

# CHAPTER 15

## The Myth of Concentrated Poverty

STEPHEN STEINBERG

All of us have stories that shape our worldview and lurk behind our scholarship. In 1996, I went to Chicago with my son, who was applying for admission to the University of Chicago. We stayed in the Marriott Courtyard on the edge of the Loop and took a taxi to campus. The driver told us that Lakeshore Drive was congested with traffic, and he made a detour through city streets. Within minutes, the window of the cab framed Cabrini-Green, identifiable by a massive rectangular sign in the middle of an open plaza. There it was—Cabrini-Green—the “project” that had achieved iconic notoriety through sensational press reports of anarchy and violence. The realization that Cabrini-Green was situated on the edge of Chicago’s legendary Gold Coast provided an epiphanic moment: It was obvious why Cabrini-Green was slated for demolition. It occupied immensely valuable real estate that was in the way of the growth machine. As two geographers (Wyly and Hammel 1999, 711) put it, Cabrini was “an island of decay in seas of renewal.”

Let me say up front that I am no housing expert or policy wonk. Had I been immersed in the social science literature, I would have known that Cabrini-Green was a shameful relic of a discredited policy that segregated blacks in soulless high-rise “projects” where the problems of concentrated poverty metastasized and took on a life of their own. No public housing had been built since the Nixon administration, and under the Clinton administration, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros instituted a policy with a seductive (and hypocritical) acronym: HOPE VI (short for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere). The stated policy objective was to replace “severely

distressed” public housing with low-rise apartments that would be mixed-income and mixed-race. Architects and urban planners at the University of Chicago had advanced a “new urbanism,” whose architectural features would blend residents of public housing into the surrounding neighborhood. Against the specter of crime-ridden, high-rise buildings that “warehoused” the poor and exacerbated their problems, we had the promise of decorous row houses that would foster integration in terms of both race and class. A compelling imaginary, to be sure.

Then again, if I had known still more, I would have known that my first instinct was correct: that there were grassroots groups fighting the Cabrini-Green demolition as a blatant land grab that served the interests of developers and politicians; that trampled over the rights and interests of the residents; and that would leave the displaced families worse off as they gravitated to other densely poor neighborhoods, further away from jobs, transportation, and services they relied upon (Bennett and Reed 1999; Goetz 2000; Wright 2006). To these critics, it was clear: HOPE VI was another instance of “Negro Removal,” a term created by James Baldwin in the early 1960s and embraced by Malcolm X to express opposition to the urban renewal projects of that period. This same charge was leveled by a few scholars who argued vociferously that the demolition of Cabrini-Green was a calamity for the 14,000 African Americans who would be forcibly evicted from their homes (Wright 2006, 169). For these critics, the promise of building mixed-race and mixed-income housing was only a smokescreen to conceal what amounted to the cleansing of cities of the black underclass.

So let me throw down the gauntlet: Does HOPE VI amount to Negro Removal by another name, one that would rid the urban landscape of the black nemesis and clear the way for the developers? This raises another necessary question: Were scholars and policy wonks complicit in providing indispensable legitimacy for this policy?

Let me be clear: I do not impugn the motives of those who imagine that HOPE VI and other mobility projects advance the cause of integration. Nor is it merely a question of unintended consequences. Rather, the thrust of my critique is on *the political uses* of scholarship for ends that may be disavowed by the scholars themselves. And if we are to follow the maxim made famous by Watergate, we have to follow the trail of money, which leads to government agencies and foundations that bankrolled and promoted knowledge production that is politically useful. Then, too, there are the subtle and pernicious ways in which social scientists share the racial mindset and worldview that spawn victim-blaming discourses and retrograde policy.

*Negro Removal* is an apt term, because it calls to mind another historical case where the state was implicated in ethnic cleansing: *Indian Removal*. Some will dismiss this claim as political hyperbole, if only because Indians

were banished from white society, whereas the ostensible purpose of mobility projects is to enhance racial and class integration. Yet in the case of Cabrini-Green, the rule for one-to-one replacement of low-income housing was abrogated by Cisneros, the allotment of low-income housing was severely scaled back, and stringent tenant screening criteria, including strict work requirements, assured that only a handful of displaced residents would be allowed to return to the small allotment of public housing units in the new mixed-income development (Smith 2006; Wilen and Nayak 2006, 221). Cabrini-Green was relegated to oblivion, and the new development was refurbished with a new name: Parkside of Old Town. By September 2007, a local real estate blog offered this rhapsodic account of the neighborhood's transformation from slum to gold coast:

#### **Parkside of Old Town Brings Development to Cabrini**

Cabrini was once one of the most notorious neighborhoods in Chicago. When public housing was built in the neighborhood, many of the old homes were destroyed and families left the neighborhood.

During the 1980s and 1990s, crime and drugs levied a heavy cost on the neighborhood, making it one of the most dangerous in the city.

Today, Cabrini is the scene of one of the largest real estate redevelopment projects in all of Chicago. Most of the housing projects are gone now, replaced by cranes and new developments that offer a mix of luxury condominiums and affordable housing for former residents of public housing in the neighborhood.

One of the largest developments underway in Cabrini is Parkside of Old Town. Buyers can choose from condos and townhomes that start at \$300,000. The townhomes sell for as much as \$700,000.

This 18-acre development will offer park space with basketball courts and a playground. There are also several other new condo developments around the neighborhood that are attracting new families and bringing back the neighborhood feel that characterized Cabrini before the construction of public housing.

Many new residents choose Cabrini for the excellent location just minutes from downtown. Prices in the neighborhood are competitive when compared to other areas of north Chicago such as the Gold Coast and Streeterville.<sup>1</sup>

Efforts of community activists and years of litigation had all come to naught, and according to one estimate, 97% of dislocated families moved into areas that did not meet either the "low poverty or racial integration requirements set out in the relocation rights contract" (Wilen and Nayak 2006, 220). Broken promises: another similarity to the nation's treatment of Native Americans.

Indian Removal is commonly remembered as an event involving the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced movement of the Cherokees from their cultivated farms and communities in Georgia to wasteland in Oklahoma in 1837. Actually, this was the last of a series of removals of tribes to Indian Country, and the removal policy was contested in legislatures, courts, and public venues for many years. Indeed, the 1830 Indian Removal Act was the subject of contentious public debate, and the Removal Act passed by a slim margin (28 to 19 in the Senate, 102 to 97 in the House). Why, one might ask, didn't President Jackson, famous for having massacred Indians in battle, simply send in the cavalry and make removal a fait accompli? According to a recent history of Indian Removal:

Jackson made certain that Indians knew he meant business, but he also wanted to avoid violent unrest. He had political worries as well. Realizing that many throughout the country would not approve unvarnished removal, he undertook to convince the public about the policy's wisdom. He recruited religious leaders and well-known proponents of Indian rights...to explain that removal was actually in the best interests of the Indians. In his first Annual Message he informed Congress of the pressing need for Indian removal and asked for money to accomplish it. As he habitually did in his public statements, Jackson framed his sentiments in humanitarian terms about the good effects removal would have on Indians. (Heidler and Heidler 2007, 23-4)

Thus, the first Moving to Opportunity program was born! As with today's HOPE VI demolitions and mobility programs, a façade was erected to maintain the pretense that this was a legal program and that the Cherokees went voluntarily. In *Race, Racism, and American Law*, Derrick Bell (2008, 688) provides quite another account:

The pressures from state and public officials created two factions among the Cherokee Nation: the Treaty Party, comprising the elite mixed bloods, and the Ross faction, supporters of Chief John Ross. Ross, who had the support of most of the Cherokee people, was incarcerated while the Treaty Party representatives negotiated the treaty. The treaty, ratified at New Echota, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, by only 20 persons, ceded all the tribal land in Georgia in exchange for 7 million acres of land in Indian Territory.

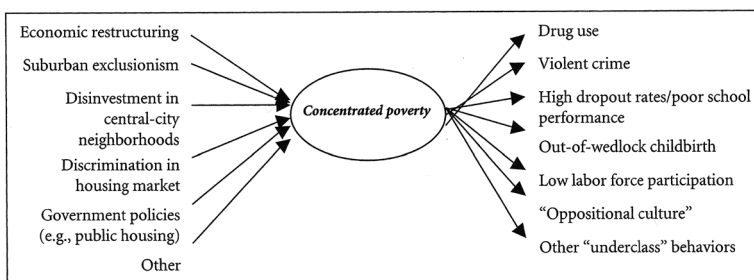
Some 16,000 of the 17,000 Cherokees signed a petition to Congress protesting the treaty, but to no avail. After gold was discovered in Georgia in 1829 (again inviting comparison to soaring real estate values in Chicago's postindustrial economy), pressures mounted to get rid of the Cherokees, the last of the so-called civilized tribes. With that ignominious act, the nation established a historical precedent for ethnic cleansing.

To my eye, HOPE VI looks like Negro Removal, and Negro Removal looks like Indian Removal, though dispossession and displacement are more ingeniously camouflaged today than in times past. Nobody accuses blacks of being “savages” incapable of being assimilated into white society. Well, that’s not entirely true. We speak euphemistically of “the urban jungle,” and social scientists who portray the inner city as a haven of pathology, disorder, and immorality, are only a word away from declaring its inhabitants “uncivilized.” Indeed, Dinesh D’Souza (1995, 554) made precisely this allegation in *The End of Racism*. According to D’Souza, racial disparities are due, not to racism, but rather to a “civilizational gap” between blacks and whites. It is precisely because the trope between “savage” and “civilized” endures that we have one African American “who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy” who inhabits the White House, at the same time that we have another 1.1 million African Americans who are in the slammer!

Like Indian Removal, Negro Removal, especially in the post-civil rights era, required intellectual and moral justification. Enter the social scientist, with a new arrow in the quiver: “concentrated poverty.” The concept of “concentrated poverty” has provided the crucial theoretical underpinning for HOPE VI and other mobility programs.<sup>2</sup> The hapless victims of these policies are not relocated west of the Mississippi, but they are removed from urban neighborhoods that are ripe for development. Dispossession and displacement are done in the name of deconcentrating poverty.

My purpose now is to subject the concept of “concentrated poverty” to critical scrutiny, and to examine the origins and evolution of this idea, its embedded assumptions, its consequences, and above all, its political uses.

Let us begin by distinguishing between concentrated poverty as fact and as theory. The fact of concentrated poverty—that poverty is spatially concentrated—is well known and easily documented. It is easy as well to chart trends, and to show that poverty, especially black poverty, has become more concentrated in recent decades (Jargowsky 1997; Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Kanaiaupuni, 1993; Orfield 2002; Wilson 1987). But there is also a *theory* of concentrated poverty that postulates a causal relationship between concentrated poverty and a host of social ills. This is graphically portrayed in Edward Goetz’s *Clearing the Way* (2003, 160). As can be seen in Figure 15.1, concentrated poverty is conceptualized as an intermediary factor between the structures that engender inequality and the “tangle of pathology” that is associated with the underclass (Clark 1965). Thus, structural factors are acknowledged as primary causes of concentrated poverty: economic restructuring, suburban exclusionism, disinvestment in central-city neighborhoods, discrimination in housing markets, and government policies (e.g., public housing). On the other hand, concentrated poverty takes on causal significance all its own, leading to the familiar litany of pathologies: drug use, violent crime, high school dropout rates/poor school



**Figure 15.1** The cause and consequences of concentrated poverty. Source: Edward Goetz (2003, 22).

performance, out-of-wedlock childbirth, low labor force participation, and “oppositional culture.”

I submit to you that this theory is deeply flawed: simplistic, misleading, pregnant with false or unsubstantiated assumptions, and dangerous as a predicate for social policy. In the first place, “concentrated poverty” may be new to social science, but it plays on the familiar image of “the huddled masses,” generously portrayed as yearning to breathe free. It also plays on the trope of those “dangerous classes,” corrupted by the city, mired in pathology, and a menace to civil society. Marx provides yet another perspective on urban concentration: It was precisely the density of the factory and of urban life that provided the ecological prerequisite for class consciousness and political action. Thus, as two housing advocates have noted, “It is debatable whether integration efforts bestow on poor African-Americans economic or sociological benefits or, rather, destroy nonwhite political power, sense of community, culture, and neighborhood-based support systems” (Wilen and Stasell 2006, 249).

As a theoretical construct, concentrated poverty entered academic discourse with William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), though I think that Wilson gets too much credit—or blame, depending on your point of view—for this mistaken idea.<sup>3</sup> There are only three citations to “concentrated poverty” in the index of Wilson’s book, mostly alluding to increases in concentrated poverty, followed by some speculation—and it is sheer speculation, without a shred of evidence—about the adverse consequences of “social isolation” or the putative “concentration effects.” Moreover, in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson did not sever the relationship between concentrated poverty and the structural forces that engender it. His policy recommendations all pertain to addressing the root causes of concentrated poverty, through policies of full employment and a WPA-style jobs programs aimed for the ghetto poor. However, as concentrated poverty emerged as the

latest rage in poverty research, Wilson got on the bandwagon, embracing both the theory of concentrated poverty and the idea that removal of the poor from neighborhoods of concentrated poverty is a policy desideratum.<sup>4</sup>

The chief exponents of removal policy have been a new breed of Moving to Opportunity (MTO) advocates and social capital theorists who make the fatal mistake of treating concentrated poverty as a factor *sui generis*—one that is a determinant of all these “urban” pathologies, and therefore one that can be remedied through targeted social policy.<sup>5</sup> Herein lies the epistemological fallacy. With a sleight of hand, all these powerful structural forces that involve major political and economic institutions are conflated into a single factor—concentrated poverty, which is now identified as *the* central problem in terms of analysis and social policy. As Goetz (2003, 160) shrewdly observed, “Over time, focus has shifted away from the causes of concentrated poverty toward the behavior of the poor in response to concentrated poverty.” Thus, instead of dealing with the root causes of concentrated poverty, as Wilson did in his initial intervention, we have one study after another treating concentrated poverty as though it were an independent and self-sustaining factor, and thus the theoretical underpinning for policies whose central purpose is to deconcentrate poverty.

But what evidence is there that *concentrated* poverty has explanatory significance above and beyond the effects of poverty itself? Do we know that concentration magnifies or exacerbates poverty? Studies that advance the theory of concentrated poverty (e.g., Jargowsky 1997; Massey and Kanaiaupuni 1993) devote pages proving that poverty has become more concentrated, especially for African Americans, but they utterly fail to prove that concentration *per se* has an additive effect.<sup>6</sup> To demonstrate this, they would have to show that poor people who do not live in high-poverty census tracts—and who are not warehoused in soulless high-rise apartment buildings (like mine in New York City)—are far less prone to aberrant behavior than poor people who live in concentrated poverty. But we know from studies of rural poverty, whether in Appalachia or upstate New York or the farm belt, that all of these “urban” pathologies run rampant there. Alas, urbanists have fallen into the trap that Manuel Castells (1979) cautioned against long ago: of positing the reified “city” or aspects of urban ecology as the cause of “urban ills,” rather than a political economy that engenders deep and persistent inequalities. And before we dynamite housing projects, obliterating the homes of 100,000 families, shouldn’t there be convincing evidence that deconcentration will have the transformative effects that are presumed?

In short, the theory of concentrated poverty is based on a faulty theoretical premise—namely, that concentrated poverty can be severed from its root causes and projected as the focal point of social policy. It is rather like diagnosing a melanoma as a blemish and treating it with a palliative.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that follow-up studies of relocation programs have failed to provide convincing evidence that deconcentration has the expected outcomes. At least this was what Goetz (2003, 256) found, based on a rigorous and exhaustive review of the extensive body of MTO research. He concludes his book with a simple, categorical judgment: “The scattering of poor people, in itself, accomplishes little.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet the cheerleaders of deconcentration turn a blind eye to the wide body of research that goes against their pet idea. This point is made forcefully in a recent article in which David Imbroscio (2008) challenges “the Dispersal Consensus” (DC for short). Imbroscio levels three criticisms:

1. The DCers trample over what Chester Hartman has called “the right [or ability] to stay put” (quoted in Imbroscio 2008, 114). Although the mobility programs typically recruit people whose participation is “voluntary,” they can hardly be seen as exercising free choice when their only alternative is to live in neglected housing and underserved communities. Imbroscio writes (115): “Preferences for dispersal become nothing more than a desperate response to a set of desperate conditions, with little to do with any real notion of freedom of choice.” Of course, in the case of HOPE VI demolitions, “choice” is a moot issue.
2. The DCers are guilty of overselling evidence, based mainly on studies of the Gautreaux program in Chicago and the MTO demonstration. Critics (Crump 2002; Goetz 2003) insist that these studies are flawed methodologically since participants are self-selected and heavily screened, vitiating comparisons to the people left behind. To make matters worse, the MTO studies typically report small findings that are wildly overstated as corroborating the claim that deconcentration has beneficial effects.
3. The DCers ignore or slight the evidence that points to viable alternatives to HOPE VI and mobility programs, such as the work of thousands of Community Development Corporations in providing affordable housing for low-income people and contributing to the revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods. Instead of contemplating strategies for ameliorating social problems where the poor live, the DCers obstinately cling to the idea that “opportunity” entails moving the poor as far as possible from the temptations and pathologies of the inner city. For all of their methodological sophistication, DCers seem oblivious to the fact that the efforts of the Community Development Corporations impact on entire communities, whereas MTO programs, at their very best, impact on the lives of a paltry number of individuals, deliberately scattered across the urban landscape: See responses by Xavier de Souza Briggs (2008, 131–37), John Goering and Judith Feins (2008, 139–48), and rejoinder by David Imbroscio 2008, 149–54).

Not only do mobility programs fail to magically transform the lives of the small number of people who are delivered from “the hood,” but studies find that relocatees are often worse off than before. With or without a Section 8 voucher, most relocatees gravitate to other poor neighborhoods where rents are low, thus moving the poor from one neighborhood of concentrated poverty to another, ironically validating the fears of the NIMBYs (Rosin 2008). Nor do the suburbs provide the magic formula. Xavier de Souza Briggs (2005, 36), a leading advocate of mobility programs, concedes that “many minority families that moved to the suburbs in the 1990s, even if they became homeowners, did not escape the pattern that contains poverty, school failure, and job isolation in particular geographic areas.” In a study of a HOPE VI relocation program in Tampa, Florida, Susan Greenbaum and her collaborators (In press) found that even when relocatees acknowledged that their housing was improved, “many...expressed feelings of loss and nostalgia for the neighborly relations they had in the public housing complexes where they used to live. In addition to enjoyment, patterns of mutual assistance and exchange among the residents had made survival easier on their very low incomes and offered a sense of community” (16–17).

There is an addendum to the narrative I began with. When my son was enrolled at the University of Chicago, living on Kimbark Avenue, his back porch provided a telescopic view of a strip of low-rise, subsidized housing that had been built on 55th Street. Architecturally, the houses were a New Urbanist nightmare: fortified bunkers, walled off to the street, with a small, internal courtyard. My son observed that on Sunday mornings, women dressed in their Sunday best would stand on the corner for a long time, waiting for a bus that would transport them, alas, back to “the hood” where their church was located.<sup>8</sup>

All of this raises the question of whether HOPE VI and mobility programs are predicated on a demonized image of the poor within those “severely distressed” housing projects. Implicitly and often explicitly, theorists and planners have in mind aberrant individuals who are the source of violence and disorder. Obviously, one can compile statistics that present a bleak picture of gangs, drugs, violence, et cetera, et cetera. But another picture emerges from ethnographic studies: of ordinary people, desperately poor and struggling to “survive”; of networks of resourceful women and extended families engaged in mutual support; of neighborhoods and churches that provide people with a sense of belonging and access to services and resources; and of activists and advocacy groups who valiantly represent the poor against the powerful institutions that seek their expulsion.<sup>9</sup> Why is it, one might ask, that social scientists valorize the solidarities of white ethnics as “Gemeinschaft,” whereas in the case of racial minorities, these same solidarities are disparaged as “hypersegregation” whose only remedy is “deconcentration by demolition”

(Crump 2002, 581)? These scholars forget that when white ethnics were poor (like the Italians who were the first occupants of Cabrini-Green), they produced the same litany of “pathologies” associated with today’s minorities. If these “pathologies” were not as prevalent or as enduring, this is because these white ethnics had the advantage of white privilege, were not encircled by discriminatory barriers, and consequently were not mired in poverty for generations (Marcuse 1997). As a result, they were able to fulfill the American Dream by moving to the very suburbs where the DCers want to place poor blacks who do not have the resources, and invariably encounter the bitter hostility of their neighbors (Moore 2008; Thompson 1998).

In short, a policy predicated on the claim that the demolition of their homes will advance the interests of the very people whose homes are being destroyed is a preposterous sham. And here we confront the cold reality: HOPE VI is not an antipoverty program, but on the contrary, one that stomps over the rights and interests of the poor and sacrifices them on the altar of political and economic power. This is how an agency whose historic mission was to provide housing of last resort for the poorest Americans is now responsible for the demolition of that very housing (Marcuse 1978). As with Indian Removal, this policy must be implemented in such a way as not to foment violent resistance or “political problems.” This is where the theory of deconcentrated poverty comes into play, which is trotted out in Congressional hearings and in Congressional Research Service reports, to paste over the patent injustices and to make a virtue of the unconscionable.<sup>10</sup>

It is not my contention that minus the theory of deconcentrated poverty, HOPE VI would not exist. Powerbrokers heed the sage advice of experts only when it is in their interest to do so. We have to be savvy about the political uses of the theory of concentrated poverty, which is invoked wherever the poor occupy valuable real estate that is coveted by developers, and which is part of the neoliberal agenda of reclaiming urban space that earlier was relinquished to the nation’s racial and class pariahs. Neil Smith (1996, 45–47) has aptly called this “the revanchist city.” Atlanta is in the process of demolishing most public housing, including housing occupied by stable families with regular employment.<sup>11</sup> And in New Orleans, even housing projects that escaped the ravages of Katrina were bulldozed despite the anguished protests of their residents.<sup>12</sup> While bodies were still being plucked from the floodwaters, William Julius Wilson and Bruce Katz (2005) appeared on the *News Hour*, declaring that Katrina presented a historic opportunity to break up concentrated poverty.<sup>13</sup> And when Xavier de Souza Briggs posted a petition on an urban sociology listserv under the title “Moving to Opportunity in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina,” nearly 200 urban experts rushed to affix their signatures, oblivious to the political uses of their dogma.<sup>14</sup>

A final point. Let us concede for the sake of argument that deconcentration and mobility programs provide better housing and schools for some poor people, and advance the cause of racial integration. Even so, we have to ask whether the political appeal of such policies is that they divert attention away from the vastly greater problem: the plight of the millions of poor people who still inhabit ghettos and barrios, whose plight has been exacerbated by the dismantling of the welfare state, and who are now threatened with gentrification and other assaults of the neoliberal city. As Susan Greenbaum (2006, 111) has commented, “A poverty alleviation policy that excludes the majority cannot be judged a success.” Not only do mobility programs provide relief only for a select few, but they provide an ideological façade for the neoliberal war against the poor and for disinvestment in the inner city. As Goetz (2003, 252) writes: “When accepted as a political strategy, deconcentration justifies the redirection of community development efforts away from the declining housing stock of poor neighborhoods and/or away from poor residents.” Thus, instead of comprehensive policies that would revitalize these communities, provide jobs—the sine qua non of antipoverty policy—and include grassroots organizations in the reconstruction of their communities, we have demonstration projects that, at best, can help a select few. Furthermore, as I suggested above, the dispersal of the minority poor makes it all the more difficult for them to mobilize politically and to put pressure on political and economic elites to live up to their responsibility to address the problems in their own back yard. Instead, in the name of deconcentrating poverty, they use dynamite as a remedy and transfer the problem to somebody else’s back yard. And they do this with the indispensable sanction of urban experts who labor under the illusion that they are advancing the project of racial and economic justice.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks to Greg Squires and Chester Hartman for welcoming a genuine and vigorous debate of housing policy. I first heard about the ravages of HOPE VI from Adolph Reed, who has provided me with invaluable perspective from both the ivory tower and the trenches on Chicago’s extraordinary campaign to obliterate its public housing communities. Susan Greenbaum was immensely helpful as I delved into the literature on mobility programs. So too were Derrick Bell, Jane Collins, Mark Harvey, Micaela di Leonardo, Jeff Maskovsky, and Devah Pager. In writing this paper, I have profited from the incisive scholarship anthologized in *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia Wright.

## Notes

1. <http://www.chicagorealestateblog.com/parkside-of-old-town-brings-development-to-cabrini/>
2. Clearly, HOPE VI and the MTO programs are different policies. However, the logic, the embedded assumptions, and the overriding policy objective are the same: to deconcentrate poverty and to move people as far as possible (as Stefanie DeLuca and James Rosenbaum assert in their paper in this volume) from the dense urban neighborhoods that putatively spawn pathology and prevent the poor from developing the social capital that would help them escape poverty.
4. For an incisive account of the origins of Wilson's "spatial turn," and the adoption and elaboration of the notion of "concentrated poverty" among urban specialists, see Crump 2002.
5. Despite the fact that Wilson's claims were altogether speculative and unsubstantiated, he provided indispensable authority and legitimacy to Chicago's plans to dismantle public housing. As far as I know, Wilson never took a public position during the acrimonious debate that raged around the decision to demolish Cabrini-Green, the Henry Horner Homes, and the Robert Taylor Homes. Yet his name and scholarship were frequently invoked by advocates of demolition. According to one account, his concept of concentrated poverty was "the ironclad precept" for housing officials and developers in enacting plans for the demolition of public housing (Bennett, Hudspeth, and Wright 2006, 195).

In the debate over the 1999 Chicago Housing Authority's "Plan for Transformation," which contemplated the downsizing of public housing, Alexander Polikoff, the senior staff counsel of Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, made the following argument: "For me the case made by Harvard's William Julius Wilson is entirely persuasive.... Wilson speaks of the 'social pathologies' of ghetto communities and adds that, if he had to use one term to capture the differences in the experience of the ghetto poor from the poor who live outside, it would be 'concentration effect'—meaning social pathologies generated when a neighborhood is composed exclusively of ghetto poor.... [S]o persuaded am I of the life-blighting consequences of Wilson's concentrated poverty circumstances, that I do not view even homelessness as clearly a greater evil" (quoted in Wright 2006, 159–60). As far as I know, if Wilson objected to the use of his name and scholarship to justify the implosion of public housing in Chicago, he never made his dissent public.

6. There is a very large body of studies (extensively reviewed in Goetz 2003; Imbroscio 2008) that purport to evaluate the efficacy of mobility programs. By far, the most influential have been James Rosenbaum's studies of the Gautreaux program (for example, Rosenbaum and DeLuca (2000, 1–8); Rosenbaum, DeLuca, and Tuck (2005); coauthored article in this volume). Other recent interventions include Briggs (2005); Goering (2005); and a recent symposium in the *American Journal of Sociology*, including Clampet-Lundquist and Massey (2008); Ludwig et al. (2008); and Sampson (2008). From the standpoint of the politics of knowledge production, the sheer amount of research on this dubious policy initiative is itself worthy of examination, as are the massive institutional subsidies. Clampet-Lundquist and Massey acknowledge support from no fewer than twelve foundations, governmental agencies, and research centers (including two grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and two from the National Science Foundation). Clampet-Lundquist and Massey begin by acknowledging that studies of the MTO housing mobility experiment "heretofore has not provided strong evidence to support the hypothesis of neighborhood effects on economic self-sufficiency among adults," and assert that selective bias casts a shadow of doubt on all these studies (2008, 107). However, instead of questioning the logic and assumptions, not to speak of the ideology, that undergird the MTO project, Clampet-Lundquist and Massey, like others before them, assume that their measures must be defective, and launch into yet another hairsplitting and word-parsing exercise to redeem the MTO concept.

On the other hand, a number of studies have challenged the logic, methodology, and findings of the MTO canon. These include: Bennett and Reed (1999); Bennett, Smith, and Wright (2006); Crump (2002); Goetz (2003); Greenbaum (2006, 2008); Greenbaum, Spalding, and Ward (in press); Imbroscio (2008); Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber (2007); Reed and Steinberg (2006); Reingold, Van Ryzin, and Ronda (2001); Thompson (1998); and Tienda (1991).

7. See Tienda (1991) for a thoughtful analysis of the logic of "concentration effects." Tienda faults existing studies for failing to specify the mechanisms through which these putative effects

are enacted. She further argues that “if resource stock problems are the *root causes* of social dislocation observed in ghetto neighborhoods, then solutions focused on neighborhood revitalization might be more productive than those aimed at rehabilitation of individuals” (252, italics in original). Tienda concludes on a skeptical note: “Given the nature of available data, it is virtually impossible to determine with any degree of confidence the existence of neighborhood effects on poverty behaviors” (258).

8. The full passage reads: “A responsible antipoverty policy should not lead with the demolition of low-cost housing and the forced relocation of the poor. This nation’s history with the urban renewal program suggests that without complementary actions to reduce exclusionary barriers and incentives that foster and facilitate growing socioeconomic disparities—and the geographic expression of those disparities—the scattering of poor people, in itself, accomplishes little.”
9. Nor is this an anomalous event: see McRoberts (2005).
10. Early ethnographic studies that portray the poor or public housing in a more positive light are Liebow (1967); Stack (1974); Susser (1982; Williams and Kornblum (1985, 1994). For a review of recent ethnographic studies of poverty, see Morgen and Maskovsky (2003).
11. For example, Maggie McCarty (2007). “Reauthorization of the HOPE VI Program,” Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity (June 21, 2007): [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110\\_house\\_hearings&docid=f:37561.wais](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_house_hearings&docid=f:37561.wais)
12. Springston (2007) and Pearlstein (2007).
13. For a glimpse of the protest before the New Orleans City Council, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMBWAXfGsc4>
14. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/weather/july-dec05/rebuild\\_9-16.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/weather/july-dec05/rebuild_9-16.html)
15. The petition can be found at <http://www.newvisioninstitute.org/movingOppotunityScholarsPetition.pdf>.

For critical commentary, see Imbroscio (2008); Reed and Steinberg (2006). Also, see the Symposium on Hurricane Katrina, including Susan Greenbaum, Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, and Xavier de Souza Briggs (2006, 107–28), and Nicolai Ouroussoff’s column in the *New York Times* (September 14, 2008) on the failure of planning in the reconstruction of New Orleans. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/14/weekinreview/14ouroussoff.html?pagewanted=print>

## References

- Bell, Derrick. 2008. *Race, Racism, and American Law*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Bennett, Larry, Nancy Hudspeth, and Patricia Wright. 2006. “A Critical Analysis of the ABLA Re-development Plan.” In *Where Are Poor People to Live?* ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 185–215.
- Bennett, Larry, and Adolph Reed Jr. 1999. “The New Face of Urban Renewal: The Near North Re-development Initiative and the Cabrini-Green Neighborhood.” In *Without Justice for All*, ed. Adolph Reed Jr. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 175–211.
- . Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright, ed. 2006. *Where Are Poor People to Live?* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Briggs, Xavier de Souza. 2005. “Introduction” and “*More Pluribus, Less Unum?* The Changing Geography of Race and Opportunity.” In *The Geography of Opportunity*, ed. Xavier de Souza Briggs. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1–41.
- . 2006. “After Katrina: Rebuilding Places and Lives.” *City & Community* 5 (2): 119–28.
- Castells, Manuel. 1979. *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Clampet-Lundquist, Susan, and Douglas S. Massey. 2008. “Neighborhood Effects on Economic Self-Sufficiency: A Reconsideration of the Moving to Opportunity Experiment.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (1): 107–43.
- Clark, Kenneth. 1965. *Dark Ghetto*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Crump, Jeff. 2002. “Deconcentration by Demolition: Public Housing, Poverty, and Urban Policy.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20: 581–96.
- D’Souza, Dinesh. 1995. *The End of Racism*. New York: Free Press.
- Goering, John. 2005. “Expanding Housing Choice and Integrating Neighborhoods: The MTO Ex-

- periment." In *The Geography of Opportunity*, ed. Xavier de Souza Briggs. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 127–49.
- Goetz, Edward G. 2000. "The Politics of Poverty Deconcentration and Housing Demolition." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22(2): 167–73.
- . 2003. *Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Greenbaum, Susan. 2006. "Comments on Katrina." *City & Community* 5(2): 109–13.
- . 2008. "Poverty and the Willful Destruction of Social Capital: Displacement and Dispossession in African American Communities." *Rethinking Marxism*. 20(1): 42–54.
- . Ashley Spalding, and Beverly G. Ward, "Scattering Urban Poverty: Hidden Results and Unintended Consequences." Forthcoming.
- Heidler, David S., and Jeanne T. Heidler. 2007. *Indian Removal*. New York: Norton.
- Imbroscio, David. 2008. "United and Actuated by Some Common Impulse of Passion": Challenging the Dispersal Consensus in American Policy Research." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 30 (2): 111–30
- Jargowsky, Paul. 1997. *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City*. New York: Russell Sage,
- Joseph, Mark L., Robert J. Chaskin, and Henry S. Webber. 2007. "The Theoretical Basis for Addressing Poverty Through Mixed-Income Development." *Urban Affairs Review* 42 (3): 369–409.
- Liebow, Elliot. 1967. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Streetcorner Men*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Ludwig, Jens, Jeffrey B. Liebman, Jeffrey R. Kling, Greg J. Duncan, Lawrence F. Katz, Ronald C. Kessler, and Lisa Sanbonmatsu. 2008. "What Can We Learn about Neighborhood Effects from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment." *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (1): 14–88.
- Marcuse, Peter. 1978. "Housing Policy and the Myth of the Benevolent State." *Social Policy* 8 (4): 21–26.
- . 1997. "The Enclave, the Citadel, and the Ghetto: What Has Changed in the Post-Fordist U.S. City." *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (2): 228–64.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- . Shawn M. Kanaiaupuni. 1993. "Public Housing and the Concentration of Poverty." *Social Science Quarterly* 74 (1): 109–22.
- McCarty, Maggie. 2007. "HOPE VI Public Housing Revitalization Program: Background, Funding, and Issues." *CRS Report for Congress*. Order Code RL32236.
- McRoberts, Omar M. 2005. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moore, Solomon. 2008. "As Program Moves Poor to Suburbs, Tensions Follow." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/09/us/09housing.html?scp=1&sq=as%20program%20for%20poor%20moves%20to%20the%20suburbs&st=cse> (August 9, 2008)
- Morgen, Sandra, and Jeff Maskovsky. 2003. "The Anthropology of Welfare 'Reform': New Perspectives on U.S. Urban Poverty in the Post-Welfare Era." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32: 315–38.
- Orfield, Myron. 2002. *American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Pearlstein, Alex. 2007. "Atlanta to Demolish Nearly All Its Public Housing." *Planetizen: The Planning & Development Network*. <http://www.planetizen.com/node/22899>
- Reed, Adolph, and Stephen Steinberg. 2006. "Liberal Bad Faith in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina." *The Black Commentator* [http://www.blackcommentator.com/182/182\\_cover\\_liberals\\_katrina.html](http://www.blackcommentator.com/182/182_cover_liberals_katrina.html)
- Reingold, David A., Gregg G. Van Ryzin, and Michelle Ronda. 2001. "Does Urban Public Housing Diminish the Social Capital and Labor Force Activity of Its Tenants?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 20 (3): 485–504.
- Rosenbaum, James, and Stefanie DeLuca. 2000. *Is Housing Mobility the Key to Welfare Reform? Lessons from the Gautreaux Program*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1–8.
- , Stefanie DeLuca, and Tammy Tuck. 2005. "New Capabilities in New Places: Low-Income Black Families in Suburbia." In *The Geography of Opportunity*, ed. Xavier de Souza Briggs. Washington, D.C., 2005, 150–75.
- Rosin, Hanna. 2008. "American Murder Mystery." *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/memphis-crime>



- Sampson, Robert J. 2008. "Moving to Inequality: Neighborhood Effects and Experiments Meet Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (1): 189–231.
- Smith, Janet L. 2006. "Mixed-Income Communities: Designing Out Poverty or Pushing Out the Poor?" In *Where Are Poor People to Live?* ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 259–81.
- Smith, Neil. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. New York: Routledge.
- Springston, Jonathan. 2007. "Activists Mobilize to Save Atlanta Public Housing, Seek Legal Options," *Atlanta Progressive News*. <http://www.atlantaprogressivenews.com/news/0141.html>
- Stack, Carol. 1974. *All Our Kin*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Steinberg, Steinberg. 2007. "Social Capital: The Science of Obfuscation," *New Politics* 11 (4): <http://www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue44/Steinberg44.htm>
- Susser, Ida. 1982. *Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, J. Phillip. 1998. "Universalism and Deconstruction: Why Race Still Matters in Poverty and Economic Development," *Politics and Society* 26(2): 181–219.
- Tienda, Marta. 1991. "Poor People and Poor Places: Deciphering Neighborhood Effects on Poverty Outcomes." In *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology*, ed. Joan Huber. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Williams, Terry M., and William Kornblum. 1985. *Growing Up Poor*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- . 1994. *The Uptown Kids: Struggle and Hope in the Projects*. New York: Putnam.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . Bruce Katz. 2005. *The News Hour*. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/weather/july-dec05/rebuild\\_9-16.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/weather/july-dec05/rebuild_9-16.html)
- Wright, Patricia. 2006. "Community Resistance to CHA Transformation." In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 125–67.
- . with Richard M. Wheelock and Carol Steele. 2006. "The Case of Cabrini-Green." In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 168–84.
- Wilens, William P., and Rajesh D. Nayak. 2006. "Relocated Public Housing Residents Have Little Hope of Returning." In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 216–36.
- . Wendy L. Stasell. 2006. "Gautreaux and Chicago's Public Housing Crisis: The Conflict between Achieving Integration and Providing Decent Housing for Very Low-Income African Americans." In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, ed. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 239–58.
- Wyly, Elvin, and Daniel Hammel. 1999. "Islands of Decay in Seas of Renewal: Urban Policy and the Resurgence of Gentrification." *Housing Policy Debate* 10 (4): 711–71.



