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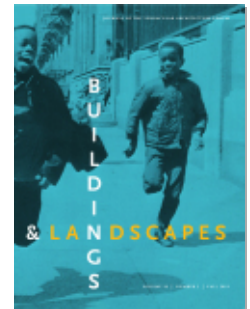
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Rehabbing Housing, Rehabbing People: West 114th Street and  
the Failed Promise of Housing Rehabilitation

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# Rehabbing Housing, Rehabbing People

## *West 114th Street and the Failed Promise of Housing Rehabilitation*

### ABSTRACT

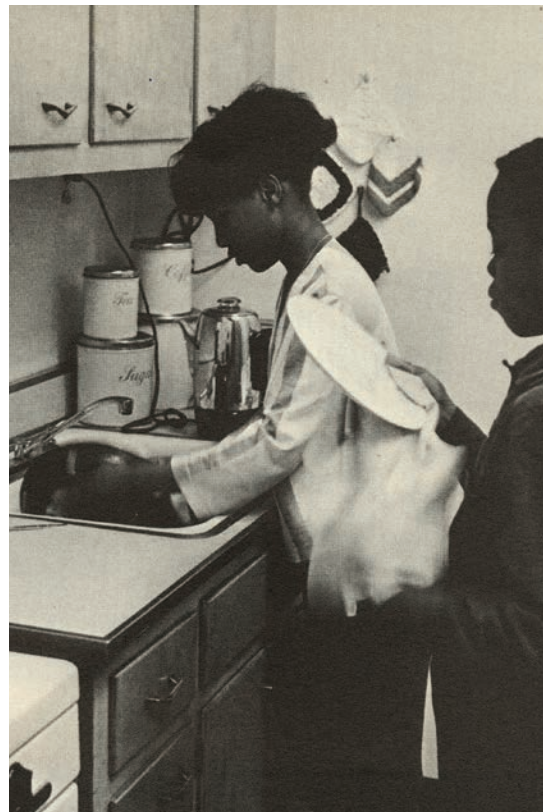
This article explores the rehabilitation of a tenement block of Harlem's West 114th Street in the late 1960s in order to examine the nature of housing rehabilitation as a common architectural practice in the aftermath of midcentury urban renewal. Rehabilitation became an antidote to renewal's human and architectural costs by promising the retention of buildings and the people who inhabited them. Sponsors intended the West 114th Street project to be a model for such approaches, generating extensive documentation in a book, documentary film, and local and national press. Yet a close reading of the project and this multimedia record suggests a more complex—and often fraught—history of rehabilitation. Despite promising to pursue architectural and social interventions equally on a block struggling with poverty and drug addiction, backers came to prioritize the physical at the expense of the social. Moreover, in their drive to showcase the architectural transformation that provided the most compelling images of this as a model project, rehab supporters espoused a physically determinist view that architectural change was itself enough to solve difficult socioeconomic challenges. Rehabilitation thus ultimately repeated many of urban renewal's mistakes, leaving residents still struggling in homes whose physical improvements proved fleeting.

Dorothy Mangum and her family moved from 257 to 263 West 114th Street, on the same Harlem block, in May 1966. “The distance was short,” explained a lushly illustrated book published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) two years later. “But in the way of life about to be opened up, Mr. and Mrs. Mangum and their seven children had accomplished a leap in time.” Two images told the tale (Figure 1). In one, a too-bright light blazed onto a dingy, unpeopled kitchen below. Floral curtains tried to dress the space up, but a cracked ceiling, with bulges suggesting water infiltration, dominated the picture. Below, a pile of pans implied the limited space available here. Electrical wiring strung across the image indicated out-of-date technology, and greater dangers too. In the second image, two Mangum children, Charles

and Marie, washed dishes in a different kitchen. An even light bathed the space, while a short cord dutifully connected a percolator to a nearby socket. Jars of flour, sugar, and coffee on one side of the counter left plenty of room for food preparation on the other. Cabinets, counters, and walls appeared as smooth as the porcelain plate in Charles's right hand.<sup>1</sup>

In depicting the transition from old kitchen to new, the photographs intended to convey more than just physical transformation. “Two years earlier,” the text explained, “Mrs. Mangum's world was focused within the four dark walls of her flat. . . . Poverty and her seemingly powerless status as a member of a minority group limited the natural instincts of a warm, gregarious, and assertive human being.” Yet new kitchens brought new hopes, explained *The House on*

Figure 1. Kitchens in the Mangum family's apartments, before (left) and after (right) rehabilitation. Photographs by Henry Monroe, from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The House on W. 114th Street* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1968).



W. 114th Street. “Now, a dramatic experiment in rehabilitation—human as well as structural—has helped her improve her home and broaden her outlook.”<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Mangum’s apartment was part of a project that rehabilitated the entirety of her block, upgrading the railroad apartments of old-law tenement houses into newly refurbished homes with unconnected bedrooms, doors that closed, modernized bathrooms and kitchens, and updated wiring and plumbing, all without changing their exterior. Mangum was part of this architectural transformation too, the project’s backers suggested. Outwardly she was still Dorothy Mangum. But inside, as story after story about the West 114th Street project explained, she and her neighbors had also been changed.

Rehabbed houses and the rehabbed people who inhabited them suggested a simple equation: the former would lead to the latter. And in drawing that conclusion, projects like the rehabilitation of thirty-six tenement buildings on West 114th Street also implied something else: that even in the years after the decline of large-scale clearance and reconstruction of

urban land, popularly known as urban renewal, strategies that were largely physical in nature remained predominant as responses to the persistence of urban poverty and its effects in communities like Harlem. Housing rehabilitation had surfaced repeatedly in the postwar period under the umbrella of urban renewal. But in the mid-1960s it reemerged in predominantly low-income communities like Harlem—the frequent targets of wholesale redevelopment—as an antidote to urban renewal, in nearly every way advertised as urban renewal’s antithesis. Clearance-based redevelopment had demolished the existing urban fabric of communities, but rehabilitation promised to retain and even restore that fabric. Urban renewal was costly but, backers promised, rehab would be much cheaper. Most crucially, renewal often brought the wholesale displacement of existing residents, many of whom, like the Mangums, were financially impoverished people of color. But projects like that on West 114th Street promised that residents could remain in their communities. Rehabilitation might require moving a couple of doors up,

officials and project sponsors promised, but not leaving the block.<sup>3</sup>

The West 114th Street project was at the forefront of this effort, celebrated in official publications, a film by the Maysles brothers, and magazines from *Good Housekeeping* to *Progressive Architecture*. From the beginning, it was promoted as a model project—what Hortense Gabel, head of the New York City Rent and Rehabilitation Administration, described as “a pioneering program with implications for the future of all American cities.”<sup>4</sup> Gabel framed it as a solution that avoided the pitfalls of urban renewal, which she characterized as “entirely architectural” and thus indifferent to the many socioeconomic challenges that existing residents faced.<sup>5</sup> And, indeed, backers initially emphasized that physical transformation would stand alongside needed social services.

Yet promises that the physical and social would share equally on West 114th Street proved hollow. In reality, sponsors and officials consistently prioritized the block’s physical transformation, an outcome especially connected to the project’s identity as a model for post-renewal rehabilitation. Eager to show those beyond 114th Street what could be done with aging tenements, backers emphasized architectural changes that provided the most dramatic tale of rebirth. At the same time, backers largely abandoned promised social programming, which, while acutely needed, was less visually compelling than full rehabilitation. Official and unofficial accounts of the project reflected these priorities: vivid depictions of the tenements and their residents—like the Mangums—before and after renovation suggested that the physical rehabilitation of buildings was itself enough to bring about the social rehabilitation of inhabitants. In doing so, an approach offered as a panacea in the face of disruptive redevelopment frequently repeated the very same physical determinism as urban renewal, a perilous strategy that traced its roots all the way back to the rise of city planning in the Progressive Era.<sup>6</sup>

The story of the reconstruction of the West 114th Street block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues suggests the need to understand re-

habilitation in this era as more than simply the enlightened answer to urban renewal’s harms. If frequently defined in opposition to its predecessors in the mid- to late-1960s, rehab nonetheless had its own complex and often fraught history. With the simultaneous rise of historic preservation, anti-renewal activism, and do-it-yourself culture, rehabilitation became a familiar strategy in both the public and private sectors during this time. Often focused on saving the very vernacular building types that renewal had targeted as obsolete and outmoded—such as the old-law tenements of 114th Street—rehabilitation itself became something of a ubiquitous vernacular. It took different forms, from moderate to gut rehabilitation, and took shape in many contexts, from ambitious test projects to home repair. The West 114th Street project stands as an especially iconic example of this approach, emblematic of both the wide interest rehab attracted and the risks it entailed in Harlem and more broadly.

Urban renewal’s failures had often derived from its overwhelming emphasis on the physical. Rehabilitation here, if different in both means and ends, likewise found that its dependence on physical intervention bore the seeds of its eventual failure. Rehab overestimated the efficacy and potential of physical change in a neighborhood whose inhabitants faced daily trials including high unemployment, discrimination, active drug markets, addiction, and deficient public services. Revitalized tenements, even at a scale larger than a single building, remained insufficient in the face of sweeping structural factors—like deindustrialization, suburbanization, and systemic racism—that were ultimately to blame for Harlem’s state of affairs by the 1960s. As it unfolded, the West 114th Street project suggested the limits of approaches to persistent urban problems that emphasized physical reconstruction, no matter their architectural form.

### **A Model Project**

At the heart of the West 114th Street project were the tenements that provided its raw material. Though rehabilitation made this block famous, the mid-rise buildings stretching between Seventh and Eighth Avenues were, in fact, quite

ordinary. Thirty-seven originally ran up and down the block, unbroken on the south side and interrupted short of Seventh Avenue by Wadleigh Junior High School on the street's north side (Figure 2). Each stood five stories tall and while they rose as seven different developments between 1895 and 1899, the buildings were similar in material and style. This was in part because the architectural firms responsible for them—Ferdon & Ellicott, Neville & Bagge, John P. Leo, and Kerby & Co.—each designed multiple buildings and, in some cases, more than one development project on the block, and especially because regulations and profit motivation largely limited the architects' creative latitude. Fire-escape-dominated façades filled the width of their narrow lots as developers sought to maximize in-

vestments; their pressed-metal cornices largely aligned. Likewise, the tenements shared the prominent and restrained residential language of the late nineteenth-century Renaissance revival. While many carried brownstone on their façades, they were not the elegant townhouses one typically thinks of as "brownstones." Rather, these were densely packed, densely inhabited multifamily buildings, twenty-five feet wide and with the characteristic form of dwellings guided by the Tenement House Act of 1879. This tenement type would become known as "old-law" when the Tenement House Act of 1901 sought to abolish dim, crowded, unventilated buildings by requiring larger courtyards, more windows, and more toilets, among other improvements. Completed just a couple of years before the reforms that ushered in "new-law" tenements, the West 114th Street apartments were consistent with their deficient predecessors. Buildings stood shoulder-to-shoulder and little light reached interiors: tenements on the north side, the first built here, bore only narrow V-shaped slots facing rear yards and miniscule square light shafts shared with their neighbors at mid-lot. The south side, built subsequently, was hardly an improvement, with hexagonal light shafts and rear wells only slightly larger.<sup>7</sup>

Inside, architectural plans echoed the density of the block (Figure 3). Buildings typically contained two or three apartments per floor, with a superintendent's apartment in the basement, yielding tenements with eleven or sixteen apartments. In the case of eleven-unit buildings, upper floors consisted of two apartments parallel to each other from front to back. Nicknamed "railroad flats," their rooms were strung together in a line. Occupants entered into the living room and passed through two bedrooms to reach the dining room, bathroom, or kitchen. Or they entered into the dining room and passed through the bedrooms to reach the living room. In tenements with three apartments per floor, a similar arrangement prevailed. At 230 West 114th Street, for example, two-bedroom units (without dining rooms) mirrored each other in the front part of each floor, while a third apartment, U-shaped in plan, overlooked the rear yard. The tenements

Figure 2. East-facing view of West 114th Street from Morningside Park, with the block undergoing rehabilitation—between Seventh and Eighth Avenues—pictured at center. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).



of 114th Street were not among the very worst of their genre; tenements with four or even five apartments per floor still met Board of Health approval in the late nineteenth century. Yet eleven-unit buildings were the most common variety at the time these were built, and sixteen-apartment tenements were not unusual either, meaning that these typified the major shortcomings across this building type. Significant among those shortcomings was a lack of privacy: some bedrooms had broad, doorless openings into living rooms and all apartments required passage through private spaces to reach more communal ones, leaving their residents rather exposed.<sup>8</sup>

This 114th Street block resembled many neighboring blocks, and so too did it follow a typical path in Central Harlem in the early twen-

tieth century. Tenements here rose in conjunction with the wave of speculative building that accompanied the growth of mass transportation uptown in the late nineteenth century. Across Harlem, the construction of elevated lines spurred developers to adopt the tenement form as a type that could quickly and cheaply house poor and working-class residents, many recent immigrants, and all white. On this block, residents had immediate or generational ties to a range of countries in northern, central, and southern Europe, from Ireland to Sweden to Russia. Though their buildings were crowded, residents could claim fewer neighbors than many Manhattan tenement dwellers. In 1900, the borough's tenements held just over thirty-seven residents per building, while the block's

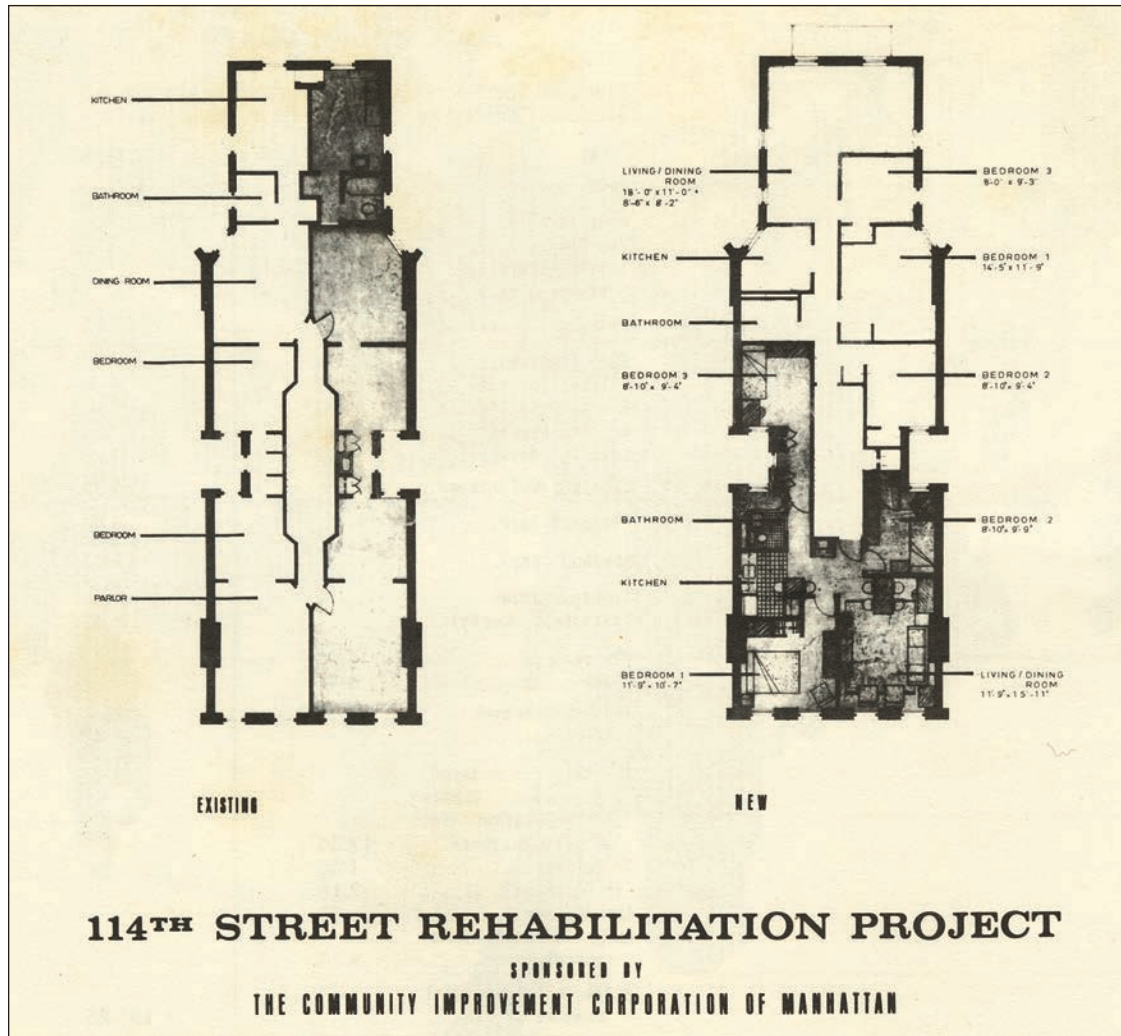


Figure 3. Plan views of typical apartments in West 114th Street tenement buildings, with existing, railroad-flat style apartments on the left and rehabilitated, reconfigured apartments on the right. From *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).

tenements held an average of just over twenty-six. As was true across Harlem, however, the neighborhood's racial composition and density began to change in the early 1900s, as African American real estate entrepreneurs saw opportunity in under-inhabited buildings, coinciding with the displacement of black New Yorkers from Midtown and the arrival of many more from the American South. The consequent racial transformation of the neighborhood started at Harlem's center, near 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, but had reached this block by 1930. Within a decade, African Americans inhabited the entirety of this stretch of 114th Street, and they did so at considerably higher numbers than their predecessors. An average of 43.6 residents lived in each building by 1940, as more and larger households made homes here. Though initial conditions often exceeded those of previous residences, a common story of decline unfolded over subsequent decades: residents were packed in, private landlords often prioritized income over maintenance, and, more generally, Harlem faced strong headwinds created by racial discrimination and increasing deindustrialization.<sup>9</sup>

As Harlem lurched from Harlem Renaissance to urban crisis by midcentury, this block rode the same tides. In 1965, 380 families lived here, with 1,600 total members, 557 of whom were children. In 1960, they were poorer than the city average, with a median income of \$4,100 (approximately \$35,200 in 2019 dollars) and more likely to be unemployed, with 10 percent seeking work, compared to 6.9 percent across Manhattan and 4.4 percent in the city as a whole. While nearly 77 percent of children under eighteen lived with both parents in New York City in 1960, just over 43 percent did so on this stretch of West 114th Street. On average, residents had completed 9.1 years of school, while New York City residents in general had completed over ten. Two characteristics contrasted with these unfavorable measures: 65 percent of residents had lived in their home more than five years, indicating greater stability than the rest of the city's old-law tenement dwellers, and residents had higher incomes, on average, than those in old-law tenements throughout the city. Yet these facts only highlighted the ex-

tent of housing segregation in the city; even residents who earned more than their neighbors had few decent housing choices. That was certainly evident here. While 73.7 percent of housing in New York at this time was considered sound, only 27.2 percent of this area met that criteria in the 1960 U.S. Census. More than 61 percent of the housing on the 114th Street block ranked as deteriorating, while over 11 percent reached the worst status of dilapidated. The block's crowded residents, far more often than not, lived in poor conditions.<sup>10</sup>

When officials came looking for a block that could serve as a test case for housing rehabilitation, it is not surprising that they ended up here. The West 114th Street project traced its origins to 1964, when the city's Rent and Rehabilitation Administration, under its demonstration rehabilitation program, joined with federal and private partners to shape such an effort. The Frederick W. Richmond Foundation signed on early as a sponsor, with the Carol W. Haussamen Foundation soon joining. Together they formed the Community Improvement Corporation of Manhattan, or CICOM, a nonprofit that purchased the block's thirty-seven tenements (one of which was later demolished) after an exhaustive search to meet the city's goal of finding a project uptown. Specifically, they considered twenty-four possible blocks between 98th and 148th Streets, settling on this one for reasons both practical and symbolic. As officials later explained, this block appealed "because of the uniformity of the structures and absence of rooming houses, industrial plants or garages." Buildings remained intact structurally, relatively speaking, and were close to schools, parks, and public transportation. They were likewise acquirable: the Richmond Foundation, then acting alone and discretely, convinced the twenty-two property owners on the block to sell by early 1965.<sup>11</sup>

Yet the block also found itself at the epicenter of larger trends that buffeted Harlemites. Alongside ubiquitous poverty, narcotics were especially a problem; the intersection of 114th Street and Eighth Avenue was a prominent drug market. The block itself had a reputation for drug sales and drug-related vandalism. Residents knew it as

“Hustler’s Street.” Properties often had unstable ownership, with absentee landlords driving inadequate maintenance. Number 263, the Mangums’ future home, had no fewer than twenty-one owners between its construction in 1884 and the mid-1960s. Proprietors at the latter end largely viewed these as cash cows, rent generating but not meriting upkeep. With superintendents no longer collecting trash and long treks between apartments and dim basements, residents had taken to throwing garbage out of their windows. The yards behind the buildings filled with refuse; unsurprisingly, rats were a constant problem inside and out (Figure 4). When the city’s Economic Opportunity Committee described the block in 1966, they wrote that “there was scarcely a more dismal stretch of land in all Manhattan.”<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the specific conditions of the block, two national factors drove both the development of the rehabilitation project and the shape it took. Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty commenced early in 1964, and the associated Economic Opportunity Act passed just before the city and CICOM obtained the 114th Street buildings. This timing was not coincidental. As the *New York Times* described the project, it was “An Antipoverty Test in Harlem,” one enabled by financial support from Johnson’s initiative. In part this came through a direct grant from the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which provided \$390,000 divided among support for mortgage interest costs (effectively a rent subsidy), staff support and facilities for social service programs, and documentation of the project, including *The House on W. 114th Street* and a documentary film. The mortgage underlying the project came through the Federal Housing Administration, which provided a \$5.5 million insured loan under the 221(d)(3) program (later increased to over \$6.6 million), to fund nonprofit housing at below-market interest rates. This was the first use of this mortgage type for a rehab project of this size.<sup>13</sup>

If the War on Poverty fueled the project, so too did the project serve as a national symbol for the War on Poverty. In April 1965, rehab got underway; in July, the House Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program held a unique hearing



on the block, which Harlem congressman and subcommittee chairman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. called the first hearing “held literally ‘in the streets.’” Before an audience that included about two hundred people assembled around the platform erected in the middle of 114th Street and another hundred on stoops, fire escapes, and in windows, Powell described Harlem as “the nerve center of the war on poverty.” Following the testimony of Hortense Gabel, Powell asked if the project would have been impossible without support from the poverty war. Gabel’s answer came clearly. “There is no question about it,” she

Figure 4. Rear yards of West 114th Street buildings before rehabilitation (ca. 1966), showing garbage that had collected over time. Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, photo no. 207-S-166-1-15.



replied. “We could have rehabilitated . . . but we would have been rehabilitating for middle-class strivers.”<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the national conversation around urban redevelopment likewise shaped the rehabilitation effort on 114th Street. A specific form of urban renewal had dominated American city centers for several decades, especially in New York City and often in Harlem. That approach, symbolized by Robert Moses, New York City’s longtime redevelopment czar, involved demolition of existing urban fabric and new development on a scale spanning city blocks. Land targeted for clearance encompassed a variety of uses but was often residential; replacements ranged widely in function, from residential to industrial to institutional. What these projects shared was a monumental, modernist architectural language, a disproportionate focus on communities inhabited by low-income people of color, and an emphasis on physical solutions to complex urban problems. Postwar Harlemites saw this firsthand in new public and middle-class housing and proposals for university and industrial expansion, plans that had cleared or would clear hundreds of acres uptown.<sup>15</sup>

Yet by the early sixties, broad opposition to this strategy had grown nationally, in response to both its social costs and the physical emphasis that brought them about. In this context, rehabilitation surfaced as a major alternative to clearance-based urban renewal. The most famous renewal critique, Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, exemplified this trend. On the one hand, she criticized architects and planners whose modernist interventions she derided as “wishes, familiar superstitions, oversimplifications, and symbols,” unwilling and unable to engage with the complexity of real life. On the other, she celebrated the forms of the existing city, especially the buildings and blocks that urban renewal sought to demolish, seeing in these the foundation for successful urban communities. Hardly alone in this, residents and even government officials joined in a reevaluation of places like Harlem, one that recognized that such neighborhoods were not perfect but could be rejuvenated

through rehabilitation of existing urban fabric rather than full-scale redevelopment. The Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem, a group of activist architects and planners focused on providing design services to Harlemites threatened by redevelopment, pointed to rehab as an ideal approach that could allow residents to remain in place.<sup>16</sup> So did the city government under both the Wagner and Lindsay administrations. “Urban renewal is an ever changing process, constantly becoming more sensitive and responsive to the physical, economic, and social needs of our citizens,” Mayor Robert Wagner said in an October 1965 speech. His administration highlighted rehabilitation as a civic priority over the next three years. Likewise, Wagner’s successor, John V. Lindsay, made rehab a focus of his design vision for the city, which emphasized small-scale interventions attentive to neighborhood needs.<sup>17</sup>

Rehabilitation and urban renewal had maintained a complicated relationship over the previous two decades. Though the Housing Act of 1949 focused on a slum clearance approach, its 1954 successor incorporated rehabilitation as a means of urban transformation. Indeed, “urban renewal,” a term initiated in the latter act, originally designated a specific emphasis on code enforcement and rehabilitation, a strategy pushed by housing industry interest groups as a private-market-friendly alternative to “urban redevelopment.” Supported by the 1954 law, a number of cities took a rehabilitation approach in subsequent projects, most notably at sites like Philadelphia’s Society Hill, Hyde Park–Kenwood in Chicago, New Haven’s Wooster Square, and Manhattan’s Upper West Side. However, while such projects attracted attention as they restored existing buildings, often for more affluent residents, they were exceptional. Home builders showed limited interest, finding rehab slow and complicated, and clearance remained predominant. In time, urban renewal and urban redevelopment came to carry the same meaning—slum clearance—and both attracted equal scorn.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of a more sensitive approach under the umbrella of renewal, by the mid-1960s rehabilitation became renewal’s foil, something separate and typically offered as an antidote.

Rehab focused on retaining the people that redevelopment displaced, emphasized historic buildings over monumental modernism, and promised comprehensive approaches where renewal prioritized physical interventions. That was certainly the case as supporters described this block. “Meeting the total housing needs of our people through the bulldozer approach . . . is no longer acceptable as a full and total answer to our housing problems,” Mayor Wagner declared at the ceremony launching the West 114th Street effort. Here, Gabel promised, buildings could be made livable “without the heartbreak of relocation.” She criticized urban renewal for emphasizing the physical “without concern for the families involved.” This project, she explained, would be different: “The social and physical problems are so closely interrelated that it’s naïve to think of tackling one without the other. We have the tools now.”<sup>19</sup>

As rehabilitation came into vogue, West 114th Street was one among several contemporary projects in New York and elsewhere focused on rehab in the predominantly low-income neighborhoods that urban renewal had once targeted. Some of these, like West 114th Street, were fully separate from redevelopment programs, while others were administered by redevelopment authorities but with different funding sources than urban renewal. They ranged in their scope of work from full rehabilitation to only the changes necessary to meet building codes, and likewise ranged in building type, from single-family homes to large apartment buildings. For example, the city demonstration project supporting West 114th Street’s rehabilitation, administered by the Rent and Rehabilitation Administration and sustained with federal funds, included projects on East 100th and East 102nd Streets and West 15th and West 16th Streets. The city also saw an experimental “instant rehabilitation” effort on East 107th and East 108th Streets and Madison Avenue in East Harlem—backed by the Frederick W. Richmond Foundation, like West 114th Street—intended to complete rehabilitation in a mere two weeks. Beyond New York, notable efforts included those of the Chicago Dwellings Association, a quasi-public nonprofit corporation that acquired six- to

eighteen-unit apartment buildings through receivership or purchase and then rehabbed them only up to code; and a range of programs in Philadelphia that involved city- and nonprofit-led rehabilitation and resale of homes. These projects shared an interest in finding alternatives to urban renewal. As the director of the Chicago effort explained, rehabilitation by nonprofit corporations “would certainly be cheaper and less disruptive than the wholesale leveling of neighborhoods.”<sup>20</sup>

The West 114th Street project emerged as more than just another New York example of a growing nationwide trend toward rehabilitation in the late 1960s. Rather, it became a national exemplar, an identity it earned for the characteristics that distinguished it, including its focus on improving tenements, a particularly difficult building type that earlier rehab efforts had not pursued; on retaining existing tenants on the block, something that other projects, such as the Chicago effort, did not do; and on providing social services alongside physical improvements, a likewise unique ambition. In this light, backers and observers explained it not merely as an example of what could be done instead of clearance-oriented renewal, but as the model project, a highly visible symbol that charted a path away from urban renewal’s physical focus and social costs. Certainly, its early role in the city’s anti-poverty program and subsequent selection for the on-site congressional hearing suggested this, as did the luminaries who celebrated its launch at a public news conference. Those included Office of Economic Opportunity head Sargent Shriver; Robert Weaver, administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency and, soon, the first leader of HUD; and Jacob Javits and Robert F. Kennedy, New York’s senators. No less than President Johnson commended the project upon its groundbreaking, calling it a “significant achievement” and a “forerunner of other successes throughout the Nation in our aggressive attack on poverty.” *Progressive Architecture* called it a “test case for future large-scale urban rehabilitation”; the *New York Times* described a “test tube,” one whose legacy would ultimately be “the careful step-by-step record that is being kept,” which would enable this effort to inform subsequent

rehabilitation projects elsewhere. Gabel saw it as a model project, too, comparing it to another recent experiment in city-building that had attracted widespread attention. Sitting before the congressional subcommittee, amid the ongoing West 114th Street project, she explained that soon this would become “Reston in Harlem”—not a suburban new town in this case, but a revitalized urban block that would blaze a trail just the same. Many were watching with anticipation, to see what rehabilitation could do.<sup>21</sup>

### Physical Transformation on West 114th Street

Meeting officials’ assurances that the rehabilitation of West 114th Street would not repeat urban renewal’s emphasis on buildings over people, early accounts of the project underlined its social dimensions. One of those dimensions involved programming for community-oriented facilities on the block. The project’s architects, Henry L. Horowitz and Wei-Foo Chun, planned renovations of most of the tenements’ basements—each of which had ground-level access to the rear yards—for this purpose. Funded by OEO and developed in concert with Harlem’s community action program (HARYOU-ACT) and the local block association, these efforts showed the influence of the War on Poverty and its goal of fostering participation. Residents employed by the Rent and Rehabilitation Administration interviewed tenants of the block to understand their specific needs. In July 1965, the city hired a director to guide social programming. Early projections suggested day care, preschool, recreational activities for both teenagers and senior residents, health care, and job training, among other services. A plan for these “anti-poverty activities,” as the city described them, was to be completed by early 1966, yet officials reported activities already occupying still-unrenovated basements as residents moved into the first three rehabilitated buildings in October 1965. These included “an arts and culture workshop” and a “Cadet Corps,” a military-inspired program for school-age residents intended to teach discipline alongside sports and tutoring.<sup>22</sup>

Project backers also emphasized direct employment in the rehabilitation effort as a second

strategy. This ranged from project planning, as with those employed to interview residents, to maintenance. CICOM, the effort’s private sponsor, employed block residents as the project’s resident manager, maintenance head, and secretary. As workers launched the first phase of construction in April 1965, encompassing three buildings on the north side, the second phase later that year, consisting of the rest of the north side, and the third phase—the block’s south side—in August 1966, they did so as integrated crews. Black subcontractors were among those completing electrical, masonry, and painting work and supplying appliances. African American-owned Harlem businesses provided security and necessary structural engineering. A black-owned moving company run by a block resident relocated neighbors from old to new units. The city liked to point out that three subcontractors were able to join their respective unions (electrical, carpentry and painting, and masonry) as a consequence of their work here, undermining the racial exclusivity common to construction unions. By fall 1966, the city estimated that 35 percent of the subcontracting business was going to African Americans and more than half of the workers on a typical day were likewise African American. At the congressional hearing, Hortense Gabel told Congressman Powell that “60 to 95 percent of the employees working here are Negroes.” The assembled crowd cheered, the *New York Times* reported.<sup>23</sup>

Yet even as West 114th Street’s backers were careful to emphasize the project’s socioeconomic aspects in making their case both before and during construction, the physical dimension nonetheless formed the effort’s centerpiece from the start. This was evident overall, in the project’s oft-noted reach from avenue to avenue. In carrying out the rehabilitation work—which stretched into 1968—across an entire block, workers were making explicit the fundamental assumption that architectural intervention at this scale would transform the lives of residents. Retained façades, complete with their historic details and stoops, embodied the project’s purposeful rejection of clearance-based redevelopment, but architects planned exterior interventions

that would nevertheless cast this as a reimagined physical space. Proposed street closure represented one such method, intended to make this block self-contained. Architects' renderings depicted other strategies (Figures 5 and 6). In those drawings, large street trees, distinctive paving, and shaded benches lined 114th Street while the rear of the buildings, once filled with trash, appeared instead as a communal plaza full of modern landscape elements, more trees, and families. A passage through one building facilitated movement between these spaces, reframing the tenements not as symbols of poverty but as the prelude to a flowing, semi-public outdoor living room for block residents. Such changes would purposely set the street apart from its neighbors, emphasizing dramatic physical transformation while the buildings remained intact.<sup>24</sup>

The centrality of the project's physical transformation was also clear at the scale of individual apartments, where full gut rehabilitation prevailed over more moderate approaches to renovation. Reorientation of floor plans and the complete overhaul of interior elements defined this strategy, demonstrating the extent to which backers prioritized wholesale architectural change inside the buildings. The significance of this approach became evident in comparison with the kind of contemporaneous building-by-building rehabilitation that middle-class residents were undertaking on their own in Brooklyn and cities like Washington, D.C. So-called brownstoners focused on restoring, not demolishing, original layouts, finishes, and historic details, a strategy that explicitly sought to retain, recreate, and enhance a building's architectural past. Abandoning the past was a central goal in West 114th Street interiors, however, as sponsors sought to realize dramatically modern living spaces, shown in renderings with open plans and colorful contemporary furniture that contrasted starkly with revivalist façades (Figure 7). As such, Horowitz and Chun fully abandoned the side-by-side organization of the railroad flats for a standard configuration that pushed one apartment to the front of the tenement floor and the other to the back (Figure 3). Curled around a shared stair landing, reconfigured apartments each had one entrance,



Figure 5. Rendering by architects Horowitz and Chun of proposed exterior improvements for West 114th Street streetscape, ca. 1966, showing benches, redesigned sidewalks, and dense tree cover. Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, photo no. 207-S-166-3-30.



Figure 6. Rendering by architects Horowitz and Chun of proposed exterior improvements for the rear of West 114th Street apartment buildings, ca. 1966, showing once garbage-strewn yards turned into landscaped communal spaces. Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, photo no. 207-S-166-1-61.

leading into a hall that enabled access to a living and dining room, bathroom, kitchen, and three bedrooms, one more than the existing standard layout. With a U-shaped configuration and each room opening onto the hall, one no longer needed to walk through private bedrooms to access common spaces. Door swings also emphasized the

new privacy achieved here: all bedrooms now had standard doorways and doors that closed. Apartments gained modern bathrooms—their predecessors did not have sinks—and modernized electrical wiring. Other changes included

laminated kitchen counters, new stoves and sinks, more cabinets, more closets, new walls, and new windows. Buildings gained intercoms, electrical locks, new mailboxes, and trash chutes. Cleaned-up exteriors maintained their appearance as old-law tenements, but interiors changed dramatically (Figure 8).<sup>25</sup>

Official and journalistic accounts both reflected and reinforced this emphasis on physical intervention as the project unfolded, foregrounding vivid architectural transformation and the experiences of the residents in those transformed spaces. Government documentation exemplified this. The original OEO grant included \$35,000 for what the *New York Times* called “a step-by-step record.” That record took form in *The House on W. 114th Street*, the HUD-published book released in 1968, and *Experiment on 114th Street*, also released in 1968, a half-hour-long documentary film produced by the Maysles brothers. Both took an unusual tack in documenting the West 114th Street project for potential future replication. Contemporary reports on rehabilitation, for example, the Lindsay administration’s *A Large-Scale Residential Rehabilitation Program for New York City*, were about

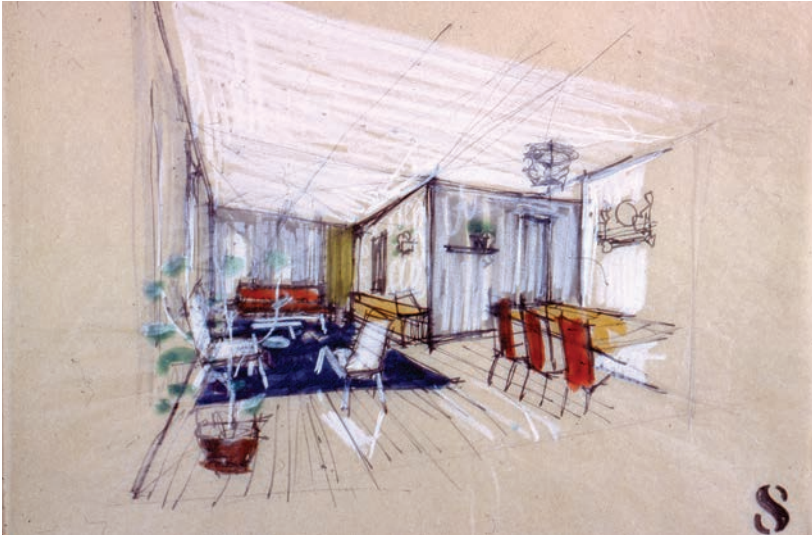


Figure 7. Rendering by architects Horowitz and Chun of proposed gut rehabilitation of West 114th Street apartments, ca. 1966. The depicted apartment interiors, dramatically modern with open plans and contemporary furniture, contrasted starkly with Renaissance revival exteriors. Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, photo no. 207-S-166-1-33.

Figure 8. Tenements undergoing rehabilitation on West 114th Street, ca. 1966. Façades remained largely the same after rehab as before, while interiors changed. Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, photo no. 207-S-168-1-7.



as engaging as their titles implied. That 1967 report included fifty-three pages of typewritten instructive text and gridded charts. There was one illustration: a drawing on the cover of a tenement undergoing rehabilitation. *The House on W. 114th Street* also featured tenements on its cover: a full-bleed black-and-white photo looking down upon the block at an artful oblique angle. But the next page shifted to a cinematic detail, not prosaic text: a high-contrast close-up of a pair of hands, holding a lit cigarette (Figures 9 and 10). No caption named the bearer of these hands, but their clasped nervousness suggested anticipation and set a tone for the book as a story told in images of buildings, people rehabilitating those buildings, and residents experiencing those buildings, all photographed by Henry Monroe. Two-thirds of the book's pages focused on such images, all black-and-white and many running from edge to edge. Some showed the tenements before and after rehabilitation, others showed trash filling a rear yard, and still others showed workers installing drywall and cleaning glass. Many photos depicted the nine Mangums moving through the spaces of their daily lives: posing for a family portrait in their new living room, making a budget in their dining room, waiting at the doctor, and traveling on the subway. Written as an engaging narrative, the text accompanying the photos chronicled drug problems on the block, dilapidated apartments, the family's daily struggles, and their eventual move to their new home. But text was not the focus, a fact evident in the space on the page it occupied. Rather, the book emphasized photographic depictions of the built environment as it was inhabited by people, giving readers a glimpse into what it was like to be in these spaces, old and new (Figure 11).<sup>26</sup>

A similar strategy defined *Experiment on 114th Street*, which as a film could simulate first-hand experience of the block's spaces in ways that static photographs could not. The style of the Maysles brothers only further enhanced this quality for viewers. Known for the method of direct cinema, Albert and David Maysles developed a reputation for letting the camera run, with action unfolding as it happened. As a 1994 profile described, "the camera seems to be a fly waiting



Figure 9. The cover of *The House on W. 114th Street*, the lushly photographed chronicle of the rehabilitation of this West 114th Street block, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1968. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).



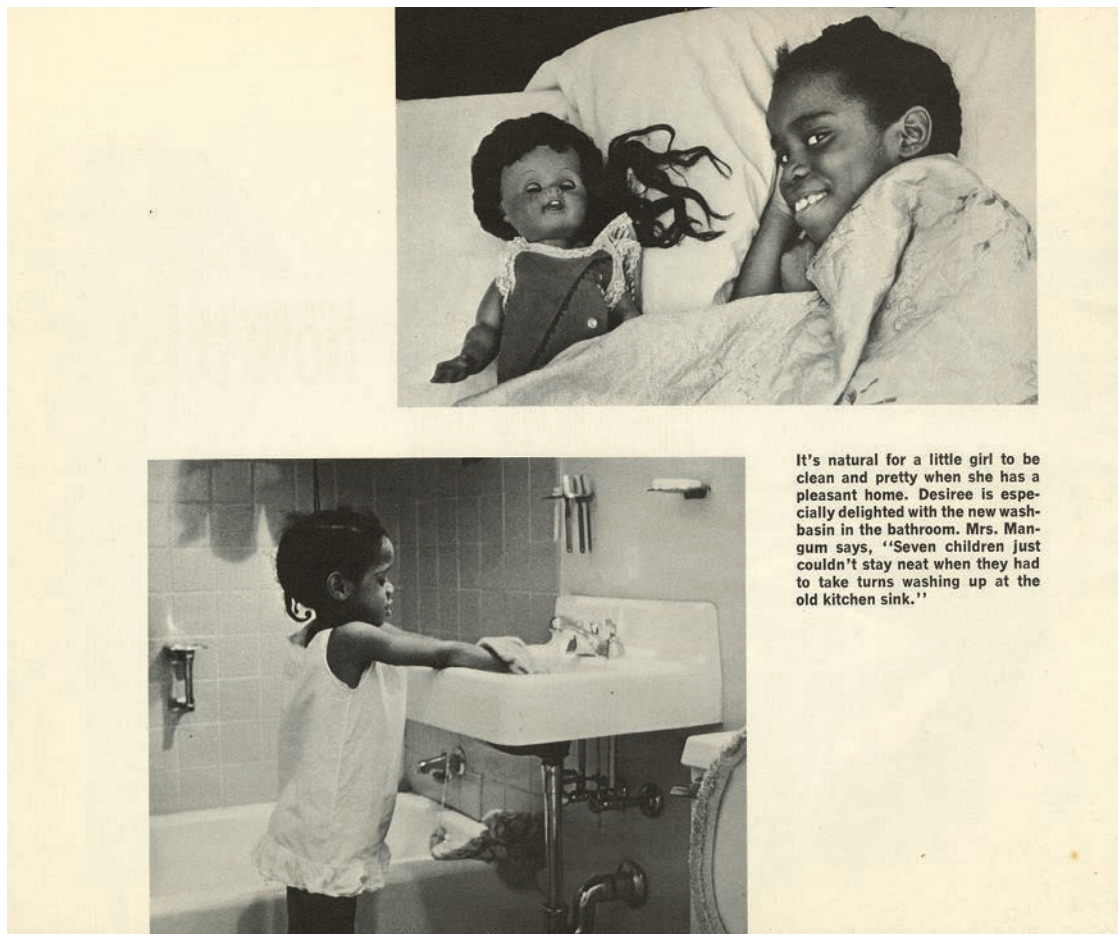
Figure 10. A close-up photograph of unidentified hands, the first interior page of *The House on W. 114th Street*. Printed as a full-bleed, high-contrast image, it exemplified the intensely visual, observational mode by which the rehab project was chronicled here and in the film *Experiment on 114th Street*. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).

on the walls of some very interesting places,” so that the viewer’s experience was akin to personal observation. Although not well known among their work, *Experiment on 114th Street* was no exception. The film’s opening put the viewer in the middle of a conversation between officials and a tenant, together discussing which rehabilitated apartment would best fit her family. This was Paige Edwards, grandmother to the Setzer family—the film’s subject. Between shots of the five Setzers, the film recorded the project’s backers, architects, construction workers, and block residents occupying its various spaces. Narrated only lightly, most speech came from subjects who were talking to each other—and not always clearly enough to be fully intelligible—or to the person behind the camera, but in the mode of normal conversation. At times there was no speech at all. The effect was to turn the viewer into a direct observer—of a resident and work-

ers in a kitchen, discussing ever-present rats, or of Edwards in her bedroom, candidly describing living on the block for thirty years. In this way, the Maysles made the audience into apartment inhabitants pre- and post-rehabilitation, as if they were themselves part of the family making this move.<sup>27</sup>

The book and film, intended as the record to which subsequent rehabilitation efforts would look, did not need to emphasize the project’s physical aspects as much as they did. Indeed, *The House on W. 114th Street* included some images that related to social dimensions, including a mothers’ support group, tutoring program, and remedial education program. *Experiment on 114th Street* portrayed residents meeting to discuss available social services and included narration describing the integrated workforce. Yet these moments were few in number. Depictions of the buildings, their rehabilitation, and people

Figure 11. An interior page of *The House on W. 114th Street*, showing the emphasis on photographs over text in the book and their focus on the built environment as occupants inhabited it, giving readers a sense of what it was like to be in these spaces pre- and post-rehabilitation. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).



inhabiting them were much more dominant, conveying the central role of physical spaces and their transformation.

To this end, both book and film adopted a similar narrative conceit, telling this as a tale of before and after and, in doing so, conflating the tenements and their residents. The film's narrator made the link explicit in its first minutes, explaining, "people, like buildings, are not meant to be neglected." In other words, here the story of architectural rehabilitation was a story of human rehabilitation and vice versa. Early in the film, the Maysles showed leaks, roaches, garbage, and sewage flooding basements. Soon after, the family sat in their old apartment, eating and watching television, with dilapidated walls in the background. By the end of the film, however, the camera depicted roomy apartments with refinished wood floors. John Setzer, age four, sat in a new bathtub, playing with a boat. "This is my bathtub!" he exclaimed to the camera. Similarly, early images in *The House on W. 114th Street* showed men standing on a sidewalk, in seeming confrontation and, in one case, holding a glass bottle (Figure 12). Another image depicted a handwritten note. "All narcotic addicts do not let me catch you shooting dope on those stairs," it read, drawing a thread from the men, to drug and alcohol use, to the block (which the captions confirm). The final interior image offered a different view of these sidewalks: three of the Mangums' young sons tore joyfully down 114th Street, with the rehabilitated tenements on the north side clearly visible behind them (Figure 13). The block, it seemed, had been cleared of menace as its homes—and their residents—became new again.<sup>28</sup>

There was a decided physical determinism in telling the story in this way, one that implied causality: improving these homes would improve the lives of the people who lived in them. That explanation argued that architectural transformation, ultimately, would enact the social transformation that block residents needed, while making little mention of a role for the social services that backers had initially promised. Robert Weaver voiced this idea clearly in his preface to *The House on W. 114th Street*. "The problems of families living



in poverty—lack of job skills, inadequate education, poor health, juvenile delinquency—are matters of the most serious national concern," he stated. "Hope of alleviating these problems comes nearer to reality for many of these people as the Nation undertakes the task of rehabilitating its existing supply of housing."<sup>29</sup>

This logic recurred repeatedly, in the words not only of officials but also of observers who chronicled the project, suggesting the extent to which the public received this as its overriding message. In 1968, *Kiwanis Magazine* picked up the story of the Mangums, explaining their move from a "rat-infested, dilapidated third-story

Figure 12. Early images in *The House on W. 114th Street*, like this one, associated the sidewalks around the block's unrehabilitated tenements with crime, conflict, and drug trafficking. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).



Figure 13. In contrast, the final photograph in *The House on W. 114th Street* showed three of the Mangum sons running with joy down the sidewalk on the rehabilitated north side of the West 114th Street block, implying that the rehabbed tenements had also improved the lives of their residents. Photograph by Henry Monroe, from *The House on W. 114th Street* (1968).



apartment” to their new, four-bedroom home. “Though they had only moved a few doors down the street, for the family it was like entering into a new world, a new life,” the article read. *Good Housekeeping* wrote about a different subject—the Roberts family—to tell a story of before and after on West 114th Street. The article offered a poignant anecdote that reinforced the determinist equation even as it suggested some of its potential reality. In October 1965, the Roberts family had moved into one of the first rehabbed apartments. The following June, one of the children made the honor roll. Without rats, with greater privacy and more space, “this apartment is the big reason Charles won that certificate,” Theresa Roberts explained. As this suggested, many area residents adopted the same theory of urban change as the project’s backers. A cleaner and tailor on the block offered a textbook definition of physical determinism in explaining the project to the *New York Amsterdam News*. “When

the block is rehabilitated the kids will realize the nice surroundings and they will walk with dignity and pride again,” he said. “That’s the psychology behind the whole thing.”<sup>30</sup>

Sponsors had initially promised that, unlike urban renewal, the rehabilitation of this block would balance architectural and social interventions. But a clear disparity emerged in the rhetoric around the project. This asymmetry did not exist only in words; as the project took shape, it became evident in deeds as well. The project’s budget served as one simple but clear illustration of the priorities here. The mortgage that funded rehabilitation—over \$6.6 million—dwarfed the OEO’s grant of \$390,000. Gut rehab was a complex and costly task, yet even the anti-poverty grant only partially went to social services, with over a third dedicated to mortgage interest costs and project documentation. In the end, \$205,000 of the initial budget focused on planning and construction of the social program.

Despite assurances of comprehensiveness, plans for these services raised questions about whether they were focused on the block's most acute problems. "When we know exactly what's needed," Gabel told a reporter, "we can tailor our program to this." Yet the constituency that came up repeatedly in assessments of the block would not be included. "The only exception I have made is on the drug addicts," said Gabel. "I don't know how we could cope with them." The challenge of drug addiction was at least as complex as that of rehabilitating dilapidated buildings and coordinating the moves of hundreds of families from old to new units. But only the latter gained priority.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, as construction on the block proceeded, it became clear that people suffering from drug addiction were not the only residents searching for promised social services. By 1968, as physical reconstruction was wrapping up, the associate director of CICOM could report the presence of the block association, a block council "to coordinate activity," a "children's play group," and a committee "which aids residents in time of hardship," but the block still awaited the arrival of "a comprehensive set of social programs," to be organized by the Urban League. "A long-range attack on dope addiction and most of the other ills of 114th Street awaits action on the Urban League's human rehabilitation proposals," *Kiwanis Magazine* explained in May. These were to arrive "after construction work is done," but their pending status persisted into the new decade. Two years later, services remained partial, compromised, or failing. An innovative grassroots news bureau, the Community News Service, visited the block to ask residents how things were going. Edith Pennamon, a longtime community leader in Harlem, made very clear that hopes of a balanced approach were unmet. "If you don't take care of the social ills along with the housing problem, you're not helping the situation at all," she told the reporter, who explained this as "echoing the feeling of other tenants." By 1971, "despite a grant from OEO," a different assessment explained, "the social programs that were planned for the block never fully materialized." Pennamon and her neighbors had refreshed apartments but the tenements' basements—the promised home

of the project's social component—remained mostly unfilled.<sup>32</sup>

Multiple factors explained the project's missing social programs. The reporter who interviewed Pennamon pointed to vandalism as one reason "facilities such as day care centers have been unsuccessful." Vandalism had certainly been a problem here in the past, one that residents had often faced in the form of battered mailboxes, among other examples. Yet this explanation seemed too pat, especially as many of the promised services simply never arrived. Cost was a more likely factor, both to the extent that social programming did not receive sufficient funding in the first place and as the project proved much more costly than predicted. In 1965, a leader in the city's antipoverty program had explicitly contrasted the project's cost with urban renewal, explaining that rehab would be half as much as demolition and new construction. Yet when the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies, then the nation's leading urban research center, completed a comprehensive assessment of the project in 1968, it found a different outcome. Increased construction, interest, and administrative costs, along with greater property taxes than forecasted, all made the project more expensive than planned. This was in large part a result of construction that took longer than anticipated. In the end, the project cost nearly as much per apartment as high- or mid-rise new construction, and more per square foot. With multiple adjustments to the mortgage financing to cover rising construction costs, money was clearly tight.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, the most crucial reason for the dominance of physical improvements over the promised comprehensive approach on West 114th Street was the degree to which backers wanted others outside this block to *see* the project. In other words, in casting this as the model for subsequent rehabilitation projects, the city and CICOM emphasized its most visible aspects, those that could easily travel as images far beyond 114th Street and Harlem, on film and in print, especially in dramatic before-and-after narratives. Those were architectural aspects. Old-law tenements were definitionally obsolete, so inadequate for their role that their very name

embodied the notion that they had been legally mandated out of existence. Yet the drive to turn this into an emblem for rehabilitation led backers to insist on the sweeping transformation of these buildings, even if the effort and resources necessary were illogical. Wei-Foo Chun, one of the project's architects, later explained that rehabilitation of old-law tenements really only made sense "as a stop-gap measure." Instead of gutting the interior, Horowitz and Chun had proposed minimal rehab to officials because, as Chun explained, "we felt there is no need to spend too much money in rehabilitating old-law tenements." The city resisted because minimal rehab did not fit their larger aspirations for the block: that it would become a symbolic exemplar. They "wanted to show the government and the world what could be done with the old-law tenements, so we went along all the way," Chun explained. The result was a project focused on dramatic architectural change and the proliferation of images depicting it, instead of less visually engaging—but very urgently needed—social programming for existing residents. In this, it shared a key quality with urban renewal, the very approach it sought to replace. The physical emphasis here, as with its predecessor, would prove the project's undoing.<sup>34</sup>

#### **"In the Beginning, Everything Was Painted a Very Pretty Picture"**

It was certainly undeniable that most residents had seen the tenements as a detriment before rehabilitation. No matter their effort in making decent homes out of aging infrastructure, Harlemites were frustrated with residential conditions. A 1966 survey of Harlem residents found that the largest proportion—36 percent—identified dilapidation as the biggest housing problem in New York City and 29 percent—again, the highest—identified living conditions as the biggest "other major problem." That survey was commissioned by pro-renewal interests, but the Joint Center's later assessment of 114th Street confirmed similar feelings among block residents.<sup>35</sup> Asked about 114th Street landlords who owned the tenements before the project began, the sixty-three randomly-selected respondents

offered overwhelmingly negative commentary about physical conditions, with over half pointing to insufficient heat and two-thirds complaining about unclean halls, stairs, and yards. Workers carted seventy-two garbage trucks full of accumulated debris from basements. With rotting joists, decades of wear, and plenty of vermin, things were no better upstairs. Thirty-three of the respondents were "glad to move out of their old apartments."<sup>36</sup>

With this, one could make a case that physical intervention was necessary, no matter the distance the project had traveled from early promises of a comprehensive approach. Yet even taking this claim on its own merits, the fact remained that the physical transformation of these buildings displayed deep flaws. Not only were the architects rebuffed in encouraging a more moderate approach to rehab given the old-law tenements' intrinsic deficiencies; the Joint Center also found that the project's backers pushed them to prioritize efficiency, speed, and budget over innovation, analysis, and experimentation. While units abandoned the archaic layouts of their predecessors, the architects could not test strategies that might fix problems of sound transmission and dim light, better address tenant needs (for example, units designed for elderly residents on lower floors), or solve the inconvenience of the five flights of stairs in each tenement. Moreover, as apartments became the first priority, other aspects suffered, including the initially proposed outdoor improvements, which were not completed. Alongside a paucity of design innovation, the project's approach also allowed little engagement with tenants. The Joint Center staff described a remarkably conventional process, with CICOM, not the residents, serving as the client, despite the many promises that this was a more resident-friendly project than its predecessors. "There was . . . a general lack of communication between the architects and the occupants of the buildings being rehabilitated," they wrote. Tenants had been consulted early on, but their eventual exclusion from the design process minimized the helpful insights they could have offered as users. Storage requirements, materials, lighting, and appliances were among the fac-

ets that might have benefited from a bottom-up approach.<sup>37</sup>

There were multiple downsides to a process that valued speed over careful and creative planning. The resulting detachment from residents echoed urban renewal's top-down approach and bore similar risks. In addition, the lack of planning and focus on cost and efficiency proved shortsighted when it came to the physical changes so core to the project. Rehab became an end in itself, with no real effort to carefully consider the long-, medium-, or even short-term viability of different material and design choices. As the Joint Center wrote, "it is . . . conceivable that equipment or materials which appear to be luxuries may really in the long run prove more economical because of their impact on lower operating costs." Yet backers did not weigh such trade-offs, and this proved compromising, especially amid uneven construction quality.<sup>38</sup>

The Joint Center also used images to tell its story, and what they showed contrasted markedly with the depictions of the project in official publications. Black-and-white photos—less artful but more revealing—showed a wealth of material failures, poor detailing, and structural miscalculations in recently rehabbed buildings (Figure 14). Underlying flaws in the aging tenements, a scale of construction that made close supervision difficult, myopic corner-cutting, and hasty and inadequate forethought explained such failures. Where old joists remained in place, continued settling caused apartment floors to sag and ceilings to crack. Likewise, settling and poor workmanship left gaps between floors and molding big enough to allow entry of roaches. Most vertical risers—pipes running through apartment ceilings and floors—also had gaps that allowed roach and rat entry. Tenants tried to patch these and other openings with putty or even concrete (Figure 15). Apartments had cracking mortar in bathtubs, flaking plaster on new walls, and separation of brand-new closets from adjacent surfaces. Indicating material and hardware failures, bathroom and kitchen tiles came loose, veneer peeled from doors, doorknobs fell off, and closet locks broke. Suggesting deficient planning, false walls for ductwork and electric

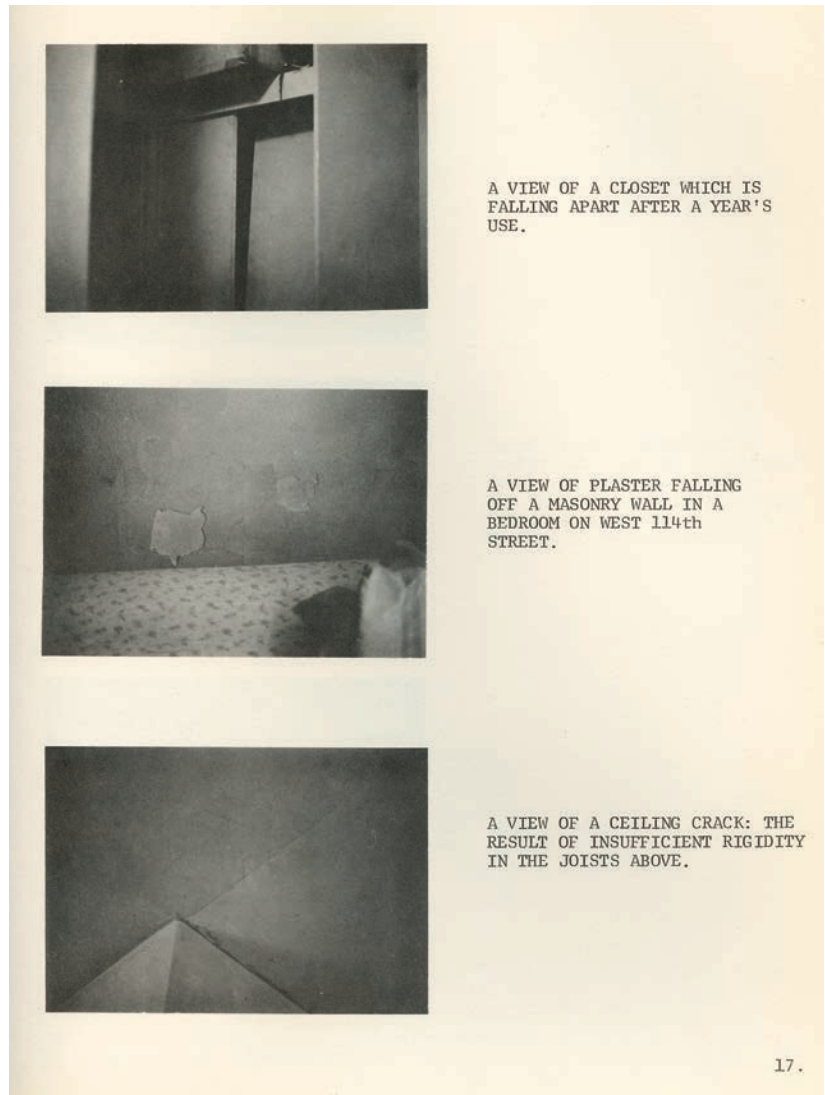


Figure 14. In its 1968 assessment of the West 114th Street rehabilitation project, the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies came to very different conclusions than did project sponsors, pointing to multiple physical failures in the rehabilitation effort, many emerging almost immediately upon completion. Photographs by Ned Snyder, from Joint Center for Urban Studies, *Rehabilitating New York's Multiple-Dwelling Tenements*. Used with permission of the City of New York.

cal wiring cut substantially into interior square footage. Similarly, front doors were too short for their frames in the first three completed buildings, leaving views into apartments. And poorly chosen hardware on building entries damaged adjacent walls with each opening. Even the much-vaunted trash chutes, featured throughout coverage of the project, proved an initial liability; located on the exterior of the buildings, they were easy to climb down until the installa-

tion of protective grills. Construction projects are rarely perfect upon completion, but the frequency of problems amid celebration of the effort in the press and official publications frustrated residents, who complained of thin walls, leaking pipes, poor paint jobs, and failing light switches. “In the beginning, everything was painted a very pretty picture . . . a very, very beautiful picture,” one resident told an interviewer. “And none of these things have come about.” Another saw initial failures spiraling into eventual clearance, the very fate that rehabilitation had cast itself

against. “That project I don’t think’ll last another five years,” he said. “Ten years from today, they’re going to have to tear that block down.”<sup>39</sup>

To focus on the physical and then execute it poorly only worsened problems intrinsic to focusing on the physical in the first place. Though residents were excited to move into their new homes, quick-to-emerge issues soon discouraged them. Many found that their street’s chronic problems had not disappeared in the flurry of construction. Residents had long complained about theft and vandalism linked to drug use and trafficking. The rehab effort, ironically, seemed to only exacerbate an issue that officials had ignored even in their limited social programming. As tenants moved out of buildings to prepare for rehabilitation, empty units attracted drug users. So did any building materials with monetary value. “We can’t concentrate on the construction and the building of the houses for worrying about the junkies,” one resident explained. “They’ll come in and take the sheetrock off the wall. They came and took the nameplates off the door!” The Joint Center included a photo of the buzzer system, much discussed in accounts of the project, with its missing nameplates. Another image showed the glass door of 251 West 114th Street reduced only to its frame, with the pane smashed out (Figure 16).<sup>40</sup>

Resident complaints pointed to the fact that the West 114th Street project, though unique in its effort to transform an entire block, left untouched the larger structural order in which Harlemites lived. In part this was a problem of scale but also one of focus. Addressing persistent neighborhood unemployment, drug addiction, deficient education, discrimination, and racism, all of which undermined both block residents and their Harlem neighbors, would have certainly been difficult here. Yet the project’s still-limited geographic scope ensured that any benefits would reach only a narrow audience, and its physical determinism overtook any more imaginative, comprehensive solutions that might have sought to address such structural factors in more ambitious ways, in their symptoms if not at their roots.

This was a lesson that had been hard-won

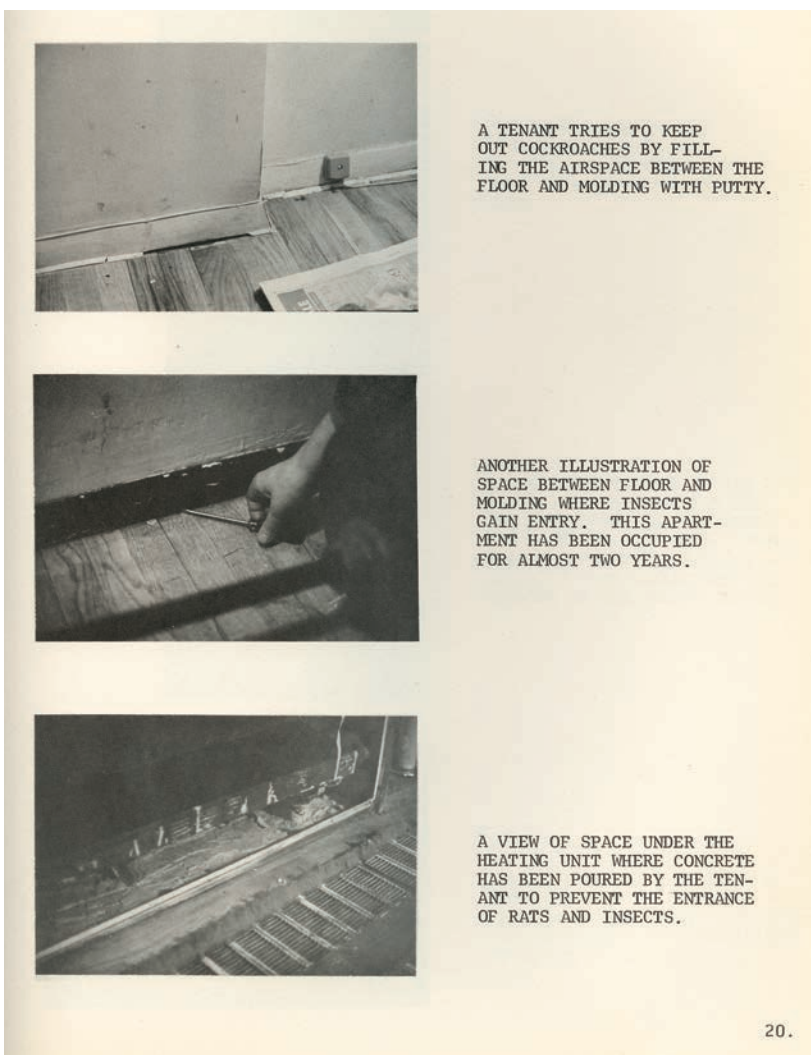


Figure 15. Residents faced multiple problems with their rehabilitated apartments, including gaps between floors and molding and along the entry points of vertical risers, which allowed rats and roaches to enter homes. Photographs by Ned Snyder, from Joint Center for Urban Studies, *Rehabilitating New York’s Multiple-Dwelling Tenements*. Used with permission of the City of New York.

with the failures of this project's urban renewal predecessors and one that observers—both inside and outside the project—picked up on quite early, even as backers did not act on it. Just months after the project's announcement, Harlem civil rights activist Clarence Funnye offered a withering critique in a letter to the *New York Times*. An integrationist, Funnye found fault in "creating and maintaining a little oasis in the midst of one of the most dense ghettos in the world" while pointing to the persistence of the limiting structure in which it existed, described as "the prevailing antisocial and spiritually destitute forces which would still surround it." Focusing specifically on education, he questioned the physical emphasis already evident in the project's first days. "Do the planners believe that mere flick of paint and plaster is sufficient to eradicate and even offset the deficiencies inherent in the pathetically bad 'neighborhood' schools to which the children . . . would still be confined?" Funnye appreciated the "dedication and sincerity" of those involved in the broader War on Poverty, yet concluded "that the planners of the 114th Street project have much less than a full understanding of the problems they purport to be solving." Curtis McFarland, president of the 114th Street Block Association and a project supporter, nonetheless echoed such concerns about whether intervention here was missing the point. "I am interested to know what is being done to 115th Street, what is going to be done to 113th Street, what will be done west of 8th Avenue, east of 7th Avenue," he said at the 1965 congressional hearing. "If we are to live on 114th Street, a showcase boulevard, and the surroundings . . . are slum areas, how can we function and say that the crime wave will be removed from this street?" Rehabilitation here seemed rather irrelevant if nothing around it had changed.<sup>41</sup>

As the project became a physical reality, those fears proved justified. Residents, even those excited at first to live in improved housing without leaving their block, found that more closet space, better appliances, and doors that closed did not fundamentally change the everyday world they inhabited, one whose turbulence made life here very difficult. Pervasive unemployment exempli-



A VIEW OF THE ROOFTOPS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF WEST 114th STREET



AT 251 WEST 114th STREET THE GLASS IN THE NEW ENTRANCE FRAME HAS BEEN BROKEN OUT



A DETAILED VIEW OF A VESTIBULE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF WEST 114th STREET INDICATING ARCHITECTURAL TREATMENT, QUALITY OF WORKMANSHIP, AND DURABILITY AND MAINTENANCE OF MATERIALS SELECTED. NOTE THAT DOOR FRAMES AND HEATING ENCLOSURE WERE NOT REPLACED IN THE REHABILITATION. THIS BUILDING HAS BEEN OCCUPIED FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR.

7.

Figure 16. Residents quickly found that rehabilitation did not solve the chronic, often structural challenges they had faced day-to-day, including theft and vandalism associated with drug trafficking, evidenced here in the smashed-out glass door of 251 West 114th Street. Photographs by Ned Snyder, from Joint Center for Urban Studies, *Rehabilitating New York's Multiple-Dwelling Tenements*. Used with permission of the City of New York.

fied this. Nathan Brown offered a case in point. His family of seven lived in one of the refurbished apartments, but on an August 1966 day he was downstairs, sitting on the front stoop. "Here it was mid-afternoon," a reporter wrote, "and Mr. Brown had nothing to do." Brown had lost his job the previous month. He had been a longshoreman, a field in decline as Manhattan's docks

faced increasing competition from newer, more sophisticated ports across the bay in New Jersey. Housing was no longer a concern for Brown. His “life is no longer a continual battle against crumbling plaster, leaky pipes, unbearable filth, and overcrowding,” the *New York Times* read. But a bigger apartment could not fix obsolete skills in a quickly changing labor market. “He has no immediate prospect of getting a job,” the reporter wrote.<sup>42</sup>

Even those who gained work through the project itself—a number that in 1965 possibly included Brown—found it to be a mixed blessing amid persistent racial barriers on this block and well beyond. An African American general contractor, hired to maintain buildings before rehab began, testified at the congressional hearing about the limitations of these gains. Rawlings J. Bisesar had bid repeatedly to be a general contractor on the much more lucrative rehabilitation work, losing out to a white-owned firm despite only a modest difference in their bids. Bisesar was frustrated; he wanted to see black-owned firms as general contractors, not subcontractors, and also black architects, construction managers, and project sponsors, none of which were present in this effort. In short, he told Congressman Powell, projects like this should enable African Americans to gain not just the wages of workers but the profits of backers, profits that pervasive discrimination had denied. Those were the kinds of inroads that would not dissipate when the project was finished, as would the construction jobs here. But those inroads were not a focus of the 114th Street effort.<sup>43</sup>

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, residents had reached a different conclusion than officials who told a stirring tale of this project and its transformation of both buildings and people. Life on the block remained hard in their eyes. “The overall impression is that many of these residents feel the sponsors of the Project have, in effect, ‘pulled their punches,’” the Joint Center wrote. “They have demonstrated that they were less than earnest or capable by promising many more good works than have been delivered.” Surveyed about services like playgrounds and policing, three times more residents said “no im-

provements had been perceived in these . . . since rehabilitation” than said there had been improvements. Nor had residents’ economic situation changed in moving to new apartments; families that earned less than a thousand dollars per capita (after rent) before the project continued to earn the same amount after, as did families with per capita income (after rent) below sixteen hundred dollars. Illegal drugs were an especially symbolic issue because they reflected larger socioeconomic dynamics in the neighborhood. Unsurprisingly, they remained ubiquitous even after construction had ended, purposely unaddressed by the project’s backers and unaffected by physical rehabilitation. Fifty of sixty-three surveyed residents saw drugs as a continuing problem post-rehabilitation. A journalist visited the block in 1970 to find that things looked much as they had in 1960, with the tenement façades a bit fresher, perhaps, but otherwise life as usual. “Drug addicts still congregate on the stoops of buildings. Windows and broken lights still go unrepaired and the children are still playing in the streets for lack of a playground,” the reporter wrote. “With rehabilitation five years ago came the hope that those slum conditions would disappear. . . . Now many residents view the experiment as a failure.”<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, for many on the block, things had only gotten worse as the urban crisis became more acute in Harlem. One resident described feeling unsafe for the first time in her thirty years in the city. “I’ve been constantly living in fear for the last month or so,” she said. She had taken to walking in the middle of the street. “I’m definitely going to move away, as quick as opportunity knocks,” she explained. Addie Bell Edwards shared that unnamed resident’s view: “Oh, the apartments are nicer, all right, but it’s much worse outside.” Her old apartment, “a railroad flat a few doors away,” lacked her new home’s amenities but she “felt safer then.” Edwards’s story especially suggested the degree to which the project had come up short. In October 1965, Edwards and her family were the first to move into the first rehabilitated building, 277 West 114th Street. In doing so, they became the first residents whose transition from old to

new seemed a move to a new life, not just a new house. The *New York Times* described Edwards's five-year-old grandson "inspect[ing]" his "gleaming, renovated" apartment. "Things will be even better than he thought," the reporter explained. "Duane will get a real bed—all for himself—in a new bedroom." Barbara Cavanaugh Wagner, the mayor's wife, presented Edwards with the apartment's key on move-in day. But for Edwards, the early promise of the family's move had gone unfulfilled. "I used to go to my job . . . in the morning and nobody would bother me," she said in 1970. "Now I can hardly get out of the building to go to the store in the middle of the day." Reflecting on moving day, the family's excitement, and Mrs. Wagner, Edwards observed, "Five years later, it seems like it never happened." Prevailing trends—suburbanization, the shift from an industrial to a service economy, and pervasive discrimination, among other factors—all undermined existence for the African American residents who lived in poverty on the 200 block of West 114th Street before rehabilitation, and likewise undermined it after. All were untouched by a physical approach that looked good in official photographs, if not those that documented rapid deterioration.<sup>45</sup>

The realities of a strategy that prioritized the gut rehab of obsolete buildings over building resident stability, economic security, or equal opportunity set in during the 1970s. Though pitched as a cost-effective alternative to urban renewal, the fact that this cost as much as new construction quickly created problems. Average monthly rents on the block had been \$47 before rehab. The city had projected average rents of \$75 a month after rehab; by 1968, however, averages were nearly \$86 on the south side and over \$90 on the north side. By 1970, rents ranged from \$90 to \$170. Two-thirds of tenants received rent assistance through subsidies or welfare that year, but it still was not enough. The director of CICOM, the project's sponsor and still the owner of the buildings, explained that most tenants were already behind on their rent. In what the Joint Center called a "delicate and fragile financial structure," this was a problem. CICOM feared impending bankruptcy. Though it held on for a few years

longer, in October 1975 HUD foreclosed on the project, suggesting that economic conditions had not improved. The nation's ongoing recession and the city's fiscal crisis, spiraling out of control in the fall of 1975, surely did not help. HUD took ownership from CICOM the following January; then, in March, transferred the block to the New York City Housing Authority, which converted the tenements to public housing.<sup>46</sup>

A block that was to have been a model for rehabilitation as the vanguard of urban transformation became a symbol of the perils of approaches that repeated urban renewal's mistakes—its top-down approach, its cost, its focus on image, and, most of all, its prioritization of physical over social solutions. These approaches remained distinct in both intended means and ends, to be sure. Urban renewal typically spelled the displacement of poor people of color into public housing and the destruction of their homes. The West 114th Street project sought to keep residents in place, in rehabbed homes. Yet, ironically, this project ended up in a similar place, with residents still struggling day-to-day, feeling neglected and ill served, and living in public housing. In the late 1960s, officials and observers cast rehabilitation as a cure for urban renewal's harms, yet the history of the West 114th Street project suggests that the story was never so simple. Rehab contained its own contradictions, especially an overdependence on physical solutions that connected this project to urban renewal and all the way back to the earliest days of urban planning. As Addie Bell Edwards, Nathan Brown, and Dorothy Mangum could attest, physical approaches remained incomplete as responses to urban problems in this era just as they had in post–New Deal public housing and in the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful movement.<sup>47</sup>

In succeeding years, this once widely discussed block was largely forgotten. About once a decade, journalists visited to describe residents' resilience in the face of continued challenges. When a nonprofit sought to rehabilitate railroad-style tenements in New York's Lower East Side in 1978, the West 114th Street project received brief mention as "one of the notable failures" that showed the approach's "dismal track record" of



“financial failure and physical disrepair” in cities including New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. The *New York Times* writer was skeptical of the claims of the latest model rehab project to create low-income housing in seemingly obsolete buildings, and for good reason. The passage of time had shown that many of West 114th Street’s contemporaries had met a similar fate, wracked by physical, financial, and other issues that undermined them. The Joint Center reached negative conclusions about all of the tenement rehabilitation projects built under New York’s demonstration program, not just West 114th Street. They shared a lack of planning, little creativity in approach, a scale that was hard to manage, high costs that raised rents, material and hardware failures, and disruptive tenant displacement, even if only temporary. They likewise shared the aspect that so frustrated block residents: efforts focused on the buildings did not change conditions outside the tenements. This was true elsewhere too, as the *New York Times* writer suggested. In Chicago, for example, nonprofits stumbled in pursuing multifamily housing rehabilitation in predominantly low-income neighborhoods. One effort, that of the Community Renewal Foundation, involved three large apartment buildings on the city’s south and west sides. Focused on the structures, the foundation found itself vulnerable to rising costs and rising taxes, and soon defaulted on the buildings. The Kate Maremont Foundation pursued the rehabilitation of thirteen buildings around the city in the mid-1960s. Costs, vandalism, and tenant frustration with displacement posed significant barriers here too; so did an inability or unwillingness to seriously confront the problems outside the buildings’ doors. Though projects varied in their specifics, these shared an insistence on extensive rehabilitation—with the vulnerabilities that entailed—and a focus on physical over broader social interventions. Unsurprisingly, by the early 1970s they had all reached similar outcomes.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the experience of rehabilitation at 114th Street and elsewhere did not end rehab’s emergence at the forefront of urban development in the post-renewal era. Rather, its reputation as a

rebutal to the sweeping approach of midcentury redevelopment maintained its foothold. In a post-Jacobsonian context, it especially appealed to those who moved into neighborhoods like Harlem, Park Slope, and the Upper West Side not to build low-income housing but to rehab old buildings into market-rate housing on gentrifying blocks. In those contexts, physical transformation—often restoration-oriented rehab—became part of the cultural currency for owners who could afford to worry about architecture first. But rehabilitation also became a tool for community developers, like housing-oriented community development corporations, who sought small-scale strategies during decades in which support for large-scale housing largely dried up.<sup>49</sup>

Despite its history on the block, in time rehabilitation would find its way back to West 114th Street. Even as the tenements continued to deteriorate, they remained essential in a city and neighborhood with accelerating housing costs. In 1990, the block gained a new name: the A. Philip Randolph Houses. The illustrious name did not free residents from leaks, rats, and false promises of repairs. They were “stuck,” one later explained. “We felt like nothing was working out for us.” In the mid-2000s, the city moved to demolish and rebuild the block. Calls for clearance were met with objections from state preservation officials, reflecting the growth of a historic preservation movement that had itself been a reaction against modernism’s approach to development. In 2014, the city announced plans to rehabilitate the buildings—while retaining the façades—once more, this time for both public and private affordable housing. The same year, the block was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. When the first phase opened in 2016, there were echoes of the past in festive remarks. “This celebration marks a new beginning for the residents of Randolph Houses, many of whom have waited years for this day to come,” one city official said. In the words of a financial partner, they had “not only preserved and renovated a vital source of affordable housing, but . . . improved the quality of life of its residents by providing them with a safe, healthy, and affordable place to live.” Images, now circulated online,

showed a stunning transformation, with bright, open plans, air conditioning, and modern lobbies. Designers cut horizontal hallways through the tenements, turning them into conventional apartment buildings with elevators. They likely did not know that this had been an innovation suggested by the Joint Center in 1968 in criticizing the approach of the previous rehab project.<sup>50</sup>

If this transformation's impressive photographs paralleled those that had chronicled the earlier rehabilitation, nearly everything else had changed around this block. Now called Frederick Douglass Boulevard, the nearby stretch of Eighth Avenue, once the active drug market that had so frustrated residents, became one of Harlem's most active spines of new investment, with restaurants, cocktail bars, and modern condominiums.<sup>51</sup> A high-end real estate office opened at the corner that had been a trafficking epicenter. Residents had once worried that their block would be subsumed by the crime of nearby blocks. Today, a more pressing question is whether this time rehabilitation will be successful—for both buildings and people—amid an ever more prosperous Harlem, or whether residents will have new homes but little else in a city that is becoming increasingly expensive. Harlem has changed, and this West 114th Street block has changed once again too, yet the structural factors that exacerbate economic inequality only grow in magnitude.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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#### NOTES

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Mogilevich, Holly Reed at the National Archives and Records Administration, Andrew Sandoval-Strausz, Terry Sass, Aaron Shkuda, and the anonymous reviewers from *Buildings & Landscapes*.

1. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), *The House on W. 114th Street* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1968), 5, 19, 29.

2. HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*, 5.

3. The block originally had 37 tenements; one was demolished as part of the project. See Joint Center for Urban Studies, *Rehabilitating New York's Multiple-Dwelling Tenements: An Evaluation Report of a Demonstration Project Consisting of the Rehabilitation of Multiple Dwellings in the City of New York* (New York: City of New York Housing and Development Administration, 1968), IV 17. On the decline of urban renewal see, among other works, Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

4. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program of the Committee on Education and Labor, *Antipoverty Program in New York City and Los Angeles: Hearings before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., July 1965, 16.

5. Lawrence O'Kane, "Experimental Block Moving Forward—Slowly," *New York Times*, April 11, 1965, R1.

6. Paul Boyer describes the emergence of "positive environmentalists" in the Progressive Era, who sought "to create in the city the kind of physical environment that would gently but irresistibly mold a population of cultivated, moral, and socially responsible city dwellers," an approach that gave rise to several strategies, including the profession of city planning, particularly as it took shape through the City Beautiful movement. See Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 189–283 (quoted text on p. 190). Though perhaps less oriented to the goal of "moral order" in subsequent decades, planners and urbanists retained a focus on physical solutions as a response to complex urban problems. Jane Jacobs

took urban renewal to task for this strategy; sociologist Herbert Gans in turn criticized Jacobs for her own adherence to what he termed the “physical fallacy.” See Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) and Gans, “Urban Vitality and the Fallacy of Physical Determinism,” in *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

7. National Register of Historic Places, West 114th Street Historic District, New York, New York, National Register #14000399, sec. 7, p. 1–4; On tenements in New York City, see Andrew S. Dolkart, “Tenements,” in *Affordable Housing in New York*, ed. Nicholas Dagen Bloom and Matthew Gordon Lasner (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 45–48; and Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 22–24.

8. For a typical 11-unit tenement plan, as used by the project’s architects, see HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*, 60. For 11- and 16-unit building plans, as recorded by inspectors with the Tenement House Department following passage of the Tenement House Act of 1901, see the “I-cards” for 230 West 114th Street, a 16-unit tenement, and 257 West 114th Street, an 11-unit tenement, both available through the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development *HPDONLINE* database, [https://hpdonline.hpdnyc.org/HPDonline/provide\\_address.aspx](https://hpdonline.hpdnyc.org/HPDonline/provide_address.aspx). For representative tenement plans in 1887, see Plunz, *History of Housing*, 32. For a detailed statistical study of tenements, including by size, see Lawrence Veiller, “A Statistical Study of New York’s Tenement Houses,” in *The Tenement House Problem*, eds. Robert W. DeForest and Lawrence Veiller (New York: Macmillan Company, 1903), 191–240. In the twelfth ward, the area designating Manhattan north of 86th Street and including Harlem, Veiller found 2,031 10-unit buildings and 659 16-unit buildings out of a total of 11,055. See pp. 203, 218–19. In Bernard Bard, “New York’s Superblock—114th Street, Harlem,” *Good Housekeeping* (January 1968), n.p., the author describes an apartment without interior doors. Contemporary photographs suggest that some apartments did have interior doors, though the large opening between the living room and front bedroom—much bigger than a standard door—common on the I-cards for both plan types indicate that some rooms did not have closeable doors at all entry points.

9. Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), 116–17, 170–78; National Register of Historic Places, West 114th Street Historic District, sec. 8, p. 1–8; Veiller, “Statistical Study,” 194; 1900 U.S. Census, Manhattan, New York County, N. Y., population schedule, enumeration district 557, sheets 23a–29a and enumeration district 558, sheets 1a–5b; 1940 U.S. Census, Manhattan, New York County, N. Y., population schedule, enumeration district 31–911, sheets 11a–18b and enumeration district 31–945, sheets 1a–14a; Kevin McGruder, *Race and Real Estate: Conflict and Cooperation in Harlem, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

10. Warren Weaver Jr., “An Antipoverty Test in Harlem,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1965, 1; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, II 4–8, II 18–19, II 24–26. Present-day income equivalents based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

11. Weaver, “An Antipoverty Test”; U.S. Congress, *Antipoverty Program*, 16–18; “West 114th Street Rehabilitation Project: Background Memorandum,” ca. July 1965, Box 060231, Folder 7 “Housing (21),” Subject Files I Sub Series, Julius C. C. Edelstein (Staff Donation) Series, Robert F. Wagner Documents Collection, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College/CUNY, New York (hereafter Wagner Documents), 6–7; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, II 44–45. Planning and construction involved collaboration among federal and local officials, CICOM, architects, and contractors, while CICOM functioned as the buildings’ landlord.

12. Bernard Bard, “Redeeming a Slum in Harlem,” *Kiwanis Magazine* (May 1968): 20; HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*, 11–17, 23–24; Public Affairs Department, New York City Economic Opportunity Committee, “The Story of a Unique Urban Renewal Project in New York City,” September 1966, Box 361, Folder 411, John Vliet Lindsay Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn. (hereafter Lindsay Papers).

13. Weaver, “An Antipoverty Test”; “West 114th Street Rehabilitation Project: Background Memorandum,” ca. July 1965, Wagner Documents, 3, 5–6; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, IV 17–18; “Housing Rehabili-

tation in NYC,” *City Almanac* 6, no. 1 (June 1971): 5; O’Kane, “Experimental Block Moving.”

14. U.S. Congress, *Antipoverty Program*, vii, 23; Theodore Jones, “Powell Conducts Hearing in Street,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1965, 1.

15. On the centrality of physical transformation to urban renewal, especially an approach involving large-scale demolition and new construction using modernist forms, see Francesca Russello Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*; and Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse*. In rare cases, like New Haven under redevelopment official Edward J. Logue, cities prioritized social renewal alongside physical renewal, but they were the exception that proves the rule. See Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America’s Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019). On the nature and scale of urban renewal in Harlem, see Brian D. Goldstein, *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle Over Harlem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), esp. 19–25.

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19. “Text of Speech—Press Conference Re \$5.5 Million Grant for Rehabilitation of West 114th Street,” 13 April 1965, Box 060022W, Folder 7, Speeches Series, Wagner Documents, 8; Natalie Jaffe, “Block in Harlem Begins New Life,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1965, 95; O’Kane, “Experimental Block Moving.”

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Project in New York City,” September 1966, Lindsay Papers, 18–26.

23. “The Story of a Unique Urban Renewal Project in New York City,” September 1966, Lindsay Papers, 14–16; “Work on 114th St. Block Begins”; Jaffe, “Block in Harlem Begins New Life”; “Two-tone Look on 114th St.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 13, 1966, 22; U.S. Congress, *Antipoverty Program*, 24; Jones, “Powell Conducts Hearing.” On racial discrimination in construction unions, see Thomas J. Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945–1969,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 145–73.

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26. O’Kane, “Experimental Block Moving”; City of New York, *Large-Scale Residential Rehabilitation Program*; HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*. Henry Monroe was a freelance photographer whose work also appeared in the *New York Amsterdam News*. See Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, “Amsterdam News Photographic Archive, Series A. Subject Files A-E, 1920–2012,” <http://rmmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMM08084AAE.html>; Terry Sass, email message to author, April 13, 2018.

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28. HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*; Maysles Films, *Experiment on 114th Street*.

29. HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*, 2. By this time, Weaver was secretary of HUD.

30. Bard, “Redeeming a Slum,” 18; Bard, “New York’s Superblock”; George Todd, “4 Bldgs. Will Be Ready for Workmen,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 13, 1965, 5.

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33. “Super Block with Super Problems,” August 22, 1970, Logue Papers; HUD, *House on W. 114th Street*, 18; Weaver, “An Antipoverty Test”; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, IV 18; Hyung Chung, *The Economics of Residential Rehabilitation: Social Life of Housing in Harlem* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 110–11. Using the Joint Center’s data, Chung found that the West 114th Street rehabilitation cost \$24.67 per square foot including acquisition costs, while new high-rise and mid-rise housing would cost \$20.84 and \$20.21, respectively. On the Joint Center, initially headed by Martin Meyerson and led at this time by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, see Michael Churchill, “Harvard, MIT Establish Center to Conduct Broad Urban Studies,” *Harvard Crimson*, February 27, 1959; Eugénie L. Birch, “Making Urban Research Intellectually Respectable: Martin Meyerson and the Joint Center for Urban Studies of Massachusetts Institute

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37. Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, III 30, III 34–37, III 49–50.

38. Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, III 30.

39. Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, vi, V 32, Appendix 1.

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42. Steven V. Roberts, “The Two Faces of West 114th St.,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1966, 35; On New York City’s decline as a port, see Elizabeth Cohen and Brian Goldstein, “Governing at the Tipping Point: Shaping the City’s Role in Economic Development,” in *Summer in the City: John Lindsey, New York, and the American Dream*, ed. Joseph P. Viteritti (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 173–74; Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 76–100; Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 161–65.

43. Bisesar cited “the rank discrimination now

being forced on Negro and Puerto Rican contractors and artisans and laborers in this city.” See U.S. Congress, *Antipoverty Program*, 27–32; John E. Brown, “Adam Powell Hears Witness: Negro Contractor Charges Bias at Open Air Congressional Hearing,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1965, 1. In October 1965, the *New York Amsterdam News* pictured a “Nathaniel Brown” constructing interior walls, though information in the article does not confirm whether this is the same Nathan Brown discussed above. See “First Families Moving in Rehabilitated W. 114th St.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 16, 1965, 3.

44. Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, V 38, V 23–24, IV 78; “Super Block with Super Problems,” August 22, 1970, Logue Papers. \$1,000 in 1968 wages is equivalent to \$7,400 in 2019; \$1,600 is equivalent to \$11,800 in 2019. See Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator.

45. Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, V 35; “Super Block with Super Problems,” August 22, 1970, Logue Papers; Jaffe, “Block in Harlem Begins New Life.”

46. “West 114th Street Rehabilitation Project: Background Memorandum,” ca. July 1965, Wagner Documents, 6; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, IV 61, IV 106; “Super Block with Super Problems,” August 22, 1970, Logue Papers; Deed between Frank A. Juliano and the United States of America, January 6, 1976, New York City Department of Finance, Office of the City Register, Automated City Register Information System (<http://a836-acris.nyc.gov/CP/>); “Randolph Houses,” New York City Housing Preservation & Development, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/developers/projects/randolph-houses.page>. The Automated City Register Information System also records a non-digitized deed conveying all properties on the block from HUD to the New York City Housing Authority on March 4, 1976. On New York City’s fiscal crisis in the mid-1970s, see Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 256–87; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York’s Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017).

47. Radford describes a New Deal–era vision of “modern housing,” especially espoused by Catherine Bauer, that included “good housing while simultaneously creating neighborhoods with convenient social services and recreational possibilities.” However, opponents of such approaches reduced public housing to cheaply built, stripped-down, and minimal structures

for the very poor, without the social and community ambitions of modern housing. See Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. 191–98 (quoted text on p. 195). On the City Beautiful movement’s emphasis on physical transformation as a means of effecting social transformation, see Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 261–76.

48. Sara Rimer, “A Harlem Block Proud of Gains and Its Children,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1984; Sara Rimer, “Holiday Cheer Fills a Harlem Block,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1991; Alan S. Oser, “Tenement Rehabilitation Test Due for Lower East Side Area,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1978, A15; Joint Center, *Rehabilitating*, v–ix; Devereux Bowly, *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 126–29, 131–36. Pursuing extensive rehabilitation over more modest efforts necessarily raised project costs; as one national study noted, however, high rehabilitation costs were fundamentally problematic for low-income tenants for whom rent increases were unsustainable. Therefore, gut rehabilitation—instead of moderate rehabilitation—only made tenants’ position more insecure, especially if a project lacked other needed services. See R. Allen Hays, “Housing Rehabilitation as an Urban Policy Alternative,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 4, no. 2 (March 1982): 41–43.

49. On rehabilitation in the context of gentrification, see Osman, *Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*; Aaron Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). On rehabilitation as a community development strategy, see Goldstein, *Roots of Urban Renaissance*; Alexander Von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of Ameri-*

*ca’s Urban Neighborhoods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Rehabilitation was never a majority of federally subsidized housing production until the retrenchment of the 1980s left it as one of the few remaining options. Rehab’s percentage of federally subsidized housing units typically stayed in the mid-teens between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, peaking at 21.6% in 1980. But about 80% of HUD subsidies went to existing or rehabbed units by the late 1980s, with development of new housing units essentially curtailed. See David Listokin and Barbara Listokin, *Barriers to the Rehabilitation of Affordable Housing: Volume I and II* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, May 2001), 27–30.

50. National Register of Historic Places, West 114th Street Historic District, sec. 8, p. 8; Rimer, “Holiday Cheer Fills a Harlem Block”; Mireya Navarro, “Harlem Housing Relic from the 1800s Is Set for a Long-Promised Overhaul,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2014; New York City Housing Authority, “Press Release: Phase I of Renovations Complete for Randolph Houses in Central Harlem,” April 22, 2016, <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/press/pr-2016/Phase-I-of-Renovations-Complete-for-Randolph-Houses-20160422.page>; Rebecca Baird-Remba, “How a Block of Abandoned Harlem Tenements Were Transformed Into Affordable Housing,” *New York YIMBY*, January 5, 2017, <https://newyorkyimby.com/2017/01/how-abandoned-harlem-tenements-became-affordable-housing.html>.

51. Irwin Arieff, “Momentum in South Harlem,” *New York Times*, December 24, 2009; Kia Gregory, “A Boulevard in Harlem Undergoes a Resurgence,” *New York Times*, December 2, 2012.