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AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN  
THE UNITED STATES AFTER FORTY YEARS

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ABSTRACT

This article first briefly reviews the history of public housing in the United States since its inception in 1937, noting that growing obsolescence of public housing units, the deterioration of inner-city neighborhoods surrounding public housing projects, racial tensions, and inflation have aggravated public housing problems in recent years. Moreover, public housing tenants are no longer predominantly white, upwardly-mobile, two-parent, working-class families, but predominantly non-white, non-mobile, female-headed, lower-class families. The remainder of the article presents the findings of a 1978 field survey of public housing in the United States conducted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in preparation for its Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program. This survey revealed the number of "troubled" projects and their major characteristics, identified and explained the principal variables causing these projects to be labeled "troubled," and, finally, assessed the impact of a variety of remedial intervention strategies proposed by HUD field office personnel. The author concludes that, in the balance, the positive aspects of the public housing program in the United States outweigh its negative features. There are problems with inconsistent regulations at the federal level, with site selection, with fraud and crime, with management-tenant relations, and with underfinancing, but the system has also responded fairly well over the past forty years to the demand for low-income housing and to changing tenant expectations in terms of the structure of public housing units and their amenities, besides incorporating new housing technologies and architectural styles.

Since America's public housing program was launched in 1937, approximately 1.5 million units have been built at 10,000 projects which are managed by 2,700 public housing agencies and serve an estimated 3.5 million low-income persons (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979). The history of the program can be divided into three distinct periods: 1937-1948, 1949-1974, and 1975 to the present. When the Housing Act of 1937 was passed, 12 to 14 million persons were unemployed and millions more were working at depressed wages. At the same time, new housing starts had fallen to only ten percent of the pre-depression level so that substandard dwelling units constituted a large proportion of the total national housing stock. Consequently, the federal government's objective in the Housing Act of 1937

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was to stimulate the economy by eliminating slums and replacing them with safe, decent, and sanitary low-cost housing in stable, working-class neighborhoods. During and after World War II, existing public housing projects were opened and new ones were constructed for war-industry workers and the families of servicemen. Throughout the first period of its history, 1937-1948, the demand for public housing was high, construction met the demand, and the program was not only financially solvent but socially successful in terms of serving working-class and temporarily poor families, both of which were generally characterized by stable internal relationships.

During the second period of its history, 1949-1974, however, the public housing program in America underwent a drastic change in the sense of becoming the haven for the poorest and least stable segments of the population. First, when slum clearance was introduced with the urban renewal program of 1949, public housing became by law the chief relocation resource for displaced persons and families who could not afford housing in the private market (Bingham, 1975). Secondly, homeownership requirements were liberalized by the Housing Act of 1949 so that lower-middle class families could afford housing in the private sector, reducing or eliminating their demand for public housing. As a consequence, public housing tenants gradually changed from a predominantly white, upwardly-mobile, two-parent, working-class population to a predominantly non-white, poverty-stricken, non-mobile, lower-class population. The issue of the "problem family" began to dominate management concerns, as did the financial squeeze created by increased operating expenses on the one hand and the limited rent-paying ability of poorer tenants on the other.

During the 1950's and 1960's, several other factors combined to produce a negative impact upon public housing: (1) the growing obsolescence of public housing dwelling units; (2) the deterioration of the inner-city neighborhoods surrounding public housing projects; (3) rapid escalation of operating costs due to inflation; and (4) racial tensions and increased crime in and around public housing sites. The crowning blow to public housing, however, was the Housing Act of 1969 which mandated that no public housing tenant would pay more than 25 percent of his/her income for rent, resulting in a shortage of public housing agency revenues which was not immediately compensated for by federal funds. Then, with the federal housing moratorium of 1973, new construction of public housing virtually came to a standstill (Welfeld, 1977).

In 1975, however, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) instituted the Performance Funding System to provide all public housing agencies with the subsidies essential to efficient management, and it framed tenant selection policies designed to ensure a broad range of incomes among the families living in public housing projects. HUD reaffirmed its commitment to public housing in 1978 with the launching of the Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program whose purpose is to enhance the quality of life in the most seriously troubled public housing projects. Indeed, the first major activity undertaken by HUD under this program was a field study to determine the number of "troubled" public housing projects in the United States, to delineate their major characteristics, to identify the principal variables causing projects to be labeled "troubled" and to ascertain the major explanations for these problem variables, and to assess the impact of a variety of remedial intervention strategies. The field study integrated four sources of both qualitative and quantitative information about problems in public housing projects:

(1) HUD's field office files which have extensive project-level data; (2) the informed judgments of HUD's field office staff responsible for the daily monitoring of the public housing program; (3) interviews with a wide variety of housing experts; and (4) visits to selected "troubled" projects by HUD's Central Office research teams, one of which included the author.

The Condition of Public Housing  
Projects in the United States

The data sample for the HUD field study, which was considered sufficient for statistical purposes and on which estimates of the condition of the nation's public housing inventory were made, consisted of 719 projects. HUD field office staff members were asked to rely not only on their firsthand knowledge of specific projects and their problems, but on the data in project files, to rate the overall condition of each project in the sample, using a five-point scale: (1) very good, (2) good, (3) marginal, (4) bad, and (5) very bad. For analytical purposes, however, projects rated as bad or very bad were grouped together as "in bad overall condition," while projects rated as good or very good were grouped together as "in good overall condition." All projects rated as marginal were classified as "in average condition." By weighting the projects in the sample, the following general evaluation was made of all the nation's public housing projects: (1) 75.5 percent were rated "in good overall condition"; (2) 20.7 percent were rated "in average condition"; and (3) 3.8 percent were rated "in bad overall condition" (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979).

The likelihood of bias on the part of the field office evaluators--either positive bias to make their offices appear to be doing a good job in the housing area or negative bias in the hope of increasing their office's share of public housing resources--was minimized by the fact that they were not directly responsible for the condition of the public housing projects in their geographical jurisdiction and by the fact that the project data in the field office files upon which their judgments were partially based were supplied by technical experts such as financial and management analysts, construction engineers, and occupancy specialists. Moreover, field office personnel were told to assess each project within the context of local standards in order to avoid concern at the time of data analysis over the issue of regional variations in ratings of public housing project condition--i.e., that a project defined as bad in Louisville might be considered good by field office personnel in Chicago. In other words, regional variations in ratings were not only anticipated but encouraged.

A second measure of the condition of public housing projects in the United States was obtained from delineation of the most serious problem areas at each of the 719 field sample projects by HUD field office personnel. This assessment, like their ratings of the overall condition of the sampled projects, was based not only on their firsthand knowledge of the relevant public housing agencies from their regular physical inspections and overall monitoring of particular public housing sites, but on the project files which contain public housing agency reports on finances and occupancy and summaries of management reviews. As Table 1 indicates, the most serious problem areas at the 719 field sample projects were as follows (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979): (1) the availability and cost of project services, which was cited 59 percent of the time among the top five problem areas; (2) the

efficacy of HUD subsidies, policies, and monitoring activities--cited 46 percent of the time among the top five; (3) the physical and social attributes of the surrounding neighborhoods--cited 43 percent of the time among the top five; (4) the characteristics and behavior of the project tenants--cited 40 percent of the time among the top five; (5) the structural quality of the projects--cited 37 percent of the time among the top five; (6) the quality of project management and maintenance--cited 34 percent of the time among the top five; (7) project site design--cited 32 percent of the time among the top five; and (8) project involvement by local government--cited 28 percent of the time among the top five.

TABLE 1  
THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM AREAS AT  
U.S. PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS

Problem Areas	Percentage of Times Listed as One of Five Most Serious Problems
Availability and Cost of Project Services	59
Efficacy of HUD Subsidies, Policies, and Monitoring Activities	46
Physical and Social Attributes of the Surrounding Neighborhoods	43
Characteristics and Behavior of Project Tenants	40
Structural Quality of the Projects	37
Quality of Project Management and Maintenance	34
Project Site Design	32
Project Involvement by Local Government	28

Looking at the research data on problem areas in public housing in greater detail --that is, by noting the frequency with which 133 specific characteristic public housing problems was mentioned, the author made the following observations: (1) "Fuel availability and rates" was by far the most frequently cited specific problem under the problem area, availability and cost of project services, being listed 28 percent of the time as one of the five most serious specific problems. The closest

that any other specific problem came to being cited as frequently--13 percent of the time--was "insurance availability and rates." (2) Under the problem area, efficacy of HUD subsidies, policies, and monitoring activities, "the number of HUD monitoring staff" and "failure of HUD's Performance Funding System to include certain public housing agency (PHA) needs (notably, security)" were both cited as being among the five most serious specific problems more than any others--each 9 percent of the time. Moreover, it is not surprising that, under the same problem area, two closely related specific problems--"adequacy of the HUD operating subsidy level" and "conflict between HUD's policies of serving low-income or mixed-income tenants in public housing and PHA economic self-sufficiency"--were both cited 8 percent of the time as being among the five most serious specific problems. (3) "The inadequacy of social services--hospitals, child care, schools, libraries, and recreation" and "the dearth of transportation facilities" were both cited as being among the five most serious specific problems more than any others--each 8 percent of the time--under the problem area, physical and social attributes of the surrounding neighborhoods. (4) The two problems most frequently cited as being among the five most serious specific ones under the problem area, characteristics and behavior of project tenants, were "the predominance of very low-income tenants"--cited 9 percent of the time--and the "predominance of single-parent, female-headed families"--cited 8 percent of the time. (5) Under structural quality of the projects, "the general housing structure (walls, floors, windows, doors)" and "insulation" were the two specific problems most frequently cited as being among the top five--each 5 percent of the time, but "roofs" as a specific problem was ranked in the same way nearly as often--4 percent of the time. (6) Under the problem area, quality of project management and maintenance, two specific problems were both cited 8 percent of the time as being among the top five--"the adequacy of modernization funds for capital improvements" and "firmness in dealing with rent payment delinquency"; two others--"coordination of community-based services for the benefit of project residents" and "the non-existence of a preventive maintenance program"--were both cited 6 percent of the time as being among the top five specific problems. (7) The three project site design area problems cited most frequently as being among the five most serious specific ones were "the number and density of buildings on the site" (mentioned 8 percent of the time); "the absence or inadequacy of amenities--swimming pools, play areas, and parking facilities" (cited 7 percent of the time); and "the lack of defensible space to provide a sense of privacy, security, and controlled access" (cited 6 percent of the time). Finally, under the problem area, project involvement by local government, each of three specific problems--"poor delivery of public services--i.e., police, fire, roads," "poor delivery of social and community services--i.e., health, education, welfare, recreational, cultural," and "local political interference in the hiring, promotion, and firing of public housing project staff"--was cited 4 percent of the time as being among the five most serious specific public housing project problems (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979).

Finally, by combining the HUD field office personnel's project condition ratings--projects in good overall condition, projects in average condition, and projects in poor overall condition--with the number of serious problem areas in each of these settings, as shown in Table 2 (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979), it was possible to identify three categories of public housing projects in the United States--troubled projects, relatively untroubled projects, and untroubled projects.

TABLE 2

PROJECT CONDITION AND NUMBER OF SERIOUS PROBLEM AREAS  
AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS

Project Condition	Number of Serious Problem Areas			Total Percentage
	Two or Fewer	Three or Four	Five or More	
Projects in Good Overall Condition	67.3	6.8	1.4	75.5
Projects in Average Condition	13.9	5.3	1.5	20.7
Projects in Bad Overall Condition	1.8	1.0	1.0	3.8
All Projects	83.0	13.1	3.9	100.0

Thus, troubled projects are those in bad overall condition (3.8 percent of all projects) and projects in good overall or average condition with five or more serious problem areas (1.4 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively) which constitute 2.9 percent of all projects. This means that only 6.7 percent (3.8 percent + 2.9 percent) or approximately 700 of the nation's 10,000 public housing projects, accommodating about 15 percent of all public housing tenants, can be classified as troubled. Relatively untroubled projects are those in average condition with fewer than five serious problem areas, which constitute 19.2 percent of all projects (13.9 percent with two or fewer problem areas and 5.3 percent with three or four problem areas), and projects in good overall condition that have three or four serious problem areas (6.8 percent of all projects), for a combined percentage of 26 percent. Untroubled projects are those in good overall condition with two or fewer serious problem areas or 67.3 percent of all projects. It is quite obvious, therefore, that 93.3 percent of our nation's public housing stock can be classified as either relatively untroubled (26 percent) or untroubled (67.3 percent). Nevertheless, as stated earlier in this article, the Department of Housing and Urban Development launched its Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program in 1978 with the expressed purpose of enhancing the quality of life in the most seriously troubled housing projects of the United States.

Characteristics of "Troubled" Public  
Housing Projects in the United States

The stereotypic public housing project in the United States is one which is large (having over 200 units), old (being over 20 years old), located in an urban area, and occupied mainly by families. Moreover, this stereotypic public housing project is characteristically thought of as a "troubled" project. Data collected in the 1978 HUD field survey of public housing in the United States, however, revealed that these public housing stereotypes are neither completely accurate nor inaccurate. On the one hand, stereotypic projects constitute only 8.3 percent of all public housing projects and account for only 27 percent of all "troubled" projects. Moreover, only 8.8 percent of all family projects in our nation's public housing inventory are rated as "troubled." On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of "troubled" projects (92.1 percent) are designed for family occupancy, although only 71 percent of the total public housing inventory in the United States is designed for this type of occupancy (the remaining 29 percent of the total public housing inventory is designed for elderly tenants). Another significant fact is that although single-parent and female-headed households each constitute only 26 percent of all public housing households, they comprise 46 percent of the households in "troubled" projects (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979).

The HUD study also revealed that 75 percent of all "troubled" public housing projects are located in urban areas, although only 64 percent of the total public housing inventory in the United States is located in urban areas. Several kinds of "neighborhood criteria" also distinguish "troubled" public housing projects. For example, although only 30 percent of the total public housing inventory is located in neighborhoods with a minority population exceeding 50 percent, 57 percent of the "troubled" projects are situated in such neighborhoods; although only 13 percent of all public housing projects are located in neighborhoods where multi-family housing constitutes more than 50 percent of the housing stock, 39 percent of all "troubled" projects are located in such neighborhoods; not only are 42 percent of all "troubled" projects located in neighborhoods rated as "high crime areas," but 56 percent are located in neighborhoods whose police protection is generally regarded as poor or fair; and, finally, only 19 percent of the "troubled" projects have access to high quality public service facilities such as employment information, counseling, day care, health, and recreation centers (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979).

In terms of size, "troubled" projects have, on an average, about three times as many units as "untroubled" projects--290 versus 106 units, but it is unclear whether or not this situation is a reflection of a whole series of other characteristics that tend to be highly correlated with large projects. For example, large projects tend to have less controllable environments, to feature high density housing, and to be located in urban areas and in middle- or lower-income minority neighborhoods that lack many amenities and offer poor quality public services. "Troubled" projects are also larger in terms of the number of buildings, averaging 33 buildings per project in contrast to only 19 buildings in the average untroubled project (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979).

Although there is a positive association between the age of public housing and the probability of its being "troubled," the survey data revealed that the difference between older and newer projects in this regard is not large. In combination with



other characteristics, however, project age has a more positive association with the probability of trouble. For example, older family projects have a greater probability of being "troubled" than newer family projects. Moreover, although small, older family projects outnumber large, older family projects by a two-to-one margin, the large, older family projects are more than four times as likely to be "troubled." In fact, the older and larger family projects are more likely to be "troubled" than projects with any other combination of age, size, and design characteristics.

Analysis of the Major Problems Affecting  
"Troubled" Public Housing Projects  
in the United States

The problems facing "troubled" public housing projects in the United States fall into four major categories:

1. Financial problems that reflect rising project expenses, low rental income, and the alleged inadequacies of HUD's Performance Funding System.
2. Physical problems that encompass design flaws (including project sizes and densities), structural deficiencies, and inadequate maintenance.
3. Managerial problems that represent the failure of HUD, public housing agencies, and project-based management personnel to establish and implement adequate operational policies and procedures.
4. Social problems that include crime, drug abuse, the absence or inadequacy of public services, and negative neighborhood conditions.

These four problem categories do not operate independently, however. A financial problem like inadequate funds, for example, may preclude the effective delivery of basic maintenance services, and the failure of a public housing agency to establish and implement effective tenant selection and eviction policies may induce severe social problems like crime and vandalism. While "troubled" projects experience problems in all four categories, HUD's 1978 field survey of its public housing inventory revealed that physical and social difficulties were most frequently reported, although financial problems were also quite severe. More specifically, the major variables which cause a public housing project to be "troubled" are: (1) building structure deficiencies and inadequate heating and/or plumbing systems associated with advanced project age; (2) a large number of high density buildings; (3) location in neighborhoods with predominantly minority populations and multi-family housing, high crime rates, inadequate police protection, and minimal human service programs and social amenities; (4) lack of defensible space; and (5) management difficulties, including problems with deviant and dissatisfied tenants and with inefficient and expensive maintenance. Although many HUD field office personnel expressed the opinion that public housing agency management often lacks an appropriate mixture of resources, skills, and commitment to address these multiple problems, it is more likely that a certain portion of perceived "management problems" stems from the weight of other problems facing troubled projects and that

another portion stems from poor management itself. In sum, for one reason or another, public housing agency management is a severe problem in "troubled" public housing projects (McHugh, 1979).

Although, as was pointed out earlier, "troubled" public housing projects constitute only 6.7 percent of our nation's total public housing inventory, public housing is frequently cited as one of the foremost fiascos among the "visionary" social programs adopted over the last forty years (Maloney and Thornton, 1980). The popular image of public housing projects as complexes of ugly reddish-brown brick, high-rise apartment buildings standing starkly amid barren open spaces in the ghettos of our large central cities persists because many such projects still exist. These older projects are not only a current public relations problem, but a monument to the mistakes of the past when they were built hurriedly as sort of "halfway houses" where the poor could stop briefly on their way "up" socio-economically. Such accoutrements as interior doors, adequate light fixtures, and even toilet seats were omitted in the name of economy, and, frequently, elevators did not stop at every floor (Liston, 1974). Extensive renovations have been made at some of these projects to provide modern kitchens and bathrooms, to enlarge the apartments, and to landscape the open space surrounding them. But much more of our nation's antiquated public housing stock needs to be "updated" or rehabilitated. Consequently, these older, high-rise projects are a tremendous financial burden on local public housing agencies today, for construction and maintenance costs have skyrocketed with inflation in recent years.

Older high-rise public housing projects are also crime-ridden, especially with vandalism, murder, rape, arson, and robbery. The high incidence of crime and violence in public housing projects has supported the contention of some critics that government agencies should terminate all their programs to house the poor (Moore, 1969). The rationale goes something like this: "these housing projects have been built at taxpayers' expense. The apartments are surely far superior to the tenants' previous housing, but the tenants don't appreciate what has been done for them. They vandalize the buildings and prey upon one another. Therefore, the government ought to forget the whole business and save the taxpayers' money. The poor should go to work, save their money, and provide for their own needs, just like everyone else."

In response to such a line of argument, it should be emphasized, as was done earlier in this article, that many public housing projects with high crime rates merely reflect the deteriorating neighborhoods in which they are located. Moreover, while expensive security programs have been launched by some public housing agencies to reduce the invasion of their projects by criminals from the areas surrounding them, their effectiveness has been greatly restricted by the fact that local police departments frequently reduce to a minimum their surveillance of these housing projects following the introduction of such programs. Typically, there is also considerable jealousy and friction between the local police and public housing agency security personnel.

The negative impact of deteriorating neighborhoods on the quality of life in public housing could be greatly reduced and, perhaps, even eliminated if public housing agencies possessed greater power to select desirable sites for their projects. Some students of public housing believe that one answer to the problem of site selection is to make public housing agencies full-fledged taxpayers (Prescott,

1974). At present, their housing projects are exempt from local property taxes, the chief source of municipal revenue. Although public housing agencies pay their respective municipalities 10 percent of their net rental income in lieu of taxes, the revenue thereby created is no longer adequate to enable local governments to provide police and fire protection, garbage collection, street cleaning, and health, education, and welfare programs for the increasing number of poor people in public housing at a time when the cost of all these services has risen drastically. It is a well-known fact that many cities in the United States have approached the point of bankruptcy in recent years.

If public housing agencies became tax-paying entities, they would suddenly become more attractive to local governments and their citizens because they would be a financial asset rather than a financial liability. As a consequence, they would find it much easier to secure larger and more desirable sites for their projects, and city officials would be encouraged to provide a higher level of public services to their tenants. At present, public housing agencies are quasi-independent branches of local government. In fact, there can be no public housing program in a city unless local governing officials sign a cooperative agreement with the local public housing agency, and before each new project is begun, they must submit an executive review report to HUD which may comment on any aspect of the proposed project. Moreover, in several states, including California, voter approval is needed through a referendum before a proposed public housing site is approved. Such procedures, which have made site selection for public housing projects vulnerable to political expediency and the changing whims of public opinion, have typically resulted in the selection of marginal sites that are offensive to the fewest people--generally in the midst of deteriorating ghetto neighborhoods. The location of public housing projects in the United States would greatly improve if local housing agencies were granted the power to choose the best economically and socially feasible sites and if an appropriate court or regional planning commission would review the selected sites to guard against any abuses by the housing officials. This would result in more low-rise projects located in attractive neighborhoods with ready access to public transportation, good schools, shopping centers, and other important community facilities (Rent and Rent, 1978).

Quite understandably, architect Oscar Newman, who is famous for his concept, "defensible space," is more concerned with the relationship of building and site design factors to crime and other problems in public housing than with the impact of outer-environmental factors like the surrounding neighborhood. Newman contends that architects have made several notable mistakes in designing public housing projects. First of all, large high-rise buildings are conducive to crime because they house so many tenants that anonymity prevails. Tenants who do not know one another by name tend to be relatively unconcerned about what harm they themselves or others may inflict upon their neighbors. Moreover, such buildings are usually full of angled corridors and blind public areas where the majority of crimes are committed, and the staircases required by fire regulations provide criminals with alternate means of escape. One technique whereby Newman has proposed to create "defensible space" in public housing is by having no more than six apartments opening onto a common hallway inside the buildings. On the outside, he suggests that fences, play equipment, benches, attractive lighting fixtures, and name plates can be very effective in engendering a feeling of personal occupancy and a concomitant desire to

defend one's residence against both intruders and fellow tenants who threaten the quality of life there. Finally, Newman maintains that privacy is a luxury which middle- and upper-income apartment dwellers can enjoy without incurring grave risk of victimization, because they can afford to hire doormen and to install expensive security systems, but privacy is a liability in public housing. Therefore, instead of buildings at public housing projects typically opening onto inner courtyards, Newman believes they should open onto streets and public sidewalks where the flow of automobile and pedestrian traffic tends to deter potential criminals (Newman and Franck, 1980).

A final public housing problem which warrants more discussion here is the difficulty management often experiences in satisfying tenants' demands. In the past, when residence in public housing was regarded as only a brief interlude on the road of social mobility, this was not an issue, but it has become a major one since the 1970's when public housing began to become permanent living quarters for many families. Public housing tenants now want better crime control, more efficient maintenance, and a wider range of social services--needs to which they believe project managers as a whole are unresponsive. It is frequently charged that public housing management personnel are predominantly white and middle class, while the tenants are predominantly black and poor, so that the former do not understand or empathize with the latter's problems (Liston, 1974).

Public housing agencies have responded to this allegation by stating that predominantly white, middle-class management personnel exist mainly in smaller communities with relatively small minority populations and in a few very large cities where public housing managers' salaries are extraordinarily high. They also contend that, irrespective of their racial identification, management personnel tend to receive all the criticism for any real or perceived deficiencies at public housing sites because they are the most visible and accessible scapegoat for the tenants. In reality, however, many tenant problems stem from inconsistent HUD policies regulating public housing. For example, the demands of HUD's social service-oriented divisions have often conflicted with those of its fiscal management division, so that while HUD has continually requested local housing agencies to provide increased tenant services, it has frequently not permitted them to spend the money required to render these services (Meehan, 1979). Consequently, good communication between public housing managers and tenants is extremely important, so that tenants will understand and accept the conflicting pressures to which local housing agencies are subject and, hence, the limitations on their authority and ability to act. Better still, tenants might join with local housing agency officials to bring pressure on HUD to improve its public housing policies and regulations.

Another common problem faced today by public housing management personnel is the "weeding out" of cheaters and criminals from among public housing tenants. If some tenants reported their full incomes, including that portion which comes from illegal sources such as welfare fraud and rackets, they might have to pay higher rents or they may become ineligible for public housing altogether. Unfortunately, such tenants do prevent legitimately poor families from securing public housing. It is also true that some public housing tenants commit crimes against their neighbors who, in turn, demand that management evict these predatory residents (Scobie, 1975). Frequently, however, headline-grabbing campaigns to crack down on deviant public housing tenants does more harm than good. What is needed is more emphasis on the

positive. It is amazing, for example, how much has been written about the infamous Pruitt-Igoe and other notorious high crime projects and how little publicity has been given to the many smaller projects, consisting of highly attractive clusters of one- and two-story townhouses and garden apartments surrounded by lawns, trees, and playgrounds, which uninformed passersby would not even recognize as public housing. It is also regrettable that so much public indignation is aroused by the relative handful of cheaters and alleged "shiftless ne'er-do-wells" in public housing who live off the tax dollars of wage-earners, and that so little positive sentiment is elicited by the many more working poor, children, elderly and widowed persons who benefit so greatly from public housing.

In the balance, it seems that the positive aspects of the public housing program in the United States outweigh its negative features. There are problems with inconsistent regulations at the federal level, with site selection, with fraud and crime, with management-tenant relations, and with underfinancing, but the system has also responded fairly well over the past forty years to the demand for low-income housing and to changing tenant expectations in terms of the structure of public housing units and their amenities, besides incorporating new housing technologies and architectural styles. We can anticipate that, under the impetus of HUD's Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program, still more improvements will be made in our public housing program in the years ahead, some of which are suggested in the following section of this article.

#### Principal Solutions to Problems Affecting "Troubled" Public Housing Projects in the United States

After identifying the major problems affecting "troubled" public housing projects in the United States, HUD's field office staff assessed the expected impact of various remedial intervention strategies. The strategies which were rated as being most likely to have a positive impact were the upgrading of project physical conditions; improvements in management's project operation and in its relationships with tenants; and neighborhood revitalization programs. To better project physical conditions, the HUD field office staff not only recommended elevating the skills of project maintenance personnel, but the undertaking of major structural and design changes capable of enhancing the safety and livability of public housing projects (Struyk, 1980). Management strategies, which were directed primarily at the social problems of "troubled" public housing projects, stressed the importance of improving the income, attitudes, and emotional stability of project residents through job training (Stillman and Murphy, 1977), counseling, and crisis intervention programs, of establishing more effective methods of dealing with deviant tenants, and of providing better law enforcement services to combat crime and vandalism. Finally, comprehensive physical and social revitalization of deteriorated surrounding neighborhoods was judged essential to improving the quality of life within "troubled" public housing projects.

As Table 3 indicates (Jones, Kaminsky, and Roanhouse, 1979), seven of the ten interventions proposed by the HUD field office personnel as being among the five best actions for resolving the problems of "troubled" public housing projects related to projects' physical environment (proposals 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9), the most unique of

TABLE 3

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS FOR "TROUBLED"  
PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS

Proposed Intervention	Percent of "Troubled" Projects for which the Intervention was Ranked as One of the Five Best Actions
1. Institute vigorous tenant selection, screening and eviction policies and procedures.	23%
2. Provide adequate funding to eliminate deferred maintenance backlog and to allow for preventive maintenance in the future.	21%
3. Carry out substantial rehabilitation of structures.	20%
4. Adapt buildings and grounds to "defensible space" concept.	20%
5. Increase rental income.	18%
6. Provide adequate modernization funds.	18%
7. Provide incentives/disincentives to encourage tenant care of project property.	17%
8. Allow underutilization of units in order to reduce population density.	16%
9. Catch up on deferred maintenance and keep maintenance current.	16%
10. Undertake neighborhood revitalization effort to reverse physical and social blight of the surrounding area.	16%

which was the suggestion to allow for the underutilization of dwelling units in order to reduce population density. The field office personnel did not believe, however, that physical improvements alone hold the key to the revitalization of "troubled" public housing projects. What emerged from an analysis of their assessments and recommendations is that making such improvements is an essential first step, but that interventions to improve public housing agency and project management, tenant satisfaction and safety, and neighborhood conditions will also be required before "troubled" projects can be substantially improved. It is significant, for example, that, as Table 3 indicates, the institution of vigorous tenant selection, screening, and eviction policies and procedures was most frequently cited as being among the five best means of solving the problems of "troubled" public housing projects, being selected by the HUD field office staff for 23 percent of the "troubled" projects.

#### Summary

The first section of this article reviewed the history of public housing in the United States from its beginnings in the late thirties to the present and discussed the factors which have changed its inhabitants from predominantly white, upwardly-mobile, two-parent, working-class families to predominantly non-white, non-mobile, female-headed, lower-class families. The Housing Act of 1949 which inaugurated urban renewal and liberalized homeownership requirements, the Housing Act of 1969 which mandated that no public housing tenant would pay more than 25 percent of his/her income for rent, and the public housing construction moratorium of 1973 were cited as the major federal government actions which have had a negative impact upon public housing. But the growing obsolescence of public housing units, the deterioration of inner-city neighborhoods surrounding public housing projects, racial tensions, crime, and inflation have aggravated the problems of public housing in more recent years.

The remaining four sections of the article presented the findings of a field survey of public housing in the United States undertaken in 1978 by the Department of Housing and Urban Development under its Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program, the purpose of which was to determine the number of "troubled" public housing projects, to delineate their major characteristics, to identify the principal variables causing projects to be labeled "troubled" and to ascertain the major explanations for these problem variables, and to assess the impact of a variety of remedial intervention strategies. The four sources of qualitative and quantitative data about the representative sample of 719 public housing projects were: (1) HUD field office files; (2) the informed judgments of HUD's field office staff responsible for the daily monitoring of the public housing program; (3) interviews with a wide variety of housing experts; and (4) visits to selected "troubled" projects by research teams from HUD's Central Office, one of which included the author. A combination of the field office personnel's "overall project condition" ratings and their "problem severity" ratings, based on their perception of the degree of impact of 8 problem areas and 133 more specific problems on the 719 sample projects, resulted in the finding that about 7 percent or 700 of the nation's public housing projects, accommodating 15 percent of all public housing tenants, could be classified as "troubled." The study also revealed that 92 percent of the "troubled"

projects are designed for family occupancy and that female-headed families constitute 46 percent of the households in "troubled" projects. Seventy-five (75) percent of the "troubled" projects are located in urban areas, 57 percent in neighborhoods with a minority population exceeding 50 percent, 42 to 56 percent in neighborhoods with high crime rates and inadequate police protection, and 81 percent in neighborhoods with inferior social services. It was further revealed that older and larger family projects are more likely to be "troubled" than projects with any other combination of age, size, and design characteristics.

The principal variables responsible for projects' being considered "troubled" were: (1) building structure deficiencies and inadequate heating and/or plumbing systems associated with advanced project age; (2) a large number of high density buildings; (3) location in predominantly minority, multi-family residential neighborhoods with high crime rates, inadequate police protection, and minimal human service programs and social amenities; (4) lack of defensible space; and (5) management difficulties, including problems with dissatisfied and deviant tenants and with inefficient and costly maintenance. Although many of the hurriedly and cheaply constructed old, high-rise project buildings have been modernized, these constitute a relatively small percentage of our nation's antiquated public housing stock. The remainder not only perpetuate the negative popular image of public housing, but they are a financial burden on local public housing agencies because of inflated maintenance and repair costs today. Old, high-rise public housing projects are also plagued with crime, but in many instances this situation may be explained by the invasion of the projects by criminals from adjacent deteriorating neighborhoods. Moreover, when these projects attempt to prevent such invasions by hiring security personnel, they often alienate the local police, who subsequently reduce their crime prevention activities in and around the projects to a minimum. Consequently, the net impact on the projects' crime rates may be negative.

It has been suggested, however, that if local public housing agencies became tax-paying entities, they might find it much easier to gain local government- and citizen-support for their selection of larger and more attractive project sites in law-abiding neighborhoods and that city officials would be encouraged to provide their tenants with a higher level of public services. Rather than attributing crime at public housing projects primarily to outer-environmental factors like the surrounding neighborhood, architect Oscar Newman blames building and site designers' failure to provide for "defensible space," the lack of which may be evidenced in one of four ways: (1) the anonymity at large, high-rise projects either prevents tenants from reporting crimes they observe or induces them to prey upon their neighbors; (2) large, high-rise buildings tend to be full of angled corridors and blind public areas which shelter criminals; (3) too many apartments opening onto common interior hallways and lack of exterior territorial boundaries militate against a sense of personal occupancy and a desire to defend one's residence; and (4) buildings opening onto inner courtyards rather than onto streets and public sidewalks creates crime-inviting privacy.

Management problems became another major area of concern in public housing after the 1970's when an increasing number of families began to make public housing their permanent residence, to demand greater participation in project management, and to expect a wider range of social services in addition to better crime control and more efficient maintenance. The establishment of good communication networks



between management and tenants has become extremely important so that management personnel cannot be accused of being unconcerned about their tenants' problems and so that tenants will understand the multiple pressures to which local housing agencies are subject and, hence, the limits on management's ability to satisfy tenants' demands. A final management problem which has been frequently exaggerated by the media is that of "weeding out" cheaters and criminals from among public housing tenants. It is unfortunate that so little publicity is given to the many more non-deviant working poor, children, elderly and widowed persons who benefit greatly from taxpayers' support of public housing.

In view of the preceding analysis of "troubled" public housing sites' major problem areas, HUD field office personnel concluded that the following remedial intervention strategies would most likely have a positive impact upon these projects: (1) major structural and design changes to enhance the safety and livability of the projects; (2) upgrading the skills of project maintenance personnel; (3) the provision of better law enforcement services; (4) the institution of vigorous tenant screening, selection, and eviction policies and procedures; (5) the establishment of job training, counseling, and crisis intervention programs aimed at improving the income, attitudes, and emotional stability of project residents; and (6) the comprehensive physical and social revitalization of deteriorated surrounding neighborhoods. Thus, while there was consensus among the HUD field office personnel that making physical improvements is a prerequisite to alleviating the problems of "troubled" public housing projects, strategies to improve public housing agency and project management, tenant satisfaction and safety, and neighborhood conditions were considered essential to completing the task.

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