

Foreword

In the United States, the rights of citizens to basic economic welfare and security, according to the prevailing standards in the society, have been experienced at levels significantly below those enjoyed by the citizens of Canada and Western Europe.¹ The discrepancy is particularly evident in the area of public housing. Whereas it is common in European welfare states to provide direct financial housing subsidies for low-income families, this practice is rare to nonexistent in the United States.² The state support of housing for poor American citizens tends to be confined to a limited number of public projects largely concentrated in inner-city neighborhoods, neighborhoods that feature weak, informal job-information networks and that tend to be removed from areas of employment opportunities.

Indeed, the location of public housing projects in neighborhoods of highest poverty concentration is the result of federal toleration of extensive segregation against African Americans in urban housing markets, as well as acquiescence to organized neighborhood groups' opposition to public housing construction in their communities. However, this has not always been the case. The federal public housing program in the United States has featured two stages representing two distinct approaches. Initially, the program mainly helped two-parent families displaced temporarily by the Depression or in need of housing following the end of World War II. Public housing for many of these families was the first step on the road toward economic recovery, and their stay in the projects tended to be brief. Their economic mobility "contributed to the sociological stability of the first