Urban Renewal and Local History
In Two Boston Neighborhoods

By
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Introduction

The city of Boston, Massachusetts launched an urban renewal initiative in the early 1950s that radically changed the city’s physical landscape and population demographic. The city’s renewal project bulldozed the Scollay Square neighborhood in downtown Boston to make way for a new complex of local government buildings known as Government Center; it led to the Prudential Center development project in the Copley Square area in the Back Bay; it constructed the Central Artery highway through parts of Chinatown, downtown Boston, and the North End; and it displaced thousands of families and businesses as the city took land by eminent domain for redevelopment. Among the areas slated for urban renewal were two densely populated residential Boston neighborhoods: the “New York Streets” section of Boston’s South End and the entire West End of Boston. Both neighborhoods were emptied and razed in the 1950s. Modern industrial and commercial construction replaced the old brick rowhouses and apartment buildings of the New York Streets while middle- and upper-middle class luxury housing replaced the tenements of the West End. The city hoped that businesses and affluent people would be attracted to the new development and move into the city.

Urban renewal in the New York Streets, the West End, and in the rest of Boston changed much of the city’s physical appearance, altered the lives of thousands of people and, ultimately, transformed the narratives dominating the local history of the West and South Ends. The experiences of people displaced during Boston’s urban renewal initiative, and the public, academic, and government perspectives and studies of Boston’s urban renewal all affect the ways in which former residents recount their experiences before and after displacement. The forced eviction of West End and New York Streets communities led many of these former residents to feel anger and sadness. These feelings then affect the ways in which displaced residents recall their old neighborhoods. Memories and
recollections touched by grief, trauma, and/or anger often idealize the past.¹

In addition, each group’s memories and their ability to claim authority over their local histories depend on a larger, outside group’s empathy with their experience. Urban planners and sociologists have concluded that the city of Boston’s should have acted more compassionately towards the West End residents it displaced. These studies became well-known and publicized and, as a result, the public, academic, and government sectors focused their attention on the West End. Alternately, even though the New York Streets demolition happened before the West End demolition, public, academic, and government groups focused little if any attention on the experiences of the New York Streets residents. Unlike West Enders, New York Streets residents were never told that their sadness, anger, and frustration were reasonable responses to displacement nor were they told that their neighborhood was anything but a blighted slum. They, unlike the West Enders, could not rely on guilt or claims of cruelty to garner much public attention. Few, if any, major newspapers, studies, or city planners showed any compassion towards former New York Streets residents.

The participation of new and more affluent residents in urban renewal and local history affects how much authority the displaced residents can claim over the history of their old neighborhood. The level of authority held by former residents and the types of memories they choose to share shape how each neighborhood’s history is told today. While the West End was almost entirely destroyed, the New York Streets neighborhood occupied one small corner of the large South End neighborhood. The former West Enders formed the West End Historical Association and later the West End Museum with no competition from other West End history groups. Because no competition existed, the new organizations formed by the former West Enders currently dominate the West End’s history. In the South End however, the South End Historical Society (SEHS) was formed in 1966. Composed of members who supported an urban renewal plan that rehabilitated rundown rowhouses and brought

middle-class suburbanites into the city, the SEHS focused on saving the buildings still standing in the rest of the South End neighborhood. The SEHS did not need to discuss a neighborhood that was already gone.

Few academic studies have explored the connection between urban renewal and its effects on local history. However, existing scholarship in urban renewal studies includes analyses of a wide variety of issues and topics. The concept of urban renewal in the United States dates back to at least the early-nineteenth century. The impetus for mid-twentieth-century urban renewal came partly from the poor state of many cities’ economies and downtown areas. The loss of many cities’ tax bases to the booming suburban sprawl forced cities to attempt to draw residents back with more modern housing and amenities. The ability of each city to engage in urban renewal depended on politicians and their battles; the interactions between state, local, and federal governments; petitions for federal funding; and the influence of powerful board room chairs from major industry and retail companies.

In Boston, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) and later the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) issued countless reports and studies detailing the conditions of each neighborhood’s buildings and infrastructure and the perceived urban renewal potential in each. Reports describing urban renewal’s progress in the West End and South End neighborhoods were issued at least every few years, if not more, for about two decades.

In addition to studies done about urban renewal in Boston, sociologists joined the conversation about Boston’s urban renewal when they began to study the effects of major urban renewal projects on displaced individuals, families, and communities. Key studies by Marc Fried and Herbert Gans detail the devastating effects of urban renewal on the population of Boston’s West End. For example, Fried

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published articles about former West End resident reactions to displacement shortly after the city evicted them. He went on to publish a book about the ways that the working class West End neighborhood served its residents and how the destruction of the neighborhood caused prolonged periods of grief. Fried used examples of the West End displacement in his study but his findings apply to the effects of displacement in the New York Streets neighborhood and other urban neighborhoods as well. His studies focused on the lives of select West End residents before displacement and then again shortly after the former West Enders moved into their new homes. Most former residents expressed mild, if not moderate-to-severe, depression as well as loneliness and anxiety, all known symptoms of trauma and loss. The studies also describe the complex community support system found in the West End and how the rupturing of this support system contributed to the severe emotional reactions to displacement.

The way that memories form, change, and affect the writing and telling of history is also well-studied. Memory Studies scholarship includes the ways in which people process and remember (and forget) events, especially traumatic ones, and how these remembrances change over time. Memory Studies has also investigated how trauma or major societal events can create or affect collective memory and how this collective memory can impact or create historical narratives. One source, the guidebook written to accompany an early 1990s Bostonian Society exhibit about West End urban renewal, even discusses the connection between urban renewal in the West End and the memories and narratives of the former West End residents. It calls into question the overwhelmingly positive accounts that former West End residents give about West End neighborhood harmony and happiness.

Both the New York Streets and the West End cases combine urban renewal, trauma, and

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displacement, memory, and local history. However, the local history component has not been thoroughly examined. The short mention at the end of the guidebook to the Bostonian Society’s West End exhibit acknowledges that former West Enders remember and/or recall mostly positive memories about their neighborhood but it does not evaluate the repercussions of such memories within local history. The trauma experienced by West Enders has been studied at length by Marc Fried and Herbert Gans, and scholars and city planners recognize that the neighborhood should have been dealt with more carefully or its urban renewal avoided altogether. These acknowledgements provide the West Enders with both public support and public sympathy, which in turn grant them power over the West End’s local history. They formed and run both West End history groups, circulate a newsletter printed by former residents, and are interviewed by local newspapers and television crews. Like the West End, the New York Streets experienced urban renewal and displacement but the similarities end there. The former residents were not the subjects of any major sociological survey and they receive no public sympathy or support comparable to that found in the West End. They do not dominate or control the local history organization, which was founded mostly by residents who moved into the neighborhood after the New York Streets had been destroyed. The New York Street residents, like the West Enders, also tell overwhelmingly positive tales of their lives in the New York Streets. But unlike the West Enders, they have no power or support structure to help them circulate their stories.

The comparison between the New York Streets and West End projects explores the relationships between urban renewal, trauma and loss, memory, and local history. It investigates why one neighborhood is remembered and one is forgotten when both experienced displacement and loss at the hands of urban renewal, and how this influences their local histories. Most major cities in the United States experienced a form of urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century and thousands of people were displaced across the country. Regardless, urban renewal and its effects on local history remains little
studied. It should be recognized as a powerful force that can disrupt and alter memory and the ways in which people construct local histories.

Chapter I: Urban Renewal in Boston

Twentieth century urban renewal destroyed neighborhoods that Boston philanthropists had devalued for decades. These philanthropists were usually middle- or upper-middle class Americans and believed that the city’s poor immigrant neighborhoods limited immigrant ability to assimilate to American life. This devaluation of immigrant communities and patriarchal attitude towards their occupants foreshadowed the treatment of these groups during mid-twentieth century urban renewal. Then, Boston city officials elected to begin major urban renewal initiatives in an effort to stem the population flow out of the city and to brighten its economic future. Boston had a long history of enacting urban improvements to revitalize the city, as well as a long history of philanthropists who worked to improve the well-being of poor and immigrant families living in Boston’s slum neighborhoods. When the Federal Government committed funds for urban renewal in major United States cities, Boston city officials felt comfortable selecting these same slum neighborhoods for redevelopment and did not understand the importance of these neighborhoods to their inhabitants. This led to urban renewal evictions and displaced populations. The city’s devaluation and patriarchal treatment of these residents affected the residents profoundly. The ways in which the residents discuss their local neighborhood history today reflect their experiences with urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century.

During and after World War II, “a generation that saw cleanliness and orderliness as goals of a truly progressive society” emerged. They embraced new advancements in technology, medicine, and construction and created clean, uncluttered, and modern living spaces. Many American families with

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the means—mostly middle-and upper-class families—moved to new houses in the suburbs. Older cities, especially the ones on the east coast of the United States, contained narrow and winding streets and congested traffic, ethnic enclaves with exotic smells and sounds, and older, outdated, and crowded housing. Suburbs offered planned residential oases with parks, pools, and houses with large yards and fences. Middle- and upper-class families left cities large numbers, moving into these new houses and enjoying the open space, light, and fresh air around their suburban homes. This departure filled the suburbs, and many cities experienced dramatic population losses. Most mid-twentieth-century Boston city officials belonged to the middle-class American culture that popularized the move to the suburbs. But, unlike the suburbanites, they needed to ensure a bright future for cities that many had abandoned. When they looked at the city they saw “slum areas...a series of narrow winding streets...poorly maintained structures...[and] people who looked like...immigrants” and their offspring.9

In Boston in particular, city officials watched with growing anxiety as decentralization increased and the city’s importance in the regional economy decreased.10 Families moved to the suburbs, eager to take advantage of the newest amenities in housing. Some businesses followed the demand and opened in new suburban shopping malls, located closer to suburban homes and outside of Boston. The city offered them little incentive to stay. For decades, Mayor James Michael Curley had “favored the interests of...ethnic neighborhoods from which he drew his political strength” and ignored the needs of city businesses.11 In addition, many of the businesses that did remain in Boston closed because they did not have the means or inclination to move to a more profitable location. Boston could not compete with the comfort and convenience of suburban living. Shopping in suburban malls near home meant avoiding Boston’s poorly maintained streets and highways. It also meant parking in large and well-

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9 Gans, The Urban Villagers, p. 3.
10 O’Connor, Building a New Boston p. 19.
maintained parking lots instead of searching for parking space on Boston’s overcrowded streets. City officials feared that, unless they found a way to make the city a more desirable place to live, work, and operate a business, more of its upper- and middle-class taxpayers would follow the exodus to the suburbs.

In response to this growing economic crisis, city officials began studying how they could redevelop parts of the city to make it more attractive to suburban residents and businesses in an attempt to stop and possibly reverse the population loss. Precedents in urban planning and patriarchal treatment of immigrants and poor families by philanthropists helped the city decide which areas might be prime redevelopment spots. Boston had a long history of changing its urban landscape to better serve the needs of its residents. In addition, philanthropists and settlement houses began identifying slum-like or blighted areas in the middle and late nineteenth century. They believed that the immigrant and poor residents living in these areas aspired to middle-class American ideals and that, ultimately, they wanted to move out into better neighborhoods. When mid-twentieth-century city planners began thinking about potential redevelopment areas, they selected neighborhoods that they perceived to be slum-like based on decades of philanthropic thought. Initially, the city did not consider the potential effects of redevelopment on the residents because they believed that the residents would welcome the chance to move. City officials did not understand that people might choose to live in an environment that diverged so much from the American ideal of planned communities and open space.

Mid-twentieth century city planners followed a long precedent of altering the urban landscape to serve municipal desires. Soon after European settlement on the Shawmut Peninsula in the early seventeenth century, Bostonians began land-making processes to shape the town to their needs. They built wharves that jutted into the harbor, filled small inlets to create more space for buildings, and dug a

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man-made creek to power a mill, among other projects. After the American Revolution Boston’s population began to grow and by the early nineteenth century, town (city after 1822) officials began to discuss planning new residential neighborhoods. They feared that, as Boston’s old neighborhoods became more crowded, affluent residents would search for other places to live. Wanting to keep their upper- and middle-class tax base within city limits, the city began a large land-making project that resulted in the creation of the new South End and Back Bay neighborhoods. Developers built thousands of new residential buildings, and by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, most were occupied by upper-, middle-, and working-class families.

The city undertook this massive project in an attempt to curb decentralization and, for a short time, it succeeded. However, new modes of public transportation began to appear in the mid-nineteenth century and, by the late-nineteenth century, many middle- and upper-class families left the city. They moved to less crowded outlying areas like Dorchester and Roxbury, and paid to use public transportation when they needed to travel into the city. In addition to city efforts to make Boston more attractive to residents, in 1909 a group of Boston business leaders began the Boston 1915 Movement with the desire to undertake massive civic improvements that would “culminate with a world exposition in Boston.” They hoped that such an effort would mark Boston as a major center of business, industry, and modernity. In addition to development for city improvement, city officials also understood the concept of taking land by eminent domain to enact such improvements. In 1915, the Massachusetts legislature passed an amendment to the state constitution that allowed the State the ability to take

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15 O’Connor, Building a New Boston p. 70.
properties by eminent domain—“to take land and...improve, subdivide, build upon, and sell...for the purposes of relieving congestion of population and providing homes for citizens.”

In addition to a precedent for city planning, late nineteenth-century Boston philanthropists and settlement house leaders set a precedent for attempting to control the housing and community environment of poor and immigrant groups. They believed that they had a moral duty to help these people, and that housing and a community’s environment played key roles in the ability of immigrants and poor people to adopt American principles. For example, social work student Mabel Johnson Dean observed life in the New York Streets area of the South End and determined that the area “led to [the]...deterioration” of its residents because its mixing of both “residential and commercial property...interfered with the organization of community life.” Area Settlement Houses and their workers tried to improve areas that they perceived as slums—like the New York Streets—through community improvement projects. They hoped that these projects would both benefit the neighborhood and teach the residents—“Americans in Process”—“how to approximate the norms of third-generation white Anglo-Saxon Protestants.” For example, in 1907, settlement leader Robert Woods “sponsored...the ‘South End Improvement Society’ as a form of neighborhood organization... [to obtain] better sanitary services from the city, improving...recreation and play space.” This Society encouraged residents to become actively involved in the improvement of their surroundings and the improvements they tried to achieve met settlement standards of cleanliness and personal health. Settlement workers tried to “superimpose an Americanizing neighborhood social structure upon the ethnic enclave... [because they believed that] old village ties worked against the adoption of American

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16 Vale, p 90.
18 Vale, p.77.
values.” They hoped that these projects and their efforts would help immigrants and poor families to move into better and more respectable middle-class neighborhoods. Settlement houses, other private welfare agencies like the Salvation Army, and public city agencies believed that families offered more “decent places to live” would “increase their morals” because these new environments would exemplify good and moral behavior. The belief that immigrants and poor families needed to leave poorer neighborhoods for their own well-being survived into the mid-twentieth century.

In the early twentieth century the city of Boston acknowledged the concerns of settlement workers and philanthropists and called for an “improvement in living conditions” for the poor. Boston Planning Board chairman Ralph Adams Cram suggested that the city achieve this improvement by “scrapping the slum” and helping those displaced to find improved housing. However, even though the state of Massachusetts, according to the law passed in 1915, could exercise the power of eminent domain it did not engage in large-scale slum-clearance projects within Boston. It avoided doing so because of the high cost of acquiring the land and because laws supported landlords’ rights to retain their buildings unless the buildings were beyond repair. Nevertheless, while no major projects for slum clearance began, the idea remained and in the late 1930s, Boston’s mayor created the “Committee on Community Rehabilitation.” He charged it to work with the City Planning Board to study Boston’s blighted neighborhoods. This effort led to the passage of “An Act Relating to the Clearance, Replanning, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction of Substandard, Insanitary and Decadent Areas in Cities in the State and Providing for and Relating to Redevelopment Corporations,” in 1943. Proponents of this bill desired “large-scale, private redevelopment of depreciated, blighted areas... [for the benefit of]

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20 Vale, p. 130.
21 Johnson Dean, p. 87.
22 Vale, p. 90.
23 Vale, p. 90.
24 Johnson Dean, p. 82.
25 Ibid.
26 Johnson Dean, p. 83.
the social and economic life of the community.” This passage of this bill represents the city of Boston’s first major connection between razing slums, rehousing residents, and using the space for redevelopment. They feared that urban blight, “unless curbed, could spread to middle- and upper-class neighborhoods,” making worse the city’s already bleak future. At the same time, the Boston Housing Authority began addressing Boston’s housing shortage by building thousands of units of public housing—housing that they believed offered better and more respectable middle-class living conditions than those typically found in urban neighborhoods.

Around the same time as Massachusetts’ passage of the 1943 act pertaining to clearance and rehabilitation, the federal government began to involve itself more in assisting state and local governments with social issues. When settlement house observer and student Mabel Johnson Dean wrote her study of the South End’s New York Streets district in 1943, she wrote that the federal government had recently begun assisting private citizens with failures in industry, unemployment, and weather disasters. In addition, after World War II, the federal government began planning how to assist cities that suffered from decentralization and population loss and in 1949, passed the Housing Act. When the act passed, President Harry Truman said that it “equips the Federal Government, for the first time, with effective means for aiding cities in the vital task of clearing slums and rebuilding blighted areas.” It guaranteed more than $500 million for urban redevelopment projects throughout the country and allowed cities to identify potential “slum” project areas. Furthermore, cities could apply for federal assistance and could assign control over projects to their own agencies. If successful in applying for assistance under the 1949 Housing Act, the federal government paid two-thirds of the cost.

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28 Johnson Dean, p. 84.
29 Johnson Dean, p. ix.
of acquiring property and land in slum areas for redevelopment. The city then owned the land, could displace its residents, and could sell parcels to private developers.

In Boston, the Housing Act “did...stimulate the City Planning Board...to issue an ambitious and farsighted general plan for Boston.” The city studied the problem and issued reports prior to this, like “Building a Better Boston,” a report published in 1941 that suggested improvement possibilities in Boston’s South End. In addition, in the early 1940s, the city of Boston and the state of Massachusetts submitted “Urban Redevelopment” bills to their respective legislatures proposing to allow “private corporations” to “undertake the acquisition, clearance, replanning and redevelopment of specified areas.” However, Boston did not seriously entertain a long-range city improvement plan until the federal government committed funds to the effort with the passage of the 1949 act. The act required that “a city must have a Master Plan to qualify for aid” and so, in 1950 the City Planning Board released its master plan: the “General Plan for Boston.” The General Plan considered long-range opportunities for city redevelopment, proposed projects that covered about twenty percent of the city, and garnered support among both public and private groups affected by decentralization and suburban sprawl.

Support for the plan came from

“retail merchants [who] favored the recentralization of high-income shoppers... municipal officials [who] coveted opportunities to have more areas that generated a revenue surplus; and city planners [who] saw it as promoting greater efficiency and curbing sprawl.”

The General Plan also included the Planning Board’s definitions of slums and blighted areas. According to them, as written in the General Plan, slums and blighted areas “are a liability to the

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32 Vale, p. 272.  
33 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, p. 75.  
35 Johnson Dean, p. 84.  
37 Vale, p. 272.  
38 Vale, p. 271.
community as a whole, in every sense...studies show them to be breeders of juvenile delinquency and crime, centers of social and family disorganization...substandard housing and neighborhood environment, along with poverty, have been demonstrated to share the blame for these social evils.”  

The General Plan also described “factors of blight” that the BHA used in measuring slum conditions. They measured the level of repair the building needed, the building’s age, and residential density. They determined that many Boston neighborhoods had buildings in such poor repair and such high residential densities that “the only way they can be restored to social and economic health [is]...sweeping clearance of buildings.”

The City Planning Board appointed the Boston Housing Authority as the General Plan’s overseeing agency and the BHA became responsible for administering renewal projects.

Mid-twentieth-century Boston city officials welcomed the federal government’s commitment to help revitalize the United States’ cities. The city was not a stranger to the potential benefits of urban redevelopment and had assessed possible project areas long before the passage of the 1949 Housing Act. The influx of money and resources that came from the Housing Act allowed the city to decide which areas it would take by eminent domain. Philanthropists had long expressed concern over poor immigrant spaces, blaming these areas for causing urban slums, and believed that residents should aspire to move out of these neighborhoods. These concerns filtered into the lives of other middle- and upper-class Bostonians. When faced with the choice of which neighborhoods to take, the city decided to take control over the long-derided urban spaces of immigrants and poor people, assuming that these residents would welcome the opportunity to move. Indeed, President Truman, when speaking about the 1949 Housing Act, alluded to this idea when he said the act “opens up the prospect of decent homes in wholesome surroundings for low-income families now living in the squalor of the slums.”

This

41 O’Connor, “Building a New Boston,” p 75.
initiative convinced “members of the postwar generation...that they finally had the human commitment... [to] generally improve the quality of life in their community.”

The General Plan for Boston envisioned a city with no dense ethnic enclaves—just modern housing and amenities—assuming that, given the option, residents of poor and immigrant neighborhoods would jump at the opportunity to move. Philanthropic precedent dictated that imposing American mores on ethnic neighborhoods “would be good for them.” These plans called for the death of Boston’s dense urban villages.

Chapter II: The Takings

In the early 1950s, with federal financial support assured, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) selected the first neighborhoods for redevelopment. They chose the North End, the West End, and the New York Streets section of the South End. All three abutted downtown Boston and all three housed primarily immigrant or second or third generation immigrant descendants, blacks, drifters, and other poor people. Boston city officials, the BHA, the City Planning Board, and philanthropists had long devalued these dense ethnic neighborhoods and assumed that most residents would welcome the opportunity to move to better housing. After selection, the BHA had to prove to the federal government that they were slums or blighted to receive federal aid. They entered these neighborhoods and judged them based on their own middle-class values and not the values of the residents. The BHA then issued public reports that described why the neighborhoods fit the definition of slum and justified their redevelopment. These interactions left many residents feeling humiliated at the slum-dweller label and frustrated that the city believed their neighborhoods were expendable.

45 Former West End residents who were evicted during urban renewal refer to their evictions and to the razing of the neighborhood as “the taking.” See the Preface of The Last Tenement, ed. Sean M. Fisher and Carolyn Hughes, (Boston, MA: The Bostonian Society, 1992), p. 12.
46 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, pp. 124-125.
The BHA and the City Planning Board planned to redevelop the North End, the New York Streets, and the West End, but North End residents protested against extensive renewal in their neighborhood. In the late 1940s, the city took fifty-four plots of land by eminent domain from North End residents to construct the Central Artery project. When the city began to evaluate the North End for more redevelopment in the early 1950s, residents organized in protest and won. While they failed to prevent the Central Artery project, they successfully warded away further efforts to redevelop more of the neighborhood. With the North End mostly removed from discussion, the West End and South End became the city’s primary renewal areas.

Figure 1: Map of Boston showing locations of neighborhoods, including the West End and the New York Streets, from John Stainton, *Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston*, (Boston, MA: The Citizens Housing and Planning Association and the Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1973), p. 9.

48 O’Connor, p. 84.
Tucked into the easternmost corner of Boston’s South End neighborhood, the New York Streets area occupied the blocks between Broadway, Dover (now East Berkeley) Street, Albany Street, and Washington Street. In 1841, the Boston and Albany railway opened and by 1844 the city had laid out streets near the railway’s Boston terminus.\textsuperscript{49} The Boston and Albany Railway connected Boston to Albany and Albany’s access to the Erie Canal. Boston city leaders and merchants hoped that this relationship would connect Boston to the “economic activity of the expanding West.” In honor of this sentiment, the city named the streets in the new neighborhood near the terminus after towns on the Erie Canal.\textsuperscript{50} Street names included Genesee, Rochester, Oswego, Oneida, Seneca, and Troy. After filling the area, the South Cove Corporation built rowhouse blocks, similar to the rowhouse construction that was happening in the rest of the South End. But, unlike most of the South End, by the early 1880s, the New York Street’s rowhouses had been “replaced by tenements of four and five stories.”\textsuperscript{51}

Settlement house leader Robert Woods wrote that in the late nineteenth century a largely Russian Jewish and Polish Jewish population lived in the area. Mabel Johnson Dean, a social work student observing settlement house life in the 1940s, wrote that by 1930, “many Italians and Greeks” had joined the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{52} Interestingly, according to former resident Gloria Ganno, residents in the 1940s and 1950s did not call the area the New York Streets. They called it “‘the South End’ or ‘our neighborhood.’”\textsuperscript{53} However, settlement houses and the city of Boston referred to the area as the New York Streets at least as early as 1941. “Building a Better Boston,” the report issued by the Boston City Planning Board in 1941, describes the area as the New York Streets. Johnson Dean also used that name when describing the area in her 1943 thesis for Boston University.

\textsuperscript{50} Marshall, “A Neighborhood Named For...New York?, August 9, 2012.
\textsuperscript{51} Johnson Dean, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
The City Planning Board and the Boston Housing Authority identified the New York Streets neighborhood as a redevelopment area because they believed that its close proximity to downtown Boston, the Central Artery highway, major railroad stations, and to the airport would attract commercial enterprise.\(^{54}\) They studied the development potential of the New York Streets well before the passage of the 1949 Housing Act\(^ {55}\) but the 1949 Act and federal commitment to local renewal projects allowed the city to take action. They thought that they could attract businesses with the promise of modern amenities and open space. They publicized their plans for “garden type” design with “modern” buildings, “suburban advantages” like off-street parking, “street set backs and landscaping,” and limited traffic congestion.\(^ {56}\) They focused heavily on the plans for modern construction. Advertisements in the *Boston Sunday Post* touted the planned “ultra modern plant locations” and said that the new locations would offer a “splendid opportunity to move from an outmoded, congested area or obsolete buildings to a modern...area.”\(^ {57}\) Mayor Hynes also pushed the project, stating that “‘This area has excellent identity value for industry...it is...less than five minutes from the heart of the financial district.’”\(^ {58}\)

The BHA and the city also believed that the neighborhood’s poor and immigrant demographic made it expendable. They assumed that, given the opportunity, those residents would welcome the chance to move to other housing in better neighborhoods. The first settlement houses opened in the South End in the 1890s, and settlement workers interacted with residents throughout it, including in the New York Streets. While they felt that they had some success in helping South End residents, some felt that the New York Streets area could not improve because they held on to ethnic traditions and did not fully assimilate. For example, in 1943, settlement observer Mabel Johnson Dean wrote that “neither

\(^{54}\) “Prepared Site for Garden Type Industrial Development,” *Boston Sunday Post*, October 30, 1955, Boston Public Library Microfilm.
\(^{57}\) “Prepared Site for Garden Type Industrial Development,” *Boston Sunday Post*, October 30, 1955, Boston Public Library Microfilm.
social control nor...organization are...possible...because these people have different cultural backgrounds... [they] have organization for the preservation of their culture, ideals and customs."  

Italians comprised the largest group and the “most closely unified one.”  Greeks, Russian Jews, and Polish Jews also comprised a significant portion of the population and were “quite self-sufficient.” In addition, the presence of anonymous people like drifters, prostitutes, and criminals contributed to the lack of homogenization because such people had higher mobility and did not form strong ties with the more permanent residential population.

In addition to the ethnically-mixed population, settlement workers believed that the physical environment in the New York Streets did not allow full assimilation to American ways. They felt that older buildings negatively impacted residents and that people needed newer buildings with modern amenities to thrive. For example, Mabel Johnson Dean warned about the potential effects of the neighborhood’s physical environment on children when she wrote that they “do not have any regard for property because the places in which they live are in such bad condition...they do not know that they are supposed to be clean.” Furthermore, they believed that neglected buildings often led to mothers who neglected their husbands and families. Johnson Dean wrote that neglected buildings often had “rats, mice, bed-bugs, water-bugs, and roaches” and these conditions demoralized housekeepers so much that they gave up attempts to keep a respectable home. In addition, settlement workers believed that people needed an abundance of light, air, and outdoor space. Concerned about New York Streets children who were forced to play in the streets because of the lack of safe outdoor space, some of the settlement houses brought children to summer camps outside of the city. They felt that bringing

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59 Johnson Dean, p. 62.
60 Johnson Dean, p. 22.
61 Johnson Dean, p. 22.
62 Johnson Dean, pp. 15-16.
63 Johnson Dean, p. 79.
64 Johnson Dean, p. 50.
the children to “wholesome surroundings” would help to achieve “mental, moral, and physical rehabilitation.”

Settlement workers believed that some New York Streets families had the potential to become respectable working- or middle-class Americans if the environments in which they lived improved. Some New York Streets families voluntarily patronized the area’s settlement houses. Settlement workers described these New York Streets residents as those “who disapprove of the demoralizing effects of the deteriorating houses...and the anti-social neighbors...These are the people who go to the Settlements and other social agencies to organize for social action.” Settlement workers approved of the residents who attempted to bring their community up to settlement standards. Believing that they worked in the residents’ best interests, settlements attempted to draw city attention to the area in the hope that the city might make improvements. For example, they hoped that the city might build new parks in some of the New York Streets’ vacant lots so that children would have safer recreation areas. However, their attempts to draw resources to the New York Streets also made the city aware of the New York Streets’ poor and working-class demographic, rundown infrastructure, and crowded tenement buildings. When the BHA and Planning Board began to select neighborhoods for redevelopment, the New York Streets’ proximity to the city and its reputation as a struggling and poor neighborhood made it a prime target.

BHA employees went to the neighborhood and judged it based on the criteria established in the General Plan by the Boston City Planning Board—criteria based on middle-class perceptions of ideal living conditions. The official report that the BHA issued, published in 1952, reflected these biases. The report describes the area as follows:

“The most cursory inspection...establishes it as a blighted and deteriorated neighborhood. The streets [are]...inadequate for the demands of modern traffic...the land is occupied by an indiscriminate mixture of commercial uses...interspersed with slum residential properties....[It] is disfigured by quantities of openly-dumped garbage

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65 Johnson Dean, p. 36.
66 Johnson Dean, p. 77.
67 Johnson Dean, p. 36.
and other filth since any vestige of pride in the surroundings has long since been abandoned by the people there...The dirty streets in the whole area swarm with children and adults too, on fair days, since the blessings of sun and light – even in the dusty gusts of air – are preferable to confinement in the squalid buildings."  

They argue that the area needs redevelopment because the streets are not suitable for “modern traffic,” which implies that they are narrow. They also disapprove of the inter-mixture of commercial and residential properties, which settlement worker believed inhibited community homogenization and assimilation. Moreover, not only did they describe the residents as slum-dwellers, they also claimed that no resident had any pride in the neighborhood. Its ragged appearance and settlement reports about its condition convinced the city that it no person would live there if given another option. The BHA proposed razing most of the area’s buildings, with the exception of a few commercial buildings that they considered still viable, and forcing its residents to relocate. Relocation, they believed, would benefit all involved.

In October, 1954, the Boston Public Housing Committee held hearings to discuss the feasibility of the New York Streets redevelopment project. The Daily Boston Globe article reporting this hearing stated that “Boston is one of the first cities of the East to take up the question of abandoned, or semi-abandoned, city areas...to get them back into active economic functioning.” The BHA began planning for resident eviction and building demolition. Kane Simonian, director of the BHA’s Urban Redevelopment Division, told the Daily Boston Globe that, per federal urban renewal regulations, the BHA would assist displaced families in finding new homes. However, “owner-occupants who sell their property to the city will be expected to find homes for themselves,” although the BHA would grant them assistance if the owner-occupant requested it. The Boston Housing Authority assumed that those

70 Ibid.
evicted would welcome relocation to public housing.  However, while the BHA found that fifty-eight percent of New York Streets families were eligible for public housing, ultimately only fifteen percent of families chose this option, reflecting how little the BHA understood the needs of those it displaced.

The BHA received their federal, state, and city approvals and began demolition in mid-1955. In September 1957, development corporation Cerel-Druker won the rights to redevelop the New York Streets and celebrated with Mayor Hynes at a ceremony in Hynes’ office. Hynes declared that the transfer of ownership to Cerel-Druker marked the “beginning of the new Boston.” Interestingly, the *Daily Boston Globe* article discussing this occasion did not remind readers that the area had been residential or that two years had elapsed since the razing of the former structures. The mayor, stressing the “new Boston,” and the *Globe*, supporting urban renewal, did not consider the displacement of New York Streets residents worth mentioning.

The city also selected Boston’s West End for redevelopment soon after the passage of the 1949 Housing Act. Boston’s West End neighborhood is bounded by the Charles River on its north and west, by Beacon Hill to its south, and by the North End to its east. Though the first European settlers came to Boston in the early seventeenth century, few settled in the West End until the mid-eighteenth century. Its importance grew when the West Boston Bridge opened in 1793, connecting Boston to Cambridge and points north by a road that ran through the West End. Many middle- and upper-class families moved to the area and it was soon dotted with fashionable homes, many designed by famous Boston architect Charles Bulfinch. In the mid-nineteenth century, Boston’s population began to rise as immigration increased. More affluent residents began to move to suburbs that were accessible by new

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72 Vale, p. 297.
73 Vale, p. 297.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
advancements in public transportation. As they left, immigrants and working-class people gradually moved in and took over most of the housing.\(^{78}\) The houses of earlier decades were demolished to make way for larger tenement buildings. Irish immigrants predominated in the mid-to-late nineteenth century but were joined by large waves of Eastern European Jews and Italians by the early twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, some first and many second and third generation Italians and Eastern European Jews made up most of the West End’s demographic.\(^{79}\)

The BHA and the City Planning Board chose the West End neighborhood for redevelopment because, like the New York Streets, it abutted Boston’s downtown area. Unlike the New York Streets however, they hoped to build housing for middle- and upper-class families instead of commercial space. Regardless, the residential plans for the West End, like the commercial plans for the New York Streets, included modern buildings, open space, and garden-like environments.\(^{80}\) The BHA planned to compete with suburban living by offering suburban-like open spaces. The city hoped that the higher incomes of these middle- and upper-class families would increase Boston’s tax revenues and allow them to reduce tax rates. The city also hoped that reduced tax rates and an influx of new residents would make the city’s downtown area more attractive to entrepreneurs.\(^{81}\) They assumed that people who lived in the West End did so because they could not improve their situations enough to move to more affluent neighborhoods. The city’s assumptions echoed the thoughts of philanthropists and settlement house workers that worked in the West End. In 1902, Robert Woods, founder of South End House, published a study about the ethnic West and North End neighborhoods titled *Americans in Process*. In it, he argued that the ultimate goal, successful assimilation, could not be achieved if immigrants settled in groups and held on to their own traditions.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.  
\(^{80}\) See figures 1 and 2.  
\(^{81}\) Gans, “The Urban Village Revisited,” p. 15.
Figure 2: City planners supported this plan for West End redevelopment. Notice the abundance of open space compared to what stood there before. “General Plan For Boston.” Boston, MA: Boston City Planning Board, 1950.

Figure 3: Below, shows the West End’s layout before it was razed. Image from the “General Plan For Boston.” Boston, MA: Boston City Planning Board, 1950.
In addition, like the New York Streets, the BHA and the City Planning Board chose the West End because they believed that its working-class and poor immigrant demographic made it expendable. By moving out, “many of the enterprising spirits...will find satisfaction in seeking the...progress of the local communities in which they...were introduced to the ways of American citizenship.” Woods also wrote that “the present condition of the tenement houses...is not satisfactory from any point of view...the city has not succeeded in preventing overcrowding, or in compelling owners to provide the necessary ventilation.” He believed that by settling near other members of the same ethnic background, immigrants limited their ability to assimilate to American ways and became stuck in substandard and crowded housing. He and other settlement leaders also held that these residents must aspire to the American ideal and that immigrants and the urban poor would welcome opportunities to move to better housing.

To qualify for federal aid for redevelopment, the BHA observed the neighborhood and wrote a report that described slum and blight conditions in the West End. Published in 1953, this West End Project Report claims that the West End’s population had dropped dramatically in recent years because of “the decline in the quality of housing,” which then contributed to the negative “effect of the environment on the people.” The BHA also argued that this environment, combined with the limited open space, contributed to “high rates of tuberculosis...juvenile delinquency,” and crime. They continued by declaring that the West End’s narrow streets endangered lives because fire engines could not navigate them quickly or easily, increasing their response times. Furthermore, the report stated that he substandard buildings, the “‘too small lots [and]...’too narrow and crooked streets,‘” did not provide enough “‘sunlight and air...for healthy living.’” Like the New York Streets, the report reflected

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86 Vale, p. 276
the middle-class values that the BHA set their criteria by. For example, a 1956 city report stated that “city inspectors...found eighty percent of the structures substandard or marginal.” The city inspectors based this affirmation on their own middle-class opinions of what suitable housing should look like—not on quantifiable or objective data. Based on these findings, the BHA decided that it needed to raze the entire neighborhood in order to serve the best interests of its residents. Former residents would be moved to better housing and the West End would be redeveloped into a location that would draw wealthier tax-payers into the city. The report recommended razing most of the neighborhood’s residential and commercial structures, with the exception of Massachusetts General Hospital’s buildings and a few historic West End buildings. Mayor Hynes declared that “many of [the original West End residents]...will find new quarters in the new low-rent housing units.”

The city began evaluating options for resident relocation shortly after the BHA published the West End Project Report. During the early stages of planning, Mayor Hynes declared that the project would include “low-rent housing for 1,175 families, 200 middle-income apartments, and 640 high-rent apartments.” Under this plan, while some families would be relocated to housing outside of the West End, many residents would be able to live there again after the project finished. However, the BHA then announced that “many of the new apartments would be too expensive for most of the people who now live in the West End.” However, the city assured residents that it would help find new housing for every displaced resident, whether in the West End or outside of it. When residents received their official notices to move in 1958, the project plans had eliminated all mention of affordable housing within the West End for displaced residents. Only the few who could afford the market rate units would

91 Vale, p. 276.
be able to stay.\textsuperscript{92} The BHA assumed that all other families would be able to find acceptable units in Boston’s public housing system. They also assumed that displaced residents would move to these more modern units willingly, happy to leave their old homes.

The response from the public to the city’s plans varied greatly between the New York Streets and the West End. Public response to the proposed New York Streets project supported the city’s efforts to redevelop the area although some disagreed about the terms of its redevelopment. Few, if any, non-residents voiced opposition to the displacement of the residents. At a February 1955 hearing, some existing businesses protested the razing of their structures and argued that the city should allow them to remain, given the proposed commercial use of the area.\textsuperscript{93} But the reporter from the \textit{Daily Boston Globe} who attended the hearing, if he heard any resident protest, chose not to record it or, if he did hear protest, his editor chose not to include it in the article. No other contemporary accounts from residents that oppose the decision appeared in major Boston newspapers. While some disagreed over the plan’s specifics, those present at the hearing agreed that, regardless of its exact use, the redevelopment of the area to a commercial district would greatly benefit the city. No one suggested leaving the area alone and allowing the residents to remain there.

The public also supported the city’s proposal for West End redevelopment in the belief that, like in the case of the New York Streets, it would help to revitalize the city. Most city newspapers agreed that the West End was a slum and needed to be demolished. For example, the \textit{Boston Globe} published an article that claimed that the West End would transform from “dilapidation to delight.”\textsuperscript{94} Herbert Gans cited an example from 1957 in which a “popular Boston column… [wrote] that:

‘The West End is today definitely a slum area. In fact it has always been…it gradually degenerated into a rooming house section and then went from bad to worse…Around the turn of the century…every conceivable sort of vie that makes for a slum

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{92}] Vale, p. 279.
\item[\textsuperscript{94}] O’Connor, \textit{Building a New Boston}, pp. 134-135.
\end{itemize}
flourished...Any change since has slowly slid toward the worse.”  

Some West End residents organized a committee to oppose the project. However, the committee formed in the late 1950s after years of city discussions about redeveloping the West End. Most residents did not join because many doubted that the project would happen. “For many years there had been a good deal of talk [by the city] about...projects...destined for the West End” and nothing ever came from those discussions. After the project became official, some newspapers wrote about the fears of West End residents before the city displaced them. For example, on Sunday, June 22, 1958, two months after West End residents received their official eviction notices, the Boston Sunday Globe published “West Enders are Going to Miss Their Friends,” an article that discussed the potential impact of displacement on residents. It asked the question: “what will uprooting from their homes do to some 2600 families who must get out of the West End?” and discussed the project undertaken by Massachusetts General Hospital to study those displaced by the West End project. However, even while discussing the potential negative impacts on the population, few questioned the perceived need to demolish and redevelop the neighborhood. In 1957, when the newly created Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) took over the West End project from the Boston Housing Authority, they held a public hearing about the project that two hundred West End residents attended. Most expressed opposition. However, even after this public protest, the BRA decided to move forward with the project.

The BHA and the City Planning Board chose the New York Streets and West End neighborhoods for redevelopment because of their close proximity to downtown Boston and because they believed that eliminating the neighborhoods would benefit both the city and the residents. For decades, philanthropists questioned the value of ethnic neighborhoods to their residents. They argued that these seemingly poor and run-down areas could only be stepping stones to the ultimate ideal: the dream of

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95 Gans, The Urban Villagers, p. 329.
96 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, p. 135.
the American middle-class. But, unbeknownst to them, ethnic populations often thrived in these locales; ignored by the city until the 1949 Housing Act made urban renewal a real possibility. The BHA then announced publicly its belief that these neighborhoods were filled with blight and needed to be eliminated. The city, which had mostly ignored the West End and the New York Streets, accused these areas of contributing to the city’s financial woes and rallied public support for their destruction. Some residents felt humiliated that the city had labeled them as slum-dwellers and frustrated that the city believed their homes were so unimportant and disposable.98

Chapter III: Displacement and Its Effects on Personal and Public Memory

The condescending and patriarchal treatment of West End and New York Streets residents by city planners before their evictions led many residents to feel humiliated and frustrated. In addition, the displacement itself and the destruction of the neighborhoods caused many to suffer from prolonged periods of grief and anger. This, combined with the city’s belief in residents’ inferiority, affects the ways in which former residents remember their neighborhoods. The BHA and the agency that took over urban renewal from the BHA, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), assured residents that they would help them to improve their situations by relocating them to better neighborhoods. After displacement, angry that the city felt that it had any right or duty to control their lives, former residents claimed that the city had no right to remove them and that they lived there happily and of their own volition. In addition, the effects of displacement led to recollections from former residents that idealize and romanticize the neighborhoods. Memories recalled by former residents focus heavily on positive and idealized aspects in order to prove that the city erred when it claimed the right to displace them and razed their homes.

Frustration and anger among displaced residents stem from the city’s patriarchal and highhanded treatment of them during urban renewal. The attitudes adopted by the city reflected their

long relationship with immigrant neighborhoods but also prevented them from understanding who lived in these neighborhoods and why. The BHA assumed that people lived in these areas out of necessity and that if they were given another option, they would move. The experiences of former residents refutes this, however. In the New York Streets,

“Tillie...was always cheerful and very proud that...she was able to be financially independent. Tillie’s son, a doctor in Brookline, was always asking her to move there and couldn’t understand her attachment to the neighborhood. However, she preferred to stay there with her friends and her social life. In fact, there were a number of people who lived in the New York Streets by preference who could afford to live elsewhere.”

Examples of patriarchal attitudes by the city include flyers and literature that the BHA distributed in the West End after they announced the project. The literature assured residents that the BHA would ensure their well-being by finding them better places to live. Messages included:

“Before anything is done, before any building is torn down, before any one has to move, the Authority will tell you what is going to happen’;...‘You will be informed well before you have to move and helped to find a new and better home’; ‘The Authority has made plans to rehouse every family that would have to move’;...’You can help the redevelopment program, your city and your family by cooperating’;...’You do not have to worry about finding a new place to live. It is the responsibility of the Authority to do this for you...No one has to worry; everyone will be rehoused, most of you in much better apartments than you have now’.”

These messages indicate that, not only did the BHA not understand the residents’ reasons for wanting to live there; the BHA also believed that the city’s decision and the relocation would be in the residents’ best interest. In addition, by telling residents that they would help them to find “much better apartments,” the BHA denounced their current homes. They developed “relocation procedures [that]...assumed that the West Enders’ housing requirements...were similar to their own...fitting [their ideal] middle-class standards.” The BHA planned to take residents’ homes, told residents that it was

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100 Vale, p. 278.
101 Gans, The Urban Villagers, p. 365.
in their own best interest, dismissed any resident protest, and then told them to “sit tight” and wait for the BHA to move them to better apartments.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition to frustration and anger, many displaced residents experienced severe grief and emotional distress after displacement. Sociologists Herbert Gans and Marc Fried published articles about former West End resident reactions to displacement shortly after the city evicted them. Both went on to publish books about the West End experience that detail the ways that the working-class West End neighborhood served its residents and why its destruction caused former residents to experience prolonged periods of grief.\textsuperscript{103} Fried began his study prior to eviction and he found that West End residents feared the “loneliness…the loss of kin, the disruption of friendships...most West Enders were unfamiliar with the wider world in which they felt alien and alienated.”\textsuperscript{104} They also feared “the loss of the web of community affiliation...and informal resources of kinship and friendship networks.”\textsuperscript{105} When studying the West Enders after they moved, he found that many believed their fears before displacement were justified. Many moved to suburbs of Boston where they had friends or family\textsuperscript{106} but the large social support network of the West End was gone. Fried concluded that, as a result, many suffered from prolonged periods of mild to severe depression. Gans, who lived among West Enders to study their neighborhood before the city evicted them, published a study in 1962 that echoed Marc Fried’s observations. Gans wrote that “the clearance destroyed...a functioning social system. The scattering...was especially harmful to the many older people....a number of deaths were attributed to the impact of the redevelopment decision.”\textsuperscript{107} A resident of Columbia Point, a housing project in South

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Marc Fried, \textit{The World of the Urban Working Class} and Herbert Gans, \textit{The Urban Villagers}.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{107} Gans, \textit{The Urban Villagers}, p. 362.
Boston observed these effects when former West Enders moved into his community. He recalled that the group of West Enders that relocated to Columbia Point “held itself apart from the rest of the community... [they] were protective of their own group...they were traumatized.”

While little information exists about the reaction of New York Streets residents to their displacement, Fried and Gans’ observations about the breaking up of urban working-class neighborhoods apply to the New York Streets as well as the West End. Former resident Gloria Ganno suggests that the eviction caused many to suffer from profound grief. Ganno wrote that an older woman, “Tillie, moved to Brookline... [and] although she was living in a more upscale place, she was lonely and missed her friends and her old neighborhood life. The elderly were especially hit hard by all the upheaval.” Ganno also wrote that, even though “everyone from our neighborhood was scattered, city and suburb ...my brother and I still returned to the South End to hang out, and so did our friends.”

Black activist Mel King, who grew up in the New York Streets, wrote, “When I was away at college, my family sent me a series of articles...which called the areas [near the New York Streets] Boston’s ‘skid row.’ I was surprised because I had always called it home.” He also wrote that the city “blocked out any understanding of the impact urban renewal would have on the lives of the people, like my family and friends, living there.”

The strong emotions felt by displaced residents led to recollections that idealize the past. Humans “tend to remember events that are...personal [and] emotional” like grief or anger and “are more likely to remember events that change our lives.” Displaced residents remembered intensely

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108 Columbia Point is a public housing project in South Boston, MA.
113 Ibid, p. 21.
114 Boyer, p. 172.
emotional events and then coped with their emotions by attempting to resist “change by creating memories of a past that was unchanging, incorruptible, and harmonious.” Fried concluded this about former West End residents who “felt helpless and angry... [and] idealized the West End.” For example, while Gans concluded that “only when the outside world discovered the West End and made plans to tear it down did its inhabitants begin to talk about the West End as a neighborhood,” former West End resident Mary Jackman claimed that even though children from different ethnicities fought, “you were from the West End...And that wiped out [being from] Europe.” Gans wrote that they did not consider themselves a neighborhood; Jackman claims they not only was it a neighborhood, it was one free from ethnic strife. In addition, while the BHA wrote about a New York Streets neighborhood whose residents “abandoned...any vestige of pride in the surroundings,” Ganno wrote about the congenial atmosphere created when everyone sat on their stoops and socialized. Mel King also recalled a mostly harmonious New York Streets. In describing its ethnic makeup, he wrote that,

“Although our buildings were pretty well sorted out by color and ethnic background, the street belonged to all of us. There was a street baseball team and when the Armenian twin sisters down the block had a double wedding, they washed down the whole street for dancing and celebration.”

These former residents attempt to resist the negative narratives of the BHA by focusing on and emphasizing positive stories, creating an idealized view of the past that eliminates more negative ones.

In addition to displaced residents’ recollections and the studies done by Gans and Fried; other academic, public, and government studies, reports, and articles joined the conversation about urban

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120 King, p. 21
renewal in those neighborhoods. Academic reports by Marc Fried and Herbert Gans drew national attention to the plight of the West End’s displaced residents. It also became the primary example “of how not to apply urban renewal.” It also became the primary example of early urban renewal in the city of Boston. Urban planners and sociologists condemned the treatment of former West Enders when they read these reports. As a result of the outcry about the West End and in the face of public criticism, the BRA and the City Planning Board had to reevaluate their relocation procedures. Prominent Boston historian Walter Muir Whitehill wrote that “the experience of the West End created a widespread conviction that if urban renewal were necessary in Boston, some less drastic form must be devised.” The West End became the point by which all future projects were compared, leaving no room for care or concern about the New York Streets. No academic published a similar report about the displacement of the residents from the earlier New York Streets project.

Additional academic studies as well as public and government perspectives released since the projects reflect continued dominance of the West End as the primary early renewal project. For example, an article published in the Boston Globe in 1980 decried the West End project as “a bulldozing job that became a national example of how not to apply urban renewal.” In 1987, another Boston Globe article recorded the BRA’s Executive Director as saying “he is tired of all of the West End controversy” and that it was necessary.” Both articles ignored the New York Streets entirely. The first called the West End project the beginning of the “rebuilding of Boston” and the second read as though the New York Streets project never occurred. In addition, one of the few Boston Globe articles that mentioned the West End and New York Streets together did not describe the extent of either project or

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123 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, p. 137.
124 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, p. 139.
their dates or how they might relate to one another.\textsuperscript{127} Another article that mentioned both neighborhoods also combined both into an amorphous blob of renewal without including specifics about either. However, it did include the New York Streets, with the West End, as “examples of how not to do urban renewal.”\textsuperscript{128} Even so, the remainder of the article focused on the West End, not the New York Streets, as a project that “haunted [Kane] Simonian [director of the BRA] for years.”\textsuperscript{129} An official report from the Boston Redevelopment Authority, published in 1972, stated that “the South End is the only project in which any sizable number of households have yet to be moved.”\textsuperscript{130} This statement, which refers to later urban renewal efforts in the South End in the 1960s and 1970s, forgets that several hundred families were moved during the earlier New York Streets project. The author either ignored the displacement of New York Streets residents or considered the amount of families removed unimportant.

In the early 1980s, popular nostalgia for the days of Boston’s ethnic neighborhoods began to emerge, leading to a renewed public interest in Boston’s historic neighborhoods. This stemmed partly from an increased interest in historic preservation, partly from a rise in interest in local history after the bicentennial, and partly from the Jane Holtz Kay’s book \textit{Lost Boston}, published in 1980.\textsuperscript{131} While West End residents received sympathy after their initial displacement from mostly academic sources, this resurgence in the early 1980s included participation by some more popular media, like newspapers. They lamented the loss of buildings and romanticized the ethnic groups that had lived there. For example, in 1980 the \textit{Boston Globe} reported that Michael Dukakis said that “the West End... [was] one of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid.
  \item Carol Kammen, \textit{On Doing Local History}, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), p. 36.
\end{itemize}
the most stable, most colorful, most integrated urban neighborhoods in America.” A reporter in 1981 wrote that the old West End “was so tragically lost to the city” and in 1985 another wrote that the modern Charles River Park complex was “physically intimidating to occupants and passerby... [and] is in sharp contrast to the teeming street life of the [old] West End.” In 1983, an article actually references the growing interest in the “contrasts of then and now” and the movement in which “people began to think of the old city not as rot to be swept away.” Another article in 1983 mentions the New York Streets in the same sentence as the West End. In it the author laments that slum clearance “simply smashed” the buildings and the poor “people scattered.”

The approximately twenty-five year gap between the displacement of West Enders and the appearance of romanticized accounts of the West End in newspapers reflects newspapers’ relationship to urban renewal. When urban renewal in the West End and New York Streets first began, Boston newspapers did not grant the residents any empathy because they supported the city’s attempts to improve the financial situation. Many newspapers suffered from the city’s poor economic state in the mid-twentieth century and some closed as a result. Perhaps to guarantee their own survival, the remaining newspapers supported the city’s early urban renewal efforts. In addition, when the city formed the BRA in 1957 to take over urban renewal from the BHA, Mayor Hynes nominated three people from “influential Boston newspapers” (The Pilot, The Boston Post, and The Record-American) to sit on the BRA board. However, after about twenty-five years, in the early 1980s, this popular media form began discussing the West End displacement with a sense of regret for the first time. Articles

136 O’Connor, Building a New Boston, p. 128.
began to appear in newspapers that called attention to the experience of the West End and questioned the city’s earlier designation of this ethnic area as a slum.¹³⁷

The academic studies about the West End’s redevelopment and the surge in interest by the public in the 1980s combined to continue to deny New York Streets residents acknowledgement for their experiences. The empathy granted to former West Enders provided a powerful place for them to recall their pasts and share their idealized memories. The former New York Streets residents did not have a similar forum from which to tell their stories because they never received the same level of concern from the academic community and when a consensus formed about the “good old days,” the West End had long since pushed other projects out of the public eye.

Chapter IV: Memory, Power, and the Creation of Local History

Former West End residents control the telling of their old neighborhood’s history much more than former New York Streets residents and their old neighborhood. The West End received most of the public and academic attention and empathy after its urban renewal displacement while no academic or critic recognizes the New York Street residents’ experiences as special or exceptional. In addition, in the West End, no new residents who moved in after urban renewal claim any authority over the West End’s local history. No group formed to claim the history of the New York Streets area but a local organization does claim authority over the South End’s history. This organization, the South End Historical Society (SEHS), formed in 1966 to argue for the preservation of the district’s nineteenth-century history buildings. They believed that the larger South End urban renewal plan, approved by the BRA in 1966, threatened the South End’s historic architecture. Rather than discuss the lost New York Streets, the SEHS focused on the preservation of the existing South End buildings and on the area’s nineteenth century upper-middle class Victorian history. Successful in their quest to save most of the historic

structures, urban renewal and its resulting gentrification became a positive narrative in the SEHS’ perceptions of the area’s local history.

In addition to the ability or inability to control local history narratives, displaced residents often recall memories skewed by urban renewal inflicted trauma. These memories focus on an idealized past that ignores or forgets negatives. Furthermore, memory studies suggest that “those most affected [by traumatic events] [are]... (people between ages 13 and 25).”\textsuperscript{138} This indicates that those affected most during urban renewal were reaching the age of “38 to 50” in the 1970s and 1980s. This is significant because they now had “the financial and political clout to build monuments and influence popular culture” at the same time that nostalgia for “lost Boston” emerged in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{139} Typically, about twenty to thirty years elapse between a traumatic event and the formation of a collective consensus about that event.\textsuperscript{140} The nostalgia for old neighborhoods combined with a growing public interest in local history in the early 1980s, at the same time that the youngest displaced residents came of age.\textsuperscript{141} In the West End these former residents control the local history organization and their memories contribute much to the organization’s narratives about twentieth century neighborhood history and to the West End’s experience with urban renewal. Former New York Streets residents also recall a mostly idealized past but their memories do not contribute to the stories about the harshness of urban renewal and the SEHS focuses on the existing built environment of the rest of the South End neighborhood. Both redeveloped areas remember idealized pasts but the New York Streets residents do not have an avenue by which to share their experience.

Former New York Streets residents have little visibility on the historical landscape because few observers chose to report about the human experience with displacement. In addition, attention given to the later West End displacement erased any discussion about New York Streets displacement or

\textsuperscript{138} Boyer, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Boyer, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{141} Kammen, p. 36.
development. Furthermore, other circumstances let to the continuation of the disappearance of the New York Streets from history. The city’s urban renewal initiatives drew new residents to the South End. New residents and old residents who remained began to focus on the future of their neighborhood when the city proposed an extensive South End-wide urban renewal project in the 1960s. The BRA planned “for the rehabilitation of structures... new public housing units for families... [and] the elderly...new schools...new playgrounds...it was the nation’s largest renewal project” and was approved in 1966.\textsuperscript{142} The BRA worked to make “the scope of their intervention acceptable to the residents [and] set about building a...constituency of...local leaders to support their planning efforts.”\textsuperscript{143} Urban renewal, to South End residents, meant their present time and the future of their community— not the past New York Streets. In addition, the founding of the South End Historical Society in 1966 continued the erasure of the New York Streets from the South End’s historical landscape. The SEHS focused on the preservation of the built environment more than the lived human experience and so also focused on their present and their battle to protect the South End’s historic rowhouses from urban renewal demolition. The community’s goals and the SEHS’ goals, shaped in response to the city’s South End urban renewal goals, thoroughly excluded the history of the New York Streets neighborhood.

In the late 1950s, after the New York Streets displacement, “liberal-minded, middle class artists...young gay and lesbian men and women, painters, writers, and some professionals, distasteful of the suburbs” began to move into the South End and “blocks of restored town houses...became a distinctive enclave” causing a “phenomenon later known as ‘gentrification’.”\textsuperscript{144} Rising housing costs forced poor families and minorities to find new housing in either the South End’s new affordable housing projects or to Roxbury and Dorchester. The new residents joined remaining residents and invested in the neighborhood and its future by voicing their opinions about the city’s plans for urban renewal.

\textsuperscript{142} O’Connor, \textit{Building a New Boston}, p. 230
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, p. 228
renewal in the South End. Lifelong resident Clare Hayes said that this concern for the neighborhood’s future led to the creation of “new organizations with strong identities” who fought for what they believed the city needed to bring to the South End.\textsuperscript{145} The BRA’s planning process for South End urban renewal involved residents in how it decided to implement projects like improvements to sidewalks, parks, schools, and streets and the construction of public housing. However, while many people wanted to give input about urban renewal in the South End, the BRA “leaders had made up their minds to ignore the interests of the poor…and were targeting their efforts mainly at the town house crowd…in their efforts to upgrade and ‘gentrify’ the community.”\textsuperscript{146} The local leaders that they included in their planning efforts and committees represented “only a small segment of the South End community”—the segment comprised of white middle and upper class professionals.\textsuperscript{147}

In response to the city’s urban renewal initiative, some residents formed the South End Historical Society in 1966. The SEHS founders and early members consisted of a few older residents of the South End as well as many from the “new slew of middle-class professionals, looking for good housing investments” that moved in during the late 1950s and early 1960s.\textsuperscript{148} The SEHS formed to ensure the preservation of the South End’s historic built environment because they feared that the BRA’s urban renewal plans might attempt to demolish structures to make way for new housing. They also wanted to reverse the widely held perception that the South End was a slum. This led to the SEHS focusing heavily on the South End’s upper-middle class nineteenth century history. In 1968 the SEHS put a notice in the \textit{Boston Globe} that stressed the South End’s importance and called for support. They wrote that “much history of Boston originated in this area” and that the slum label “is not true.” It goes on to list well-known historic South End residents and visitors and then declares that this history “cannot

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{146}] O’Connor, \textit{Building a New Boston}, p. 231.
\item[\textsuperscript{147}] Ibid, p. 233. Here O’Connor references a 1965 article that appeared in \textit{Boston Magazine}.
\item[\textsuperscript{148}] Small, p. 34
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be buried underneath the Boston Redevelopment Authority development.\textsuperscript{149} They tied their present to
this illustrious past by concluding “many members of this Society live now in the South End, restored to
their fine homes as they used to be then.”\textsuperscript{150} The rowhouses, they argued, were housing upper and
middle-class families once again, just as they did in the nineteenth century. This effort contributed to
the gentrification of the neighborhood, a trend encouraged by the BRA. The BRA cared about this
upper-middle class demographic and so listened to its concerns. And many people in this
demographic— including those who belonged to the SEHS— cared about preservation and the image of
the neighborhood.

The SEHS’ focus on the nineteenth century pushed twentieth-century South End history,
including the history of the New York Streets neighborhood and demolition, further away. The
demographic in the South End changed so rapidly that few in the neighborhood had lived there prior to
urban renewal and so did not contest the absence of twentieth century history. While some New York
Streets residents relocated to homes within the South End, displacement scattered many to
neighborhoods like Jamaica Plain and Dorchester. In addition, while the SEHS was wary of the BRA’s
plans for the South End’s buildings, they supported urban renewal efforts in the South End as a whole.
They wanted civic improvements and they wanted the BRA to adopt a more sensitive approach to the
built environment. The SEHS did not discuss the New York Streets area history or displacement because
they had other historic buildings in the South End that they could use as proof of the area’s historic
nature. The New York Streets represented a part of South End history that the SEHS wanted to distance
itself from.

While the city planning agencies (the BHA and then the BRA after 1957) ignored any potential
historic value of both the West End and New York Streets buildings in the 1950s, the rising concern for
historic preservation in the 1960s and 1970s allowed the SEHS to gather support for the preservation of

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
the South End’s rowhouses. For example, in the 1960s, the Boston Athenaeum’s Walter Muir Whitehill and the Bostonian Society’s Harriet Ropes Cabot expressed concern for the survival of historic buildings to Mayor Collins. Mayor Collins established the Boston Historic Conservation Committee, which, in addition to encouraging preservation of individual buildings, influenced “the movement toward preserving entire streetscapes and districts rather than individual buildings or monuments.”\(^{151}\) The movement helped to save historic buildings that might have otherwise come down to make way for new buildings. In addition, city pride in its role in the United States’ bicentennial celebrations of 1976 fed a feeling of nostalgia for the past and the lost buildings of Boston’s earlier residents.\(^{152}\) Jane Holtz Kay’s book on this topic, *Lost Boston*, published in 1980, captures this feeling and encourages readers to adopt a sense of pride in the city’s historic buildings.

While New York Streets residents do not command a large outside audience and they do not control their own local history organization, they still tell their stories and, sometimes, outsiders hear them. For example, Mel King, the well-known black activist from Boston, wrote the book *Chain of Change*, in which he discusses briefly his time growing up in the New York Streets. Radio hosts, television programs, documentaries, and oral historians have recorded him and often asked him questions about his upbringing. These recordings of King’s experiences contribute snippets of urban renewal era New York Streets history. Significantly however, none focus solely on his New York Streets background. They inquire about his upbringing to inform their understanding about his work as a civil and social rights activist, not to inform their understanding of the New York Streets. In addition to Mel King, his wife Joyce King also grew up in the New York Streets and, like her husband, recorded interviews with local media outlets in which she mentions her old neighborhood. Famous immigrant Mary Antin also lived in the New York Streets area for a short time, although she did not refer to the neighborhood by that name, and included her experience in *The Promised Land*, an autobiography published in 1912.

\(^{151}\) O’Connor, p. 193.  
\(^{152}\) Kammen, p. 36.
Like Mel King however, readers value her more for her immigrant experience than her descriptions of life in the New York Streets. Ganno also chronicled her experiences about growing up in the neighborhood and her family’s displacement. Ganno wrote “My Two Lost Neighborhoods,” an article about growing up in the New York Streets and several local newspapers published it between 2009 and the present. Ganno approached the South End Historical Society in early 2010 and they published her article as well. One of the South End’s local papers, South End News, published it the following summer. Of all former New York Streets residents, Ganno succeeded the most in spreading the story of the neighborhood’s destruction.

The few stories about the New York Streets that manage to garner some attention tend to focus on the period of time around the displacement and tend to idealize the neighborhood. Perhaps Mel King’s interviewees ask about the displacement and not earlier New York Streets history because they want to know about King’s own life and experiences, not his former neighborhood’s past. In addition to focusing on the period of displacement, Joyce King speaks about the neighborhood in idealized terms. In an interview with WGBH, when asked about the New York Streets she responded by saying

“most of the white people who lived in the neighborhood were first generation Americans... [their parents came from] various parts of Europe....[they were] Greek Armenian Syrian Lebanese Italian...it was an area that had a variety of stores that reflected the various ethnic groups that were represented...so we grew up... experiencing a greater variety of food and people’s lifestyles than I think perhaps other neighborhoods did. And that was the value...of growing up in the South End...it was always integrated...there was a lot of getting together and participating because we were all in the same boat, we were all poor.”

Here, Joyce King takes one of the BHA’s reasons for selecting the New York Streets— poverty— and describes how poverty actually benefited the neighborhood because it encouraged integration and cooperation. Her account idealizes the experience of New York Streets residents because it ignores the negative effects of poverty and ignores any occurrence of interracial strife. Ganno’s remembrances also

153 Christopher Lydon and Joyce King, “Interview with Joyce King,” The Ten O’Clock News, (Boston, MA: WGBH, November 6, 1983), tape two of three.
concentrate on the impact of displacement and idealize the neighborhood. Ganno might focus on the period of displacement because she was fifteen when evicted; an age “most affected” by traumatic events, leaving an indelible mark on her life.\textsuperscript{154} Ganno describes her “sunny” street, the fun times she and other children had playing in the vacant lot across the street from her home, the “lifelong” friends that she and her mother made, and the marvelous and “scrumptious aromas” emanating from the abundance of ethnic food stores that dotted the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{155} No negative comments about the neighborhood or its people appear in this article. It finishes by describing the heartless process by which the BHA evicted them. Ganno and King both focus on their short time there and then the destruction.

The poor and minority groups affected by urban renewal and gentrification the South End are much more visible in the South End than the former New York Streets because some formed strong and vocal organizations and protests. Organizations like Emergency Tenants Council, the Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE), and the South End Tenants Council formed and protested the city’s lack of attention to their needs.\textsuperscript{156} Activists like Mel King staged protests, like the famous sit-in that King led at Tent City, which drew local and national attention to the plight of poor and minorities who were being displaced by urban renewal.\textsuperscript{157} These protests and the rich body of literature that exists about the efforts of these groups do not acknowledge the earlier displacement of the poor and minority New York Streets residents.\textsuperscript{158} They focus on poor and minority rights and movements that occurred with the large South End urban renewal initiative, not earlier urban renewal projects. They, like the SEHS, do not need the New York Streets to argue for their mission. In addition, the public housing buildings that dot prominent streetscapes in the South End offer visible reminders to South End

\textsuperscript{154} Boyer, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{156} O’Connor, \textit{Building a New Boston}, p. 238.
\textsuperscript{157} King, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{158} Examples of secondary sources dealing with this issue: Lawrence Vale, \textit{From the Puritans to the Projects}; Mario Luis Small, \textit{Villa Victoria}; Anthony Lukas, \textit{Common Ground} (winner of a Pulitzer Prize); and Mel King, \textit{Chain of Change}, among others.
residents of the existence of the poor and their place in urban renewal history. The New York Streets area occupies a plot of land tucked into the southeast corner of the South End and little traffic passes through it. It sits invisible, overshadowed first by the West End and later by the larger and contentious urban renewal initiative in the rest of the South End neighborhood.

In the West End, unlike the South End, no major urban renewal project occurred after the first razing, allowing this first event to dominate urban renewal history in the West End. In addition, the West End has remained visible in the decades since the razing. It occupies a central location in Boston’s downtown area in a location visible to the communities of Beacon Hill and the North End, as well as to commuters and other drivers passing by it on the abutting Storrow Drive. The new buildings of Charles River Park contrast strongly with the historic buildings of Beacon Hill and the North End and most stand several stories taller than their neighbors. Furthermore, even though later urban renewal on the scale of the project in the South End did not occur in the West End, later projects elsewhere in the city tried to assure residents that their project would not unfold like the West End’s. These assurances brought the West End into public memory every time it was referred to. Every later plan strove to place itself far away from the West End experience, even if the project administrators lied to calm people who were nervous about potential displacement.\(^{159}\) The West End example dominated urban renewal fears so much that, ironically, later projects in the South End like the razing of the Castle Square neighborhood did not dredge up memories of the New York Streets even though some Castle Square residents had experienced eviction from the New York Streets.\(^{160}\) Rather, later South End urban renewal “conjured up bitter memories of what had happened in the West End.”\(^ {161}\)

New West End residents who moved into the Charles River Park housing did not form a historic organization for West End history. Few historic buildings remained and those that did were deemed

\(^{160}\) O’Connor, *Building a New Boston*, p. 231.
\(^{161}\) Ibid, p. 233.
important enough at the initial neighborhood razing to be saved. In addition, few former West End residents could afford to live in one of the new West End buildings in Charles River Park and so most moved to suburban areas. As a result, the new demographic, which moved into the area from the suburbs, had little if any attachment to the area’s past. They did not grow up there and few remembered or had any connection to the destroyed buildings. They did not have to prove the area’s historic value, like in the South End, to ensure its survival— the old neighborhood was already gone. The lack of any local West End history organization left open an opportunity for the displaced group to step in and claim authority over the West End’s past.

Early efforts to stay in touch with former neighbors and friends led to informal and private gatherings of West Enders. For example, some families remained in contact and held reunions, like Josie Meola and her daughter Nikki Polcaro, who hosted a reunion dinner in the early 1980s for two hundred former residents of the West End’s Wall Street. In addition, before the demolition, West End resident Joseph McDonald “rallied his neighbors” and “‘after it was torn down, he tried to keep the old group together’.” This group, called the “Old Time West Enders” had a reunion as early as 1952, before the displacement. A pamphlet that they circulated to members in 1963 reads “…they can destroy the streets and the buildings—but not our memories, love, respect and friendship for one-another.” They held reunions and printed these notices for each other, not for the wider public. Some former residents met more regularly at the West End House. The West End House, a settlement located in the West End, “closed in 1967 after the population it served…had been scattered by urban renewal.” It searched for another community that it could serve and in 1971 opened in Allston, another Boston

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neighborhood. Many “West End House” alumni returned to the House in its new Allston location, sharing the facilities with Allston residents.\textsuperscript{166} However, while many participated in reunions, the Old Time West Enders, and in the West End House, “most people...lost touch with each other and their common past.”\textsuperscript{167}

In the mid-1980s however, former West End residents began to try to make public assertions of their right to remember and disseminate West End history. The new residents had no local history organization and so the former residents stepped easily into the gap. It began with the publication of the first issue of the West Ender Newsletter in March 1985, edited by former resident James Campano. Campano “didn't know what to do with a list of 125 names and addresses collected at a reunion...so he and Papa, who's a printer, launched The West Ender, filled with West End tidbits and letters from readers.\textsuperscript{168} After about two years it had gained a circulation of about 1,800 people and by 1992 it had 3,000 subscribers.\textsuperscript{169} Campano still publishes it today.\textsuperscript{170} It offers former residents a place in which they can record memories, vent frustrations, find old friends, or brag about their families. Former residents send letters to Campano to print that describe where they went to school, who they married, what jobs they or their parents held, and who had died. For a community without a physical place in which to remember, the newsletter provided a “memory palace,” a place where former residents could reconstruct their pasts together with people who went through similar experiences of displacement.\textsuperscript{171} It allows people to “develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing on memories...creating...discovering...a common memory”\textsuperscript{172} and its creation launched a slew of other efforts by West Enders to remember their neighborhood. It led to a “volunteer-produced ‘West End

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Neustadt p. 94.
\textsuperscript{168} Irene Sege, “Love Lingers for Lost West End,” 1986.
\textsuperscript{169} Neustadt, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{170} Peter Anderson, “West End Story: It is a Classic Urban Drama,” May 24, 1987.
\textsuperscript{172} Neustadt, p. 97.
Video newsletter’ through the local community access station” and to the formation of the West End Historical Association (WEHA) in 1987. 173 WEHA began recording oral histories almost immediately. 174 Through the newsletter, former residents organized a large reunion in 1986 that hosted about seven hundred people. The event sold out because the hall that they rented could not fit all of the people that wanted to attend. 175

The growing movement to reconnect former West Enders attracted the attention of the Bostonian Society and in 1992 they unveiled an exhibit dedicated to urban renewal in the West End. They constructed the exhibit, called “The Last Tenement,” with input from former West Enders and published an accompanying exhibit book with articles by prominent historians like Thomas O’Connor, as well as sociologists Marc Fried and Herbert Gans. The newsletter’s beginning, the WEHA founding, and the large reunions helped former West Enders to connect with one another, to form a consensus about their shared past and to “empower...themselves with authority.” 176 The Bostonian Society’s exhibit helped to legitimize their efforts to create history and this collaboration provided the West Enders with additional authority over the West End’s history. The empathy given to their situation by academics and the public and the lack of a competing local history organization allowed them to take control of and being disseminating their versions of West End history.

Now that former West Enders have the means through which to speak to larger, outside audiences, they recall an idealized West End past. This idealization questions the BHA and BRA’s decision to destroy the area and, by questioning the validity of the city’s assessment of the area as a slum, serves to vindicate angry and upset former residents. They remember a neighborhood where

174 Ibid.
176 Neustadt, p. 100.
“Jew married Catholic, and a black child played with the white”\textsuperscript{177} and where “you could cut through alleys at night without fear and...if a youngster misbehaved at one end of the neighborhood, his mother would know by the time he came home.”\textsuperscript{178} Former resident Mary Jackman recalled inter-ethnic cooperation and friendship when she said that “the Italian parents wanted to know [from the Irish] how do you cook corned beef and cabbage. The Irish wanted to know how to cook spaghetti. The Jewish people gave you wine and matzo, and you sent them something at Christmas.”\textsuperscript{179} Former residents also remember those that displaced them with hatred and discuss this hatred publicly. For example, the first edition of the West Ender newsletter condemns Jerome Rappaport’s role in the development of the new West End. Jim Campano reiterated this in an interview for an article in the Boston Globe in 1986. He said that “Jerry R. makes the Brinks robbers look like a bunch of pikers; Jerry R.’s action is truly the ‘Crime of the Century’...some people...would like to hit Rappaport with a bat or do all sorts of things to him.”\textsuperscript{180}

The ability of former West End residents to attract empathy and to speak about the West End’s history keeps their displacement in the public eye. For example, in the late 1980s, the developer Jerome Rappaport began planning to build an affordable housing complex on a West End lot that had remained empty since urban renewal. Former West Enders “sought preference for all the 183 units [but] a federal district court judge ruled that...they could receive priority for no more than 55 percent.”\textsuperscript{181} The story appeared in local newspapers and recorded James Campano as saying, “‘we’ve waited over 30 years for the city to right the wrong they did to us in 1958.”\textsuperscript{182} He felt that they were entitled to the housing, given the city’s cruel treatment of them thirty years before. Interestingly, while this West End incident

\textsuperscript{177} Peter Anderson, “West End Story: It is a Classic Urban Drama,” May 24, 1987.
\textsuperscript{178} Irene Sege, “Love Lingers for Lost West End,” 1986.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Alan Lupo, “West End Rancor Stirs Anew,” 1996.
concerning the new housing complex made regular news for almost a decade, no one is clamoring to provide former New York Streets residents with housing in the new development beginning on the site of their former neighborhood in 2013.

Today, the number of former West End residents is dwindling and the remaining “Old Guard” has begun to reach out to attract new members. In their attempts to ensure that their efforts—WEHA, the West Ender Newsletter, and the West End Museum—stay alive, they continue to recall memories that reflect an idealized past. But they also recall the past with such desperation and zeal that they are creating a specific history for themselves as the saviors of neighborhood history.

Volunteer museum tour guide and former resident Bruce Guarino gives "dramatic presentation[s]" during museum tours: "I exude myself and explain it the best way I know how...hopefully the passion and enthusiasm rub off." In March, 2010, the Boston Globe published an article about former residents like Bruce Guarino called the "West End's Old Guard Reaches Out to Instill Passion For Cause."

The author calls the former West Enders who volunteer at the museum “the gray-hair gatekeepers [who] are trying to pass their torch to a new generation of West Enders who don't share the old-timers' memories of the neighborhood—or their zeal.” She goes on to write that the current

“residents are using the story as a source of inspiration...It’s like a phoenix rising from the ashes, and that phoenix would not have risen the way it did without the Old West Enders’ displacement and sorrow...the men were teens when the bulldozers came, and they have never forgotten the rage.”

Conclusion: Local History in Boston’s Future

Boston’s local history landscape reflects the effects of urban renewal on its neighborhoods.

Urban renewal began as an attempt to curb decentralization and ensure the success of the city’s

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185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
financial future. The city met many of its goals—the downtown area became the home to many popular market-places; large businesses like Prudential Insurance built offices in Boston; and city neighborhoods gradually gentrified. But these changes also changed the city’s physical and demographic landscape, deeply affecting thousands of residents displaced from their homes. Recognition and empathy by outsiders allowed some of the former West End residents to become authorities on the local history of the West End. The lack of attention to the plight of the former New York Streets residents denies them authority over their neighborhood’s past because they have no audience.

The future may promise a more balanced view of each neighborhood’s history. The South End Historical Society has gradually broadened its interpretive focus to include twentieth century South End history. They recorded an oral history interview with Gloria Ganno and published an article written by Ganno about the New York Streets in the SEHS newsletter. Interestingly, the West End Museum staff may also begin discussing the New York Streets. In 2011, they contacted the SEHS to discuss the possibility of mounting a New York Streets exhibit in their facility in the West End. They want to call attention to the shared experience of displacement. In addition to the changes in the telling of South End history, the West End Museum has reached out to residents who moved to the West End more recently. Former West Enders fear that, as they age, their stories will fade. By involving residents from the post-urban renewal West End, they hope that they can garner enough interest in the West End’s history to ensure the museum’s survival.
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List of Images:

Page 16: Figure 1, Map of Boston showing locations of neighborhoods, including the West End and the New York Streets, from John Stainton, *Urban Renewal and Planning in Boston*, (Boston, MA: The Citizens Housing and Planning Association and the Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1973).

Page 24: Figure 2, This image shows the West End plan supported by Boston city planners. Notice the abundance of open space compared to what stood there before. “General Plan For Boston.” Boston, MA: Boston City Planning Board, 1950.

Page 24: Figure 3, This image shows the West End’s layout before it was razed. Image from the “General Plan For Boston.” Boston, MA: Boston City Planning Board, 1950.