

ARTIST STATEMENT

The gravesite of Pruitt-Igoe has remained unused since the high-rise public housing was demolished in 1972. It now sits as a small forest within the city. Nature has reclaimed the land, creating a strange intersection of the wild and the urban. Among the trees are remnants of what once was there—a fire hydrant hides in the brush; patches of the original asphalt and street are visible through the undergrowth. It's reminiscent of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, 30 years later.

Pruitt-Igoe's desolation is a testament to the trend of neglect, displacement, and subsequent redevelopment after communities have been dispersed.

In 2016, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) West Headquarters were looking to relocate and expand. It seemed this could've been the perfect use for the empty plot of land where Pruitt-Igoe once stood. Instead, the NGA chose the land that sat directly across the street from the Pruitt-Igoe remains as the site for their new headquarters, which meant not only relocating around 200 residents, but dismantling an entire community.

Pruitt-Igoe was instead slated to become a new Healthcare Clinic, with a completion date in the summer of 2018. It sat almost untouched, with the original debris from the Pruitt-Igoe demolitions remaining on the land. Rather than moving forward with construction, the land became a dumping ground for the detritus from the demolitions of residents' homes that had once been across the street. The sign out front now reads, "Spring 2019," yet these images document the state of construction in spring of 2019.

Both the NGA site and the new Healthcare Clinic are part of Northside Regeneration, a development plan spearheaded by Paul McKee. Northside Regeneration has benefitted from emptying out neighborhoods and producing a narrative that paints North St. Louis as a blighted area that is in desperate need of a "large-scale holistic transformation." While much of North St. Louis has been neglected by the city and is in need of more care and resources, the area's needs are not in the vein of the "transformative" redevelopment, reminiscent of the slum-clearing initiative that demolished Mill Creek Valley.

After years of no development in the area, a new grocery store opened at 13th Street and Tucker Boulevard. Their website reads, "GreenLeaf Market is bringing fresh and locally grown food to the residents of the food desert in North St. Louis, downtown St. Louis, and beyond." It is the first project McKee has completed in his Northside Regeneration plan after more than a decade, partially funded by an increased sales tax in that district. As of this April, the City of St. Louis has reissued building permits for Northside Regeneration's urgent care facility. This came after the attorney general of Missouri filed a lawsuit against McKee for tax credit fraud and St. Louis City officials accused McKee of violating the terms of their development agreement, since McKee had made no development progress on the 1,500 acres of land.

We chose to capture the remains of Pruitt-Igoe alongside the newly-opened grocery store. By juxtaposing the sterile, ordered images of the market with the organic decay of the plot where Pruitt-Igoe once stood, we hope to contribute to the conversation about ethical redevelopment. Amongst this spectrum of detachment from the community, there is an overarching connection: a silent emptiness left in the wake of "slum-clearing" masked as progress. We hope our viewers feel a sense of discomfort as they compare the realities of what is and what isn't there.

