

Adequate & Affordable Housing for All

Research, Policy, Practice

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Represent¹: The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance and its struggle against the imposition of the Neoliberal agenda: Background, theoretical framing and preliminary conclusions

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“Modern” spatial practice might thus be defined—to take an extreme but significant case—by the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project. Lefebvre, The Production of Space

Abstract

This research looked at how a group of public housing tenants in New York City (The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance—NYCPHRA) have responded to the neoliberal environment of the late 20th—early 21st century.² The focus of the research is NYCPHRA’s work to win further implementation of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act. Section 3 mandates that all renovation and construction activities within public housing give priority to employing public housing residents. Section 3 has gone largely unimplemented since 1968. Nearly 30 years after its passage public housing activists and advocates sought to

¹ To stand up for or be down with something. “I represent the Bronx.” (http://members.tripod.com/the_yz/dictionary/q-r.html) ; To make a good showing; to stand up for, to be a role model, to give respect to. “I don’t care where you started out from, now that you are here you’ve got to represent.” (www.bhs.berkeley.k12.ca.us/departments/english/slang_dictionary.htm); To represent the real, to do something the way it should be done. (www.xent.com/FoRK-archive/spring96/0455.html)

² The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance (NYCPHRA), is a city-wide organization of public housing Tenant Associations from each of the 5 boroughs that have united in order to more effectively confront the challenges and attacks facing public housing and its residents. The NYCPHRA has been forced into a somewhat reactive position by the efforts to dismantle public housing that arose in the mid-1990s and continue at the time of writing. They inform and organize residents, represent resident interests to the New York City Housing Authority, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and to elected officials. They also work proactively on issues of high importance to residents, including activities related to increasing training and employment opportunities.

resurrect and implement Section 3 in their search for possible counters to the new austerities in social welfare programs, including efforts to repeal rent caps in public housing (The Brooke Amendment) and to place limits on the amount of time that a household can spend in public housing. Its efforts to win further implementation of Section 3, the NYCPHRA formed alliances with an array of organizations with which it had not previously interacted, including, most importantly, building trade unions including the Carpenter's Union and the Painter's Union.

The responses of the NYCPHRA to the neoliberal environment are important to consider for a number of reasons. Neoliberalism is here understood to be the predominance in policies and practices in the US of the rule of the market, cutting taxes, reducing public expenditure for social services, deregulation, privatization, and elimination of the concept of "the public good" or "community" and replacing it with "individual responsibility." (Martinez and Garcia, 1997). Ignoring the historical and structural impediments faced by inner-city public housing residents, an important and defining characteristic of the neoliberal agenda, is to the severe detriment of individuals in the inner-city and the communities there.

The research, which is informed by a combination of theoretical frameworks, considers the weight of the material and political history of public housing in the US, and the history of social movements concerned with housing in light of the way that the spaces of public housing are produced by both neoliberal policies and practices and by grassroots groups. I take into consideration the usual ebbs and flows of everyday life in public housing (social reproduction in public housing) and the ways in which life in public housing has confronted (sometimes more successfully than others) obstacles placed in its path by the neoliberal disregard for the needs of public housing residents. I also look at the NYCPHRA and its work to implement Section 3 through the lens of geographic scale and through the historical and analytical view of a structural racism perspective.

Via a set of extensive interviews, document review and participant observation, the research examines the Resident Alliance's Section 3 activities in the current neoliberal context as it manifests in legislation, policies and practices surrounding public housing, employment issues, and activism (or social movements) in New York City.

Introduction

In 2003, tenants in public housing in New York City tend to fall in the categories of low- to very-low income, minority, single female head of household, unemployed or "working poor," and with limited educational background.³ Many programs exist in public housing to address the poverty, joblessness and limited educational opportunity that have become its characteristic. Some efforts are funded and implemented by the New York City municipal government, the US government, charitable organizations, religious organizations, and groups with social justice orientations. Other such efforts are sponsored and run by public housing tenants themselves. This research has focused on one such group: The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance. The Resident Alliance is a group of tenant organizations from public housing projects in each of the five boroughs of New York City.

The Resident Alliance was founded in 1998 in the wake of the passage of federal legislation that drastically reduced/changed the nature of government involvement in the social welfare of poor people. All forms of welfare benefits, including shelter and food subsidies were

³ Community Service Society, 1999.

affected by this legislation at federal, state and city levels.⁴ In the case of public housing residents for whom the Alliance was fighting, what was at stake were measures that would require residents to perform “volunteer” labor in order to remain in public housing, as well as measures that would have imposed time limits on tenancy and allowed tenants to be evicted “at the authority’s pleasure when leases expired”⁵ (Community Service Society, 1999). While this legislation can be understood in a number of ways, including in terms of reform of a flawed and often counterproductive welfare system, the Resident Alliance’s perspective on the legislation is that it posed threats to the very livelihoods and survival of public housing residents. The formation of the Resident Alliance can be understood as a means of defending public housing residents from the imposition of laws and practices that *claimed* to have the best interests of residents and communities in mind, but which instead were examples of neoliberal tendencies within the realm of social policy law that made it both legal and culturally acceptable to disregard and diminish the welfare of poor people. It is important to note that the brand of neoliberalism that became prominent in the 1990s, and continues its prominence at the time of writing, is a quantifiably severe brand, particularly in terms of state concern and involvement with public welfare and public welfare programs.⁶

While public housing residents often find their lives satisfying in the realms of family life and personal accomplishment, they also understand the structural realities of everyday life to be complicated and often exceedingly difficult: employment opportunities are limited, schools fail to prepare students or to provide them with access to gainful positions in universities or the labor market, and crime and violence are regular occurrences. Representatives of the state, the media, and neoliberal discourse, on the other hand, constitute life in public housing as filled with “welfare queens,” lazy people and thugs who need new regimes of discipline and work. An example of such neoliberal discourse is evidenced in the writing of conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation that aim (and often succeed) to influence the direction of public policy. In a testimony before the congressional Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, Robert Rector, a prominent member of the Heritage Foundation’s staff, expressed the following:

When undergoing annual re-certification, residence by current tenants should not be automatically extended. Instead, able-bodied, non-elderly heads of household should be placed in

⁴ Personal Responsibility Act of 1995 & Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998.

⁵ The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the New York City Housing Authority began to press for and implement eviction procedures more frequently as part of plans to reduce the role of government in housing provision and other social services, and to turn over the oversight of such institutions to the private sector since there is a perceived absence of public will for spending public money on social welfare programs. One way of achieving a smaller fiscal role for the government is to have people move into public housing who can pay higher rents. By having easy vehicles for eviction of tenants, the Authority makes it easier to free up apartments, accept tenants with higher incomes, and so reduce expenditures. The more vacant apartments that a private owner can do with as they wish, the easier it will be to turn over buildings to private owners.

⁶ In an editorial in *The New York Times*, Matthew Miller describes the situation in the following way: Consider one of the most pressing issues, health care. [Democratic senators] have unveiled plans to expand coverage that are more modest than the proposal offered by President George H.W. Bush in 1992 . . . On the supposedly “liberal” side, Howard Dean, John Kerry and Richard Gephardt say they eventually want to cover everyone. But in the years ahead their various plans would reach perhaps 30 million of today’s 41 million uninsured. No serious Democratic contender today would endorse Richard Nixon’s plans from the early 1970s for universal health coverage and a minimum family income: Nixon’s package was far too liberal. (Matthew Miller, September 4, 2003).

a selection pool along with similar new applicants. Priority in selecting residents for the next year from within this pool should be given to those applicants with the best record of employment and/or other constructive activity. It is important to note that this system would not penalize those cannot find formal employment since they would be given credit for performing other constructive activity. The system would, however, send the very strong message that idleness would not be tolerated for able-bodied individuals within assisted housing (Rector, 2002).

Residents of public housing and inner city communities were in the past recognized as largely shut out of opportunity structures of education and unemployment and so truly in need of government assistance (in its different forms) both for the sake of the individuals in question and for the society at large. The current social and political climate, however, makes no such concessions. It is important to understand the neoliberal turn, which has been gaining momentum since at least the Nixon administration (1969-1974) especially as it relates to the context of public housing, jobs and tenant activism, and the ways in which its representatives understand and “deal with” populations who have not been granted a place on the coattails of neoliberal prosperity.

Recognizing that extremely limited access to living wage employment is a major obstacle faced by many public housing residents in New York City⁷, in 1998, actors from across a number of sectors, including public housing residents, public housing tenant associations (including the Resident Alliance), labor unions, community organizing groups, as well as a small number of elected officials have focused on the Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968. Section 3 requires that public housing authorities (PHA) across the US hire and train “low and very low income people/public housing residents to work on federally funded construction, renovation and economic development initiatives that are undertaken within public housing as a way to broaden access to training and employment opportunities for public housing residents.” Despite its admirable intentions, Section 3 has been little implemented by PHAs across the US. Section 3 lay dormant for many years after its passage in 1968, but renewed interest was directed towards it after the 1992 race riots in Los Angeles (The National Congress for Community and Economic Development, 2001). Others suggest that welfare reform also spurred renewed interest in the Act. (Bailey, et. al., 1996).

Contexts: historical & social

The Resident Alliance’s development has taken place in the midst of two particularly important historical and social contexts:

- The evolution of public housing in the US since it was created in 1937
- The waning of Keynesianism and the rise of neoliberalism in the US.

US public housing was created during the Great Depression when capitalism was clearly in crisis. The government provided some but not full support in financing it. Strong opposition to public housing was voiced by representatives of the real estate industry and those who opposed it on ideological grounds as “socialism.” Public housing was established, it is important to note, not necessarily because there was widespread support for government subsidized housing, but because via the construction of public housing, jobs were created. For a

⁷ More than half of resident households in public housing in New York City have incomes below the poverty level (55%), and more than half (53%) are on public assistance. Thirty-five percent of residents are working families (Community Service Society, 1999).

time, from the 1940s until the late 1960s, belief in government intervention in social welfare and in the regulation of business largely held sway in the US. But by the early 1970s many US corporations became dissatisfied with profit margins and acted in the interest of recapturing profit gains. These actions were accompanied by a logic to justify them, the logic of neoliberalism which evolved in corporate and conservative think tanks, among other places.

Because the formation of the Resident Alliance, as well as the Resident Alliance's Section 3 activities, were prompted by the imposition of neoliberal legislation and practice, it is important to understand the neoliberal environment in which the Resident Alliance works. For example, the idea of "individual responsibility" as if individuals exist in a vacuum is one of the current hallmarks of the discourse surrounding public housing. Neoliberalism pulls the economic rug out from under people, and then charges them with cleaning up the mess, all the while making it seem as if the neoliberal forces themselves are giving public housing residents and others an "opportunity" to exercise individual responsibility. Another way that the current dominance of the neoliberal perspective affects the subjects of this research is via the professionalization, or near-commodification, of grassroots organizations. In order to penetrate the systems that dominate the spaces of their lives (governmental and economic), activists must play by the rules of business, of proposal writing, of foundation-established "best practices" and evaluation strategies.

Producing the Spaces of Public Housing in New York City

The quote that opens this paper refers to Lefebvre's definitions of spatial practice. *Spatial practice*, along with *representations of space*, and *representational space*, form the conceptual triad that is fundamental to *The Production of Space*. In the opening quotation Lefebvre used the example of everyday life in government housing to exemplify his definition of spatial practice. Spatial practice under capitalism is "dominated" space, it is the actual space where struggles over the production of space are carried out. This contention over the production of space emanates from the struggle between two other distinct spaces: representations of space and representational space. *Representations of space* refers to space created according to the logic of capital accumulation, it is "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived . . . this is the dominant space in any society." (pp 38-39). *Representational space*, on the other hand, is space created according to the logics of experiences grounded in everyday life, "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' . . . This is the dominated . . . space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate." (p 39). This struggle over the production of space can be seen in the case of public housing and in the work of the Resident Alliance: where there is contestation over the space produced according to the abstract logic of capital accumulation (representations of space) and its production by logics that come from experiences of everyday life (representational space).

Representations of space is a fitting way of conceptualizing the spaces of public housing, both social spaces and physical spaces, that the Department of Housing and Urban Development and its municipal satellite in New York City, the New York City Housing Authority, produce. In the recent phase of neoliberal leadership in the US and its public works, planning for and administration of public housing itself does not take place from the perspective of residents' well-being residents, but instead from, to borrow Lefebvre's phrasing, from "the logic of capital

accumulation.” On the other hand, representational space as described by Lefebvre is a fitting way of conceptualizing the space that the Resident Alliance produces vis-à-vis its advocacy efforts, which work to inform and influence policies that most affect public housing residents with the organic knowledge that comes from living out everyday life in public housing.

In its own words, The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance “is a citywide organization of concerned public housing residents seeking to improve our homes and communities. Our purpose is to inform and connect residents so that we can have a strong and effective voice and secure greater accountability in government decisions that affect public housing in New York City.” Below is a list of some of the Resident Alliance’s activities of the past several years:

- The Alliance has pressed for repeal of the community service requirement as it appears in the 1998 law.⁸ Under this provision, adult residents must contribute 8 hours monthly to “voluntary” community service or face eviction. Many residents consider this provision to be akin to forced labor. The Alliance worked to inform and mobilize residents to deal with then imminent New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) implementation of the service requirement.
- The Alliance has created a resident voice at the Washington, DC level to press Congress to eliminate the community service requirement. On May 8, 2001, the Alliance met with the New York City Congressional delegation and provided them with a clearer understanding of the implications of the community service requirements on the everyday lives of residents.
- In the middle of 2000, NYCHA implemented a new lease for all of its residents. The new lease was required under the 1998 federal law, but both its content and its implementation raised a good deal of confusion and anxiety among resident leaders. The Alliance conducted a series of workshops—at community and citywide levels—to inform residents about the lease provisions and advise them on how to deal with NYCHA when they were asked to sign the lease.
- In the Spring of 2001, the New York City Council held hearings on Section 3 of the federal law that requires housing authorities to create employment and training opportunities for public housing residents. Members of the Alliance testified at these hearings.
- More than 12 informational meetings were conducted for residents by the Alliance on the community service requirement.

I have examined the range of the New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance’s activities to improve public housing, and especially the Alliance’s activities to advocate for broader implementation of Section 3.

Following were the main questions guiding the research:

1. How are the Resident Alliance’s efforts to facilitate and secure the production and reproduction of social life, especially via their Section 3 efforts, spatialized?

⁸ Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998.

For example, who does the Resident Alliance encounter and interact with in its Section 3 advocacy efforts?

2. What space is *produced* by the Resident Alliance's efforts?

For example, what are the tangible results of the Resident Alliance's Section 3 efforts?

3. What is the space where the social life and social order aspects of social reproduction meet in the Resident Alliance's efforts?

For example, in the language of 'production of space,' what new space is created via the interactions that the Resident Alliance has in its advocacy for resident-centered public housing, and especially for Section 3 implementation? What 'oppositional space' is created in the meeting of the Resident Alliances (representational space) with those who have power over the implementation of Section 3 (representations of space)?

4. How is the hegemony of neoliberalism in the US surrounding the Resident Alliance's activities, especially their Section 3 efforts, spatially expressed and enforced?

For example, what types of spaces, places and practices thwart the Resident Alliance's Section 3 activities?

5. How, via jumping scales, does the Resident Alliance rescript stereotypes of public housing residents and reproduce the scales of their lives?

For example, what effect does the Resident Alliance working on the Section 3 issue as a *citywide* organization have that is different from the effect that individual public housing Tenant Associations have been able to have?

6. How has the role of tenant activist become 'professionalized'?

For example, how have the demands of tenant activists been delegitimized to the point where their demands or assertions are ignored unless they follow business formats, for example grant proposal writing, evaluation procedures, following "best practices," etc.? Have the operations of the RA changed over the last # years? What is the nature of these changes? Are these changes associated with the tendency toward the grassroots organizations conforming their practices to those of business? And has the 'professionalization' of grassroots activists like the Resident Alliance been a way of distancing decision-makers and the gatekeepers of resources of resources vital to a community like that of public housing residents from those activists who represent their needs?

These questions are considered in light of the following theoretical frameworks:

- The relationship of the Resident Alliance's work to processes and theories of social reproduction

- The Resident Alliance's Section 3 activities as a social movement/tenant movement in light of both the production of space and the production of scale, and
- The context of structural racism in the US as it relates to issues of housing, public housing, employment and government-sponsored employment initiatives like Section 3.

This research, focused on public housing, is at the intersection of some of the most contested areas of social life: distribution of social goods, community activism, struggles around race, labor, class, gender, political practices under neoliberalism. It considers in particular the relationships between a) threats to the production of the household, community and urban environments, and b) the intervention of activists.

Public Housing

Historical perspectives on public housing in the US show it to have been a highly contested program from its inception. Domestic perspectives on the US's public housing program can be divided into 3 basic camps: Some believe it has gone wrong and should be demolished (Husock, 1997); others believe it is a flawed program that should be tolerated, but reformed (Hornburg & Lang, 1997); and still others believe that public housing is a potential source of social well-being and should be enhanced (Spense, 1993). There was never great support for public housing⁹ in the US (Radford, 1996). It was introduced during a period of severe, widespread national economic crisis. Its creation and construction were tolerated because of the degree and magnitude of displacement, homelessness and social unrest in the 1930s and because of the employment opportunities that such large scale construction might offer.

It is important to understand and account for the ideological environments in which public housing has existed. It was born at a time when housing and jobs for those who did not have them was an urgent need. In his book, *The Federal Government and Urban Change: Ideology and Change in Public Policy* Hays describes the degree to which ideology has borne considerable weight and influence on housing questions in the US as follows:

...characterized by: (1) a lack of consensus as to the basic validity of government intervention of behalf of the poor in general; and (2) a lack of consensus as to the need for the government to provide adequate housing to those who cannot purchase it on the private market. A substantial segment of the political/economic elite stratum of American society has felt, with varying degrees of consistency and intensity, that such government activity is inimical to the long-term well being of a capitalist economy. They have opposed or tried to curtail such activities at every turn. They have occupied key leadership positions at various times throughout the last five decades and have had a major impact on housing policy outcomes, despite the legislative, bureaucratic, and constituency interests supporting a public role in housing and community development.

Hays also identifies ways that this environment has negatively affected "government" housing. "Among the most important are: 1) a consistently low level of resources (in relation to need) . . . ; 2) feedback regarding the difficulties encountered by various programs has been used to argue for their curtailment or abolition rather than as knowledge useful for their improvement . . . ; and 3) constant fluctuations in program design between opponents and proponents of government

⁹ There were, in fact, important forces opposed to it. The real estate industry feared de-commodification of the nation's housing stock; and, because it was perceived as a socialistic program, it faced ideological opposition as it was feared that it would undermine the dominance of the private property system.

involvement.” To paraphrase Hays, the need for public housing, or subsidized housing in general, runs contrary to dominant narratives of equality of opportunity, meritocracy, and upward mobility. Belief in these “national values,” however, is crucial to the reproduction of the political economy of the United States. Since the situation of public housing casts serious doubt upon these national values, it ends up being cast in a negative light in order to preserve, more or less, the national values and production and reproduction of the social order.

Hays is not alone in his findings. Halpern (1995), Bratt, (1993); and Salzer (1998) make similar assertions about the ideology against public housing reinforcing itself, and becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy (through site selection, target population, etc.). They point to the lack of regard that has been given to the impoverished opportunity context—failed schools, high unemployment, low-wage opportunities—to which public housing residents (and inner-city residents more generally) are the heirs (Salzer, 1998; Smith, J. 2000). Public housing residents, and residents of low-income communities more generally, are not understood in terms of the context in which they are situated, but in terms of an imposed context which decontextualizes public housing residents and gives an appearance that the insecure social positions occupied by many public housing residents are matters of individual choices, completely erasing historical and structural legacies. Decontextualization facilitates domination of everyday life in public housing by making it easier for abstract ideologically-based policies to govern everyday life in public housing instead of policies informed by the real experience of living in public housing.

While the contradictory and often despised status of public housing can be traced to its contested origin, it might be more useful to think about public housing, tenant activity there, and programs like Section 3 in terms of the neoliberal decision-making process as having *exploited* these original contradictions surrounding public housing. The result is public housing communities across the United States that are cut off from quality resources (especially educational), often unprepared and excluded from the workforce, and stigmatized to the point of having little to no public sympathy for their situation.

Public Housing Residents and their Position in the Workforce

Another way of understanding public housing is to look at what segment of the labor force has resided there in public housing’s lifetime of nearly 70 years (Marcuse, 1995). Public housing tenants have historically been groups that were either a) necessary to the interests of the nation at the time that the housing was constructed, or b) groups that the labor system does not absorb or accommodate and have fallen on or developed in extremely hard times. For instance, when the US federal government passed the Public Housing Act of 1937, it was to alleviate the misery and unrest of the Great Depression and therefore to house people suffering the consequences of long-term unemployment. Later, during World War II, it provided housing for the workers who were needed for the war effort. After the war and during the era of “slum clearance,” veterans and the labor required by post-war prosperity became public housing’s typical residents (Marcuse, 1995, 1986, 1982; Freedman, 1969; Friedman, 1973a and b; Bellush & Hausknecht, 1973; Radford, 1996). When the limits of post-war prosperity were reached in the late 1960s and 1970s and unemployment levels were at new highs, especially among minorities in deindustrializing cities, public housing became the major reliable source of housing for a segment of the labor force no longer required by the local economy. The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were dominated by two important background points: 1) conservative governments (led by the the Nixon, Reagan, and two Bush administrations) marked by intolerance for publicly funded housing and social programs, and 2) the abandonment of manufacturing bases especially in the older US cities, the

effects of which were readily visible on the inner city communities in which the majority of public housing is located.

Starting in 1998 and continuing to the present time, public housing residents who are not employed were constituted as potential participants in the “Work Experience Program,” commonly known as “workfare.” With the passage of the 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, Section 509 of this law began to require eight hours per month of community service of public housing residents. Public housing residents could also “opt” for participating in a self-sufficiency program in lieu of community service. The elderly, disabled, employed, and others with prior state exemption certificates were considered exempt, but all others would have been required to participate and risked losing their leases if they were ‘non-compliant.’ Interpreting this measure as unduly punitive public housing residents in New York City protested in great numbers. The Resident Alliance and its allies undertook a special campaign directed at NYCHA and HUD to resist the measure. While they were not able to overturn the measure entirely, they did succeed in gaining the support of NYCHA to broaden the categories of who would be exempt from the requirement. They also gained NYCHA as an ally in the fight against the community service requirement since while the federal government mandated the requirement, insufficient resources have been granted to local authorities to implement the measure. NYCHA stands to lose its federal funding if it does not comply with enforcing the community service requirement and therefore must comply to a certain degree, but, in an interesting and telling turn of events, NYCHA and the RA ended up fighting the same fight to increase the types and number of residents who would be exempt.

In light of the long-running relationship between public housing and work, the focus of this research—activism and employment in public housing, particularly the Resident Alliance’s activities to get Section 3 jobs for residents—is especially relevant because it sheds light on the nature of US society, how it is reproduced, and the roles that work and housing play. It also points to the shifting lines in the contestations over work between workers/potential workers and the actors who control access to work, as well as what can be thought about in terms of a gradual dispossession of urban workers. The Resident Alliance’s efforts towards further implementation of Section 3 are indirect measures being taken towards producing a space of public housing that is different from what currently exists. They are working to increase the number of people who have jobs, and who therefore bring money and other resources into the community. The Resident Alliance’s efforts are met, however, by a number of obstacles generated by the contestations and contradictions surrounding public housing, as described above, as well as by contradictions of the Section 3 jobs program itself, which is detailed in the following section.

Section 3

Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 required all federally funded public housing authorities (PHA’s) to “the greatest extent feasible, economic opportunities created by HUD funding for the operation, development and modernization of public housing be steered to low and very low-income people, especially public housing residents” (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996). As with the creation of public housing, Section 3 was created in response to social unrest. The following is an excerpt from the introduction of the act in a 1968 report by the United States Congress Committee on Banking and Currency:

A basic factor in the magnitude and urgency of our present housing problems has been the failure to include all parts of our population in the general rise in incomes and wealth. In fact this growth of prosperity has accentuated and may have even widened the gap between the poverty of the approximately 6 million families who still live in substandard housing and the affluent majority. Because of this contrast and the unrest it has created, the task of our housing and urban development programs is more critical than ever. (United States Congress, 90th Congress, 1968).

Nearly 40 years later, the challenge to “include all parts of our population in the general rise in wealth...” remains unmet. A report on the Section 3 program in the late 1990s commissioned by the Department of Housing and Urban Development stated the following: “The public housing population has grown poorer and progressively more disadvantaged over the last 30 years, adding urgency” (p 2).

As mentioned above, Section 3 went almost unnoticed and certainly underutilized for more than 20 years. The mandates of Section 3 were strengthened in 1992 with amendments to the 1968 Act, and again in 2001 with the Housing and Employment Opportunities Reform Act (HR 2243 IH). After the 1992 Act was passed, HUD commissioned a report from the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. The report, which was published in 1996, looked at the viability of Section 3 as a tool for creating jobs and promoting economic independence. It stated that the potential of Section 3 alone to provide adequate empowerment (employment) opportunities was not reliable since the awkwardly positioned initiative was confronted by an overwhelming set of obstacles including “the realities of the labor market, supply and demand imbalances, institutional and legal constraints, [fact of work disincentive/smarter not to work, fear of instable work environment and of loss of public housing], the small business environment, and the needs and capabilities of public housing residents” (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996). The program has also suffered from lack of implementation and enforcement on the local level, and thus has not realized its potential (report).

MDRC also recommended that Section 3 implementation continue, but with the caveat that it should be part of an *array* of community building efforts. It offered a 3-pronged strategy consisting of 1) work incentives, 2) rent reform, and 3) use of best training and employment programs. According to the report, PHAs with the “highest level of formalized resident involvement” had the strongest Section 3 programs. The report states, “The challenge of moving large numbers of unemployed residents into jobs will require dramatic changes in the ways PHAs operate.” It recommended large scale collaboration with community partners, where community partners are understood to include: the welfare system; the employment and training system; the education system; the private sector; the local community; and civic organizations (p. 69). Collaboration of the depth and scale recommended by the report had the intended outcomes of “facilitating empowerment of residents, breaking isolation of public housing communities, forging partnerships with the private sector, and creating linkages with social service systems.” The MDRC report clearly revealed the complexities of Section 3 and the significant organizational commitments that would be required to make it a reality.

However, despite the complicated nature of Section 3, the Resident Alliance has chosen it as one of their projects. The next section places the Section 3 aspect of the Alliance’s overall strategy in the context of struggles over social reproduction or efforts by social movements to influence social reproduction.

Activism in Public Housing

Historically, tenant movements have been able to achieve major victories in the US under two different circumstances. The first has been during times such as the first half of the twentieth century, when there were a political movements supporting either a bona fide tenant movement or tenant-related issues such as the Socialist & Communist parties, labor unions, and blacks and women who identified as a group for the sake of solidarity (Marcuse, 1999). The second was when there were crises in the economic system, for example during the period of landlord abandonment in the 1970s and 1980s, which afforded opportunities for tenant activists to galvanize as a group with a particular set of interests (see Lawson & Naison, 1984). This has been true of New York City and of US cities in general.

Once public housing was secured and constructed, tenant activism around it more or less fell off the radar screens of scholars and has since received little academic attention. Public tenants as a group or constituency with “movement potential” seem to be “forgotten,” or at least not included in the frame.¹⁰ It is possible that this is because scholars most often focus on areas in which activity is taking place, as in the Lawson and Naison study (1984). There was very little “tenant movement” activity in the public housing environment, even though, in many cases, prevailing conditions warranted it. Over time public housing tenants to a large degree had become ‘clientized,’ tenants were expected to pay their rent and follow regulations. They were not encouraged or expected to participate in the political or administrative aspects of their housing developments (source?). While mandatory tenant associations were set up in every public housing development in New York City, it was intended by the Housing Authority that these groups focus almost exclusively on social and recreational activities. From the outset active political engagement on the part of tenant associations was only partially tolerated by NYCHA (Schwartz, 1986). More recently, in the mid- and late-1990s in New York, under the mayoralty of Rudolph Giuliani, enacted a measure that forbade public housing residents and elected officials to convene on New York City Housing Authority grounds without the written permission of Housing Authority officials.

Peter Marcuse’s efforts to understand in broad historical context the nature of housing movements in the US (1999) led him to attempt an understanding of tenant movements as social movements—a frame that he claims his research does not support. Using definitions of social movements as put forth by Garner (see Marcuse, 1999) and Castells (1983), which both indicate structural change as a goal and or result of social movements, Marcuse asserts that tenant movements never “seriously demanded basic changes in the housing system” (p. 81). And, like other housing scholars (Drier, 1984; Lawson & Naison, 1984), Marcuse notes that tenant activity of the 20th century has been largely reactive or defensive. He advocates looking at “not so much the independent role of housing in [movement] histories, but at the linkages between housing and those broader concerns that did in fact produce movements and movement.”

A question worth asking, then, is whether housing movements in the US have not achieved social movement status, in terms of not challenging the underlying structure of housing distribution because such movements have been disinclined to do so as a result of practical considerations or philosophical beliefs, or whether housing activists have been especially *prevented* from challenging the structure. While constantly being put in a defensive position has

¹⁰ Studies of resident activity have focused mostly on small scale anti-drug or anti-graffiti initiatives or on site specific economic development that take place within one or two housing projects (Marcuse, 1999; Keys, 1992; Breitbart & Pader, 1995).

historically undermined housing, including public housing, as a rallying point for progressive social movements, a more recent problem in this regard can be identified in the *professionalization* of housing activists. Professionalization of housing activism takes the form of housing activists being required by the institutions governing housing distribution refusing to communicate with activists on any terms other than “professional.” Activists then, become more involved in grant writing, record keeping, bureaucratic navigation, and the like, diminishing their time and energies as activists. And while professionalization perhaps provides an antidote to clientization,¹¹ when it is required of tenant advocates and activists without appropriate assistance (such as providing tenant associations with introduction or access to grant writers when they are required to submit proposals in order to carry out community activities), it becomes a significant obstacle to achieving their goals.

One example of this situation came to light in August of 2003. Large amounts of money were made available for resident participation activities in New York City public housing. Tenant Associations were supposed to write proposals for the money that would allow them to use it to support their work. The application was a complicated process, with any activity over \$5,000. requiring a formal bidding process. NYCHA held a small number of workshops on grant-writing to help to prepare TA leaders to request the money. The workshops, it was reported by tenant leaders who attended them, were not very informative. Out of 346 developments under the jurisdiction of NYCHA, only 5 developments submitted proposals. I wrote two of the proposals for two individual developments (The James Weldon Johnson Houses and The Thomas Jefferson Houses) at the request of Ethel Velez, president of the Johnson Houses and Executive Director of the Resident Alliance. A group within NYCHA, remarking on the paucity of proposals, launched an investigation into the proposal process, alleging that it was unfair and not inclusive enough. The launching of the investigation, in turn, froze the money, which then was not available to any tenant association until the investigation was complete. While there is validity to the allegations that the proposal process was not inclusive enough, the fact remains that now the resources are frozen and not in the communities being put to use. It is also not clear that the allegations were brought against the process on entirely forthright premises, and tenant leaders fear that the investigation is but another misappropriation of funds and attempt to starve out resident participation.

There is an important connection between housing activism (as a non-social movement per Marcuse) and activism around Section 3 because of their combined potential toward the social movement Peter Marcuse, among others, has identified. Section 3, especially because of its relationship to unions and to work could provide the needed traction or momentum on which a social movement could rely (Levi, 2001). A connection with unions and employment issues may have more potential to produce space and to allow for jumping of the scale of current activity. This would follow Marcuse as he advocates looking at “not so much the independent

¹¹ This view of ‘professionalization’ as an antidote to clientization is a valid one. Saegert, Thompson and Warren (2001) argue that “social transformation capable of addressing the root causes of poverty requires a paradigm shift in public policy discourse from a view of poor people as the passive object of social policy to view them as equal participants and leaders in policy-making and implementation. A social capital building strategy then requires that public discourse about poverty be infused with new mechanisms that enable poor people to participate more fully in shaping their own destinies and the future of American society.” (p. 23). What is troubling about the current phase of what *may* be such a shift, is it’s the tokenistic and “bait and switch” manner in which “resident participation” is currently treated.

role of housing in [movement] histories, but at the linkages between housing and those broader concerns that did in fact produce movements and movement.”

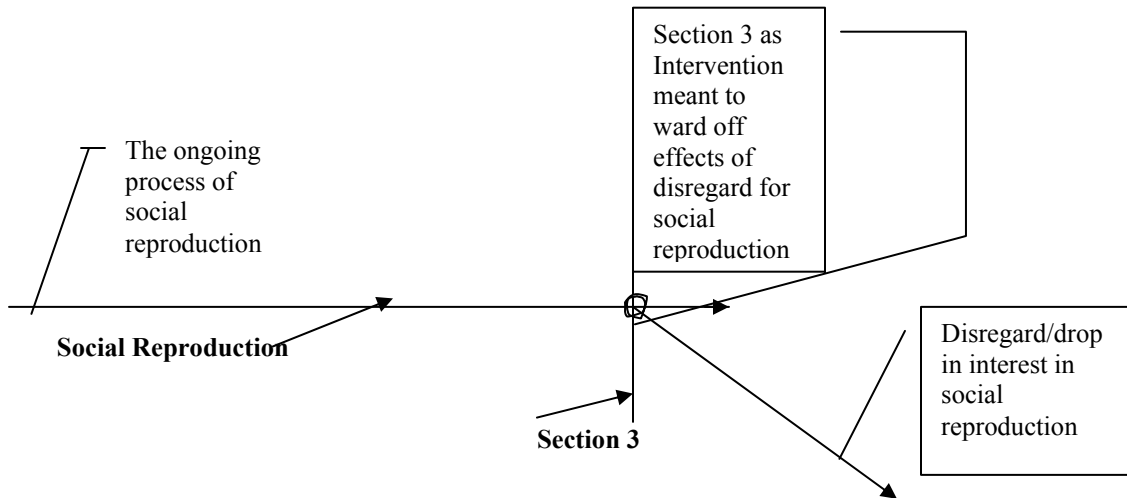
Theoretical Perspectives

Social Reproduction

Social reproduction theory is often applied to questions of how class status is reproduced unchanged through generations (Willis, 1977), the degree to which either structure or agency determine outcomes for individuals (MacLoyd, 1987), and the ways in which capitalism is able to reproduce the conditions for its survival. In the case of the Resident Alliance’s activities to secure increased Section 3 job opportunities, however, social reproduction theory is following the lead of those like Katz (2001), who are looking at how the current era is witnessing new formats of disregard for the concerns of social reproduction.

Social reproduction is here understood to encompass biological reproduction, the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, labor force production, as well as the reproduction of cultural forms and practices that maintain a social formation at a particular level of development (Katz, 2001). Social reproduction theory aims to understand how class structures are reproduced from one generation to the next. “They attempt to unravel how and why the poor are at a decided disadvantage in the scramble for good jobs” (MacLeod, 1987).

The connection between social reproduction and Section 3 jobs is as follows: Section 3 was introduced (by its creators and by those who seek to implement it) as a way to provide skills and income to public housing residents, which can be conceptualized as supporting social reproduction in poor public housing communities. Access to the material means of social reproduction have been and are increasingly beyond the reach of the poor residents of inner city public housing. As Katz (2001) also notes, “Disregard for the concerns of social reproduction is visible in the landscapes of neglect common in urban areas of both industrialized and underdeveloped countries.” Inner city communities across the US experienced the relocation of the extant industry and hence disappearance of jobs. Once jobs and income were gone, the labor of people in such communities was no longer as required as had been the case during the first six or seven decades of the twentieth century. The combination of the lack of jobs, eroded tax bases because of the disinvestments of the 1970s and its subsequent inability to support public institutions like education, together with existing inclinations against government involvement in social welfare translated into the absence of sufficient power and will invested in those who had been disinvested of employment. The discontinuation of many social welfare benefits starting in the mid-1990s, as has been discussed in the pages above, has contributed to the challenges that public housing residents face in ensuring social reproduction—including having enough to eat (biological reproduction) and having access to social and cultural institutions like adequate schools. The diagram below is a graphic depiction of the relationship between the concept of social reproduction and the Section 3 mandate. It is the intersection of the Section 3 as an intervention with the drop in interest and involvement on the part of the state in the US that is of particular interest for this part of the research.



Section 3 of the law, and the Resident Alliance's efforts can be understood within this framework as efforts to ensure social reproduction. Biological, cultural and political economic reproduction, as subsets of social reproduction are vital to the endeavors of the Resident Alliance, with wages (jobs), knowledge (education, training and work experience), and political power the contested mediators determining the conditions in which everyday life is carried out.

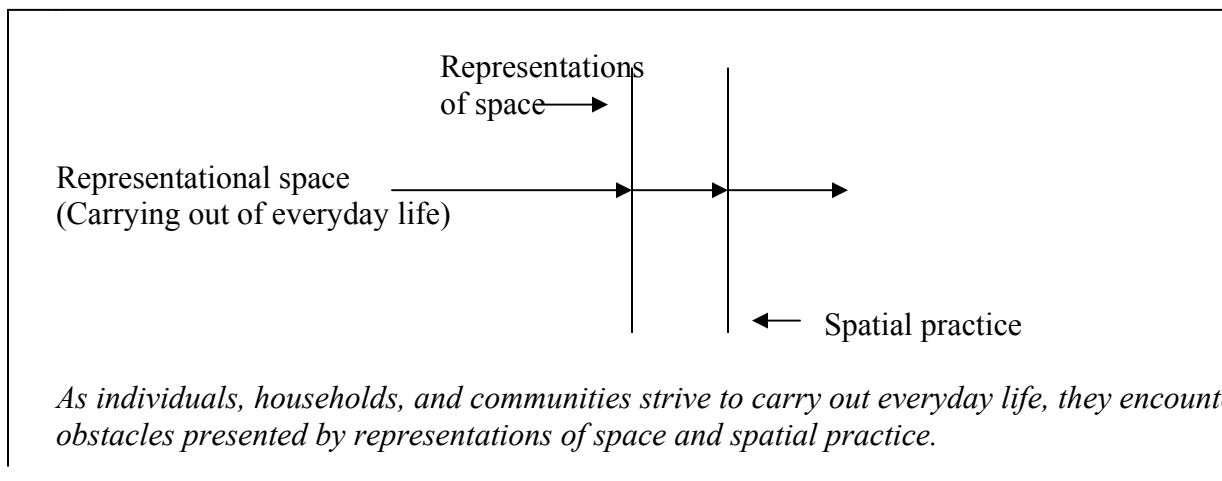
Examination of the Resident Alliance's activities to gain Section 3 jobs for residents from a perspective of social reproduction theory provides important vantage point on differing logics of social reproduction and how, to varying degrees, everyday practice is able to influence the dominant structures that determine the conditions of social reproduction. Or, as MacLeod put it, "in the process of social reproduction, what is the relationship between structural forces and cultural innovation?" (1987). And what is the relationship between cultural innovation, collective action and effecting broad change? For, as Saegert, Thompson and Warren have noted, "If we want to make headway in combating poverty, if we want people to "get ahead," survival is not enough" (2001).

Production of Space

Janet Smith (2000), has pointed out that US housing policy is a "space producing activity," but one that "excludes key historical and contextual factors which local government and PHAs will need to take on if public housing is to be effectively transformed" (Smith, year). Both McCann (1999) and Gottdeiner (2000) have also pointed to the need for informing Lefebvrian theory with the racialized urban context of the US. Examination of the Resident Alliance's Section 3 work provides a timely and specific opportunity to respond to this call. The landscapes and struggles created in tandem with everyday life and social reproduction are the particular concern of theories of the production of space.

As explicated earlier in the proposal, the three pivotal concepts on which Lefebvre's *Production of Space* rests are a) representations of space, b) spatial practice, and c)

representational space.¹² It is the intersection of representational space with representations of space and spatial practice that is most relevant to the research. The Resident Alliance's activities can be seen as the actualization of what Lefebvre termed "representational space." The Alliance's activity voices the perspective and knowledge of residents and creates spaces that are derived from directly living in, using and inhabiting public housing—the knowledge that comes from public housing being the concrete reality of its residents. Spatial practice, on the other hand, and representations of space, are the two types of space with which Resident Alliance work clashes. Just as Smith (2000) notes, it is the problem of exclusion of contextual factors (the knowledge that emerges from representational space and lived experience) from the policy-making process to which attention must be drawn.



Production of Scale

I have found the concept of scale useful in understanding the contexts and dynamics surrounding the Resident Alliance's Section 3 work because of the breadth of domains to which public housing, tenant activity and employment issues are related. Scale is a "language of spatial differentiation" that refers to the distinctions between the body, the household, community, the urban, the region, the national and the global (Smith, 1992). It is "the produced societal metric that differentiates space..." (Marston & Smith, 2001). Socially constructed scale also signals the different manifestations of power relations. Marston has applied the concept of scale to 19th and 20th century women's movements and the household. Smith has applied the concept of scale to, among other issues, homelessness (1992), uneven development (2000) the politics of difference (1992).

"In a literal as much as metaphorical way, scale both contains social activity, and at the same time provides an already partitioned geography within which social activity *takes place*. Scale demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as the resolution of contest. ...It is geographical scale that defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted and contested." (Smith, 1992).

Both the conceptual and descriptive aspects of scale provide a framework that allows for more facile navigation of the complex and intertwined dynamics inherent both to public housing

¹² Insert definitions of each.

and to political activity on the part of public housing residents. While public housing is most often thought of as being on the community or urban scale, the situations affecting it are produced at national and global scales. The scales of everyday life in public housing in New York City range from that of the households in public housing, the work of the RA, the policies and practices of NYCHA, the private practices of hiring, etc., state and federal policies and practices, and the governing ideologies/hegemonies of the dominant political economy. The Resident Alliance challenges existing bounds of scale. Had they not united into an Alliance, singular tenant associations would be isolated to the scale of the individual housing project. In the act of uniting tenant associations within New York City, the Resident Alliance by definition changed their position in the scaling ‘process.’ To use Neil Smith’s term, the Resident Alliance has ‘jumped scales’ both in its formation and its organizing efforts.

Scalar Fix in Public Housing: Class, Gender and Structural Racism

The concept of the ‘scalar fix’ is also relevant to understanding the Resident Alliance and its Section 3 work in that the Alliance’s Section 3 work is an attempt to assist public housing residents in overcoming the constraints placed on them by discriminatory education and employment systems. A scalar fix is the imposition of scale, a socially constructed ‘boundary,’ which can be physical, social or psychological, that plays the role of *bounding* people and/or places. The most influential scalar fixes on the environments of public housing are class, race and gender (Bailey, et. al., 1996). Public housing developments in New York City are characterized by a majority female headed, minority households.

Due to the power configurations that over time have developed the distinctions of class, race and gender, each of these categories tend to burden or constrain the individuals who find themselves so-classified. Women, for example, continue to experience phenomena such as unequal pay for equal work. The responsibilities of childrearing also fall on the shoulders of women. Women are also more likely to fall into poverty and/or homelessness when household partnerships disintegrate.¹³ When compounded with ‘membership’ in a minority racial group, the odds of a person being confronted with material hardship are further increased. Race, class and gender as scalar fixes constrain well-being and potential, isolating individuals from opportunities that exist beyond the scales of the household and the community, leaving them without the financial, social or cultural resources that provide *entrée*, freedom of movement and participation in the arenas where control over power and resources is negotiated.

Race produces its own independent ‘scalar fix’. It is not possible to understand public housing or resident efforts to implement an employment program like Section 3 without considering of the historical contexts of racism in the US. The public housing constituency in New York City is decidedly minority. Race and public housing have a longstanding ‘engagement.’ Public housing was racially segregated when the program was created, and while some projects were desegregated between 1937 and the 1960s, it was not until 1968, with the passage of the Fair Housing Act (FHA) that housing segregation was outlawed. Even with the passage of the law, however, public housing remained largely segregated, with black and white

¹³ An additional gender dynamic that occurs in public housing is the denial or erasure of male presence there. This erasure, which is largely attributable to high incarceration rates among men, or to “[m]en who live and are actively involved in the community, but “invisible” to housing authority administration...in part because of both AFDC and HUD income eligibility guidelines, officially acknowledging the presence of men, especially those who are employed (even if only intermittently) is perceived as a significant threat to the continued receipt of benefits.” (Bailey, et. al, 1996).

projects the norm, until eventually very few white families resided in public housing in New York City (footnote on current percentage of white households in New York City Public Housing).

Scholars began using the term structural racism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. West (1993), Dyson (1993), and Riggs (1992) used the term to refer to “the ways in which racism is so deeply encoded in American society’s structure as to seem natural” (Birmingham, 1999). Having recognized a) that the civil rights paradigm has reached many of its limits in the changing atmosphere of US society, and b) that individual acts of discrimination have been replaced by structural impediments to the individual and community well-being of people of color, a structural racism analysis aims to articulate and dismantle:

...the many factors that work to produce and maintain racial inequities in the US today. It identifies aspects of history and culture that have allowed the privileges associated with “whiteness” and the disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. It also points to ways in which public policies and institutional practices produce inequitable racial outcomes. A structural racism lens highlights chronic racial disparities, power arrangements that perpetuate chronic disparities, general cultural assumptions and stereotypes that allow disparities to go unchallenged, the process of ‘progress and retrenchment,’ which describes how racial equity gains on some issues can be undermined by forces operating in other spheres or by oppositional actors, as well as political, regional and other contextual factors. (Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives, 2003).

A decade after the term’s inception, scholars like John Powell (forthcoming), Manning Marable (forthcoming/his book 2002), Keith Lawrence (2001), and Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres (2002) continue to build conceptually upon the term as well as move it into practice through their work in the fields of legal studies, regionalism advocacy, history, African American Studies and political science.

Both the configuration of public housing, historically and currently, and the activities of the Resident Alliance provide an excellent opportunity for examining the workings of structural racism analytically. A structural racism analysis works to understand how race is imposed, or how race works as a ‘scalar fix.’ Housing and employment, which my project identifies as the two priorities of the Resident Alliance’s work, are perhaps the two key arenas in which structural racial dynamics are in evidence. As Powell, Pastor, Omi (2003, forthcoming) note, “While conceptually distinct, racial ideologies and belief systems are mutually determined in concert with the institutional organization of the labor market, the allocation of housing, and the extension of political rights among other social arrangements.” Unfortunately, even though decision-making and resource allocation for public housing continues to be peppered with *discourses* of equal opportunity, meritocracy, they are, as Powell, Pastor and Omi note, undermined by racist practices.

Preliminary Conclusions

This research has aimed to contribute to scholarship and practice in a number of domains of work relative to environmental psychology, interdisciplinary social science generally, and to inform public policy. It has also aimed to contribute to grounding key concepts of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad (spatial practice, representations of space and representational space) and to ground and provide empirical data towards the expansion of Lefebvre’s idea of oppositional space. Janet Smith (2000) has pointed out, the need to recognize public policies, especially

housing policy, as “space producing activities,” Smith suggests that public policy makers need to be aware of the role that context plays in the formulation and implementation of public policies—which, in turn, produce space. Furthermore, this research responds to the calls put out by McCann (1999) and by Gottdeiner (2000) for informing Lefebvrian theory with the racialized context that defines the urban environments in the US.

Following the vein of deepening capacities for contextualization, this research tried to provide further examples of and detail on the specific role that ideology plays in the production of space, especially in terms of the influence of specific types of ideology (neoliberalism, for example) on the production of public policy and the production of space. I intend that work be able to both deepen with empirical detail, as well as contribute to ‘spatializing’ the work done by Hays (1995) and others on the role of ideology in US housing policy.

I also intend that the research contribute to **histories of public housing**, and housing policy generally by examining how policies affect tenant activism and residents and how, in turn, residents are working to affect policies. Furthermore, this research, unlike much research on public housing, highlights *tenant* activity instead of policy-maker or government activities. Close examination of the RA’s Section 3 implementation efforts also shows the new sectors involved, new alliances forged, who initiates them, and what leverages are involved in the production of the spaces of public housing. The research has also highlighted developments in the **connections between labor and public housing**. In particular, it directly addresses the recent constitution of public housing residents as “workfare” workers.

Research on the Resident Alliance has also uncovered particular instances of the causes of and the factors that sustain may or may not sustain **housing and tenant movements**. It documents movement activity in public housing, where movement and or action is not usually documented (see, for example, Lawson and Naison, 1984). In addition, the research provides empirical data to support Marcuse’s assertion that housing ‘movement’ should be scouted not just in the realm of housing itself, but among the linkages between housing and other areas of life inherently connected to it.

This research has also generated information about both how the **social reproduction** of public housing residents has been disregarded, as well as on the new methods that public housing residents are using to assure their social reproduction). The research has also provided new detail on how citizens are coming together and forging new alliances in order to mediate the tensions between the cultural and political disregard for social reproduction and the real survival needs of poor people in public housing.

Furthermore, the research has also documented trends in the **professionalization** of the work of grassroots activism. While some accounts of this trend, in which community activists like the Resident Alliance members are required to play by the rules of professionals, submitting proposals and bids for the work they do in their communities, exist (see Kenny, 2002), more empirical detail is required in order to document the extent to which grassroots efforts are either limited and kept at bay or brought more into a “mainstream.”

Having applied the concept of scale revealed a great deal about power relations relative to public housing and articulate more clearly the dynamics by which the scales of public housing are produced. It lends further understanding of the other realms of influence produce public housing and how policies and practices generated at one scale, removed from the everyday realities of the individual, household and community scales, affect the people and the immediate spaces public housing. At the same time, it illustrates the ways in which the scales that are “closer to home” (the individual, the household, the community) have the potential to voice the

needs and concerns of these more intimate scales within the realms of the more abstract scales of the urban, national and global.

This research has also provided empirical detail on the ways in which the components of structural racism are and have been at work in molding the environment in which the RA works, as well as the ways in which the RA and its partner organizations are working to dismantle not only its effects, but some of the structures that maintain the status quo of structural racism.

An examination of the Resident Alliance's activities to fully implement Section 3 has revealed a great deal not only about how to support efforts concerned with the well-being of individuals and communities, but also about how to understand other communities that are outside of the mainstream, disconnected, or at significant disparity from the larger society. Those, in other words, who are in the position to *struggle* for the means of social reproduction, instead of being "in the swing of it" (H. Marcuse, 1964).

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