "assume responsibility" for tenants who were eligible for the projects. Authority chairman Thomas Farrell added that redevelopers could collect substantial rents on properties during clearance. Moses cautioned that although the CSC could write-down the land to $3, city tax exemption on that figure was out of the question. A few days later, he turned the screw, informing reporters about Tretter's demand for $3 property. Tretter was livid, but Moses soothed him with word that reliable sponsors would have five years to clear and rebuild. "You will not forget," Moses added, "that in the interval they will be collecting rents and have other advantages not enjoyed by strictly public agencies in dealing with the tenant removal problem." The negotiations stalled on the expense of relocation, until Moses guaranteed the $3 figure if the foundation bore the cost of removing tenants who were ineligible for public housing. The Field trustees disliked the terms, but chose to stay with Spring Street, "where the demonstration [in interracial living] would mean most." 18

At this juncture, Moses responded to Tretter's hint about a better site plan by adding 6 acres on Houston Street. At a July 1950 luncheon, Moses explained the improved version. "His thought was that the planning for the three northerly blocks," Tretter recorded, "would create a centralized shopping area" for redevelopments on both sides of Houston. "Revenue from these commercial facilities would substantially 'sweeten' the financial structure of the Foundation project," Tretter added. By throwing in park space and automobile parking at nominal cost, Moses expected Tretter and his associates, as "preferred developers," to handle the whole area below Houston Street. The project now stood at 584 apartments, plus a shopping center and parking lots. Its new scope would displace 1,700 site families. Tretter endorsed the changes, particularly the commercial facilities, which he considered a "revenue producer" that would lower rents.

In September of 1950, Moses met Tretter and Ruth (Mrs. Marshall) Field to finish the deal. Moses told them that if the foundation finally committed, he would write-down the land to $5, toss in closed
streets and a park, give the tax exemption and reduce assessments to $5, and guarantee a shopping monopoly on Houston Street. Moses could help remove those among the 1,700 families who qualified for public housing; the foundation would have to relocate most of the others. But he suggested that the sponsor could build in stages to ease relocation and use rents in the first section to finance the second. Tretter called on realtor James Felt to verify the figures, particularly the “anticipated income in the period between purchase and site clearing.” In the meantime, Tretter calculated that only 500 families were on the site of first-phase operations, and that of these perhaps only 250 were ineligible for public housing. But all this was upset when Harry Taylor announced that the CSC expected $5 for the closed streets as well, which Tretter rejected. Moses phoned him and insisted on payment for all the land, but at $4. Those terms made the deal.

By October of 1950, the Field Foundation’s interracial experiment had grown to a $13.4 million project that included seven fifteen-story buildings with 791 apartments, a shopping center, a movie theater, and parking for 241 cars. The city would write-down $12 land to $4 and provide a twenty-five-year tax exemption based on that figure. But average rentals had climbed to $26 per room, requiring yearly earnings in the $3,500 to $7,500 range. Of the 1,700 site families, Tretter concluded that the foundation would have to relocate at most 650. The foundation’s modest outlay was part of the neighborhood plan oriented around West Broadway, which the CSC renamed “Fifth Avenue South” and planned “as a fine residential and shopping avenue.”

More than the Field trustees ever reckoned, South Village depended on their willingness to act as benevolent slumlords. Moses’s embrace made the venture less appealing to philanthropists at the very time that mobilization for the Korean War was forcing Washington to limit construction of new housing. Tretter’s estimates were outdated, so he adopted Moses’s suggestions that the foundation purchase the site, run the properties on existing rentals, and wait for federal restrictions to lift. Tretter figured that with $4 land and the tenements fully occupied, the foundation would net 15 percent. James Felt advised that placing the tenements under unified management would cut expenses even further. In May of 1951, the foundation resolved to acquire the site and “operate existing buildings without relocation or demolition at this time,” assuming that Moses would grant a three-year leeway on construction.

By the summer of 1951, however, South Village was over-
whelmed by the revolt against Title I south of Washington Square. Explaining the fierce opposition, Tretter commented that “residents are not distinguishing between the South Village project, the public housing project and the higher rental insurance company project to the north.” Several Italian storefront clubs formed the Lower West Side Civic League to foment the racial issue and appeal to the local Democratic leader, Carmine DeSapio. They forced Borough President Robert F. Wagner, Jr., to delay Board of Estimate hearings, which caused Moses to shelve his plans. He blamed the debacle on Wagner, but the borough president told Tretter that Moses had “not adequately prepared the neighborhood for the major tenant relocation problem.”

The politicians were cutting South Village adrift, but Moses would not let go. In July of 1951, he arranged with the city tax department to reduce assessed values to $4 per foot, which, Tretter explained, “would materially increase the returns from the existing property.” If the site were acquired and assessed at that “bargain price,” the tenements would earn after-tax annual profits of more than $256,000. As Field Foundation trustee Lloyd K. Garrison advised one possible investor, Winthrop Rockefeller, “while waiting for a favorable moment to build, we can operate the existing properties at a very substantial profit, all of which would go to reduce the ultimate capital investment and the scale of rentals.” Moses gave still another advantage to the foundation. Because of expected delays in relocating families, clearing the site, and obtaining a mortgage, Tretter explained, the city might accept a 20 percent down payment, with the balance due in three years. “In the meantime the developer would, of course, manage the existing properties,” said Tretter. “In the case of South Village, as you know, there would be a very substantial surplus.” Tretter figured that the Field Foundation could obtain title for $250,000.

Despite the inducements, South Village’s advocates were deterred by the anger of community members, who had mistaken the interracial experiment for a speculative venture. When Moses, in the spring of 1952, thought that the foundation might consider an alternative site closer to Washington Square, Tretter reported the trustees’ disillusionment. Tretter knew that the foundation had been right to use Title I to realize the promise of the fair-housing laws. “As these public aids increase and more projects are planned,” Tretter argued, “there is even a greater need for a genuine nondiscriminatory housing project with a significant number of Negro families in it.”
But Greenwich Village was not ready for interracial progress and the Field Foundation regretfully withdrew.  

Washington Square South

The Field Foundation’s worthy endeavor was a victim of the controversy over Washington Square South, a Title I packaged in 1950 by the Committee on Slum Clearance to give Villagers what they always seemed to prefer, renewal south of Washington Square. The CSC kept the plan vague, although the Greenwich Village Association learned of, and tentatively approved, clearance that would spare walk-ups on Sullivan and Macdougal streets as “a relic of the ‘old’ Village.” The Washington Square Association recalled its long campaign for redevelopment and thanked the CSC that improvements were finally under way. Village acceptance hinged on the assumption that the Title I would consist of a modern middle-income complex with only a token amount of public housing. Neighborhood planner Robert C. Weinberg believed that 300 low-rent units would be tucked behind an insurance company redevelopment similar to Peter Cooper Village, Metropolitan Life’s upper-middle-income version of Stuyvesant Town.  

Greenwich Village was never as tolerant of social diversity as its bohemian reputation proclaimed it, and the district’s postwar love affair with the low-rise brownstone, particularly north and west of Washington Square, reinforced the instincts of preservationists and proprietors alike. Greenwich Village might have welcomed Moses-style clearance had he kept the public housing to modest proportions. But he showed more on the community because of the mixed signals it sent to the CSC and the debts he owed to New York University. NYU officials had begun to look on Washington Square College as not just the cash cow for the university’s Fordham Heights campus, but as the center for a multiversity to rival Columbia. By late 1950, the university’s appetite for land had grown ravenous. University administrator James Madden and his planning consultant, Daniel Higgins, Moses complained, eyed more Title I acreage than even he could deliver. Still, Moses could not demur. Madden and his colleagues made NYU’s operations in the Village and at Bellevue Hospital crucial to city redevelopment, and Moses would do his utmost for the university, even if that meant increased relocations and more public housing. He overstepped the Village’s intolerance.
of low-rent housing, and, in the process, touched off a property owners' rebellion. In late December of 1950, the CSC announced Washington Square South. Between West Third and Bleeker streets, a Title I sponsor would build thirteen nineteen-story middle-income towers, for a total of 1,956 apartments with rents of $35 per room. Accompanying the Title I would be the Housing Authority's Houston Houses, eight fourteen-story buildings for 884 low-income families. The CSC estimated that 2,751 families—some 6,800 people—were occupying the western portions of the site, and 200 in commercial buildings further east. The Village was stunned and rose in righteous anger at the intrusion. Neighbors across the political spectrum, from St. Anthony’s Roman Catholic parish to the parents at the Little Red School House, a progressive academy, united against the projects. Their lead was taken by a committee that combined Moses critics such as Robert Weinberg and Charles Abrams with a host of middle-class Village residents who were just beginning to capitalize on the brownstone revival. Deplored the impact of “large-scale redevelopment,” the Greenwich Village Association called a February 21, 1951, conference at Greenwich House.

Despite the vehement opposition, many Villagers saw aspects of Moses's plan that they could support. The ambivalence was reflected in the memorandum Robert Weinberg prepared for the February conference. Weinberg warned that some plan had to be adopted before objections reached “a point where no redevelopment in Greenwich Village could be accomplished.” Other liberals regretted that the CSC had not concentrated on the “blighted areas” on the southern and eastern “fringes.” The Washington Square Association, still committed to the Holden, McLaughlin plan and “on record as favoring redevelopment” on the south, could hardly reject the Title I. The association, badly divided by Moses's proposal, urged a compromise: a Village planning council, chaired by Weinberg, to trim the Title I to local standards. As Maxwell Tretter related to the Field Foundation trustees, that meant severe limits on the public housing.

“Mr. Weinberg states that the [Planning] Council and other civic groups have no objection to some low rent public housing, but not at the expense of eliminating the private development.” Greenwich Villagers wanted to keep public units incidental to the middle-class redevelopment they had long expected south of Washington Square. Their objections killed the Title I, which was rejected by the Board of Estimate just before Columbus Day of 1951.
Morningside Gardens

On Morningside Heights, neighborhood planners were partners with Robert Moses in creating a middle-class anchorage that became a Title I showplace. The Rockefeller-dominated Morningside Heights, Inc. (MHI), fashioned the Morningside Title I that was acclaimed as a genuine triumph in redevelopment and compassionate relocation. When critics accused Moses of Negro removal and connivance with Tammany, Moses and his supporters could point to Morningside and the civic movement that turned a neighborhood around.

MHI had worked for months to target slum clearance on the Heights, but had paid less attention to the fringes across 125th Street. The CSC put a Morningside Title I on the city's agenda in late 1949, but Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) officials wanted firm plans for the low-rent component. As David Rockefeller explained to Dwight D. Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University, MHI's studies had "to include Manhattanville, in order to present a proposal based on a sufficiently extensive area." MHI executive director Lawrence Orton tapped the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center to help reach what he called "indigenous groups," but federal demands meant a more expensive survey. Within days, Orton sent a grant application to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Orton wrote that Morningside Heights would stand against neighborhood decline at "notorious La Salle Street," where private capital found a site "protected against the intrusions of adjacent slum and blight." Orton wanted $20,000 to survey residents, particularly those likely to need on-site public housing and rehousing elsewhere. Financed by Rockefeller Brothers and carried out by the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research, the survey provided the statistical bedrock for redevelopment.

It was also part of what the head worker at the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center called "the community organization process." "The City will only endorse a plan which has the full approval of local inhabitants," the center president wrote John D. Rockefeller, Jr. "Through its [the center's] close contact with the people living there, it is in a position to learn the wishes of the neighborhood, to interpret their needs to the planners and then to 'sell' the plan to the neighborhood." In the spring of 1950, MHI organized the Morningside Community Advisory Committee, chaired by Father George B. Ford, an Americans for Democratic Action
leader and Catholic chaplain of Columbia College, to prepare the community for the survey. During the summer, the survey counted 11,000 people on the redevelopment site between 122nd and 135th streets. Nearly half were black or Hispanic and many were poor, but the residents experienced no exceptional overcrowding by Manhattan standards. Roughly half were dissatisfied with their housing, however, which MHI took as grass-roots support for change. The survey also touched off community fears of imminent clearance. The Community Advisory Committee called meetings at Corpus Christi, Father Ford's church, and at the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center to squelch "unfounded rumors." Father Ford pledged that redevelopment would create "one integrated community" between 122nd and 135th streets. David Rockefeller told a neighborhood rally at the Riverside Church about the spirit of brotherhood that was behind the renewal. Proclaiming the opportunity to pioneer "the field of interracial living," Rockefeller said that on Morningside Heights, "where a premium is placed on civil liberties and the rights of man, it should not be an impossible task to make mixed tenancy housing projects profitable and successful ventures."

MHI's redevelopment package reflected that social obligation. The MHI board invited United Housing Foundation expert Shirley Boden to prepare a cooperative housing plan for the Title I. Boden proposed a 600-unit middle-income cooperative, financed with $20-per-room maintenance and controlled by Amalgamated-style management. But he warned about the relocation problem posed by the "high density" of tenements on the site. He suggested enlarging the clearance area to make the Title I "part of an overall redevelopment plan where relocation can be handled on a broad scale." In November of 1950, David Rockefeller sent MHI's plans to Moses, who advised strong public-use language for municipal tax exemption. Rockefeller reported Moses's enthusiasm for the two-block site between 123rd and La Salle streets and the cooperative housing. In January of 1951, MHI learned that the CSC would recommend the Title I to the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate.

That obstacle overcome, MHI organized the Morningside Committee on Cooperative Housing, which notified the CSC that it would sponsor the Title I cooperative. During the summer of 1951, the Community Advisory Committee worked on the redevelopment message. Money from the Field Foundation enabled the committee to hire a community organizer to prepare a "Report to the People" justifying slum clearance. With simultaneous publicity releases in September of 1951, the CSC and the Morningside Committee on
Cooperative Housing unveiled the Morningside Title I. The announcement received glowing front-page coverage in the *New York Times*. The site’s “badly rundown” tenements would be replaced by six twenty-story slabs designed by Harrison & Abramovitz, architects of the United Nations headquarters. The redevelopment would provide decent housing for many of the 6,000 people who worked in the area but could not afford to live there. The CSC also mentioned the Housing Authority’s plans for Manhattanville, a 1,600-unit low-rent project further to the north, implying overall integration with the middle-income Title I.

Although Morningside delighted the proponents of renewal, many residents reacted with rage, which was stirred by American Labor party activists, who organized a Save Our Homes Committee. The committee’s campaign caught MHI by surprise. Commissioner Orton voted with the rest of the City Planning Commission, which unanimously approved the project on October 17, 1951. But when the Board of Estimate held hearings on the Morningside Title I the following week, seventy Save Our Homes protesters, as Orton reported, “vehemently stated that they would rather have no housing than housing not suited to their incomes.” The board put aside further action until November.

Stunned by the resistance, MHI staffers blamed community relations that had left neighbors with genuine, if misguided, fears. Social workers at the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center said that MHI should have prepared definite plans for rehousing, a criticism shared by Father Ford, who faced 500 Corpus Christi parishioners who were bitter about losing their homes. David Rockefeller’s assistant suggested that MHI reaffirm the commitment to low-rent housing, seek tax exemption and foundation support to lower Morningside’s equity, and pursue an offer from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to sponsor limited-dividend housing north of 125th Street.

Worried that the project might unravel, Lawrence Orton wanted more from Robert Moses than gratuitous advice to calm his “hysterical” colleagues. The Morningside Committee on Cooperative Housing was furious that Moses had announced the Title I with only vague mention of low-rent housing in Manhattanville. They also felt betrayed that he had reneged on the tax exemption to reduce Morningside’s $23-per-room maintenance. Father Ford convinced Orton and David Rockefeller to confront Moses about the community uproar. At their meeting, Rockefeller talked of tax exemption, but Moses coldly responded that the CSC would have to ask the institutions to invest more in the cooperative’s equity. The added
factor of tax breaks, he said, would force him to suspend Board of Estimate hearings. Opponents of the Title I came well prepared for the November 1951 encounter with the Board of Estimate. Save Our Homes collected signatures from 5,000 site residents and gathered several hundred pickets outside City Hall. Three days before, the Housing Authority had announced a $23 million low-rent project (General Grant Houses) to be built north of Morningside that would give priority to families displaced by the cooperative. But protesters jeered the “luxury” co-ops that would force families back to “walled-in Harlem.” The dissidents claimed victory when officials postponed the project until spring, handing Moses, a New York Post columnist wrote, “his first—no temporary—setback.”

Over the winter, MHI repaired its tattered community relations. MHI geared up a Morningside Citizens Committee, a neighborhood forum to rally support for mixed-income projects in the renewal plan. Ruth M. Senior, the MHI consultant who guided the citizens’ deliberations, defended Morningside’s campaign against what she called “economic ghettos.” MHI was widening “the representation of income, education, and ethnic groups,” she explained, by including middle-income projects “in a well-rounded program of new housing.” Father Ford’s Community Advisory Committee organized the Manhattanville Civic Association across 125th Street to give blacks and Hispanics their say in “community improvement.” Despite encouragement from liberals, including Hortense Gabel of the State Committee Against Discrimination (SCAD) and speakers from the Puerto Rico Migration Office and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, opponents packed the association’s first meeting. Determined to defeat “the high rent cooperative,” Save Our Homes warned the crowd about a “sneak play” at the Board of Estimate. Morningside liberals deplored what they labeled a “Communist-backed pressure campaign” on the Manhattanville Civic Association, but they could not break Save Our Homes’ grip.

For the showdown at the Board of Estimate hearings on April 24, 1952, the Morningside Committee on Cooperative Housing launched a public relations campaign that collected endorsements from key liberal groups. The Riverside chapter of the American Veterans Committee claimed that the “integration of housing for middle-income families along with the public housing projects is in the highest spirit of democratic living.” Harlem Councilman Earl Brown, coauthor, with Councilman Stanley M. Isaacs, of the city’s open-housing ordinance, called projects “built side by side . . .
maneuver and collaboration

socially sound and progressive." Most applauded the cooperative
features, the link with public housing in Manhattanville, and the
sponsor's pledges of nondiscrimination. Moses also informed David
Rockefeller that he had spoken with the Housing Authority chair-
man "about officially announcing the public housing project next
to yours." 39

Although liberals closed ranks around Morningside, opponents
kept up their attack. Save Our Homes orchestrated pleas at the
Board of Estimate from residents and owners of small stores, along
with complaints from an old enemy of Rockefeller expansion, Father
Joseph Konora of St. Joseph's Church. The Daily Worker boasted
that the Save Our Homes leader "shocked" the experts with her
calculations that the site could accommodate 59 per room pub-
lic housing. Father Ford was moved by the opposition's "dignified
and impressive" testimony, although a Rockefeller staffer was dis-
gusted by how "the Party line" had hoodwinked "a lot of simple
people." Cooperative advisor Shirley Boden was particularly stung
by Save Our Homes' claim that tenants had some prior moral right
to the neighborhood. Opponents' vehemence forced MHI to accept
another delay until the fall of 1952, when "the fanatic fervor of the
opponents might have a chance to abate." Lawrence Orton's staff
expected that time, along with the chance for residents to apply for
coop apartments, would weaken the opposition. A small group of
troublemakers could not hold back progress.40

Manhattanville

The liberalism that was responsible for Morningside was indistin-
guishable from the civic activism that produced Manhattanville,
the Title I that was synonymous with Negro removal. It was led
by West Side civic leader Herbert Sternau, who brought members
of the American Veterans Committee, the Americans for Demo-
cratic Action, and the Park West Neighborhood Association into
the West Side Housing Committee to campaign for slum clear-
ance across 98th Street. In the early summer of 1950, Congressman
Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., forwarded the West Side Housing Com-
mittee's data to the Committee on Slum Clearance. Although it is not
clear who chose the sponsor, Jack Ferman Builders, the West Side
Housing Committee maintained "an excellent" relationship with the
firm. Congressman Roosevelt remained a staunch supporter, incor-
porating the Manhattanville Development Corporation as a pro
bono favor to his constituents. He spent the next two years contributing legal work, and, with good reason, Robert Moses praised his help "in all phases of the project." Manhattan town also received support from young Roosevelt's liberal allies. When West Side ADA chairman and staunch FDR, Jr., supporter Bentley Kassal ran as the "anti-Tammany" candidate for state assembly, he boasted of his vigorous work for slum clearance. Manhattan town sponsors later enlisted the formidable talents of Samuel I. Rosenman, the New Dealer, husband of public-housing activist Dorothy Rosenman, and writer of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's appeals for the ill-housed "third of a nation."41

That kind of inspiration was needed when rumors of Manhattan town's scale circulated through the West Side. In October of 1950, Congressman Roosevelt promised his constituents that the project would forbid discrimination. But the following month, the New York AJC sent its chief community conciliator, Israel Laster, to the West Side Housing Committee's discussions with the Housing Authority. "Out of this meeting developed plans to set up a public relations committee," Laster explained, "to insulate the community against overt tension which might result during the next two years, when families will be displaced because of new high cost housing." Both New York AJC chapter committees, Housing and Intergroup Relations, and SCAD were part of the effort. Hoping to lessen the pain of displacement, Intergroup Relations helped organize a neighborhood forum, the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly. Its first sessions heard Clarence Senior and Joseph Montserrat of the Migration Office describe the steps to ease the influx of Puerto Ricans into the city and praise the West Side's achievements in integration. In January of 1951, Israel Laster joined the West Side Housing Committee to ask State Housing Commissioner Herman Stichman for a low-rent project near the redevelopment site. Stichman assured Herbert Sternau's group that he would consider a project if it could document the need. With that, the New York AJC and the West Side Housing Committee surveyed West 98th Street's low-rent requirements.42

All the conciliatory work failed to prepare the community for the unveiling of Manhattan town by the Committee on Slum Clearance in September of 1951. Moses had taken the West Side Housing Committee's plans and doubled their scale. The CSC had proposed to clear 3,600 tenement units to make room for seventeen twenty-story apartments containing 2,720 units. Unabashedly middle-income, Manhattan town's rents would average $30.50 per room, more than twice what site tenants paid. Herbert Sternau wrote Moses a carefully
worded letter stating that the West Side Housing Committee appreciated his efforts, but was disturbed that nearly all black and Puerto Rican site tenants would have to relocate to distant projects. Because the CSC had mentioned probable relocation to Manhattanville at 125th Street, Sternau said that he hoped that Moses would designate a low-income development near 100th Street. Moses blandly replied that the CSC planned a project to “coincide” with Manhattanville. He urged the West Siders to join him in wiping out “an uneconomic slum.”

Moses’s answer hardly dispelled the West Side Housing Committee’s worries about relocation, and Sternau’s comments to the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly reflected the search for a compromise. He conceded that Manhattanville’s $30.50 housing would “cater to the upper middle class,” but said his own committee was working for “$10. to $20. per room housing north of Manhattanville.” He wanted the assembly’s civic organizations to deluge the Housing Authority with appeals for “an integrated housing development along these lines.” Although he urged them to compliment the city for its plans for Manhattanville, he hoped that they would make clear that the Title I “will not, alone, fulfill the need of the area.”

Sternau had reason to worry. American Labor party workers, operating through a Manhattan Tenants Council, were on the scene, helping tenants organize another Save Our Homes Committee. They were busy circulating petitions and planning demonstrations at City Hall. Already upset by Manhattanville’s dimensions, City Councilman Stanley Isaacs was unnerved to learn about a “left-wing” tenants group. Isaacs forwarded the news to Ira Robbins of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council. Isaacs warned of the “almost insuperable” relocation problem, but Robbins assured him that he was keeping an eye on Manhattanville’s political impact. Commissioner Stichman offered 1,800 public housing units to site families, but the gesture proved to be too little, too late. Moses’s indifference had allowed another neighborhood to become radicalized.

The New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee agonized about Manhattanville, but was prepared to brazen out the controversy because of the enemies the project had made. In late October of 1951, John L. Freeman, chairman of the New York AJC Committee on Discrimination in Housing, claimed that his group had actively pursued slum clearance at Morningside and Manhattanville. Admitting that both had shortcomings, he favored more public housing in areas where “tension situations exist.” But a few days later, AJC community relations expert Israel Laster confided to
Herbert Sternau that he expected “to find certain people coming out in opposition to the Project,” and was readying a cautious defense of the redevelopment. In the meantime, Lastor planned to intensify his conciliation work.  

By then, the community was beyond reach of words. In late November of 1951, Sternau convened the West Side Housing Committee to deal with new agitation against Manhattantown. The committee heard that “a group with questionable background” planned a neighborhood protest rally for December 8. Several Jewish clergymen were among the sponsors, and Sternau’s committee “alerted both Rabbis to the situation and upon learning the facts they withdrew.” Sternau hoped to upstage the affair with one of his own. He brought in Congressman Roosevelt, Borough President Wagner, and Councilman Earl Brown. The speakers tried to quiet a crowd of 650 with promises that both “Manhattantown” projects, the Title I and the public housing, would be integrated and that all site tenants would get new homes. The audience booed the notables off the stage.  

The Save Our Homes protest occurred as scheduled at a local church. To offset Sternau’s liberal celebrities, radicals brought in activists from the ALP, the West Side Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, the Civil Rights Congress, and the West Side Tenants Council. Controlling the floor and the microphones, speakers said that Manhattantown would uproot 5,000 families. The leader of Morningside Save Our Homes called the project part of the “wall of Title One houses to bar the West Side and the River Front to Negroes and Puerto Ricans.” As the Daily Worker reported, the meeting vowed to make its rage heard in Washington.  

Choosing Sides  

During the spring of 1952, the anger rising from residents of Title I sites forced New Yorkers to grapple with the consequences of Moses-style progress. With an Olympian detachment from the city’s turmoil, realtor James Felt, president of the New York Urban League, offered a homely rationale for what he called the “knotty problem” of tenant relocation. “After cities reach maturity parts or sections wear out. They must be replaced and new elements introduced, otherwise the total city would soon be in jeopardy.” Redevelopment would cause pain, but the city had to proceed with the process.
Liberals worried whether renewal could justify upheavals on the scale of Manhattantown. As one Citizens Housing and Planning Council staffer pointed out, the relocation "arrangements" left much to be desired, but State Housing Commissioner Stichman had moved in the right direction by approving a nearby public project. But that did not quiet the debate in the CHPC subcommittee on redevelopment, where Herbert Sternau defended Manhattantown and Ira Robbins attacked its pretensions. Sternau tried to convince his colleagues to urge the Housing Authority to foster the utmost "integration" of Manhattantown with the adjacent public housing. Sternau claimed that the city could "avoid creating two economic ghettos" by designing the Title I and the public housing with the same site densities, height limits, and construction materials. He also proposed culling the separate projects, both the Title I and the public housing, by the same name, Manhattantown. Robbins questioned whether "identical buildings would conceal economic differences of site tenants." He derided the notion that nearby public housing would change that reality.10

The New York AJC found Manhattantown to be adequately balanced and questioned the motives of those who disagreed. As AJC conciliator Israel Laster concluded, "the fact that some Communists support low-rent developments is not disturbing. Yet, when they rant, holler and rave only about the fact that there will be high-cost housing and ignore completely the fact that there will also be balanced housing, which will include low-cost, cooperative, middle income and high-cost housing, then it is important to separate ourselves completely and decisively from such rantings." Laster calculated that balance, however, by including Manhattantown's low-rent units across 125th Street, more than a mile away. Having made up his mind, Laster prepared to educate the community about the "true nature of the project."11

Those who weighed Manhattantown's improvements against the social cost of relocation focused on the project's first hurdle, February 1952 hearings at the City Planning Commission. Citizens Housing and Planning Council president Robbins concluded that it was the place to warn the city about the crisis from Title I relocation. He tried to convince the CHPC to urge the City Planning Commission to postpone approval of four Title I sites until the commission could figure the total displaced and devise a system of gradual relocation. Robbins considered unconscionable the CSC estimates that 28 percent of site families would go into public housing. Unless the commission faced the "relocation toll," he warned, the misery
would create an environment where "the entire redevelopment program might be severely prejudiced." The CHPC subcommittee on redevelopment split the difference, however, between Sternau and Robbins. It endorsed Manhattantown, but "with all of Mr. Robbins' qualifications."52

Some West Side groups never wavered. A community conference hosted by the Spanish-American Youth Bureau failed to mention Manhattantown, although members of the West Side Housing Committee urged whites and Puerto Ricans to work together and fight discrimination. Far more important was the adamant stand taken by the West Side Housing Committee. Herbert Sternau alerted the City Planning Commission that "a neighborhood mass meeting was called by a leftist group . . . to secure a large delegation to protest the project at commission hearings." Save Our Homes had already showed that it could disrupt a civic occasion. Liberals feared that radicals would try a repeat performance at the City Planning Commission and wanted to "offset the misleading effect of their propaganda." Sternau assured the commission that the West Side Housing Committee was "heartily" behind Manhattantown. He would attend the hearings and bring along enthusiastic representatives from the American Veterans Committee, the ADA, B'nai Brith, and the Park West Neighborhood Association.53

The New York AJC also gave a qualified endorsement to Manhattantown. Although it did not take a formal position, the chapter urged the City Planning Commission "to complete plans for proper relocation before beginning new projects and . . . to give serious attention to public relations before public announcements are made." Refusing to condemn Moses's plans for Manhattantown, the chapter seconded the call by the Citizens Housing and Planning Council for a civic committee to look at the problem of Title I relocation. A few days later, the City Planning Commission approved CSC plans for Manhattantown without any revisions.54

The following month, Ira Robbins, writing for the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, quietly warned the Housing and Home Finance Agency that Moses's Title I policies were creating "an unfavorable public reaction [that] will jeopardize the program for years to come." Robbins explained the political pressures growing in New York. "Communist dominated groups are piling misrepresentations and falsehoods on top of the weak relocation structure presented by the Committee on Slum Clearance Plans," he added. "The racial and political tensions that can be stimulated by an ill-advised rehousing program are too dangerous to be ignored." But
the HHFA dismissed these fears, citing the city’s vast housing supply and nondiscriminatory ordinances that ensured shelter for everyone. Despite the rebuff, Robbins circulated the CHPC’s call for a “go slow” policy to allow work on Concars Hook and only one other Title I as an experiment in careful relocation.  

By the spring of 1952, Robbins had lost a good deal of liberal support. The defections included not only the redevelopers on the West Side Housing Committee, but many members of the New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee. Although the New York AJC subcommittee on redevelopment urged the Board of Estimate to stay Title I work until there was proper relocation under city supervision, the committee on discrimination supported Sternau’s call for adequate relocation on future projects. Robbins also was abandoned by Morningside’s advocates, who were annoyed by his attempts to link their project with Manhattan-town. A Morningside stalwart told Robbins that the cooperative deserved to be detached from the “larger question of over all relocation” because of the nearby public housing. The New York ADA was commodious enough for the confederates of redevelopment and for those dismayed by its side effects. West Side leaders who worked with Sternau on Manhattan-town remained with the citywide ADA even when the organization resolved for Title I plans based on “more realistic and more humane tenant relocation.”  

With the failure of the behind-the-scenes appeal, the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, joined by the NAACP, United Neighborhood Houses, and New York ADA, went public, warning Mayor Impellitteri that “Communist dominated groups” were making mischief with Title I relocation. The cold war jitters had some basis. In May of 1952, delegates from sixty-two civic and housing organizations, spearheaded by American Labor party affiliates, met to protest Title I and Truman administration domestic policies. Save Our Homes offered vivid accounts of the hardship faced by blacks and Puerto Ricans on demolished sites. Morningside Heights liberals could display their own lumps from radical assaults. As Lawrence Orton complained, Save Our Homes had “exploited every opportunity . . . to arouse the latent hostility of the site residents against the large institutions ‘on the hill.’”  

Throughout the winter and spring of 1953, threats both to decent Title I projects and to objectionable ones forced liberals to choose between Moses and Save Our Homes. On Morningside Heights, that reality led redevelopers to close ranks and fudge evidence. Moses heightened the crisis by exaggerating Washington’s
queries about the Morningside Title I and his own weariness with the redevelopment. He wrote to David Rockefeller, "I need not emphasize again the fact that it has been a tough job to keep the adjacent City Housing Authority low rent federal project high enough on the list to be reached and that delays as to the Title I project are not helpful." Moses passed the word to David Rockefeller that HHFA officials were skeptical about Morningside's blight. MHI would have to make, he said, "a stronger case for physical deterioration." Meeting the challenge, Lawrence Orton was reported to have employed "compelling [arguments] rather than figures which must fit into the statistical strait jacket of [the] U.S. Census housing survey." An MHI staffer added that "the strongest index of slum conditions" was the building coverage of 91 percent. Orton threw in other arguments: ambiguous census data that MHI claimed made a "stronger case for physical deterioration," Father George B. Ford's attack on the neighborhood's "festerling sore," and CSC figures on the influx of low-income groups that "definitely proves that it is deteriorating and it is blighted." 88

The battle for Morningside Heights climaxed in Washington, as Truman administration officials waited the arrival of President-elect Dwight Eisenhower. Orton made the rounds at HHFA, while others visited influential Democrats on Capitol Hill, including Jerry Voorhis of the Cooperative Society of the U.S.A. and John Sparkman, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. A few days later, the Truman administration gave the nod to the Morningside write-down. On January 15, 1953, the Board of Estimate braved 300 diehard protesters and approved the Morningside-Manhattantown redevelopment. 89

The CSC proclaimed Morningside a Title I showplace and model of compassionate relocation. The site became an obligatory stop for Moses's limousines when he wanted officials to see Title I at work. As scandal engulfed Manhattantown in 1954, the CSC squeezed every endorsement from the liberal and labor groups that had supported progress on the Heights. In the 1954 elections, Congressman Jacob K. Javits, running for state office against Congressman Roosevelt, contrasted his support for Morningside against FDR, Jr.'s ties with Manhattantown. "There hasn't been any scandal in the project," he told television viewers. "It provides for federal public housing for 1,950 families and a housing cooperative, owned by the tenants, for 934 families. This is much closer to the total number of families
removed from the site, many of whom will be able to qualify for public housing."61

Morningside Gardens, as the Title I cooperative was called, proved a typical Moses operation, softened by Heights compassion. Removals began in 1954 with messages, an MHI social worker advised, to inform site tenants that redevelopers "understand the fears and worries of the residents, that they stood ready to help them with information and advice and, if need be, advocacy during the months ahead." But they were expected to follow self-relocation, and sponsors' neglect of building maintenance urged out a good portion of them. Save Our Homes kept an angry vigil, bitterly disputing MHI's "diligence and sincerity" in relocating the forlorn blacks and Puerto Ricans who remained.62
Weighing Values

Although many liberals were dismayed by Title I, many hoped for painless relocation that would lead to the creation of mixed-race, balanced communities. As evidence mounted about the price that blacks and Puerto Ricans paid for redevelopment, observers kept their faith in the instruments of interracial harmony. Their soul-searching, which found redeeming features in the worst projects, gave Moses an inestimable advantage, which he used to show that Title I stood in the forefront of the fair-housing movement.

Title I projects that turned neighborhoods upside down were accompanied by social analysis that was preoccupied with the consequences rather than the causes of neighborhood “tension.” The New York AJC’s activists against discrimination were deeply involved with the campaign for interracial public housing in the Bronx. The committee focused on “an important preventative . . . to insure that the development of mixed housing in Bronx residential areas are [sic] not lead[ing] to the sort of interracial difficulties that materialized in Chicago and elsewhere.” Emphasizing the positive impact of law and group understanding, the committee worked with SCAD for a city ordinance banning discrimination in publicly assisted housing. Members also provided a “consultation service” to supporters of integrated public housing. During the Manhattan town controversy, for instance, the AJC held a series of “emergency conferences” with West Side leaders, including Sternau’s group.62

The American Jewish Committee’s views on redevelopment brought it charter membership in the Committee for Balanced Communities, which was formed by activists from SCAD and the Ethical Culture Society to foster neighborhoods that reflected “the varied population patterns of the American community.” The committee hoped to achieve that balance within redevelopment areas by locating public housing “on peripheral, fringe, or border neighborhoods.” Endorsing the Forest Houses, a low-rent project in the Bronx, the committee urged the Housing Authority to use “proper site and tenant selection, [and] propitious timing of projects, which help to develop harmonious and integrated communities.” When the Citizens Housing and Planning Council demanded drastic cutbacks in Title I during the spring of 1952, the Committee for Balanced Communities agreed that “lack of clarity” in relocation was “supplying ammunition to those groups which thrive on confusion” and whose obstructive tactics would jeopardize “the whole urban redevelopment program.” A sensible relocation policy had to measure family
need against the existing housing supply, open the outer boroughs
to minorities, and expand the Housing Authority’s construction on
vacant land. “We would like to see urban redevelopment go for-
ward as quickly as possible,” the committee told the city, but “not
so quickly, however, as to trample upon the rights of families now
living on the sites.” Redevelopment would be modified, but never
shut down.64

Several groups, no longer able to ignore the numbers, ended their
ambivalence during the winter of 1952–1953. SCAD staffers spent
fertile months gathering relocation statistics and worrying about
“premature leaks to the Mayor, to Mr. Moses, to the opponents of
public housing or to the press.” Their data showed that seven Title I
projects would tear down the dwellings of 9,604 families—45 per-
cent of them black and an unknown but substantial percentage of
them Puerto Rican, particularly at Manhattantown and Morning-
side. Another 19,970 families, 5,000 of them black, resided on sites
marked for clearance by the Housing Authority. Thousands more
families lived in wartime Quonsets scheduled for demolition, and
still more would be removed for construction of schools, highways,
and Port Authority projects. Only 15 percent of those displaced
could afford Title I rents, and another 35 percent could meet the in-
come requirements of public housing. That left huge numbers to the
crowded private market. Brandishing the data, SCAD leaders, along
with Councilman Stanley Isaacs and Ira Robbins of the CHPC, pre-
vailed upon liberals to form a City-Wide Committee on Housing
and Relocation Problems. In the meantime, SCAD warned Mayor
Impellitteri that 45,000 families were being pushed into an urban
limbo. The 60 percent that were black and Puerto Rican would have
few housing alternatives because of color. Uncontrolled clearance
would create worse slums and dangerous political tensions.65

A few days later, SCAD and the City-Wide Committee con-
fronted the CSC and Title I sponsors with “severe questions” about
relocation. While the officials made promises, the realtors pleaded
ignorance on the “specific data.” Councilman Isaacs resolved for a
City Planning Commission study on relocations, which passed the
city council unanimously. The anti-Moses activists hoped that they
would finally have the numbers to bring the city to its senses. In-
stead, the decision to get the facts touched off a back-room struggle,
described by Robert Caro, during which City Planning Commission
mavericks led by Lawrence Orton tried to assemble the data, while
Moses, with the help of Manhattantown counsel Samuel Rosenman,
prepared a whitewash.66
The most dire statistics, however, would not have dented support for Title I among redevelopers drawn to the challenge of “humane” relocation. At Morningside, Alfred Rheinstein, the builder and former chairman of the Housing Authority, headed a redevelopment group that offered businesslike handling of Title I’s complex features, from initial land acquisition to the sale of completed apartments. Rheinstein’s attorney, Maxwell Tretter, had experience at Queensview, South Village, and another Title I cooperative at Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Milton Saslow, president of Nassau Management, Inc., and a relocation consultant to the CSC, had directed the Housing Authority’s postwar removal of 27,000 site families. Saslow, an enthusiast for self-relocation, believed that effective site managers knew the kinds of constraints and incentives that got tenants to find their own shelter. Rheinstein added that his redevelopers had expertise “in each branch of the [clearance] work and seasoned judgment on when and where concessions in one phase should be made to give the best end result.” He could field a staff of relocators experienced in public housing admissions as well as in the ways of the private market.

“It works closely with the legal branch in court procedures, such as eviction orders, and at all times and in these and other matters gives explanations to the tenants whom they will get to know,” Rheinstein added. “The staff will foster a good tenant relationship which will speed relocation and if it does not always eradicate antagonisms and resentments it at least softens them.”

Outrage against Manhattantown never reached the Mayor’s Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs, which had focused since the early 1950s on the Upper West Side, “a relatively new Puerto Rican area where tensions are understandably greater.” Committee advisor Herbert Sternau conceded that the district suffered from a severe shortage of low-rent apartments. The inadequate housing, compounded by a lack of bilingual workers in city agencies, was confirmed by a representative of the Spanish-American Youth Bureau. Arthur Loeb, a local ADA activist who worked with Sternau’s housing committee, worried about increasing prejudice against Puerto Ricans and called on the city to create an educational campaign against ethnic stereotypes. A spokesman for the West Side ADA told the mayor’s committee that the neighborhood needed more settlement houses and ways to break down “prejudices between the people of different economic levels.”

Redevelopment’s loyalists interpreted Manhattantown’s impact as a series of problems overcome by improved site management. In the spring of 1953, Herbert Sternau advised community activists on
the Protestant Council how they could aid 500 small store owners “put out of business” by the Title I. He suggested, according to the clerics, that “by communication with our ourlying churches we might find neighborhoods where drugstores, shoe repair shops, fruit
and vegetable stores, etc. might be needed.” In January 1954 Sternau appeared as chairman of the Bloomingdale–Park West Health Committee to speak on the health needs of Puerto Ricans. Families dislocated by Manhattan town could get help at an office on 100th Street. “Private enterprises and real estate people,” Sternau informed the Protestant Council, were handling the problem. Some tenants “are being gradually re-located in public housing,” he noted, “and others are relocating themselves.”

Even during the height of the controversy, liberals rallied around Moses because he represented public housing progress. At the fall 1953 dedication of the Bernard Baruch Houses, President Eisenhower and Moses were featured speakers. Moses proclaimed the city’s intention to finish the job of cleaning out “the whole overcrowded and malodorous East Side.” He appealed to the Eisenhower administration to stand by Title I subsidies and to maintain public housing for “displaced persons of low income.” Housing Authority member Frank Crosswhite praised Moses’s support of slum clearance and sent his personal thanks. Ira Robbins congratulated Moses for a “brilliant speech,” and William Vladeck wrote to Moses that he was “thrilled and delighted” by the occasion. Savoring the moment, Moses had the accolades bound and sent to Housing Authority chairman Philip Cruise.

Throughout the debate over Title I, partisans believed that many refugees would end up in planned interracial communities. The most prominent was the Queensview cooperative, organized on the old Ravenswood site in Long Island City by Housing Authority veterans Louis Pink, Maxwell Trettter, and Gerard Swope. Robert Moses provided city condemnation and a partial twenty-five-year tax exemption that brought equity investment of from $2,000 to $3,000 per owner and monthly maintenance of from $68 to $98. James Felt volunteered to recruit occupants, and a laudatory New York Post article written by Charles Abrams drew ninety buyers. “We made it clear to everyone,” boasted Pink, “that we would take Negro families on the same basis as white.” Pink proclaimed Queensview the city’s “first private non-discriminatory project.” But the Queensview boosters were deluding themselves, along with the public. In 1949, the Field Foundation privately observed that “no affirmative effort is being made to interest Negro applicants.” Although not dismiss-
ing Queensview, the Field appraisal found minimal compliance with the antidiscrimination laws. "The organizers do not propose to go out and look for qualified Negro cooperators in order to conduct a planned social experiment in inter-racial living," the appraisal concluded. Few black families, in any case, could manage the $2,000 equity.\(^7\)

The affirmative effort sustained hopes, but made little difference on the interracial front. The Committee for Balanced Communities, together with the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith and SCAD, remained committed to integrating Bronx public housing, and distributed brochures designed to interest whites in "the physical attractiveness of a new community." When the Housing Authority opened the Forest Houses in the summer of 1954, the Committee for Balanced Communities tried to reach white applicants and readied volunteers for the novel social work. Eventually they interviewed fourteen Japanese-American families displaced from the Morningside Title I site, a few of whom went into the Bronx project. The committee chairman, realtor J. Clarence Davies, Jr., was encouraged when they were joined by twenty-two white families. But these scant numbers proved the limit. "The Housing Authority now feels," Davies noted, "that it is unfair to withhold any qualified applicants from moving into the [Forest Houses] project, despite the pressure we have been placing upon them to keep the project racially balanced." The New York AJC never regretted the efforts expended to create "this first inter-racial" project.\(^3\)

By 1956, the campaign for balanced communities produced housing as racially divided as the city. While experts on the New York State Commission Against Discrimination strained to find "an increasing trend toward mixed occupancy," its own statistics showed Housing Authority projects badly skewed by race and more dismal outcomes in the middle-income redevelopments. Twenty-one limited-dividend projects with a total of 11,145 dwelling units contained seventy-five black families (thirty-five lived in one project, the 1,400-unit Hillside Houses in the Bronx). Nevertheless, the commission proclaimed "continuing improvement in the occupancy patterns." It cited the 2,000-unit Electchester in Queens, built by the Electrical Workers, which accepted its "first ten minority families," and it applauded the "energetic" efforts that integrated Hillside. Ten Title I projects, completed or under construction, contained 13,784 units, another field for integration. The first to open, the 1,600-unit Coxe's Hook cooperative, had approximately fifty black families in addition, the state survey said, "to representation of many other
ethnic, religious and racial groups. But another Title I, the 600-unit Coliseum Apartments on West 60th Street, whose rents averaged $62.50 per room, typified the general trend. Despite the sponsor's pledge of nondiscrimination, few nonwhites could afford the upper-middle-class rents.72

One widely admired exception was the 1,000-unit Morningside Gardens, which defied the wisdom, Shirley Boden wrote, that "Negroes have been reluctant to buy into a cooperative in an 'all-white' neighborhood." Largely on Morningside's record, the New York State Commission Against Discrimination indulged in wishful thinking about "the marked increase" in nonwhite families seeking cooperative apartments. While controversy swirled around Title I, Morningside Gardens remained a beacon of racial tolerance and social justice. Its administrators knew that Morningside depended on elaborate controls and word-of-mouth recruitment of Chinese- and Japanese-American families from MHI's member institutions.

To guide the process, MHI called in a housing specialist who advised that "20% Negroes is about the limit in a truly integrated project," but that 13 percent was more "easily justified," considering that the city's population would have that percentage of blacks when Morningside opened. With black groups ready "to support any policies arrived at in a practical and just way," the expert pointed out, Morningside's real problem was recruiting whites. As for the Manhattanville public project across 125th Street, the expert suggested that MHI discreetly arrange with the Housing Authority chairman for "a special selection policy" to recruit white tenants.73

The campaign's tiny quotas and elaborate controls reinforced the middle-class privatism among cooperative shareholders, who, as Abraham Kazan was the first to admit, were never cooperative-minded. "No preliminary work had been done with these people," a 1956 assessment concluded, "to prepare them . . . to understand the responsibilities that operating a cooperative required." Social investigators found the redevelopments filled with white, middle-class families who "over-scheduled" their children and directed their ambitions toward Ivy League futures. The projects were isolated enclaves that recoiled from what one observer called "the mores and behavior of lower income groups." That was the community balance achieved by the social engineers in league with Robert Moses. But for true believers, it brought measured progress in a city determined to strike down racial barriers.74