Repairing Communities Through Demolition: Evaluating the Motivations and Outcomes of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND URBAN STUDIES at THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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May 3, 2024

Abstract

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Chicago Housing Authority demolished all of its high-rise family projects and undertook a massive redevelopment plan. The Plan for Transformation turned the former sites of high-rises into mid-rise, mixed-income communities to address the issues of crime and poverty concentration that had plagued the projects. While the resulting communities have largely avoided the symptoms of social decay that beset their predecessors, their construction has carried with it a decrease in public housing units and a tumultuous relocation period for many public housing residents. This paper seeks to evaluate both the successes of the CHA's Plan for Transformation and its flaws in implementation and planning, questioning who the Plan was designed to benefit. Using the Oakwood Shores community as a case study, this paper analyzes the changes in demographics and social outcomes at the Oakwood Shores developments, comparing them with data from the surrounding area to determine whether the resources invested in redevelopment have resulted in measurable social change in Chicago public housing. This paper concludes that the results of the Plan for Transformation on the ground are somewhat disappointing compared to what was promised, as demographic changes are equivalent to the trends in nearby neighborhoods. Furthermore, by reducing the number of public housing units and reintroducing tenant screening, the CHA has not succeeded at making high-quality housing available for the most vulnerable Chicagoans. Chicago's public housing is no longer as dangerous, nor a source of bad press, nor an aesthetic blight, but it also no longer serves the same social function.

Introduction

The provision of quality affordable housing to low-income people has been a goal of federal and local governments in the United States for over a century, and in that time, the dominant approach has varied. Throughout the middle part of the 20th century, governments primarily constructed geographically segregated "superblocks" of high-rises, but by the 1990s, this came into question as housing projects were associated with crime, deferred maintenance, and concentrated poverty after decades of negative headlines. Over time, with the influence of ideas of austerity pushed by President Reagan, cities began to deem these projects unsalvageable and developed new ideas about how public housing ought to be structured. The federal government, in the wake of the 1994 elections that gave small-government Republicans control of Congress, subsequently mandated an overhaul of urban public housing, beginning with a rule that forced the demolition of public housing buildings if demolition would be cheaper than rehabilitating all units (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006). This juncture was an opportunity to reimagine the future of urban housing for low-income residents, and public housing agencies across the country began to change their development plans. Chicago undertook the largest of these projects, as the city's Plan for Transformation covered three times as many units as the next largest redevelopment plan (Chaskin and Joseph 2015). Based on new ideas of mixed-income development and New Urbanist principles of design (attempting to integrate developments with the surrounding area and emphasizing human-scale architecture), the Plan for Transformation viewed housing as a vehicle of opportunity for its residents, replacing the demolished high-rises with mid-rise, income-integrated communities. Given the radical departure from prior thinking, and the amount of time that has now passed since this new strategy, it is valuable to assess whether the optimistic visions of change presented in the Plan for

Transformation have become reality, and what implications that has for the trajectory of public housing in the United States.

The Plan for Transformation followed a period where the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was placed under federal receivership and is congruous with many of the policies put forth in the federal HOPE VI program. HOPE VI was a grant program established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in order to rebuild and rehabilitate maligned public housing developments into mixed-income communities that would provide resources to assist public housing residents in becoming self-sufficient and exiting poverty. Chicago served as a primary example of the goals HOPE VI attempted to meet, as the city received more grants than any other city (Venkatesh et al. 2004). In line with other actions taken by the U.S. government at the time, HOPE VI sought to redesign public housing from being an underperforming program into a more result-based process designed to promote changes in the behavior and economic status of low-income Americans. It also led to increasing privatization of various aspects of subsidized housing. In Chicago specifically, the demolition of high-rises along with substantial numbers of units set aside for non-public housing residents meant that new developments had significantly fewer public housing units than what they replaced. The difference, as well as the majority of relocation housing during the demolition process, was to be made up using Section 8, a federal program that gives low-income residents subsidized vouchers to rent units on the private market (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006, 216).

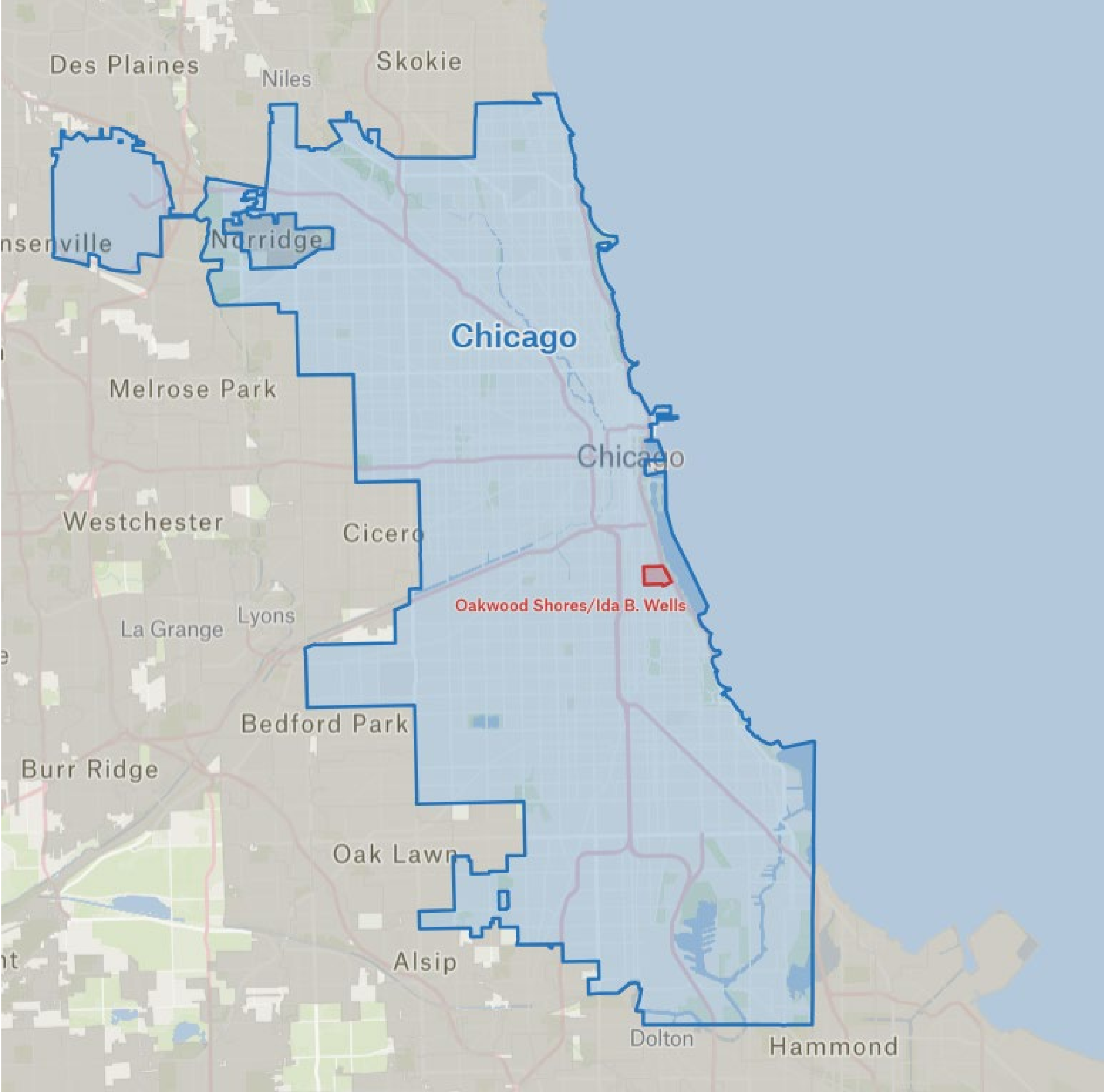
The motivation for the overhaul of Chicago's public housing was not solely due to federal trends; it was also responding to the image that was associated with projects like Cabrini-Green and the Robert Taylor Homes. Public housing had become synonymous with crime and had been getting negative news coverage for decades, and the physical image of those high-rises

came to represent danger, crime, and the incompetence of city government. To distance Chicago public housing from its maligned past, the Plan for Transformation ensured the new era would look totally different from its predecessors by rebuilding its developments from the ground up. The desired shift in perception of Chicago's public housing in the wake of the Plan for Transformation has certainly occurred. However, the solution may have been excessively oriented toward rectifying the most visible flaws of the old model. This paper seeks to evaluate whether the social benefits of redevelopment have borne out, and whether they outweigh the impacts of a reduction in public housing units, increasing privatization, and the strain of the relocation and reconstruction process. The Plan for Transformation was predicated on several assumptions about the benefits of mixed-income housing, the optimal design of a housing project, and the lack of harm of the relocation process. As a result, this paper will investigate both the impacts of the changes enacted in the Plan for Transformation and the merits of the assumptions the Plan for Transformation was based on. Enough time has passed for the Plan for Transformation to display results as to the degree of change, and whether the new developments are functioning as parts of a neighborhood, and yet there has been no up-to-date assessment of the outcomes at these sites.

In order to conduct this evaluation, this paper focuses on the Oakwood Shores site in the Oakland neighborhood of Chicago (the former site of the Ida B. Wells Homes, Madden Park Homes, and Clarence Darrow Homes), compiling data on the social, economic, and physical impact of the development, and comparing it to trends in the surrounding area. This paper finds that the Plan for Transformation has had some unequivocal successes, such as substantial increases in employment rate and median income and reductions in poverty and crime at the Oakwood Shores site. However, a more holistic analysis of all of the factors that went into the

redevelopment, including the negative impacts of relocation and unit reductions, as well as a comparison between trends at the Oakwood Shores and its surrounding area, calls into question whether the Plan for Transformation was the catalyst for this socioeconomic change.

Figure 1: Location of Ida B. Wells Homes Development in Chicago



Background & Context

History and Politics of the Chicago Housing Authority

Government involvement in subsidized housing in Chicago began in earnest during the New Deal, with federally funded projects for wartime workers. Shortly after this, the Housing Act of 1937 empowered municipalities to start public housing agencies, and in Chicago, this took the form of a municipal not-for-profit corporation, the Chicago Housing Authority (Bowly 2012). The public housing of this period was based on an ideology of "slum clearance," attempting to give residents of overcrowded neighborhoods with substandard living conditions access to modern, high-quality affordable housing. Very little public housing in this period was built on vacant land - 89% of units built in the United States under the Housing Act of 1937 were on sites previously occupied by slums (Meyerson and Banfield 1955). The public housing of this period was also built with the goal of not competing with good quality private sector housing, instead seeking to meet the portion of the market not covered by private industry. However, because of this ethos, as well as regulations that forced the minimization of construction costs, most buildings were constructed cheaply and poorly (Hunt 2009).

In Chicago, a housing project could not be constructed without the approval of the local alderman. Very few White aldermen ever approved any public housing in their wards, while Black aldermen were eager to alleviate the extreme housing pressure in the city's Black Belt (due to racially restrictive covenants in White areas and the massive growth of the city's Black population due to migration from the South) and approved most of the projects, leading to a significant concentration of public housing in majority Black neighborhoods (Meyerson and Banfield 1955 and Hunt 2009). Prior to 1946, there was a "neighborhood composition rule" that required the racial makeup of public housing to match the surrounding area, but after this point,

the waiting list for Black residents continued to grow and Black tenants were admitted into projects in majority-White neighborhoods (Bowly 2012). The political gridlock on approving public housing projects outside of Black neighborhoods never diminished, and most new public housing buildings were built adjacent to existing ones (Hirsch 2021). The final ruling of the *Gautreaux v. CHA* court case in 1976 found that the CHA was complicit in discriminatory site selection and ruled that the agency must build an equal amount of public housing in Black and White areas, but this only led to a functional standstill in the construction of new projects (Hunt 2009).

The physical design of this era of CHA projects was informed almost entirely by minimizing costs. The agency was scrutinized for the fact that its construction costs were significantly higher than those in New York, despite offering lower wages, and it was unable to design low-rise public housing under the federal cost guidelines (Bowly 2012). As a result, the vast majority of projects constructed in Chicago in the middle of the 20th century took the form of high-rise tower blocks, which kept short-term costs low but caused long-term maintenance issues, primarily due to elevators that continually broke due to vandalism (Hunt 2009). It is also possible that the site design of these projects, with tall buildings and a "superblock" form that removed internal streets and thus decreased street traffic, contributed to the crime problems they faced by creating low-security choke points at elevators and stairwells (Bowly 2012).

Decline of Chicago's Housing Projects

Through the 1950s and 1960s, CHA projects were still a relatively desirable place to live, especially for working-class Black residents whose housing options were constrained by racist real estate practices that prevented them from moving outside the Black Belt. However, as

middle-class White Chicagoans moved to the suburbs in large numbers, more units in other neighborhoods became available for Black Belt residents, and when given the choice between public housing and cheap market-rate housing, many wage-earning Black residents left CHA projects. The loss of desirability was due to an increase in crime, in addition to a shift in CHA policy to charge rent as a percentage of income. It also coincided with an expansion of welfare programs, and as a result, CHA projects became overwhelmingly filled by unemployed welfare recipients - in other words, those with no other options, rather than those choosing to live there. This included many single mothers, such that in 1970, the ratio of youths to adults living in the Robert Taylor Homes was 2.86, compared to 0.53 on average in Chicago (Hunt 2009). This demographic mix was nearly unprecedented in an urban setting and may have also contributed to the proliferation of vandalism and crime in the projects.

The first attempt to reverse the downward trajectory of the CHA came with the appointment of developer Vincent Lane as the new chairman of the CHA in 1987. Shortly afterward, Lane began an experiment in two high-rises at 40th Street and Lake Park Avenue, completely renovating the structures and then repopulating the building with a mix of working-class and very low-income residents (Hunt 2009). The combination of revamped tenant screening and income mixing makes this effort a clear forerunner of the Plan for Transformation, and it was generally seen as a success. However, renovation was a costly endeavor, and a 1995 federal rule declared that public housing buildings must be demolished if demolition would be cheaper than rehabilitation (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006). Lane's tenure could not fix most of the structural problems faced by the agency, and in 1995, the CHA went into federal receivership. HUD's solution to management issues was to privatize several aspects of the CHA's operations (Hunt 2009). The Plan for Transformation was presented to HUD in 1999 as

the city regained control of CHA, to indicate how the agency would proceed and seek to rectify its most pressing issues.

Implementation of the Plan for Transformation

The documentation of the Plan for Transformation always stated that the goal of the Plan was to build 25,000 public housing units through a combination of rehabilitation and new construction. The CHA acknowledged that this would lead to a substantial reduction in total units, around 13,000 less than existed before the Plan, but contended that this was necessary to create more functional developments, with that difference being comprised of units that were vacant at the outset of the Plan as well as families that would be moved to Section 8 (Chicago Housing Authority 2000). However, in 2010, the CHA began including project-based housing vouchers in their count of rebuilt units (Chicago Housing Authority 2011). Section 8 units were initially only supposed to make up some of the 13,000 unit difference, but instead are being counted in the 25,000 total, effectively making the gap larger. Indeed, up to today, the CHA has only built 3,470 new units in mixed-income development (along with 16,866 unit rehabilitations), far behind its initial goal of 7,704 without having any major developments currently in progress (Chicago Housing Authority 2010). The difference between those 3,470 new units and the 18,754 demolished units is 15,284, meaning that the CHA has delivered more than 2,000 fewer public housing units than promised. Despite this, the 2022 CHA annual report declared the 25,000 unit goal “closed,” counting more than 5,000 voucher units in that total (Chicago Housing Authority 2023). In addition, the CHA has been selling land on sites initially planned for redevelopment to private developers for less than market value, implying that they do not intend to continue their plans to meet the initial unit goal (Dumke 2022). The mixed-

income redevelopment that was the most eye-catching, impactful part of the Plan for Transformation has not occurred anywhere close to the extent that was promised and has led to a meaningful reduction in family units in the CHA system.

In addition to the effects of privatization and a reduction in total units, the Plan for Transformation created greater challenges for the most vulnerable public housing residents. Tenant screening (effectively, background checks for potential residents) was reinstated at the new developments and less than 15% of former public housing residents met the initial criteria - though notably, the CHA worked with residents to develop fairer criteria at the Henry Horner Homes, and with those modifications, 90% of public housing residents passed the screening at that development (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006). The changes of the Plan for Transformation certainly shifted the role of the CHA and made it pivot away from catering to the communities of greatest need (Chicagoans who would struggle to find housing elsewhere). Simultaneously, the restructuring of the CHA in the Plan diminished the agency's prominence: In the 1990s, the CHA had 2,000 employees, but by 2010 the number was closer to 500 (Chaskin and Joseph 2015).

Other areas of the implementation of the Plan for Transformation did not go smoothly and had a negative impact on the resident experience. The relocation process was rushed, with a particular effect on families with children, as it occurred shortly before the beginning of the school year (Venkatesh et al. 2004). Relocation case managers were given "unmanageable" amounts of cases, and thus pushed residents to take the easiest housing options, which were often in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods (Chaskin and Joseph 2015). After moving into the new developments, most public housing residents reported a general level of satisfaction with the housing quality (Popkin et al. 2010), but there were some social issues involving integration of

public housing and market-rate residents. Market-rate residents criticized public housing residents for “ghetto behavior,” scrutinizing their use of public space in the developments and leading to rules about gathering and, in some cases, the construction of physical barriers (Khare, Joseph, and Chaskin 2014). There do not appear to have been any major issues or flare-ups other than those localized disagreements, but there is minimal evidence of social cohesion between neighbors developing in the new mixed-income communities.

The CHA was born in the 1930s with the objective of slum clearance, based on the premise that poverty and social ills were partially caused by poor, unregulated, disorganized living conditions, and that a more intelligently planned project would improve residents’ outcomes. It is a bit facetious to act as if the Plan for Transformation was a second iteration of slum clearance, but there are certain parallels, as both involve similar overhauls of the built environment based on assumptions of being able to better organize housing to improve the lot of low-income Chicagoans. One major difference is that early CHA projects were intended to not compete with market-rate housing, while the new mixed-income developments are explicitly intended to equal market-rate housing in quality, as they must attract people to buy the market-rate units.

Oakwood Shores Development

The data in this assessment will be taken from the Oakwood Shores development, which replaced the Ida B. Wells, Clarence Darrow, and Madden Park Homes. Located in the Oakland community area in the greater Bronzeville district, about four miles south of the Loop, this site has been primarily occupied by public housing for at least eighty years, beginning with rowhomes in the 1930s before the construction of dozens of high-rise buildings through the mid-

20th century. The development was never as notorious as Cabrini-Green or the State Street corridor, but it was the subject of a 1997 documentary by Frederick Wiseman called *Public Housing*, which depicted everyday scenes from the project right before the HUD takeover of the CHA, including police-resident interactions, and the bureaucracy that stalled residents attempting to improve their situations (Wiseman 1997).

After 2000, the entirety of the site was demolished, with construction of new buildings beginning in 2004. As of 2017, 863 units had been built at the Oakwood Shores site, 43% of those being public housing and a further 33% being affordable housing with rents below market-rate (Gensler 2017). Thirty-four acres of the site remain vacant, and the amount of construction is far below the initial goal of 3,000 new units. The new units are primarily in three-story buildings, which is congruous with the scale of many of the non-public housing buildings adjacent to the development. They have a consistent, sleek design aesthetic with some modern elements (the use of both brick and concrete) while still retaining compatibility with other Bronzeville buildings by using similar geometric forms. The site was developed and is managed by a not-for-profit organization called The Community Builders, Inc. (Chaskin and Joseph 2015).

Figure 2: The Ida B. Wells Homes in 1978

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 3: Oakwood Shores in 2009

(Source: The Chicago Housing Authority)

Overview of Research & Conceptual Framework

The Plan for Transformation represented a dramatic shift in how the government thought about public housing in a way that followed national trends of the time. The general trend of HOPE VI-era projects was toward deconcentration and privatization and using public housing redevelopment as a vehicle of neighborhood change, and the Plan for Transformation was no exception. In addition, it had the largest scope of any HOPE VI project, and affected neighborhoods of Chicago with a variety of economic trajectories. As a result, the implications of assessing the performance of the Plan for Transformation extend past Chicago and can indicate whether public housing has been on the right trajectory nationwide.

The Plan for Transformation attempted to address the extreme concentration of poverty and unemployment that characterized Chicago's tower blocks. By creating mixed-income developments, the Plan intended to bring more resources into these neighborhoods immediately and provide better conditions for public housing residents to improve their socioeconomic status over time through a combination of creating connections, modeling behavior, and taking advantage of support services - the idea of "positive gentrification" (Chaskin and Joseph 2015, 12). The Plan for Transformation covered many aspects of the functioning of the CHA, from property management to sanitation, but the primary goal of the extensive investment in redeveloping public housing sites was the economic revitalization of struggling neighborhoods and an increase in economic opportunity for CHA residents (Chaskin and Joseph 2015). Therefore, evaluating data on economic and social outcomes for residents, demographic and economic changes in the geography of the development, and when possible, resident satisfaction should indicate how closely the Plan for Transformation has approached its desired outcomes.

In addition to measuring the progress of the Plan for Transformation according to its goals, it is also important to look at the shortcomings of those intentions. The Plan addresses the reduction of public housing units resulting from its implementation by stating "While the overall loss of project-based housing is concerning (a net loss of approximately 13,000 units), there is no alternative. The remaining inventory will be built/rehabilitated to a standard of quality sufficient to attract a mix of incomes so that public housing does not again become home to extreme concentrations of poverty. Moreover, enough units are produced to accommodate all existing lease-holders" (Chicago Housing Authority 2000, 2). By prioritizing the deconcentration of poverty and de-densification at the same time, the CHA necessitated a reduction of public housing units on Plan for Transformation sites, meaning that the purported benefits of mixed-income living would be available for fewer residents.

The need for change at the demolished high-rises was undeniable, and the CHA's boldness in overhauling the goals of public housing, in addition to its physical form, represents a recognition that the past system's flaws were simultaneously deeply set and fixable. However, many of the agency's solutions were oriented around addressing specific flaws that had come to be associated with public housing, raising the question of whether the redevelopment plan was truly designed to be transformative, or whether it was too focused on distancing itself from the previous era, thereby leading to oversights in planning and implementation.

Literature Review

Investments in American public housing since the 1990s have followed the HOPE VI model, based on providing more opportunities to residents through the deconcentration of poverty and reconstruction of project sites. The decision to invest significant resources into this

vision for public housing carried with it a few assumptions about the root causes of social problems in public housing. In order for the HOPE VI typology of development to meet expectations, mixed-income communities would have to create the conditions to give better economic opportunities to low-income residents; those benefits would have to be enough to counteract the stresses of relocation; and Section 8 vouchers would have to enable the private market to absorb more low-income residents following the reduction of total public housing units, without adverse effects.

Mixed-income interactions, vouchers, and relocation were key components of the implementation of the Plan for Transformation in Chicago and had a huge bearing on its outcomes, especially the negative ones. In order to understand the rationale behind the Plan for Transformation, it is important to understand the research consensus on how mixed-income developments affect resident interaction and socioeconomic outcomes. The relocation process and emphasis on Section 8 were both byproducts of the Plan for Transformation, intended to enable mass-scale redevelopment, but nonetheless played a huge role in the overall impact of the Plan. The specific consequence of relocation in Chicago is valuable to study, in order to see how it affected residents' stability, but the research basis for "housing choice" through vouchers and relocation of low-income residents into high-opportunity areas is also relevant to understanding the ideas that informed the Plan.

Mixed-Income Development

The benefits of mixed-income development are taken for granted by the government in their HOPE VI plans, with the theoretical basis that more prosperous residents would raise the quality of services in a neighborhood, and that connections between neighbors would help lower-

income residents find higher wages (the aforementioned "positive gentrification.") Mixed-income developments hope to address the downward spiral of concentration of poverty, where middle-class people leaving neighborhoods reduces resources, access to services, and behavior models for poor residents. However, these assumptions do not hold up under scrutiny. Studies have concluded that interaction between neighboring residents of different income levels is uncommon and does not have an impact on low-income residents' employment prospects (Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber 2007). A study of HOPE VI projects across the nation did find a slightly greater decrease in poverty rate in tracts with HOPE VI projects than nearby tracts that did not get redeveloped, with a more significant correlation in high-poverty neighborhoods. However, these trends can potentially be explained by the reduction of public housing units to make way for higher-income tenants, as HOPE VI developments made of entirely affordable housing saw a minimally significant reduction in poverty (Levine Coley et al. 2023).

The spatial proximity of residents of different socioeconomic status has not, as hoped, led to smooth social integration. A study at my case study site of Oakwood Shores asked residents about interpersonal dynamics after redevelopment and found a general feeling of caution when interacting with neighbors of different backgrounds, while public housing residents did not want to interact too much with their fellow public housing residents, fearing stigmatization (Chaskin and Joseph 2015). This results in an overall decrease in social well-being, as high-income residents are stressed due to fears of crime, while low-income residents suffer from the derogatory attitudes of their neighbors (Thurber, Riehle Bohmann, and Heflinger 2018). A case study of volunteers who moved into public housing in Southern Israel as part of a privatization effort found that trust between social groups was lacking and low-income residents had some animosity to volunteers who were able to take units ahead of those on waiting lists (Shmaryahu-

Yeshurun 2022). Public housing residents did not report benefiting from being able to model their behavior on more well-off homeowners, though they noted a significant increase in feeling safe in their development (Chaskin and Joseph 2015).

A 2003 study done by HUD assessing demographic changes at HOPE VI sites across the country was more optimistic about the impact of moving into mixed-income developments, finding that median income increased 33% among public housing residents compared to pre-HOPE VI developments. The same study found significant increases in the percentage of residents' income earned from employment and huge decreases in the percentage of residents on welfare (Holin et al. 2003). However, most of the social and economic improvements found in new developments may be due to the enforcement of tenant screening and work requirements (Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber 2007). CHA residents during the process of redevelopment alleged that mixed-income developments were an excuse to remove low-income residents from neighborhoods with rising property values (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006). All evidence of positive demographic change must be placed in the context of the greater restrictions on who is allowed to live in these developments.

The potential benefits of neighborhood change must also be weighed against the impact of being uprooted, as public housing residents are often very vulnerable, with major disruptions having an outsized impact on their financial and social stability. A case study of relocated residents from public housing in Duluth, Minnesota found that 35% of residents were "less satisfied" with their new dwelling, as opposed to only 25% who were "more satisfied" (Goetz 2010, 16). It is possible that the relocation process damages public housing residents' economic situations by weakening their extant social networks. A study on race in mixed-income developments found evidence of some tensions between residents of different races and incomes,

as former public housing residents objected to the strictness of rules imposed by property managers, while market-rate residents complained about poorer neighbors' behaviors. On the other hand, the same study noted instances of social connections developing between residents of different income levels with similar racial backgrounds (Khare, Joseph, and Chaskin 2014). Mixed-income developments are more prosperous and safer than the public housing developments they replaced, but there is not much evidence that they are successfully lifting public housing residents out of poverty.

Section 8/Housing Choice Vouchers

While the Chicago Housing Authority intended to replace all occupied public housing units that were demolished, only 6,200 of the 25,000 units were rebuilt at the same sites (Bennett, Smith, and Wright 2006), and at the Oakwood Shores development, only 30% of units were to be given to former CHA tenants (Hunt 2009). Much of the difference was made up by increasing the number of Section 8 subsidies in the city. Section 8 tenants live in units managed by private landlords but have their rent paid by the government, and the program's merits are debated by scholars. Vouchers offer some advantages by giving tenants more choice in where they will live, but they represent a major shift from the traditional social housing model, and by dispersing public housing populations, it makes it more difficult to target services and resources to residents. Economically, vouchers can be more easily targeted to those in greatest need, as opposed to the lottery model of many subsidized units. They also incentivize landlords to make their units desirable, due to market discipline effects, as opposed to project-based subsidies that take advantage of high demand through waiting lists and keep units in worse condition (Ellickson 2010). Nationally, a HUD report from 2000 found that waiting lists were far shorter

for Section 8 units than project-based units, and a similar percentage of Section 8 residents live in high-poverty and majority-minority areas compared to the rental population as a whole. However, in the largest metropolitan areas, where demand for subsidized housing is highest, Section 8 units are more likely to be in high-poverty areas, and waiting lists are longer (Department of Housing and Urban Development 2000).

Other analyses of Section 8 vouchers in the public housing relocation process find more flaws. A study in Phoenix, where 66% of public housing units are voucher-based, found minimal evidence of deconcentration of poverty over time, with most movement of voucher recipients occurring between different high-poverty neighborhoods. In addition, movement out of high-poverty areas was more common for white voucher recipients than minorities (Thomas and Alozie 2019). In Chicago, fewer than 3% of relocated CHA residents moved to “opportunity zones" with both low poverty rates and substantial racial integration, though only 70% were in high-poverty areas, with the other 27% in areas without high poverty that remained racially segregated (Venkatesh et al. 2004). The trends in Phoenix and Chicago may indicate that, when given the chance to choose where to live, minority groups prioritize staying near others with the same background, rather than seeking the greatest opportunity in areas with more resources. The national trend toward Section 8 has continued, with the number of people living in Section 8 exceeding traditional projects around 2005 and continuing to increase since. Chicago is no exception, and the Plan for Transformation has exacerbated this pattern (Ellickson 2010). While vouchers may present a quick solution to enable poverty deconcentration, they are not a panacea, and Chicago public housing residents who moved to Section 8 are receiving less attention and fewer resources than those in mixed-income developments.

The Relocation Process

The process of relocating CHA residents out of condemned high-rises encountered many issues, some in execution and some in planning. The relocation process itself was difficult, with limited time to make decisions on where to move, and overwhelmed relocation caseworkers applying pressure to make quick decisions (Venkatesh et al. 2004). In addition, many residents with children had to move very shortly before the start of the school year. The relocation process was also particularly difficult for some families with disabled members or elderly caregivers of young children and impacted their ability to find suitable new housing (Popkin, Cunningham, and Woodley 2003). Those with the most mobility and means to move relocated as soon as given the opportunity, which meant that those with the most challenging cases were left with less time and fewer options.

The CHA also underestimated the strength of neighborhood ties within public housing projects. 73% of residents relocated from the Robert Taylor Homes returned to the project site multiple times per week (Venkatesh et al. 2004). This trend was also seen elsewhere, with a case study in Duluth finding a significant amount of dissatisfaction with relocation, with residents' negative feelings about their new neighborhood tied to their lack of enthusiasm about moving and high level of attachment to their old neighborhood (Goetz 2010). It is possible that a development like Orchard Gardens in Boston, which remained 85% low-income after redevelopment, and thus retained more of the original residents, can temper the negative effects of relocation, and bring more social benefits (Shamsuddin and Vale 2017).

When it comes to the CHA's own stated goal that all former housing project residents be given the right to return to the new developments, the outcomes are far behind the ideals.

Stringent tenant screening often prevented those most in need of housing from returning, while those who were given preference often found they preferred Section 8 units and did not want to return (Chaskin and Joseph 2015). As of 2014, only 11% of displaced public housing residents had returned to a new mixed-income development (Khare, Joseph, and Chaskin 2014).

A smooth relocation process would have been essential to the Plan for Transformation going as intended. Instead, there were several hiccups that impacted the most vulnerable public housing residents disproportionately, and it seems clear the CHA did not allocate enough resources or time to this important task.

Conclusion and New Contributions

The assumptions carried in the Plan for Transformation about the benefits of moving residents from a segregated development to an integrated one were overly simplistic and caused the agency to give insufficient resources to the efforts that were needed to make redevelopment truly work for residents. The CHA did not pay enough attention to the difficulty of creating harmonious social relationships between groups of vastly different backgrounds, and rushed relocation rather than making sure each resident ended up in a situation that was right for them. However, while research indicates the theoretical shortcomings of the CHA's approach to the Plan for Transformation, there is much less scholarly work on what happened at the new mixed-income developments after residents moved in. As the sites passed through each phase of development, and now that they have existed as communities for about a decade, conditions have changed, and more representative conclusions can be drawn. There is also very little research on the social outcomes at Plan for Transformation sites, or how demographic data has changed over time, through different steps of the redevelopment process.

This paper intends to build upon the foundations and theories of prior researchers, updated and contextualized with current data from the Oakwood Shores area in order to evaluate the CHA's intentions and process in building mixed-income developments. Specifically, I will analyze demographic changes between the different eras of CHA developments, measuring the degree of difference and how well the outcomes match the Plan for Transformation's goals. There are reasons to see the CHA's ambitious overhauling of its projects as a potentially exciting path forward for American public housing, as well as reasons to critique its execution and be skeptical of the city's motivations. Researching and evaluating what change at Plan for Transformation sites has actually looked like will help in answering some of the most important open questions that remain regarding the Plan.

Methods and Data

In order to evaluate the Plan for Transformation and the effectiveness of the "positive gentrification" theory that guided the structure of the mixed-income developments, I must determine the social and economic outcomes at those developments. The CHA identified the concentration of poverty as a major cause of the flaws of the old project model, and thus invested its resources and attention towards reducing this concentration. In this paper, I will first assess the degree of change that occurred (what was the measurable extent of the "gentrification") and then look at demographic indicators to determine the effects of that change (whether the gentrification was truly "positive").

To do this, I focused geographically on the Oakwood Shores development, built between 2004 and 2013 on the former site of the Ida B. Wells Homes, between 35th Street, Cottage Grove Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, and Pershing Avenue, as my case study. I have chosen

this site as it is more representative than certain other prominent projects, as all the redevelopment was done after the Plan for Transformation (unlike some West Side sites), most of the site has been redeveloped (unlike the Taylor Homes) and it is under less pressure from nearby real estate demand than the Cabrini-Green site. As a result, I believe data from Oakwood Shores may be more generalizable to other redevelopments using a philosophy of positive gentrification.

To measure the impact the Plan for Transformation had on the Oakwood Shores site, I primarily used Census and American Community Survey data on population and unit type (American Community Survey data is only available after 2006 but is used after this for greater detail). I assessed the changes in the characteristics of the population of the site by measuring the change over time of median income, income distribution, housing tenure, and relocation. Given that Census data requires looking at the site every 10 years, I began taking data from 1980, using 1980 and 1990 as measures of the pre-transformation site demographics, 2000 and 2010 as mid-transformation data, and 2020 as the current demographics.

The specific variables I assessed to evaluate the social outcomes at the Oakwood Shores site were based on the stated goals of the Plan for Transformation. The Plan places a primary focus on improving economic opportunity and lifting residents out of poverty, and so measuring changes in median income and employment rate can determine to what extent this has occurred. I am using employment rate as a variable rather than unemployment rate because many public housing residents are not in the labor force and are thus excluded from unemployment data. Related to this, measures of single-parent households and child-to-adult ratios will show whether the Plan for Transformation has contributed to greater family stability and addressed some of the drastic outlier demographics that occurred at many Chicago public housing sites in the 1980s.

Another important outcome to measure is crime rate, given that much of the negative associations with housing projects before the Plan for Transformation stemmed from the amount of violent crime. Data for this was taken from a dataset on the Chicago Data Portal that contains all incidents of crime reported in Chicago going back to 2001 and enables sorting by date and by police beat. While 2001 is late in the existence of the Ida B. Wells Homes to set a baseline, this source is very geographically precise and enables me to isolate data from the case study area.

I also used previously compiled data to get more precise assessments of certain parts of the resident experience. The CHA's annual reports do not contain much data that is separated out between the different project sites, but there are useful updates on the progress of redevelopment and some demographic data I would not be able to gather otherwise. The CHA also released a report on the relocation process in 2011 that should provide the most detailed and accurate information on resident relocation and demographics. There are also resident surveys carried out by researchers that will allow me to consider CHA residents' voices and compare the purported benefits of the Plan for Transformation with how residents actually felt. Most of these surveys are from more than a decade ago, but they offer data about residents' own perceptions of the developments and the immediate impacts of relocation.

The analysis of relocation is an important component of assessing the impacts of the Plan, since the reduction of units means that Oakwood Shores is housing fewer people than the projects it replaced. In order to have a complete measurement of the effects of redevelopment, the part of the population that did not have the chance to benefit from the improvements made to the area must also be considered. There are some surveys of relocated residents, and a CHA document with more extensive data, but determinations on the impact of relocation will mostly

be qualitative considerations of how significant the reduction in units is, as well as information from other studies about the benefits and drawbacks of Section 8.

The analysis of the demographic data mostly takes two forms: looking at trends over time and comparing the trends in the tracts of the Oakwood Shores development to those of the Bronzeville area as a whole. The tracts I'm defining as the Oakwood Shores area (see Figure 5 for tract boundaries) are Cook County tracts 3511, 3602, and 8365 (3511, 3601, 3602, and 3603 prior to 2010). There is a small amount of land outside of the Oakwood Shores development covered by these tracts, but this definition is the most precise possible with Census data and the population trends of redevelopment should be very noticeable, given that the majority of the buildings in these tracts are in Oakwood Shores. The Greater Bronzeville area is defined as the Douglas, Grand Boulevard, Oakland, and Kenwood community areas - bounded on the north by 26th Street, on the south by 51st Street, on the east by Lake Michigan, and on the west by the Rock Island railroad tracks. This also consists of Cook County census tracts 3501-3515, 3601-3605, 3801-3820, and 3901-3907 (using pre-2010 boundaries). This area extends from Oakwood Shores 1-1.5 miles in each direction, and has distinct geographical boundaries, and thus represents the most easily definable "surrounding area" for the development. The one complicating factor of using this area as a comparison is that, in addition to Oakwood Shores, it also contained the State Street corridor, another sizable public housing project, and these neighborhoods also received a significant number of relocated residents after the demolition of projects. As a result, the demographic changes of the Greater Bronzeville area from 1990-2020 were substantially impacted by the Plan for Transformation, rendering it an imperfect "control," but still the most applicable comparison.

Figure 4: Oakwood Shores and Greater Bronzeville in Chicago

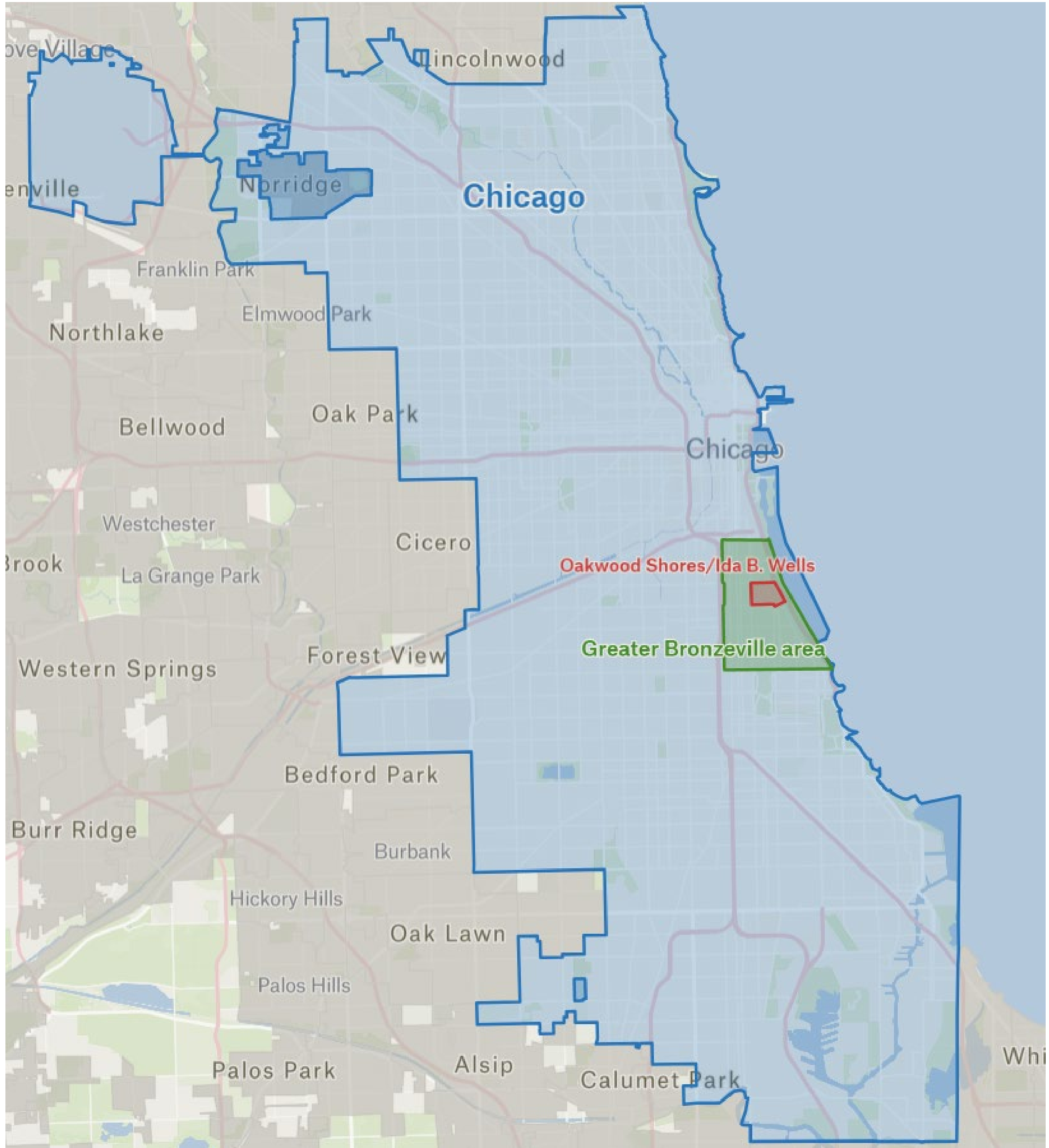
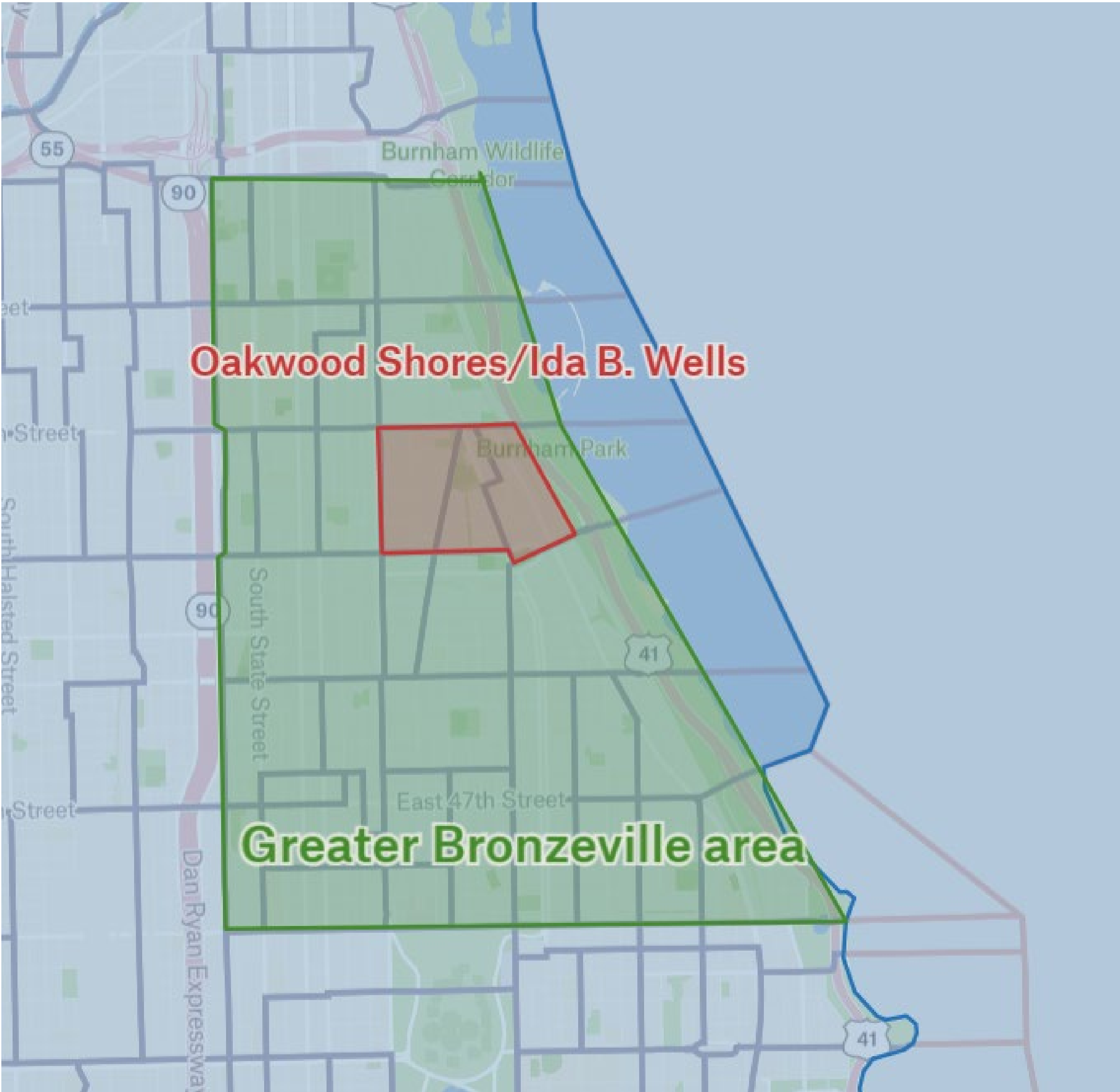


Figure 5: Census Tracts Detail



Data Analysis

The Plan for Transformation intended to provide public housing residents social and economic opportunity by creating diverse communities that would eliminate the harmful effects of poverty concentration. In this section, I will present demographic data taken from the

Oakwood Shores site and compare it to data from the Greater Bronzeville area defined above. I will also supplement this with existing survey data to provide a more complete account of the resident experience during and after the Plan for Transformation.

Table 1: Demographic Changes Between 1990-2020 At Oakwood Shores Site and Greater Bronzeville

Percent Change, 1990-2020	Oakwood Shores	Greater Bronzeville
Population	-49.6%	-24.6%
% Female	-4.9%	-0.2%
% Black	-10.4%	-17.4%
% Single Parent Households	-34.1%	-50.4%
Median Household Income in 2020 Dollars	+114.6%	+88.9%
% Families Below Poverty Line	-40.5%	-58.8%
% Renters	-6.6%	-17.3%
% Units in Structure of 50+ Units	-15.6%	-12.5%
Employment Rate	+96%	+47.1%
Crimes per 100,000 Residents*	-50.1%	-44.7%

*Greater Bronzeville crime data is taken from Chicago Police District 2 which has slightly different boundaries than the area defined for other variables. Data also reflects the difference between the 2001-05 yearly average crimes and 2019-23 yearly average crimes.

Analysis of Census Data

The Oakwood Shores area has undergone significant change in the decades since the implementation of the Plan for Transformation, and this is clearly reflected in the demographic

data. When the Ida B. Wells Homes and nearby projects were torn down, they contained more than 3,200 units, but as of 2017, when construction had stopped on Oakwood Shores, only 789 units had replaced them (Gensler 2017). Because of the mixed-income character of Oakwood Shores, this meant that the 3,200 public housing units that had existed in the 1990s had turned into only 336 public housing units. This explains why population decreased by almost 50% from 1990 to 2020 around the Oakwood Shores site (the decrease would be more dramatic if not for the non-public housing units contained in these tracts).

Regarding the social outcomes of residents, Oakwood Shores' data reflects similar trends to the surrounding area. The most encouraging data points are seen in the employment rate, median income, and crime rate, all of which saw greater change than the surrounding neighborhoods. These outcomes represent primary goals of the Plan for Transformation in making project sites better places to live. However, these results do not necessarily indicate unequivocal success for the Plan. The change in employment rate and median income significantly outpace surrounding neighborhoods, but some of that can be attributed to the introduction of more market-rate residents, as well as increased tenant screening, rather than solely reflecting public housing residents finding greater economic opportunity. In terms of crime rate, the decrease at Oakwood Shores (50%) is slightly sharper than that in the surrounding area (44%) but roughly equivalent.

There were also several variables where the trend at Oakwood Shores lagged behind other South Side neighborhoods. The change in single-parent households, notable given the extremely high concentration of single-parent families in CHA projects prior to the Plan for Transformation, was more significant in the broader area than at Oakwood Shores. The decrease in single-parent households within Oakwood Shores is substantial and shows a general increase

in diversity of family types within the project, with almost all of that decline occurring between 2010 and 2020, demonstrating a more recent demographic change that corresponds closely to when residents moved into new construction on the Plan for Transformation site. However, the halving of the proportion of single-parent households across the surrounding neighborhoods is a striking phenomenon, albeit one that exceeds the scope of this research. Nationally, the percentage of single-parent households was 20% lower in 2020 than in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 2023). Given public housing's role as a home for the most vulnerable members of society, and the fact that many single parents will need that assistance, it is not surprising or concerning that the neighborhood trend exceeds the site-specific trend in this case.

In the same way, the decrease in households below the poverty line at Oakwood Shores was substantial, but much less than in the broader area. It is hard to draw too much of a conclusion from this, due to the existence of income caps for public housing units. In addition, the change in Black population and renters is harder to assess as a positive outcome but given the fact that both Oakwood Shores and nearby neighborhoods were above 90% in both categories in 1980, decreases in these variables would reflect more diversity in the area. Even in 2020, despite the homeowners living in the development, Oakwood Shores remains a community of 95% renters and 89.7% African-Americans, though both of these percentages are lower than they were historically. The surrounding neighborhoods have seen a more substantial reduction in these variables, but given the demographics of CHA residents overall, and the defined number of units set aside as rentals, it makes sense that diversity would be lower within a public housing development.

Resident Perceptions

Demographic data is useful for assessing some aspects of resident outcomes but does not speak to how the changes at public housing sites were received by residents. For greater depth in this area, it is useful to look at existing survey data. Most surveys of public housing residents are now out of date, but they do contain data on the personal impact of the relocation process, which is completely missing from demographic data. The most valuable of these studies, done by the Urban Institute, profiles residents of the Ida B. Wells and Madden Park Homes before demolition in 2003, and follows up with them in 2009 (Popkin et al. 2010). The initial profile reports on the unique circumstances of many CHA residents that were mostly unaccounted for in the relocation program of the Plan for Transformation - many residents dealt with addiction or had criminal records that made finding housing elsewhere challenging; the buildings had squatters and non-leaseholders who were not eligible for relocation; and some families required large units (4+ bedrooms) that are difficult to find elsewhere. This survey, as well as a Columbia University survey examining relocation plans of residents, illuminates the extensive community networks based around CHA projects that gave residents strong ties to the physical locations of projects (Venkatesh et al. 2004).

By the time of the 2009 follow-up survey, only 29% of former Ida B. Wells Homes residents were living in a public housing unit, with another 54% in Section 8 housing and 17% not receiving housing assistance of any kind. Residents consistently reported much greater satisfaction with their housing quality, whether in another public housing development or in a private unit (Popkin et al. 2010). They also reported feeling safer in their neighborhoods, and all respondents lived in communities with lower poverty than the Wells Homes. This survey predates the construction of Oakwood Shores, but it nonetheless shows that extracting residents from the environment of the old CHA projects had some benefits.

Another survey, conducted from 2007-2011 at redeveloped CHA sites, focused specifically on perceptions of race at mixed-income public housing developments. Low-income, Black public housing residents reported interactions in which they felt stereotyped by higher-income neighbors and property managers, including instances at multiple developments where fencing was put up to discourage gathering. White residents at the developments also reported experiencing race-based resentment (Khare, Joseph, and Chaskin 2014). Despite the extreme segregation that defined the demolished projects, the CHA did not place any emphasis on the impact of race in the Plan for Transformation in official documents or give much consideration to how it would influence interactions between new neighbors. Overall, these surveys give greater depth to the post-Plan for Transformation resident experience, though they do not offer much commentary on the support services offered by the CHA. The Urban Institute survey corroborates the idea that the Plan for Transformation removed public housing residents from sites of extremely concentrated poverty, while the study on race relations notes the issues with social interactions between residents of different backgrounds. While relocation and integration into the new developments was a challenging process, it did come with significant benefits for the public housing residents who returned.

Discussion and Further Research

This survey of results, even if it was more conclusive, would not tell the complete story of Oakwood Shores. Census data represents just two snapshots from two distinct moments in the history of this site, and the Plan for Transformation was not the only thing that impacted this neighborhood between 1990 and 2020. In addition, it is impossible to separate the data from public housing residents, low-income residents, high-income residents, and residents of these

Census Tracts living outside of the CHA site. If demographic trends were different for each of these groups, that would be significant, but this level of detail is impossible to determine without more precise surveys.

Given the limitations, it is best to draw broad conclusions rather than specific ones from this data. The fact that the trends from Oakwood Shores look similar to the surrounding area is an indication that the Plan for Transformation didn't ultimately allow public housing residents to exceed their neighbors in achieving better status - but it also didn't preclude them from benefiting from the general trends of the area, either. However, when combining this ambiguous social and economic data with the documented difficulties associated with relocation and creating social cohesion on the new projects, it is hard to argue that the redevelopment process achieved the remarkable results that the creation of a mixed-income community promised to deliver.

In addition to more precise identification of the impact of redevelopment on public housing residents and how specific mechanisms of the Plan for Transformation interacted with residents' self-sufficiency, further research could compare results from Chicago with those from other cities or compare fully redeveloped sites with sites that kept buildings intact but rehabilitated all units. At any individual site, local factors will impact data, but collecting data from many sites that underwent similar redevelopment would produce more significant trends.

Conclusion

The Plan for Transformation led to measurable success in some areas. It improved the quality of the public housing stock in Chicago, and the problems of concentrated poverty and ultra-high crime rates at public housing developments are not nearly as pervasive as they were

when the Plan was written. The state of the CHA at the time HUD took over was untenable, and since then, the agency has improved the physical design of its projects and certain administrative processes and become more functional. However, there have also been many downsides to the changes in the CHA over the last three decades. The CHA has become less prominent, ceding units to private landlords through vouchers and losing 80% of its workforce due to privatization of various services (Chaskin and Joseph 2015).

The Plan for Transformation also saw Chicago lose more than 15,000 units of public housing, though many of those were replaced by voucher units. The mixed-income units that heralded the greatest change for public housing in the city only make up about 3,500 of the CHA's 63,538 households. For the considerable investment and attention given to these developments, and the toll of relocation on residents, their impact is relatively small. The Plan for Transformation instead impacted many more residents by expanding voucher programs, which carry some benefits in terms of potentially deconcentrating poverty but are inherently less stable and permanent than CHA-constructed developments. The Plan for Transformation is just one aspect of a long-term trend away from the CHA being a landlord and manager of physical infrastructure, and towards a more heterogeneous system of distributing low-income housing in the city.

More damning than the reduction in scope of the mixed-income redevelopment program is the inconclusive evidence of the supposed benefits of income mixing in practice. The improvements in median income, employment rate, and crime rate at the Oakwood Shores site from 1990 to 2020 seem to support the idea that combining public housing and market-rate units in the same community had a beneficial effect. However, the data is roughly equivalent, and in some cases less promising, than the same variables in surrounding neighborhoods; it is not clear

whether the Plan for Transformation had a greater impact than the prevailing socioeconomic trends in the Greater Bronzeville area over the same period. In addition, because the effects of the Plan were always intended to extend beyond project sites, some of the increased desirability of nearby neighborhoods may in turn be a result of the Plan.

Given the lack of evidence that the Plan for Transformation was actually transformative, at least to the socioeconomic status of CHA residents, should the city see the program as a failure? Would it have been better off solely investing in a large-scale rehabilitation program? Putting aside the federal mandates that the city had no control over, the Plan for Transformation was clearly still beneficial to Chicago and the CHA. By tearing down the high-rises that were associated with crime, gangs, neglect, and concentrated poverty and replacing them with aesthetically clean, modern developments that looked a lot more like the neighborhoods around them, the Plan for Transformation overhauled the aesthetics of public housing in the American city where that image was most negative. This change in image is not solely a concern of reputation, as residents have benefited from improved housing quality, and the shift in media coverage is as related to real reductions in crime as it is to the optical overhaul of Chicago public housing. Nonetheless, the lack of negative media coverage of housing projects is an aspect where the Plan clearly succeeded, unlike others where results are much less definitive. At every stage, the Plan for Transformation has been limited by oversights in implementation which have held it back from being the revolutionary reorganization of public housing that it initially promised to be, but that should not erase the fact that it succeeded in fixing many of the worst aspects of the CHA's operations.

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Appendix A: Complete Data for Oakwood Shores, 1980-2020

Oakwood Shores Tracts	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Population	16749	11066	8490	4916	5574
% Female	59.6	59.5	58.8	59.6	56.6
% African American	99.4	99.5	98.5	96.3	89.1
% Single Parent Households	46.9	49.6	50.2	47.4	32.7
Median Household Income	4817	6158	10408	15814	26170
% Families with Income Below Poverty Level	55.9	66.9	55.3	49.9	39.8
% Renters	97.8	98.3	97.6	94.5	91.8
% Units in Structure of 5 or More Units	83.2	81.3	70.1	88	74.2
% Units in Structure of 50 or More Units	--	50.4	38.8	59	42.5
Employment Rate	27.8	27.3	31.3	38.8	53.5

Appendix B: Complete Data for Greater Bronzeville, 1980-2020

Greater Bronzeville Tracts	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Population	128163	92924	78949	65276	70064
% Female	55.6	56.3	55.8	55.1	56.2
% African American	92.1	92.4	88.9	82.9	76.3

% Single Parent Households	27.1	29	26.1	18.9	14.4
Median Household Income	7031	10658	22272	32820	39864
% Families with Income Below Poverty Level	44.2	50.7	35.1	24.7	20.9
% Renters	90.5	89	82.8	71.7	73.6
% Units in Structure of 5 or More Units	82	80	77.6	65.7	70.4
% Units in Structure of 50 or More Units	--	49	48.9	41.9	42.9
Employment Rate	36.2	36.1	41.9	52.2	53.1

Appendix C: Number of Crimes in Each Year for Oakwood Shores and Chicago Police District 2, 2002-2023

Number of Crimes	Oakwood Shores	Chicago Police District 2
2002	1838	25939
2003	1402	24913
2004	1911	23644
2005	1827	21786
2006	1493	20098
2007	1914	19320
2008	1042	17450
2009	480	16520
2010	496	15933
2011	447	15294
2012	582	13587

2013	641	12800
2014	542	11445
2015	514	10486
2016	554	11298
2017	633	11412
2018	553	11664
2019	565	11156
2020	484	9287
2021	520	9352
2022	588	11629
2023	704	13459