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*Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities*. By Lawrence J. Vale. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. xvi+428. $27.50 (paper).

Robert J. Chaskin
*University of Chicago*

Public housing in the United States began as a relatively small-scale effort to provide temporary, decent, affordable housing to people suffering economic hardship in the wake of the Great Depression and became, within the matter of a few decades, emblematic of the worst examples of concentrated urban poverty and racial segregation in the country. The latter is the vision of public housing most commonly promoted in the popular imagination, evoked especially by images of the large-scale, often high-rise "projects" built under urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s and the disastrous outcomes many of them engendered. And the failure of these projects drives current efforts, most notably under the federal HOPE VI program, to remove and remake them. In *Purging the Poorest*, Lawrence Vale argues for the need to look beyond this narrow orientation toward public housing. Instead, he describes and compares what he frames as three distinct phases of public housing policy implementation, a "triple social experiment" in which the most common view of public housing as a mechanism that led to the concentration, isolation, and racial segregation of the extremely poor is seen as an anomalous phase sandwiched between efforts primarily focused on housing not the most needy, but on clearing slum neighborhoods to provide housing for the "worthy poor." In Vale's analysis, the narrative arc of public housing policy enactment and reform is not merely a story about housing the poor, but more broadly about the appropriation and reappropriation of urban space in succeeding efforts to reenvision, reclaim, and remake parts of the city that have become "discredited" by poverty, crime, and physical decay and to build in their place new, wholesome, reimagined communities. In pursuing these broader goals of urban renewal, public housing policies in different phases both reflect a set of moral judgments about the poor and are framed by a set of moral claims that justify the need for demolition, relocation, development, and resettlement. Within this process, residents moved out to make way for redevelopment constitute a small minority of those who move back.

*Purging the Poorest* is grounded in an in-depth historical analysis of emblematic public housing development sites in each of two cities, Techwood/Clark Howell in Atlanta and Cabrini Green in Chicago. These "twice-cleared communities" are located in cities that were both early public housing innovators and are now engaged in the most sweeping public housing reform in the country. Each site moved through all three phases of public housing development. The first phase saw the initial creation of public housing to replace tenement housing in slum neighborhoods and to house, primarily, the "upwardly mobile" poor. The second was characterized by a changing public housing population, increasingly very low-income and principally African-

American and, in Chicago, by the expansion and redevelopment of the site itself, including the creation of the high-rise towers that became infamous in media coverage of Cabrini's decline. The third phase brings a return to demolition, relocation, and redevelopment, this time focused on the creation of mixed-income communities that seek both to attract middle-class households and to provide subsidized housing for a more selective, "least poor among the poor" set of low-income residents.

Drawing on a broad range of sources, Vale investigates in significant detail these phases of appropriation, demolition, development, and reform and the people, plans, processes, and politics that drove them in each site. He frames this examination around what he calls the "design politics" of public housing—the ways in which design, planning, and development processes are both shaped by and reflective of political values, and how the choices that drive particular aspects of development (and the ways in which they are presented and debated in the public sphere) operate through both symbolism and concerted political action and contention. Vale's careful and detailed rendering of these processes highlights this complex interplay in which rationales for action are framed within specific moral claims (such as the stigmatization of neighborhoods as sites of depravity and decay), supported by the selective reading (and sometimes willful misreading) of data and the selective presentation of images (often driven by racial politics), and reflected in a broad range of design choices and aesthetic preferences.

In the first two phases of public housing policy implementation, Vale suggests, design politics framed public housing as a solution to social problems of urban poverty and disorganization, each time grounded in a vision and narrative of modernization and progress. In the third, current phase, public housing is seen largely as a problem to be solved, and its dismantling and reimagining is driven by a more nostalgic vision of the "traditional neighborhood" promoted by new urbanist planners (but in practice differentially and selectively implemented). These current reforms, Vale makes clear, are again generating significant challenges to our ability to house the most disadvantaged. Rather than engaging development policy to support affordable housing and considering the ways in which public housing—properly conceived, well managed, and effectively distributed—can play an important role in this regard, the current emphasis further marginalizes the very poor, squeezing them out of communities rebuilt, rebranded, and remade largely for the benefit of others. Public housing complexes are being replaced by mixed-income developments (entailing a net loss of public housing units) and subsidies are increasingly provided through vouchers that rely on housing availability in the private market. As the need for affordable housing grows and the system of public housing shrinks, this change amounts, in essence, to a different kind of double purge for many public housing residents, both off the site and out of the system. Vale's analysis, and the historical perspective it provides, is an important contribution to current debates and a corrective to the inclination toward the wholesale dismantling of public housing in response to the failings of its immediate past.