REDEVELOPING THE CABRINI-GREEN HOUSING PROJECT:

A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, 1989-2004

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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April 2006
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Abstract
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The Cabrini-Green housing project on the Near North Side of Chicago was the site of a redevelopment struggle from 1989 to 2004. The city of Chicago, the Chicago Housing Authority, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development advanced plans to tear down the Cabrini high-rises and build mixed-income neighborhoods in their place. Cabrini-Green residents opposed the proposals through protests and court injunctions. In this paper, we utilize theories of poverty concentration to explain the protracted conflict at Cabrini-Green, illustrate why proposed policies have been met with opposition, and provide insights for future action that might ease the skirmish. These theories also uncover three major issues underlying the Cabrini-Green narrative: the problems of moving public housing residents to new mixed-income neighborhoods, the issue of affordable housing in the Chicago metropolitan area, and the efforts of the public housing residents to shape their own future through collective action.
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INTRODUCTION

“CHA’s plan all along has been to wipe the slate clean…to demolish all the buildings, remove all the families, with no plan for when new units will be built or when families could return. That’s why residents are fighting so hard…they know once they’re gone, there won’t be any constituency to argue for public housing units to come back any time soon.” (Richard Wheelock, lawyer representing Cabrini-Green residents, quoted in Grossman 2005)

“Our commitment is to build new, low-rise, lower density, mixed income communities, which will end the isolation of public housing residents.” (Terry Peterson, CHA Chief, quoted in Korecki 2004)

Public housing policy in America at the beginning of the 21st century is very different than it was in the decades following World War II. Whereas public housing policy after World War II promoted the construction of concrete high-rises surrounded by large swaths of land built primarily in existing Black ghettos, recent policy is stressing the deconcentration of poverty among public housing residents.

Sociologists have formulated distinct perspectives to explain the preponderance of African-Americans living in concentrated poverty, often in public housing projects (Bickford and Massey 1991; Goering, Kamely, and Richardson 1997; Massey and Kanaiaupuni 1993). William Julius Wilson (1987; 1996) and Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) have emphasized the isolation and hypersegregation of minority public housing residents in the major cities of America. Wilson argues that the economic restructuring of America since the early 1970s has bypassed inner-city ghettos that are socially and economically isolated from larger American society. Massey and Denton,
while agreeing with Wilson’s claim, emphasize patterns of residential segregation as the main cause of inner-city ghettos. Joe Feagin (1998; 1999; Feagin and Parker 1990) claims that racism is the primary reason a relatively high proportion of African-Americans live in concentrated poverty. Kevin Fox Gotham (2002), through a case study of housing patterns in Kansas City during the 20th century, declares the current segregated outcome is the result of a racialized housing process.

The Cabrini-Green housing project in Chicago provides an opportunity to examine the new public housing policies in light of the theories of concentrated poverty. Since 1989, various private and governmental groups have developed proposals to tear down the high-rises at Cabrini, infamously known for their frequent deadly violence and bleak conditions\(^1\), and replace them with mixed-income neighborhoods. The stated goal of the demolition and redevelopment is to reduce the isolation of the public housing residents (Koreckti 2004). The residents of the high-rises have blocked the redevelopment plans at various points because of a lack of representation in the planning process and a claim that the proposals do not provide enough replacement housing for displaced residents. The struggle has taken place at local planning meetings and in the courts as residents, developers, and the government squabble over the exact future of the housing project.

This thesis focuses on the singular struggle over redevelopment at Cabrini-Green. We will discuss the struggle in light of sociological perspectives of poverty concentration in order to delve below the surface of the Cabrini-Green conflict and understand why some residents are resistant to leaving Cabrini. These perspectives will reveal that the

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\(^1\) For a description of the conditions in Chicago’s public housing high-rises, see Kotlowitz (1991).
planned mixed-income developments will not necessarily overcome the economic and social isolation experienced by public housing residents formerly living in concentrated poverty. In addition, public housing residents living in the new developments or displaced into the private housing market may experience a segregated housing process that will severely limit their access to affordable and quality housing. Because of the uncertainties and difficulties associated with building new mixed-income neighborhoods and seeking private housing, some Cabrini residents have sought housing assurances should they leave the project. Finally, the theories of concentrated poverty could be the key to explaining the success of the residents’ movement at Cabrini-Green.

Cabrini-Green is a unique public housing complex for several reasons. Cabrini has a notorious reputation because of high crime levels and squalid physical conditions. In contrast to most of the public housing projects in Chicago, the project is located outside the historically black South and West sides of Chicago. In addition, Cabrini has a coveted location for a public housing project, minutes away from the upscale shops and residences of Michigan Avenue, the shore of Lake Michigan, and the Loop, the business and finance district of Chicago (see Figure 1). In addition, whereas other high-rise public housing projects in Chicago and across the country have been torn down, at the end of 2004, high-rises still existed at Cabrini-Green and the redevelopment process had been severely slowed. A group of the Cabrini residents of the complex have been able to mobilize to obstruct the redevelopment plans proposed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and the city of Chicago.
Figure 1. Map of Chicago with locations of CHA housing sites. 
The theories of Wilson, Massey and Denton, Feagin, and Gotham will help to guide our discussion as we explain the social forces behind the ongoing redevelopment conflict at Cabrini-Green, show why proposed policies have been met by opposition, and provide insights for future action that might ease the conflict. We first examine the theories sociologists have developed to explain concentrated poverty and public housing ghettos. We next briefly look at public housing in Chicago, focusing on the actions of the Chicago Housing Authority since its formation in 1937. We will then explore the history of the redevelopment process of Cabrini-Green from 1989 to 2004, emphasizing the planning of the CHA and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the responses of Cabrini residents. Last, we discuss three major issues underlying the new strategies for public housing in America and arising in the Cabrini-Green narrative: the problems present in government plans to move residents from high-rises to mixed-income developments; the larger issue of affordable housing that surrounds the debate at Cabrini-Green; and the efforts of CHA residents to shape their own future through collective action.
PUBLIC HOUSING POVERTY THEORIES

Sociologists agree that predominantly African-American ghettos in American inner cities are unique to this particular group. Arguments differ on how this happened and how the ghettos are perpetuated.

William Julius Wilson (1987; 1996) argues that the spatial concentration of poverty in inner-city ghettos and public housing projects can be explained by the social isolation of the neighborhoods and their residents. Lacking ready interaction with the broader American society and ready economic opportunities within and outside of the community, African-Americans are isolated and surrounded by buffers. Ghetto communities have been further isolated by the restructuring of the American economy since the 1970s with a shift from manufacturing to service and professional sectors.

While race does play a part in the process of isolation, Wilson’s primary emphasis is the lack of economic opportunities in the ghetto. When a neighborhood contains a certain proportion of very poor residents, institutions and social organization disintegrate, multiplying the problems of the inner-city: single-mother households, drugs, welfare dependency, crime, teen motherhood, and weak labor force attachments.

Subsequent works (Anderson 1999) have confirmed the isolation and lack of economic opportunities in African-American ghettos and the concurrent rise of alternative value systems and economies. In order to shrink the ghetto, the social buffers must be reduced and communities reintegrated into America’s social and economic
When poor groups are deconcentrated, more prosperous neighbors can act as role models and a healthy buffer against pathological behavior and disorganization (Bennett and Reed 1999).

Agreeing with Wilson that there have been important consequences of the structural transformation of the American economy, Massey and Denton (1993) contend that Wilson fails to adequately explain why this transformation has led directly to a black underclass rather than an underclass of other groups. The authors maintain that racial residential segregation is the primary reason for urban poverty. They demonstrate that the residential segregation of African-Americans in the inner-city from World War II to the present is the highest level of residential segregation of any ethnic or racial group in American history. Because levels of African-American residential segregation were relatively low in 1900 and increased significantly later, Massey and Denton argue the segregation is the result of deliberate institutional policies and private actions. According to the authors, the majority of American society, white Americans, needs to take responsibility for the still-present though illegal residential segregation. Government organizations like HUD need to strictly enforce anti-discrimination laws and society needs to go beyond individual enforcement of such laws.

Feagin (1998) also emphasizes the consequences of race as he views the ghetto from “the New Urban paradigm”, a perspective that places class and racial oppression at the center of urban analysis. Feagin investigates how powerful economic actors in private and government sectors create and build cities. Feagin views the restructuring of the American economy discussed by Wilson and Massey and Denton as part of a new international division of labor with local consequences for American cities. Powerful
social actors, such as real estate brokers, developers, and city planners, continue
economic domination of African-Americans that began in the early days of American
slavery. While Blacks have many more rights at this point in history, racism is still very
real, especially in job and real estate markets. Instead of overt racist laws and institutional
practices, the new racism is covert and informal.

Gotham (2002) applies the new urban paradigm to the specific case of housing
patterns in Kansas City in the 20th century. Drawing upon the work of Wilson, Massey
and Denton, Feagin, and others, Gotham traces the dynamics of real estate activities,
federal policies, and capitalist development. Gotham’s argument differs from previous
explanations of concentrated poverty in three ways. He links uneven development in
cities and suburbs and residential segregation to better understand how race is connected
to metropolitan problems like poverty. Instead of focusing primarily on race or class,
Gotham explores the intertwining of the two. In addition, exploring the history of housing
in Kansas City allows Gotham to examine the changes in racial ideology in the real estate
business and federal housing policies. (Gotham 2002:3-5)

In the study of Kansas City, Gotham (2002:12) uses racialization as a frame to
understand how residential segregation was shaped by the actions of the federal
government and the real estate industry. With this frame, Gotham finds evidence for new
racism in the actions of banks disproportionately denying black mortgage applications.
Schools in Kansas City are still highly segregated because of racialized housing
settlement patterns. Due to actions of real estate activities and government policies, the
poor are concentrated in inner-city neighborhoods whose conditions perpetuate racial
stereotypes. Gotham argues that government needs to move beyond promoting market-
based social policy and helping the private sector in order to solve the problems of racial residential segregation.

Each of the four theories discussed above emphasizes different causes of the hypersegregation of African-American public housing residents. According to these sociologists, a number of factors have led to concentrated poverty: economic and social isolation; residential segregation; racism; and historical and current institutional policies that perpetuate segregation. We will use this sociological framework to understand the battle over the redevelopment of public housing at Chicago’s Cabrini-Green. However, before dissecting the conflict at Cabrini, we will first present a brief history of the CHA and the widening struggle over redevelopment at Cabrini-Green.
2.1 The Chicago Housing Authority

A case study of Cabrini-Green would be incomplete without outlining its institutional context. As Gotham (2002) found in Kansas City, the current housing situation is a manifestation of a racialized housing process stretching back into the early 1900s.

Cabrini-Green is managed by the Chicago Housing Authority, a government agency initially created after the passage of the US Housing Act of 1937. The CHA is currently the third largest housing authority in the country after housing authorities in New York and Los Angeles.

The first leader of the CHA, reformer Elizabeth Wood, faced severe housing problems in Chicago. Following World War II, the Chicago Plan Commission estimated city limits enclosed more than 242,000 housing units in 23 square miles of blight (Hirsch 1983:22). The housing shortage for lower income residents was exacerbated by a steady migration of African-Americans to northern cities like Chicago. Between 1910 and 1930, Chicago gained almost 200,000 African-American residents, giving Chicago the second-largest urban black population in the United States (Meyer 2000:32). From 1940 to 1950, the black population expanded from 278,000 to 492,000 (Hirsch 1983:17). Many of the blacks in Chicago moved to the area known as the Black Belt, a geographic area along State Street on the South Side. In the late 1940s, an estimated 375,000 blacks lived in the
main part of the Black Belt, an area that was suitable for no more than 110,000 people (Hirsch 1983:23).

The first three public housing developments in Chicago, built between 1935 and 1938, were nearly all white (Feldman and Stall 2004:31). However, following World War II, public housing came to be seen as housing for blacks. Wood was removed from her position in 1954 following her efforts to integrate the Trumbull Park Homes on the Southeast Side of Chicago (Hirsch 1983:236).

Chicago’s city council consistently overruled the CHA and voted to build most of the new public housing in black neighborhoods (Hirsch 1983:241-242; Meyerson and Banfield 1955). To be cost-effective and provide as much housing as possible, the city council emphasized large housing projects. Instead of constructing attractive neighborhoods as initially planned by the CHA, many projects consisted of concrete frame high-rises on superblocks cut off from the Chicago street grid. Many of these projects were further isolated from surrounding communities by later highway construction and expanding mass transit lines. Contractors cut corners in construction, population density levels were raised, and room sizes were reduced because of federal cost limits. (Von Hoffman 1998)

Between 1950 and 1969, the CHA built eleven high-rise developments (Popkin et al 2000:12-13). Of the 15,591 family units constructed between 1957 and 1968, all but 696 were in high-rises (Bowly 1978:112). Whereas racial minorities comprised 60% of Chicago public housing residents in 1948; the figure rose to 86% by 1960. Only one of the 33 public housing complexes built between 1945 and the mid-1960s was built outside
existing black ghettos on the West and South sides of Chicago. (Feldman and Stall 2004:41-43).

The segregated housing situation in Chicago reached a crisis point during the 1960s when the Civil Rights movement chose Chicago as the best location for nonviolent action over housing\(^2\). Though civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. met with Mayor Richard J. Daley in August 1966 and secured promises for better housing, the city and CHA did little to follow through on their promises (Hirsch 1983:265).

In that same year, CHA residents Dorothy Gautreaux and three others charged the CHA with discrimination in tenant assignments and housing site selection (Gautreaux vs. the Chicago Housing Authority) (Lawrence and Grossman 2001). At the time of the lawsuit, the CHA managed 30,000 units and 64 projects. Sixty of those projects were 99.5 percent black and four projects were 95 percent white (Welfeld 1998:226). Three years later, in 1969, the CHA and HUD were found guilty of segregation through violation of the equal-protection clause of the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The judge delivered an order creating a formula intended to help the CHA build new housing outside of black neighborhoods. (Lawrence and Grossman 2001)

The CHA was to build the next 700 units in white areas and 75 percent, later lowered to 60 percent, of future public housing was to be built in white neighborhoods (Hirsch 1983:265). Subsequent litigation based on this case would eventually reach the Supreme Court in 1976 (Hills vs. Gautreaux) and little public housing and affordable housing was built in the following two decades. Instead of providing new housing,

\(^2\) Chicago was chosen, according to Martin Luther King, Jr., because “If we can break the backbone of discrimination in Chicago, we can do it in all the cities in the country.” (Hirsch 1983:264)
Chicago was allowed to practice scattered-site housing, mainly through provisions of Section 8 housing vouchers for public housing residents.

Despite the court rulings in favor of public housing residents, the overall housing situation in Chicago continued to deteriorate. Early in the 1980s, federal officials called the CHA “the worst managed housing authority in the nation” (Venkatesh 2000:112). In 1987 and 1995, CHA was placed in receivership by a federal judge until HUD could establish a new management team (Venkatesh 2000:118).

Emerging from receivership in 1999, the reshaped CHA juggled new regulations, legislation, and goals. Five years earlier, a Republican-led Congress repealed the one-for-one replacement rule for demolished public housing. That same year, President Bill Clinton unveiled a proposal calling for HUD to focus on the demolition of high-rise public housing that could not be maintained. (Ihejirika 1994b) And in 1997, a federal law required the CHA to tear down many dilapidated properties consisting of 19,000 units. Federal funds were also directly appropriated for high-rise demolishing, mixed-income housing, and training and social services for tenants. (Lawrence and Grossman 2001)

Since the early 1990s, HUD has emphasized the construction of mixed-income housing developments. These neighborhoods should help HUD reduce the isolation of low-income public housing residents (Handley 2004). Federal money for new developments came through HOPE VI grants that aimed “to transform public housing communities from islands of despair and poverty into a vital and integral part of larger neighborhoods” and “to create an environment that encourages and supports individual and family movement toward self-sufficiency” (Clampet-Lundquist 2004:58).
2.2 Cabrini-Green: A Case Study, 1989-2004

Since the early 1990s, a civic battle has raged over the redevelopment of Cabrini-Green. With new leadership and strategies, the city of Chicago and the CHA have been active in promoting plans to tear down the dysfunctional high-rises and replace them with mixed-income developments. Many Cabrini residents have opposed the plans which often lacked a substantial number of replacement affordable housing units. Through 2004, residents’ opposition has largely delayed this redevelopment process.

Cabrini-Green consists of three major sections with over seventy buildings constructed in Chicago’s Near North Side neighborhood (see Figure 2)\(^3\). When construction initially began, Cabrini was built upon an Italian-American slum known as Little Hell (Bennett and Reed 1999:175-176). The Cabrini project was originally intended to be bi-racial with a composition of 80 percent white and 20 percent black (Meyerson and Banfield 1955:123). The percentage of blacks in the slum grew from 20 percent in 1940 to 79 percent in 1950 (Bowly 1978:35,117). Cabrini was Chicago’s only public housing development out of 33 built between 1945 and the mid-1960s that was not built on existing black ghetto site (Feldman and Stall 2004:43).

The three sections of the project were built in 1942, 1958, and 1962 and included both two and three story low-rises and seven, ten, fifteen, sixteen, and nineteen-story high-rises. In all, 21 high-rises were built at Cabrini-Green. (Bowly 1978:35,116,118) At its peak, Cabrini-Green was home to 15,000 people living in 3,500 apartments. At the beginning of 2005, 370 families lived in 586 row houses and by the end of the year,

\(^3\) For an earlier sociological study of this neighborhood, see Zorbaugh (1929).
Figure 2. Cabrini-Green area from the air. Cabrini is enclosed by the dashed line. Two sections of Cabrini are labeled: the William Green Homes and the Cabrini Row Houses. Source: http://maps.cityofchicago.org/kiosk/maptags.jsp?map.x=332&map.y=308&maxx=1174258.01954781&maxy=1909647.19503365&minx=1170418.01954781&miny=1906447.19503365&mapaction=pan&service=mapsplats_aerials.

proposed redevelopment plans would leave 165 families in three high-rises. (Grossman 2005) In 1991, the CHA estimated the vacancy rate at Cabrini-Green to be 33.2% out of 3,608 units (Chicago Sun-Times 1994).

Planning for redevelopment at Cabrini-Green began in the late 1980s. In 1989, a neighborhood-based planning exercise began through the efforts of a local non-profit group called the Near North Development Corporation. By the end of 1991, the North
Town Redevelopment Advisory Council (NTRAC) produced a plan for redevelopment that shaped subsequent proposals for Cabrini-Green. The plan had several main points: the building of mixed-income housing in areas surrounding Cabrini-Green, the improvement of social service programs from local nonprofit groups, improved mass transit connecting the Cabrini-Green area to the rest of the city, and the construction of a Town Center at the east end of Cabrini-Green to provide a neighborhood focal point. Though the report did not call for the demolition of the Cabrini-Green high-rises, it did claim demolition could be plausible if replacement housing was built. The NTRAC also said “the Near North community ‘belongs’ to public housing residents as much as it does to other, more affluent residents.” (Bennett 1998)

In 1993, CHA Chairman Vincent Lane announced that he was seeking $50 million from the Federal Government in order to create a mixed-income community at Cabrini-Green. On August 25, 1993, HUD announced their HOPE VI funding for 1994 but Chicago was not on the list despite the support of President Clinton and positive predictions from housing industry officials. (Ihejirika 1993a) However, the government reversed course in November when federal officials approved the $50 million HOPE VI plan for the renovation and demolition of Cabrini-Green buildings after two Chicago Democratic congressmen changed their minds and provided endorsements.

The HOPE VI plan for Cabrini included redeveloping four high-rises, demolishing three buildings, rehabilitating a CHA-owned community center, building replacement housing, and allowing for 852 market-rate housing units. (Ihejirika 1993b) Lane claimed the proposed neighborhood would replace the public housing complex with a “normal neighborhood” (Reardon 1994).
Various redevelopment plans for Cabrini-Green were explored in the following three years. In 1995, Lane proposed the demolition of three high-rises and the building of 700 units of low-rise housing on Cabrini-Green and nearby land. After HUD’s takeover of the CHA in May 1995, officials rejected Lane’s plan (Ihejirika 1995a). However, lacking a plan of their own, HUD officials adopted Lane’s proposal in July 1995 and asked residents of two Cabrini-Green buildings to move so that the buildings could be demolished (Ihejirika 1995b). In October 1995, the CHA received $110 million of Federal funds from HUD. Of that money, $25.4 million was earmarked for demolition of buildings and the construction of replacement housing at Cabrini-Green and at Lakefront Properties. The remaining money was marked for Section 8 rent certificates for CHA residents. (Jimenez 1995)

Late in 1995, new CHA executive director Joseph Shuldiner solicited privately sponsored proposals for Cabrini’s redevelopment. The North Town Community Partnership, a group including some members of NTRAC, submitted the proposal receiving the most attention. The plan called for the development of 236 acres, including Cabrini-Green’s 70 acres, the demolition of most of the Cabrini high-rises, and the construction of more than 2,000 units of new housing. The new development would provide mixed-income housing built along streets that would connect to the Chicago street grid. (Bennett 1998)

This report asserted repeatedly that the Cabrini residents were isolated from the rest of the city. The report said, “[S]een from 40 floors up in a luxury tower across town, Cabrini-Green’s apartment slabs brood like tombstones on quarantined turf” (North Town Community Partnership 1995:1). While the group claimed Cabrini residents were more
isolated from the city than residents of other projects, the report acknowledged the influence of wealthy and racially diverse communities surrounding Cabrini (Bennett and Reed 1999).

Chicago and its mayor, Richard M. Daley, unveiled their own plan in June 1996. The city’s proposal, called the Near North Redevelopment Plan, called for the demolition of 1,324 housing units at Cabrini-Green and replacement of nearly half of the units. Near the end of that year, the city of Chicago sponsored a one-day meeting, a charrette, for government officials, urban planners, architects, and one public housing tenant leader with the purpose of sketching out a plan for Cabrini development. Motivation for this charrette came from United States Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros who had developed an interest in New Urbanist architects who advocated traditional town planning principles. At first, the city did not invite any public housing residents to the charrette but bowed to criticism several days prior to the gathering. (Kamin and McRoberts 1996)

The city’s plan underwent further revision in February 1997. This version called for the demolition of eight high-rise buildings, no repairs for fifteen buildings to remain standing, and 2,000 new units, many of them to be sold at market-rates, to replace the demolished buildings (Ryan 1997b). With the city facing a shortage of funding, fifteen of the status-quo high-rises would be attended to later. Fifty percent of the replacement housing would be sold at market-rates, 20 percent reserved for working-class families (affordable housing), and 30 percent set aside for Cabrini residents (Fegelman 1997b). The plan included a new public library, a new park, a new elementary and high school, and a new commercial district for the Cabrini neighborhood (Wu 1997).
Meanwhile, the Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council (CGLAC) had already countered the city’s plans by filing a federal lawsuit in October 1996 to prevent the city from demolishing the complex’s housing units without providing plans for replacement units for displaced families (Chiem and McRoberts 1996). This lawsuit also charged that the CHA and the city of Chicago had excluded residents from redevelopment planning.

When the latest plans for development near Cabrini were formally unveiled by the city in February 1997, the CGLAC and the residents were initially not invited. (Fegelman 1997a) However, over 400 public housing residents and their supporters protested at and attended a presentation by the city and CHA (Wu 1997). They heard that these new plans included demolition of eight high-rises, a feature that residents claimed differed from the 1993 agreement decreeing demolition of only three buildings (Ryan 1997a).

On March 28, 1997, the CGLAC added the city of Chicago and Mayor Richard Daley as defendants to the lawsuit (Ryan 1997b). Along with the filed lawsuit, the CGLAC proposed an alternative plan to the city’s Hope VI provision that called for demolition of three buildings (660 housing units) and replacement of these buildings by mostly new units and 167 Section 8 housing certificates.

In July 1998, Cabrini residents agreed to settle the lawsuit filed in 1996. After meeting with housing leaders, residents agreed to a settlement decree that allowed for demolition of six more buildings and development of 60 more acres by the city, CHA, and private developers. In return, the CHA agreed to build 895 apartments for public housing residents. The agreement also allowed the Cabrini tenant council to be “co-general partner for the development of all units…with a 51 percent interest in the ownership of the general partnership.” This agreement meant the tenants would receive a
portion of the developers’ fees and profits and would also participate in choosing contractors and property managers. (McRoberts and Bils 1998)

That lawsuit settlement disappeared when Habitat Corp., the company placed by court order in charge of overseeing all new public housing construction in Chicago, obtained a restraining order against the settlement. Habitat argued that it had not been involved in negotiations with the CHA and residents and that the residents had been given too much power with a 51 percent ownership stake and the ability to choose the developer. (Editorial 1998; Lawrence 1999)

After two more years, hope was rekindled for a lawsuit settlement in August 2000 as CHA, Chicago, and tenant officials signed a consent decree settlement. The new agreement allowed for demolition of six Cabrini high-rises and building of 2,100 mixed-income housing units, 700 for public housing residents. This decree differed from the 1998 agreement in that residents would have “up to [a] 50 percent” share. With this altered provision, developers would be able to decide how much ownership the residents would have. (Ciokajlo 2000)

All parties accepted the consent decree settlement and the CHA started actions to redevelop Cabrini in 2001. The plan of the settlement called for 700 public housing units, 400 affordable homes, and 1,050 market-rate homes. (Lawrence 2000) According to the CHA, costs for the Cabrini redevelopment were expected to top $160 million and it was estimated that the CGLAC would receive a 33 percent ownership stake. The fate of several other sections of Cabrini-Green, the William Green homes and the Cabrini row houses, were left undecided. (Grossman 2002)
Redevelopment of the area surrounding Cabrini-Green had begun in the mid-1990s. By 2000, the Cabrini area included grocery stores, Starbucks, Blockbusters, upscale national stores, fine restaurants, and a health club. In one development of market-rate units, all but 10 of 131 units sold within four weeks. Market-rate units sold for as much as $410,000 despite the proximity to Cabrini-Green. The city of Chicago leased or sold land to developers at low prices, sometimes for just $1, aiming to keep more home prices below market rates. (Glaser 2000)

In 2004, the CHA asked residents of seven of the remaining seventeen Cabrini buildings to relocate by October 20. In response, Cabrini-Green residents again filed a federal lawsuit against the Chicago Housing Authority on June 3. The lawsuit claimed that asking residents to relocate violated their civil rights. The residents feared it would be years before they could return to the new developments. The CHA replied that the relocation was necessary to end the isolation of public housing residents and demolition of the remaining high-rises would allow for the construction of lower density mixed-income developments. The CHA also claimed cost considerations were a factor as the city was spending $5 million a year for maintenance and 24-hour police patrols at a number of buildings that were at least half-vacant. (Korecki 2004)

Ground-breaking was to begin in mid-2005 at another development, North Town Park, located near Cabrini and Old Town and bounded by Division, Oak, Larrabee, and Seward Park. (Finley 2004) This 18-acre development should contain 680 units comprising of about 285 for-sale townhouses and condos and about 395 rental apartments. North Town Park also included space for about 200 public housing owners. (Finley 2004) The development proposed a housing mix of 50 percent market rate, 20
percent affordable, and 30 percent for the CHA (Handley 2004). At the time of the proposed construction, eight Cabrini high-rises still loomed nearby (Handley 2004).
REINTERPRETING THE STRUGGLE AT CABRINI-GREEN: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section, we will use the sociological perspectives of Wilson, Massey and Denton, Feagin, and Gotham to explain the ongoing conflict at Cabrini-Green, reveal why the proposed policies were met by opposition, and present insights for future action.

While plans for high-rise demolition and mixed-income neighborhood construction may well serve to lower the concentration of poverty-stricken public housing residents in high-rises, there are three major issues underlying the ebb and flow over redevelopment at Cabrini-Green: the feasibility of mixed-income developments; the overall lack of affordable housing in the Chicago metropolitan area, and the potential for public housing residents to assist in deciding their own future. Each of these issues will be examined in light of the poverty concentration and hypersegregation theories.

3.1 Mixed-Income Neighborhoods

The overriding concern present in the Cabrini redevelopment process is whether moving public housing residents from high-rises to mixed-income developments would substantially deconcentrate their endemic poverty. The HUD HOPE VI program builds mixed-income communities where public housing residents live side-by-side with economic diverse neighbors. In theory, the mixed-income neighborhood will reduce the
social and economic isolation of the public housing residents, weaving them back into the fabric of mainstream society.

The goal of deconcentrated poverty is rooted in the work of William Julius Wilson who argues that the concentration of poverty and social isolation are key factors in explaining the problems of urban African-American neighborhoods. At Cabrini, high-rise buildings will be turned into low-rises, townhouses, and apartments. The Cabrini street grid will be reconnected to surrounding areas and new public spaces draw residents together.

The solution proposed to the problem of poverty and public housing at Cabrini-Green suggests that design will produce desired social consequences. Poor design in the construction of concrete high-rises has often been blamed for the problems facing Cabrini-Green and other public housing projects in Chicago. Public housing in Chicago after World War II was built with European aesthetics, strongly influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier who advocated large open areas surrounding high-rise buildings, reserving spaces for passive recreation. The high-rises were built in public housing superblocks, high-rises surrounded by unused land. This spatial arrangement was intended to create order and enhance community life through available open spaces and the promotion of public health due to ventilation, density, and exposure to the sun (Feldman and Stall 2004:36). The building corridors in the high-rises were intended to reproduce the social life surrounding sidewalks and city streets (Von Hoffman 1996).

Between 1955 and 1963, 19,000 of the 21,000 low-income apartments built in Chicago were in high-rises. At the Robert Taylor Homes on Chicago’s South Side, the earliest design proposal had included eight-story high-rises and land set aside for parks,
playgrounds, ponds, and pathways. However, because these plans exceeded the budget, the CHA submitted another plan calling for twenty-eight sixteen-story high-rises. This latter plan was accepted and after construction was completed, buildings covered only seven percent of the ninety-six acres of the Robert Taylor Homes.

Despite the initial hopes for the high-rises, the towering structures of public housing were to keep residents isolated from the rest of the city for years to come. (Venkatesh 2000:16-19) Though government officials often justified building high-rises by citing fiscal savings, the necessity of elevators, need to maintain large open space, and the sinking of numerous caissons for the building foundations made high-rise housing more expensive than low-rise units (Von Hoffman 1996). Serious problems quickly flared due to resident over-crowding, shoddy building construction, a lack of maintenance, the development of a public-housing culture focused on survival, the urban turmoil of the 1960s, and proliferation of racial incidents and discrimination.

Whereas Cabrini high-rise residents are primarily poor African-Americans, the new mixed-income neighborhoods would strictly limit the number of public housing residents in the community. This would reduce the spatial concentration of poverty and theoretically, reduce the isolation of the public housing residents from the larger American society. Once isolation is reduced, said Wilson (1987), the public housing residents should have better access to economic opportunities. We might expect then as years go by, the public housing residents and their families would move up the educational, social, and economic ladders. Tracking former Cabrini residents in their new mixed-income neighborhoods over the next decades would help us to test the deconcentration theories of Wilson and Massey and Denton.
What the new designs for mixed-income neighborhoods do not account for is the
difficulties of poor, African-American public housing residents living side-by-side with
middle and upper-class whites. The sociological perspectives of concentrated poverty
alert us to its complexities.

Even with an improved design, the new mixed-income communities could very
well present the public housing residents with the same racial issues that they have faced
their entire lives. Early evidence of racial tension from the new communities at Cabrini
indicates that the problems of racial segregation and discrimination discussed by Massey
and Denton, Feagin, and Gotham could be present in the new neighborhoods (Schmich
2000; Chicago Tribune 2003). Just the threat of racial tension contributed to a low
turnout among Cabrini residents to apply for homes in new mixed-income developments
(Schmich and Trice 2001). Massey and Denton (1993) argued that Chicago into the
1990s had some of the highest levels of African-American isolation and segregation in
the entire country. Gotham’s historical view of Kansas City suggests that racism has been
a crucial component in the housing of poor African-Americans since World War II.

Despite the traditional design, and presumably better-design, of the new communities,
new homeowners are dismayed at the prospect of living in the same block as public
housing residents. Clearly, racism has been perpetuated in different forms.

Simply moving public housing residents from concentrated high-rises to
deconcentrated mixed-income neighborhoods will not necessarily overcome the racial
history associated with poor African-Americans, particularly the stigmas attached to
public housing residents in the past several decades. “White flight” and the concentration
of poor minorities in the inner cities led federal commissions in the 1960s and 1980s to
note that America was in danger of separating into two “separate and unequal” societies (Feagin and Parker 1990:230). In order to overcome this negative racial history, more work is needed: this could come from the efforts of white America as Massey and Denton suggest or a societal move beyond individualistic and market-based approaches as argued by Gotham. In order for public housing residents to escape both concentrated poverty and racial prejudice, more than the design of a mixed-income community may be needed.

Whether mixed-income neighborhoods can become positive communities is thrown into question by recent findings that indicate whites tend to move out of neighborhoods that are predominantly black or diverse while minorities are more likely to move to ethnically diverse neighborhoods (Denton and Massey 1991). Whites have different attitudes toward living near African-Americans than near Asians and Hispanics. Living close to Blacks is acceptable for whites until the African-American population in a neighborhood approaches 15 percent. (Emerson, Chai, and Yancey 2001) One county in Maryland found an affordable housing income mix of 85-10-5 averted social problems (Rusk 2003). In the new mixed-income developments at Cabrini-Green, the proposed mix is fifty percent market-rate, thirty percent affordable, and twenty percent going to public housing residents.

In turn, public housing tenants complain they receive little respect from their new neighbors and are treated poorly. Similar prejudices have been encountered in mostly African-American neighborhoods in Chicago. After moving to highly segregated neighborhoods such as South Shore, Englewood, and West Englewood, former public housing residents are blamed for community troubles. (Bebow and Olivo 2005) Few people, including African-Americans, want to live in a neighborhood with public housing
residents. Negative sentiments from both the middle and upper classes and public housing tenants illustrate the growing pains associated with integrated neighborhoods.

While New Urbanists and other like-minded planners have claimed that traditional and mixed-use design will promote healthier social environments, there is still little evidence in Chicago that mixed-income neighborhoods with public housing residents are or will be successful⁴. According to critics, the perspective of the New Urbanists does not sufficiently recognize the social, political, and economic factors influencing urban life (Feldman and Stall 2004:350; Feagin and Parker 1990:145; Gotham 2002; Kamin 1995).

Sociologists have inadequately determined whether mixed-income developments can help pull poor public housing residents out of poverty. Von Hoffman (1996) argues that mixed-income policy comes in two forms. The moderate form argues that by combining poor residents with better-off households, the organizations, values, and order necessary for a healthy neighborhood will develop. In its stronger form, the policy calls for mixing residents who differ in ethnicity and economic class. According to Hoffman, this stronger form solves only the problem of housing and not other social problems. The Cabrini plan seems to embody some of each form: the city hopes a better community will arise on the grounds of a notorious housing project, and at the same time the new mixed-income neighborhoods will mix black and white, poor, middle, and upper classes.

Researchers have acknowledged that in the real world, positive community does not necessarily develop in mixed-income neighborhoods (Popkin et al 2000:184). Evidence from a different Chicago housing project showed that although the custom-built

⁴ For more information on the New Urbanist movement, see Duany et al. (2000) and Katz et al. (1994)
environment may positively affect residents’ lives, New Urbanist plans fail to account for “the complex interaction of social, economic, and political factors...as well as the role of human agency.” (Feldman and Stall 2004:350)

In a study of dispersed public housing in Maryland, Kleit (2001) found that public housing residents living in non-clustered communities had stronger social ties to their neighbors. However, when poor residents were grouped with other poor residents in a mixed-income community, poor residents may only interact with people of a similar status. For an interdependent community to develop and help poorer residents, it may be necessary to include upward mobility programs and add social services (Brophy and Smith 1997).

In order for planned mixed-income communities to succeed, HUD acknowledges that sound financial underwriting and careful planning are needed. Developments can either end up as low-income due to location in a distressed area and poor management, or as market-rate neighborhoods if a percentage of affordable units is not guaranteed. When the proper combination of conditions is met, mixed-income neighborhoods provides low-income residents affordable housing in a stable environment and exposure to previously unavailable social and economic opportunities. (U.S. HUD 2003:55-57)

According to HUD, the communities also provide neighborhood schools, economic benefits, safe investment both for developers and residents, and reduction of political opposition to low-income housing (U.S. HUD 2003:5-6).

Scholars have argued that more research is needed on both the preconditions and outcomes of mixed-income communities (Schwartz and Tajbakhsh 1997). Several researchers concluded that further research is required to test whether low-income
residents view higher-income residents as role models and see a greater likelihood of finding work (Rosenbaum, Stroh, and Flynn 1998). Testing these theories will likely require both interviews with mixed-income community residents and direct observation (Khadduri and Martin 1997).

Despite the difficulties of creating successful integrated (racially and economically) neighborhoods, the developments near Cabrini-Green have sold at a rapid pace. People who have moved into these developments are mainly middle and upper class white professionals who are returning to the city. The Cabrini-Green developments are attractive, their prices compare favorably to property values in nearby Lincoln Park, and they occupy land close to the center of Chicago.

Before the city concludes that these sales figures indicate mixed income-neighborhoods are working and proceeds with tearing down more public housing high-rises and displacing residents, it seems reasonable that the city should look further into the matter. More evidence of the positive effects of mixed-income neighborhoods such as reduced social isolation and an increased amount of economic opportunities may be necessary before residents of Cabrini-Green and other projects are willing to leave their homes. Before high-rises are demolished because of their poor design and resulting negative social consequences, leaders should be sure the new designs will not lead to similar or different negative social consequences. Displacement of current residents for displacement’s sake may be a poor solution.

When first built, the public housing high-rises constructed after World War II were hailed by many as the answer to the problem of public housing in America. Decades later, few would argue that public housing high-rises have been profitable for their
residents or the community as a whole. It would be unfortunate if a similar fate befalls the mixed-income neighborhoods built at the turn of the 21st century.

3.2 Affordable Housing

The second large issue in the Cabrini-Green narrative, the lack of affordable housing in the Chicago area, applies to a larger social level beyond the project. There are two questions important to affordable housing: are there enough units available to all who want to rent a unit and do all buyers and renters have equal access to housing? We will examine these two questions in light of the sociological theories of concentrated poverty and explore the consequences at Cabrini-Green. We will also discuss the role developers play in answering these two questions.

A main complaint of Cabrini residents is that they will have nowhere to go following their removal from the high-rises (Grossman 2003; Grossman 2004). The mixed-income developments do not offer sufficient spots for displaced residents. In the HOPE VI awards of 1993 through 1999, only 11.4 percent of displaced residents across the country were given spots in new developments. On average, the relocation time is 4-5 years. (Clampet-Lundquist 2004) Because many of the displaced Cabrini residents will be unable to secure housing in the new mixed-income developments, these residents will have to find other housing, primarily in the private market.

Though commentators have argued over the acuteness of the shortage in America, data from a number of urban areas suggests there is a shortage of affordable rental properties (Bratt 1989:6-10). Chicago has a history of a housing shortage stretching back
to the early twentieth century (Meyerson and Banfield 1955:29-35). In 1993, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated that 259,600 low-income renters were in competition for 142,400 low-rent apartments in Chicago. The 2002 American Community Survey estimates that out of the 1,041,038 renter-occupied units in Chicago, slightly more than 450,000 had renters who paid 30 percent or more of their household income for gross rent. Adding a large number of public housing residents to this tight market would likely boost rents beyond the reach of former public housing residents and force them to choose between slumlords. (Moberg 1995)

In order for the public housing residents to better compete for housing on the private market, the city has offered displaced residents Section 8 housing vouchers. The Supreme Court in the 1970s decided Section 8 vouchers were part of the answer to affordable housing problems as the subsidies would assist poor public housing residents in finding private housing. HUD reported in 1995 that 80 percent of residents with vouchers found suitable housing, leaving 20 percent with few options (Moberg 1995).

Cabrini residents are hesitant to accept these vouchers and other figures dispute the effectiveness of Section 8 vouchers. Although the goal of the vouchers was to help the poor move out of urban slums, advances have not occurred in large numbers (Welfeld 1998). Roughly 3 out of 10 Section 8 recipients are unable to use the vouchers (Bennett and Reed 1999). When the urban poor are able to find housing in suburban settings, they have found themselves isolated and lacking child-care options, transportation, support, and jobs that provide adequate income (Von Hoffman 1996). Public housing residents

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5 The American Community Survey, administered by the Census Bureau, is still under development. The 90% confidence interval for the figure cited above is 419,441 and 481,533. For more information on the American Community Survey, see http://www.census.gov.
frequently encounter racial discrimination, landlords who do not want large families (especially those with teenagers), and a bias against CHA residents in general (Popkin et al 2000:185). Although the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities in Chicago claims to have relocated over 5,000 CHA families to subsidized private apartments, this number does not approach the number of residents in the CHA system and is only slightly larger than the number of Cabrini residents who would be displaced if all of the high-rises were torn down (Marcinak 1996).

A study of the Gautreaux program that was mandated by a court order resulting from the Gautreaux lawsuit found that many families who do move to the suburbs are rewarded with new opportunities and higher levels of attainment. Despite initial troubles, children had higher achievement levels after the first several years and families experienced less anxiety over crime and safety. However, the program served only 7,100 families, some families moved to the suburbs but returned to the city, city social networks were lost, and finding large-enough suburban housing for families was difficult. (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000) The success of some Gautreaux beneficiaries could be attributed to their volunteer status, participants were carefully screened, and it is possible the most motivated join the move. (Popkin et al 2000:185)

By the mid-1990s, four of the six Chicago community areas that contained the greatest concentration of Section 8 users were Austin, West Englewood, Woodlawn, and South Shore. Each of these neighborhoods contained an African-American population near or over 90 percent. (Bennett and Reed 1999) These neighborhoods with large populations of Section 8 voucher users are nearly as segregated as the public housing projects the residents were trying to leave.
In 2004, the state of Illinois decided the shortage of public housing required legislative action. The state passed a law stating that at least 10 percent of all housing in every Illinois town be “affordable”. (Toomey 2004) The city of Chicago has moved slowly on the affordable housing front: a 2004 plan would require city-subsidized developers to set aside at least 10 percent of the units for affordable housing. However, the Chicago Housing Department estimated such a move would only create 500 to 1,000 affordable units a year, just a small piece of the estimated 50,000 units Chicago needs. (Spielman 2004)

Another concern of residents is that leaving the high-rises means they must leave their entire social environment. The residents will be moving to new neighborhoods where they will have to overcome a public housing legacy of isolation. Many residents have developed strong informal ties at Cabrini while others have participated in and taken advantage of local social service agencies, religious congregations, and community organizations (Bennett and Reed 1999). The complex is also situated in a decent location with easy access to Lake Michigan, the Near North side, and the Loop (Fuerst 2003:106). Because of their prolonged social and economic isolation from larger society (Wilson 1987), residents will have a difficult time building social and economic ties in new communities.

When residents are forced out of the high-rises, a diaspora takes place: some residents leave for the suburbs or private housing in the city with Section 8 vouchers, a few live in the new mixed-income developments, and others end up in different public housing complexes, and some become homeless. When public housing residents are scattered from an area of concentrated poverty, they may be even worse off than before.
because of the loss of a developed social network. Though Cabrini-Green may be a
deteriorating environment, options elsewhere are lacking. Whereas some former Cabrini
residents have encountered racial tension in the new mixed-income communities, they are
certain to find racial prejudice in the private housing market in Chicago.

The government’s encouragement of mixed-income housing fails to account for
the racism present in initially pushing poor African-Americans into public housing high-
rises and which still limit the choices of poor minorities in cities (Massey and Denton
1993; Gotham 2002). One reason public housing residents across America lived in high-
rises after World War II was racism in the rental and home-ownership process.

Historian Arnold Hirsch (1983) argued that the large projects represent an
institutional means by which the CHA could contain blacks within a ghetto. Federal
government policies that provided generous help to middle-class and working-class
citizens in the pursuit of home-ownership through special mortgage programs embodied
racism as comparable help was not extended to the bottom rungs of American society.
The 1949 Housing Act, legislation that allowed for massive urban renewal, intended that
federal money be used for slum clearance. Low-rent replacement housing was to be built
by private actors. In the next two decades, the Act provided federal support for urban
renewal that destroyed large inner-city areas. The cleared land was then turned over to
private developers who did not provide low-rent housing. (Feagin and Parker 1990:145)

Home-ownership discrimination existed throughout the twentieth century in the
United States. The National Realty Board included a rule in their constitution that said
real estate agents were not to interfere with neighborhood composition. The National
Association of Realtors (NAR), formerly known as the National Association of Real
Estate Boards, had a rule in its books until the mid-1970s that stated, “A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood” (Feagin 1994; Meyer 2000). While rules like these were often defended as means to protect the rights of individual citizens, the intent was clear: minorities, especially blacks, were not welcome in white neighborhoods. Other restrictions included deed restrictions, race-restrictive covenants, covert steering by real estate agents, and block busting by brokers who stymied efforts of African-Americans. In seeking loans for housing, African-Americans face added requirements and indirect discrimination. (Feagin 1994)

In Chicago history, blacks trying to cross into white neighborhoods were often met with violence. Neighborhood residents would demonstrate, hurl insults, and even throw bombs when blacks tried to move into white neighborhoods. Battle lines were clearly drawn; in a number of cases, African-Americans encountered strong negative responses when they tried to move into a white neighborhood located just blocks away or next-door to a black neighborhood.6 When blacks did succeed in moving into white neighborhoods, many whites fled to the suburbs. In 1940, 47,500 whites, comprising 96% of the tracts population, lived in the thirteen census tracts surrounding the Black Belt on the South Side. Two decades later, 1960 census figures reveal that only 1,600 whites still lived in those thirteen tracts. (Meyer 2000:116-117)

A major goal of the Civil Rights Movement was equal housing opportunity. Though legislation has been passed to outlaw discrimination, including Title VII of the

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6 For accounts of the violence and terrorism committed against African-Americans who tried to move to predominantly white neighborhoods in Chicago, see Meyer (2000).
Civil Rights Acts of 1968, discrimination in housing has not ended (Massey and Denton 1993). Recent research shows that although racial differences in housing may be less overt today, there exists a “new racism” that is less obvious (Gotham 2002:145-146). This “new racism” that includes covert or informal discrimination is present in the actions of mortgage lenders, homeowners, developers, real estate officials, and government practices (Denton 1994; Feagin 1999; Gotham 2002; Williams, Nesiba, and McConnell 2005).7

As a result of the explicit and covert racism of the 20th century in the United States, a “new urban poor” live in isolated and jobless neighborhoods (Wilson 1987; 1996) that are hypersegregated, meaning they are isolated, clustered, and racially homogeneous (Massey and Denton 1993). In Chicago, residential segregation lines that were not crossed during the era of the Civil Rights Movement have still not been breached today. Lenders may still practice racial redlining and local governments maintain residential segregation by a variety of zoning restrictions and concentrating low-income housing in specific areas, often the inner city. (Meyer 2000:218) The racialized process of housing in America still exists and has consequences to this day (Gotham 2002).

The issue of affordable housing and the specific battle over public housing at Cabrini also involves influential developers. While their names and goals often hover in the background behind CHA leaders, city officials, and public housing residents,

7 The “new racism” is also said to include a national color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003), an emphasis on cultural rather than biological difference (Bonilla-Silva 2000), and an ideology of individualism, competition, and a laissez-faire society (Omi and Winant 1994). See Gotham (2002:145-146).
developers have strongly influenced housing public policy in Chicago and the United States (Hirsch 1983:268-269).

Developers were crucial in the passage of the National Housing Act of 1934 and the building of public housing complexes following World War II. Developers with political connections sometimes used inferior materials, practiced poor workmanship, and diverted large cash sums into their own pockets (Feagin and Parker 1990:27; Popkin et al 2000:13). Some suburban neighborhoods were built with racially restrictive covenants to exclude Blacks from white middle and upper class communities and others were zoned to prevent the construction of public housing (Gotham 2002:40-43; Gans 1967; Jackson 1985). While the 1977 Housing and Urban Development Acts authorized monies for areas with housing and poverty problems, many of the funds for private development in minority and poor areas were directed to infrastructure in developments for business and wealthier residents (Feagin and Parker 1990:135).

When Chicago started planning Cabrini’s redevelopment, developers were involved in the initial stages. Developers were particularly interested in the Cabrini-Green land because of its high values due to its location near Michigan Avenue, the Loop, and the pricey Lincoln Park neighborhood. When the Cabrini residents’ lawsuit moved towards settlement in the middle of 1998, the court-appointed developer, Habitat Corp., rejected the court proposal due to its lack of involvement in the process.

Involvement of developers in redevelopment is advantageous because they leverage money unavailable to governments. While Chicago often lacks funds for public works projects, developers readily draw resources from companies, bankers, mortgage companies, politicians, and more. (Feagin and Parker 1990:17) For example, developers
at Cabrini-Green sought and produced a shopping center that included a grocery from a major grocery store chain.

The issue of affordable housing and home ownership still matters today in the Cabrini-Green area. For Cabrini residents, there is both a lack of affordable units in the city and metropolitan area and they do not have the same access to available units that other racial and ethnic groups may have. Developers who are interested in the city’s plan for the redevelopment of the Near North Side focus most of their attention on building single-family homes and townhouses because of sizeable profit margins. Because so many displaced Cabrini residents would not be able to find houses in the new mixed-income communities, residents are unwilling to leave Cabrini-Green until they are given satisfactory replacements.

In order to promote affordable housing that is both plentiful and available to all, the city of Chicago, the CHA, and HUD have a variety of options. Massey and Denton (1993) suggested that one way to open up the housing market to poor African-Americans is to enforce the laws already on the books prohibiting racial discrimination in housing. While laws like the Fair Housing Act of 1968 promote equitable housing, Massey and Denton argue that the enforcement of such laws is often left to individuals rather than institutions or the government. But Chicago history indicates that enforcement of fair housing laws is a difficult task.

When ordered to build new public housing in non-black areas as the result of the Gautreaux lawsuit, the city built as few units as possible over the next decade. A concerted effort would be necessary by all agencies involved to open the housing market in Chicago to poor African-Americans. To garner widespread public support for such an

Another possible course of action would be to follow the suggestion of Gotham (2002) to move beyond the privatist and individualistic assumptions underlying the current housing system in America. Metropolitan and regional planning could spread housing responsibility to a wider range of municipalities than just the inner city (Orfield 1997). Where planning includes larger regions, poverty is more proportionately distributed, the economy is less segregated, and housing is more integrated (Rusk 2002).

The Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1957, does advise communities and units of government but cannot make binding decisions. Housing planning could be done on a county or metropolitan-wide basis rather than as the need arises with the demolition of a public housing project.

In 1971, housing activist Charles Abrams wrote, “No sooner had the federal law [Housing Act of 1949] been enacted then two facts became plain: (1) there were no houses available for the slum-dwellers to be displaced from the cities; (2) these slum-dwellers were largely minorities to who housing in new areas was banned.” (Abrams 1971:244, cited in Gotham 2002:78). Both parts of Abrams’ statement still contain a grain of truth for today even though housing today cannot ban specific minorities. Cabrini residents do not have the perception that housing is available if they are to be displaced. If affordable housing does exist, they need assistance in finding it. And if it does not exist because of racism, laws on the books need to be enforced. The residents of Cabrini who

8 For more information on the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, see http://www.nipc.org.
have slowed redevelopment would rather remain in the high-rises than venture into the uncertain public housing market without guarantees of housing.

3.3 Public Housing Residents’ Movements

The third critical issue present in the battle at Cabrini is the role of public housing residents in influencing their own future. Despite the economic, social, and political isolation of many Cabrini residents, they have successfully overcome a legacy of discrimination and stalled redevelopment plans.

The maelstrom at Cabrini-Green would have looked very different without the efforts of the Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council (LAC). The LACs were born on April 8, 1971 when CHA Chairman Charles Swibel allowed public housing residents to directly choose their own leaders. This decision by Swibel came only after HUD threatened to freeze $8.2 million in modernization funds for the CHA. Initially, public housing residents believed the LACs existed to support and push for CHA policies. (Popkin et al 2000) After their first few years of existence, however, the LACs become a way for residents to organize and oppose the CHA. Since Cabrini’s LAC beginning in the 1970s, the Cabrini-Green LAC has dealt with issues including managing building laundry rooms, home appliance orders, architectural modifications, and the ongoing Cabrini redevelopment process. (Bennett and Reed 1999)

Even though the Cabrini-Green LAC has had difficulty negotiating with the CHA, it has promoted a number of complex initiatives to serve residents. The Human Capital Development Committee has provided funds for a number of community service-oriented
programs. In the early 1990s, small groups, mostly teenagers, raised and sold produce to residents. Project Lead was developed to promote decision-making and action to address social problems among teenagers. Project Peace offered conflict resolution training in local schools. Hope VI money has been used to train and license Cabrini residents as professional day care workers. (Bennett and Reed 1999) The LAC has not only represented Cabrini residents to the outside world but also worked to serve residents and the complex.

A recent study of the activism of public housing residents in the Wentworth Gardens project in Chicago (Feldman and Stall 2004) found that activists have built community relationships similar to family relationships. By creating a community household, the activists brought forth social relationships characterized by trust and community norms. A foundation of shared concerns for their development and an interest in sustaining themselves and community through struggles binds the resident activists together. The members of the LAC provide social services that government and private agencies cannot. Though it is an idealistic goal, the members of the LAC seek to act as mediators between the residents and bureaucracy.

At Cabrini-Green, residents of at least one building have been able to directly influence building life. In 1985, the public housing building at 1230 N. Burling, located in the William Green sector of the Cabrini-Green complex, was chosen for a pilot resident management program. One day in 1986, ten residents of Burling “actually pushed the gang-bangers out of the building…we really shoved them right out the door, and every day after that we sat downstairs to make sure they stayed out.” (Jimenez 1996)
The residents of 1230 N. Burling were incorporated and granted management control in May 1992. These residents became a Resident Management Corporation (RMC) responsible for an annual budget of $6 million (Jimenez 1996). Resident management program participants were trained for five to seven years in operational, fiscal, and maintenance management (Ihejirika 1992). Through the help of a local bank, building residents were able to access financial training and development project guidance while also opening a laundromat in the building in late 1994 where residents shared in the profits. CHA Chief Operating Officer Graham Grady praised the efforts of the resident managers and said, “Twelve-thirty’s accomplishments are significant not only to its residents, but they help send a message system wide that residents can do it themselves.” (Ihejirika 1994a)

Because of the positive efforts at 1230 N. Burling, the CHA turned over management of seven other Cabrini-Green buildings to residents in March 1997. In 2000, the CHA agreed to turn over the 1230 N. Burling building to residents for ownership, provided that the residents met certain guidelines for several years. However, the CHA later cancelled the management contract of the 1230 N. Burling team, along with contracts at three other buildings in Chicago, due to allegations of violating the management contract (McNeil 2003).

While some have blamed the Advisory Councils for prolonging the fight over the redevelopment of high-rise public housing (Editorial 1997), these groups are often public housing residents’ only line of defense. Whereas some public housing residents and others living in concentrated poverty have built an oppositional culture that has little faith in the police and the judicial system (Anderson 1999), these residents have engaged the
existing political structure and fought for the rights and interests of the Cabrini community. While federal and local governments have often ignored these rights and interests, the Cabrini LACs have provided residents a social and political voice in public and in the courts. While it is unclear whether the Cabrini activists are better-off than dispersed residents from Cabrini or other Chicago public housing residents, the activists feel they are fighting for their right to public housing (Grossman 2005).

The success of the Cabrini resident movement in delaying redevelopment suggests questions for future research. When is it possible for public housing residents to overcome decades of difficulties and stand up for themselves? What can lead to a successful public housing tenant movement? Why was the movement at Cabrini-Green successful while residents at other Chicago public housing projects failed to mobilize or attain the success of the Cabrini movement?

Whereas Wilson’s (1987) isolated resident has little interaction with the broader world, Cabrini activists meet regularly with each other, other public housing residents in Chicago, public housing activists from other cities, and government officials and bureaucrats. The Cabrini activists may have been more successful than most public housing residents because of the reduction of the social distance between themselves and outsiders. Their successful mobilization could then be attributed to their ability to break out of ghetto isolation and erect two-way bridges to the broader community. Down the road if Cabrini residents are displaced, the activist residents might be the best-off due to their increased social ties and less isolated status.

An important element of the Cabrini-Green project is that the surrounding community is less racially segregated compared to many housing projects in Chicago.
Massey and Denton (1993) argued that higher levels of segregation would lead to higher levels of concentrated poverty. While there is certainly segregation around the Cabrini-Green complex, the surrounding community is not as segregated as the South and West sides of Chicago. In fact, in a small reversal of the “white flight” phenomenon from the middle of the twentieth century, some whites have moved back to the area of Cabrini-Green. Though Cabrini residents may not interact frequently with individuals and institutions that surround them, the proximity to wealthier areas is striking compared to other public housing projects.

These two factors, reduced social isolation and lower levels of residential segregation in surrounding neighborhoods, may explain the resident councils’ achievements at Cabrini. Activist residents at Cabrini have fought to be assured of housing, whether that is at Cabrini-Green, in the new mixed-income developments, or elsewhere. Their efforts have successfully slowed the redevelopment process at Cabrini-Green.
CONCLUSION

The dispute over redevelopment at Cabrini-Green is a complex tale. We have discussed the struggle in light of the sociological perspectives of poverty concentration to understand the ongoing conflict at Cabrini-Green and illuminate the problems of the proposed policies.

The struggle at Cabrini-Green has involved a variety of actors including public housing residents, the Chicago Housing Authority, real estate developers, and local and federal government officials. Each of these groups has a different plan for the Cabrini-Green residents and land. Residents recognize the decrepit conditions of Cabrini and yet some are unwilling to leave unless they are provided housing. The CHA has a vision that includes the demolition of all of the Cabrini high-rises and the construction of mixed-income neighborhoods in their place where public housing residents will live among people of the middle and upper classes. Real estate developers would like to build upon land that is located on the Near North side of Chicago near trendy neighborhoods, shopping districts, and the Loop. Government officials have provided the vision of mixed-income neighborhoods adopted by the CHA and judges have overseen the redevelopment process that has been detoured to the courts.

The poverty concentration perspectives applied in this paper have uncovered three major issues that have provided the basis for the ongoing redevelopment conflict. First, it is unclear whether the proposed mixed-income neighborhoods will reduce the economic
and social isolation of public housing residents. Early reports from several of the mixed-income neighborhoods at Cabrini-Green indicate that it will take time for public housing residents and market-rate residents to build a strong joint community. Cabrini residents have been slow to apply to live in these new communities and have decried the small number of public housing residents who could live in them. A community boasting better design cannot simply reverse the social and economic forces that helped to create the ghetto of concentrated poverty. More crucial to the project of ending concentrated poverty is providing economic opportunities, reducing social isolation, and overcoming a legacy of racial discrimination in housing. Mixed-income communities may represent a partial solution to the problem of concentrated poverty at Cabrini, but because of the restricted numbers of public housing residents who can live there, the possible positive effects on the public housing residents is limited.

Second, it is uncertain whether residents displaced from Cabrini-Green can escape the racialized process of housing that has existed in Chicago for nearly a century. Moving residents from decrepit high-rises to the decentralized private housing market will not necessarily eliminate the ghetto. Although public housing high-rises are public symbols of troubled inner-city neighborhoods, their demolition does not inevitably solve the housing problems of large cities. The second ghetto of public housing high-rises could very well turn into a deconcentrated third ghetto where private landlords and social forces will reinforce a segregated housing process. Without plentiful available housing opportunities and strong hope for improvement elsewhere, many Cabrini residents are unwilling to leave.
Third, some remaining residents of Cabrini have protected their own interests by slowing redevelopment plans. Cabrini residents have had to fight to even be part of the redevelopment process and provide input for their own housing future. This activism has been successful despite the social and economic disadvantages of the Cabrini neighborhood. The Cabrini narrative indicates that when public housing residents are less isolated from surrounding neighborhoods, they may be able to access political resources and mobilize. Whether such action aids residents in escaping concentrated poverty remains to be seen.

Further, these perspectives can help guide our understanding of what will happen in the future. Cabrini-Green can function as a quasi-experiment to test whether new neighborhoods with certain designs can have positive effects on the lives of public housing residents. If the mixed-income neighborhoods have a positive influence on residents, in future years, public housing residents should be able to find better jobs, access better education, and join social networks previously unavailable to them. In addition, the neighborhoods should help fight discrimination in housing by providing a certain number of units of affordable housing to public housing residents. If successful communities develop and low-income residents experience upward social mobility, these mixed-income neighborhoods can serve as a model for future developments.

This study of the Cabrini-Green complex in Chicago illustrates the work still ahead in resolving conflicts between public housing residents and government bodies. The issue of public housing is especially salient in large cities containing many isolated and poverty-concentrated neighborhoods. In light of the theories of Wilson, Massey and Denton, Feagin, and Gotham, the new mixed-income policy should concentrate on two
major social issues that are part of the Cabrini-Green narrative. Public housing policy should reduce the social isolation of the residents and place them in a position where they can be re-integrated into the American economy and social life. In addition, policy and new neighborhoods should seek to overcome prejudice and discrimination in housing.

This new form of racism in housing, found in mortgage lending practices and the actions of real estate agents, is less blatant and overt than in the middle of the 20th century but is discriminatory nonetheless. The historical legacy of housing discrimination and segregation must be overcome, especially if policymakers continue to push public housing residents into the private housing market with vouchers.

Public housing in America will certainly look much different in the future compared to its status in the mid twentieth century. At Cabrini-Green, it is possible that all of the high-rises built in the 1950s and 1960s will be demolished in the coming years and replaced by new neighborhoods. By currently promoting mixed-income developments and scattered-site housing, government officials hope to reverse the damage of failed public housing policies following World War II. The present case of redevelopment at Cabrini-Green illustrates how this new vision of public housing can be met with opposition due to underlying issues of isolation, segregation, and racism as Cabrini residents seek housing reassurances. With recognition of these issues, government officials and private entrepreneurs can better assess employment of the money and plans of the HOPE VI grants to bring forth what its name implies: hope for communities in need of it.
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