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Dismantling Development: How Black Activists Spearheaded Affordable Housing In Paterson, New Jersey, 1950-1980

by

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This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

~ Emily Sánchez

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Abbreviations

CCP:	Christopher Columbus Housing Project
CDC:	Community Development Corporation
FORCES:	(Northside) Families Organized for Renewal of Community, Education, and Society
INCCA:	Inner-City Christian Action Organization
NAACP:	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NJHFA:	New Jersey Housing Finance Agency
PHA:	Paterson Housing Authority
PLAN:	Paterson Plans Ahead Now Organization
PRA:	Paterson Redevelopment Agency
PSEG:	Public Service Electric and Gas Company
SNCC:	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UNITED:	United Neighborhood for Industrial Training and Economic Development Agency

Introduction

Around 5:00 a.m. on a weekday morning in August 1977, Vera McCants walked up to the Carroll Street Houses office in Wrigley Park, a working-class Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhood in Paterson, New Jersey. The Inner-City Christian Action (INCCA) for Housing team had finally completed Carroll Street Houses and was accepting applications, after eight years of filing paperwork, searching for funding, and battling with city officials who opposed the construction of affordable housing for working-class communities of color. From afar, McCants, the vice-president of INCCA for Housing in 1977, noticed that people had started forming a line outside the office. This line later extended down the whole block. That month, so many people had flooded the office that McCants had to develop a system where each application was stamped with the date and time.[1] Ultimately, the INCCA team helped 1,500 people file applications for one of merely 88 houses in the new Carroll Street development.[2] The number of applications was a testament to the magnitude of the need for affordable housing in Paterson.

For the 30 years prior, McCants and many of the applicants had witnessed how Paterson's mayors and city boards had neglected the growing need for affordable housing open to working-class people of color. McCants was from Wrigley Park and could barely find any housing for herself and two children in the early 1970s. Of the housing options she did find, many were unavailable to her because of her identity: several landlords refused to rent to her because she was a single Black mother. McCants did not want

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[1] "Incca for Housing," *The News,* August 30, 1977; Vera McCants, in discussion with author, October 20, 2021.
[2] "It was 9 Years in the making, But It's Home Sweet Home," *The News,* February 2, 1978.

anyone else to experience the same struggles and discrimination that she did, so in 1974, she joined INCCA for Housing's leadership board and ultimately helped construct affordable housing for over 200 families by 1980.[3]

Although several US historians of public housing have claimed that the creation of affordable housing in the 1950s and 1960s was rooted in public institutions, I argue that, in the case of Paterson, New Jersey, affordable housing built primarily for working- class people of color was fundamentally rooted in the efforts of middle- and working- class Black residents who lived in Paterson's predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. By "people of color," I mean both the Black and Spanish-speaking populations in Paterson (the term "Spanish-speaking" was used in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s to refer to people of Latin American descent).[4]

Even though the growing presence of the housing shortage in Paterson's predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods—Northside and Wrigley Park—was clear to the city government in the 1950s and 60s, the mayor, city board members, and Paterson Housing Authority (PHA) did not mobilize to address the issue. The PHA primarily built low-income housing developments in predominantly white, working-class neighborhoods throughout the 1950s and 60s. Several mayors pointed to these developments to claim that the city government had done more than enough to address the housing shortage and thus could focus instead on developing the downtown into a profitable area immune to popular suburban shopping centers. With the support of

[3] Vera McCants, in discussion with the author, October 20, 2021.
[4] By the late 1960s, there was also a considerable number of Cuban immigrants and a small, but growing population of Peruvian immigrants. "Latins Plan March on Trenton," *Morning Call*, November 12, 1967; "City's Peruvians Begin Independence Program," *The News*, July 29, 1977.

mayors, a private businessmen's organization, Paterson Forward, tapped into federal urban renewal funds to develop the downtown in the 1960s. While the city government grew more fixated on helping the downtown business elite cultivate the downtown's economic potential, housing conditions in Paterson's predominantly Black and Spanish- speaking neighborhoods worsened. In this context, Black residents, from both middle- and working-class backgrounds, rose up and advocated for the construction of affordable housing in their neighborhoods. They formed part of the leadership of affordable housing organizations, like INCCA, and recognized the needs of working-class Black and Spanish-speaking Patersonians in the same housing developments.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that middle- and working-class Black residents, motivated by their personal experiences with local institutions, spearheaded the creation of affordable housing primarily for working-class people of color and worked to change local outlooks on housing policy in the 1960s and 1970s.[5]

Paterson's Industrial Background

To understand Paterson's housing shortage and community-led affordable housing projects, we must first understand the city's intense industrial past and urban decline. As Chris Norwood explains in *About Paterson,* the city was not "designed as a city; it was designed as a corporation." Through the Society for Establishing Useful

[5] I define the middle class as people who were employed as professionals and had a college degree. One of the case studies in this thesis, Julius Threet, falls under the category of middle class. He went to college, worked as a realtor, and had his own real estate company. Additionally, I define the working class as people who are in the labor force and have not obtained a college degree. Orabell Nickelson, another case study, falls under the category of working class. She did not go to college and worked as a cafeteria worker at Paterson's public schools. Vera McCants, mentioned at the opening of this thesis, straddles the line between working class and middle class. She was in the process of obtaining a degree while leading the INCCA for Housing organization.

Manufacturers (SUM), Alexander Hamilton founded Paterson in 1792 with the hopes of making it the future "national hub of industry." Hamilton saw Paterson's Great Falls and Passaic River as promising power sources for factories.[6] In the following century, Paterson became a center for locomotive and silk production. Each of Paterson's industries rose and fell at different times.

The departure of the silk industry between 1913 and 1950 is distinct from the departure of previous industries and is significant to the story of affordable housing because it coincided with the rise of the downtown as an economic powerhouse. This departure began when the Industrial Workers of the World helped silk factory laborers organize several strikes to demand eight-hour workdays and more control over the workplace in 1913.[7] After these strikes, Paterson's silk industrialists moved to areas, mainly in the US South and abroad, that allowed for the continuance of exploitative employment practices. Factories that remained started producing nylon and rayon fabrics instead but did not produce enough to become economic powerhouses.[8] Rather than focusing on manufacturing, the city's wealthy elite turned to downtown development to save Paterson from further economic decline. In the 1950s and 60s, competition from surrounding suburban shopping centers further motivated wealthy residents to develop and protect the downtown.

As more factories left Paterson in the 1950s and 60s, many white people also started fleeing the city due to the decline of industrial jobs and the increasing population

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[6] Chris Norwood, *About Paterson: The Making and Unmaking of an American City* (Harper & Row, 1975), 37–38; Paul E. Johnson, *Sam Patch, the Famous Jumper*, First edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 42.
[7] New Jersey Community Development Corporation, "History of Paterson," https://www.njcdc.org/what-we-do/page.php?Revitalizing-Paterson-Great-Falls-Promise-Neighborhood-History-of-Paterson-24.
[8] Jane Wallerstein, *Voices from the Paterson Silk Mills* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Pub, 2000), 115.

of people of color.[9] The number of Black people from the US South and Latin Americans moving into the city was ultimately greater than the number of white people moving out and led to Paterson's growth during a time when many cities across the country were shrinking. Wrigley Park and Northside (also known as Riverview) were the neighborhoods with the largest Black and Spanish-speaking populations (Figure 1).[10] By 1964, this population growth made Paterson the fourth densest city in the country.[11] Despite experiencing this growth, Paterson endured other troubling "symptoms" of urban decline like a municipal fiscal crisis. The city's greater population density in fact exacerbated the demand for sound housing.

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[9] George Lipsitz and Richard E. Polton, *The 1964 Paterson Riot - Three Days That Changed a City* (North Jersey Media Group Books, 2014), 28.
[10] Wrigley Park and Northside (also known as Riverview) had the largest populations of people of color in the city in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970, Wrigley Park had a total population of 20,850 and 59.9% of residents identified as Black and 14.9% identified as someone of "Spanish origin or descent." Northside (Riverview) had a total population of 10,366 and 75% identified as Black and 4.7% identified as someone of "Spanish origin or descent." Boorman and Dorram, INC. Consultants, "Neighborhood Analysis, Paterson Master Plan, Report 7," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1966, 34-64, held at New Jersey State Library; Breakdown of population in Paterson by race, derived from data gathered for the 1970 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database.
[11] Lipsitz and Polton, *The 1964 Paterson Riot,* 29.

Figure 1: Map of Paterson, published in the 1966 Paterson Master Plan.

In response to these "symptoms," Paterson's mayors and city boards decided to use federal urban renewal funds to revitalize the nonresidential, downtown area even though working-class residents of color had urged the city government to construct affordable housing.[12] The city's unique strong-mayor form of government, which gave

[12] Several cities around the country, like Baltimore and Pittsburgh, focused on "high-end" redevelopment. As Alison Isenberg highlights in *Downtown America,* many high-end redevelopment projects were private initiatives. Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 171; Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 7-8 and 108-109; Robert D. Lewis, *Chicago's Industrial Decline: The Failure of Redevelopment, 1920–1975* (Cornell University Press, 2020), 10.

power to the mayor to appoint all the members of city boards (who ultimately made decisions regarding urban development distribution of funds) allowed for the streamlined prioritization of the downtown and simultaneous downplaying of the housing shortage. As Chapter One of this thesis will demonstrate, this strong-mayor form of government and focus on the downtown exacerbated Paterson's housing shortage in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. In 1950, the housing vacancy rate was 1.7%—this rate increased to 2.5% in 1965, most likely due to white flight. But by 1974, about four years before the opening of Carroll Street Houses, the rate decreased to 1.1% and only about 75% of the vacant housing was suitable for habitation. Most residents who lived in housing "unsuitable for habitation" were Black and Spanish-speaking and did not have many options other than to stay in the city and continue living in unsafe housing.[13]

The story of community-led affordable housing projects adds to scholarship about Paterson's history, which mainly focuses on its industrial heyday in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Moreover, much of this scholarship centers the experiences of European immigrant laborers and does not address the lives of people of color in Paterson.[14] Very recently, scholars have begun to address this gap and document the history of communities of color and their experiences.[15] My thesis will add to this

[13] Breakdown of housing quality in Paterson by race, derived from data gathered for the 1950 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database; Boorman and Dorram, INC. Consultants, "Neighborhood Analysis, Paterson Master Plan, Report 7," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1966; Division of Planning and Zoning and Department of Community Development, "Supplementary Master Plan Report No 1: Housing Plan, Paterson, NJ," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1978, held at the Paterson Public Library; "Remarks of R.J. Cornish, President of the Paterson Coalition to the Paterson Redevelopment Board, June 11, 1973, Upon Presentation of the INCCA Housing Plan," Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.

[14] Wallerstein, *Voices from the Paterson Silk Mills*; Johnson, *Sam Patch.*

[15] For more on the history of uprisings and police brutality in 1960s Paterson, see *The 1964 Riot: Three Days that Changed the City* by George Lipsitz and Richard Polton. For more on the history of free and enslaved Black people in the Paterson area before the 20th century, see *Slavery at the River's Edge* by Jimmy Richardson. For more on the history of Peruvian immigrants in Paterson, see Gianncarlo Muschi's

growing body of literature by centering the experiences of working-class people of color and their fight to establish affordable housing in the 1960s and 1970s.

This thesis will also clarify the role and main goals of community-based housing organizations in the city. Lawrence Kramer, mayor of Paterson from 1967 to 1972 and 1975 to 1982, believed that community-based housing organizations functioned to "hang manners" on "meatheads" within communities of color, who made the issue of affordable housing "tougher" because they "wrecked" housing improvements.[16] While several city officials, including Kramer, believed that the main goals of community-based organizations were to correct the misbehavior of people within communities of color, leaders of community organizations themselves believed that their main purpose was to address the backlog in the construction of affordable housing exacerbated by city government officials, like the mayor and city boards. This focus on the story of community-based affordable housing organizations in 1970s does not only change the historiography of Paterson specifically but also opens significant new questions to ask of other cities about the origins of affordable housing.

Historiographical Interventions

This thesis specifically intervenes in four historiographical subfields: the history of urban renewal, the history of grassroots community organizing, the history of downtown development, and the history of community development corporations (CDCs).

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journal article, "U.S.-Peruvian Business Relations and Their Effects on the Pioneer Migration of Peruvians to Paterson, New Jersey 1920–1950" *The Latin Americanist* 65, no. 2 (2021): 286–311.
[16] Lawrence Kramer, in discussion with author, March 11, 2022.

Urban Renewal

Thus far, scholarship on urban renewal has effectively tracked how urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 60s benefitted the white middle class while also gutting communities of color. Historian Eric Avila in *Folklore of the Freeway* argues that the historical development of infrastructure, especially highways, "formed and followed inscriptions of race, class, and gender on the urban landscape" and urges other scholars to examine further the aftermath of infrastructural development on communities of color.[17] He explains that highways created in the post-WWII period generated jobs, commerce, and enterprise mainly for the white suburban middle class, while literally cutting through and destroying communities of color.[18] Studies like that of Avila have added to the narrative of federal and local public institutions planning redevelopment projects in undemocratic ways that ultimately benefited the white elite over working-class people of color. Lizabeth Cohen complicates this narrative in *Saving Our American Cities* by arguing that urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s did have a usable past. She claims that shifting approaches to development by urban planner Edward Logue helped cities come back to "economic, cultural, and commercial vitality with increasing amounts of community participation." Cohen reveals that Logue, in the latter half of his career, was responsive to the demands of community housing activists in South Bronx and helped expand available housing.[19] Despite her important contribution to the field of

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[17] Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 4.
[18] Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway*, 5.
[19] Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 10.

urban renewal, Cohen overlooks how community housing activists also made affordable housing a reality without the support of local officials and urban planners.

My thesis fills this gap within the scholarship by highlighting a narrative wherein middle- and working-class Black urban residents led efforts to address urban inequalities in the late 1960s and 70s. As the case of Paterson demonstrates, Black residents tried determining the direction of urban renewal funds even when their ideas and opinions were not well received by local officials and urban planners.

Grassroots Community Organizing

Historians of grassroots organizing in New York City have documented how tenants organized to fight for their rights within the private rental market in the first half of the 20th century. In *The Great Rent Wars,* Robert Fogelson examines how tenants, along with landlords, judges, and legislators navigated rent regulation post World War I (between 1917-1930s).[20] Roberta Gold picks up where Fogelson left off in *When Tenants Claimed the City* and examines the relationship between NYC tenant organizing in the post-World War II era and tenant organizing of the 1960s and 70s. Although the fight of tenant co-ops against urban renewal and mobilizations to save their homes went "down in defeat" in the 1950s, Gold finds that their struggles reinvigorated a local consciousness of tenants' rights and ultimately influenced the schooling and organizing of prominent tenant advocates in the late 1960s and 1970s.[21]

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[20] Robert M. Fogelson, *The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917-1929*, Illustrated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 5-13.
[21] Roberta Gold, *When Tenants Claimed the City: The Struggle for Citizenship in New York City Housing*, 1st edition (Urbana, Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 4-5.

In *Politics of Public Housing,* historian Rhonda Williams shifts our focus to the grassroots activism of working-class Black women in Baltimore, Maryland. She explores how they urged local and federal officials to address problems faced by tenants in public housing. Williams effectively demonstrates, through her engagement with oral histories, that working-class Black women's experiences with public housing in the 1940s and 1950s led to their political activism in the 1960s.[22] Lisa Levenstein adds to Williams's work in *Movement without Marches,* where she investigates how working-class Black women's experiences with public assistance programs in 1950s Philadelphia informed local civil rights activism in the 1960s.[23] *More Than Shelter* by Amy Howard builds on Williams's scholarship as well by analyzing the activism and community building of public housing tenants in San Francisco, California, between the 1940s and the early 2000s. Drawing from oral histories, newspapers, and local government documents, Howard concludes that public housing tenants formed a sense of community by advocating for the improvement of their homes together.[24]

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor extends Williams's, Levenstein's, and Howard's studies by exploring the experiences of working-class Black women in the aftermath of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act. This act enticed the private real estate market by removing the risk of buying and selling "deteriorating housing stock" in neighborhoods where "inharmonious" racial groups resided.[25] However, as Taylor explains in *Race for*

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[22] Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.
[23] Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia*, New edition (Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[24] Amy L. Howard, *More Than Shelter: Activism and Community in San Francisco Public Housing*, 1st edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xiv-xv.
[25] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 8.

Profit, this end to discriminatory housing policy did not dismantle the racism embedded within the real estate market. Mortgage bankers purposefully sold houses on the verge of being condemned to working-class, single Black mothers to "rack up sales."[26] Black women fought against this "predatory exclusion" and declared their rights to decent homes by leading class-action lawsuits against the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the 1970s.

I expand upon Taylor's study and the larger field of grassroots community organizing by arguing that working-class Black women also asserted their rights to decent homes by pushing for the creation of comprehensive, community-based, affordable housing organizations in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Downtown Development and Community Development Corporations (CDCs)

Thus far, historians of downtown development have examined how the downtown became a site of power and exclusion over time. In the *Rough Road to Renaissance*, John Teaford traces how 12 cities in the Northeast region attempted to tackle the problem of urban decline, while also developing their downtowns between the 1940s and 1985. He claims that downtowns in many of these cities served as "turf common to all."[27] Robert Fogelson, in *Downtown: Its Rise and Its Fall,* begins to critique the idea of the downtown as "common turf" by exploring how interests of power brokers and political movers "shaped" the history of downtowns across the country between 1880 and 1950.[28] Alison Isenberg expands upon this critique in *Downtown America* and argues that

[26] Taylor, *Race for Profit,* 18.
[27] Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, 8; Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, 17.
[28] Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7.

exclusion within the downtown development process was just as common of a theme as "democratic inclusion." As her book demonstrates, downtown development and improvement strategies were often tied to policies "designed to attract certain types of people downtown while ignoring or explicitly rejecting others" based on race, gender, class, and age.[29] However, the subfield has yet to explore the legacies of exclusionary downtown development on affordable housing and community development corporations (CDCs). CDCs were a "broad range of organizations" in the late 1960s and 1970s that shared the main aim of "building economic and political power" through job training programs, social services, and community-run housing.[30]

Historians of CDCs have also overlooked the impact of exclusionary downtown development. They have instead investigated how the legacies of labor organizing and the Black Power movement shaped CDCs. In *The Fixers*, Julia Rabig tracks how organizers applied a labor model in the late 1960s to create the Tri-City Citizens Union for Progress, a CDC in Newark, New Jersey.[31] She also demonstrates how the Congress of African People/Kawaida Inc., another Newark CDC, was tied to the Black Power movement.[32] In *Roots of the Renaissance,* Brian Goldstein nuances Rabig's understandings of CDCs by arguing that choices made by CDC leaders, mainly African American community developers and architects, helped contribute to gentrification in

[29] Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 6.
[30] Julia Rabig, *The Fixers: Devolution, Development, and Civil Society in Newark, 1960-1990* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 15.
[31] Rabig, *The Fixers,* 175.
[32] In her book, Rabig, by drawing on oral histories, civil rights organizational records, and local newspapers, ultimately finds that Newark's CDCs hoped to institutionalize" their social justice agendas in the 1970s by counteracting "shortchanged programs of the War on Poverty," building affordable housing, and creating employment opportunities. Rabig, *The Fixers,* 197, 15.

Harlem. However, the role of downtown development does not form part of Goldstein's narrative of Harlem's gentrification or the participation of CDCs.

In short, historians of downtown development have pointed out how the downtown was exclusionary, while historians of CDCs have examined how the organizations formed out of labor organizing, the Black Power movement, and contributed to gentrification decades later. But, neither have linked the "origins" of CDCs and the "legacies" of exclusionary downtown development. I bridge this gap by demonstrating how, in Paterson, exclusionary downtown development, supported by the strong-mayor form of government, exacerbated the housing shortage in predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods and spurred the creation of community- based affordable housing organizations, including CDCs like INCCA.

This thesis builds upon scholarship about urban renewal, grassroots community-organizing, downtown development, and CDCs by drawing from oral history interviews, newspaper articles, master plans, and personal papers of local activists in Paterson, New Jersey, in the late 1960s and 1970s. Together, these sources demonstrate that middle and working-class Black residents, responding to exclusionary downtown development, spearheaded the construction of affordable housing primarily for working-class people of color and worked to redefine local approaches to housing policy.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter One explores how the downtown business elite and city government officials, including the mayor and city boards, directed urban renewal funds to save the downtown from economic decline in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Paterson's Chamber

of Commerce began efforts to “revitalize” the downtown and make it competitive against “motor-friendly” suburban shopping centers through a city-wide commercial campaign in the mid-1950s. Soon after this campaign, in 1956, a group of white local businessmen and members of the city government created the Forward Paterson organization with the goal of further developing the downtown. The power of the white business elite and the city government’s streamlined focus on downtown development exacerbated the housing shortage in predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

Chapter Two explores how these dire housing conditions motivated Paterson’s first Black realtor, Julius Threet, to create the United Neighborhood for Industrial Training and Economic Development agency (UNITED) in the mid-1960s. UNITED was a nonprofit organization dedicated to the construction of affordable housing in Wrigley Park. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Threet and UNITED challenged the development ideals put forth by Paterson’s white business elite by creating opportunities for homeownership primarily for Paterson’s working-class people of color. While doing so, Threet faced many obstacles from city government officials and realized that the completion of UNITED’s affordable housing projects was tied to cooperation and support from the mayor and city boards. The way the mayors and city boards sidelined his own housing projects inspired him to make change beyond UNITED and run for mayor on a platform that prioritized the creation of affordable housing.

Chapter Three tracks how the activism and housing policy ideas of two working-class Black women, Orabell Nickelson and Nina Gray, led to the construction of affordable housing designed primarily for and by working-class people of color. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, both Nickelson and Gray urged the city boards, mayors, and

churches sponsoring antipoverty programs to do more about existing racial inequalities, including accessibility to decent housing. Their efforts eventually motivated INCCA, an organization originally founded by local churches to provide educational enrichment opportunities for low-income children, to create a subbranch focused on affordable housing. By doing so, they paved the way for Vera McCants, a single Black mother and native of Wrigley Park, to become INCCA for Housing's vice president in the 1970s. McCants centered the voices of working-class people of color throughout the design and construction process of the organization's affordable housing projects.

Ultimately, it was the efforts of middle- and working-class Black residents that led to the construction of affordable housing in Paterson primarily for working-class people of color in the late 1960s and 1970s. They witnessed how Paterson's strong-mayor form of government, a system that allowed for the white downtown elite to control urban development in the 1950s and early 60s, exacerbated the housing shortage and consistently inhibited the construction of affordable housing. It was this exacerbation of the housing crisis and faults of the strong-mayor form of government that inspired Black Patersonians to take matters into their own hands.

I. Business Driving Development: How a Quest to Save the Downtown Guided the City's Future and Outlooks on Affordable Housing, 1950s and early 1960s

Paterson city officials' streamlined focus on downtown development was no accident. In the 1950s, downtown business owners around the country were fearful of what the rise of suburban shopping centers meant for their yearly profits.[33] For the Greater Paterson Chamber of Commerce, this fear manifested into the creation of a campaign to make downtown Paterson a regional commercial center. By June 1956, white business leaders, including Henry Haines, owner of a local newspaper, began to understand the campaign and the downtown's economic success as the key to Paterson's "progress."[34] This chapter explores how this continued urgency to protect Paterson's future as a regional commercial center led to the creation of Forward Paterson, an organization of local businessmen devoted to saving the city's downtown.

The power of the downtown elite and support from city mayors, under Paterson's strong-mayor form of government, facilitated the transformation of this urgency into development efforts that aimed to avert the downtown's economic decline and simultaneously disregarded the growing need for affordable housing in working-class communities in the 1950s and 60s. While the Paterson Housing Authority (PHA) met the housing needs of working-class white residents in the 1950s and 60s, they failed to do so the same for working-class Patersonians of color.[35]

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[33] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 168-69.
[34] Haines owned *The News. N.W. Ayer & Son's American newspaper Annual*, Philadelphia, 1956.
[35] Division of Planning, "Supplementary Master Plan," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1978, held at the Paterson Public Library.

Introducing the Power Players: The Chamber of Commerce and Paterson Housing Authority, 1940s–1950s

The Greater Paterson Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1908 and was led by prominent industrialists, including E.H. Lambert of Lambert Silk and Eli Mirandon, manager of the Copper Mining and Smelting Albert E. Hall Company.[36] By the 1940s, retailers, bankers, and realtors had taken over the chamber's leadership partly due to deindustrialization. Presidents included Henry Stam, a realtor, and Howard Schoonmaker, owner of a prominent men's clothing store.[37] No chamber members were also part of the Board of Aldermen most likely due to conflict of interest and the alderman's powerlessness. Aldermen had lost all legislative power in 1907, when the state legislature transferred all the aldermen's authority to the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, the Board of Finance, and the Board of Public Works.[38]

By the time Schoonmaker had risen to the position of chamber president in 1944, city officials had made barely any progress on affordable housing. The Board of Finance had created the Paterson Housing Authority (PHA) in 1941 and appointed five men to the authority's leadership. The men, all white, included a representative of the Electrical

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[36] Wallerstein, *Voices from the Paterson Silk Mills*, 40-42; "Paterson Board of Trade Is Reorganized," *The Passaic Daily News,* July 11, 1914; "The History of Copper," *The Morning Call,* May 2, 1902; The Board of Trade changed its name to the "Paterson Chamber of Commerce" in July 1914.

[37] Two industrialists, John Verduin and Weldon Hemus, were elected presidents of the Chamber of Commerce in the 1950s. They both managed nylon fabric finishing companies. However, their leadership did not mean that realtors, bankers, and retailers did not have power during their terms–retailers controlled branches of the commerce. For example, under the Hemus administration, Jerome Levine, owner of a women's clothing store in downtown Paterson, was president of the Division of Distribution. "A.T. Riedel Sr., Elected President of Realty Board," *Morning Call,* December 19, 1940; "Greet Chamber's New President," *Morning Call,* February 6, 1944; "Verduin Drawing Army Cartoons, Paris Trib Likes Them," *The News,* March 10, 1953; "Committee Heads of Chamber to Meet Wednesday," *The News,* February 20, 1954; "Sale Days," *Morning Call,* February 3, 1953; Advertisement for the John Verduin Corporation, 1952, accessed XYZ, https://vintageadsandbooks.com/john-verduin-machine-corp-1952-vintage-textile-ad-dye-finish-print-zl374; "Behrman Heads Chamber Parking Traffic Group," *The News*, January 17, 1953; "January Clearance: Schoonmaker's," *The News*, January 15, 1953.

[38] "Aldermen Had Power – And Blew It," *The News,* July 7, 1972.

Workers Union, a sales manager at the Public Service Company, a lawyer and former Speaker of the House of Assembly member, a president of the Citizens Trust company, and a prominent building contractor.[39] Considering their occupations, none of them, except perhaps for the Electrical Workers Union representative, were familiar with the hazardous living conditions that working-class people of color faced.[40]

The PHA's projects in the 1940s and 1950s reflected this unfamiliarity. All four housing projects completed by the PHA by 1956 were located in predominantly white neighborhoods. In 1942, the PHA completed Riverside Terraces in census tract 11, which was 94.9% white, 5.1% Black, 0.2% other, and 0% Spanish-surnamed. In 1951, the PHA completed Brooksloate in census tract 3, which was 94.8% white, 5.2% Black, and 0.4% Spanish-surnamed. A few years later, in 1953, the PHA completed the Alexander Hamilton high-rise development in tract 31. This tract was 87% white, 14.7% Black, 0.1% other, 0.8% Spanish-surnamed. Lastly, in 1956, the PHA completed another high-rise housing project, Dean McNulty. This development straddled two census tracts: census tract 20, which was 84.9% white, 15.1% Black, and 13% Spanish-surnamed, and census tract 19, which was 99.6% white, 0.4% Black, 0.1% other, and 0.5% Spanish-surnamed. The PHA did not build in the predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking Wrigley Park and Northside neighborhoods (Figure 2).[41] Although is it not clear whether these housing projects were segregated, their physical location suggests that the PHA

[39] "Board of Finance Appoints Five-Man Housing Authority," *The News,* December 28, 1941.

[40] Even the white Electrical Workers Union representative might have not been familiar with the housing conditions of working-class people of color—most electricians, due to their "skilled" position, were closer to middle- than working class and thus might not have been living in the same neighborhoods as did working-class people of color. Moreover, access to technical training was likely not as accessible to working-class people of color than working-class white people.

[41] Division of Planning, "Supplementary Master Plan," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1978, held at the Paterson Public Library; Breakdown of housing quality in Paterson by race and census tract, derived from data gathered for the 1960 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database.

built them to primarily house working-class white residents and not working-class residents of color.

Establishing the Ideals That Guided Paterson's Future in 1954

On January 7th, 1954, Henry D. Adamy, president of the Quackenbush Main Street department store, delivered a speech to Chamber of Commerce members and established ideals that directed the efforts of business leaders to make Paterson a regional commercial center in the late 1950s. He first described an imaginary "promising metropolitan center" and explained that it was "an inland city … with a trading population of 300,000 within a seven-mile radius. The average retail purchases per family amounts to $4,101 per year."[42] This focus on who surrounded the city and how much they could spend within it ignored working-class people who lived and worked in Paterson.[43] Adamy then explained that this imagined city made more than $50 million worth of sales each year in apparel and general merchandise, furniture and household supplies, automobile and food store sales, indicating that, to Adamy and his audience, what made a city full of "promise" and a potential candidate for a metropolitan center was how well the city's businesses made profit. At the conclusion of his speech, Adamy revealed to the audience that this city was "your own city of Paterson."

[42] "Adamy Praises City, Challenges it to meet suburban competition," *The News,* January 7, 1954.
[43] This focus on out-of-city suburban shoppers and the erasure of working-class people of color who lived in the city is connected to a longer history of racist and gendered marketing. As Alison Isenberg highlights in *Downtown America,* marketers, since the 1920s, mainly ignored African American consumers and their shopping decisions. Informed by stereotypes, marketers "relegated African American women to the irrelevant margins of consumption," while also centering white women in their marketing strategies. Additionally, many marketers aimed to specifically engage white, middle-class housewives over downtown workers because white, middle-class housewives "*chose* whether to shop downtown." Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 79-89.

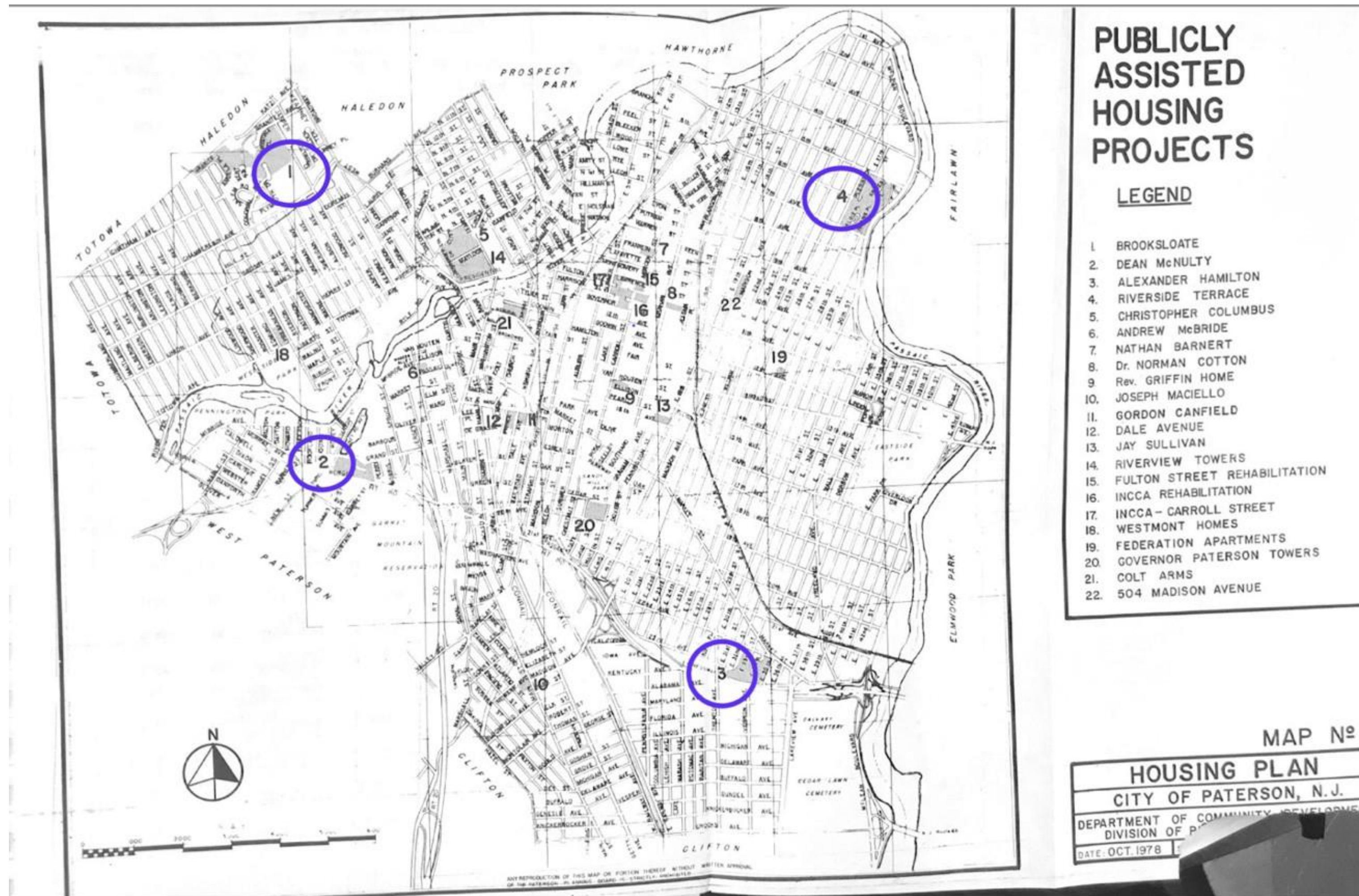

Figure 2: Map of all publicly assisted housing projects built in Paterson between 1942 and 1978, published in the "Housing Plan" supplement of Paterson's 1978 Master Plan. All the low-income housing projects built between 1942 and 1956 by the PHA (encircled) were in predominantly white census tracts.

Furthermore, his audience's reception demonstrated that many local business leaders did not already understand Paterson as a potential commercial center. For example, in reaction to his speech, Abe Greene, who was associate editor of *The News,* commissioner of the National Boxing Association, and toastmaster of the night, said, "I was all set to join that town until it dawned on me that you were talking about home," suggesting that he could not have easily imagined a city like Paterson accomplishing commercial success to the extent described by Adamy. Greene then added, "In all seriousness, though, I want to thank you for a complete and masterful message. I had never heard such an exhaustive presentation of our city's tremendous economic potential," implying that local businessmen more generally had not thought of the city as a potential hub of commerce.[44] This surprise, accompanied with the inability to conceptualize Paterson as commercial center, together illustrated that local businessmen were not accustomed to viewing Paterson as a "promising city" for commercial development. The fact that the city was in a moment of transition contributed to the dissonance between Adamy's vision for Paterson and the businessmen's understanding of the city.

Paterson was transitioning out of an industrial period into a retail commercial one and was reckoning with the exploding age of the automobile. By the 1950s, more and more businessmen in Paterson, as demonstrated by the leadership of the Paterson chamber of commerce, were in the retail business. However, as was the case in several industrial cities around the country, Paterson's old, narrow, and unpaved streets were not made to support retail business and the free movement of suburban shoppers' cars.

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[44] "Adamy Praises City, Challenges it to meet suburban competition," *The News,* January 7, 1954.

Paterson's automobile inaccessibility became more of a problem with the rise of suburban "motor-towns," like Radburn, and the construction of shopping sites with spacious parking lots, like the Bergen Shopping Center in Paramus. Both Radburn and Paramus were about 15 minutes away from Paterson and threatened local businessmen's yearly retail profits.[45] In response to this threat, Paterson's businessmen advocated for the creation of more parking lots to help level out the competition between themselves and the motor-friendly commercial centers.[46] Adamy also manifested the desire for a motor-friendly Paterson when he explained that the imagined commercial city in his speech had "hundreds of miles of paved roads, outstanding means of transportation, parking lots and many other advantages."[47]

Downtown Paterson Has Everything!

In May 1955, about a year and half following his speech, Adamy and his supporters created a campaign that aimed to make a reality their vision of an idealistic commercial center in Paterson. This campaign communicated that the profitability of local businesses depended on the commercial engagement of white women living in surrounding suburbs. One of the campaign's first advertisements, published in the

[45] For more on how downtowns throughout the country were battling with shopping malls for the dollars of white, suburban middle-class housewives in the 1950s, see *Downtown America* by Alison Isenberg; "Merchants Launch Program to Sell City as Shopping Center," *The News,* May 4, 1955; "Demolition of Regent Theatre," *The News,* June 21, 1956.
[46] In the years following this meeting, the mayor of Paterson Edward O'Byrne led efforts to create more parking spaces. As Isenberg explains in *Downtown America*, demolitions of hotels, theatres, and churches for the creation of parking lots were also common in the 1930s and were "practical depression solutions." "Demolition of Regent Theatre," *The News,* June 21, 1956; Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 140; "Adamy Praises City, Challenges it to meet suburban competition," *The News,* January 7, 1954; "Merchants Launch Program to Sell City as Shopping Center," *The News,* May 4, 1955.
[47] According to the Gruen Plan, the construction of two major shopping centers had caused a decline in the trade area in the 1940s. By the mid-1940s, the trade area population had shrunk to half its original size. Victor Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now: A plan for downtown Paterson," March 1962, 5; "Adamy Praises City, Challenges it to meet suburban competition," *The News,* January 7, 1954.

Paterson News, included a cartoon image of a white woman gesturing toward a cloud of words around her (Figure 3). This cloud listed all the types of businesses and amenities a shopper would find in downtown Paterson, such as "beauty shops, shoe stores, department stores, sportswear stores, theatres, bowling alleys and restaurants."[48] The choice to use a cartoon of a white woman to present the many kinds of businesses in Paterson's downtown suggested that white women consumers were the campaign's focus. Additionally, the inclusion of places like movie theatres, bowling allies, and restaurants implied that Paterson was a place for relaxation and suggested that the campaign's target audience were consumers from middle- to upper-class backgrounds who could afford such leisure activity regularly.

[48] "At your fingertips in Downtown Paterson," *The News,* July 12, 1955.

Figure 3: Advertisement with cartoon image of a white woman gesturing toward a cloud with different types of amenities and businesses found in Paterson's downtown, published in *The News,* July 1955.

An advertisement published the following year further demonstrated that Adamy and his supporters were hoping to engage middle- to upper-class white mothers (Figure 4). This ad, titled, "My Mother Shops in Downtown Paterson," promoted Back-to-School sales and included six photographs of white mothers shopping with their children.[49] Each photograph was accompanied by a caption, which included the woman's name, residence, and a short testimonial about their downtown Paterson shopping experience. All women, except for one, were from suburbs surrounding the city, namely Fair Lawn, Prospect Park, Saddle Brook, Wayne, and East Paterson. They also seemed to come from middle- to upper-class backgrounds as well. Mrs. George Aughey, on the bottom left, was photographed alongside her car, and Mrs. William Oftenberg, on the bottom right, was pictured at a restaurant with her two daughters and mentioned that her husband had recently opened a printing company.[50] Ultimately, the overwhelming presence of suburban white women in these ads implied that Adamy and his supporters viewed them as the key to unlocking Paterson's full potential as a regional commercial center.

Measuring the Campaign's Success

In 1956, the Chamber of Commerce pressed full steam ahead in creating the impression that their ad campaign was working and on the way to bringing prosperity to the whole city. For example, in a New Year's forecast, Adamy announced that 1956 was going to be "better than 1955, particularly if there is continued cooperation by retailers

[49] Marketers often hoped to engage white housewives over single white women because housewives bought products for their whole families. In this ad, Paterson's white businessmen were attempting to engage white housewives in the region who were going to purchase items for themselves and children. Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 89*;* "My mother shops in downtown Paterson," *The Herald-News,* August 22, 1956.
[50] "My mother shops in downtown Paterson," *The Herald-News,* August 22, 1956.

and all other downtown interests in promoting Paterson and developing our rapidly growing potential trading area," suggesting that the campaign was economically successful thus far and had the potential of increasing retail sales more if continued into the new year.[51] Six months later, in June 1956, the Princeton Research Service company, hired by the chamber to investigate the campaign's successes, confirmed Adamy's prediction and found that the campaign had increased downtown shoppers by 4% and had expanded the trading area from 53 to 86 communities. Motivated by these findings, the chamber began fundraising another $122,000 to continue the campaign and sought "city- wide support" because if "downtown prospers, the entire community will benefit" and if it did not, "all of Paterson will suffer from the blow."[52] Paterson's prosperity depended on the campaign's success.

[51] "Continued Prosperity Forecast by Chamber," *The News,* January 6, 1956.
[52] "Will Continue Development Fund for 12 Months," *The News,* June 6, 1956.

My Mother Shops in Downtown Paterson

for BACK-TO-SCHOOL needs!

For best Back-To-School Values, shop at "Approved Member" Store displaying this seal

DOWNTOWN PATERSON APPROVED MEMBER 1956 SHOPPING CENTER

Downtown Paterson has EVERYTHING!

Figure 4: Advertisement featuring six white women, published in *The Herald-News,* August 1956.

Paterson's Success Depends on Commercial Success

After the campaign had grown to more than a year old, Henry Haines, owner and editor of *The News,* also seemed to have conceptualized the campaign as more than a successful project benefitting the downtown's businesspeople.[53] He expressed that the city's future "progress" hinged on the continued success and growth of the downtown campaign in an article called, "Wake Up, Paterson!" As the title implied, this article called out Paterson residents for not having given enough "blood, sweat, and tears," to the project of building a "better Paterson." Haines encouraged residents to join the downtown campaign and applauded the Chamber of Commerce for having "revived" the spirit for creating a "new Paterson." He communicated that Paterson's businesspeople, specifically Adamy and his supporters, had been the only Patersonians contributing actively toward the city's future. Haines also said, "What's good for others is good for them [Chamber of Commerce] and the combined benefits is good for all of us," reaffirming the idea that the campaign was going to benefit everyone in the city, not just downtown businesspeople.[54]

Haines called for highway development as well. He explained that several cities and small towns were "sprouting" because of highways and their "corollary benefits," meaning improvements in traffic flow and increased regional accessibility. These improvements led to rises in visits from suburban shoppers and bolstered retail business. To Haines, the highway construction "going on" in cities "all around us," including "Pittsburgh," "New York," "Newark," and "Squeedunk," elevated the urgency for

[53] *N.W. Ayer & Son's American newspaper Annual*, Philadelphia, 1956.
[54] "Wake Up, Paterson," *The News,* June 13, 1956.

Paterson's own highway development.[55] Moreover, by comparing Paterson to Squeedunk, an imaginary place in the middle of nowhere, Haines suggested that Paterson was not just behind with regards to highway construction among large cities but also was more generally behind in terms of city development. This proposition awakened a new spirit among Paterson's businessmen to control the direction of Paterson's development for the next several years.

Who Is Forward Paterson?

On June 21, 1956, executive assistant of the Passaic Division of the Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSEG) Frederick Frei organized a meeting with over 70 businessmen at the city's premiere hotel, the Alexander Hamilton.[56] He aimed to discuss how Paterson's businesspeople could increase "revitalization" efforts to ensure more profit for retail businessmen and remaining industrialists. Frei had been so inspired by the "Wake Up, Paterson" article that he enclosed copies of the editorial with each invitation. When speaking with *The News* reporters, he reverberated the fear that Paterson was not up to speed with development efforts and said that the "march of progress in surrounding communities is leaving Paterson behind." Yet, he also explained that the city was "ideally situated to compete for the mushrooming expansion of commercial and industrial activity in metropolitan area," expressing hope in the idea of transforming

[55] "Wake Up, Paterson," *The News,* June 13, 1956; Deseret News, "WORD DU JOUR," Deseret News, May 21, 1993, https://www.deseret.com/1993/5/21/19048760/word-du-jour.
[56] It is also important to consider that in 1955, PSEG had started their own campaign called "New Jersey: At the Crossroads of the East," which was an attempt to grow the state's industrial development and attract more manufacturers to the state. Perhaps, Frei saw the "Wake Up, Paterson" article echo the hope that PSEG had been attempting to circulate state-wide. "Fred Frei Named Division Leaders of the "Y" Youth Fund Drive," *The News,* May 19, 1955; "Noodling about 1955 … Public Service … at the crossroads of the East," *The Morning Call,* January 3, 1955; Public Service Electric and Gas Company, *What Do You See When You Look at New Jersey at the Crossroads of the East* (Newark, 1945).

Paterson's downtown into a regional commercial center. [57] The men who resonated with Frei's worries and hopes and accepted his invitation became the "Forward Paterson" organization.

The group's first meeting clearly established that Forward Paterson planned to make the city a commercial center through urban renewal efforts, rather than address the housing crisis endured by working-class residents. For example, at this meeting, Frei expressed that he wished to make the city a "home office center" for national firms. Another Forward Paterson member and Chamber of Commerce vice president, Edwin MacEwan, advocated for highway construction to make the city more accessible to suburban shoppers. He also recommended that the city tear down "not one or two blocks, but 10 and 20," to make space for an industrialist who was looking to buy five acres for a new plant, because it would "enhance Paterson's growth." [58] Without any second thoughts about the people living on the 10-20 blocks of land, MacEwan was prepared to destroy homes to make space for industry and profit. Ultimately, the ideal of making Paterson a commercial center and this prioritization of consumers and profit over the lives of working-class people living in the city foreshadowed the ideals that motivated and directed Paterson's development over the next 10 years.

Mayor Edward O'Byrne was also on board with the idea of Paterson as a future commercial center. He actively expressed support for Adamy's downtown campaign by attending chamber meetings, and in June 1956, expanded his support to Forward Paterson's efforts.[59] At the group's first meeting, O'Byrne promised that every "city

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[57] "City Leaders Get Invitation to 'Wake Up, Paterson,'" *The News,* June 21, 1956.
[58] "Hard Driving Program Laid Down for the City," *The News,* June 26, 1956.
[59] The mayor who preceded O'Byrne, Lester Titus, had also begun a parking garage program. "4 Candidates for Mayor Debate Variety of Issues," *The News,* October 19, 1955; "O'Byrne, Adamy, Slater

agency and facility would stand behind" the plan to make Paterson a downtown commercial center and added that he would personally "dedicate his time and effort" to make the vision a reality. O'Byrne later used his mayoral powers to fill the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Planning Board with Forward Paterson members, ultimately enhancing the organization's power.[60] With the advisory board stacked, Forward Paterson had the power to advise and have a direct say in the development plans for Paterson. This type of support is what allowed Paterson's businessmen to control and manage the city's development for nearly a decade.

Growing National Concerns

Forward Paterson was part of a national pattern of local associations emerging to address the decline of downtown areas in the 1950s.[61] Leading urban planners and architects, like Victor Gruen and James Rouse, constantly warned city residents about the precarious future of their downtowns. At a National Retail Dry Goods convention in January 1957, Gruen asserted that if cities did not protect their downtowns, the areas would become "potato fields," which symbolized the country's "agricultural past" and a return to nonurban lifestyles. He mirrored the ideas present in Paterson that aimed to protect the downtown to "progress forward." Rouse added to Gruen's statement and said that current efforts to revive downtowns, such as the promotion of shopping sales and the addition of parking lots, were "panicky and piecemeal defense[s]." He argued that an

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and Acken on Chamber Panel," *Morning Call,* January 14, 1956; "C of C Fetes W. H. Wulp at Dinner," *Morning Call,* March 2, 1956.

[60] "O'Byrne, Adamy, Slater and Acken on Chamber Panel," *Morning Call,* January 14, 1956; "C of C Fetes W. H. Wulp at Dinner," *Morning Call,* March 2, 1956.

[61] Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 168.

effective plan to revitalize a downtown required the leadership of "merchants, bankers, and the entire business community," in addition to a "sympathetic attitude in City Hall."[62] These sentiments reverberated around the country and bolstered Forward Paterson's efforts.

Forward Paterson's Plan and Power

In June of 1957, Forward Paterson met again to outline a 538-acre region that was to be studied by the PHA's Urban Renewal Division. The division found the region outlined, which included the downtown business area, to be overcrowded, "deficient," and in need of renewal.[63] When it was time for all PHA members to vote on the architectural firm that would create the renewal plan for this area, most selected a plan that that would only renew a third of the outlined region, with an explicit focus on the downtown business area.[64] This plan, made by Victor Gruen Associates, did not include any residential neighborhoods. As explained earlier, all PHA members were white, middle- to upper-class, and were not familiar with the housing crisis faced by working-class people of color in Paterson firsthand. Perhaps, this unfamiliarity made it easier for them to ignore the housing needs of working-class people of color and select a plan that prioritized downtown development over the creation of affordable housing.

Nevertheless, their lack of familiarity with the housing issue did not completely explain why the PHA chose a firm that was going to renew just a third of the outline region. By choosing the "multi-million dollar" Gruen Plan which specifically focused on

[62] "Downtowns Warned to Pep Up or Lose Out to Suburbs," *The News,* January 15, 1957.
[63] "Housing Board Moves on Multi-Million Downtown Building Plan: Area of Downtown Paterson Slated for Rehabilitation; Victor Gruen Retained to Run Program," *The News,* April 15, 1959.
[64] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 1.

the downtown, the PHA had to hire separate firms for the renewal of the remaining two-thirds. They did not make a pragmatic decision. Even some PHA members were doubtful of the choice. Commissioner Whitaker disagreed with "placing Gruen on a pedestal" and explained that another firm based in NYC had offered to plan the initial stage of the Gruen Plan (12 acres) "for nothing." Another Housing Authority commissioner, Lazzara said, "It would be wrong to hire one firm and then another." He then added that hiring one firm for one phase was like placing a "new hubcap" on "an old Maxwell."[65] In other words, the decision was not practical from a design point of view—a newly developed downtown was not going to match with the older surrounding neighborhoods. So then what explained the PHA's seemingly unsound decision?

Forward Paterson's power and influence explained the PHA's decision—the Citizens Committee of the Planning Association, a group entirely made up of Forward Paterson members, recommended that Gruen Associates be selected. The PHA had also consulted O'Byrne, who years prior had promised Forward Paterson to dedicate his "time and effort" to make the downtown a regional commercial center.[66] O'Byrne supported the Gruen Plan.[67] Moreover, at least five out of nine PHA members had been invited to participate in the original 1956 Forward Paterson Luncheon and thus were aware of the conversations about protecting Paterson's downtown.[68] Considering Forward Paterson's

[65] "Victor Gruen Retained to Run Program," *The News,* April 15, 1959.
[66] "Hard Driving Program Laid Down for the City," *The News,* June 26, 1956.
[67] "Housing Board Moves on Multi-Million Downtown Building Plan: Area of Downtown Paterson Slated for Rehabilitation; Victor Gruen Retained to Run Program," *The News,* April 15, 1959.
[68] I cross-listed the names of the men who were part of the Paterson Housing Authority and the men invited to Forward Paterson's luncheon and found five names in common. "Victor Gruen Retained to Run Program," *The News,* April 15, 1959; "Hard Driving Program Laid Down for the City," *The News,* June 26, 1956.

influence, it was no surprise that most PHA members selected a firm created by an outspoken downtown advocate.[69]

A Businessman's Approach to Development

Victor Gruen's approach to the Paterson plan was biased in the direction of Paterson's elite downtown business class. When creating the downtown plan, Gruen seemed to be mainly in conversation with Forward Paterson members and did not seek input from the city's working-class populations.[70] This disregard for the perspective of working-class populations was also reflected in his own conceptualization of the urban crisis's root causes. For example, in a speech given to Forward Paterson after the acceptance of his plan, Gruen said, "one of the strongest and most clearly recognizable factors in the deterioration of our cities is the growth of the automobile population" and tied automobile growth to rising congestion on the streets. In his perspective, traffic was a major issue within cities because it "robbed" leisure time and prevented people from enjoying "the country on a weekend or vacations."[71] Considering that those who could afford to go on such vacations regularly were likely the city's elite classes, Gruen's

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[69] Forward Paterson members were "managerial growth" advocates. In his book, *Streets of San Francisco*, Christopher Lowen Agee notes that advocates of "managerial growth" used local government control and "technocratic arrangements" to redevelop downtowns with the hope of stimulating the urban economy. Christopher Lowen Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7.

[70] Local newspapers heavily documented Gruen's visits to Paterson, and from this record, it seems that Gruen was only present at luncheons and meetings with city officials and local white businessmen. "Patersonians Are Told Their Future Depends on Hard Spade Work as Speakers Tell Program," *The News,* June 11, 1959; "Forward Paterson Lunch to Attract Notables June 10," *The News,* June 2, 1959; "Sign Urban Renewal Contracts," *Morning Call,* December 9, 1960.

[71] Victor Gruen, "Remarks at the Third Anniversary Luncheon-Meeting of the FORWARD PATERSON MOVEMENT" (speech, June 10, 1959, Alexander Hamilton Hotel, Paterson, NJ), Victor Gruen Papers, held by Victor Gruen Associates, New York, New York.

comment conveyed that his guiding "planning framework" for the Paterson plan was grounded in the needs of the city's wealthy.

The Gruen Plan, also referred to as the Central Business Plan, echoed Gruen's planning framework and demonstrated that the plan's purpose was to save the downtown from economic decline. The plan, completed and published by Victor Gruen Associates in 1962, explained that it was going to "reinstitute Paterson's position in its own trade area" by renewing the "health, and activity of the many urban functions" of the Central Business District. Through revitalization of the space, it was going to ultimately stop the downtown's "deterioration process." The plan also reflected the values of Forward Paterson, which by 1962, had become P.L.A.N (Paterson Looks Ahead Now). In its introduction, Gruen Associates described the downtown development as a "difficult task" but ultimately worth doing because the downtown's "successful revitalization and stabilization" was "essential to the economic well-being of the entire City of Paterson." The downtown development, according to Gruen Associates, was going to serve as the "panacea" to the city's economic decline.[72]

Like Forward Paterson members, the plan's authors focused on ways to make the city more accessible to out-of-city shoppers and neglected to center the housing needs of working-class residents.[73] For example, in the two-page "background data - analysis" section, one entire page was devoted to describing the primary and secondary trade areas

[72] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," March 1962, 3; Frank Blesso, in discussion with author, July 30, 2021.
[73] Since the plan did include senior citizen housing, it seems that P.L.A.N. did not explicitly ask Gruen Associates to exclude housing from the plan. Unfortunately, P.L.A.N.'s original charge to Gruen Associates was not found and the above claim cannot be confirmed. Nevertheless, the absence of low- income housing for low-income families within the published plan speaks to the priorities of P.L.A.N. and Gruen Associates—they prioritized saving the downtown from economic decline over the housing of working-class residents. Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 11, 23.

within the region. This section detailed that an estimated 474,000 out of the 750,000 region residents shopped in downtown Paterson and explained that the trade areas had been divided in half since the 1940s because of competition from nearby shopping centers, "lack of convenient access from the trade area to the Central Business Area, the increased obsolescence of facilities, and the lack of adequate parking."[74] From this analysis, it seems that one of the largest problems confronting the city was its decreasing number of shoppers and not its growing housing shortage.

The housing issue was also nearly absent in the five-page "environmental analysis" section, except for one small paragraph on the first page. This paragraph acknowledged poor housing on the business district's fringes and ultimately concluded that the "combinations of adverse development has made most of these areas unsuitable for residential use." Building new, affordable housing in this district was evidently not the firm's priority. Moreover, three out the five pages discussed the city's decline in retail sales, poorly designed streets for vehicular mobility and need for better located parking spaces.[75] One of the other two pages included a map of Paterson's existing land use and retail concentration (Figure 5).[76] The other page included a zoomed-in map of the downtown area with information on location of parking lots, traffic counts, and flood-prone areas (Figure 6).[77] All this business-centered analysis made clear that the city as a center of profit, and not as a home, was the driving force of the plan.[78]

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[74] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 5.
[75] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 13,15.
[76] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 12.
[77] Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 14.
[78] In the plan's introduction, P.L.A.N. members explained that "revitalization here [downtown area] has the greatest tax return potential for the City," further suggesting that one of the plan's driving forces was the potential profit downtown renewal would bring to the city's businessmen. Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 2.

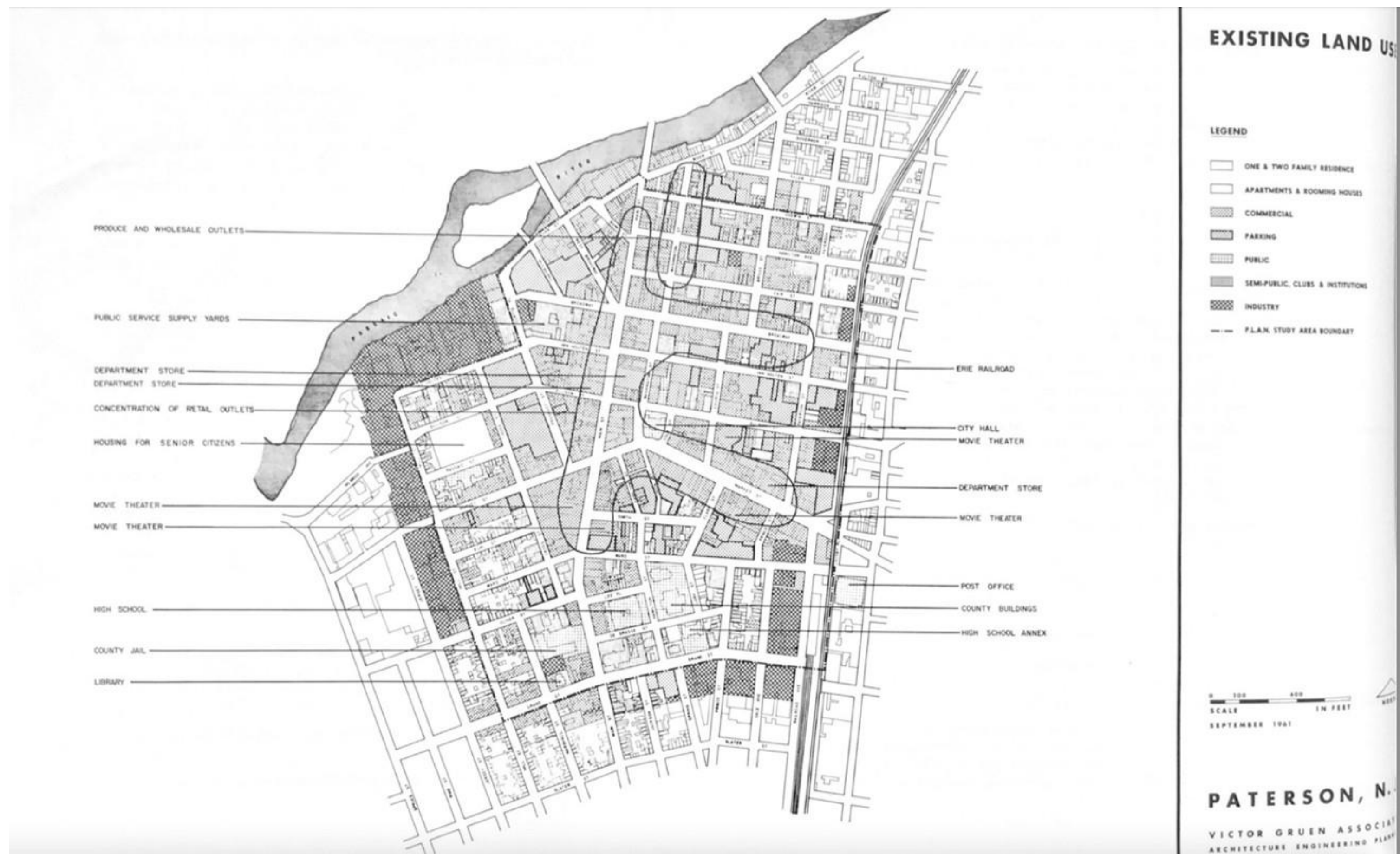

Figure 5: This map illustrated Paterson's existing land use and retail concentration.

Figure 6: This map included data about flood-prone areas, traffic counts, and parking. This information was relevant to determining how to make Paterson more accessible to out-of-city shoppers but not necessarily relevant to addressing the growing housing shortage faced by working-class residents of color.

A centerpiece of this plan, the peripheral road, also made clear that white suburban shoppers were the Gruen Associates' priority rather than working-class city residents. The road was specifically planned to "speed traffic in the central business district" and help connect the downtown to the surrounding highway network.[79] To make it, the city would have had to destroy the homes and places of employment of several hundreds of Paterson residents. When James Crowley, senior field representative for the federal Urban Renewal Division's Philadelphia office, learned about the peripheral road, he urged Mayor Frank Graves and the PHA to account for replacement housing in the plan—they did not listen and the Gruen Plan remained the same. The plan ultimately sacrificed the homes and jobs of several hundreds of Paterson residents to make the area more accessible to white suburban shoppers and thus save the downtown from economic decline, stave off economic loss, and reassert Paterson's place as a retail center in the trade area (Figures 7 and 8).[80]

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[79] "Highway is Key to Paterson's Future," *Morning Call,* March 26, 1956.

[80] "May Limit Paterson on Renewal Plans," *Morning Call,* August 23, 1961; Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," March 1962; Henry Browne, "Do You Want a Highway Through the Heart of Paterson – Fact Sheet," undated, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University, New York, New York.

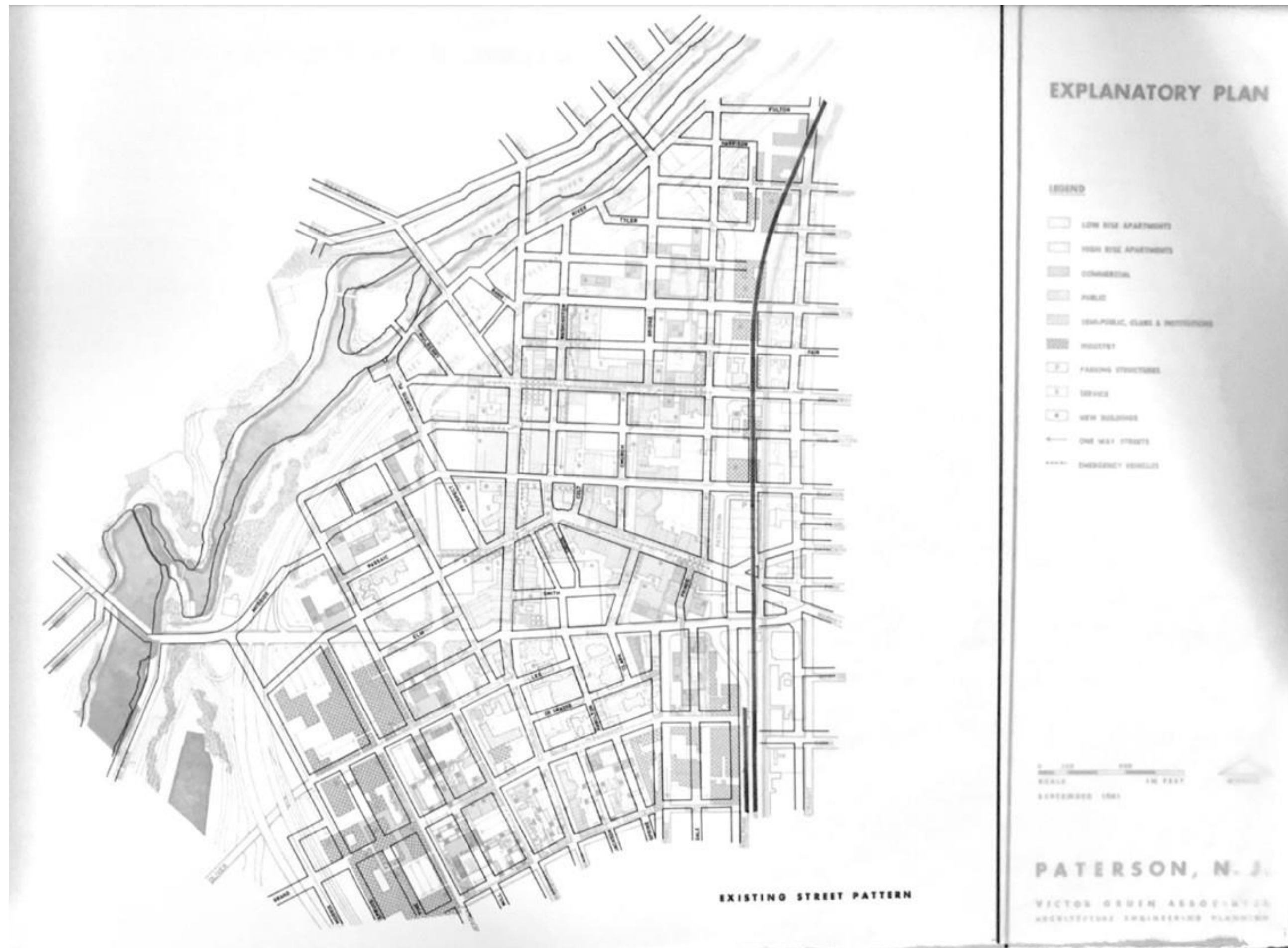

Figure 7: This map demonstrated the layout of the Central Business District in 1962.

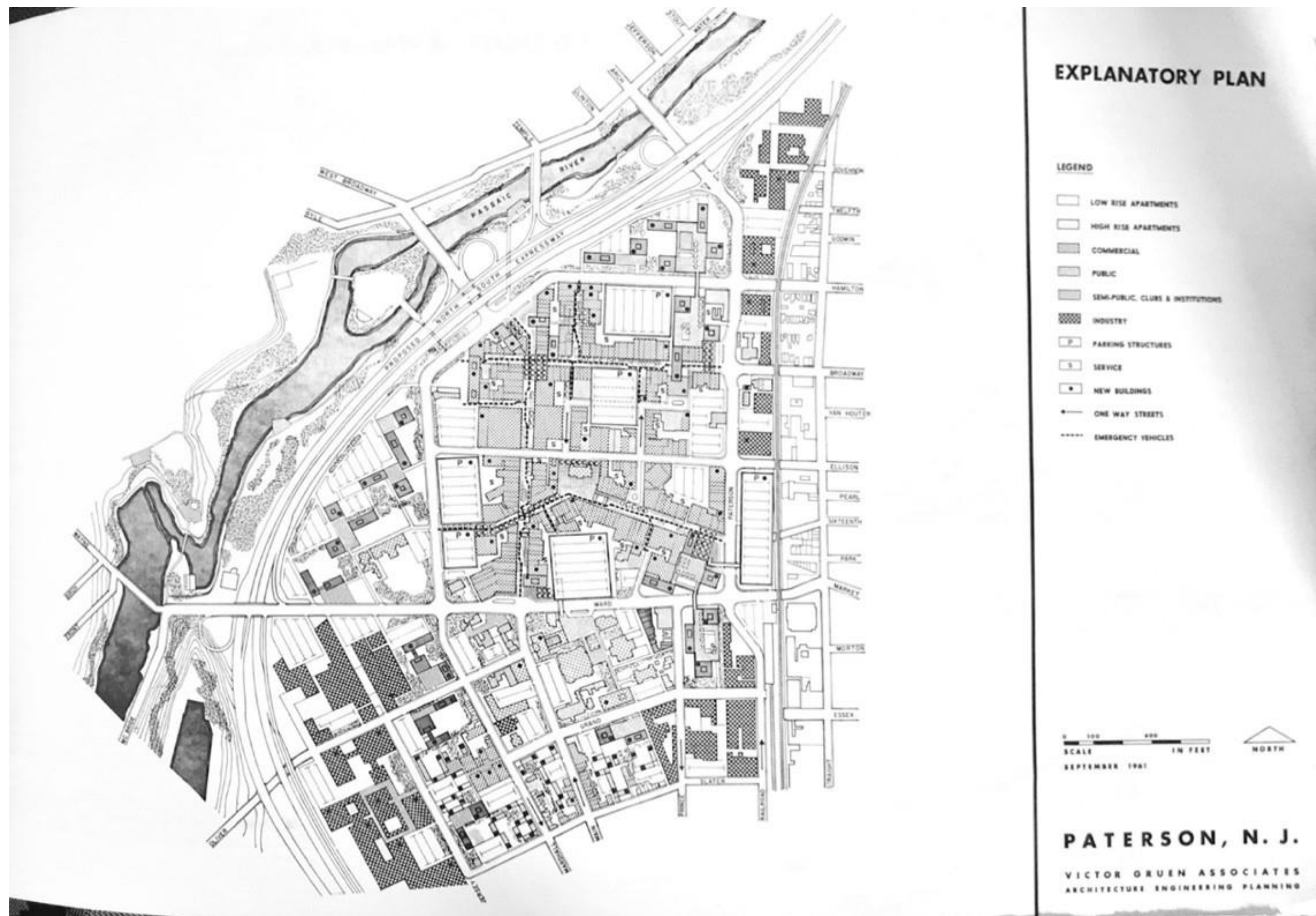

Figure 8: This map depicted where the peripheral road (labeled North-South Expressway) would have cut through if built. Ultimately, the highway would have cut through 125 industrial buildings and 659 residential buildings and left 6,166 people without homes and 2,449 without jobs. Moreover, as shown in this figure, Gruen Associates planned to have "low-rise" and "high-rise apartments," but no specific housing for low-income families.

City Mayors Authoring and Directing Development

The Gruen architects were not the only authors of development in Paterson who prioritized saving the downtown from further economic decline. The support and power of city mayors, under the strong-mayor form government, made it possible for the city business elite to gain enough power to control development. Mayor Edward O'Byrne was present at the first Forward Paterson gathering in 1956 and expressed support for the idea of making Paterson a regional commercial center. He had supported the project so much that he named members of the Citizen's Advisory Committee to the Planning Board from the roster of Forward Paterson members. This move brought the city's downtown elite much power in shaping the direction of city development.

Frank Graves, who followed O'Byrne after his sudden death in December 1959, also continued fueling the vision of a regional commercial center.[81] He used his power as mayor to command the PHA to "concentrate on the renewal of the downtown area and a new industrial project" because there had already been "so much residential construction, mainly in the form of garden apartments."[82] All garden apartments built by 1962 were in predominantly white neighborhoods. Moreover, at the time, the only public housing built in a predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhood was the Christopher Columbus high-rise housing project in Northside. It had just been completed in 1960. There was no public housing for low-income families in Wrigley Park. The power of the

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[81] "Democrats Put off meeting because of Mayor's Death," *The Herald News,* December 8, 1959.

[82] By 1962, the PHA had helped build two garden style apartments, Brooksloate and Riverside Terraces, which were both located in predominantly white neighborhoods. "Mayor Calls for Full Speed Urban Renewal," *The News,* February 2, 1962; Division of Planning, "Supplementary Master Plan," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1978, 30, held at the Paterson Public Library.

mayor to appoint members to city boards and direct focus on development efforts that prioritized saving the downtown from economic decline ultimately left the housing crisis in predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods to the wayside.[83]

How Did the City Respond to the Gruen Plan?

Several Paterson residents noticed the shortcomings of the Gruen Plan and its downtown focus. At a public hearing on the plan, Sylvia Bluestein congratulated Gruen Associates for having created a "fine plan" but said she was more worried about "human welfare than economic growth." Another resident, Ruth Fetterman, asked if the plan was going to include more "public housing." In response, a Gruen representative explained that "the hope is for private housing to meet the needs of the community."[84] Although it was not clear whether Bluestein or Fetterman liked public housing, their comments did make clear that the absence of public housing within the Gruen Plan was evident to Paterson residents. Moreover, the response to Fetterman's question further suggested that Gruen Associates and the PHA had removed themselves from the responsibility of creating more affordable housing. In their perspective, the creation of more housing in the city laid not in the hands of the PHA but in the hands of the private sector.

Conclusion

In the 1950s, like downtown businessmen in cities around the country, Paterson's downtown business elite were fearful of the competition from suburban shopping centers.

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[83] Even Gruen Associates admitted that the mayor and his power under the strong-mayor form of government had an important role to play in the plan's execution. In the plan, they explained that "under Paterson's strong mayor form of government, special emphasis must be placed on the role of the mayor in spearheading urban renewal and re-planning." Gruen Associates, "Paterson Looks Ahead Now," 30.

[84] "100 at Public Hearing on Urban Renewal," *The News,* May 28, 1963.

Anxieties around the downtown's fall motivated the Chamber of Commerce to create a campaign that aimed to make downtown Paterson a regional commercial center. This hope for an economically successful Paterson, cultivated by Paterson's businessmen and supported by city mayors, led to development efforts of the 1950s and 60s that aimed to save the downtown from economic decline and simultaneously ignored the housing needs of working-class people of color. This focus on saving the downtown area did not stop in 1963 with the Gruen Plan. In the late 1960s, Paterson native and recent Farleigh Dickinson graduate Lawrence Kramer made saving the downtown from further deterioration the center of his mayoral campaign. He won the election in November 1966.[85]

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, during Kramer's first and second terms, Black Patersonians rose up and challenged city officials to meet the needs of working-class communities of color. In Wrigley Park, a neighborhood right next to the downtown, Julius Threet jump-started efforts to create affordable housing primarily for working-class people of color with the creation of his nonprofit organization, UNITED.

[85] Lawrence Kramer, in discussion with author, March 11, 2022; "Aiding Bloodmobile — Mayor-Elect," *Morning Call,* November 26, 1966.

II. Building Black and "Spanish" Homeownership in Paterson: The Work of Julius Threet and UNITED in Reaction to Continuous City Government Neglect, 1966-1974

Mavelyn Santiago and the Beginnings of UNITED

On Sunday, May 8, 1966, Marcelina and Pablo Santiago Perez scaled up the stairs to their apartment building on Harrison Street after checking on their children, who were playing outside. There was absolutely no space inside their small apartment for their eight children to play comfortably.[86] Their best alternative was to go outside and play in the neighboring alleyway, next to a large, smelly, and wobbly garbage shed. That evening, around 7 p.m., Marcelina and Pablo went outside again to check on their children and found their five-year old Mavelyn crushed underneath the 22-feet long, 3-feet wide, 7- feet high garbage shed. Marcelina and Pablo immediately rushed their daughter to Paterson General Hospital. Mavelyn died at 2:20 a.m. the next morning.[87]

The story of Mavelyn Santiago demonstrated the danger of a strong-mayor form of government that ignored the voices of working-class people of color and maintained the power of the elite. Her tragic death also inspired Julius Threet to create the United Neighborhood for Industrial Training and Economic Development agency (UNITED) in 1968, which began to challenge how white elites controlled discriminatory housing and homeownership mechanisms in Paterson. UNITED was a private nonprofit organization that spearheaded the rehabilitation of affordable housing in Wrigley Park and aimed to increase opportunities for homeownership within the city's poor, working-class Black and Spanish-speaking communities. It was due to the work of Julius Threet and UNITED that working-class people of color in Paterson finally had the opportunity to purchase

[86] "Collapsed Shed that Killed Girl," *The News,* May 10, 1966.
[87] "Children Play by Shed That Killed Sister," *The Morning Call,* May 11, 1966.

safe and affordable housing in the early 1970s, when the vacancy rate was 1.1%.[88] By opening these avenues for Black and Hispanic homeownership, UNITED was changing the landscape of who owned property in Paterson. Up until the late 1960s, many of Paterson's landlords were white and from surrounding suburbs. UNITED also started to change who was in control of city development—up until 1968, those in charge were mainly the city's white downtown elite who did not have an interest in investing in housing infrastructure and prioritizing the lives of working-class people of color.

The barriers Threet encountered during the process of building affordable housing in Wrigley Park made him realize that the success of organizations like UNITED was connected to support from city officials like the mayor and city board members. The organization's most serious hindrances were city officials who did not support UNITED's efforts. Mobilized by Mavelyn's tragic story and his own experiences with city officials, Julius Threet ran for mayor in 1972 on a platform that prioritized affordable housing.

Julius Threet's Calls for Change in the 1960s and 70s

Julius Threet was originally from West Palm Beach, Florida, but had to leave his home in the early 1940s to escape racial violence. After returning from World War II, Threet faced threats from white West Palm Beach residents because he had received an award in honor of his service as sergeant. In one instance, white residents sent their dog to attack Threet. To save himself from serious injury, he killed the dog. In vengeance, the dog's owners and other white residents planned to lynch Threet. To save his life, Threet

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[88] "Mortgage OK for 4th Ward Renewal Unit," *The News,* March 12, 1968.

escaped West Palm Beach and made his way north, ultimately settling in Paterson's Wrigley Park neighborhood in 1950.[89] Soon thereafter he married Miriam Swann, a music teacher and longtime Wrigley Park resident.

Wrigley Park was right next to the downtown and was about 4.8 acres large. By 1966, it had one of the highest density rates in Paterson. When Threet arrived at the neighborhood, he likely did some of his shopping at one of the several stores on Broadway Ave. On this street, he would have walked past the Main Public Library, City Museum, and 3 churches (a total of 17 of were spread out across Wrigley Park). Not too far from there, Threet would have found the city's two public schools: Elementary School #6 on Carroll Street and the Technical Vocational High School on Ellison Avenue.

Nearby, on the corner of Broadway Avenue and Carroll Street was Barbous Park, one of the two neighborhood parks. The other park, the neighborhood's namesake, was located on the north end.[90]

Threet's Beginning in Paterson

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[89] During the time after WWII, many African American veterans who had returned from war faced racial violence throughout the country. Lynching and the threat of lynching as a mode of violence were more common in the South. Threet most likely did not take his case to West Palm Beach police, because he probably would have faced a white criminal justice system that would have dismissed his case completely. Ken Threet (son of Julius and Miriam Threet), in discussion with author, December 29, 2021; United States census enumeration records, 1940, West Palm Beach, Palm Beach, Florida, roll: m-t067-00606, page 1A, enumeration district: 50-14, from Ancestry Library Edition; Bryan Greene, "After Victory in World War II, Black Veterans Continued the Fight for Freedom at Home," Smithsonian Magazine, August 30, 2021, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/summer-1946-saw-black-wwii-vets- fight-freedom-home-180978538/.

[90] Paterson Planning Board, "Neighborhood Analysis: Paterson Master Plan Report 7," Boorman and Dorram Inc. Consultants, July 1966, 64-65, held at the New Jersey State Library.

Although he settled in a predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhood, Threet continued to experience racial discrimination, especially as one of the few Black histologists in the area. Before coming to Paterson, he had trained in histology at the Negro Agricultural and Technical College of Greensboro, North Carolina and hoped to work with Black doctors (Figure 9).[91] However, once in Paterson, he did not find any employment with either white or Black doctors, because they did not want to stop existing relationships with white histologists.[92] With the support of his wife, Threet then turned to real estate and, by the late 1950s, founded Paterson's first Black-owned real estate company, Julius Threet Real Estate (Figure 10).[93]

Figure 9: Yearbook photograph of Julius Threet. Taken during his final year at the Negro Agricultural and Technical College of Greensboro, North Carolina. Retrieved from the Ancestry.com database.

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[91] Negro Agricultural and Technical College of Greensboro, North Carolina, *Yearbook* (Greensboro: The college, 1948); Ken Threet, in discussion with author, December 29, 2021.
[92] Ken Threet, in discussion with author, December 29, 2021.
[93] Miriam Threet supported Julius Threet financially when he decided to make the move from the medical sciences to real estate. She helped pay for his real estate license. Ken Threet, in discussion with author, December 29, 2021.

Figure 10: This is a map of the Wrigley Park neighborhood and was published in Paterson's 1966 Master Plan. The neighborhood was home to 17 churches, 1 elementary school, and 1 vocational high school. Julius Threet's real estate business was at the intersection of Lafayette and Graham Street (encircled).

Although Threet had moved out of Wrigley Park in 1952, his real estate company remained in the neighborhood. His own lived experience in Wrigley Park combined with his experience as a local realtor made Threet very aware of the dilapidated housing conditions African American and Spanish-speaking families had to live through.

Moreover, in the mid-1960s, his position on the Citizens Advisory Board for Urban Renewal gave him even more reason to be up to date with the housing shortage. In March 1965, city housing coordinator Richard Grosso had appointed Threet to the Citizens Advisory Board—the Urban Renewal Agency required that cities create these boards in order to receive federal urban renewal aid.[94] As a board member, Threet visited areas of Wrigley Park with substandard housing and noted how more families were living in overcrowded housing situations with no proper heating or ventilation systems and had to go to measures like building fires within their homes to keep their families warm.[95]

In response to the dangerous housing conditions he witnessed in Wrigley Park in the mid-1960s, Threet began publicly identifying Paterson's housing shortage as an issue of utmost importance and called for the usage of government funds to create more opportunities for homeownership for Paterson's working-class populations of color. As a board member and chairman of the Public Housing subcommittee, Threet explained that the city was in "dire need of inexpensive housing available for purchase by modest groups."[96] He did not just urge the Paterson Housing Authority (PHA) to place more efforts in creating affordable housing but also demanded that they construct affordable

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[94] "City Seeks Citizen Support for Urban Renewal Plan," *The News,* March 23, 1965.
[95] Ken Threet mentioned that his father had taken him to parts of Wrigley Park to show him the dangerous housing conditions people were living through in the area. Ken Threet, in discussion with author, December 29, 2021.
[96] "Mayor's Advisory Group Plans January Election," *The News,* September 24, 1965.

housing "for purchase" by working-class residents. Mavelyn's death and the ambivalent reactions from the landlord, mayor, and responsible city boards inspired Threet to take the project of creating affordable housing into his own hands.[97]

The Santiago Perez's had confronted their landlord about the garbage shed's unstable condition long before their daughter's death. In February 1966, Marcelina and Pablo asked their landlord, who lived in the nearby suburb of Wayne, to replace the shed because it had started leaning, but the landlord did nothing. The landlord continued to do nothing after repeated reminders from the Santiago Perez's and let the shed rot. It had become so visibly hazardous and the landlord so unresponsive that Pablo Santiago and his nephew, Marcelino Vasquez, considered removing the garbage shed themselves. "It's been leaning 3 months. It was not against the wall. My uncle and me were planning to tear it down ourselves to avoid accidents, but we were afraid to it doesn't belong to us,"[98] Vasquez explained to a news reporter in the days following Mavelyn's death. Vasquez alluded to the power dynamics present in the situation—as Puerto Rican migrants who worked at a local dye factory, most likely at or near minimum wage, and lived in a city with a 2.5% vacancy rate, they could not risk upsetting the landlord to the point of facing eviction.[99] If evicted, it would have been very difficult for them to find housing elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Santiago Perez family still took some risk and asked the landlord repeatedly to act.

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[97] It is unclear *how* Julius Threet learned about Mavelyn's story. It's possible that he learned about Mavelyn's death through word of mouth from Mavelyn's neighbors or from the newspapers.

[98] "Officials Baffled on Cause of Shed Fall, Fatal to Girl," *The Record,* May 11, 1966; Paterson Planning Board, "Neighborhood Analysis: Paterson Master Plan Report 7," Boorman and Dorram Inc. Consultants, July 1966, 88, New Jersey State Library.

[99] The vacancy rate in 1966 was 2.5% according to the 1966 Neighborhood Analysis report. Boorman and Dorram, INC. Consultants, "Neighborhood Analysis, Paterson Master Plan, Report 7," Paterson Planning Board, Paterson, NJ, 1966, 88, held at New Jersey State Library; "Officials Baffled on Cause of Shed Fall, Fatal to Girl," *The Record,* May 11, 1966.

While outwardly voicing the dangerous condition of the garbage shed, the Santiago Perez family had also hoped that city officials would have taken note of the shed's state and made the landlord address it—but they did not. The Board of Health, a city government office responsible for keeping landlords accountable in maintaining the safety of their properties, seemed to purposefully ignore that hazardous garbage shed on Harrison Street. A Board of Health officer had visited the apartment building several months prior to Mavelyn's death and had noted the shed's dangerous condition—Vasquez was sure that the officer was going to file a violation. However, when pressed to confirm this visit, city health officer Dr. J. Allen Yager said, "he knew nothing of the incident, location of the shed, or problem that might have been involved with the Board of Health." A *Morning Call* reporter's investigative journalism revealed that the Board of Health had inspected the property in October 1965 and had asked the landlord to clean up the area around the shed—they had not noted anything regarding its structural integrity.[100] The inconsistency between what the Board of Health inspector saw at 236 Harrison Street and what was written in the official report points to broader irregularities within the larger Board of Health. Yager's reaction further supports the presence of disorganization within the department. Although a board official was, at the very least, aware that 236 Harrison Street had a garbage shed and the landlord had not been keeping the shed and its premise up to code, Yager said that the board did not know anything about the case. This disorganization was another key part of the system that permitted exploitative landlords to operate in the 1950s and 60s.

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[100] "Officials Baffled on Cause of Shed Fall, Fatal to Girl," *The Record,* May 11, 1966.

The Paterson police department and mayor attempted to remove responsibility of Mavelyn's death from the landlord and Board of Health as well. Despite clear testimonies given by the Santiago Perez's regarding the shed's longtime dangerous conditions, the Paterson police department closed their investigation in the days following May 8th because their detectives found "no evidence" of criminal negligence against the landlord.[101] Five months after Mavelyn's death, no one in the city had yet taken fault for the shed that killed her. One police detective, Ralph Ventrella, had even gone so far to suggest that the children who were playing with Mavelyn had pushed the shed and caused it to fall over—an attempt to remove the fault from the landlord and Board of Health to the working-class children of color most impacted by their negligence.[102] Mayor Frank Graves, the same mayor who prioritized downtown development over the construction of affordable housing, said nothing regarding Mavelyn's death. In his silence, he dodged his responsibility for keeping Patersonians safe in their own homes.

Mavelyn's case was an extreme one but ultimately exemplified a larger theme in Paterson's urban crisis—the theme of mayors and mayor-elected officials not taking responsibility for the structural and racial inequalities present in a city, including the dilapidated housing conditions of working-class people of color. This theme was a constant part of Mavelyn and her neighbors' realities. Her story revealed what Paterson's

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[101] While one Paterson police detective and chief building inspector, Ralph Ventrella, suggested that the shed had been secure in his report because it "had been fastened at its roof to the brick wall of the garage," another detective at the scene, Joseph Campbell made clear in his report that the shed was in an unstable condition and detailed that it "looked very, very old, and rotted at the base." Even though Campbell's report supported the testimonies of the Santiago Perez family who had seen the shed rot and lean for several months and had alerted the landlord of its dangerous condition, the Paterson police department found that no one was responsible for its hazardous state. "Officials Baffled on Cause of Shed Fall, Fatal to Girl," *The Record,* May 11, 1966.

[102] "Power Diffuses Among 11 Commissions; What Other Commissions Won't Accept Remains for Aldermen," *Morning Call,* October 14, 1966.

low-income communities of color were facing throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s—a series of unresponsive mayors and city boards that neglected their core needs for safe and affordable housing.

After hearing about Mavelyn's tragic death, Threet began to explicitly identify inaction from city government officials who were responsible for the maintenance of safe living environments and construction of affordable housing (like the mayor, Board of Health, and PHA members) as a root cause of ongoing dangers endured by the city's poor working class. Specifically, in the days following Mavelyn's death, Threet wrote a letter to the editor:

> A child is dead, crushed to death last week in garbage by the garbage shack. She is gone, but her friends will come to play again and the garbage trap remains to catch again. How long should the hearts of the powerless bleed? How long before the cries of agony be heard?[103]

By allowing children to play in the same area where Mavelyn died, Board officials and the mayor, according to Threet, were continuing to place children in danger. They were not just neglecting but actively ignoring the working-class people of color whose "cries of agony" had been falling on deaf ears.

A previous draft of this article showed that Threet also understood federal government entities as responsible for ongoing dangerous housing conditions. Specifically, Threet had included the sentence, "Your daughters will die in the ghetto and your sons in Vietnam, and you will have nothing but worthless paper to blot the tears."[104] By referencing the "ghetto" and "Vietnam," Threet alluded to the federal government and asserted that it played a constant role in deaths of young people of color. Perhaps the

[103] "Stand United," *The Morning Call,* May 18, 1966.
[104] Draft of "Stand United" editorial, May 1966, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.

Morning Call asked Threet to remove that sentence because of the way it implicated the federal government. Or, perhaps, Threet removed the sentence himself because he wanted to underline the role of local systems in perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Lastly, in this letter, Threet proposed that working-class people of color had to unite to make change and were part of the solution to ongoing systemic inequalities. He recommended that they redirect their pain, "their cries," to "pool our strength and swim together." He echoed racial uplift ideology by framing their "tears" and "cries" to local and federal government officials as a "waste" of their energy and implied that working-class people of color had to stop looking toward local and federal agencies for help and instead had to "help themselves."[105]

In the next year, Threet founded UNITED primarily with the help of white and Black small-business owners who were moved by Mavelyn's death and ultimately wanted to change the city's housing situation.[106] Many UNITED members, like Louis Gilmore, Luther Williams, Junius Sturdifen, and Julius Threet were also members of the Small Business Men's Mutual Aid Association (SBMMAA), an organization of Black businessmen in Paterson. Though Mavelyn was Puerto Rican, the Puerto Rican community and the larger Spanish-speaking community did not get involved in Threet's efforts. This may be due to two reasons. First, Mavelyn's family may have been too physically distant from the Puerto Rican community's "center." Whereas Mavelyn's family lived in Wrigley Park, most of the Puerto Rican community was concentrated in the Dublin and Sandy Hill neighborhoods (Figure 11). Secondly, in the late 1960s, the

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[105] "Stand United," *The Morning Call,* May 18, 1966; Kevin Gaines, "Racial Uplift Ideology in the Era of 'the Negro Problem', Freedom's Story, National Humanities Center," accessed January 11, 2022, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/racialuplift.htm.

[106] Statement in response to criticism, January 1970, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.

local Spanish-speaking community did not have civil rights organizations that advocated on their behalf or leaders who were connected to the city government. As a *Morning Call* article explained in 1967, "Until now, the approximately 25,000 Spanish speaking people in Paterson have not been able to act as a united force and lacked spokesmen acceptable to the entire community."[107] However, the African American community did have chapters of organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and leaders like Julius Threet, who was on the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal. Although Spanish-speaking residents were not involved in UNITED, the organization's creation was rooted in the experiences of both African Americans and Spanish-speaking working-class residents.[108]

[107] This article reported on how Spanish-speaking employees at the Paterson Task Force office were planning a march on Trenton to "oppose a Congressional freeze or cutback of antipoverty funds." "Latins Plan March on Trenton," *Morning Call*, November 12, 1967.
[108] I look forward to exploring further the relationship between Paterson's Spanish-speaking community and African American community in future research projects.

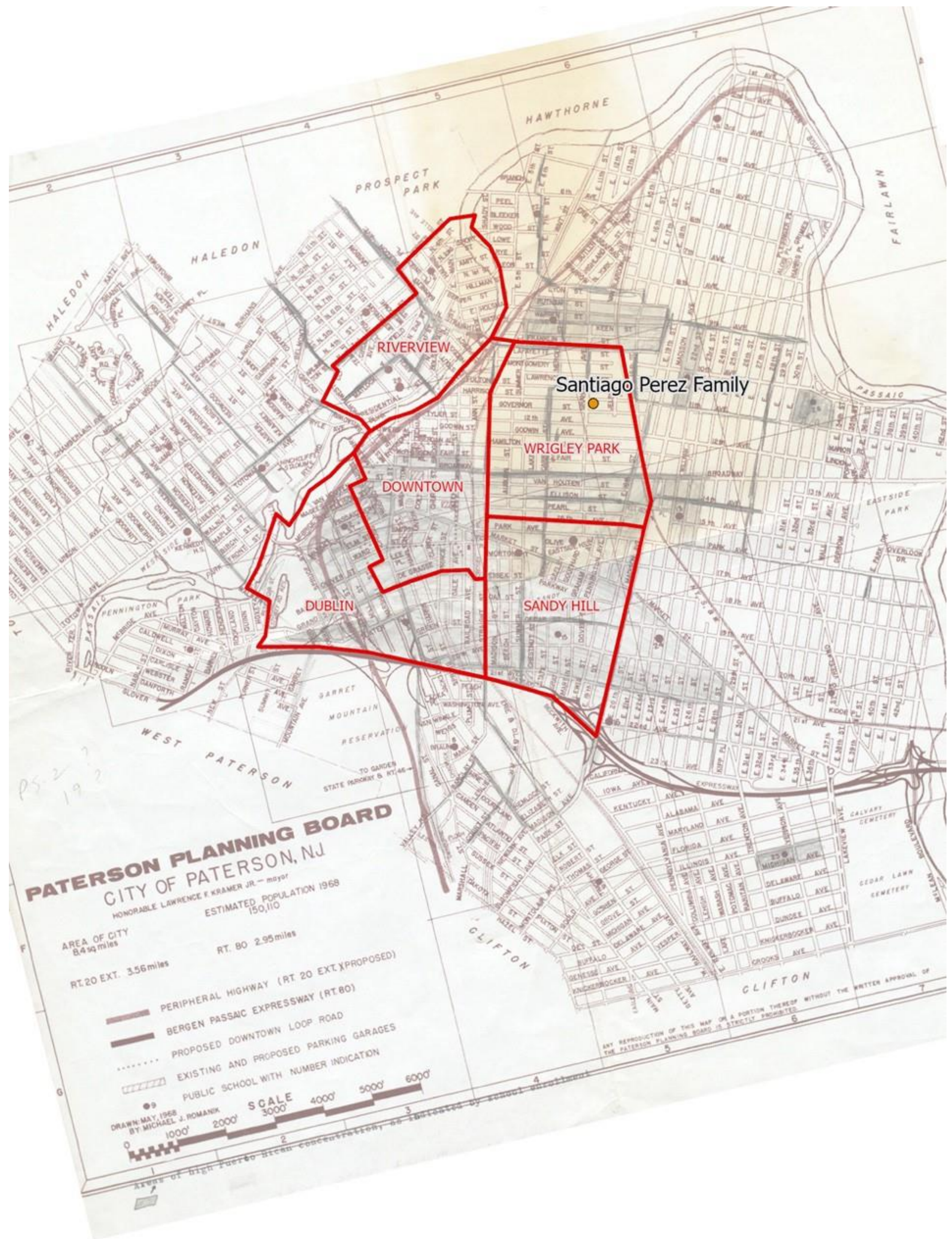

Figure 11: Map, created by the author and Tsering Shawa, with location of Mavelyn Santiago Perez's home, neighborhood delineations. and areas of "high Puerto Rican concentration" (indicated by dark gray shading). In 1968, Puerto Rican social worker and community activist Amilkar Velez-López created the background map and used school enrollment data to determine the areas with a high concentration of Puerto Rican residents.

Increasing Opportunities for Homeownership

UNITED's Aims

From UNITED's first housing project, Threet made clear that the organization's aim was not just to increase the amount of safe and affordable housing in the city but also to increase homeownership opportunities for working-class populations of color. UNITED's first project was the rehabilitation of 47-49 Carroll Street, which resulted in the creation of 16 condominium units. Even before the project received federal funding, Threet explained that the purpose of UNITED was to "rehabilitate slums and provide homes and home ownership for ghetto residents."[109] He was able to sell the Carroll Street condominium apartments at a subsidized cost that was affordable to working-class populations by gathering funds from UNITED supporters and federal agencies, such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the New Jersey Housing Finance Agency.[110] UNITED also received loans from the First National Bank of Passaic County, the New Jersey Bank, the Broadway Bank, and the Franklin Bank.[111]

Why Homeownership?

Threet viewed the creation of affordable homeownership opportunities as a better solution to the city's housing shortage in comparison to the creation of more public rental units because it was a way for working-class people of color to gain agency in the maintenance of their homes. He explained that public rental housing "even with improved housing conditions contains the same frustrations as any ghetto residence, with

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[109] "Work Begins," *The News,* July 31, 1968.
[110] "UNITED Project OKed," *The Morning Call,* September 26, 1969.
[111] "UNITED's Projects," October 22, 1969, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.

the only exception, a different landlord," and thus did not bring about long-standing access to safe and affordable homes.[112] Threet advocated for homeownership under the local context of exploitative management practices as well.[113] In the years leading up to UNITED, there had been several cases where PHA members mismanaged public housing complexes and abused the rights of tenants—they rarely kept their buildings up to date with housing regulations.[114]

Threet's emphasis on homeownership can also be understood as part of his broader goal to "uplift" the local Black community. Preparing for a 'SBMMAA dedication dinner of UNITED in April 1969, Threet wrote a summary of the organization's goals and explained that the Black community had an "important role to play [in UNITED projects]. For it is our community and our image that must be lifted." He echoed racial uplift ideology and suggested that it was the responsibility of Black people to build, own, and maintain affordable housing in Paterson.[115] By doing so (building, owning, and maintaining homes), the Black community then helped "lift" their "image." Threet also framed UNITED as an organization that was going to bring economic power and pride through homeownership and by hiring "neighborhood residents wherever possible to fill the jobs in the actual

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[112] "Mortgage OK for 4th Ward Renewal Unit," *The News,* March 12, 1968.

[113] Threet specifically created "condominium apartments." These type of apartments were traditionally marketed toward white veterans. Black families were often excluded from the condominium real estate market; Matthew Gordon Lasner, *High Life: Condo Living in the Suburban Century*, First Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 127.

[114] Maxwell Tow, "*Grit and Grace: An Urban Minister's Story* (Courier Printing, 2003), 12; "Tenants UP in Arms; Can't Phone for Help," *Morning Call,* February 12, 1968.

[115] In *Grassroots at the Gateway*, Clarence Lang explains that Black Capitalism was a "version of middle-class racial uplift" in St. Louis, Missouri. Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), 242; "Small Business Men's Mutual Aid Association Dedication Dinner Presents a Dedication Dinner for UNITED," Program Itinerary Pamphlet, April 27, 1969, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.

rehabilitation and construction work."[116] He emphasized "pride in ownership" in advertisements for UNITED housing as well (Figure 12). This cultivation of economic empowerment and pride resonated with major tenants of the Black Power movement. As scholars Lauren Warren Hill and Julia Rabig explain in *The Business of Black Power*, many Black Power activists and advocates of Black Capitalism "fought to create Black ownership opportunities and promote Black wealth through forms of collective capitalism and collective ownership" in the late 1960s.[117]

Figure 12: Advertisement for Fulton Place Cooperatives, *The News*, July 1970.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that Threet's personal relationship with local Black Power activists was complex. He opposed direct articulations of Black Power. When Reverend William Mason moved to Paterson and served as pastor for Threet's parish, the Central Reformed Church, Threet criticized Mason because he was an outspoken supporter of the Black Power movement.[118] Threet believed that Mason's support of Black Power had "destroyed" the Central Reform Church and led to the exodus of white members.[119] Moreover, UNITED's leadership suggested that Threet opposed another principle of the Black Power movement—the

[116] UNITED Brochure, undated, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ; "Pride in Ownership – Advertisement for Wrigley Park Cooperatives," *The News,* July 17, 1970.

[117] Black Power organizations, such as the Rochester Business Opportunities Corporation (RBOC) in Rochester, New York created a similar job-training program to that of UNITED. Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, "Introduction," in *The Business of Black Power*, ed. Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America (Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 5; Laura Warren Hill, "FIGHTing for the Soul of Black Capitalism: Struggles for Black Economic Development in Post-rebellion Rochester," in *The Business of Black Power*, 45–67.

[118] "150 WPC At Rally for Angela," *The News,* March 19, 1971; "Student Park Rally Pays Tribute To Malcolm X," *The News,* May 20, 1971.

[119] "Threet Charges 'Black Hero' Mason Destroyed Church," *The News,* February 11, 1972.

tenet that Black people had to unite and create Black-led organizations before creating multiracial coalitions. UNITED had both Black and white board members.[120]

Implementation of Ideas

To a certain extent, UNITED did succeed in bringing more economic power to Wrigley Park throughout the late 1960s and 1970s by creating several stable employment opportunities for Black men through its various construction projects. In doing so, UNITED ultimately started breaking down racial barriers within the labor unions and simultaneously ensured that local Black construction workers had a platform to fight against exploitative wages, dangerous workplace environments, and racial discrimination. The organization collaborated with SBMAA to train local Black men in several phases of construction work—everything from floor finishing to bricklaying and demolishing.[121] They also ensured their acceptance to unions, which had "been notoriously slow about accepting minority people as members."[122] Due to this collaboration, Paterson saw its first Black union painting contractor, first Black union floor finishers, bricklayers, electricians, carpenters, and demolition contractors by 1970.[123] Although the UNITED construction projects lasted no more than two years, through its collaboration with SBMAA, the organization was able to establish long-term access to decent jobs for working-class men of color in Paterson.[124]

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[120] "Small Business Men's Mutual Aid Association Dedication Dinner Presents a Dedication Dinner for UNITED," Program Itinerary Pamphlet, April 27, 1969, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.
[121] "UNITED Points with Pride to Role of Black Craftsmen in Renewal Job," *The News,* July 10, 1970.
[122] "Wyckoff Church Unit Learns Of 'Miracle of Fulton Street,'" *The News,* May 2, 1970.
[123] "UNITED Points with Pride," *The News,* July 10, 1970.
[124] UNITED's job-training program's impact on the employment of Spanish-speaking men was unclear. Whereas *The News* published an article reporting on UNITED's success with increasing the number of Black craftsmen in the city, there was no such article on the number of Spanish-speaking craftsmen. "UNITED Points with Pride," *The News,* July 10, 1970.

UNITED and the SBMAA hoped to eventually guide the laborers they helped train with the process of opening their own businesses as well. Civil rights leaders viewed this small business component of the UNITED project as essential to the regional Black Capitalism movement and crucial to the project of increasing Black economic power because of ongoing discriminatory banking practices. Although the federal government had specifically allocated loans to help people of color open small businesses and stabilize existing ones, many banks in the Passaic County area did not take the federal government's lead and continuously refused to give out small business loans to Black residents.[125] Civil rights leaders themselves, like president of Passaic's NAACP Samuel Taylor, had been rejected multiple times by local banks. As Louis Gilmore (UNITED board member) suggested, training and guidance was essential in Paterson and the larger Northern New Jersey region especially given that "in the past, black men couldn't get started because they couldn't get training or funds." These efforts to increase access to stable sources of capital, whether it was a job, business, or home, were also important because they began to challenge the foothold of white economic power. As John Crawley, executive director of Bergen County's Minority Entrepreneurship Program, explained to a reporter from *The News*, "Black capitalism isn't a choice. It's a necessity. There's no use talking about power without economics."[126]

UNITED also increased access to resources and knowledge necessary for affordable homebuying within the context of the late 1960s and 1970s. As scholar

[125] In March 1969, President Richard Nixon created a federal agency, Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE), that allocated federal loans for the purpose helping people of color open small businesses and stabilize existing ones. Tom Adam Davies, *Mainstreaming Black Power* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 80.
[126] "The Blacks and Green Power," *Morning Call,* June 30, 1969.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has explained in her book, *Race for Profit,* the real estate market had intentionally avoided selling houses to Black families since the real estate profession's creation in the 1920s. The market only intentionally began supporting African Americans, mainly single Black mothers, with buying homes in the 1970s.

Through FHA-backed loans, realtors gave many Black women access to "conventional real estate practices and mortgage financing, but on more expensive and comparatively unequal terms." These same realtors targeted single mothers because of their economic vulnerability and purposefully sold them houses in dilapidated conditions and on the verge of being "condemned."[127] This context of exclusion and "predatory inclusion" made the creation of information resource centers, such as the one formed by UNITED, even more important. UNITED's information resource center at 45-47 Carroll Street opened in May 1969 and provided "free advice and counseling to residents in its neighborhood on condominium living, community involvement, housekeeping and maintenance, budgeting money, and consumer affairs."[128] Knowledge on condo living was important and necessary for UNITED's target audience, low-income families of color who had been avoided by the condominium and real estate market more generally.[129] Workshops on housing maintenance were also essential for new homebuyers in the area for the same reasons. Lessons on how to budget money and understanding one's own "consumer affairs" were essential as well, especially under a context where several families of color might have encountered exploitative real estate practices.

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[127] Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 5, 7.

[128] "Businessmen Open Center in Paterson," *The News,* May 6, 1969.

[129] "Small Business Men's Mutual Aid Association Dedication Dinner Presents a Dedication Dinner for UNITED," Program Itinerary Pamphlet, April 27, 1969, Threet Family Papers, Paterson, NJ.

UNITED, by constructing safe and affordable housing in Paterson, worked around local discriminatory real estate and loaning practices, thus making it more possible for aspiring Black and Spanish-speaking homeowners to find homes for purchase. Access to resources like home mortgages had been limited to white people in Paterson and the region for decades prior to the efforts of UNITED and SBMAA. For example, up until 1964, Black and Puerto Rican people had been prohibited from buying homes in the nearby suburb of Wayne.[130] Regional discriminatory housing problems made it difficult for minoritized groups to seek out housing outside of the city—if they were going to find safe and affordable housing, they had to find it in Paterson.

City Government Negligence and Its Impact on UNITED

Once UNITED's projects got larger, funding from state grants, bank loans, and personal loans from UNITED board members was not enough. These funds were especially insufficient when it came to covering relocation costs. UNITED needed more support from local resources, such as the Board of Health, to complete these larger projects.

Rather than providing assistance, the city's Board of Health instead presented UNITED with major obstacles in the 1970s. When UNITED undertook their largest housing project in January 1970 and needed help with relocating families, the Board of Health failed to step in. The organization struggled to find relocation housing for the 60+ families living in the project area because of the city's already dire housing shortage and

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[130] It is unclear when exactly this discrimination in Wayne stopped. In the mid-1960s, Action Council of Wayne Churches was attempting to bring an end to the discrimination. "Wayne 'Off Limits' to Negroes, Panel Hears," *The News,* May 22, 1964.

insufficient funding.[131] The Board of Health, on the other hand, did have enough funds and resources to relocate families. As Threet explained in an interview with a *News* reporter, the Board of Health received federal funding to relocate families who were in housing "unfit for human habitation," and could have condemned the buildings, evicted, and relocated tenants. However, this Board, the same one that overlooked the decaying garbage shed that killed Mavelyn Santiago, seemed to have purposefully avoided meeting their responsibilities to the people. The only recorded instance of the Board helping with the relocation of UNITED residents was in January 1970, when they moved 11 people living on 143-151 Fulton Street after their broiler broke down and left them with no heat. The Board had waited until the last possible moment to relocate the residents.[132]

All the while, Threet received criticisms from the Board of Health, among other city government offices, about his inability to successfully relocate families and follow through with his projects.[133] In response to this criticism, Threet released a statement where he identified these critiques as specific attacks on UNITED. Threet communicated that although UNITED was addressing discrimination in contractor employment, real

[131] Threet explained that UNITED was planning to use money from the rent to help find relocation housing, but several of the tenants stopped paying for rent once UNITED acquired the property because they knew that the buildings were going to be renovated soon. UNITED also could not have used the NJHFA's grant to find relocation housing because those funds were specifically allocated for construction costs. "Threet Answers UNITED Criticism, Says City Must Condemn Buildings," *The News,* January 29, 1970.

[132] Threet also took part of the blame for the lack of federal funding for relocation—UNITED could have applied for specific federal funding for relocation but missed the application amidst many other applications they had to fill out to cover the construction costs of the new condominiums. Nonetheless, UNITED's error did not justify the Board of Health's dereliction. "Complaints Against UNITED Examined: Mismanagement Charged in Slum Rebuilding Program," *The News,* January 28, 1970; "Threet Answers UNITED Criticism, Says City Must Condemn Buildings," *The News,* January 29, 1970.

[133] In late January, the Board of Health had charged Threet with "mismanagement" of its Fulton and Harrison Street properties. Members of the Department of Community Affairs had said they were worried with the "management of the buildings" as well. However, these city government officials, especially the Board of Health, did not point to their own responsibilities in helping with family relocation. Threet explained that relocation, not mismanagement was the problem. "Complaints Against UNITED Examined: Mismanagement Charged in Slum Rebuilding Program," *The News,* January 28, 1970; "Threet Answers UNITED Criticism, Says City Must Condemn Buildings," *The News,* January 29, 1970.

estate, and substandard housing, the organization had been "kicked down by the traditionalist, sat upon by the ignorant and abandoned by the politicians." In conclusion, he asked if this criticism from the city boards was done

> because of fear of change? [...] Is this attempted because of fear of the (so-called) champions of the poor will be discovered as frauds? Is this a fear that millions spent for the poor might be discovered as millions taken from the poor."

According to Threet, this criticism (from city board members) about his failure to relocate families and not complete his project was deliberate and exploitative of the city's poor, working-class communities.[134] Moreover, although he did not name who were the specific "politicians," Threet likely meant the Board of Health members and Mayor Lawrence Kramer, considering UNITED's previous encounters with them. The Board of Health did not help with relocation housing when the organization most needed it, and the mayor had remained quiet throughout the entire time UNITED had been bombarded with criticism. Kramer had failed to use his power within Paterson's city government to move the Board of Health to action and effectively had abandoned UNITED. This was an organization he applauded, in May 1969, for showing what "dedicated, sincere people" could accomplish when they got "together with private business and government."[135] Ultimately, through his concluding questions, Threet suggested that the abandonment UNITED experienced from the Board of Health and mayor was deliberate and was the main obstacle in the creation of safe and affordable housing in Paterson.

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[134] "Threet Answers UNITED Criticism, Says City Must Condemn Buildings," *The News,* January 29, 1970.

[135] During our interview, Kramer admitted that his administration could have done more on the front of affordable housing, but did not frame his administration's abandonment of housing issues as deliberate—he attributed the abandonment to "time." Lawrence Kramer, in discussion with author, March 11, 2022; "FHA Okays Fourth Ward Commitment," *The News,* February 9, 1968; "UNITED Apartments Now Reality, Navy Vet Becomes First Owner," *The News,* September 16, 1969.

Consequences of Deliberate Dereliction

This negligence significantly backtracked UNITED's construction efforts. By the time the Board of Health intervened and relocated the first (and only) group of UNITED residents, UNITED had been struggling with relocation for 11 months. In total, this project took 17 months to complete, whereas UNITED's first and smaller housing project on Carroll Street took only 9 months. The main differences between the Fulton and Carroll Street projects were scale and feasibility of relocation. The Carroll Street project consisted of one building which housed 16 families, whereas the Fulton Street project consisted of about 15 buildings, which together housed more than 60 families.[136] Nevertheless, if the Board of Health had stepped in and provided relocation aid, UNITED would have most likely relocated the families in a timelier fashion and would have finished the project much earlier. Although the difference would have been a matter of months, these months mattered within the context of Paterson's housing crisis.

Ultimately, UNITED members approached this relocation issue and deliberate dereliction by taking matters into their own hands and pooling personal resources. UNITED board members, including Threet, and supporters took money from their own pockets to relocate families. One board member, John Minnema, used his own money to fix apartments in the surrounding area for UNITED families.[137] Although it took much longer than it would have had the Board of Health helped, UNITED ultimately addressed the relocation obstacles by relying on their own resources.[138]

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[136] "Ottilio Helps UNITED Show Way to Urban Renewal in Fourth Ward," *The News,* February 21, 1969; "Wyckoff Church Unit Learns Of 'Miracle of Fulton Street,'" *The News,* May 2, 1970.
[137] "Wyckoff Church Unit Learns Of 'Miracle of Fulton Street,'" *The News,* May 2, 1970.
[138] "Ottilio Helps UNITED Show Way to Urban Renewal in Fourth Ward," *The News,* February 21, 1969; "Threet Answers UNITED Criticism, Says City Must Condemn Buildings," *The News,* January 29, 1970.

Backlash from Thomas Rooney and the Taxpayers Association

Another obstacle UNITED confronted was opposition from Thomas Rooney, the president of the Paterson Taxpayers Association. By the end of the 1960s, taxpayers associations and similar organizations had become some of the staunchest desegregation opponents. In mid-1960s New York City, the Parents and Taxpayer's Association, mostly formed by white Queens residents, strongly opposed the busing of their children to schools in predominantly working-class communities of color.[139] In the 1950s and 60s, the Taxpayers' Organization in Atlanta garnered white opposition against desegregation by claiming that white residents contributed more taxes than Black Atlantans and thus had a right to decide desegregation's fate.[140] The Paterson Taxpayers Association, whose members were mostly white conservatives, had a track record of opposing federally funded projects.[141] In the early 1960s, the association opposed the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan proposed by the Paterson Forward group because they worried that the plan was adding too many tax-exempt properties to the city.[142]

In 1970, on behalf of the Paterson Taxpayer's Association, Thomas Rooney opposed UNITED and framed its efforts to bring safe and affordable housing to

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[139] Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 64.

[140] Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 127.

[141] In March 1971, the Taxpayers Association board elected Michael DeLuccia, 18, to the board. Rooney supported his selection and highlighted how DeLuccia was "hard-working" and cared about what was going "on not only Paterson, but on a wider scale." DeLuccia was chairman of the National Traditionalist Caucus, a conservative group of college-aged students "dedicated to curbing and fighting radicalism on campuses." Before becoming president of the Taxpayers Association, Thomas Rooney was a TV repairman. He was also an avid anti-welfare opponent well before he opposed UNITED. In a letter to the editor, published in August 1966, Rooney advocated for the denial of welfare to people who did not work, people who had been jailed, and to women who had "illegitimate" children. "Accent on Youth: Taypayers Elect Teen-Ager to Board of Directors," *The News,* March 1, 1971; "A Position Paper: Welfare, Taxes, And a Distrust," *Morning Call,* August 18, 1966; "Guida Out of Race; Wegner, De Vita File," *Morning Call,* August 5, 1966.

[142] "Neighborhood Development is Given Boost at the Hearing," *The News,* June 10, 1969.

Paterson's working-class communities of color as efforts to take money away from the white "working" people of Paterson. Rooney's opposition manifested in legal action—in September 1970, he sued the Board of Adjustments for extending a variance originally granted to UNITED in June 1969—the Taxpayers Association believed that the allotment of such an extension was illegal according to city law. However, in a letter to the editor, Rooney suggested that the lawsuit was more so rooted in opposition to UNITED's project and the people who would be living in these apartments because of their rent subsidy eligibility, rather than the illegal variance extension. He said:

> Even though the project will pay full taxes, its occupants will be eligible for rent subsidies. This means that all working people in Paterson and surrounding towns will have taxes taken out of their paychecks each week so the occupants of these brand new, modern apartments will be able to have lower rents. Should any welfare recipients live in the apartments they will, of course, have their entire rent paid by the taxpayers, and working people. The taxpayers will pay toward this project, not through tax abatement, but through tax subsidies.[143]

By emphasizing that Paterson's "working people" were going to have money "taken out of their paychecks each week" because residents qualified for rent subsidies, Rooney suggested that his issue with UNITED was the residents and their status as low-income and qualification for government aid. Moreover, the insistence that "working people" were going to pay the UNITED residents' rent suggested that UNITED residents, primarily people of color, were "not working" and even lazy. By "working" Patersonians, Rooney evidently meant white people.[144] Even more reminiscent of 1960s and 70s anti- welfare rhetoric was the imagery of UNITED residents living in "brand new, modern apartments" while completely being covered by "taxpayers and the working people."

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[143] "Rooney's Reasons," *The News,* September 5 ,1970.

[144] Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007); "80 Mothers Protest Welfare Bill," *Morning Call,* November 11, 1969.

These claims were unfounded.[145] Although Rooney ultimately lost the case and was nothing more than an oppositional voice to UNITED, his staunch antagonism toward federally funded projects continued well into the mid-1970s, when he was elected mayor.

UNITED's Success and Threet's Hope for a Future Paterson

Despite these setbacks, Threet ultimately created more opportunities to increase access to safe and affordable housing within communities of color in the city through UNITED. The New Jersey Finance Housing Agency had been so impressed by UNITED's efforts to create homeownership opportunities in August 1970 that they sent a representative, Lewis Dow, to admire one of UNITED's housing developments (Figure 13).[146] By January 1972, UNITED had create more than 80 affordable housing units in Wrigley Park.[147] In a city where only 4.7% of homes were owned by nonwhite people in 1960 and 7% in 1970, Threet's small dent within the housing market mattered and opened opportunities for people who had rarely been considered possible homeowners.[148]

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[145] The mortgage payments for families who bought UNITED apartments were subsidized, meaning families still paid a certain amount each month for their homes. They were not "living off" the money of taxpayers. Moreover, a portion of the loans UNITED used for the construction of the buildings and subsidizing of mortgage payments came from federal sources, like the New Jersey Housing Finance Agency (NJHFA). The other portion came from the private fundraising efforts of the organization. "UNITED Project Oked," *Morning Call,* September 26, 1969; UNITED's Projects Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1969, Threet Family Papers.

[146] "UNITED Renovates 61 Units," *The News,* August 29, 1970.

[147] This was not the first time the NJHFA expressed admiration for UNITED. In September 1969, director of NJHFA, Thomas Seessel, said of UNITED's Fulton Place Cooperative, "I don't know of anyone in the country who is providing this kind of housing […] It's the most needed by urban families." "UNITED Project Oked," *Morning Call,* September 26, 1969; "UNITED Renovates 61 Units," *The News,* August 29, 1970; "Threet Enters Race as Independent," *The News,* January 8, 1972.

[148] The 1960 Census reported that 4.7% of housing units were owned by nonwhite people and the 1970 census reported that 7% of housing units were owned by Black people and 0% were owned by Hispanic people.*The racial categories were different in each decade.

*0% might have been reported because there were too few Hispanic homeowners and the Census did not want to reveal their identities. Breakdown of housing quality in Paterson by race, derived from data gathered for the 1960 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database; Breakdown of housing quality in Paterson by race, derived from data gathered for the 1970 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database.

Additionally, Threet stood out as an anomaly amongst real estate brokers who mostly participated in selling homes to poor, working-class people of color for exploitative purposes.[149]

Figure 13: Photograph of Lewis Dow, Mrs. Yvonne Thomas, a prospective UNITED tenant, and Miriam Threet (from left to right) inside a UNITED development.

Threet's experience with UNITED and the deliberate inaction he faced from city officials like the mayor and Board of Health ultimately motivated him to run for mayor of Paterson in 1972. His platform prioritized the construction of affordable housing and directly framed deliberate city government inaction as the main obstacle for organizations like UNITED. "I do not believe that the blunder, the incompetence and bitter chaos in the Wrigley Park Redevelopment Area was accidental. I believe that the depression in that area was and is a planned, deliberate attempt to destroy the will and dignity of those who dare to help themselves," Threet declared during this

[149] Taylor, *Race for Profit,* 5.

campaign, directly linking UNITED's own challenges in Wrigley Park to deliberate city government inaction.[150]

Threet's own choice to run as an independent was also rooted in his experience with city government as UNITED president. When the Democratic Party had invited Threet to run under their ticket, he rejected their invitation because of the "deep frustration" he encountered when implementing "programs [UNITED projects] to relieve Paterson's problems from both Democratic and Republican administrations."[151] Lawrence Kramer, the mayor who disappeared when UNITED needed relocation help, was Republican. Thomas Rooney, the Taxpayers Association president and later mayoral candidate who opposed UNITED because of its usage of federal funds, was a Democrat.[152]

Unfortunately, Threet's platform and indictments of deliberate city government inaction did not resonate with enough residents to vote him into office. Threet lost miserably with 565 votes. His loss also showed that Paterson's white residents were not ready for a Black mayor—the city was 72.5% white. Moreover, his approval of federally subsided affordable housing projects was probably a deal-breaker for white conservatives. Many of the city's conservatives most likely did not even consider giving Threet a vote at any point during his campaign because Thomas Rooney was also in the race. Most votes went to Rooney and Edwin Englehardt, Paterson police chief. They received 17,201 and 14,015 votes respectively.[153]

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[150] "News Release," July 5, 1972, Threet Family Archive.
[151] "Cuccinello, Threet KO Invites of Democratic Unit on Mayoral Pick," *The News,* April 5, 1972.
[152] "OHP Thomas Rooney - Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service)," accessed February 20, 2022, https://www.nps.gov/pagr/learn/historyculture/thomas-rooney.htm.
[153] 'Look What You Did," Rooney Tell Throng of Jubilant Followers," *The News,* November 8, 1972; "Pet Group Backs Englehardt," *The News,* November 3, 1972.

Conclusion

UNITED dissolved when Julius Threet passed away in December 1974 after a long battle with terminal cancer.[154] If Threet had been given more time to live, he probably would have continued to address the ongoing racial inequalities in the city and perhaps run for mayor again.

Notwithstanding his electoral defeat, Threet's mark on the history of housing in Paterson remains. Inspired by Mavelyn Santiago's tragic death in 1966, Threet founded UNITED and formed some of the first opportunities for working-class Black and Spanish-speaking residents to own homes. He founded the organization on principles borrowed from both the Black Power movement and racial uplift ideology and connected the organization's success to cooperation from Black residents, but he later realized that the organization's success hinged on cooperation from the city government. This cooperation never came, so Threet decided to run for mayor himself in 1972 on a platform that prioritized affordable housing. By this time, Threet recognized that the same entities that had left Mavelyn's story to be forgotten—city government forces like the mayor and Board of Health—were the main obstacles in the construction of affordable housing for working-class communities of color.

Orabell Nickelson and Nina Gray also identified the mayor and city boards as obstacles in the creation of affordable housing. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, they criticized antipoverty programs run by the city government and local churches as

[154] Although Threet transferred leadership of UNITED in 1971 (before he ran for mayor), his presence and guidance seemed to have remained essential. The organization dissolved in the months following his death. "Lindell to Head UNITED," *The News,* October 25, 1971; Ken Threet, in discussion with author, December 29, 2021.

incomplete approaches to racial inequalities. Their advocacy for comprehensive programming led to the creation of INCCA for Housing and paved the way for Vera McCants, who helped create affordable housing designed by and primarily for working-class people of color.

III. Demands for Comprehensive Programming and Design: Impact of Orabell Nickelson, Nina Gray, and Vera McCants on INCCA's Fight for Housing

In January 1964, Maxwell Tow, a white Methodist priest from Paterson's Christ Church, traveled to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to help with a voter registration drive organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).[155] There, he participated in prayers "for those harassed and beaten and for those in jail," and sometimes found himself "paralyzed" at the "real possibility of random violence from any quarter at anytime."[156] Weeks later, upon his return to Paterson, he met Orabell Nickelson at a Christ Church neighborhood meeting and shared his experience in Mississippi with her. He explained that the trip made him realize "how difficult it was for the blacks who lived there." In response, Nickelson reminded Tow that "things weren't all that great for blacks in Paterson either. 'You been *down* south but now you're *up* south and you better not forget it!"[157] Paterson had its own share of racial inequalities, which were in no way less harmful or violent than those in the South. Thus, Tow had to treat racial inequalities in Paterson just as seriously as he would have treated inequalities in the South.

This early exchange between Orabell Nickelson and Maxwell Tow was a precursor to how Nickelson and Nina Gray, two Black women, demanded systemic and comprehensive approaches to racial inequalities from local churches, the mayor. and city boards. By demanding these changes in approaches to racial inequalities, Nickelson and Gray were policymakers. However, in his memoir about his civil rights activism and priesthood in Paterson, Tow did not highlight them as such. In *Designing San Francisco,*

[155] Maxwell Tow, *Grit and Grace an Urban Minister's Story*, 1st Edition (Courier Printing, 2003), 16.
[156] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 18-19.
[157] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 23.

Alison Isenberg explains that this lack of accreditation was usual for women policymakers in the 1960s and 1970s.[158] This lack of accreditation was particularly common for Black women, who faced both white liberal and Black Nationalist discourses that "associated matriarchy with the black community's poverty" during that time.[159] Contrary to Tow's memoir, this chapter frames Orabell Nickelson and Nina Gray as policymakers and follows their activism to better understand the innovation of housing policy in Paterson in the 1970s.

The first section of this chapter explores Orabell Nickelson's and Nina Gray's early activism in the 1960s and examines how they began critiquing programs meant to address racial inequalities at the state and local levels. Next, the chapter details how Nickelson and Gray directly challenged white clergy to take more comprehensive and systemic approaches to racial inequalities in the late 1960s. Their intervention eventually led to the creation of the Inner-City Christian Action (INCCA) for Housing organization. This chapter then transitions to INCCA vice president Vera McCants, a single Black mother and native of Wrigley Park, who began imagining housing communities created for and by working-class people of color in the 1970s. Unfortunately, the mayors and city boards did not embrace INCCA's housing projects and delayed their completion. The last

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[158] Historiography has often placed men as the dominant leaders in the profession of urban design. However, as Alison Isenberg's research highlights, women were leaders in urban design in the post-WWII era as well. In San Francisco, social revolutions of the era, including civil rights, feminism, and peace movements, transformed the urban design professional practice and opened opportunities for women to take leadership. In the case of Paterson, Black women took center stage when advocating for and designing affordable housing. Alison Isenberg, "Introduction: Land and Landscape," in *Designing San Francisco*: *Art, Land, and Urban Renewal in the City by the Bay* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 9.

[159] In *Grassroots to the Gateway,* Clarence Lang highlights how several Black power organizations, like ACTION in St. Louis, created their platforms while often overlooking Black women and their experiences with racism. Nevertheless, Black women organized on their own—in 1969, Black women living in St. Louis public housing organized the "nation's first, and largest citywide rent strike and continuously "claimed rights to respect." Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway*, 200, 187.

part of this chapter follows how INCCA addressed these challenges to complete two major housing communities: Triangle Village and INCCA Carroll Street Houses. Both Black and Spanish-speaking Patersonians found a home in INCCA's housing developments. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that the interventions of Nickelson, Gray, and McCants led to the successful creation of housing designed by and primarily for working-class residents of color in 1970s Paterson.

Orabell Nickelson and Nina Gray's Early Activism

Nina Gray was born in 1934 in Lodi, New Jersey, and lived there until she moved to Paterson in 1954. She worked at the Paterson Public Library and Martin Luther King Jr. Day Care Center and was a member of the Paterson Task Force, an antipoverty organization formed in 1964 (Figure 14).[160] She was also the mother of two sons and two daughters.[161] Orabell Nickelson was not originally from New Jersey—she was born in 1928 in Johnston, South Carolina, but lived in New Jersey for most of her life. She first lived in Garfield and Lodi before moving to Paterson in 1956. In addition to being a member of the Central Presbyterian Church, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and NAACP, she was supervisor of the cafeteria personnel for the Paterson Board of Education. Nickelson was the mother of four sons and four daughters (Figure 15). Her husband, Joseph Nickelson, helped raise their children up until his death in 1977.[162]

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[160] The Paterson Task Force was part of a wave of antipoverty organizations created in the wake of Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." Dr. Allen Yager created the Paterson Task Force in November 1964, when he was chairman of Mayor Frank Graves's Committee on the National Economic Opportunity Act. The Task Force's main responsibility was to develop antipoverty programs related to health, employment, and education. "Unified Leadership Needed for Program," *The News,* November 23, 1964; Garth L. Mangum, *The Persistence of Poverty in the United States* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2.
[161] "Nina Gray," *The News,* January 24, 1984.
[162] "Orabell Nickelson Paterson cafeteria work supervisor," *The News,* May 8, 1981.

$1,000 for Child Day Care Center

Paterson News Photo

$1,000 CONTRIBUTION to the Martin Luther King Child Day Care Center on Broadway presented Friday to the Day Care director by a labor official on behalf of two unions and a supermarket chain. From left: Leon Straus, vice-president of the Supermarkets General Corporation; Frank K. Tucker, Paterson's finance commissioner and vice-president of the Supermarkets firm; Mrs. Mary Variance, the Center's Day Care director; the Rev. Fred Wilkes, deputy director of the Paterson Task Force; Passaic County Freeholder John V. Niccollai, secretary and treasurer of Meat Cutters Local 464; Mrs. Nina Gray, chairman of the Welfare Recipients League holding her seven-months-old grand-daughter; and Arthur Jones, director of the Center.

Figure 14: Photograph of Nina Gray (carrying her granddaughter, second from the right). Published in *The News* article entitled, "$1000 for Child Day Care Center" in August 1968.

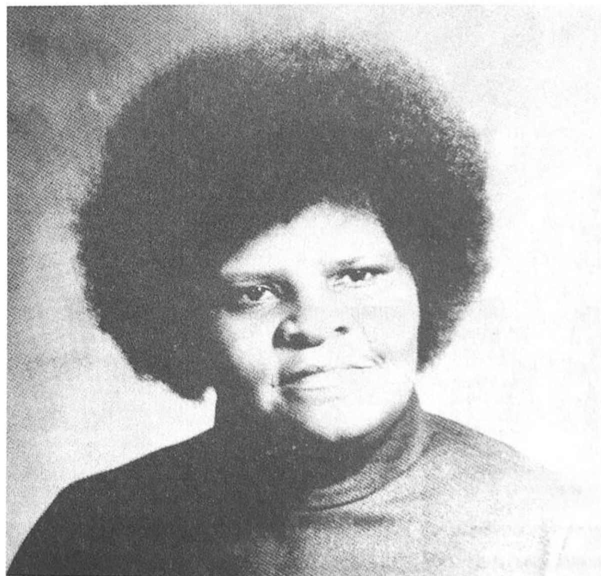

Figure 15: Photograph of Orabell Nickelson, published in Maxwell Tow's memoir, *Grit and Grace*.

Although we do not have primary sources authored by Nina Gray or Orabell Nickelson where they describe why they joined the fight for affordable housing, we can conclude that their motivations were rooted in experiences with federal and local governments' inadequate efforts to address racial inequalities. In *Movement without Marches*, Lisa Levenstein explains that throughout the 1950s, working-class Black women around the country "pursued public assistance" because they wanted to "fulfill goals shared by people of all classes," such as mothering their children, living in decent housing, and receiving effective health care.[163] However, once they received public assistance, many women realized that public institutions were only making half-hearted attempts at addressing racial inequalities. In the case of housing, federal funding policies obligated developers to design and build with the cheapest materials, resulting in the construction of bare-bones public housing. Local authorities also did not prioritize necessary upgrades or maintenance of these buildings.[164] Nickelson experienced the danger of this neglect firsthand. She lived in the Christopher Columbus Housing Projects (CCP) and, in February 1968, was unable to call the housing police after someone fired shots through one of her building's first floor windows. Elmer Grosso, the authority's assistant director, suspended the phone service for everyone in CCP days before the incident because the "bill was too high."[165] As Levenstein explains, rather than helping working-class Black women reach their aspiration of having decent housing, public institutions "maintained them in poverty, sought to regulate their behaviors, and restricted their abilities to substantially improve their lives."[166] It is due to these disappointing and

[163] Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches,* 24.
[164] Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches*, 119.
[165] "Tenants up in Arms: Can't Phone for Help," *Morning Call,* February 12, 1968.
[166] Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches,* 91, 119.

dangerous experiences with public institutions that Gray and Nickelson got involved with church-sponsored organizations and advocated for the housing rights of working-class residents of color in Paterson.

Before intervening in the work of church-sponsored organizations, both Nickelson and Gray were involved in advocating for the rights of single Black mothers in New Jersey. In March 1967, state assembly minority leader Albert S. Smith proposed a welfare bill that would have banned any increase in welfare aid to women who "already had two illegitimate children."[167] Days after Smith's proposal, leaders of the Passaic County Welfare League, including Gray, Nickelson, Mabel Clark, Dorothy Robinson, and Mamie Davis, released a statement against the bill. The league's leaders said, "If you pass such a law in this State and it spreads to other states, we will petition the government to stop helping people overseas because you do help unwed mothers throughout the world," and highlighted the bill's hypocrisy under the context of the Vietnam War. While claiming to protect the human rights of people abroad, the country was denying basic needs to working-class people of color. They also explained that the bill's passage would have given "credence to the belief of some that Negro youths from poverty areas are being sent to Vietnam to cut down the US Negro population."[168]

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[167] Albert Smith was a Republican and represented Atlantic County. Single mothers in Atlantic County also organized against the passage of the bill. "Legislative Luncheon Next Monday," *The Herald News,* March 6, 1967; "Unwed Mothers Ask Governor to Veto Measure," *The Daily Journal* (Vineland, NJ), February 11, 1967; Welfare Unite Backs Unwed-Mother Aid," *Morning Call,* March 4, 1967.

[168] Historian Paul T. Murray has confirmed the Passaic County Welfare League's statement on the drafting process—Black men were overrepresented in the Vietnam War draft. Murray explains that "rather than risk the political consequences of drafting middle-class whites for Vietnam duty, the Pentagon planners created "methods for drafting a disproportionate number of blacks." Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971): 57–76; "Welfare Unite Backs Unwed-Mother Aid," *Morning Call,* March 4, 1967.

Several months later, in November 1967, Gray and Nickelson stood against this bill again, but this time, rather than writing a statement, led a protest in front of Charles Joelson's office. Joelson was a Passaic representative who had voted to pass the bill. A total of 80 women gathered in front of Joelson's office to oppose his vote. At the protest, Gray expanded the scope of the demonstration and identified white middle-class conservatives as the one of the main sources of the struggles of working-class people of color. She said,

> We are declaring war against a Congress that has declared war on the poor. [...] If Congress and President Johnson think they got burned-down cities, they haven't seen anything yet. We aren't going to burn down our own homes anymore. We'll go to the middle-class suburbs and burn those down.[169]

In Gray's perspective, the US government, at a state and federal level, had been fighting a "War on the Poor" instead of a "War on Poverty" and had been actively making the lives of poor, working-class citizens worse instead of improving them. Gray also warned that Congress might see burned-down "middle class suburbs" if they continued to ignore the inequalities faced by working-class people of color, just like they had seen their previous failure to address those inequalities culminate in uprisings and "burned-down cities" in the mid-1960s. Paterson had direct experience with an uprising in 1964.[170] Ultimately, at this protest, Gray asserted that the largest obstacle facing people who were fighting to address racial inequalities laid not in inner cities but in white suburbia, where many of the white conservatives who voted for Smith's welfare bill resided.

Although Nickelson did not agree with the idea of declaring a "war on Congress," she did agree that Congress had "declared a war on us," and questioned the bill's

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[169] "80 Mothers Protest Welfare Bill," *Morning Call,* November 22, 1967.
[170] Lipsitz and Polton, *The 1964 Paterson Riot.*

viability. By the time of the protest, the state had added a new provision to the bill, which criminalized single mothers who did not have jobs and stipulated the mandatory removal of their children. In front of Joelson's office, Nickelson said, "We know what we have to do. There aren't enough jails, foster homes, shelters that will hold our children and us," suggesting that the state did not have the resources to follow through with jailing all mothers who were without jobs and/or engaged in the protest. The power of the state did not surpass the power that working-class women of color had in numbers.[171] The bill was not passed.[172]

Throughout the late 1960s, Nickelson also critiqued existing local programs meant to help poor, working-class Patersonians because of their short-term nature. As she explained in a letter to the editor, she had seen "every kind of program imaginable for children up to adults [in poverty areas] but only for the summer." These summer programs were not-encompassing of the larger issues faced by working-class Black people, and, as Nickelson pointed out, did not address the "cold, hard winters" families often endured in their poorly heated, overcrowded houses. Even though local policymakers, "the mayor, [and] churches," claimed to have understood the "anger" of working-class Black people "at being thrown on the hot streets and [with] no money," they did not comprehensively understand the hardships of "being shut in, in overcrowded homes, with not enough to eat, not enough clothes to keep his body warm." They had been more focused on creating programming that prevented the next summer uprising

[171] "80 Mothers Protest Welfare Bill," *Morning Call,* November 22, 1967.
[172] There is no record of the legislature having passed the bill. New Jersey Legislature, *Acts of the One Hundred and Ninety-First Legislature of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton: The legislature, 1967); New Jersey Legislature, *Acts of the One Hundred and Ninety-Second Legislature of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton: The legislature, 1968).

and addressed their fears of "summer violence" rather than addressing inequalities comprehensively. Nickelson urged the mayor and local churches to create programming through a more long-term, comprehensive lens, instead of being "selfish."[173]

Nickelson also demanded that local civil rights leaders, and the larger working-class population of color in Paterson, focus on addressing racial inequalities at a local level. She emphasized the need of a localized movement when reflecting on Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to Paterson in April 1968. In a letter to the editor, Nickelson described the visit as "disappointing" because King had just talked about the Poor People's March on Washington. Moreover, none of the event organizers had talked to Dr. King about the "problems here in Paterson." Instead of marching on Washington, Nickelson argued that civil rights leaders should stay in Paterson "when there was more than enough work to be done here." She explained,

> We have poor, exploited, hungry, bad-houted [sic] people here. We have more than out share of police brutality, and so far nothing is being done. The danger of trouble in the city is still here. We still have men without jobs, they are still treating welfare families like second-class citizens. Our schools in the ghetto are still a disgrace to the word "education." We still have houses that are not fit for human beings, and the rent is higher for these places than it is to buy a house. We still have stores and salesmen and finance companies that exploit our people because they are not properly educated and don't have much money. We have hunger here because the average family on welfare cannot make ends meet on the stipends they get, and more days than we care to admit these families go hungry.[174]

The ongoing list of racial inequalities—everything from police brutality to poor housing conditions—emphasized the urgent need for civil rights leaders to stay in Paterson instead of going to Washington. It was "time for the poor people to stop looking to these people as leaders" and fight "for what they want and need." The success of localized

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[173] "Hanging Question," *Morning Call,* August 3, 1967.
[174] "The Poor People at Home," *Morning Call,* April 4, 1968.

movements against racial inequalities depended on the leadership of working-class people of color in Paterson, and not of national civil rights leaders.[175]

White Clergy-Run Organizations and the Interventions of Black Women

In the 1970s, Nickelson's leadership as president of the Northside Families Organized for Renewal of Community, Education, and Society (FORCES) group echoed her own calls for a localized, grassroots-led, structural approach to inequalities in the city. FORCES was another organization originally founded by white clergy, including Maxwell Tow, to provide educational resources to children from poor, working-class communities of color. As FORCES president, Nickelson held meetings with the Paterson mayor to advocate for funding for a local dental clinic and urged him to consider his own role in the city's ongoing racial inequalities.[176] Nickelson also continued to write letters to the editor, where she demanded that city officials make tangible changes related to racial injustices and public space. In May 1975, she called for the city to close Williams Lounge on North Main Street because it had been known to serve alcohol to minors of color.[177] The Lounge's owner, Elsie Williams, from the neighboring suburb of Wayne, was the wife of a suspended Paterson police officer and had repeatedly admitted minors, only to receive no consequences from the city.[178] It was only after the Nickelson's letter that William's alcohol license was revoked.[179] In another letter to the

[175] "The Poor People at Home," *Morning Call,* April 4, 1968.
[176] In 1975, Orabell Nickelson held a meeting with Mayor Kramer to look for financial assistance from the city for the maintenance of a local Dental Clinic, started by FORCES. At this meeting, Nickelson explained that the "poor of Paterson were no better off under Kramer than they were under Rooney." Kramer ultimately disagreed and did not give FORCES any funding. Tow, *Grit and Grace,* 47.
[177] "Wants Tavern Closed," *The News,* May 16, 1975.
[178] Williams admitted to repeatedly admitting minors to her bar in her own *News* editorial. "Young Troublemakers," *The News,* May 22, 1975.
[179] "Tavern License Killed, As Crackdown Begins," *The News,* May 30, 1975.

editor, Nickelson asked the Department of Human Resources, the Recreation Department, and the Department of Public Works to "get it together" and make Titus Park, located in the Northside neighborhood, "operational for the coming summer." She also proposed that the city departments hire the area's residents to "fight high unemployment" and establish "supervised spring, summer, and fall recreational programs to meet the needs of all." As president, Nickelson ultimately tried to address racial inequalities through a more systemic, localized approach.[180]

Nickelson was also in direct conversation about racial inequalities with white clergy before her presidency and involvement with Northside FORCES. As alluded to in the introduction of this chapter, Nickelson was a member of Christ Church and had been urging Tow, since 1964, to treat racial injustices in Paterson just as seriously as he treated racial injustices in the South.[181]

The Inner-City Christian Action (INCCA) for Housing

Years after this conversation, in 1967, Tow and Vincent Puma, pastor of the Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic Church in Paterson, created the Inner-City Christian Action (INCCA) organization to pick up responsibility for summer programs supported by the Paterson Task Force. In the years prior to INCCA's creation, the federal government had shifted their funding priorities to the Vietnam War, and thus made it difficult for the Task Force to support ongoing summer programs. Rather than relying on

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[180] As FORCES president, Nickelson also managed the organization's several branches, including Century 21 Housing, the Northside Health Center, the Urban Youth Union, the Senior Citizen Center, the Nutrition Program, and the Paterson Ecumenical Preschool program. Although it's not clear whether Nickelson was the impetus behind the creation of these branches, her leadership as president was reminiscent of her calls for more focused, localized approaches in the late 1960s. "Rundown Playground," *The News,* July 1, 1975; Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 47.
[181] Tow, *Grit and Grace,* 16; Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 18-19.

federal funds, INCCA depended on donations from local businesses, industries, and foundations to run a city-wide summer program for about 2,000 children.[182] INCCA also relied on the resources of its executive board members, who were mostly white clergymen, to house their programs. These programs were primarily held in church facilities.

In the summer of 1967, Nina Gray challenged INCCA's executive board to focus on issues beyond educational access and approach racial inequalities in Paterson through a more structural and comprehensive lens. She presented this challenge at a meeting with the executive board originally intended to address the summer program's unwholesome lunch menu. That year, one of Gray's children had participated in INCCA's summer program and had told her that the program had been mainly feeding them peanut butter sandwiches. She and a couple other mothers then set up a meeting with the executive board to call attention to the program's menu. They demanded that INCCA provide more variegated and nutritious options for the students. Just when the clergy agreed to provide better lunch options and were about to adjourn the meeting, Gray said, "I want to know *why*, if you preachers can put together a program for almost all the kids in the city and raise one hundred thousand dollars to pay for it, *why* can't you do something that will make for lasting change for the poor people in this town?" "Like what?" one of the clergy asked. "Jobs, decent housing, better schools […]," Gray responded.[183] The clergy had the power and resources to create more impactful and comprehensive programs that addressed racial inequalities in the city and Gray urged them to do more—to raise funds,

[182] Tow, *Grit and Grace,* 85.
[183] Tow, *Grit and Grace,* 85.

as they did for the summer educational programs, to create more jobs, build better housing, and improve the public schools.

Gray's meeting with the clergy ultimately led to the creation of the INCCA for Housing branch. The clergy dismissed most of the action items Gray recommended as "too difficult or impractical," but several of them "agreed that housing was a crucial need."[184] The already existing pressure the city was receiving from the federal government to proceed with its urban renewal projects and create affordable housing influenced the clergy to select housing as the issue they would address.[185] Even though the clergy did not decide on taking a comprehensive approach to ongoing inequalities in the city as Gray suggested, her intervention pushed INCCA's board to think about the housing issue and make an effort to address it. INCCA for Housing was officially a community development corporation (CDC). CDCs were nonprofit, community-run organizations that aimed to improve development of low-income areas through housing, job training programs, and educational enrichment opportunities.[186]

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[184] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 87.

[185] As mentioned in Chapter One, when James Crowley, a representative of the Urban Renewal Division in Philadelphia, learned about the construction of the peripheral road and the destructions it would have on the homes of working-class people, he urged Mayor Frank Graves and the Paterson Housing Authority (PHA) to prioritize the creation of affordable housing and replacement housing for people who would have been displaced. In another case, in July 1967, a federal urban renewal representative urged the PHA to quickly find replacement housing for families living on Dale Avenue (part of the downtown renewal project). The PHA had acquired their properties and forced tenants to move out without giving them any help with relocation housing. "May Limit Paterson on Renewal Plans," *Morning Call,* August 23, 1961; "Tenants to Get Time to Relocate," *The News,* July 1, 1967; Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 87.

[186] Rabig, *The Fixers,* 175.

Vera McCants and INCCA for Housing

Vera McCants's leadership on the INCCA for Housing board contributed greatly to the organization's success in the late 1970s. She was born and raised in Paterson, New Jersey, and grew up on Godwin Avenue in Wrigley Park. McCants joined the board in 1974 after receiving an invitation from Tow (Figure 16). At the time, she was balancing three part-time jobs, raising her two children alone, and managing her studies as a full-time 'student at Rutgers University in the Urban Planning and Community Organization master's program.

She made time for the board position because she did not want anyone else to experience what she did when she was looking for safe and affordable housing in Paterson. In the years before joining INCCA's board, McCants had trouble finding housing for herself and two children—of the housing available, none were open to single Black mothers.

Several landlords in the city refused to rent to single Black mothers because they did not believe that single Black mothers were able to pay rent on a regular basis.[187] This discrimination was technically legal—by the early 1970s, the New Jersey State Legislature had not yet passed a law against housing discrimination that applied to properties that were privately owned.[188] McCants's own motivation behind joining INCCA for Housing and personal experience with this housing discrimination were reflected in her leadership.

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[187] Vera McCants, in conversation with author, October 20, 2021.

Figure 16: Photograph of Vera McCants published in *The Herald-News*, May 1979.

McCants made INCCA's housing projects personal and intimately tied to the experiences of working-class residents of color in Wrigley Park and Northside. She garnered support for the organization's housing projects and collected input from neighborhood residents through door-to-door canvassing. Several of the doorstep conversations in Wrigley Park were personal and intimate because of McCants's own connection to the neighborhood—she had several friends and family living in Wrigley Park in the 1970s, including her brother and her friend, Art Jones.[189] Moreover, McCants's regularly scheduled neighborhood meetings gave residents the opportunity to speak directly with INCCA board members and express what they wanted to see in the organization's housing projects. These meetings, usually held at local churches, were always "packed" and were where residents asked for low-rise housing and comfortabl

[188] In 1957, the NJ State Legislature passed a law stating that "any place of *public* accommodation and *publicly* assisted housing accommodation" (italics added) could not discriminate based on "race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry." The state legislature finally passed a law in 2002 that included private property and made it unlawful for landlords to discriminate someone because of their "race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, affectional or sexual orientation, familial status, or nationality." There were cases of Paterson residents standing up against housing discrimination in the city and surrounding suburbs in the late 1960s. In March 1969, the Council of Puerto Rican and Spanish organizations held a meeting to discuss housing discrimination practices in the city. Another example is the case of the Mahwah Ford Factory workers, many of whom were Black and Hispanic and lived working-class neighborhoods of Newark and Paterson. The workers filed a legal complaint with the United Auto Workers group against Mahwah's exclusionary zoning ordinances; Ax Act to amend the "Law Against Discrimination,'' N.J. Stat. § 10-5:4 (passed June 4, 1957); "Spanish Council Convenes Today," *Morning Call,* March 22, 1969; "Mahwah Girding for Test," *The News,* September 24, 1971.

[189] Vera McCants, in conversation with author, October 20, 2021.

sized apartments—qualities that made the housing units look and feel like a home.[190] From this neighborhood input, INCCA created Carroll Street Houses (located in Wrigley Park) and Triangle Village (located in an area of the downtown district, nestled between Northside and Wrigley Park).[191] These housing communities were low-rise, "felt like homes," and were unlike the high-rise CCP, the only PHA housing project in the Northside and in a predominantly working-class Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhood in Paterson. By canvassing and creating these regular meeting spaces, McCants was able to bring the voice of neighborhood residents into the planning phases of the project.

INCCA's Obstacles

Before even breaking ground for Carroll Street Houses and Triangle Village, INCCA faced strong backlash from Thomas Rooney, the same man who opposed Julius Threet's work and the use of federal funds to create safe and affordable housing in 1970. But, what changed between his stance against UNITED in 1970 and his stance against INCCA in 1972 was his power as Paterson mayor. The city's strong-mayor form of government gave the mayor the capability to appoint members to city boards, including the Planning Board and the Board of Finance (which appointed members to the PHA). With this appointment power, Rooney could control most, if not all, of the city's funds. The

[190] Vera McCants, in conversation with author, October 20, 2021; "It was 9 Years in the making, but it's now Home Sweet Home," *The News,* February 2, 1978.

[191] Triangle Village was located between census tracts 16.1 and 16.2—areas of the Downtown district that were predominantly Black and Spanish speaking. Specifically, 59.9% of this area's population identified as Black, 39.4% as white,* and 0.8% other race. 13% of the population identified as someone of "Spanish origin or Descent." *At the time, "Spanish origin or Descent" was not a racial category—many people who identified as white might have been Spanish-speaking as well. Breakdown of population in Paterson by race and census tract, derived from data gathered for the 1970 U.S. census, generated by the Social Explorer database.

first time he exerted his power over INCCA was at a meeting where the organization planned to present their plans for Triangle Village. In his memoir, Tow recalled:

> Bernhard Haeckel [INCCA board member] led off with a masterful presentation describing all the problems and possibilities of the project in a historical perspective. However, before he had even finished the mayor [Thomas Rooney] broke in to ask if federal money was involved. The obvious answer was "Yes." That was all he needed to hear and stalked out of the meeting. It was a dark day for INCCA.[192]

Rooney left because he disagreed with the usage of federal funds. As explained in the previous chapter, this point of opposition was rooted in the racist belief that communities of color, through federally subsidized housing projects, were taking away money from "working" white people. Due to Rooney's opposition and obstruction, INCCA did not attain the appropriate funds needed to complete their housing projects quickly.[193]

For FORCES's Century 21 Housing organization, mayoral obstruction led to its ultimate failure and dissolution in the early 1970s. Northside FORCES's executive board created the Century 21 Housing branch in the late 1960s, likely due to input from Northside's working-class, residents of color.[194] Many of the residents who were regularly engaged with the organization were parents of children participating in FORCES's preschool program. In comparison to INCCA, the organization did not have board members who were personally tied to the neighborhood, like Vera McCants was to

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[192] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 93.

[193] When I asked McCants what was one of the main obstacles INCCA encountered, she said, "funding." The mayor was a major obstacle in getting these funds. Vera McCants, in conversation with author, October 20, 2021.

[194] Century 21 has no relation to the present-day real estate company. Moreover, Tow's memoir did not make clear who initiated the creation of Northside FORCES's Century 21 Housing branch. He did recall that parents with children in the Northside FORCES preschool program often gathered at the organization's office and gave input about community priorities. It was the parents who voted on changing the organization's name from the "Ecumenical Association for Urban Concerns" to "Northside FORCES." It also might have been the parents who urged Northside FORCES's leadership, mainly white clergymen, to create a branch dedicated to the construction of affordable housing in the early 1970s. Considering INCCA for Housing's own history, this possibility is very likely. Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 40.

Wrigley Park. It was primarily led by white Patersonians who had an interest in the housing crisis, like Maxwell Tow and Carol Hentz.

In 1971, when Century 21 sought out support from Mayor Lawrence Kramer to renovate Titus Park and create 40-50 housing units nearby, Kramer's nonengagement deterred the project. He excused himself from meetings where Century 21 planned to present on their housing projects and explain their funding needs. Again, without Kramer's approval, Century 21 could not get funding from the PHA. In October 1971, Kramer finally wrote to the organization and said that he "believed that the corporation's requirements could be met." However, Kramer's resignation the following week made Century 21 start from square one—they had to receive approval from the new mayor Art Dwyer.[195] Tow tied Kramer's nonengagement to the mayor's opposition to civil rights activism. He explained that board members' involvement with civil rights protests in the late 1960s had placed Century 21 in an "adversial relationship with the city administration."[196]

Although Dwyer promised to create no more delays for Century 21, the city's Planning Board continued to provide setbacks. After Century 21 spent 18 months advocating for the renovation and rehabilitation of the Titus Park area, the Planning Board director, George Ferensick, refused to give the organization any land, tax

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[195] Kramer left his position as mayor of Paterson to become State Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, under Governor William Cahill. Lawrence Kramer, in discussion with author, March 11, 2022. "Community Unite Shakeup may signal changing role," *Asbury Park Evening Press,* December 30, 1971.

[196] Throughout his term, Kramer was often frustrated with local civil rights protests. For example, when civil rights activist Eunice Braggs organized a demonstration in front of city hall to protest the local police department's use of mace, Kramer ordered the police to remove and jail the 70+ protestors from city hall's steps. While jailed, protestor John Eldred demanded that Kramer fire policemen who had been perpetrators of brutality. In response, Kramer said, "Don't hold a gun to the Mayor of Paterson." Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 44, 55.

abatement, or relocation assistance for the families already living in the area.[197] Without the support of the mayor and city boards, the project was not possible.[198] Dismayed by this lack of support, Century 21 dissolved in the early 1970s.

Century 21's dissolution contributed to INCCA's longer existence and success. Once Century 21 ended, its president, Carol Hentz, started working for INCCA and Tow devoted more time to the organization. They brought their Century 21 experiences with maneuvering bureaucratic processes and raising "seed money" through collaborations with nearby suburban churches to INCCA.[199] Tow's ability to create connections with white suburban churches helped increase the number of INCCA sponsors.[200] Furthermore, INCCA's Carroll Street Houses were possible, in part, due to Julius Threet's efforts in Wrigley Park. Part of the land used for INCCA Carroll Street Houses was first obtained by UNITED. This land was located near the corner of Harrison and Carroll Street. When UNITED dissolved in 1974, following Threet's death, the land was turned over to the Redevelopment Agency. The agency then asked INCCA to develop the site.

Contributions from the organization's donors were able to keep INCCA afloat until Paterson changed its city charter in May 1974 and the mayor's absolute power was no longer an obstacle.[201] Nevertheless, INCCA continued to face antagonism from local city government offices, including the Department of Community Development and the Redevelopment Agency. While the Redevelopment Agency had helped INCCA acquire

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[197] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 84.
[198] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 84.
[199] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 85; "All Things Black and Beautiful' To Benefit 3 Self-Help Projects," *The Paterson Evening News,* March 16, 1972; "Hansberry Play to be Offered in Ridgewood," *The Paterson Evening News,* February 8, 1971.
[200] Vera McCants, in conversation with author, October 20, 2021.
[201] The city changed is charter from a strong-mayor form of government to a mayor-city council form of government in May 1974. The concluding chapter details how and why this change came about. "Final Council Results," *The News,* May 16, 1974.

land for Carroll Street Houses, it came into repeated conflict over plans for Triangle Village. When the agency redesigned the peripheral road, they planned for it to cut through Triangle Village's first location. INCCA then had to regroup and plan for the housing project to be in another area. Later, the agency developed plans for a police-fire complex on top of Triangle Village's second location. INCCA had to regroup again.[202] The Redevelopment Agency's constant oversight placed several delays on Triangle Village's construction—these delays were compounded in 1976 when the director of the Department of Community Development Walter "Nap" Gardner announced he would "deep six" the Triangle Village plans at a meeting with Max Tow.[203]

Gardner and other community development members opposed the project because they viewed Triangle Village as an infringement on the city's downtown. Some city council members also held this opposition and claimed, publicly, that Triangle Village was going to place "too many low- and moderate-income families too close to the business district."[204] The mere presence of low- and moderate-income families was going to be detrimental to the success of downtown businesses—the downtown business community and the creation of affordable housing were in direct competition, in their perspective. The council echoed the Chamber of Commerce's vision for the city from the 1950s and 1960s, which prioritized the downtown's economic potential over the livelihoods of working-class residents of color. Further aligning with the chamber's

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[202] INCCA had to change Triangle Village's location about five times due to conflicts with plans from the city's Redevelopment Agency, which kept designing on top of INCCA's plans. Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 94. [203] In July 1974, the Paterson city council and mayor at the time, Lawrence Kramer, decided to place the Paterson Redevelopment Agency under the management of a new Department of Community Development to increase its "effectiveness in serving the public." This new department also managed the PHA, Planning Board, and Zoning Board. "Public Hearing July 30: Paterson's Code Agreed Upon," *The News,* July 13, 197; Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 94; "In Paterson Government: City Coalition Seeks Voice," *The News,* July 11, 1974.
[204] "A Bleak Housing Outlook," *The News,* January 3, 1977.

vision, several Community Development members believed that Triangle Village's proposed location was more "suited for light industrial development than for housing." Industrial development near the loop road would have led to low- and moderate-income people working near the downtown, but not living there, and thus "preserved" the downtown's profitability. To replace Triangle Village, Gardner proposed an alternate plan that would have placed manufactured houses "in every vacant space in the downtown renewal area as well as in the Governor Street area" and allowed for light industrial development near the peripheral road.[205]

INCCA ultimately approached this pushback by publicly calling out the department's skewed development efforts and applying legal pressure. After Gardner announced his plans to replace Triangle Village, Orabell Nickelson (now an INCCA board member) explained in a letter to the editor that Gardner had originally been willing to cooperate with INCCA on Triangle Village, but that the "place of some of our city fathers changed and in spite of their so-called commitment to housing." She explained that she would have liked:

> to see the city bosses' and the council's real agenda for the Triangle and to see who will profit financially from this piece of land. You can be sure it won't be the needy people of Paterson. Nap Gardner has served his masters well; the people haven't benefitted from the Community Development money the way they should have."[206]

Perhaps, by "city bosses" and "Nap's masters," Nickelson meant the downtown business elite who feared the presence of low- and moderate-income families dampening their

[205] Walter Gardner never released exact numbers on how many housing units his plan would have produced, but it seems like it would have been much less than that of INCCA's Triangle Village plan, which aimed for 159 housing units. Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 94; "VMC Management Corporation: Our History," Vera McCants Family Papers.
[206] "Paterson Housing," *The News,* January 14, 1977.

profits? Or, perhaps, she meant the white conservatives who opposed all federally subsidized housing? Or maybe, she meant both? Either way, Nickelson exposed how opposition to Triangle Village was opposition to the livelihoods of working-class people of color and benefitted the city's elite. In January 1977, the INCCA's board applied more pressure by taking legal action against the Department of Community Development.[207] Two days before their February court date, the department agreed to support INCCA with the necessary funds. INCCA had applied enough pressure. Due to the organization's persistence and leadership, Triangle Village opened in June 1980.

INCCA's Successes

In the end, the fight for housing in Paterson, which transformed into a fight for a more democratic government, was worth it. Wrigley Park and Northside residents showed an overwhelming amount of support for Triangle Village and Carroll Street Houses. Many were excited at the prospect of finally getting the opportunity to live in a safe and affordable home. When applications for INCCA Carroll Street Houses opened in August 1977, lines started at "4:00 AM, 5:00 AM in the morning" and went "down the block."[208] The lines got so long that McCants had to set up system where INCCA members "stamped each application with the date and time" of the applicant's arrival so that each one was properly handled. Thousands of city residents applied, but only a

[207] The exact nature of the lawsuit was not clear from the historical record. Tow's memoir mentioned that Jim Shashaty was planning INCCA's legal defense but did not specify what INCCA was suing the Department of Community Development for. It is possible that they were suing the department for delaying approval of their project for so long. The local newspapers did not provide any details on the lawsuit against the department either—it's possible that newspapers did not cover the lawsuit extensively because INCCA and the Department of Community Development never got to face each other in an actual courtroom. Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 94.

[208] "Incca for Housing," *The News,* August 30, 1977.

portion of them got accepted. Triangle Village and INCCA Carroll Street Houses had 247 housing units combined (Figure 17). Peggy Williams was one of the accepted applicants. She was a single mother of five and was finally able to leave her poorly heated and roach-infested apartment in 1978 for an INCCA apartment on Carroll Street.[209] Juana Castro, a 76-year-old woman originally from Puerto Rico who suffered from nerve arthritis, was another accepted applicant. She no longer had to climb flights of stairs when she moved to her "shining" one-bedroom apartment in Triangle Village.[210]

Figure 17: Delia Matos was one of the accepted applicants. She is pictured above with her husband and children in front of their Triangle Village apartment. This photograph was published in *The News* in June 1980.

[209] "It was 9 Years in the making, but it's now Home Sweet Home," *The News,* February 2, 1978.
[210] "Triangle Village: Pilgrim's Dream Come True," *The News,* June 27, 1980.

Conclusion

INCCA could not have reached the success it did with its housing projects without the leadership and involvement of Orabell Nickelson, Nina Gray, and Vera McCants. Before their intervention, the city government and churches created local antipoverty programs in the late 1960s that did not address the housing shortage. These programs mainly focused on providing children with educational opportunities in the summer and nothing else. In the late 1960s, Nickelson openly critiqued their short-term nature and urged for more systemic and localized approaches to the city's racial inequalities. This understanding of Paterson's inequalities informed her own leadership in FORCES. Also in the late 1960s, Gray challenged INCCA to make use of their resources and address the challenges faced by working-class people of color through a systemic lens. She ultimately inspired the organization's executive board to create INCCA for Housing. In the mid-1970s, McCants, as vice president of INCCA, ensured that Triangle Village and Carroll Street Houses were projects of the neighborhood and directly opposed the city development approach taken by the Chamber of Commerce in the decades before. Rather than ignoring the experiences of working-class Black and Spanish-speaking residents, McCants placed them at the center of Triangle Village and Carroll Street Houses' design. Ultimately, between the late 1960s and 1970s, Orabell Nickelson, Nina Gray, and Vera McCants proposed comprehensive housing policies that centered the experiences of working-class people of color. It was due to their policies and leadership that INCCA created safe and affordable housing in Paterson that was designed for and by the people.

IV. Conclusion

Of the affordable housing projects that were built in Paterson between 1950 and 1980, mainly the ones created by and primarily for working-class residents of color have survived to the present day. After UNITED's dissolution in 1974, two of the organization's completed housing projects, 47-53 Carroll Street Housing and Jay Sullivan Court on 700 E 18th Street, were foreclosed and resold by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Both housing communities still stand today and provide low- income housing.[211] The last completed housing community, the Fulton Place Cooperative, met a different fate. The Hamilton Hobbs real estate company bought out all the Fulton apartments in the 1980s and then developed the land to make space for the Starr Laundry Company.[212]

What became of UNITED's last, incomplete housing project on Harrison Street is part of INCCA's and Vera McCants's story. Once UNITED's leadership dissolved in 1974 and left the Harrison housing project in the hands of the Redevelopment Agency, the agency asked INCCA to sponsor and develop the site—Vera McCants helped transform the site into INCCA Carroll Street Houses, which still stands today and provides low-income housing.[213] Vera McCants' management company, VMC, manages the property today. VMC also manages INCCA's Triangle Village which continues to

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[211] "You Are Invited to Submit a Purchase Proposal for Jay Sullivan Street," *Morning News,* July 21, 1979; "Legal: Notice of Marshall's Sale," *The Herald-News,* December 28, 1972; "For Sale by Sealed Bids," *Paterson News,* October 23, 1973; "Carroll Street Apartments, 47-49 Carroll Street, Paterson, NJ 07501, LowIncomeHousing.Us," https://www.lowincomehousing.us/det/07501-1261-carroll_street_apartments; "Jay Sullivan Court, 700 E 18th Street, Paterson, NJ 07501, LowIncomeHousing.Us," https://www.lowincomehousing.us/det/07501-2386-jay_sullivan_court.

[212] "Tax Sales," *The News,* November 5, 1982; "Notice of Tax Sale Certificate," *The News,* September 6, 1986; "Fulton Pl, Paterson, NJ 07514," Fulton Pl, Paterson, NJ 07514, https://www.google.com/maps.

[213] Tow, *Grit and Grace*, 89; Vera McCants, in discussion with author, October 20, 2021; "INCCA-Carroll Street Houses, 40 Carroll Street, Paterson, NJ 07501, LowIncomeHousing.Us," https://www.lowincomehousing.us/det/07501-1206-incca-carroll.

provide low-income housing to over 159 families. Both housing communities remain in good condition.[214]

None but one of the low-income housing projects designed and managed by the PHA remain standing. Both high-rise housing complexes constructed in the 1950s, Dean McNutly and Alexander Hamilton, were demolished.[215] Another high-rise housing complex, the Christopher Columbus Housing Projects (CCP), was demolished under the Hope VI program. This program was created by Congress in 1992 to address "the problem of severely distressed public housing." By the 1990s, CCP was classified as "distressed" and had the highest vacancy rate of any public housing project in Paterson due to its need for repairs and high crime rates.[216] CCP was torn down in early 2000 and was replaced with Christopher Columbus Homes.[217] Brooksloate Terraces is the only PHA housing project standing today.[218]

Although historians of public housing have mainly argued that the creation of affordable housing was rooted in the efforts of public institutions in the 1950s and 60s, this thesis demonstrates that, in the case of Paterson, affordable housing was rooted in the efforts of middle- and working-class Black residents who lived in predominantly Black

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[214] "VMC Management Corporation – Our History," McCants Family Papers, Paterson, New Jersey.
[215] Riverside Terraces, originally built by the PHA to house war veterans and war workers in the 1940s, was demolished in 2020. Its last residents described it as "deplorable" and explained that they "never want to live in that type of environment again." Joe Malinconico, "Paterson Breaks Ground on $106 Million Riverside Terrace Housing Project," NorthJersey.com, August 6, 2020, https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/paterson-press/2020/08/06/paterson-nj-breaks-ground-106-million-riverside-terrace-apartment-complex/3302597001/; Lawrence Kramer, in discussion with author, March 11, 2022; "HMFA Breaks Ground on First Phase of New Alexander Hamilton Project in Paterson," NJ Department of Community Affairs, October 22, 2009, https://nj.gov/dca/news/news/2009/approved/102209.html.
[216] Larry Buron et al., "The HOPE VI Resident Tracking Study," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 2002, 50.
[217] "Lottery to Decide HOPE VI relocations," *The Record,* February 23, 2000; "Christopher Columbus Homes, Paterson, NJ Low Income Apartments," https://affordablehousingonline.com/housing-search/New-Jersey/Paterson/Christopher-Columbus-Homes/10035019.
[218] "Remembering Brook-Sloate," *Newsletter of the Passaic County Historical Society 15*, no. 4 (Fall 2015).

and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods in the late 1960s and 70s. The buildings that stand today urge us to recognize the importance of housing communities that are led and designed by residents of color (Figure 18).

Even though the housing shortage's growing presence in predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods was evident to the city government in the 1950s and 60s, the mayor, city boards, and PHA did not mobilize to address the issue. The PHA did, however, address the housing shortage in predominantly white areas of the city throughout the 1950s and 60s. Several mayors then pointed to these developments to justify the use of urban renewal funds to "save" the downtown from economic decline and support the downtown business elite.

It was in this context that Julius Threet created UNITED, and Orabell Nickelson and Nina Gray challenged organizations like INCCA to address the housing shortage. Through UNITED, Threet created some of the first opportunities for affordable homeownership for working-class people of color in Wrigley Park in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Also in the late 1960s, Nickelson and Gray urged antipoverty programs managed by the city government and local churches to address ongoing racial inequalities, including lack of access to decent housing. Their advocacy led to the creation of INCCA for Housing and paved the way for Vera McCants's leadership. As INCCA vice president, McCants ensured that the voices of Wrigley Park and Northside residents were at the center of the housing projects' design process. Ultimately, Black residents who lived in Paterson's working-class Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods spearheaded the creation of affordable housing primarily for people of color and worked to change housing policy outlooks in the 1960s and 1970s.

Figure 18: Map, created by the author and Tsering Shawa, shows the distribution of PHA, INCCA, and UNITED housing developments. PHA housing developments are represented by red dots. INCCA and UNITED housing developments are represented by orange dots. The background map was taken from the 1966 Neighborhood Analysis document.

Advocating for Structural Change Beyond the Issue of Housing

However, the story of affordable housing in Paterson is incomplete without recognizing the constant role of the strong-mayor form of government as an obstacle in the successful creation of the affordable housing communities. Both UNITED and INCCA witnessed firsthand how uncollaborative mayors and city boards had the power to delay affordable housing projects indefinitely under this strong-mayor form of government in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[219] This story is also incomplete without recognizing how both organizations and their leaders combatted this obstacle. As explained in Chapter Two, Julius Threet, after having seen how the strong-mayor form of government allowed for the sidelining of his plans, attempted to run for mayor on a platform that prioritized affordable housing. The rest of this concluding chapter will show how INCCA's leaders also combatted the strong-mayor form of government and attempted to establish a more equitable and representative city government structure through their involvement with the Paterson Coalition.

In April 1973, due to their own experiences with this strong-mayor form of government, INCCA's leaders along with 20 other community-based organizations formed the Paterson Coalition to ensure that the city government no longer ignored the voices and experiences of working-class people of color. Several members of the group's leadership, including executive vice president Max Tow and vice president Orabell Nickelson, had witnessed firsthand how uncollaborative mayors and city boards had the

[219] In his book, *The Streets of San Francisco*, Christopher Lowen begins to examine how mayoral politics shaped policing in San Francisco. He explores how mayors between the 1950s and 1970s involved working-class populations in their city governments. I look forward to continue engaging with Agee's work and further explore the relationship between Paterson's mayors and its working-class residents of color in future research projects. Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco,* 7.

power to delay affordable housing projects for months.[220] Henry J. Browne, secretary of the coalition, also witnessed the detrimental power of the strong-mayor form of government as an INCCA board member. Browne was a former housing activist in New York's Upper West side, and between 1970 and 1980 was a professor of labor history at Rutgers University. While working at Rutgers, he lived in Paterson with his family.[221] Robert J. Cornish, president of the coalition, was also very aware of how mayors and city boards had neglected the housing shortage as someone who had grown up in Wrigley Park.[222] Moreover, as the son of a pastor who worked at Second Baptist Church, a predominantly Black church in the neighborhood, Cornish was well connected to the city's Black community and likely knew people who lived in poor housing personally.

Aside from INCCA, coalition groups included Northside FORCES, Kennedy High School Youth, Calvary Baptist Church, the YMCA, and the local chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization.[223] They organized together to fight for structural change and institutionalize a city government that would have guaranteed equal representation for working-class people of color and ensured that Paterson residents had a "strong voice in the decision-making process in all areas of the life of the city of Paterson which affect them."[224]

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[220] "First Paterson Coalition Assembly draws 150 delegates, elects officers," *The Herald-News,* April 30, 1973.
[221] "Henry Joseph Browne Papers, 1797-1980," http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4078408/.
[222] "Two Will Get Lou Costello Scholarships," *The Morning Call,* June 8, 1959; "Second Baptists Holds Its 8th Anniversary Fete," *The News,* May 6, 1948.
[223] It's possible that UNITED was not part of the founding Paterson Coalition organizations because it was undergoing a moment of transition in leadership. Threet transferred reins of UNITED to Walter Lindell in 1971. "Paterson Coalition: Membership Group List," circa April 1973, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University; "Lindell To Head UNITED," *The News,* October 25, 1971.
[224] "The Paterson Coalition Constitution," circa April 1973, Box 35, Folder 5, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.

Not long after their creation in June 1973, the coalition organized a meeting with the Paterson Redevelopment Agency (PRA) and tried convincing its members to focus on the issue of housing.[225] At the meeting, Cornish explained that the coalition did not "believe the city had done enough to solve the housing problem which is getting worse daily." The mayor and city boards had shown they could "collectively" do the "job of redevelopment" through their downtown development efforts but had failed to meet their "moral and legal obligation to provide decent relocations" to working-class Black and Spanish-speaking residents in dilapidated housing. Cornish urged the PRA to "redirect" efforts placed on the downtown "to solve Paterson's Housing problem" and support ongoing INCCA housing projects.[226] He clearly articulated the frustrations that working-class residents of color and organizations, like INCCA and UNITED, had faced under the strong-mayor form of government and urged the PRA, mayor, and city boards to prioritize the housing shortage, instead of downtown development, in the long term.

The coalition also advocated for more structural change and joined city-wide efforts to change the city charter. In February 1972, Reverend William "Bill" Mason of Second Baptist Church and alderman Edward Murphy had filed a suit against the city. They argued that the current strong-mayor form of government was not representative of all Paterson residents because most of the decision-making power laid in the hands of city boards members who were appointed by the mayor.[227] In July 1972, Superior Court Judge John F. Crane ruled that Paterson's strong-mayor form of government was

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[225] "PRA Starts INCCA Plan Opposed by Rooney," *The News,* June 12, 1963.
[226] "Remarks of R.J. Cornish, President of the Paterson Coalition to the Paterson Redevelopment Board, June 11, 1973, Upon Presentation of the INCCA Housing Plan," June 11, 1973, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.
[227] "Aldermen Challenge Charter," *The News,* March 2, 1972.

unconstitutional, citing there was "no logical reason" why all legislative functions in the city were performed by officials appointed by the mayor, while many nearby cities similar in size to Paterson had elected representatives preforming those same functions.[228]

In the months following Crane's decision, Paterson residents voted five people onto the Charter Study Commission. The commission's responsibility was to study potential plans of government outlined under the Faulkner Act, also known as the Municipal Charter Law. This act had been passed by the New Jersey legislature in 1950 and gave municipalities the option to adopt a new form of government.[229] The commission suggested that the city adopt the mayor-council plan, under which the mayor was the "municipal chief executive" and the council was the "municipal legislature." It was roughly modeled after federal and state governments and incorporated a system of checks and balances between city government branches. Additionally, under this model, the city council was made up of nine councilmembers—six of which were elected by wards and three of which were elected at-large.[230] The commission ultimately recommended this plan because of its checks and balances system.[231]

After the commission announced their recommendation, the Paterson Coalition urged for the creation of another government plan that would have guaranteed equal representation of all of Paterson's residents. The coalition argued that the mayor-council

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[228] "Rev. Mason Lauds Murphy's Effort on City Charter Reform," *The News,* February 9, 1972; "Aldermen Challenge Charter," *The News,* March 2, 1972; "City Staff Shaken by Court Decision," *The News,* July 8, 1972; "Paterson's Government Rule Unconstitutional," *The News,* July 17, 1972.

[229] Paterson, as a large municipality, only qualified for two plans under the Faulkner Act: the mayor-council plan and the council-manager plan. Under the council-manager plan, all policy-making power was concentrated under the city council. The mayor was included in the council but did not have separate policy making power. Albert J. Wolfe, *A History of Municipal Government in New Jersey Since 1798* (New Jersey State League of Municipalities, 1990), 23-24.

[230] "Public Appears Favorable to Proposed City Charter," *The News,* July 16, 1973; "Public Appears Favorable to Proposed City Charter," *The News,* July 16, 1973.

[231] "Public Appears Favorable," *The News,* July 16, 1973.

form perpetuated inequalities because it called for six ward-elected council members and three at-large, elected councilmembers. At the time, in 1973, Paterson was divided into 11 wards. Thus, under the Faulkner Act's mayor-council form of government, the city had to go through a process of ward realignment. This process did not guarantee equal representation for marginalized populations and only ensured "power" for the "already powerful," in the coalition's perspective. Instead, the coalition argued that the "most honestly democratic form of representation is by geographic districts," and advocated for a mayor-council form of government that included a representative from each of Paterson's 11 wards.[232] Months later, several civil rights leaders, including NAACP president Floyd Hinton, publicly supported the coalition's position and urged Charter Study Commission members to recognize that "through the years, minorities have been shut out of Paterson government." Commission members ignored Hinton's and the Paterson Coalition's calls, claiming that it was "unrealistic to expect the state to adopt a special legislation for Paterson before the November referendum on a change of government."[233] In their view, it was impossible to expect the state legislature to make an exception for Paterson and allow the city to choose a form of government not listed under the Faulkner Act.

Although the November ballot did not provide an option for an alternate mayor-council form of government with 11, ward-elected councilmembers, the coalition still encouraged residents to vote for the Faulkner Act's mayor-council form for two main reasons. First, if the city did not vote to transition to a mayor-council government

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[232] "Paterson Coalition on Charter Reform," May 22, 1973, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University; "New Charter Position," circa November 1973, Box 35, Folder 5, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.
[233] "Public Appears Favorable to Proposed City Charter," *The News,* July 16, 1973.

structure, Paterson would return to "the Aldermanic form of government that existed here in the 1800's," which had treated "big corruption" as a "rule rather than an exception" according to local historians.[234] Secondly, the mayor-council form gave more "real power" to city residents than the current strong-mayor form because its city council had power to make decisions. Under the strong-mayor government, the only elected city officials, ward aldermen, were purely decorative and did not have any decision-making power. Who did have the power were City Board members—they were all appointed by the mayor. The coalition wished for a city government where city residents were "in a position" that was "closer to the decisions" that governed "our lives and our collective life as a city." The mayor-council form of government helped them get closer to that position.[235] Ultimately, the coalition's and the Charter Study Commission's efforts to promote the Faulkner Act's mayor-council form of government were successful in getting enough Paterson residents to vote for the plan on November 6, 1973.

A Continuous Fight for Structural Change

The coalition's fight to create structural change and institutionalize a more representative city government did not end with this election. In the following months, the coalition advocated for the creation of citizens councils that would have worked in tandem with the city council to improve accountability of councilpersons and strengthen representation of predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. Each

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[234] "Aldermen Had Power – And Blew It," *The News,* July 7, 1972; "You've got one choice. A BETTER CITY CHARTER," circa 1974, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.

[235] The coalition had seen the mayor "stack City Boards with friends," and ultimately eliminate "the voice of all who did not agree with him." "You've got one choice. A BETTER CHARTER," circa 1974, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University.

citizens' council would have been made up of two people who would have been elected from each of Paterson's 72 voting districts. The citizen councils then would have met with their respective councilperson monthly to discuss any neighborhood concerns, budgetary matters, and pending development plans.[236] Since representatives on these councils would have been elected by voting districts and would have had regular meetings with city councilpersons, these citizens councils would have guaranteed more specific representation of predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods and accountability of the councilpersons than the Faulkner Act's mayor-council plan alone.

Despite the changes, specters of the strong-mayor government ultimately ended the coalition's citizens council plan. When the coalition presented their plan at a city council meeting in September 1974, Frank Graves, ex-mayor of Paterson, city council president, and representative of the sixth ward, questioned the need for citizens councils. He asked, "Don't we already have enough citizen participation in government?"[237] Graves' particular objection was important considering his own role as council president, which gave him the power to decide which proposals would be heard and voted upon by the city council. His position on the matter likely explained why the city council did not utter another word about the coalition plan until Henry Browne brought up the idea again at a council meeting in November. Browne called out the city council for not considering their plan, and in response, Graves said he feared giving "too much power" to citizens

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[236] "Two years ago the people of Paterson voted for plan D," circa 1974, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University; "We believe these Citizen Councils will help our Council members keep in touch," circa May – August 1974, Box 35, Folder 4, Henry Joseph Browne papers, 1797-1980, Columbia University; "In Paterson Government: City Coalition Seeks Voice," *The News,* July 11, 1974.

[237] "Coalition Recommends Ward Citizen Councils," *The News,* September 25, 1974.

and, "we have to be very careful we don't have two governments."[238] Graves then ended the meeting and closed any further discussions on the citizens council plan.

In the year and half prior to this meeting, the coalition had been fighting against a city government that had allowed city officials and mayors, like Graves, to ignore the voices of working-class people of color. Under the new mayor-council form of government, Graves used his power as city council president to end the citizens' council plan and again silence the voices of working-class people of color and organizations advocating on their behalf.

In the years following this meeting, the coalition attempted to tackle issues such as the creation of more public schools and discriminatory loaning practices, and eventually dissolved in 1984 after losing much of their original leadership team.[239] In 1979, Max Tow left the coalition and Paterson after being reappointed to Morrow Memorial Church in Maplewood, New Jersey.[240] Henry Browne died in November 1980 after a battle with leukemia.[241] The following May, Orabell Nickelson passed away at age 53 due to health complications as well.[242]

Ultimately, the coalition's defeat in the fight for structural change demonstrated that the mayor-council form of government was not enough and still allowed for the

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[238] "Public's Role in City Program Draws Debate," *The News,* November 11, 1974.
[239] The last newspaper mention of the Paterson Coalition was in June 1984. Msgr. Vincent Puma had been honored for his work with the Paterson Coalition. There were no mentions of the coalition following this article, suggesting that the organization had dissolved by then. Other "Paterson Coalitions" had formed in the mid-1980s, but they were not related to the Paterson Coalition mentioned in this paper and were not coalitions of several community organizations. They were more single-issue organizations, such as the Paterson Coalition for Healthy Mothers-Healthy Babies and the Paterson Coalition for Public Accountability. "O'Byrne, Grimes receive honors," *The Herald-News,* June 1, 1984; "Community services," *The Record,* January 3, 1984; "Keep Our Babies Healthy," *The News,* June 20, 1985.
[240] Tow, *Grit and Grace,* 96.
[241] "Henry Browne, 61, Rutgers Professor; An Activist Priest, He Crusaded for Housing in Manhattan A Priestly Innovator Leading Figure in 1960's," *The New York Times,* November 30, 1980.
[242] "Orabell Nickelson Paterson Cafeteria Work Supervisor," *The News,* May 5, 1981.

silencing of working-class people of color and community organizations advocating on their behalf. Contrary to what Graves thought, Paterson's residents, especially the city's working-class people of color, still did not have enough power within the local government. And city officials who had been only receptive to the needs of the city's elite remained with too much power. INCCA's own struggles to gain approval for the construction of Triangle Village after the transition to a mayor-council form of government further illustrated that the mayor-council form, like the strong-mayor form, failed to prioritize the needs of working-class people of color.

Although UNITED and INCCA were able to complete several affordable housing developments under the strong-mayor and mayor-council form of governments, the trajectories of the organizations and its leaders urge us to critically examine local government structures and continue their fight for more equitable city governments. In 1972, Julius Threet tried addressing the obstacle of unsupportive city boards and mayors by running for mayor on a platform that prioritized affordable housing. Between 1973 and 1974, Maxwell Tow, Orabell Nickelson, and Henry Browne, all INCCA board members, helped create the Paterson Coalition and fought for the institutionalization of citizens councils. They advocated for a city government that would have better assured agency for working-class residents of color over city decisions that affected their lives, including the construction (or lack thereof) of affordable housing. Ultimately, the survival of the UNITED and INCCA housing communities today, along with the trajectories of the housing organizations and their leaders, together demonstrate that the creation of affordable housing primarily for working-class people of color was rooted in the efforts of Black residents who lived in Black and Spanish-speaking neighborhoods,

and signal to us that the future of housing is connected to structural changes in local government that prioritize the voices of working-class people of color.

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