

Community Building versus Housing Reform:

Roy Lubove and the History of Housing Reform in the United States

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Roy Lubove identified housing as a central issue in the progressive reform movement. He used housing as a way to explore the complexity of urban reform and the mentality of the reformer in twentieth century America. The sheer enormity of New York's slum housing problem dramatically symbolized the crisis of late nineteenth-century urban industrialism. Indeed, much of Lubove's contribution to the history of housing reform derives from his seminal insight that nineteenth and early twentieth century housing reformers such as New York's Richard Watson Gilder and Lawrence Veiller occupied the front lines in the war against the savage consequences of nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization, which manifested themselves most egregiously and exquisitely in the case of Gotham's notorious tenements. Housing reformers, both apostles of philanthropy at five percent such as Gilder and "professionals" such as Veiller, who carved lifelong careers warring against the "slum evil," battled the city's failure to supply even minimally decent housing to its mushrooming immigrant population.¹

Lubove's housing scholarship consistently viewed the slum more as a transitional community type rather than just housing. From his *The Progressives and the Slums* (1962) to his 1990 Kalikow Company report challenging the designation of Elgin Gould's City and Suburban Homes' York Avenue Estates on historical grounds, Lubove rejected housing reform narrowly focused on shelter in favor of schemes that involved neighborhood rehabilitation. He sought citizen empowerment to

1. Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1962).

strengthen the social fiber of community life.² He championed the neighborhood reconstruction views of Jacob Riis, Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, and Arthur Thomas, and in the 1970s and 1980s he espied evidence of community revitalization in the work of Pittsburgh's community development corporations. Lubove, in fact, moved easily from the progressive crusade against the tenement house into this broader realm of neighborhood reconstruction, the garden city, and city and regional planning. He conceived housing as part of environmental reform. However, he repudiated the progressive and paternalistic notions of social control and social engineering. He especially chastened progressives for espousing the belief that "good safe and sanitary housing makes good people," that model tenements transformed a brutal, slovenly dressed, and dangerous immigrant population into well-bathed, solid American citizens. Lubove sternly rejected this image of housing as bludgeon especially when brandished by big government.

His view of impersonal big government as oppressor appealed to young intellectuals of the 1960s, who, wrote John Higham in a *Journal of American History* article, were often in revolt "against all large impersonal structures of authority . . . dominant nationalities, ruling elites, national states, and entrenched legal, economic, and educational systems turned vile."³ Good neighborhoods, Lubove might say, not good housing, makes good people, and good neighborhoods involve people organized into community development groups interacting with banks, school boards, city government, and local, regional, and national business and foundation leaders, not with a distant and bureaucratically-minded paternalistic federal government. For this reason federal public housing looms as the *bete noire* in Lubove's saga of housing reform. Not surprisingly, near the end of his *Progressives and the Slums* (1962) he conjured up Harrison Salisbury's stunning disclosure about public housing first used by Daniel Seligman in *The Exploding Metropolis* (1958). "Once upon a time," confessed Salisbury, "we thought that if we could only get our problem families out of those dreadful slums, then papa would stop taking dope, mama would stop chasing around, and Junior would stop carrying a knife. Well, we've got them in a nice new

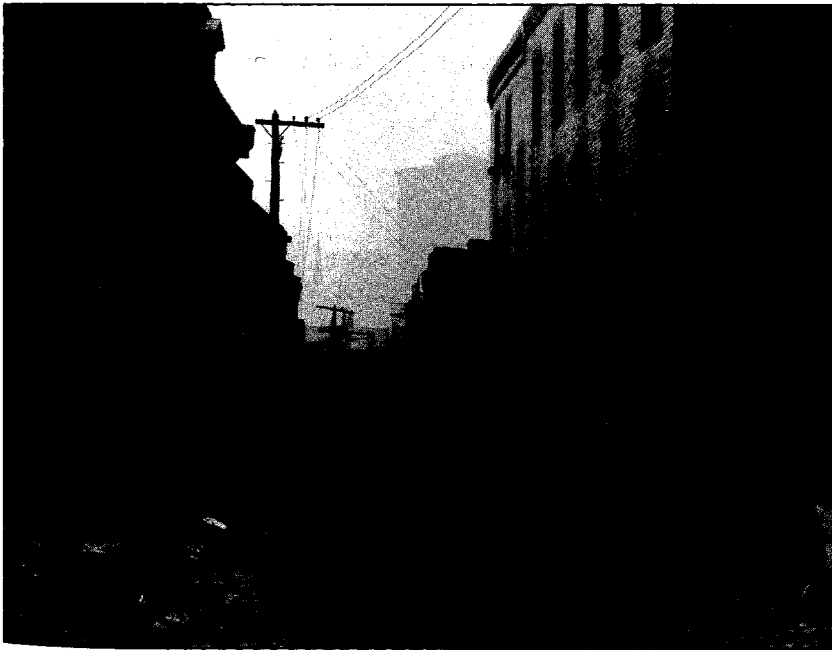
2. Roy Lubove, "At War with Itself: The City and Suburban Homes Company and the Model Tenement Movement. A Report Opposing Landmark Designation," in Gina Luria Walker and Associates, eds., *The City and Suburban Homes Company's York Avenue Estates: A Social and Archaeological History, Volume 4* (New York: Kalikow 78/79 Company, 1990), pp. 1-59.

3. John Higham, "The Future of American History," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 80, (March 1994), p. 1298.

apartment [in Fort Green Homes he might have added] with modern kitchens and recreation center. And they're still the same bunch of bastards they always were."⁴ For a disillusioned Lubove, as for many, Salisbury's epitaph for New York's Fort Green Homes summarized a popular verdict on government built-slums.

Lubove argued his case for community over bureaucratic/paternalistic housing reform through the medium of a local history strongly tinged with biography. His venue, first New York, then Pittsburgh, reflected his academic career experience, a scholar born, raised, and educated in New York, whose academic career was mainly spent in Pittsburgh. Much of his contribution to housing scholarship spanned that geographic distance from his acclaimed early work on *The Progressives and the Slums*, the history of tenement reform in New York City, to his final work *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: The Post-Steel Era*, a celebration of local community planning and housing in the city where he established himself as an academic and a civic activist.

Courtesy: Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



Lower Hill District alley scene in the early twentieth century with downtown barely visible in the background. From the Kingsley Association Collection

4. Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums*, p. 254; Bernard Seligman, "The Enduring Slums," in Editors of Fortune, *The Exploding Metropolis* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 106.

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Lawrence Veiller and "Negative" Housing Reform

Five years before Robert Wiebe published his seminal *Search for Order* (1967) Lubove had situated a group of New York housing reformers within the vanguard of what he described as a self-conscious, professional, scientific, and bureaucratically-minded-middle class. Led by Lawrence Veiller, these middle-class reformers scientifically investigated the housing problem, amassed data on tottering foundations, rotting sills, airless interior rooms, and overflowing privy vaults, and lobbied for the creation of tenement house commissions to press for laws to outlaw these conditions. Lubove distinguished between Veiller's brand of scientific housing, which collected data and drafted legislation, and the scientific philanthropy of Gould and Gilder which to be sure assailed the tenement house evil, but focused on building "model" low-rent dwellings to prove that capitalism, responsibly directed, could erect healthy and affordable neighborhoods. This latter nineteenth century tradition attempted to make charity – including the efficiently-managed model tenement – not only sound character-building institutions, but also "good investments." Indeed, the crux of Lubove's case against the designation of Gould's York Avenue Estates for landmark status involved his contention that the project belonged to a charity organizing tradition of philanthropic housing which had vanished in the twentieth century. Therefore, the building was an anachronism, and contrary to the preservationists' arguments, not an example of progressive housing.⁵

Veiller believed just as fervently as Gould in science and efficiency and linked good housing to character building. But, emphasized Lubove, professional housers like Veiller eschewed the philanthropic impulse in favor of what they saw as the broader impact of housing on society. Veiller, a housing specialist employed by the New York Charity Organizing Society's Tenement House Committee, mastered housing as a body of knowledge, and, to quote Lubove, "relied less upon moral suasion than upon his ability to manipulate men and events."⁶ Nevertheless, while lacking the "bubbly optimism" of a Jacob Riis, Veiller harbored the same intense outrage at the slum. Tenement conditions degraded people and, to quote Veiller, "most of the poverty and crime that is met with in our large cities is due directly to the [slum] environ-

5. Lubove, "At War With Itself," p. 2; Curiously enough, Wiebe fails to cite Lubove's *Progressives and the Slums* in his important work on progressivism. He does note Lubove's *Professional Altruist*. See Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

6. Roy Lubove, "Lawrence Veiller and the New York State Tenement House Commission of 1900," in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 47 (1961), 663.

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Veiller never preached. He campaigned, lobbied, and politicked. He triumphed first in 1900 when he organized and produced the New York Tenement House Exhibit, and again in 1901 when by shrewd politicking and help from the governor, Theodore Roosevelt, he secured the New York State Tenement House Law. Lubove credits Veiller for introducing expert professionalism and scientific, efficient organization

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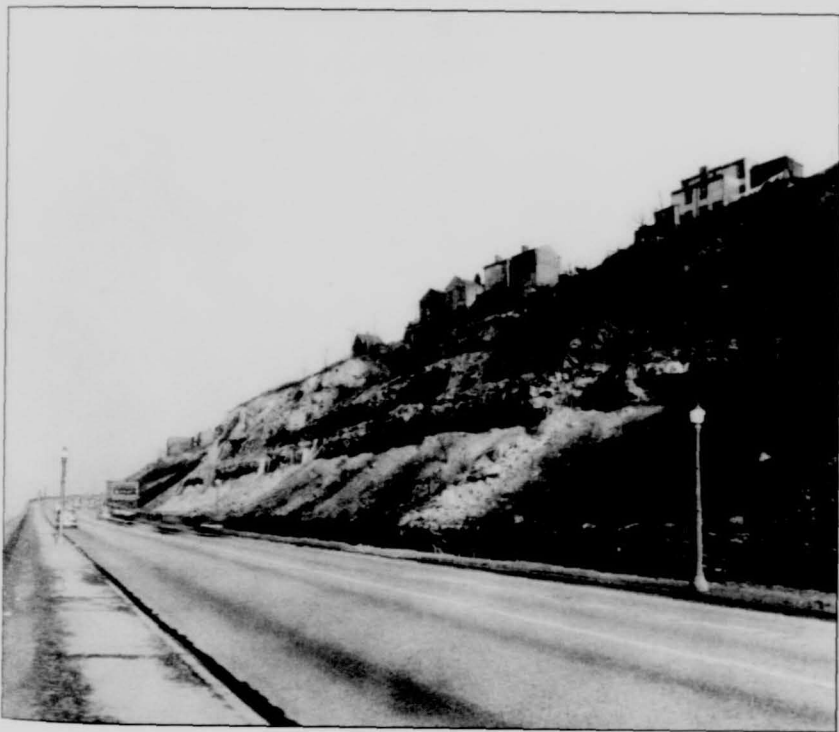
Denuded landscape of Herron Hill above Bigelow Boulevard in the early twentieth century. From the Kingsley Association Collection

7. Lubove, "Lawrence Veiller and the New York State Tenement House Commission of 1900," 666; Lubove, *Progressives and the Slums*, pp. 48, 187.

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to the housing movement. But, he also observed that Veiller's 1901 Law neither removed the moldering stock of Old Law tenements, nor added a single unit to the city's housing. In fact the politically and socially conservative Veiller opposed government action to construct new homes. For Veiller, "the state had no more right to interfere with housing than to bake bread."

Housing Reform versus Neighborhood Reconstruction

Lubove drew a key distinction between housing reformers such as Lawrence Veiller, Bleecker Marquette, Bernard Newman, and Albion Bacon, who advocated restrictive legislation such as housing codes, and those reformers such as Jacob Riis who believed that slum communities must be either reconstructed and the housing supply increased, or, by new mass transit, slum populations relocated to cheaper land on the urban periphery. Slum reconstructionists like Riis and I.N. Phelps Stokes avoided the myopia of housing technicians like Veiller, whose only goal was safe and sanitary housing. Riis and settlement workers such as Mary Simkhovitch, observed the sympathetic Lubove, espoused the "neighborhood" idea, which purported to restore the face-to-face village ties withered in the immigration process and thanks to the harsh conditions of tenement house life. In addition they viewed the neighborhood as an organic unit comprising the people and the array of institutions which bound residents into a community. Riis, like Clarence Perry, whose "neighborhood unit" (according to Howard Gillette) reflected Riis's and the settlement worker's vision, sought to restructure community life around such unifying institutions as the school. In any case, these progressive reformers viewed the community, not as a body of housing, but as the nucleus for social reconstruction.⁸

An architect, not a settlement house worker, I. N. Phelps Stokes epitomized for Lubove the practical-minded housing reformer whose housing designs exuded strong elements of neighborhood reconstruction. With ties to City and Suburban Homes – a philanthropic housing corporation founded in 1896 to build model housing for New York's ill-housed – and to Lawrence Veiller and to New York's real estate industry, Stokes bestrode New York housing history. Stokes served with his friend Veiller on the first New York Charity Organizing Society (COS), and on

8. Lubove, *The Progressive and the Slums*, pp. 66, 76-80, 187; Howard Gillette, "The Evolution of Neighborhood Planning: From the Progressive Era to the 1949 Housing Act," *Journal of Urban History* 9 (August 1983), 421-44; on Settlement movement, see Allen Davis, *Spearheads of Reform* (New York:Oxford,1967).

the Tenement House Committee. Yet, Stokes abjured restrictive housing codes and even favored the use of government police power to expand the supply of good, low-income shelter by using the city's condemnation powers to site creatively attractive, low-rent tenements on park-like, decongested New York blocks. Stokes, therefore, looked beyond the singular tenement house to large-scale community renewal. In 1901 he entered the Charity Organizing Society's competition for the best design of modern low-income housing using the boundaries of the New York city block. In the 1920s Stokes' creative, practical design inspired architect-philanthropist Andrew Thomas' garden-type apartments, five-and-six-story multiple-family dwellings arranged around a spacious interior court. Lubove saw Stokes' creative renewal plans foreshadowing the enlightened public-private partnerships that characterized Pittsburgh's community development of the 1980s and 1990s.⁹

Courtesy: Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



Two girls in an alley, circa 1910. From the Kingsley Association Collection.

9. Roy Lubove, "I.N. Phelps Stokes: Tenement Architect, Economist, Planner," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 23, (1964), 79.

Stokes' brand of economic planning, therefore, contrasted sharply with "post-World War II urban renewal [which Lubove scorned as] only marginally concerned with low-income housing needs."¹⁰

Neighborhood Construction in the Twenties and Thirties

Lubove's dichotomy between narrow and unproductive restrictive housing reform and broad, socially sensitive community reconstruction led him first to write about America's World War I housing experiment, then to the Regional Planning Association of America, and, finally forced him to explore the relationship between housing and city planning. In *The Progressives and the Slums* Lubove very loosely wove together the stories of housing and planning from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the emergent City Beautiful Movement to New York's 1916 Zoning Ordinance. He found City Beautiful planners such as Rochester, New York's Charles Mulford Robinson sharing a vague notion of housing betterment as the outcome of urban beautification. Parks, boulevards, and fountains would enrich the lives of slum dwellers. However, contended Lubove, rather than Robinson's conception, it was the British civil servant Ebenezer Howard's vision of the decentralized Garden City and the German-born idea of zoning which most intrigued planners and architects interested in housing. Prior to World War I a few planners such as John Nolen, Charles Olmsted, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., had designed innovative industrial housing complexes and garden villages such as Kistler, Pennsylvania and Forest Hills Gardens, New York. Planners, argued Lubove, seized mainly on zoning as the means to deconcentrate and rehouse congested urban populations. While he briefly alluded to Benjamin Marsh's landmark 1909 National Conference on City Planning and the Problem of Congestion held in Washington, D.C., calling it "on the national level . . . a significant link between the housing and planning movements," Lubove portrayed the early link between housing and planning nebulously.¹¹

In *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era* (1967) Lubove moderated even more his tepid assessment of the linkage between housing and planning. He characterized the tie between the City Beautiful and housing as "minimal," and dismissed the Garden

10. Lubove, "I.N. Phelps Stokes," 87.

11. Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums*, p. 234.

City movement in America as “making little progress.”¹² Elsewhere in the same book he more generously described planning’s significance for housing as “limited and indirect.”¹³ Peter Marcuse, in a 1980 *Journal of Urban History* article, “Housing in Early City Planning,” modified this picture. Marcuse found housing to be an issue of great importance among early planners. Veiller and Simkhovitch, a co-founder of the Committee on City Congestion, linked arms with John Nolen and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. at the first National Conference on City Planning in 1909. However, it was that same year, argued Marcuse, that housing and planning diverged. For one, Veiller in 1909 founded his National Housing Association. Simultaneously, the bacteriological revolution, the public health movement, and restrictive legislation itself relieved some of the greater dread of tenements. Then too, World War I and subsequent immigration restriction legislation lessened population pressure on the slum housing supply. Finally, as Marcuse points out,

Courtesy: Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



Billboards disfigure the approach to the Bloomfield Bridge, 1928. From the Pittsburgh City Photographers Collection.

12. Roy Lubove, *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 11.

13. Lubove, *Urban Community*, p. 11.

efforts to assault frontally the so-called "land problem" and basically restructure the speculative urban housing market proved politically "impractical" at the very moment that progressive planning was transforming itself into the epitome of what is practical.¹⁴

Lubove lost interest in the professional housing movement once it failed in 1909. Thus, he ignored an interesting era of non-intrusive, non-paternalistic housing vigilance that he might have cheered. During the 1920s professional housers aggressively pursued their historic agenda of pushing for the enactment and enforcement of sanitary and other restrictive housing laws, usually in the form of codes governing housing design and construction. Housing associations watchdogged city housing code enforcement, organized clean-up, fix-up campaigns (where neighborhoods cleaned up trash-strewn lots and repaired unsightly fences and outbuildings), and they declared war on the common house fly. They also urged builders to construct better low cost housing. To this end they enlisted in the vanguard of Mrs. William Brown Meloney's Better Homes movement, backed by Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover's campaign to encourage private builders to supply affordable housing, and which annually sponsored Better Homes Week. In 1931, led by Veiller, housing association delegates appeared in force at President Hoover's National Conference on Housing and Homebuilding; but, as Lubove never tells us, so did Edith Elmer Wood, Fred Ackerman, Robert Kohn, Catherine Bauer, members of that other stream of housing consciousness that he lumped into the urban reconstruction movement.¹⁵

Even more than Veiller, the central figure in *The Progressives and the Slums*, it was Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and Lewis Mumford, the formulators of a distinctive philosophy of urban reconstruction, who came to dominate Lubove's housing scholarship. Lubove saw the "golden moment," the dawn of a new era in American housing history,

14. See Peter Marcuse, "Housing in Early City Planning," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 6 (1980), 153-177; see also Mel Scott, *American City Planning, 1890-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

15. On professional housers in the 1920s, see Robert B. Fairbanks, *Making Better Citizens: Housing Reform and the Community Development Strategy in Cincinnati, 1890-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); on Meloney, see Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981).

arriving in 1917 when a national housing crisis forced Congress to intervene in the marketplace by funding the housing construction activities of the United States Shipping Board's Emergency Fleet Corporation and the United States Housing Corporation. Although short-lived, Congress's action, as Lubove observed in his seminal 1960 article, "Homes and 'A Few Well Placed Fruit Trees': An Object Lesson in Federal Housing," marked a significant precedent. Equally important was the war housing itself. Planning the wartime housing developments involved a host of housing and planning luminaries, including Ackerman, Stein, Nolen, Wright, Robert Kohn, Olmsted, Jr., as well as Stokes. Lubove praised their dedication to the construction of "total communities," the building of working-class communities that met aesthetic and sanitary standards "vastly superior to speculative commercial builders." Although most of the World War I communities built in places such as New York; Camden; Philadelphia; and Bath, Maine; opened too late to affect the war effort, the large-scale, impeccably designed communities, featuring curvilinear streets, architecturally tasteful row and attached housing, and generous open areas conformed to Garden City principles and instantly served as models of good housing and community development.¹⁶

While Edith Elmer Wood, a housing reformer of the 1920s strongly influenced by European ideas, viewed Camden's Yorkship Village as stark evidence that "government alone can supply the adequate capital necessary to decently house low-income families," for Lubove the developments symbolized the rejection of the old housing betterment agenda of model tenements and restrictive legislation, and fostered the idea that working class families deserved good, well-developed housing as a right.¹⁷ He espied that message resonating loudly among the members of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) founded in 1923 by Charles Whitaker, Mumford, and Stein, and including many people recently involved in the World War I community-building work.¹⁸ Spurred by the severe postwar housing crisis, housing analysis now shifted from simply sanitary conditions and social pathology to the

16 See, Lubove, "Homes and 'a Few Well-Placed Fruit Trees': An Object Lesson in Federal Housing," *Social Research*, 27 (1960), 469-86; Christian Topalov, "Scientific Urban Planning and the Ordering of Daily Life: The First "War Housing" Experiment in the United States," *Journal of Urban History* 17 (1990), 14-45; and Kristin M. Szylvian, "Industrial Housing Reform and the Emergency Fleet Corporation," *Journal of Urban History* vol. 25 (July 1999), 647-690.

17. Lubove, "Homes and 'a Few Well Placed Fruit Trees,'" 469-86.

18. Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920s*, p. 33.

problem of supplying good, low-cost housing, which RPAA members saw speculative commercial builders incapable of providing. Moved by the ecologically-based, social theorizing of the Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes and the town planning ideas of Ebenezer Howard and his disciple Raymond Unwin, Mumford, Stein, and Wright envisioned dense urban-industrial populations decentralized into modern garden cities where positive urban and rural values could be blended into a more humane, socially productive culture.¹⁹ However, on the eve of the Great Depression the incarnation of this RPAA vision, the town planning *tour de forces* at Sunnyside, New York; Radburn, New Jersey; and Chatham Village, Pennsylvania; flopped as low-income housing solutions. While scintillating demonstrations of the best in modern town planning, employing large-scale, superblock designs and using mass production methods, they failed to better the housing conditions of America's ill housed. Despite their location on peripheral rather than costly central city sites, and the use of economical building techniques, rental rates for the units barred most working-class families, the presumed target of the model developments.

Lubove discussed several other examples of large-scale housing developments undertaken in the 1920s, including Andrew Thomas's Metropolitan Life Insurance Company projects and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Lavanberg Homes which were aided by New York's 1926 tax exemption law, meant to mobilize tax policy behind creative low-income housing development. In Lubove's view both the Thomas and Lavanberg projects served as models of government-voluntary sector collaboration leading to reconstructed urban community life; such non-oppressive, non-bureaucratic group housing experiments afforded a promising solution to New York's housing problem as the nation moved into the 1930s.

Lubove's Case Against Public Housing

Accordingly, Lubove contended that the real housing history of the 1930s was about large-scale housing development, the "neighborhood unit," and the legacy of Andrew J. Thomas and Clarence Stein, not simply about the evolution of public housing. Lubove never explored the impact of the Great Depression on urban housing; moreover, he ignored

19. Ibid., pp. 83-105; see also Clarence S. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

the thousands of evictions in Harlem and the mortgage foreclosures in Queens where he was growing up.²⁰ His research focused almost exclusively on ideas, especially how the Great Depression challenged housing reformers to experiment with creative solutions to neighborhood reconstruction. Convinced that the declining American birth rate associated with the Great Depression actually worsened rather than ameliorated slum conditions, New York's housing czar, Langdon Post, pressed for qualitative development rather than increased supply. Post favored modern community housing design fashionable in Europe in the 1920s and early 1930s as described in Catherine Bauer's 1934 classic *Modern Housing*. Lubove examined the popularity during the 1930s of large-scale, neighborhood-unit schemes which, according to their proponents, strove to restore face-to-face relations and "reduce the vast abstraction of the city to human terms" and at the same time to keep unit costs in the low-income range.²¹ Curiously, Lubove's extensive correspondence with Louis Mumford revealed that the author of *The Culture of Cities* believed that the touted garden city developments of the late 1920s, Sunnyside, New York, and Radburn, New Jersey, proved the futility of expecting significant cost savings from large-scale design.²²

Lubove endeavored to insulate the RPAA from the contamination of public housing by emphasizing the affinity of members such as Bauer, Wright, and Kohn for large-scale design and socially sensitive modern housing. He thus downplayed the role of the RPAA as a bulwark of the

20. See the special edition of the *Journal of Urban History*, Vol 12, (1986) devoted to public housing in New York, including Ann Buttenweiser, "Shelter for What and for Whom: On the Route to the Vladeck Houses, 1930-1940," 391-413.

21. Catherine Bauer, like Perry and many other housers of the 1930s, stressed the necessity of streamlining housing production using mass production and the economy of uncluttered *bauhaus* architectural design. Bauer discovered this streamlined design when with Mumford during the 1920s she toured Ernst May's publicly-built worker housing in Frankfurt. See Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934). As head of the Labor Housing Conference in the 1930s Bauer pushed the New Deal to enact a universalist housing program that would build "modern housing" open to all social classes. According to Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), the "two-tier" housing program that emerged in 1937 which enabled the Federal Housing Administration to guarantee mortgages for the middle class, and minimal standard public housing for the poor, greatly disappointed her. Few of Lubove's writings treat the 1930s in any depth. Lubove's "New Cities for Old: The Urban Reconstruction Program of the 1930s," *The Social Studies*, 53, No. 6 (1962), 204-213, provides a thorough examination of Perry's "Neighborhood Unit," as an inspiration for the planning of the decade. Perhaps Lubove's best discussion of the 1930s, Thomas's work, Langdon Post, and the New York Housing Authority, is found in his "At War with Itself," study for Kalikow (1990), 1-59.

22. Lewis Mumford to Roy Lubove, August 24, 1961, Roy Lubove Papers, University of Pittsburgh.

early public housing movement. Early in the 1930s it had vigorously lobbied for government-underwritten, limited-dividend ventures that would be open to all classes regardless of the home seeker's "means."²³ Kohn in 1933, as Lubove noted, headed Harold Ickes' PWA's Housing Division, which built a number of publicly-funded, tastefully-designed modern housing projects to warm the heart of any urban reconstructionist. Moreover, in 1936 Kohn helped convene the Baltimore Housing Conference that assembled housers of all stripes, including the adamantly anti-government interventionist Veiller, to hear Raymond Unwin urge America to abandon its anti-public housing stance and enact a permanent housing program. This would create a permanent government housing agency to build thousands of units of "safe and sanitary" shelter for America's sizeable ill-housed working-class. Out of that conference came the 1937 Wagner Housing Act, that to Bauer's chagrin ensconced both "minimal standards" and strict low-income requirements for admission to public housing.²⁴

Lubove knew this housing history; he bemoaned that by 1937 some, but not all, New Deal bureaucratic types increasingly elevated utility over the reconstructionist function of good housing. Nevertheless, Lubove's antipathy notwithstanding, the early United States Housing Authority projects, even shorn of many architectural or social frills, radiated neighborhood unit design and revealed features such as community rooms, tot lots, interior walkways, and generous grassy areas reminiscent of Thomas's and Stoke's.²⁵

Lubove's Housing History: Post World War II Pittsburgh

Lubove's scholarship on post-World War II America centered on Pittsburgh, not New York, and raised new questions about housing and environmental reform. His probe of New York began with the squalor of Fort Green, a housing project. In sharp contrast Lubove unfolded his Pittsburgh odyssey with Gateway Center, the gleaming physical symbol of the Pittsburgh Renaissance. How, he asked, could an American city famed for its sparkling reborn downtown tolerate scabrous neighbor-

23. In *Modern Housing for America*: Gail Radford contends that Bauer and her RPAA friends fought for "universalist" housing program that did not impose a "means test." In the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Act the New Deal forged a "two-tier" housing program: public housing for the poor, and government-insured mortgages for middle class suburbanties.

24. Ibid.

25. On projects and housing as "utility," see Lubove, "At War With Itself"; on the communitarian design of PWA and early USHA projects, see Bauman, *Public Housing, Race and Renewal*.

hoods? As in his New York phase, Lubove found his answer in the progressive movement, and particularly in the *Pittsburgh Survey*. Pittsburgh environmental reform, argued Lubove in *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business and Environmental Change* (1967) had historically been dominated by a coalition of civic, business, and professional elites.²⁶

As in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other major cities, so in Pittsburgh the housing movement prior to the Great Depression never advanced beyond restrictive legislation. Pittsburgh, in fact, lagged behind other cities in creating a progressive housing movement. The city's conservative, business-dominated culture inhibited even voluntarist-led social change. Scanning the city's Progressive Era landscape, Lubove found no towering housing reformer such as Lawrence Veiller emerging in the Steel City despite lurid disclosures between 1907 and 1909 by Margaret Byington and the other contributors to Paul Underwood Kellogg's *Pittsburgh Survey*. Progressive reformers in Pittsburgh, such as the Civic Club of Allegheny County's (CCAC) Mrs. Franklin Iams, had won in 1903 a Division of Tenement House Inspection operating under an independent Department of Health, but it was always chronically understaffed. Other Civic Club leaders, often members of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, touted model tenements or even single tax nostrums for housing betterment.²⁷

Lubove concluded that Pittsburgh's "housing betterment under voluntary auspices was less a social policy than a substitute for one."²⁸ He found this especially true in the 1920s. Threatened industrially by Cleveland, Ohio, and Gary Indiana, and enduring a severe postwar housing crisis, Pittsburgh businessmen through the Chamber of Commerce created a Commerce Housing Corporation. Sadly the Chamber's housing venture added a mere 304 new houses countywide. Tragically, observed Lubove, Pittsburgh typically solved its housing problem by

26. On businessmen as reformers, see Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); with special reference to cities and planning, see Christine Rosen, *The Limits of Power: Great Fires and the Process of City Growth in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); also Mansel G. Blackford, *The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

27. Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh, I*; on *The Pittsburgh Survey* and housing and planning reform, see John F. Bauman and Margaret Spratt, "Civic Elites and Environmental Reform: The Pittsburgh Survey and Urban Planning," in Maurine Greenwald, ed., *Pittsburgh Surveyed: Social Science and Social Reform in the Early Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

28. Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh, I*, p. 64.

ignoring or denying it. Lubove searched in vain for evidence of a "constructionist" movement in Pittsburgh during the 1920s comparable to New York's. It was not until 1928 that Pittsburgh civic leaders founded the Pittsburgh Housing Association that pushed housing code enforcement, not a constructive housing program.²⁹

As in his saga of New York, Lubove skirted Pittsburgh's housing history of the 1930s. He admitted that the Great Depression convinced "one segment of [Pittsburgh's] business and professional leadership . . . [that the] historical allocation of public-private responsibility was no longer viable."³⁰ That segment did not include the Buhl Foundation which in 1930, anxious to prove that capitalism could still provide good moderate income housing, undertook Chatham Village. Buhl's acclaimed garden village designed by Stein and Wright blatantly sought tenants among the city's respectable middle-income clerical, professional, and small business families, not its ill-housed working class. Lubove acclaimed Chatham Village as "a brilliant experiment in residential site planning and design," albeit one that like Sunnyside and Radburn demonstrated the bankruptcy of voluntarism as a strategy for mass housing betterment.³¹

Slighting the Great Depression, Lubove spurned the Pittsburgh poor. He hardly acknowledged that the federal government built public housing in Pittsburgh, stating almost blithely at the end of chapter four, "Housing: The Gordian Knot," that public housing "was a limited response to the housing needs of the low-income population . . . not an important precedent for constructive public intervention." It was mainly "Negro" housing, although in truth only one of Pittsburgh's first three projects, the 420 unit Bedford Heights complex, housed a disproportionately large (75 percent) African-American population. Blacks comprised barely half of the residents of the Addison Terrace and the giant 1,851-unit Aliquippa Terrace projects.³²

29. *Ibid.* I, p. 70.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83. Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, *The First Seven Years: A Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh for the Years 1937-1944* (Pittsburgh: Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, 1944).

Toward Neighborhood Reconstruction in Pittsburgh

Lubove also had few kind words for the city's post-World War II redevelopment. He branded Pittsburgh's post-World War II Renaissance "the reverse welfare state, . . . wholesale environmental intervention on behalf of the city elite."³³ However, amidst what he termed the social blindness and aesthetic boorishness of Renaissance I, Lubove found a gem, in the Allegheny Council to Improve our Housing (ACTION-Housing), a non profit, businesslike organization founded in 1957. Funded by the Sarah Mellon Scaife, A.W. Mellon, and Richard King Mellon foundations, and Westinghouse, Jones & Laughlin, and United States Steel corporate monies, Lubove detected here the "social dimension of the Renaissance." ACTION-Housing portrayed the positive value of elite partnerships and elite leadership in neighborhood reconstruction. ACTION's neighborhood activity – reminiscent of the settlement house and the urban reconstruction work undertaken by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and I.N. Phelps Stokes and Andrew Thomas in the 1920s – involved partnership not paternalism, without the oppressive mandates of a federal bureaucracy. ACTION-Housing mobilized private funds to achieve a public purpose. It created a revolving development fund to leverage Federal Housing Administration (FHA) monies which were then used to construct large-scale, architecturally sensitive, low to moderate income housing. In 1968 ACTION established the Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (AHRCO), a consortium of some forty Pittsburgh-based corporations which created a three-million dollar fund which with FHA help would rehabilitate existing Pittsburgh housing for low-income rental purposes. Lubove viewed ACTION-Housing and AHRCO, as the mid-20th century manifestation of Riis's vision of neighborhood reconstruction. They were the forerunners of the community development corporations (CDCs) which in the 1980s arose in Pittsburgh's Shadyside, Manchester, Bloomfield, Garfield, and Homewood-Brushton inner city neighborhoods beneath the umbrella of Pittsburgh's Partnership for Neighborhood Development (PPNP).³⁴

33. Lubove, *Twentieth-Century Pittsburgh, I*.

34. Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Vol. II. The Post-Steel Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Lubove, ed., *Pittsburgh* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 179-180. Lubove heaped further praise on ACTION Housing, particularly its neighborhood urban extension program in areas such as Homewood-Brushton. He wrote that "Neighborhood urban extension served a number of useful purposes. It led to many small, but concrete improvements in physical facilities and social conditions. It involved neighborhood residents to a greater degree than previously. And it suggested a supplementary concept of urban renewal: more diffuse, neighborhood centered, and attuned to social problems." p. 180.

Lubove focused on these CDCs in his second volume of *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*. Non-profit CDC's mobilized public and private funds both to revitalize blighted business districts and to aid community-based, non-profit housing developers to convert abandoned schools or decaying industrial buildings into attractive moderate-income housing. From Lubove's increasingly libertarian point of view these private foundation-backed, community board-directed CDCs accentuated grassroots involvement in place of the more hierarchical oversight of ACTION. They afforded an overwhelming advantage for community reconstruction over the "conventional redistributive welfare" of Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society.³⁵

Just as Lubove devalued the federal government's part in shaping Pittsburgh's low-income housing policy in the 1930s, he similarly minimized Washington's role in the city's post-World War II era. Indeed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to extrapolate from Lubove's two Pittsburgh volumes any significant federal role in molding the city's housing environment. By declaring public housing a debacle, Lubove freed himself to jettison intellectually Pittsburgh's history of low-income housing. He focused exclusively on community development, and in *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, Vol. II*, excluded all but a fragmentary history of federal legislation enacted between 1934 and 1977. This included the critical 1949 housing law, the below-market interest rates for moderate as well as low income housing included in the 1954 housing law, and the generous grants for urban and community development found in the 1974 and 1977 legislation. Not that Washington scorned neighborhood participation and development. The 1937 Housing Act required citizen involvement, and after World War II the Housing and Home Finance Administration, – responding to a tidal wave of conservatism and the drumbeat of what John Mollenkopf called the "Pro-Growth Coalition" – made the federal housing and urban renewal agency often much too intimate partners with business in profitable community development as the Section 235 and 236 scandals of the 1960s revealed. No one, such as Arthur Zeigler – founder of the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation credited with saving Pittsburgh's fabled 1840s and 1850s Mexican War Streets in the Manchester District – will deny the extraordinary impact of federal Below Market Interest Rate [BMIR] programs and the historic preservation

35. Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh II*, p. 92.

tax act legislation. Both propelled "neighborhood reconstruction," and enabled community development corporations to attract neighborhood investment in both low and moderate-income housing. Lubove included these federal initiatives in his lengthy narrative of "The Post-Steel Era," but they paled in his treatment before the greater importance of the private sector. However, a 1996 *New York Times* article, dealing with the threatened deep cuts in what is left of federal housing subsidies, observed that the federal Section 8 low-income housing program often acts as a linchpin for private or non-profit development of low-income housing, because it guarantees a certain number of tenants at a predetermined rent. The article quoted Paul S. Grogan, president of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, an organization featured prominently in Lubove's *Volume II*: "What worries us about Section 8," explained Grogan, "is the stability of the neighborhoods we are working in. Are these neighborhoods going to come apart even more than they have [if Section 8 is reduced]." ³⁶

Lubove built his uncritical assessment of Pittsburgh's community development corporations on what many knowledgeable people have seen and applauded as the organization's solid record of accomplishment. Alberta Sbragia, in a chapter, "The Pittsburgh Model of Economic Development," written for Gregory Squires' volume *Unequal Partnerships: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment in Postwar America* (1989), concurs. She is more temperate in her praise, as are others who have dissected the CDC record in other cities such as Cleveland and Philadelphia. Cleveland's CDCs, while triumphant in revitalizing that city's downtown, foundered in many of the city's poor black neighborhoods. Community development corporations in Philadelphia provided a power base for city politicians such as state assemblyman John Street, and have demonstrated some success in economic development. Meanwhile, according to Carolyn Adams, David Bartlet, and the other contributors to *Philadelphia: Neighborhood Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (1991), the city's CDCs have also diffused rather than enhanced neighborhood activism and cohesiveness, one of the primary goals of what Lubove called neighborhood reconstruction. Sbragia, too, finds Pittsburgh's CDC operating best where the elements of a

36. On post-war federal low-income housing policy see John F. Bauman, "Public Housing: The Dreadful Saga of a Durable Policy," *Journal of Planning Literature*, vol 8, (1994), 347-361; also see Rachael G. Bratt, et. al., *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Jan Fisher, "U.S.-Subsidized Housing Facing Assault by G.O.P.," *New York Times*, March 3, 1996.

stable economic base existed, not in neighborhoods where that base had been severely eroded by postindustrialism, or where the social and political foundations of African-American leadership was often ill-formed or insecure, as in the Homewood-Brushton or Hazelwood areas.³⁷

Conclusion

Lubove's prolific and distinguished scholarship about urban housing chronicled and illuminated historically the legacy of progressive housing reform. Lubove interpreted the progressive housing agenda broadly to encompass community social reconstruction and development, not narrowly as low-income housing. Following Riis, he viewed the slum as more than an agglomeration of wretched four-story walk-ups where immigrant families crowded into airless apartments and huddled in the damp confines of water-logged basement units. He beheld slums as dysfunctional environments which cried out for neighborhood reconstruction to enable ethnic adaptation and acculturation. He followed this stream of housing thought from Riis, to Simkhovitch, to Stein and Wright, to Mumford, to Perry, Thomas, Stokes, and finally to the Pittsburgh CDC movement.

But Lubove's contribution to housing scholarship extended farther. He documented historically the failure of restrictive legislation as a strategy for housing betterment in America, despite memorializing Lawrence Veiller for his achievements as a significant figure in the progressive movement. And, finally, Lubove documented at least in part America's traditional distrust for government intervention in the housing marketplace, a distrust that he and many others of the 1960s came to share. Although World War I and the housing crisis that followed combined with the Great Depression to undermine temporarily the nation's antipathy for government subsidized housing – the cherished mortgage interest tax deduction notwithstanding – for Lubove, as for many, Harrison Salisbury's grim epitaph for New York's Fort Green housing project offered a resounding verdict. Good neighborhoods, preached Lubove, not good housing made good people, and good

37. Alberta Sbragia, "The Pittsburgh Model of Economic Development: Partnership, Responsiveness and Indifference," in Gregory Squires, *Unequal Partnerships: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment in Postwar America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 80-103; Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and John Metzger, "Cleveland: Post-Populist Public-Private Partnerships," in Squires, ed., *Unequal Partnerships*, pp. 121-142; Carolyn Adams, et. al., *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

neighborhoods involved citizens building their communities in concert with local governments and private foundations, not being herded by impersonal government into benighted public housing projects. For Roy Lubove, and increasingly for housing policymakers from the Jimmy Carter presidency through the Bill Clinton years, that remains the final word on housing. Yet, for citizens excluded from the housing marketplace by chronic racial discrimination, gender, or very low income, the shimmering promise of a public-private partnership solution to America's historic low-income housing conundrum remains unfulfilled, even today.