

The Road to Public Housing

By: Jasmine Luna

Before Housing Act

A century before housing Act, there were movements for housing reform

- The 1840's showcased how religious, moral, and sanitation reformers believed slums degraded health and moral values of those living in them

As part of the Progressive Era, Tenement Acts were passed in weak effort to better the lives of those living in the slums

- Tenement Acts of 1867 and 1901 required fire escapes and proper light, air ventilation be

Starting in the 19th and 20th century house reformers campaigned for building and sanitary regulations

Progressive Era and Housing Reform

- Tenement Acts that called for fire escapes and a window in every room to allow better ventilation, were ultimately ineffective
- Jacob Riis, an immigrant from Denmark showcased how much of the poor was living through his book *How the Other Half Lives*
 - This publication helped bring light into how poor people lived in cramped deteriorating housing
- Housing reform began to push for better housing not just housing codes e.g. tenement acts



Photo credit: Jacob Riis

This was how majority of the city's poor was living. Conditions were horrendous and areas like this became known as the slums.



Photo credit: Jacob Riis

The early approach to slums showed to be ineffective, as slums still persisted



Photo credit: Jacob Riis

Slums grew as more poor and working class immigrants moved into the city in search of work during the industrial boom

The National Housing Act of 1934

- Inspired by Europe and Britain in the 1910's and 1920's reformers called on the federal government to provide a rental program that would not only help the poor and working class but that extended upwards to also help middle-class Americans
- Pushed during the Great Depression Congress and Roosevelt passed The National Housing Act of 1934
- Through the new act, slum clearance was a top priority, even if reformers had different reasons for the clearance

The Housing Act of 1937

- The Wagner Housing Act gained support for public housing by pushing public housing as the solution for ridding the city of its slums
- Established a federal public housing authority to make loans, grants, and annual contributions to local public housing agencies to develop, acquire, and manage housing projects
- Limitations was put by having an income ceiling which ensured that only low-income people qualified, this created a negative view of public housing and became seen as a "poor people's program"

Queensbridge Houses -1939

- Opened in 1939, it is the largest public housing in the U.S and is overlooked by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
- The Queensbridge houses can be seen as a model for how the 1937 Housing Act was used for public housing to be built
- The building of the Queensbridge Houses did not come without tremendous backlash
- Criticism also came that there was more vacant land and did not include much slum clearance



Model of Queensbridge Houses

Photo credit: New York City Housing Authority



Construction of Queensbridge Houses,



Mural in community center in Jacob Riis Houses. Artists were hired to paint and create art for public housing.



Queensbridge Houses

The Housing Act of 1949

Kept goal for decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, though this was rarely found to be the case

Urban redevelopment allowed \$1 billion in loans, used to buy up slums and blighted areas

The use for these were to be redeveloped by both public and private

Problems with Public Housing

- Public housing was criticized for the high-rise buildings they came to be known for
- Finding location for public housing showed to be difficult
- Segregation in public housing was well known to be going on
- Social and racial segregation had stigmatized public housing and led to a decrease of federal support
 - Public housing was kept only for low-income for it would be seen as a poor man's program and not seen favorably by the rest of society

RECEIVED
 No. 22-5-307
 From: The Mayor
 To: Chairman Alfred H. Stein
 City Housing Authority
 Subject: QUEENSBIDGE
 Proposed site for a housing project and bringing for investigation.
 Objecting to proposed Queensbridge site for a housing project and bringing for investigation.
 Date: April 13, 1938
 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION
 City of New York
 OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
 F. H. LA GUARDIA, Mayor.
 Referred for such action as the facts of the case may warrant.
 Form 15
 FLA 53 36 NL 3 EXTRA=TDFL LONG ISLAND CITY NY APR 9 1938 M. A.
 THE HON FILORELLA H LA GUARDIA=
 NEW YORK NY=
 AS A LONG ISLAND CITY CAPITOL GOODS MANUFACTURER I VIGOROUSLY
 CONDEMN THE QUEENSBIDGE SITE FOR A CITY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AS
 BEING DETRIMENTAL TO THE ONLY CONCENTRATED MANUFACTURING CENTER
 IN NEW YORK CITY. I SOLICIT YOUR FURTHER INVESTIGATION=
 R A STEEL VICE-PRESIDENT R STEEL AND SONS
 LONG ISLAND CITY NY.
 11351
 Telephone Your Telegrams to Postal Telegraph

A telegraph by a Long Island Manufacturer
 that strongly opposed the Queenbridge
 Houses

Mr. Clendenin J. Ryan, Jr.,
Secretary to Mayor LaGuardia,
City Hall,
New York City.

APR 13 1938

ANSWERED

FILE

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Referring to our conversation today, I hope you will be able to make an appointment for a Committee from our organization to confer with Mayor LaGuardia relative to the Queensbridge Housing Project within the next few days, or at least before any definite action is taken regarding this project.

This project, if carried through as suggested, will undoubtedly prove detrimental to the industrial growth of our Borough.

Will you please let us hear from you as soon as possible.

Very truly yours,



P. W. MOORE
Executive Secretary.

PWM/H

A letter to the Mayor's secretary about the effect Queensbridge will have on the industrial growth of borough

Public Housing Today

We see today's focus on public housing on preserving what is left

There is no indication that housing reform will push for public housing

Affordable housing has essentially replaced public housing