Stuyvesant Town
*Evaluating the Beneficiaries and Victims of an Act of Urban Renewal for the Middle Class*

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of Requirements for Graduation with Distinction in the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies With a Major in Art History

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Signed Elizabeth Speed

Signed Dr. Annabel Wharton

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Abstract

My thesis offers a critical analysis of Stuyvesant Town, a housing development built in New York City in 1947. At this time, Stuyvesant Town was the largest redevelopment housing project ever built in the United States and remains the largest housing development in New York City. Stuyvesant Town is comprised of 8,755 apartments that are distributed throughout 35 13-story red brick cruciform buildings. The development is bound by 20th Street to the north, 14th street to the south, Avenue C to the east, and 1st Avenue to the west. Although Robert Moses planned Stuyvesant Town for white middle-income residents, primarily veterans and their families, affordability protections have gradually been dismantled and Stuyvesant Town now offers over half of its units at market-rate rents to the relatively wealthy. While scholars often regard Stuyvesant Town as a harmful failure by criticizing its design and how it was developed, I investigate their views by examining the complex’s evolution over the 70 years since its conception. My thesis employs Moses’ writings and speeches, contemporaneous articles, scholarly literature, author interviews, and close on-site observation to analyze Stuyvesant Town’s goals, design, development, and impact on New York City. I conclude that while Stuyvesant Town’s layout and amenities separate it from New York City and make the development spatially disorienting, this separation is to the detriment of the city in which it resides, rather than to Stuyvesant Town’s residents. My research indicates that the development’s desirable location and its security and amenities, made possible by its residents’ socioeconomic status, have prevented its insular qualities from being harmful to its residents in the way that some other tower in the park style developments have been to their own and even make residents appreciate Stuyvesant Town’s containment. I also conclude that Stuyvesant Town is problematic for New York City as a whole because its affordability has devolved, while its lack of racial diversity has remained fairly consistent. It is no longer a middle-class bastion, contradicting its intended purpose, but it has maintained its predominantly white racial makeup. Government intervention is needed if Stuyvesant Town is ever to regain its capacity to fulfill Moses’ promise of middle-class affordability within New York City.
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Sincerely,
Elizabeth Speed
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiography</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Moses’ Urban Visions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuilding, Not Rehabilitating</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Stuyvesant Town’s Design</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Inspiration</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exterior and Layout</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Stuyvesant Town’s Impact on New Yorkers</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. After Stuyvesant Town</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Urban Development Post-Moses</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tower in the Park Exception</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City Middle-Income Housing Today</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

My thesis offers a critical analysis of Stuyvesant Town, a New York City housing development that was built from 1945-1947 for white middle-class residents, mostly veterans and their families.\(^1\) At its creation, Stuyvesant Town was the largest redevelopment housing project ever built in the United States and it remains the largest housing development in New York City.\(^2\) While scholars often regard Stuyvesant Town as a harmful failure by criticizing its design and how it was developed, I investigate this assessment by examining the complex’s evolution over the 70 years since it opened.\(^3\) I evaluate Stuyvesant Town’s goals, design, development, and impact on New York City by analyzing Robert Moses’ writings and speeches, contemporaneous articles, scholarly literature, author interviews, and close on-site observation.

The coordinator of Stuyvesant Town’s development, Robert Moses, held a variety of public offices in New York throughout his career. His first New York City appointment occurred in 1934 when he became the first Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks. Moses’ reign lasted until 1968 when he was ousted as chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority upon its merge with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).\(^4\) At his height, Moses simultaneously held 12 public offices.\(^5\) At the time of Stuyvesant Town’s construction he held six.\(^6\)

Moses’ ability to use these posts to accomplish large-scale projects like Stuyvesant Town earned him the title of the master builder or, more negatively, the Power Broker. In the words of Robert Caro, the author of Moses’ biography, *The Power Broker*,

\[\text{[Moses] displayed a genius for using the wealth of his public authorities to unite behind his aims banks, labor unions, contractors, bond underwriters, insurance firms, the great retail stores, real estate manipulators—all the forces which enjoy immense behind-the-scenes political influence in New York.}\]
Moses’ often-criticized practices were ethically questionable, but were also effective. He created hundreds of highways, bridges, parks, housing developments, civic centers, and exhibitions halls.\textsuperscript{8} His potency is demonstrated by these works, which make New York City’s footprint what it is today.

In the United States, mass-housing construction began in the 1930s when President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated state housing interventions through the New Deal, a series of federal programs, public work projects, and policies enacted in response to the Great Depression. The first state-sponsored housing project was built in New York City. Many mass-produced tower projects followed, including ones like Stuyvesant Town, which were built by private companies that were given government exemptions.\textsuperscript{9}

Following the end of World War II, New York City experienced a shortage of affordable housing for veterans and their families.\textsuperscript{10} Robert Moses, acting as Mayor Fiorello La Guardia’s housing coordinator, hoped to take advantage of New Deal funding to address this need. In order to do so, Moses worked with New York City Corporation Counsel Paul Windels, State Insurance Superintendent Louis Pink, and State Housing Commissioner Edward Weinfeld on the Redevelopment Companies Law (RCL) of 1942.\textsuperscript{11} The RCL allowed the City to exercise eminent domain in order to assemble parcels of land on behalf of private developers. In return, developers were required to find adequate housing for residents displaced from soon-to-be redeveloped areas, build parks and streets within the land, and place rent limits on the housing for the duration of the developer’s tax exemption.\textsuperscript{12}

The RCL enabled the public-private partnership between the City of New York and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) that created Stuyvesant Town. Moses chose the Gas House District, located between 14\textsuperscript{th} Street and 27\textsuperscript{th} Street in Manhattan, as Stuyvesant Town.
Town’s site. At the time, the Gas House District housed over 3,000 families, 500 stores and small factories, three churches, three schools, and two theaters. The deal therefore included the displacement of thousands of residents, along with a 25-year tax exemption and the ceding of public streets.

Stuyvesant Town’s 8,755 apartments are distributed through 35 13-story buildings that are surrounded by tree-lined paths, gardens, and outdoor amenities, qualities that make it a tower in the park style development. Some of Stuyvesant Town’s residents have lived in their apartments long enough that original rent-stabilization policies have kept their rents dramatically below market rate, however others pay market-rate rents that are up to five times as expensive.

While there is considerable scholarly research on the creation of Stuyvesant Town, the existing literature largely focuses on criticism of Stuyvesant Town’s design and its development in terms of the racial policies, power structures, and development practices that made it possible. There is also some contemporary investigation into the dynamic between longtime and newer renters. However, Stuyvesant Town’s impact on New York City has not been examined through simultaneous analysis of its design and declining affordability. The tension between criticism of Stuyvesant Town’s design and current residents’ admiration of the complex has also been ignored.

At present, New York City affordable housing is scarce and real estate prices are ever rising. Thus, the analysis of Stuyvesant Town, a development that once symbolized a promise that middle-class families could live comfortably in the city, is both necessary and urgent. This thesis also brings light to large-scale urban redevelopment’s limited ability to integrate into a preexisting city. Although Stuyvesant Town was built 70 years ago, it continues to impact New
Yorkers, both directly and indirectly. By examining its history, design, and affordability, my thesis offers an assessment of the development’s contribution to New York City today.

I conclude that while Stuyvesant Town’s design and amenities separate it from New York City and make the development spatially disorienting, this detachment harms the city in which it resides, rather than Stuyvesant Town’s residents. The development’s desirable location and its security and amenities, made possible by its residents’ socioeconomic status, have prevented Stuyvesant Town’s insular qualities from harming its residents in the way that some other tower in the park style developments have harmed their own and even make residents appreciate Stuyvesant Town’s containment. I also conclude that Stuyvesant Town is problematic for New York City as a whole because its affordability has devolved, while its lack of racial diversity has remained fairly consistent. It is no longer a middle-class bastion, contradicting its intended purpose, but it has maintained its predominantly white racial makeup. Government intervention is needed if Stuyvesant Town is ever to regain its capacity to fulfill Moses’ promise of middle-class affordability within New York City.


3 B. Testa (2003), 14.


5 A. Palleta (2016).


7 R. Caro (1975), 18.

8 Ibid., 9-11.


Methods

I visited Stuyvesant Town in November 2017 to collect information about and take photos of the development. As part of my visit, I posed as a potential resident to tour the complex with a leasing agent. This tour provided me with information about the process of obtaining a market-rate apartment in Stuyvesant Town and how the development sells itself to market-rate renters. Additionally, I interviewed five residents: one who has lived in Stuyvesant Town for two years and pays market-rate rent, one who lived in Stuyvesant Town from 2011-2014 and paid market-rate rent, and three who have lived in Stuyvesant Town for approximately 50 years and pay below-market-rate stabilized rents. I also utilized information and resident quotes that are available on the Stuyvesant Town corporate website. I gathered data on the more recent economic changes of Stuyvesant Town from contemporary articles in newspapers and websites such as The New York Times, The Real Deal, The Guardian, and the City of New York website.

In order to gauge Robert Moses’ perspective and motivations, I analyzed his speeches and writings, which illuminated Moses’ sensibilities, both in terms of why he created Stuyvesant Town and why he developed it in the manner that he did. Articles written at the time of Stuyvesant Town’s building in the mid-1940s provided insight into the criticisms and assessments of the development during conception. Articles from sources such as The New York Times, Architectural Forum, Journal of the American Institute of Architects, and People’s Voice specified both numerical figures and the public’s reaction, mostly negative, to the development during its planning and building. To reference reaction from the architectural community, I also examined alternative Stuyvesant Town site plans created by Marcel Breuer and Serge Chermayeff, in addition to a condemning map drawn by Simon Breines. I also consulted laws that made the development of Stuyvesant Town possible, such as the 1938 New York State
Insurance Code and the Redevelopment Companies Law (RCL) of 1942. Additionally, I gained understanding of scholarly assessment of Robert Moses, Stuyvesant Town, and housing more broadly through the texts mentioned in the following historiography.

I employed two theoretical frameworks in the fourth chapter of my thesis, which explores the urban development practices, design preferences, and middle-class housing options that have followed Stuyvesant Town. One theoretical lens that I drew upon is Jane Jacobs’ argument in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The city elements that Jacobs advocates for have become tenets of contemporary urbanism and therefore provided the context through which to analyze these evolutions. The other framework that I utilized is Oscar Newman’s theory of Defensible Space, which was born from research that showed that high-rise housing projects have more crime than lower-rise ones. Despite being a high-rise urban development, Stuyvesant does not have a crime problem and I used Newman’s acknowledgement of middle-class complexes to argue why this is the case.
1 M. Breuer (1944); S. Chermayeff (1943); S. Breines (1943).

2 J. Jacobs (1961).

Historiography

As mentioned, I drew upon a number of scholarly texts that both directly and indirectly pertain to Stuyvesant Town. The first was *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, Robert Caro’s iconic biography of Robert Moses. This book follows Moses’ evolution from student, to park commissioner, to highway builder, to housing czar, and ultimately to man who lost both his power and reputation. Caro not only outlines Moses’ accumulation of influence, but also the relationships and decisions that made his impact possible. Ultimately, as the book’s title suggests, Caro argues that Moses contributed to the downfall of New York City.¹ I utilized the extensive biographical information that Caro provides in order to focus on just one of Moses’ products: Stuyvesant Town. My thesis therefore offers an assessment of how Moses’ impact has evolved over the 50 years since *The Power Broker* was published.

Florian Urban’s book, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing*, provided context of the mass-housing developments that were built throughout the world following World War II. Urban argues that while in many parts of the United States the modular products of this development movement have come to symbolize confinement and exclusion of the poor and even the failure of modernism, many other countries have continued to appreciate towers as a housing form.² Pertinent to my thesis is the exception that Urban offers to this United States pattern: New York City. He argues that high-rise towers have not been stigmatized in New York City in the same way that they have been in other parts of the country because this housing typology was not restricted to the poorest of the poor, land prices were high enough that only the wealthiest could afford single-family homes, New York City received more public funding than most other American cities, and Manhattan’s island geography inhibited convenient suburbanization.³ These ideas were crucial to understanding why Stuyvesant Town has been able
to transition from a middle-class to a luxury development, an evolution that my thesis focuses on. Because all classes of New Yorkers live in high-rise buildings and the island geography makes Manhattan’s land particularly limited, Stuyvesant Town’s convenient location is capable of making it desirable.

Richard Plunz, an American architect, critic, and historian, offers an analysis of Stuyvesant Town in his book, *A History of Housing in New York City*. His book grounds Stuyvesant Town in the overall history of New York City housing, providing context for its predecessors and successors. Plunz argues that Stuyvesant Town was a failure, describing it as an omen. My thesis builds on the background and context that Plunz presents by comparing them to Stuyvesant Town’s current state.

In his book, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City*, Joel Schwartz argues that the projects that Moses accomplished were made possible by the civic leaders who sustained his power. This notion opposes the traditional portrait of Moses as an all-powerful builder. In Schwartz’s chapter on Stuyvesant Town, he suggests that the development represents a turning point for American cities in that it established a precedent for New York City redevelopment. My thesis expands on this work by analyzing how Stuyvesant Town has evolved from the model it created and the extent to which this model has succeeded.

Architectural historian Hillary Ballon and New York City historian Kenneth T. Jackson’s anthology, *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, provides further analysis of Stuyvesant Town, both criticizing the project and offering some defense of Moses, arguing that he deserves more than the reputation of a bulldozer. Hillary Ballon’s essay, “Robert Moses and Urban Renewal,” situates Stuyvesant Town in the context of Title I urban
renewal programs.\textsuperscript{6} Martha Biondi’s essay, “Robert Moses, Race, and the Limits of an Activist State,” criticizes Stuyvesant Town for its policy of racial exclusion, which allowed the development to be whites-only.\textsuperscript{7} Additionally, Hillary Ballon and Robert T. Jackson’s “Housing and Urban Renewal” similarly denounces Stuyvesant Town’s racial policies in addition to the government exemptions that essentially allowed MetLife to gain Stuyvesant Town’s land for free.\textsuperscript{8} While these essays focus on a critique of policies and practices that allowed for the creation of Stuyvesant Town, my thesis revisits the effects of these policies and practices on the complex and the greater New York City population today.

Rachael A. Woldoff, Lisa M. Morrison, and Michael R. Glass’ book, \textit{Priced Out: Stuyvesant Town and the Loss of Middle-Class Neighborhoods}, outlines Stuyvesant Town’s transition from a middle-class to a luxury development and highlights the tension between longtime rent-stabilized residents and newer market-rate residents. Their book offers extensive resident interviews and concludes that Stuyvesant Town has lost its stability and sense of community due to these tensions and transient new tenants. The authors suggest that government officials must intervene in order to maintain affordable housing that will allow middle-income families to remain in the increasingly expensive city.\textsuperscript{9} My thesis agrees with this notion and weighs Stuyvesant Town’s affordability loss against its architecture and layout.
1 R. Caro (1974).


3 Ibid., 32.

4 R. Plunz (1992), 255.


I. Moses’ Urban Visions

This chapter situates Stuyvesant Town within the context of Robert Moses’ larger goals and contributions to New York City. Although he was not an elected official, Moses’ range of roles gave him influence over the direction of the city. Fiorello La Guardia, who served as New York City’s mayor from 1934-1945, gave Moses his first New York City appointment. Charles Garrett wrote in his book, *The La Guardia Years*, “For giving Moses scope and backing, La Guardia deserves a good deal of praise…[Moses] had a genius for getting important things done. It is unlikely that another man, even with a plethora of federal funds and a pool of WPA labor at his command, could have achieved for the city all that Moses achieved.”¹

Moses was able to create large-scale projects according to his visions, making his agenda important to acknowledge. Because Stuyvesant Town is one such project, this chapter explores Moses’ role in demolishing and rebuilding areas that he qualified as slums, building parks and recreational amenities, increasing vehicular accessibility, and creating housing for the middle class. Stuyvesant Town fits within this four-part agenda.

Rebuilding, Not Rehabilitating

Robert Moses’ approach to city improvement was complete slum clearance, rather than rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings. According to the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, a slum was defined as: “any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation are detrimental to safety, health, or morals.”² Moses razed these areas in order to carry out monolithic redevelopment, which entailed demolishing preexisting parts of the city to develop from the ground up and often merging several blocks into one, enlarging the dimensions of the
preexisting city grid. The Gas House District, the region destroyed to build Stuyvesant Town, was one of the thousands of areas in New York City identified as a slum. Seeing them as cancer on the city, Moses believed that slums needed to be eliminated in order to allow new life to flourish.\(^3\) Their poor state and proximity to one another made demolition the most efficient way to do so. He communicated this method in 1943 saying, “We believe that the older, run-down sections of the city will be rebuilt.”\(^4\)

Moses defended his belief in the effectiveness of mass-redevelopment in his address to the Texas Society of Architects in 1956. He quoted Clarence Stein, an American urban planner, architect, and writer, on the topic. Moses stated:

> This is what Clarence said about the approaching abandonment of our cities when he accepted on May 17\(^{th}\) the 1956 Gold Medal of The American Institute of Architects: “In the contemporary city the green openness will go far beyond the built-in-parks, flowing through and connecting the super-blocks. Not only will every building open on views of fine old trees or distant hills, but broad green belts will be close by for agriculture or forests, for great sport fields or hiking, boating, fishing, swimming, skating, or just for solitude in the peaceful valleys or the wilds. This is the kind of beautiful and healthful city that can be built in various parts of the United States if we start from the ground up. When they are seen and lived in I am sure that those who remain in the archaic cities will insist that redevelopment must also start from the ground up; that it must clear away all signs of the nineteenth-century pattern. Thus we can build truly green modern cities on the sites of the old stone deserts…Such communities cannot be secured by the ordinary piecemeal process of city planning. A beautiful and livable urban environment cannot be boxed into cubbyholes bounded by fixed and dominating streets and lot lines. It must be created as an entity, embracing the site, the mass of buildings and their relation to each other and to the natural setting.”\(^5\)

Moses’ decision to quote Stein conveys his support of ground-up urban development. The only way he could gain this blank slate in Manhattan, which was built in the “nineteenth-century pattern” that Stein mentioned, was by destroying preexisting structures and neighborhoods. Solely with this type of mass-development could Moses avoid the limitations of “fixed and dominating streets and lot lines” that Stein warned against.
While Stein’s description of the contemporary city sounds utopic, the reality of the destruction and displacement that Moses employed in order to replicate it was quite the opposite. In a 1958 speech on slum clearance, Moses described the process of redeveloping Lincoln Square, the area of Manhattan that now houses the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (Fig. 1.1). He noted, “50 odd acres of congested land in the center of Manhattan like the Lincoln Square area…[required] put[ting] out the tenants, and raz[ing] the buildings.” The destruction of buildings brought with it the destruction of the homes and the displacement of lives. His description can be applied to Stuyvesant Town, as over 3,000 Gas House District families were removed in its creation alone.⁷

Fig. 1.1. *Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, built atop the demolished neighborhood of San Juan Hill*, courtesy of *New York Daily News*, 1963.
The displacement that Moses’s redevelopment caused through demolishing homes and neighborhoods was particularly troublesome because his redevelopment plans were not informed by citizen consultation. Despite never being elected to any of his posts, Moses saw himself as uniquely positioned to interpret what the public needed and doubted that the general public could arrive at the assessments that he could. He conveyed this sentiment in 1958 when, in a speech on slum clearance, he commented: “few comprehend the differences between the various types of low, middle, and high income housing and their relationship.” He continued by lamenting that he did not know “whether the average citizen will ever grasp how aggravating, and complex our task [of urban redevelopment] has been.” When Moses did seek advice, he preferred professional expertise to the views of local residents. In fact, Moses only involved the public once designs were complete, publishing materials to ensure that the public could not say that they were not consulted. In doing so, he was making citizens aware of coming changes rather than collecting their input to inform his plans for their neighborhood. Moses saw New York City’s residents as uncomprehending people whose lives he knew how to improve, rather than as partners or constituents whose needs he could understand through efforts to interact with them.

Moses eventually reached the limits of his ability to accomplish demolition. Despite his success in carrying out urban redevelopment for previous projects such as Stuyvesant Town, in the June 1959 edition of Journal of the American Institute of Architects Moses conceded that “complete urban renewal [was] not in the cards” for future projects. Almost 30 years into his career, Moses acknowledged that projects of a certain scale or that promised a certain extent of destruction would no longer be approved by the City. While his imagination was an asset to his large-scale planning, it hindered him when selective renewal, renewal of buildings rather than full blocks, became a favored approach over redevelopment by the end of the 1950s. Moses did
not understand how small changes could result in the large effects that he envisioned.15 He commented in 1959, “it’s easy to be the monarch of all you survey if you are on a remote, uninhabited island.”16 Unfortunately for Moses’ ambitions, people did inhabit New York City and they ultimately limited the extent to which he could change its urban fabric. The 1940s conditions that had rendered him as omnipotent as a monarch no longer existed by 1960.

Open Space

Monolithic redevelopment allowed Moses to increase the amount of open space present in New York City. As Commissioner of Parks, this was an inevitable element of his job, but he also prioritized decongestion through work carried out in a variety of his posts. For example, though Moses’ involvement in Stuyvesant Town was administered from his position as housing coordinator, its development contributed green space to the city. Open paths, trees, and outdoor recreation amenities surround the complex’s buildings.

Moses increased open areas by taking advantage of funding available through the New Deal, the previously mentioned federal program enacted in response to the Great Depression. Moses used this funding to orchestrate the largest urban park and playground construction in the United States. Under his leadership, New York received one-seventh of all expenditures made by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935 and 1936. During these two years alone Moses spent $113 million on parks and recreation projects.17

Beyond creating open space, Moses encouraged its use by building recreation facilities within park areas that were available to the public for swimming, handball, tennis, basketball, and other forms of outdoor activities.18 These amenities were positioned throughout New York City and were designed to encourage recreation amongst adults, teenagers, and children. They
included 17 swimming pools, 111 bathhouses, 73 wading pools, 255 new playgrounds, two reconstructed zoos, three beaches, and a new beach pavilion. In *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*, author Phoebe Cutler asserted that the pleasure park “could not fill all the recreation needs of the leisure-rich twentieth century.” Moses filled this void with activity facilities in the open spaces that he constructed. Similar to these public parks, Stuyvesant Town’s grounds have outdoor activity amenities including basketball courts, outdoor gym apparatuses, and an ice skating rink.

Hoping for decongestion, Moses tried to site pools, one of his recreation amenities, in crowded neighborhoods. He commented, “the problem [of crowding] therefore resolves itself into one of providing open-air swimming pools, properly located in the most congested sections (Fig. 1.2).” True to his word, Moses built most of his pools in working-class neighborhoods or in pre-existing parks. In the latter case, Moses extended the parks, compensating for any space that was turned into a swimming facility, to ensure that there was no loss of open playground as a result of his renovations.
Just as Stuyvesant Town was created primarily for World War II veterans and their families, Moses’ creation of open spaces also addressed post-war needs. Moses especially emphasized that his recreation facilities were built for all generations, rather than only for children, because he anticipated veterans’ improved fitness levels would lead to an increased interest in physical activity. Further, these spaces provided working-class people with amenities that had previously only been available to the wealthy. As such, Moses supported the social dividend, or publicly owned assets, promised by the New Deal.

Not only were these facilities available to working classes, but their creation also employed them. Moses believed that another critical aspect of building public works was its ability to address post-war unemployment. He wrote:

The city of New York has a realistic program of public work for post-war construction. Money has been provided in our capital budget for design. Executives, engineers, architects, and draftsmen are actually making contract drawings and specifications…By the middle of 1944, projects having a total
estimated construction cost of over $700,000,000 will be completely designed and ready for advertising.\textsuperscript{26}

Tens of thousands of construction workers and hundreds of architects, landscape architects, and engineers were employed by the Department of Parks for Moses’ recreation projects.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Traffic}

While Moses did increase the parkland available to city residents, New York experienced a simultaneous rise in popularity of alternative residential locations that traditionally offered more open space: the suburbs. The growth of suburbia was enabled by an increase in personal automobile ownership and a resulting emphasis on driving in the United States. Moses therefore increased New York City’s automobile-friendliness, believing this expansion was necessary in order to maintain the city’s relevance. To name only a few of his roadway projects, Moses created the Triborough, Whitestone, and Verrazano bridges, the Henry Hudson Parkway, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and the Cross-Bronx Expressway (Fig. 1.3).\textsuperscript{28} Moses admitted that he planned with the car in mind when he wrote, “Defense made city planning what it was for many centuries and the motor car largely makes it what it is today. We are not wholly free agents in any case.”\textsuperscript{29}
This auto-centric mentality was not his alone. In the first decades of Moses’ career, namely the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the vast majority of the public shared his opinion that the car was integral for the future, whereas rail-based transit systems were associated with the overcrowded and chaotic cities of the past. Moses wrote:

The manufacture of automobiles is pretty nearly our biggest industry. Its ramifications are endless. Cars are no good without roads, and roads are largely paid for and maintained out of charges and tolls paid by the users. What has brought about car pools, express bus services, and long-haul trucking is door-to-door, uninterrupted, comfortable travel at reasonable cost, and no one will charm this type of commuter, rider and purveyor of goods back to the railroads.

Moses saw the automobile as the transportation method of the future. Making New York City car-friendly seemed to secure the city’s status as a place of work and residence in the decades to come.

Moses’ focus on making the city support car traffic, made evident by the many highways, bridges, and tunnels that he brought to fruition, conveyed his transportation objective: improving
New York City’s accessibility and convenience only for people of a certain class, rather than the efficiency of New York City as a whole. Moses began building roads in 1924 in order to serve his Jones Beach State Park project, which was not accessible before his parkway was completed. In not including mass-transit in his plans, Moses prioritized the improvement of travel for those who could afford a vehicle and excluded poorer New Yorkers. Defending his neglect of public transportation, he wrote:

> Completely integrated metropolitan transportation is a dream. I do not assert for a moment that all forms of metropolitan transportation should not be considered together. I do say that any attempt to merge and consolidate them under one management and one financial plan is, in areas like New York, quite impractical.

It is ironic that Moses pointed to efficiency of process as justification for ignoring public transit improvement, as the presence of cars that he enabled slows the city today. Positioning Stuyvesant Town adjacent to the FDR Drive and making parking available throughout it made car ownership and use convenient for its residents.

The limitations of a car-reliant city became clear later in Moses’ career. In the 1960s, his proposals for highways that would cross midtown and lower Manhattan, along with one of a highway going through Washington Square Park, were opposed and ultimately failed. By that time, urbanists also began to reject Moses’ conception of an automobile-centric city. In late 1964, Lewis Mumford, a historian and the author of the 1961 book, *The City in History*, assessed regretfully that “the fatal mistake we have been making is to sacrifice every other form of transportation to the private motorcar.” While he was not specifically referring to Moses, Mumford’s comment is an apt assessment of Moses’ transportation philosophy. He strengthened New York City’s automobile accessibility without bolstering its public transportation infrastructure.
Housing

Moses took steps to accommodate for the auto age to which suburbia contributed, but he also aimed to combat the middle class’ exodus to the suburbs. Moses warned that if New York City did not take action for the middle class, it would become polarized, housing only the rich and the poor. One of Moses’ first middle-class residential redevelopment projects was Stuyvesant Town.

As previously mentioned, when developing housing in New York City, Moses razed areas classified as slums. Once these areas were razed, he had the ability to commission housing developments that combined square blocks, as he was no longer limited by the city’s grid. Complexes, such as Stuyvesant Town, that Moses sited on this land were comprised of many apartment buildings, most of which were in identical cruciform plans, connected by paths, and surrounded by parks and playgrounds. Tracy Augur, planner of the Tennessee Valley Authority, praised these large-scale projects in 1944 saying, “The greatest danger to successful urban redevelopment is that it will be attempted in a timid, piecemeal fashion and will fail for that one reason. Little islands of redevelopment in a big sea of blight have little chance of survival.” Moses’ housing work did not run this particular risk.

While the Redevelopment Companies Law (RCL), which enabled public-private partnerships to allow redevelopment, enabled Stuyvesant to be built, many of Moses’ subsequent housing projects were made possible by Title I of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949. This legislation provided federal subsidies for the clearance of slums in order to stimulate reconstruction by private developers. Moses took advantage of these subsidies during his 12-year leadership of the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance. Over this time period, New York City received $65.8
million, more than twice as much as Chicago, which was the second biggest recipient. Moses saw private developers, such as Stuyvesant Town’s MetLife, as necessary partners to accomplish his middle-class housing goals. On the topic of including them in this process, Moses commented, “the size of New York’s problem can be measured by the 9,000 acres of recognized slums which cannot be eradicated by ordinary private, speculative building...[But] obviously, private capital must be brought into the picture.” Through this process, Moses created 17 Title I middle-class residential projects during the 1950s.

The clearance that Moses administered under Title I afforded no protection to dislocated tenants. He focused on building housing for the middle class, but these developments were built on areas once occupied by the city’s poor. This dynamic was especially problematic because while Moses’ motivation for slum redevelopment was to improve the city’s housing options and living conditions, he did not build enough developments to rehouse dispossessed residents. Moses did not publicly acknowledge that these Title I evictees were often not able to find haven in public housing. In turn, demolishing their homes resulted in relocating, not eliminating, the affected slums, as their residents looked elsewhere for housing that they could afford. Even though the creation of Stuyvesant Town displaced 11,000 residents, when reflecting on this development process in 1970 he wrote, “Practically all of those moved benefited.” Moses also did not focus on the disproportionate harm that relocation caused to black New Yorkers, who often experienced re-segregation as a result of redevelopment, which created housing that excluded them.

When orchestrating housing creation, Moses did not see innovative architectural form as an instrument of policy. Although he worked with many distinguished planners and architects including Gilmore Clarke and I.M. Pei, he left the choice of architect and design to private
developers. For example, MetLife’s board of design created the plan for Stuyvesant Town. Additionally, Title I projects generally did not set high standards of design. The work that these projects undertook, namely urban renewal, yielded almost automatically to cost-efficient approaches that disregarded the city grid to create superblocks. The developers who were in charge of choosing designs were likely focused on their profit margins and thus apparently had no incentive to invest in revolutionary plans or aesthetics. As Title I was federally administered, the effects of its spending caps were particularly harsh in New York City because land was expensive. This set of circumstances led to the design negligence that allowed housing developments like Stuyvesant Town to be at their best repetitive and at their worst harmful to the vitality and cohesion of their cities.

This picture of Moses’ priorities helps explain why Stuyvesant Town was created in the manner and for the purposes that it was. Stuyvesant Town was created for middle-class residents, but in order for it to be built, the Gas House District was destroyed. The ensuing blank swath of land in turn allowed Stuyvesant Town’s buildings to be surrounded by trees, open grass areas, recreation amenities, and parking options. These elements align Stuyvesant Town with Robert Moses’ urban visions and approaches.
1 C. Garrett (1961), 180.


3 Ibid., 96-102.

4 R. Moses (1943), “Parks, Parkways, Express Arteries, and Related Plans for New York City After the War”.


6 R. Moses (1958), “Robert Moses on Slum Clearance”.

7 D. Schulz (2015).


9 R. Moses (1958), “Robert Moses on Slum Clearance”.

10 Ibid.,


12 Ibid., 99-100.


14 Ibid.


17 “Press Release Announcing the Opening of Hamilton Fish Pool” (1936).


19 Ibid.


21 “Mayor Opens Pool in Brooklyn Park” (1936).

22 R. Moses (1934), “Public Swimming Facilities in New York City”.

23 Ibid.


35 L. Mumford (1964), 179.


37 A. Garvin (1980), 75.


40 T. B. Augur (1944), 8-13.


42 The Committee on Slum Clearance Plans (1949), 1.


II. Stuyvesant Town’s Design

This chapter offers critical analysis of Stuyvesant Town’s design. It begins by examining precedent and inspiration for the development’s architecture and layout and then moves to assessing both its exterior and interior design.

Design Inspiration

Roots of Stuyvesant Town’s design can be found in European architecture. French architect Auguste Perret first introduced the idea of a city in the park, towers surrounded by parkland, in the early 1920’s (Fig. 2.1).¹ Architect Le Corbusier, a pupil of Perret, subsequently published principles for the tower in the park. These were presented in images of the tower city, or villes-tours (Fig. 2.2).² In 1927, Le Corbusier published the Ville contemporaine, a plan for a utopian community, which further elaborated on his ideas of skyscrapers placed at wide intervals amongst park space. These buildings housed both office and residential space.³ Le Corbusier’s proposed cities were planned for the automobile, which was deemed to be the transportation method of the future. The cities were lined with multilevel arterial highways composed of a below-ground level for heavy traffic, a ground floor level for ordinary traffic, and an elevated level that would run north and south and east and west for fast one-way traffic (Fig. 2.3).⁴ Le Corbusier’s schemes, set to provide all city residents with access to sun, space, and green, were only unrealized utopic visions in the 1920s.
Fig. 2.1. *Image of a city of maisons-tours*, by Jacques Lambert from the sketches of Perret, 1922.

Fig. 2.2. *Villes-tours*, by Le Corbusier, 1921.
German architect Marcel Breuer later developed Le Corbusier’s ideas into buildable form. Breuer first conceived the slab block, high-rise rectangular elevator buildings dispersed in a green setting, as a form for low-cost housing in 1924 (Fig. 2.4). Another German architect, Walter Gropius, then expanded on Breuer’s work and created a site analysis that documented the efficiencies of high-rise blocks over other housing forms. With a series of site sections, Gropius showed the blocks’ ability to increase open space, light exposure, and ventilation (Fig. 2.5).
Fig. 2.4. Proposal for low-cost housing using the slab block form, by Marcel Breuer, 1924.
These European designs inspired American architects and manifested themselves in New York City housing. For example, Le Corbusier designed the Unité d’Habitation, an apartment building completed in Marseilles, France in 1951, in a slab block surrounded by greenery form. The appearance of the Unité’s plans in the American architectural press in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s is a testament to American designers’ exposure to these theories and forms. Additionally, Le Corbusier’s 1924 book Urbanisme, or The City of To-morrow and Its Planning,
which outlines his urban planning recommendations, including urban parks, auto roads, and central skyscrapers surrounded by parks, was translated into English in 1929. Then, in 1935, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City held the first exhibition of Le Corbusier’s work in the United States. This exhibit consisted of photographs, plans, models, and furniture. The presence of Le Corbusier’s work in the United States and New York City further communicates that Moses and his contemporaries were most likely exposed to Le Corbusier’s theories. It therefore follows that Stuyvesant Town’s design, as will be discussed, echoes some of these European forms.

Richard Plunz, an architect and historian, remarked on New York City’s adoption of European towers in *A History of Housing in New York City*:

> From the point of view of the architects, theorist-practicioners such as Sert or corporate practicioners such as Gordon Bunshaft, the “tower in the park” was legitimized as a progressive vision by its association with European theory, especially with Le Corbusier, who was emerging as the most powerful single international architectural “hero” of the postwar period. From the point of view of Robert Moses, New York’s most powerful bureaucrat, the “tower in the park” was ideal as a forceful emblem of reform, which could sustain universal application in a myriad of neighborhoods, and at a low cost that tended to maximize profits to the development community…Robert Moses was the catalyst and buffer between theory and practice. He gave the “tower in the park” final economic and political credibility, and also its incredible design mediocrity.

Plunz’s assessment communicates why both public officials and architects supported the tower surrounded by greenery plan that Stuyvesant Town displays. Furthermore, as one of Moses’ roles was the Commissioner of Parks, it was also in keeping with the role that he created housing situated in an open garden environment, similar to the park spaces he added to other areas of New York City.

Not only were there aesthetic precedents from Europe for the design of Stuyvesant Town, but there were also economic incentives present in designing buildings in this manner. Towards
the end of the depression, decent New York City middle-class housing created by private enterprise could not compete economically with that which was available in the suburbs. Therefore, in 1938, the New York State Legislature created economic incentives designed to encourage investment in New York City middle-income housing. These incentives came in the form of an amendment to the New York State Insurance Code. The amendment allowed life insurance companies, such as Stuyvesant Town’s developer MetLife, to make direct investment in moderate-rental housing projects. However, the rent restrictions that were imposed on this allowance meant that MetLife and other insurance companies faced stringent economic parameters when pursuing these projects. As the companies prioritized profit, they emphasized economy of construction, rather than design quality.

In 1934, the Housing Study Guild, a private civic group that researched housing and community planning, published a study that argued for the economic advantage of the high-rise cross-plan tower over low-rise patterns. Beginning with Breuer’s initial proposals, the slab block was argued to be the cheapest design possible. Furthermore, the 1919 law permitting automatic elevators also decreased the cost of elevator operation. This reduction enabled more middle-class housing to have elevators and therefore more stories. Towers’ technological improvements and economic benefits led this form to being the most cost-efficient way to house people at moderate rents. Therefore, Stuyvesant Town and other developments that faced limited rent revenues were erected in this manner.

Although it reflected architectural sensibilities of the time, Stuyvesant Town’s design was nonetheless already challenged by architects at the time of its conception. For example, Hungarian-born architect Marcel Breuer developed an alternative scheme for the Stuyvesant Town site, which replaced concentric planning with an axial organization (Fig. 2.6). This
building alignment actually evokes the organization of Le Corbusier’s utopic designs (Fig. 2.7). Russian-born British architect Serge Chermayeff also demonstrated an efficient system that enabled a variety of large, family-size one- and two-level apartments to fit within a conventional high-rise block grid (Fig. 2.8). He timed his publishing of this study, which was sponsored by *Architectural Forum* and exhibited at the Architectural League, with the announcements of the design for Stuyvesant Town.\footnote{14}

Fig. 2.6. *Alternative site plan for Stuyvesant Town*, by Marcel Breuer, 1944.
Fig. 2.7. Rendering of Le Corbusier’s utopias, Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City), by Le Corbusier, 1933.
Exterior and Layout

Stuyvesant Town’s red brick 13-story buildings are connected by winding, tree-lined landscaped pathways, which lead to the central Stuyvesant Oval and separate residents from city traffic and public sidewalks. The buildings have cruciform layouts, composed of one to five crosses each. The buildings on the perimeter of the development are parallel to their surrounding...
streets: 20th Street to the north, 14th Street to the south, Avenue C to the east, and 1st Avenue to the west. A few core cross building layouts were combined to create each of the 35 buildings, allowing those within this outside layer to conform to the central Stuyvesant Oval, rather than the city grid (Fig. 2.9). All buildings, even those that are along the perimeter, have entrances facing this central point, rather than the surrounding public streets (Fig. 2.10, Fig. 2.11).

Fig. 2.9. Stuyvesant town map, courtesy of LGSEM.
This inward-facing layout, coupled with the buildings’ identical red brick and uniform architecture, makes walking through Stuyvesant Town disorienting. While the city around it conforms to a grid, the diagonals and winding pathways of the development make understanding
direction within the complex’s confines almost impossible (Fig. 2.12). Even a resident who has lived in Stuyvesant Town since 1971 commented, “I’m still getting lost when I walk through Stuyvesant Town.”

Fig. 2.12. Stuyvesant Town paths, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.

Stuyvesant Town’s eastern border is adjacent to the FDR Drive, a parkway that runs along the East River. The development has street parking throughout it, along with six parking garages for residents (Fig. 2.13). The closest subway station is the 1st Avenue L train stop, which is on 14th Street and 1st Avenue. While ideally placed for the residents who live on the south west corner of Stuyvesant Town, the station is a half mile away from those who live closer to 20th Street or Avenue C, forcing these residents to walk this distance to access the subway and the rest of New York City. Along with size, apartments are priced according to their proximity to convenient 14th Street and 1st Avenue.
While Stuyvesant Town is centrally located, it is not integrated into the city’s urban fabric. Most noticeably, its repetitive red brick buildings, which conform to the central fountain, rather than the city grid, separate Stuyvesant Town as an entity from the streets and neighborhoods that surround it (Fig. 2.14). The complex’s detachment from the encompassing city was achieved with Moses’ favored bulldozer method of urban renewal that involved razing swaths of the city (Fig. 2.15). This approach is the antithesis of self-preservation redevelopment, which instead entails selective renovation and the maintaining of functions and block layouts, rather than the creation of separate superblocks. When Stuyvesant Town was developed, its residential towers replaced 600 buildings of the Gas House District that had followed the city’s grid layout. The private residential complex therefore stands in contrast to the neighborhood that it replaced, which seamlessly integrated into the city and included spaces with functions
beyond housing like education, worship, and entertainment.\textsuperscript{20} Instead, Stuyvesant Town exists as a city within a city.

Fig. 2.14. \textit{Stuyvesant and neighboring Peter Cooper Village to its north}, courtesy of The Real Deal.

Fig. 2.15. \textit{Aerial view looking south east in 1943, after the razing of old buildings}, courtesy of Stuyvesant Town, 1943.
Stuyvesant Town is further separated from the surrounding city due to its limited entry points. The combination of low brick walls and commercial and parking structures on its perimeter limits the pedestrian and vehicular access to eight points, two on each side of the complex (Fig. 2.16, Fig. 2.17). Additionally, Stuyvesant Town is designed so that residents are required to enter the development as a whole in order to access any of its buildings. There is no building access on the public sidewalk (Fig. 2.10, Fig. 2.11).

Fig. 2.16. *Brick wall on perimeter of Stuyvesant Town*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.
Within the confines of the complex, Stuyvesant Town’s grounds house a basketball court, roller hockey court, ice rink, community center, café, paddle tennis courts, bocce ball courts, parking, playgrounds, library, concierge services, green market, fitness center, daycare center, and car rentals (Fig. 2.18, Fig. 2.19, Fig. 2.20). Stuyvesant Town even offers its own Christmas tree market during the holiday season (Fig. 2.21). A former resident mentioned, “people who live in StuyTown tend to be really passionate about the fact that they live in StuyTown. They only go to their farmer’s market, they only use their parks, [and] they try to get all of their friends to live there as well.” The amenities that Stuyvesant Town offers also separate its buildings’ residents from the rest of the city. They allow residents to opt to stay close to their apartments and to interact with others of similar experiences, bringing them inwards, instead of out to the city existing beyond their boundaries.
Fig. 2.18. *Outdoor gym*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.

Fig. 2.19. *Playground*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.
Fig. 2.20. *Five Stuy Café*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.

Fig. 2.21. *Christmas tree market*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.
Interior

Entering a Stuyvesant Town apartment building on the bottom Terrace level, one finds mailboxes, a laundry room, a storage room, and a dimly lit hallway leading to two elevators. The elevators carry residents up to the apartments, which are considered family-size, as they are spacious for New York City apartments. On average, one bedroom apartments are 750 square feet, two bedroom apartments are 950 square feet, three bedroom apartments are 1,000 square feet, four bedroom apartments are 1,150 square feet, and five bedroom apartments are 1,700 square feet. However, regardless of apartment size, each unit has only one bathroom.

Stuyvesant Town management renovates apartments as they become vacant. Therefore, current on-view apartments are no longer in their original states. These renovated apartments that I, posing as a prospective renter, was able to visit when touring Stuyvesant Town appeared to be freshly painted and polished. One enters an apartment into a dining and living space that has a galley kitchen occupying its left or right side. Beyond the living spaces are the bathroom and bedrooms (Fig. 2.22). Although the apartments do not have open floor plans that are popular in apartments designed today, the ones that I saw did have contemporary finishes and new appliances (Fig. 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26). Most windows look out onto trees and playgrounds, successfully maintaining a tower in the park feel.
Fig. 2.22. *Three bedroom apartment floor plan*, courtesy of Stuyvesant Town.

Fig. 2.23. *Renovated bathroom*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.
Fig. 2.24. *Renovated living room*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.

Fig. 2.25. *Renovated kitchen*, by Elizabeth Speed, 2017.
However, the apartments that have not been renovated do not exude the luxury that I witnessed. A below-market-rate rent-stabilized resident who has lived in Stuyvesant Town since 1971 explained that her apartment had its original stove and refrigerator from the 1940s until about two years ago. When her stove did finally break, she received one that “seemed to be about thirty years old.” The resident’s apartment also still has its original bathtub and shower, which have some mold. While she did not seem to mind because of her economical rent, clearly the conditions of the rent-stabilized apartments differ drastically from those that are rented at market rates. The resident’s nonchalant attitude about this difference presumably follows from the fact that a correlation between rent level and apartment condition is customary in the United States real estate market. Additionally, the state of one’s apartment is private, hidden behind doors.
These factors combine to convey that the discrepancy in apartment renovations does not divide Stuyvesant residents or make them resentful of one another.

The described apartment layout is consistent throughout the complex. Reflecting on her time growing up in Stuyvesant Town, a resident remarked, “when you visited a friend’s house the floor plan was reassuringly familiar. The bathroom was in the same place, your friend’s bathroom was the same size as yours.”27 A couple that moved to New York City from the United Kingdom chose to move into Stuyvesant Town because they were facing time constraints. Due to the complex’s standardization, they knew what their apartment would look like without even touring it. “Stuyvesant Town was a known entity” they explained to The New York Times in 2016.28 The uniformity of Stuyvesant Town’s layouts helps to standardize resident experience and to ease understanding of apartment designs for non-residents.

Early 20th century European city and housing proposals served as design precedent for Stuyvesant Town. The product of this inspiration is a development that stands separate from the surrounding city, due to its inward-facing design, limited entry points, and non-conformity to the urban grid. The amenities that Stuyvesant Town offers enhance the architecture’s insularity because they limit residents’ need to leave its borders. While apartment layouts are consistent, their finishes and appliances range in condition. However, this difference does not cause a fissure in the community because the state of an apartment correlates to the rent that its household pays, an accepted convention.
2. Le Corbusier (1923), 457-470.
4. Le Corbusier (1929), 168.
5. W. Gropius (1935), 72-73.
7. Le Corbusier (1929).
13. Ibid., 259.
14. Ibid.
20. B. Testa (2013), 156.
26. Ibid.
27. C. Demas (2000).
III. Stuyvesant Town’s Impact on New Yorkers

This chapter explores the effects that Stuyvesant Town has on the city it lies in and those that reside in its units. It begins by examining the opposition and admiration that Stuyvesant Town has faced and then analyzes its contemporary affordability.

Opposition

The demolition of the Gas House District, the neighborhood that preceded Stuyvesant Town, received opposition when first proposed in 1942.¹ Most obviously, Gas House District residents who were displaced protested the plan. At the time, 11,000 people lived in the area. Along with displacement, they were worried about privatization of the district and the intended development’s lack of accessibility. Some local residents formed the Stuyvesant Tenants League in order to advocate for and to support the soon-to-be evicted tenants.² However, the opposition was relatively timid, pushing mostly for guaranteed relocation, rather than fighting eviction.³ The Stuyvesant Tenants League’s secretary stated, “Throughout all of our negotiations [for relocation housing], it has been our concern not to embarrass the city administration in any way.”⁴ Although then-Mayor Fiorello La Guardia had reservations about the project, he provided his approval. It was then sent to the Board of Estimates, which passed the plan in a few weeks.⁵

However, opposition to Stuyvesant Town did not end with the approval of its plans. In 1943, architect Simon Breines created a map of Stuyvesant Town, which highlighted the features of the proposal that he found most dubious (Fig. 3.1).⁶ These included the development’s density, lack of schools, racial exclusivity, pedestrian inaccessibility, shortage of direct sunlight, and exclusivity to the city around it. Most of Breines’ worries are still valid concerns today.
Given the weakness of the Gas House District resident pushback, the racial segregation of Stuyvesant Town was the focal point of the majority of the opposition that the project received. In 1938, a civil rights amendment to the state constitution was proposed that would authorize the state to combat discrimination in private housing, reading:

No person shall be denied the equal protection of the laws of this state or any subdivision thereof. No personal shall, because of race, color, creed or religion, be subjected to any discrimination by any other person or by any firm, corporation, or institution, or by the state or any agency or subdivision of the state.

Moses undermined this legislation by persuading the delegate-sponsors to insert the phrase “in his civil rights” after “discrimination.” Moses explained that this change made “the whole thing meaningless” due to the very narrow definition of civil rights. Therefore, from its conception, Stuyvesant Town was able to exclude black residents. Frederick Ecker, the president of MetLife, asserted, “negroes and whites don’t mix…if we brought them into the development it would be to the detriment of the city, too, because it would depress all the surrounding property.”
Moses defended his position regarding racial exclusion in *The New York Times* in August 1943 when he asserted that integrated developments were economically risky because they would deter private investment, which was crucial to urban redevelopment. Moses also contended:

> the infiltration of colored people into many areas previously white, especially in Brooklyn and the Bronx, has caused a drop in values, deterioration of buildings, retirement of responsible owners and mortgage holders, [and] substitution of undesirable landlords.\(^{10}\)

Although this racist sentiment was not his alone, Moses’ decision to support racial exclusion meant that Stuyvesant Town perpetuated discrimination, rather than set a pioneering standard for integration with its public-private status. The racial exclusion was particularly problematic because MetLife received Stuyvesant Town’s 16.9 acres of land, which were previously public, free of charge.\(^{11}\) This meant that the city essentially designated a parcel of its land exclusively for whites.

In 1944, MetLife attempted to dodge accusations of racism by developing another housing project for black New Yorkers, Riverton Houses in Harlem. African American novelist James Baldwin, a Harlem resident, commented the community’s reaction to the project.

> Harlem got its first private project, Riverton…because at the time negroes were not allowed to live in Stuyvesant Town. Harlem watched Riverton go up, therefore, in the most violent bitterness of spirit, and hated it long before the builders arrived. They began hating it at about the time people began moving out of their condemned houses to make room for this additional proof of how thoroughly the white world despised them.\(^{12}\)

Black New Yorkers felt excluded by Stuyvesant Town and were not receptive to MetLife’s apparent attempt to remedy its actions.

These racial policies received pushback when implemented. For example, *People’s Voice*, a Harlem weekly newspaper, warned, “with its money and power Metropolitan [Life

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### Speed

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### Stuyvesant Town

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Company was] crystalizing patterns of segregation and condemning thousands of Negroes to a secondary citizenship status for generations to come” through its implementation of Stuyvesant Town’s exclusivity.\textsuperscript{13} The magazine was not wrong. Even though a law was subsequently passed in 1951 barring discrimination in publicly aided housing projects, the city did little to enforce the ruling for the next 20 years.\textsuperscript{14} In 1960, almost 10 years after the legislation was created, there were still only 47 black Stuyvesant Town residents out of a total population of 22,405, or 0.2%. This exclusion was especially detrimental since, at its creation, Stuyvesant Town was the largest redevelopment housing project ever built in the United States.\textsuperscript{15} Blocking blacks’ access to these middle-class units therefore handicapped this population in their efforts to find affordable housing on the New York City housing market.

Opposition to Stuyvesant Town on the grounds of its racial demographics is still valid. Although Stuyvesant Town no longer has racially exclusive policies, its population’s diversity is limited. As a longtime resident commented in 2006, “My perception is that excluding celebrities and black immigrants or foreigners, the number of ‘average, everyday African-Americans’ has been relatively static over the last 30 years. Our sparse numbers, spread out over this huge complex, makes it difficult to be accurate.”\textsuperscript{16} He went on to explain that he did not attribute the racial representation to past discrimination practices, but rather to the low turnover of rent-stabilized units. When a current Stuyvesant Town leasing agent was asked about the complex’s 2017 demographics, he responded that providing such information was illegal.\textsuperscript{17} Although Stuyvesant Town no longer excludes on the premise of race, its racial demographics have outlasted policy.
Admiration

Despite Stuyvesant Town’s lack of racial diversity and controversial development practices, current residents enjoy their quality of life. One element that contributes to this satisfaction is the development’s central location, which is particularly treasured by residents who have rent-stabilized apartments and who may not be able to live in the neighborhood otherwise. A resident who has lived in Stuyvesant Town since the 1970s commented: “The Lower East Side has gone from being a drug den to really hip. There is very expensive housing right near us now.” While the neighborhood’s rents have skyrocketed, thus pushing out middle-class residents like her, she has been able to remain.

Residents also feel that people in the community take care of one another. One resident mentioned that when her parents were sick, her neighbors volunteered to look after her children. Another resident attested to the cordial nature of those who live in Stuyvesant Town. She said, “Everyone is polite, everyone holds the door for you. After hurricane Sandy, especially, everyone was checking on one another and holding together.” In addition to acknowledging neighbors as friendly, residents find the management helpful and quick to respond to requests and concerns.

When asked why some non-residents may have negative perceptions of Stuyvesant Town, a resident postulated that they may only think about the development’s history and ugly and intimidating exterior, rather than the convenience of living there and how much is taken care of if you do. A longtime resident mentioned that over the years the perception of Stuyvesant Town has become more positive. She said, “In the 60s, 70s, and 80s people would say, ‘we started out there, but then we moved.’ Now people really like it.” A communal sense of Stuyvesant Town pride also enhances the residential experience.
While residents acknowledge that Stuyvesant Town is separate from the city around it, they view this insularity positively. A resident commented, “When I’m running around the rest of the city, I can’t wait to get back.” She notices a difference in the development and the rest of New York City, but enjoys this respite. She added that Stuyvesant Town is “very peaceful, very quiet, no hustle bustle. But [that she does not] feel disconnected to the rest of the city.”

Another resident commented, “the Oval is the key…It’s a place that I can hang out around the fountain and read until 11:00 or later on a hot summer night or crisp early autumn evening. Seriously, how many places in NYC can you do that?” Stuyvesant Town’s insular tranquility, which makes it a “green oasis in the middle of the metropolis,” is a draw for many residents, but relies on an inherent detachment from the encompassing Lower East Side. Residents acknowledge a sensory difference when within Stuyvesant Town, but do not feel that they are separated in an inconvenient way. Instead, they view Stuyvesant Town as an oasis within the urban environment.

The separation of Stuyvesant Town not only provides its residents with relief, but also with a sense of safety when on its grounds. A resident commented, “I feel like I’m living in a suburb within Manhattan. StuyTown is the greatest neighborhood in the greatest city.” This comment about suburbia paints Stuyvesant Town as a refuge, separate from the rest of the city. While suburbs may be considered safer than urban environments, they also are their own entity, insulated from the metropolis that they neighbor. These attitudes express a way in which Moses has succeeded. The tower in the park design is lauded by its residents for the privacy that it provides.

The safety felt can also be seen in family rules. Parents let their children play without supervision on Stuyvesant Town’s grounds, which would likely not be the case if Stuyvesant
Town were more integrated into the city grid or if non-residents felt more comfortable passing through. As discussed in the previous chapter, Stuyvesant Town’s layout makes understanding the streets and directions beyond Stuyvesant Town’s buildings difficult. While disorientation traditionally has negative connotations, in this case it obstructs thoughts of the city beyond, likely enhancing perceptions of privacy and safety.

To this end, a resident commented that people feel safe because most people who are on the grounds live in Stuyvesant Town. She said, “To walk a dog on the property you need to have a Stuyvesant Town resident dog collar.” The resident attributed actively exclusionary measures like this to why non-Stuyvesant Town residents are discouraged from enjoying the grounds. While Stuyvesant Town’s exteriors would be very difficult to change, Stuyvesant Town’s policies amplify its architecture’s exclusionary effects. Encouragement of enjoying the grounds or even walking dogs on the paths could allow Stuyvesant Town to positively influence the city at large. Instead, Stuyvesant Town’s insular qualities, which contribute to senses of safety and community for its residents, only negatively contribute to how the rest of New York City experiences it. Therefore, resident experiences stand in contrast to Stuyvesant Town’s impact on the city. Residents recognize the features that make it harmful to New York City at large, but alternatively view them as assets.

Affordability

While Robert Moses’ effort to limit Stuyvesant Town’s population to whites has largely sustained itself, Moses’ work to create residential opportunities for the middle class has not. Although Stuyvesant Town was designed for a middle-class population, many of Stuyvesant Town’s rent protections were dismantled between 2002 and 2015. In August 1947, a small

Speed  59  Stuyvesant Town
metal plaque dedicated to MetLife’s President Frederick Ecker was installed on the west side of the Stuyvesant Oval. It read, “brought into being this project, and others like it, that families of moderate means might live in health, comfort and dignity in parklike communities, and that a pattern might be set of private enterprise productively devoted to public service.” MetLife removed the plaque in 2002, foreshadowing the affordability decline to come. Then, in 2006, MetLife announced that it would sell Stuyvesant Town. Prospective buyers subsequently bid on the development based on projected residential turnover. These vacancies would allow them to administer sufficiently costly renovations to push empty apartments’ rents above $2,700. Once over this threshold, the apartments would be removed from New York’s rent stabilization program and the future owner would be free to charge market rates.

Tishman Speyer, a real estate investment firm, offered the winning bid of $5.4 billion for Stuyvesant Town. In order to be profitable, the firm needed to convert hundreds of rent-stabilized apartments into the market each year, the feasibility of which relied on turnover that Stuyvesant Town did not traditionally have. Tishman Speyer therefore issued more than 1,000 eviction notices based on research that indicated residents who may have been abusing lease terms. By 2009 it deregulated more than 4,000 units. In 2001, fewer than 100 of Stuyvesant Town’s 8,755 apartments were rented at market rates, but by 2015, over half of them were. Tishman Speyer undermined Stuyvesant Town’s ability to promise middle-class affordability within New York City.

To accompany its market-rate apartments, Stuyvesant Town currently seems to be trying to attract well-off residents by marketing itself as a luxury development. On the Stuyvesant Town corporate website, the community is explained as an “80-acre private park located near the East Village, Gramercy Park, and Murray Hill,” which offers spacious, beautifully renovated,
pet-friendly apartments. Market-rate one bedrooms rent for $3,500 per month on average and two bedrooms rent for $4,500 per month on average. Utilities are included in both of these figures.

Stuyvesant Town’s decline in middle-class affordability can be seen in the development daily. One interesting portrait of this switch is the type of families that can now afford to live in Stuyvesant Town. A longtime resident commented, “one change over the years is that I used to see mothers at the Oval with children, while now it is mostly nannies.” This change is likely in part a testament to the fact that Stuyvesant Town’s rents now require a family to have two incomes in order to afford them. The transition of apartments to market-rate is also apparent in residents’ professions. Another resident commented that Stuyvesant Town used to be occupied by “the middle class who runs the City of New York like nurses, teachers, and fire fighters. [But] no one in government jobs can afford the rents now.”

Further unaffordability of Stuyvesant Town lies in the fact that using many of its amenities including the gym, ice rink, library, storage space, and play space, requires paying extra fees. Not surprisingly, most of the rent-stabilized tenants who I spoke to do not use them. One mentioned, “the gym is ridiculous. I think it’s $100 per month and if you want to go one time it’s $25 per visit.” While Stuyvesant Town can advertise itself as luxurious, many services that it touts are only available to residents who can afford them.

However, some hope for middle-class affordability may come with Stuyvesant Town’s newest owners, Blackstone and Ivanhoé Cambridge. These companies bought the complex and another adjacent housing development, Peter Cooper Village, in 2015. The owners promised that a total of 5,000 apartments, spread between Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper’s combined total of 11,241, will be rented to middle- and low-income tenants for 20 years. 90% of the affordable
units must be rented to middle-income households earning no more than $128,210 for a family of three and 10% must be rented to moderate-income families earning no more than $62,150 for a family of three. New York City’s Mayor De Blasio called this stipulation the largest affordable housing preservation agreement in the city’s history.41

The agreement applies to Blackstone, Ivanhoé Cambridge, and any future owner. As longtime-occupied apartments are vacated and renovated and the total number of affordable units falls below 5,000, apartments will be placed into the affordable pool instead of being rented at market-rate. About one of every three units that become vacant is put into a pool for the yearly affordable lottery. The City predicted that all but 1,500 units would have been converted to luxury units within the allotted 20 years without this intervention.42

The adherence to this affordability contract, however, will still be accompanied with Stuyvesant Town consisting of two communities: one benefitting from affordability or paused in time, holding on to aging lease agreements, and another that can afford expensive market-rate apartments.43 That being said, a resident who lives in a rent-stabilized apartment that she moved into in 1967 assessed that she cannot functionally tell the difference between the residents who pay market-rate and those who do not.44 As such, the most worrying part of hailing this deal as an affordable housing preservation technique is its 20-year timeline, which makes it unsustainable, rather than its potential to divide the community. In 2035, Stuyvesant Town will possess 5,000 renovated units in a desirable location that have no requirement to offer its current or future residents relief from what will likely be the highest market-rate rents ever seen.

Furthermore, Blackstone and Ivanhoé Cambridge seem to have a generous definition of affordability. According to the 2018 Stuyvesant Town Affordable Lottery information sheet, eligibility for a one bedroom apartment requires annual household earnings of $86,670 -
$141,735 and for a two bedroom requires $106,290 - $170,115. These brackets are still above New York City’s 2017 Average Median Income (AMI) of $66,800 for a single person, $85,900 for a family of three, and $103,100 for a family of five. Therefore, Stuyvesant Town apartments are not affordable for median earners, let alone families below this mark who likely have an even larger need for affordable units. A resident who pays market-rate rent commented,  

If you win the [Stuyvesant Town Affordable] Lottery you will have the apartment forever, but if you only make the minimum salary requirement, then you definitely can’t afford it. Even if you can, in New York, “affordable” is still unattainable for most people. The rents might be affordable to the people who qualify, but these people are making a good amount of money.

As she alluded to, the monthly affordable rents of $2,889 for a one bedroom and $3,543 for a two bedroom still ask for over 30% of a monthly paycheck brought in by those on the lower ends of the income ranges. These rents are therefore unaffordable according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s definition of affordable housing.

Given the exemptions and city land involved in Stuyvesant Town’s creation, the loss of middle-class affordability is unacceptable. Why are only one third of the apartments that are renovated offered to moderate-income households? Furthermore, why is the income needed for eligibility for these units above the median New York City income? While Stuyvesant Town’s evolution is similar to that of most real estate subject to the United States’ market-driven economy, the differences in this case are Stuyvesant Town’s momentous scale and the contradiction that market-rate rents have to its founding purpose. Although Stuyvesant Town does offer some units that are more affordable than most market-rate developments in similar areas of Manhattan, Stuyvesant Town has economically strayed from Moses’ middle-class housing ambition. An expansion of the timeline of and number of apartments included in
Stuyvesant Town’s affordability stipulation, likely only possible with government intervention, is necessary if New York City is to support a diverse population.

Upon creation, Stuyvesant Town received opposition because it displaced the Gas House District’s low-income residents and was racially exclusive. It also received architectural criticism. However, current residents enjoy living in Stuyvesant Town because of its central location, close community, and the privacy, safety, and respite that they feel from its separation from the city. Stuyvesant Town’s spatial disorientation likely only serves to make them feel further protected and separate. They acknowledge the features that make Stuyvesant Town unable to positively contribute to New York City at large, but only as beneficial to their own experience. Stuyvesant Town’s devolution of affordability is also harmful to the city. Although the leasing of apartments at the highest rents that residents are willing to pay for them is traditional in the United States real estate market, this shift contradicts Stuyvesant Town’s purpose, which was to ensure New York City’s affordability for the middle class. Government intervention is needed to rectify Stuyvesant Town’s detrimental evolution.


4 F. Seabrook to V. Marcantonio (1945).

5 C. Garrett (1961), 253-254.

6 R. Plunz (1992), 258.


8 R. Moses (1943), “What’s the matter with New York?”.

9 R. Moses to Frederick H. Ecker (1943).

10 R. Moses (1943), “What’s the matter with New York?”.

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12 J. Baldwin (1960), 73.

13 People’s Voice (1947).


15 Ibid.


17 P. Grant (2017).


21 A. Speed (2018).

22 Ibid.


25 Ibid.


27 C. Demas (2000).

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IV. After Stuyvesant Town

This chapter examines New York City after Stuyvesant Town’s opening and elements of Stuyvesant Town that make it unique for a development of its design. It focuses on the direction that urban development took following Stuyvesant Town’s creation, the ways in which Stuyvesant Town differs from other tower in the park developments, and today’s alternative middle-class housing options.

Direction of Urban Development Post-Moses

As expressed, Stuyvesant Town’s design makes it insular, disorienting, and exclusive. Not coincidentally, the tower in the park building style fell out of favor. Over the 10 years following the development’s 1947 opening, the aesthetic tastes and power structures that created Stuyvesant Town waned. Jane Jacobs’ opposition to Robert Moses exemplifies this shift. Jacobs was a journalist and activist who resided in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. Her criticism of Moses sprung from her concern with his urban renewal approach, the bulldozer method that cleared an entire neighborhood to build Stuyvesant Town. She was driven to public opposition of his approach when Moses released plans of demolishing her neighborhood in 1955.¹

Jacobs presented her argument against urban renewal in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. She wrote,

To approach a city, or even a city neighborhood as if it were a larger architectural problem, capable of being given order by converting it into a disciplined work of art, is to make the mistake of attempting to substitute art for life. The results of such profound confusion between art and life are neither life nor art. They are taxidermy. In its place, taxidermy can be a useful and decent craft. However, it goes too far when the specimens put on display are exhibitions of dead, stuffed cities.²
Jacobs rejected a top-down approach to city redevelopment. She described its products as dead. In order to understand the shift in urban values that she pioneered, I will place Stuyvesant Town into her taxidermy metaphor. Through this lens, Stuyvesant Town’s inability to integrate with the surrounding city or to participate in its evolution classified its section of the city as a cut-off limb. This limb died when its organs, or the Gas House District, were removed and replaced with the stuffed, or lifeless, repetitive buildings of Stuyvesant Town.

In her book, Jacobs also argues that city blocks should have multiple uses, pedestrian access, various age buildings, and density. These elements have become tenets of contemporary urbanism and largely antithesize the design of Stuyvesant Town. Jacobs also presents the benefits of short blocks, which were often erased by projects like Stuyvesant Town that disregarded the traditional city grid and forced pedestrians to travel long avenue perimeters (Fig. 4.1). She explains that short blocks ensure that pedestrians have frequent opportunities to turn corners and explore new paths, as opposed to being being limited to an isolated route. She wrote that on the opposite end of the spectrum:

Super-block projects [like Stuyvesant Town] are apt to have all the disabilities of long blocks…even when they are laced with promenades and malls, and thus, in theory, possess streets at reasonable intervals through which people can make their way. These streets are meaningless because there is seldom any active reason for a god cross-section of people to use them.

Stuyvesant Town has two entrances on each of its sides, despite spanning six blocks north to south and four avenues east to west. The development therefore creates long blocks. Furthermore, Jacobs’ argument explains that even its access points do not function as paths for new routes because there is no reason for non-residents to venture into its part of the city, as it is just occupied by Stuyvesant Town. The limitations of super-block projects that she described contributed to their fall from favor.
In February 1961, 300 Greenwich Village inhabitants, including Jacobs, met in opposition to Moses’ proposed demolition of their neighborhood. An article in The New York Times reported on the meeting and provided background on Moses’ proposal, explaining that Title I of the General Housing Act of 1949 provides for Federal aid to cities that are eliminating or preventing slums. It permits aid for demolition and rebuilding and loans for upgrading of individual houses. However, under Robert Moses, former head of the slum work here, Title I aid was sought exclusively for demolition and Title I hence came to be identified with the bulldozer. In 1959, the city began to seek aid for mixed demolition and rehabilitation projects. Moses used Title I in such a way that it became synonymous with destruction. However, as the article mentioned, toward the end of Moses’ career the city administration began to pursue alternative approaches to revitalizing New York City. The stark contrast between the city characteristics that Jacobs promoted and Stuyvesant Town’s convey the city’s movement away from multi-block redevelopment and tower in the park housing projects.

Despite the rising popularity of Jacobs’ beliefs, Moses continued to support the design of Stuyvesant Town. In 1968, close to the end of his career, Moses said that in order to accommodate large numbers of people more comfortably, the answer is vertical construction on less land. Instead of a building four or five stories high,
covering 80 or 85 percent of the land, you go up four or five times as high on 20 percent coverage. This will leave plenty of open space, playgrounds for the kids, and better views.\textsuperscript{6}

He still believed that towers spread amongst greenery were ideal vehicles to house New Yorkers. However, in 1960, facing criticism and accusations of corruption, Moses had resigned from the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance.\textsuperscript{7} Therefore, by the time of this statement Moses no longer had the influence that once allowed him to create Stuyvesant Town.

Moses’ favored tower in the park housing design fell out of taste relatively quickly when considering the relatively long lifespan of buildings, another testament to a shift in urban development practices. In 1967, only 20 years after Stuyvesant Town was completed, New York City’s then-Mayor John Lindsay created a Task Force on Urban Design, which reported that “the largest single design sin of New York’s subsidized and urban renewal housing is that, although immense…it does not produce neighborhoods…the buildings begin bland in design, but end brutal in effect.”\textsuperscript{8} This conclusion supports the notion that Stuyvesant Town is neither part of the neighborhood in which it is geographically located, nor is it a neighborhood of its own.

Alternatives to the multi-block building demolition that created Stuyvesant Town included rehabilitation of older buildings and infilling buildings into open lots.\textsuperscript{9} These new practices were not compatible with tower in the park architecture.

Although Stuyvesant Town was created for a middle-class population, much of its contemporaneously and similarly-designed government-sponsored housing was low-income public housing that is run by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Today, NYCHA houses over 600,000 low-income New Yorkers in over 300 developments, many of which were built in the same tower in the park style during Moses’ tenure (Fig. 4.2, Fig. 4.3).\textsuperscript{10} While Stuyvesant Town is not a NYCHA development, due to its similar architecture, NYCHA’s shift
in development practices also exemplifies Stuyvesant Town’s and similar developments’ design’s fall from favor.

Fig. 4.2. NYCHA’s Polo Grounds Houses in Harlem, courtesy of Amsterdam News, 2016.

Fig. 4.3. NYCHA’s Holmes Towers on the Upper East Side, courtesy of Rew-Online, 2015.
One alternative approach that NYCHA has pursued to create new affordable housing is leasing its complexes’ open space to developers. As most NYCHA developments cover less than 15% of their sites, there are many parks, courtyards, parking lots, and playgrounds that the Authority is willing to lease. While this tactic was primarily designed to raise revenue to address NYCHA’s billions of dollars of capital needs, it simultaneously adds density to the developments and chips away at housing development elements that were crucial to Moses’ approach.

A Tower in the Park Exception

While NYCHA only adds to its housing stock, many other housing authorities across the country that govern large-scale high-rise public housing projects have demolished their towers and replaced them with low-rise buildings (Fig. 4.4). Some of the best-known cases occurred in Chicago, Illinois, St. Louis, Missouri, and Newark, New Jersey. This approach was pursued because these buildings’ designs were blamed for the crime, poverty, and racial segregation that occurred within them. Attributing these social problems to the buildings’ architecture, their cities deemed the housing towers as being beyond salvation. Instead of helping the ails of cities like Le Corbusier and his fellow utopists had hoped, these tower developments failed to provide their residents with safe homes. Their demolition communicates the idea that high-rise towers negatively affect their residents.
Architect and city planner Oscar Newman argued that the tower in the park’s open space is a no-man’s land, which limits natural surveillance and residents’ attachment to their home. He formed this conclusion from research carried out in New York that showed that there were higher crime rates in high-rise apartment buildings than in lower-rise housing projects. His theory of Defensible Space, the notion that the physical layout of a community affects its residents’ control and safety, was born from this observation.¹⁴

However, if the tower in the park design is so harmful, then why is Stuyvesant Town still functioning? Why do many residents pay market rate rents to live there? Why do they feel safe? Stuyvesant Town, clearly, is different. Its architecture has not cultivated crime and squalor. I argue that this is because of the fundamental differences between Stuyvesant Town and low-income developments. Stuyvesant Town’s design is repetitive, disorienting, and boring, but the
elements that go beyond the design—the maintenance and patrol staff, the amenities, the well-groomed grounds—are made possible by the socioeconomic status, middle- and increasingly upper-middle- rather than low-income, of its residents who in turn feel safe, satisfied, and cared for. These factors allow the tower in the park design to work.

While Newman highlighted tower in the park developments’ lack of defensible space, he also acknowledged the differences that are central to the success Stuyvesant Town. He wrote in his book *Creating Defensible Space*:

> Most of us have seen highrise apartments occupied by middle-income people that function very well. Why then do they not work for low-income families? Middle-income apartment buildings have funds available for doormen, porters, elevator operators, and resident superintendents to watch over and maintain the common public areas, but in highrise public housing, there are barely enough funds for 9-to-5 nonresident maintenance men, let alone for security personnel, elevator operators, or porters. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is within these interior and exterior common public areas that most crime in public housing takes place.15

Newman’s attention to elements of Stuyvesant Town that go beyond its bricks and mortar shows why its architecture is able to benefit its residents, rather than hurt them. Because of the amount of low-income developments that were built in the tower in the park style, generalizations about the design were born from their fates. As elements that these low-income developments cannot afford may be necessary for a tower in the park scheme to succeed, the style has gained a reputation that misrepresents middle- or upper-middle-class Stuyvesant Town.

**New York City Middle-Income Housing Today**

Despite its original mission of providing affordable housing to middle-class New Yorkers, today Stuyvesant Town also makes room for higher-income people. Consistent with Stuyvesant Town’s trajectory, middle- and low-income New Yorkers have been squeezed out of many
neighborhoods around the city because of gentrification. Gentrification is a process of renovating a building or neighborhood in such a way that attracts affluent residents and transforms a district in order to meet the needs of a new population, rather than those of the people who are already there. Longtime residents are often priced out of their apartments during this evolution. For example, starting in the mid-1980s, lofts once occupied by artists in SoHo, Tribeca, and the Lower West Side of Manhattan were converted into apartments for the wealthy. Significantly wealthier tenants occupied these spaces after renovations, just as they do in Stuyvesant Town today. This process has repeated itself throughout both Manhattan and the outer boroughs.

Not only has gentrification hurt the affordability of New York City housing, but a shift in government priorities has as well. The federal government has continuously reduced its commitment to subsidizing housing through the previously discussed pathways established by the New Deal, which made Stuyvesant Town possible. Tax breaks and land donations that do exist to encourage private developers to build low- and middle-class units have often promoted problematic approaches to affordable housing planning.

For example, in 2016 a 33-story condominium building was built on the West Side of Manhattan that allocated 55 of its apartments for residents who made no more than about $50,000 per year. While able to live in this building at a low price, these residents did not have access to all of the amenities that the market rate residents did, nor did they even enter through the same door. The developer received economic compensation for providing affordable units, but still physically separated the lower-income residents from the wealthy and excluded them from community involvement. These visible decisions are markedly different than the renovation differences present in Stuyvesant Town between market-rate and stabilized-rent units. They call attention to the socioeconomic differences of the building’s population and remind residents of

Speed 75 Stuyvesant Town
them every day. The moderate-income residents are not integrated into the building like they are in Stuyvesant Town.

Even without offensive practices like this building’s, New York City government’s current middle-income housing programs are still illusive, competitive to enter, and actually disappearing. The primary middle-income housing program administers Mitchell-Lama housing developments, which provide affordable housing to moderate- and middle-income families. The program was signed into law in 1955 and still operates today. It is economically feasible because builders receive tax breaks and low-interest mortgages for participating.

Mitchell-Lama buildings are either composed of rentals that are priced based on a tenant’s income or limited equity co-ops for which buyers pay an equity value, meaning that when they sell, no profit is made. A prospective resident must first enter lotteries at individual developments to even complete the first step of obtaining an apartment: joining their waitlists.\(^{19}\) Not only are the waitlists long, but only about 45,000 Mitchell-Lama apartments exist today, while 139,000 were constructed originally.\(^{20}\) This shrinkage has occurred because shareholders can vote after 25 or 35 years, depending on the building’s age, to opt out of the program after the building’s mortgage has been paid.\(^{21}\) Although New York City needs more middle-income housing, rather than less, Stuyvesant Town is not the only affordable option vanishing. This makes its fall from affordability all the more devastating. The connection of the decline in affordability of both Mitchell-Lama developments and Stuyvesant Town to the expiration of their respective government contracts communicates the necessity of renewed government intervention if New York City is ever to be accessible to the middle class.
While Stuyvesant Town’s architectural style and development techniques are no longer favored in New York City, its design has proved successful for its residents. They, in contrast to those of many other tower in the park developments, have flourished. Problematic is Stuyvesant Town’s exclusivity: it does not adequately offer the affordable housing that it was created to.
1 A. Paletta (2016).
2 J. Jacobs (1961), 373.
3 J. Jacobs (1961).
4 J. Jacobs (1961), 186.
5 S. Brewer (1961).
7 R. Plunz (1992), 291.
11 R. Plunz (2016), 351.
12 M. Navarro (2013).
13 R. Plunz (2016), 351.
18 A. Schwartz, (2016).
20 R. Plunz (1992), 326.
Conclusion

My thesis describes the complex and contradictory nature of both Stuyvesant Town and its creator. Understanding Stuyvesant Town in terms of its development context, design precedent, architecture and layout, public and resident perceptions, affordability, and successor projects allows an evaluation of its contributions to New York City. This analysis of the housing development, in particular one that is often viewed negatively, reveals the disparity between how it affects those who directly and those who indirectly interact with it.

Stuyvesant Town’s history reveals tensions between the positive aspects of the complex felt by its residents and its negative impacts on the city. The creation of Stuyvesant Town displaced low-income Gas House District residents and a range of neighborhood functions, but it provided safe and clean housing for middle-class veterans and their families who otherwise may not have been able to afford it. Stuyvesant Town cuts off city blocks and supports automobile use, but it was created at a time when cars were seen to be the transportation method of the future and families were fleeing to suburbs with the luxury of a garage and a backyard. Stuyvesant Town excluded black New Yorkers when it was built and remains predominantly white, however racial preferences of stakeholders far beyond Moses ensured this segregation. Although the inward nature of Stuyvesant Town’s buildings separates residents from the city, it makes them feel safe and connected to the larger Stuyvesant Town community. While Stuyvesant Town is no longer a promise of sustained New York City affordability, it does continue to offer some low- and moderate-income households apartments via lottery and house longtime residents at stabilized below-market rates. Stuyvesant Town limits non-residents’ ability to benefit from or utilize its section of the city, but it provides its residents with a convenient residential location within Manhattan.
At the heart of these tensions is Robert Moses. Moses saw urban change in terms of large-scale projects. His visionary attitude allowed him to build on a scale and to an extent that is still unprecedented, but also limited his ability to develop without harming existing communities and populations that were in his way. Stuyvesant Town was one such all-encompassing project that fit well into his mission to increase open space and middle-class housing in the city during a time of suburban flight and automobile deference.

The design of Stuyvesant Town was inspired by utopic European housing schemes. Unlike lower-income tower in the park developments inspired by similar designs, Stuyvesant Town’s architecture does not hurt its residents. Stuyvesant Town’s exemption from this fate can be attributed to the additional safety, convenience, and community building measures made possible by the socioeconomic status and attitude of Stuyvesant Town residents. However, its design does harm the surrounding city as it interrupts the urban fabric and bars full use of land and streets that would be public if a development did not stretch across them. Stuyvesant Town’s amenities, while convenient for residents, limit their need to interact with the community and businesses beyond the complex’s borders.

Although Stuyvesant Town’s design does not integrate into the surrounding city and therefore hurts New York City as a whole, residents enjoy living in the development. They like the privacy and the greenery that are rooted in its separating features. Even though Stuyvesant Town’s architectural and development styles have fallen out of favor, Stuyvesant Town has not lost popularity. It is a beloved housing option for which residents today are willing to pay more than ever before.

Nonetheless, Stuyvesant Town’s original mission was the provision of middle-class housing to New York City. Because of its market-rate apartments and efforts to attract well-off
residents, Stuyvesant Town can no longer claim to do this. It does offer some income-limited apartments via lottery and house families that have held onto leases for decades, but it no longer sustains the middle class’ ability to live in New York City. Instead, it serves as a reminder that even an immense and seemingly impenetrable project to preserve affordability can be undermined by demand, capitalism, and a city’s evolution.

I conclude that while Stuyvesant Town’s layout and amenities separate it from New York City and make the development spatially disorienting, this detachment is to the detriment of the city in which it resides, rather than to Stuyvesant Town’s residents. The development’s desirable location and its security and amenities, made possible by its residents’ socioeconomic status, have prevented Stuyvesant Town’s insular qualities from being harmful to its residents in the way that some other tower in the park style developments have been to their own and even make them appreciate Stuyvesant Town’s lack of urban integration. I also conclude that Stuyvesant Town is problematic for New York City as a whole because its affordability has devolved, while its lack of racial diversity has remained fairly consistent. It is no longer a middle-class bastion, contradicting its intended purpose, but it has maintained its predominantly white racial makeup.

Government intervention is needed if Stuyvesant Town is ever to regain its capacity to fulfill Moses’ promise of middle-class affordability within New York City.
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